

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Sean Scully](#)

It's Presidents' Day, everyone. Ok, for the more pedantic among us, it is technically the federal George Washington Birthday holiday, with all those other presidents hitching a free ride. But apparently the broader name helps sell cars and mattresses, so we're happy to play along. So Happy Presidents' Day everyone. Let's see what's in the news.



## The Big Takeaway

**Speaking of presidents, perhaps you've heard that we're picking one this year?** Not like we're picking a NEW president, of course. Mostly it's shaping up to be a warmed-up leftovers election, choosing between one guy who is president now and the other guy who was president once before.

But one candidate is soldiering on, trying to give primary voters a chance to put a *new* choice on the fall ballot. Former South Carolina Governor and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley [lost in Iowa](#), [lost in New Hampshire](#), [even came in a distant second to "None of these Candidates"](#) in Nevada, but she's hoping her home state might give her a boost in the Feb. 24 GOP primary election.

**Not so fast, voters appear to be saying.**

"Home state advantage melts away against former President Donald Trump," [the](#)

[South Carolina Daily Gazette writes](#) of a CBS News poll. “Three-fourths of South Carolina voters say it makes no difference at all that Haley’s from South Carolina...”



*Good question.*  
(Abraham Kenmore/SC Daily Gazette)

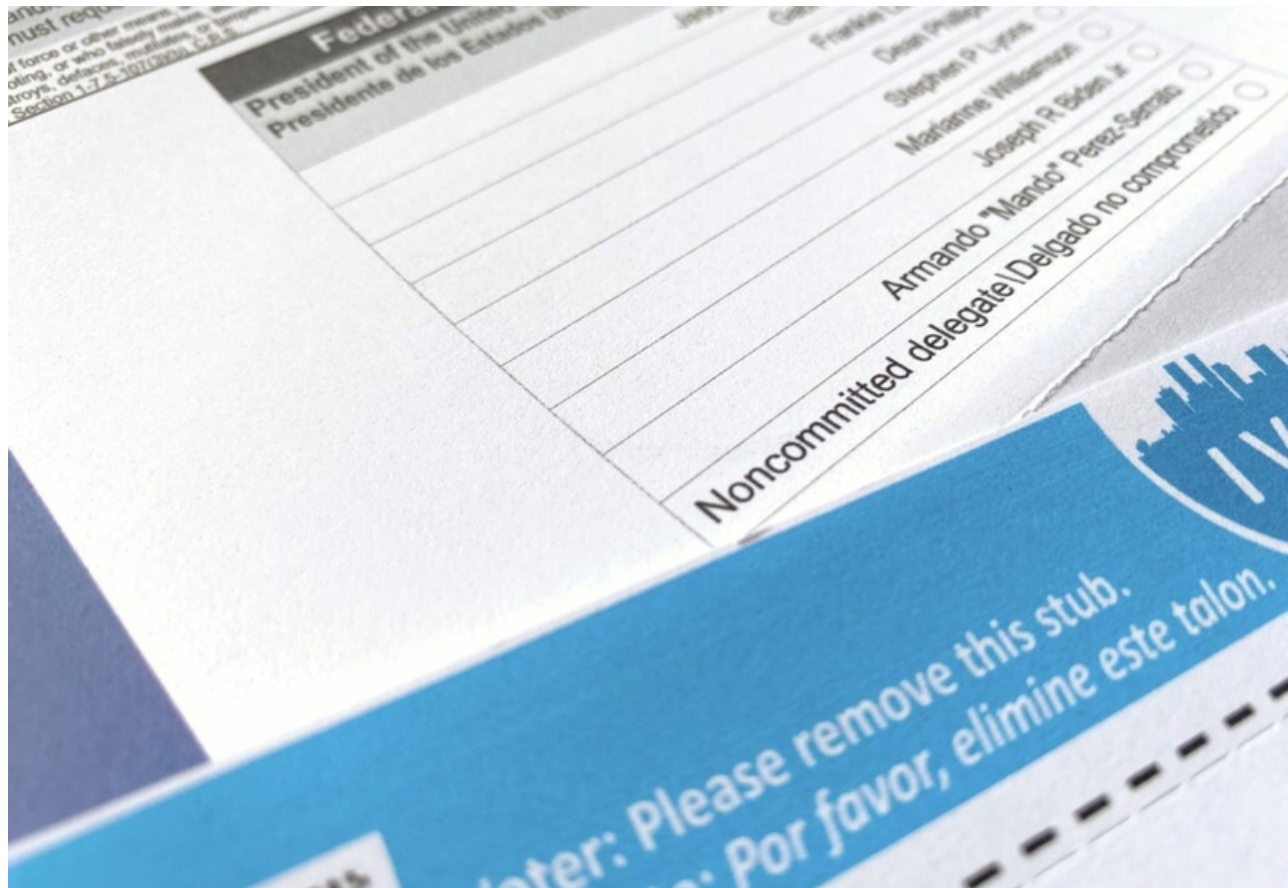
South Carolina voters tell pollsters that Haley is not part of the MAGA movement, and many say that her escalating attacks on Trump will backfire at home. They don’t even think Haley has a better chance than Trump of beating President Joe Biden, who seems certain to be the Democratic candidate.

