

News From The States

EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

It's still winter, but I feel like it should be summer break by now. Is this a side effect of endless school news, or just the perpetual unraveling of adulthood? Honestly, who can say?



The Big Takeaway

Six years and one week ago, 14 teenagers were killed [in a mass shooting](#) at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. On Tuesday, parents of two of the victims stood in Utah State Capitol with a warning: It could just as easily happen here.

“I encourage Utah, just because you haven't had a tragedy in this state, make sure you take this seriously,” said Max Schachter, whose [14-year-old son Alex](#) was murdered in his English class. “We were complacent in our state. We never thought it would happen in our community. But it can and it does.”



Grief into action.

(Photo by Kyle Dunphey/Utah News Dispatch)

Utah has had plenty of close calls already. More than 120 violent threats have been reported in schools since August, resulting in more than 60 lockdowns, officials said at a news conference Tuesday. Public safety officials defused at least three of those incidents, which may otherwise have led to school shootings, [the Utah News Dispatch reported](#) . In each case, authorities relied on tips from students and educators. But there’s no guarantee someone will catch the next red flag, said state Rep. Ryan Wilcox, an Ogden Republican.

“We’ve gotten lucky so far,” he said. “I don’t know how long we can.”

Luck would be far less of a factor under a [sweeping school safety bill](#) that would establish minimum safety requirements for schools, require new training standards for school resource officers, mandate threat reporting and allow certain employees to carry weapons on campus after completing a training program overseen by law enforcement. The proposal, currently awaiting a ruling from a Senate committee, would also require classrooms to be equipped with silent panic alarms that link directly to first responders. That provision is known as “Alyssa’s Law” in memory of Alyssa Alhadeff, a 14-year-old who was killed in

the Parkland shooting.

“Alyssa was the heartbeat of our family,” her mother Lori said at Tuesday’s news conference. “We turned our grief into action.”



EGAD A BOOK

(Illustration by Alex Cochran/for Utah News Dispatch)

Of course, for every substantive Republican action, there is an equally stupid reaction. Utah House lawmakers accepted that challenge Wednesday, voting [mostly along party lines](#) to approve a bill making it easier to enact statewide bans on “criminally indecent or pornographic” books once they’ve been removed by a certain number of schools or districts, [per the News Dispatch](#).

In its original form, the bill would have automatically banned any book containing “objective sensitive material” or the aforementioned “criminally indecent or pornographic” content, as determined by at least three school districts, or two districts and five charter schools. That provision was watered down in the Senate version of the legislation, which would have allowed school boards to decide locally whether to retain a book before the statewide ban took effect. The change rankled state Rep. Ken Ivory, who said it “defeated the purpose” of his bill, which

was designed to create “uniformity” across schools.

This was the brief, shining moment where lawmakers could have admitted that *both* versions of this dumb bill were equally dumb, which, naturally, they did not. Instead, they got together to hash out their (dumb) differences, eventually settling on [a compromise measure](#) allowing only the state board of education to override statewide book bans. That was good enough for Ivory, who said it restored “both clarity and uniformity” to the bill and then patted himself on the back for his own courageous efforts to save public education. You’re welcome, Utah!

“It’s time that we stand for the good and the clean and the pure and the powerful and the positive for our children, because that’s why we have public school,” he said.



Go forth to the clean and the pure, students!
(Photo by Jon Cherry/Getty Images)

The vibe was similar Tuesday in Alabama, where Republicans revived a proposal to bar public schools from allowing students or employees to “affirm, adopt or adhere to a divisive concept.” Per the bill, that would include basically anything that might acknowledge the reality of systemic racism or the role of slavery in American history, [the Alabama Reflector reported](#).

[The legislation](#) is a retread of a bill introduced two years ago to attack [critical race theory](#) , a college-level curriculum that drew nationwide wrath from GOP lawmakers for an entire year before they dropped it in favor of [attacking trans kids](#), [banning books](#) , and being generally outraged about the existence of humans who are not Christian, white and/or cisgender. The revived version incorporates some of those, uh, *interests*, barring state agencies, local boards and public colleges and universities from employing [race-conscious admissions](#) or sponsoring diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Higher ed facilities would also be required to ensure that restrooms are “designated for use by biological sex.”

Lawmakers last year described the bill as a defense against “woke ideology that divides people, adults and children alike,” but [teachers said](#) it would mostly just prevent them from teaching any sort of remotely accurate history curriculum. As usual, the teachers knew best. Both versions of the legislation ban “concepts” like the idea that “slavery and racism are aligned with the founding principles of the United States” (they [definitely were](#)) or the notion that “fault, blame, or bias should be assigned ... on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, ethnicity, or national origin” (a long-winded denial of both [implicit bias](#) and [systemic racism](#)).