“(Voters) may have a candidate they really like, policies in the past they really respected, but no matter what that person says or does, they’re not Donald Trump,” said Scott Huffmon, director of the Winthrop Poll.

Although she was generally popular during her time as governor, Haley trails Trump by about 36 percentage points in the latest poll, the Daily Gazette reports.

“I do like her, I do,” said South Carolina resident Kim Cessna, 58, of Mount Pleasant, who came to a Trump rally toting a sign reading “Nicki who?” “We

need to do what's good for the party. I don't think she's offensive, but I think that she doesn't have a clear path. She needs to stop, let it go, and then she can have next time."



*None of the Above for president!  
(Colorado Newslines)*

**In Colorado, Democratic and unaffiliated voters are, for the first time, allowed to effectively vote “none of the above” this year, a category that [did very well in Nevada](#) earlier this month.**

There are seven candidates on the March 5 Democratic ballot, including President Biden. But there are eight lines on the ballot, including the choice for “uncommitted delegate,” [reports Colorado Newslines](#).

That means at least some of Colorado's 72 delegates to the Democratic National Convention this summer could arrive with no orders to support a specific candidate.

That had been an option under the state's old caucus system, but ended when the state switched to a primary election in 2016.

“We had a conversation about it, and everybody agreed that this would increase participation and be a more democratic process,” said Karin Asensio, the party’s executive director. “Back when we had the presidential caucus, there was always an uncommitted option at caucus. A lot of people really appreciate having the choice of not committing.”

There will only be uncommitted delegates if at least 15% of Colorado voters pick that option. That’s a tall order, analysts say, but some Colorado voters say they will pick it in protest of Biden’s age and policy positions.

Drew Romano, a former DNC delegate, says he knows his vote is unlikely to change the outcome of the primary, but he intends to vote uncommitted anyway.

“I still want to make a statement,” he said. “If (Democrats) cared about our future Biden would put his ego down and step aside.”

**We’re already three years into the 10-year cycle of redistricting triggered by the 2020 Census, but some voters in North Dakota still don’t know what legislative district they live in.**

A federal court in January ordered changes to the legislative districts created by lawmakers, but appeals could drag on well into the late summer or fall, [reports the North Dakota Monitor](#).

Meanwhile, there is an election coming up for half the state legislature. The candidate filing deadline is April 8, leaving elections officials with a choice: follow the new map ordered by the judge in January or follow the old map set by legislators.

Either choice risks being overruled later by the appeals court, but judges are not set even to hear the case until July or August.

North Dakota Secretary of State Michael Howe has opted to go with the new map, which combines two Native reservations that had been split between districts by the legislature.

“Any action taken by the appeals court would not impact the maps used for the 2024 election cycle,” his office told the Monitor.

Republican legislative leaders are still hoping that the appeals court will reverse the judge’s ruling before the fall election, but Tim Purdon, attorney for the Turtle

Mountain Band of Chippewa and Spirit Lake Nation, finds that unlikely.

“Given the Secretary of State’s formal legal filings stating that he cannot implement a new map for the 2024 election cycle after Dec. 31, 2023, anyone in the Legislature stating that the 2024 elections could possibly take place under any map other than the one ordered by Judge (Peter) Welte should probably walk down the hall and talk to Michael Howe,” Purdon said.



*A pleasant day of sightseeing in the Nation’s Capital.  
(Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)*

**Ohio Republican candidates are sure there is something fishy about the whole “Jan. 6 was an attempted coup” thing, but they can’t quite agree on what it is.**

“With Ohio’s primary elections around the corner, there’s been a notable rise in January 6 conspiracy theorizing among a handful of the state’s Republican candidates,” [reports the Ohio Capital Journal](#). “Some peddle the idea that FBI informants provoked an otherwise peaceful crowd. Others, that those convicted of crimes are hostages or political prisoners. Still others suggest investigators are covering up information about pipe bombs left at the Republican and Democratic National Committee headquarters.”

Such conspiracy theorizing at the local level follows years of attempts by national Republicans to downplay or even discredit the official narrative about the violent events of that day. Ohio's Rep. Jim Jordan and Sen. J.D. Vance have been particularly vocal in that effort. Vance has called the sweeping FBI investigation, which has led to hundreds of convictions and guilty pleas, a "farce."

In Ohio's U.S. Senate race, Republican Bernie Moreno has tried to equate the protest at the Capitol with the protests and civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police. He says people who destroyed property on Jan. 6 should be punished but says the vast majority were peaceful, saying most of those charged are "political prisoners."

"They've been stripped of their due process," Moreno insisted at a recent debate. "These are moms. These are grandmothers that were wandering the Capitol. Now were they trespassing? Sure, but we treat trespassers in a certain way."

In Ohio's 2nd Congressional district, Republican candidate Derek Myers claims he was approached by the FBI to be a provocateur on Jan. 6, but refused. He claims to have evidence, but so far has refused to release anything.

Republican state house candidate Dillon Blevins agrees that the riot was a setup of some sort, despite zero credible evidence.

"The January 6 insurrection, it came out that FBI operatives were within the crowds, and leading them into the building, into the Capitol," he said.

Ohio State University sociologist Laura Dugan says Republicans are just following the lead of former President Trump, who from the start has played down the seriousness of Jan. 6.

"The problem is that Trump has a huge base of supporters, and they turn to him for explanations of what went wrong, or what happened that day," she said.

Trump's version of events, which have diverged from reality ever more as his presidential campaign heats up, have become a litmus test for candidates in the party, extremism experts say.

"I think any Republican candidate who attempts to criticize what happened on January 6, and would associate Trump as at least somebody behind what

happened, is going to incur the wrath of Trump himself,” Ohio State political scientist Paul Beck said.

### Politics at its Finest:

- [Alaska Permanent Fund Corp. board again warns that the fund is running out of spendable money](#)
- [How psychedelic drug therapy became a rare bipartisan issue in California](#)
- [\(Utah\) Which water bills are making waves this legislative session?](#)
- [\(Virginia\) Patron accuses Democrats of killing bathroom check bill because he's a Black Republican](#)



### Also Trending

#### **Louisiana's prison system is legendary for its size, expense and brutality.**

The very name “Angola,” its infamous maximum security prison, has become shorthand for the worst that the American system of mass incarceration can do to people.

So in 2017, legislators and then-Gov. John Bel Edwards agreed to a package of reforms, shortening sentences and allowing more flexibility on parole to reduce overcrowding, and diverting money from prisons to victim services. The state has moved more than \$20 million to services, according to state auditors, including \$6.8 million for domestic violence survivors.

**New Gov. Jeff Landry is having none of it.** The newly elected Republican has called a special session, set for this week, to convince legislators to unwind the reforms, [the Louisiana Illuminator reports](#).

“Enough is enough. We’re going to hold everyone — and I mean everyone — responsible for violent crime,” Landry said in one of his tough-on-crime campaign spots from the 2023 election.

Even as the state faces a half-billion-dollar budget deficit, spurred in part by a sales tax cut set to go into effect next year, Landry is calling for tougher prison sentences that could send the prison population surging.

Advocates worry that the return to pro-incarceration policies will threaten the

money for victim services, such as the domestic violence funding and a drive to clear a long backlog of rapekits.

“It is definitely for me a fear that we will be thrown out with the dirty dishwater,” said Suzanne Hamilton, executive director of the Capital Area Family Justice Center, which relies on state money to provide services to domestic violence victims.



*A prison dorm at Holman Correctional Facility.  
(Alabama Reflector)*

**Less than a month after Alabama put a man to death using the previously untried method of asphyxiation by nitrogen gas,** another death row inmate is suing to block his pending execution using the same method, [the Alabama Reflector reports](#).

“In a lawsuit filed Thursday in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, David Wilson, sentenced to death for the 2004 murder of Dewey Walker during a robbery, argues that nitrogen gas asphyxiation is inherently inhumane and would be particularly painful for Wilson due to pre-existing health conditions, including chronic lung problems and sensory sensitivities,” the Reflector writes.