But state Sen. Will Barfoot doesn’t see it that way. His mom was a history teacher, you see, so he made sure to draft the bill in a way that protects “historically accurate history.”

“I don’t think we need to gloss over that,” he said. “We need to teach that we need to talk about the bad times that have happened in Alabama and the inequitable treatment that certain citizens of the state of Alabama have had and we need to talk about that more than we talk about it now.”

It’s not really clear to me how you’d have those conversations when you’re ... not allowed to have those conversations, but Republicans are unconcerned. The bill [cleared a Senate committee](#) Wednesday and heads next to the full chamber.

Just do it nicely

- [Alaska lawmakers grapple with test-score performance gap between charters and other public schools](#)
- [Arizona schools are struggling to fill teaching positions as leaders brainstorm staffing solutions](#)

- [North Carolina Supreme Court to revisit landmark school funding case](#)
- [Amended bill would remove vaccine requirements for West Virginia's private, parochial schools](#)



State of Our Democracy

What's better than one Michigan GOP convention? *Two* Michigan GOP conventions, obviously — especially when they're both scheduled for the exact same date and time!

Of course, only one of them is legit. That honor goes to the event helmed by former U.S. Rep. Pete Hoekstra, who was appointed state party chairman by the Republican National Committee and has the ever-important endorsement of Donald Trump, [per the Michigan Advance](#) . Hoekstra's convention will take place Saturday, March 2, at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids, about 160 miles west of Detroit, where exiled MIGOP chairwoman Kristina Karamo will hold her own convention.



*Laura Ingraham is not involved.
(Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)*

Obviously, this is awkward. Karamo hasn't officially led the party since Jan. 6, when she was ousted over her egregious mishandling of its finances. (Hoekstra was installed two weeks later.) But Karamo and her supporters have refused to accept her fall from grace, which they've framed as an overstep by the RNC that overrode "the will of the committee" and has caused "massive confusion." Fortunately, she's got a solution: Hoekstra should come to *her* convention for a rematch in the form of a floor vote, winner take all.

"In order to stop the confusion, instead of some back room deal, I challenge @petehoekstra to join me and stand for a vote, and let the 2,000+ delegates on March 2nd at the Huntington Place in Detroit decide," she [tweeted](#). "The majority have already spoken which one of the only two bodies who have a right to settle this matter, the other are the precinct delegates. This [is the] only way to settle this matter with integrity."

The dispute will probably be decided by the court system, which is expected to begin hearings this week in a lawsuit aiming to legitimize the Hoekstra faction as the state party. Should it drag on, the conflict could impact the GOP primary process, which will award a majority of delegates at the March 2 convention. (Or one of them, anyway.) Hoekstra, for his part, does not seem to be sweating the outcome.

"All the court precedents say that once the RNC has made a decision, you're going to win in court, so we're going to win in court," he told reporters Saturday. "But if they want to go through the process and lose in court, that's an option that they have."

Multiple choice

- [Arkansas attorney general rejects first draft of direct democracy initiative](#)
- [Bipartisan bill trying to shield Kentucky elections from 'deep fakes' clears committee](#)
- [Michigan AG charges two in 'dark money' scheme connected to former Senate leader Shirkey](#)



From The Newsrooms

Criminal Justice

- [Measures repealing parts of Parkland 2018-gun safety law head to the Florida House](#)
- [Louisiana cops and gun owners could get immunity from most wrongful death lawsuits](#)
- [Minnesota Dems offer modest gun control agenda, fearing election backlash](#)
- [Controversial police training firm files for bankruptcy, blames New Jersey investigations](#)

Environment

- [Federal regulators deny permits for hydropower projects on Arizona's Navajo Nation](#)
- [Maryland bill to make polluters pay for climate damage runs into Democratic skeptics](#)
- [Northeast Nebraska county delivers blow to plans for carbon pipeline](#)
- [Cat lovers implore Nevada city to stop killing ferals](#)

Gov & Politics

- [Lawmakers advance new map with two majority-Black Louisiana Supreme Court districts](#)
- [Maryland's local governments face 'hundreds of millions' in lost property tax revenue due to mailing snafu](#)
- [Former Detroit lawmaker torches Michigan House redistricting plans as 'fit for the garbage'](#)
- [South Carolina has \\$1.8B sitting in a bank account. State leaders don't know why or how it happened.](#)



One Last Thing

Don Henley [headed to court Wednesday](#) in a bid to secure a trove of handwritten Eagles lyrics he claims were peddled illegally by rare book dealers. The legal system: You can check out anytime you like, but you can never leave.

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