Witnesses to the [execution of Kenneth Eugene Smith by nitrogen in January](#), which included a Reflector reporter, say the process appeared to be agonizing for the condemned prisoner, contrary to state claims that it was short and painless.

“This is an open and shut case. The media witnesses were there to be the public eye, and to tell us what happened. They described minutes of writhing in agony and pain, and that is simply unconstitutional,” said Bernard Harcourt, executive director of Columbia Law School’s Initiative for a Just Society and counsel for Wilson.

State officials did not respond to requests for comment on the lawsuit.



*Native drug and alcohol counselor and former NFL player Levi Horn holds up naloxone, an opioid overdose reversal medication, as part of a tribal opioid use prevention campaign by the Health Care Authority. (For Our Lives/Health Care Authority)*

**Tribes in Washington are hoping to learn a thing or two about combating opioid addiction among youth from a seemingly unlikely source:** the island nation of Iceland, the [Washington State Standard reports](#).

The model involves re-thinking how to discourage drug use by placing responsibility on the community, rather than the individual, the Standard writes. Instead of asking kids to ‘just say no,’ the Icelandic Prevention Model calls on

the adults in a child's life to create an environment without drugs and alcohol, according to Margrét Lilja Guðmundsdóttir, chief knowledge officer at Planet Youth.

The model is credited with slashing alcohol use by young people from 77% to 35% in 20 years.

Tribal leaders say the community support model used in the Nordic nation is good fit for cultural practices among the tribes of North America. A delegation of health officials and tribal leaders visited Iceland last year, and this year they are asking legislators for \$1 million to launch a 10-year test program on reservations.

“There's no other model in the world that has that kind of turnaround in the community,” said Nick Lewis, councilmember of the Lummi Nation and chairman of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board.

### **From the Public Safety files:**

- [\(Montana\) Ketamine therapy for mental health a 'Wild West' for doctors and patients](#)
- [\(Nevada\) Ex-con schools law enforcement on approach](#)
- [Arkansas Supreme Court races offer inflection point on sovereign immunity](#)



### **From The Newsrooms**

#### **Health Care**

- [‘It was the life raft’: Transgender people find a safe haven in Florida’s capital city](#)
- [Kansas women’s prison could build nursery under new legislation](#)
- [Report: Connecticut Medicaid underpays many health care providers](#)
- [Poll: Maryland voters support medical aid-in-dying option, but bill is far from the finish line](#)

#### **Education**

- [\(New Hampshire\) Sports betting](#)
- [Full tuition waivers proposed for](#)

[raised \\$100 million for education in first four years](#)

- [At 93, Maryland woman is still in the fight for better textbooks](#)

[Nebraska student teachers](#)

- [New Connecticut law on kindergarten age cutoff causing confusion](#)

## Government and Politics

- [Republican legislators push bills requiring government to collect reasons for abortion](#)
- [Ohio Dems and GOP unsurprisingly fire off different ways to handle domestic abusers with guns](#)
- [Kansas Senate eager to alter state laws on internet porn, death benefit, train travel](#)
- [Oregon House passes bill to allow more state investigations of suspected child labor violations](#)



## One Last Thing

**Tired of the United States but don't feel like moving?** How about you just secede?

Pollsters for [YouGov](#) tested the idea this month with residents of 46 states.

The result? About a quarter of respondents said they'd like to see their state leave the Union and strike out on its own, [the Minnesota Reformer reports](#) . Generally more Republicans said yes than Democrats, but pollsters believe that has more to do with who is in the White House at any given time than anything else.

The most enthusiastic secessionist states were Alaska at 36%, Texas at 31%, and California at 29%.

In Minnesota, the mood to become an independent republic was less warm. Just 13% want to break off, the lowest in the nation other than Connecticut. The rate was nearly identical for Republicans and Democrats.

Curiously, about 26% of Minnesotans want *another* state to secede.

“While the poll didn't ask respondents to specify which state, we're going to guess that most who answered in the affirmative had Wisconsin in mind,” the

Reformer writes.

**In other Minnesota news, [the Reformer reports](#) that a new survey finds that the state’s population of goats has exploded, from 36,000 to 51,000. The boost is likely due to demand for halal goat meat from the state’s booming population of Somali immigrants.**

The state’s goat industry is “concentrated in a belt running roughly from Moorhead down to the far southeast corner of the state,” the Reformer writes. “The goat population is highest in Todd County, northwest of St. Cloud, which is home to about 5,000 of the lovable critters.”



*I, for one, favor staying in the Union.  
(National Park Service)*

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