

# News From The States

# EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

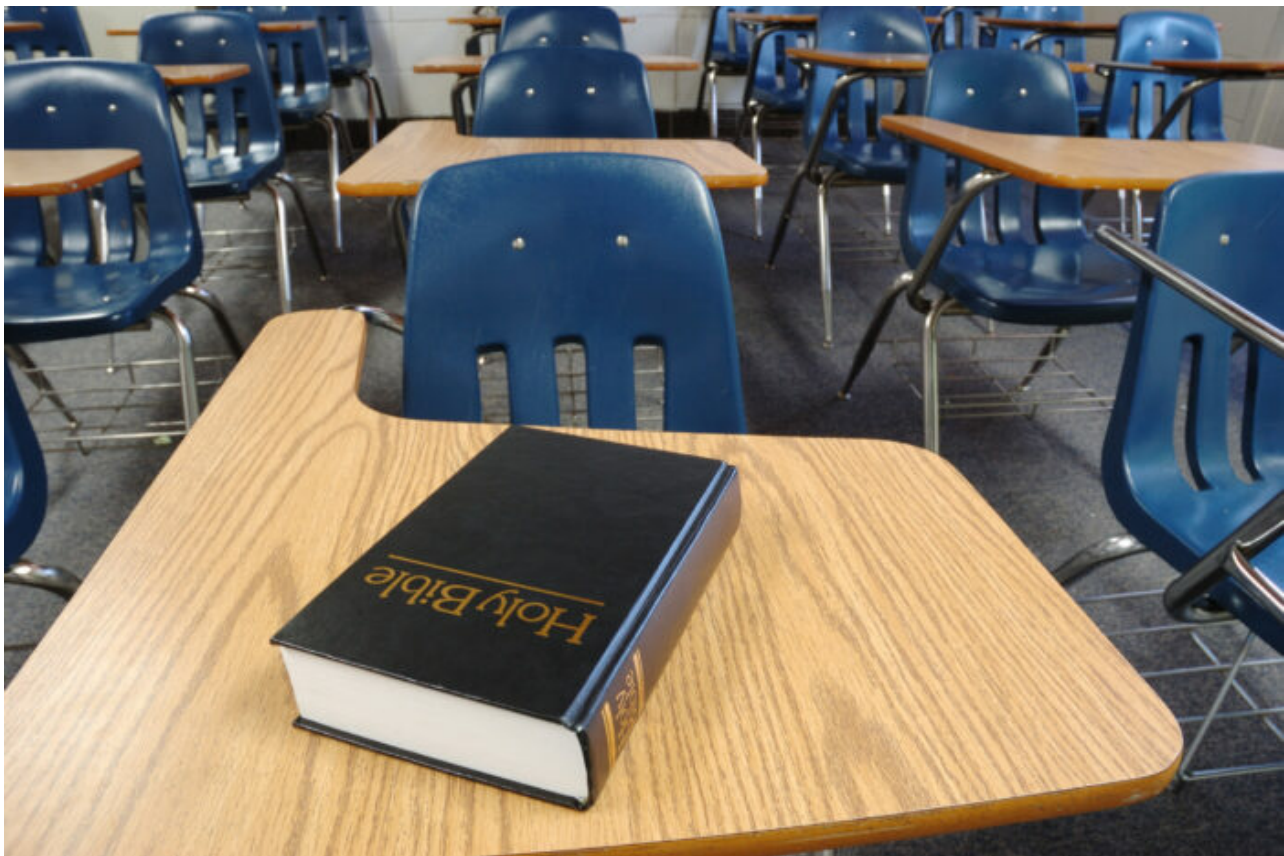
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I always enjoyed school. I like learning (except for calculus and chemistry, don't @ me, I'm right) and talking to people, and school is a good place to do both of those things. Of course, that was years ago. These days, school is mostly just a good place to watch fetal ultrasound videos, learn about the Bible and prepare to spend your future as a mindless cog in the machinery of capitalism, so I probably wouldn't like it as much.



## The Big Takeaway

A nonprofit organization that facilitates Bible-based lessons for students during school hours will be in more than a quarter of Ohio's school districts by next year, prompting pushback from critics who say the classes amount to state-sanctioned indoctrination, [the Ohio Capital Journal reported](#).



*Casual.*

*(Photo by Getty Images)*

“Per its own words, LifeWise [Academy]’s goal is clear,” Sammi Lawrence, legal fellow for the Freedom From Religion Foundation, wrote [in an August letter](#) sent to more than 600 districts. “They seek to indoctrinate and convert public school students to evangelical Christianity by convincing public school districts to partner with them in bringing LifeWise released-time Bible classes to public school communities.”

Joel Penton, the group’s founder, views it differently.

“I believe it’s God’s grace,” said Penton, who launched LifeWise Academy in two Ohio districts in 2019. “I am certain that many, many parents want Bible education for their students. ... We’re under the impression that the majority of our students aren’t receiving any other type of Bible education elsewhere.”

**The program is legal** under a [1952 U.S. Supreme Court ruling](#), which permits students to leave during school hours to pursue religious instruction as long as the classes require parental permission, and are privately funded and conducted off-campus. LifeWise meets all of those criteria and also adheres to separate restrictions under state law, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost [said in November](#).

“Released-time programs are not new or legally controversial in the least,” he wrote in a letter to the superintendent of Buckeye Valley Local Schools. “If a school simply allows students to leave, according to parents’ wishes and without public funds, the school is honoring religious liberty, not violating any rules against establishing a state religion.”



*Hang on, gotta press record.*  
(Photo by Make\_story Studio/Adobe Stock)

**There’s a surprising amount of wiggle room in the “technically legal” margins.** Take Iowa, where House Republicans on Tuesday passed a bill that would require middle- and high-school health classes to incorporate lessons on “pregnancy and fetal development,” including classroom viewings of “high-definition ultrasound videos” that depict fetal organ growth and are at least three minutes long, [per the Iowa Capital Dispatch](#).

Other teaching materials would include computer-generated “renderings” or “animations” of fertilization and every stage of fetal growth, which [the bill](#) says should be “comparable to ‘Meet Baby Olivia,’” a propaganda video produced by an anti-abortion group with [the stated goal](#) of “shift[ing] public opinion on the killing of preborn children.” Which is just a *suggestion* and is not meant to convey any specific *position* on abortion, according to state Rep. Anne

Osmundson, a Republican and the legislation's floor sponsor.

But it's also a *reputable video* that was "reviewed and endorsed by several medical experts," she added.

"This is scientific information," Osmundson said. "This is teaching basic biology to our children. And it helps to answer one of life's biggest questions: Where did I come from?"



*"Yeah, I think I came from over there."  
(Photo by be free/Adobe Stock)*

**I don't have an existential answer to that question, but I do have some literal ones:** Osmundson is from [northeastern Iowa](#), and the bill is part of [a calculated push](#) to incorporate anti-abortion junk science in classrooms across the country. A similar policy already passed [in North Dakota](#), and others are under consideration in [Kentucky](#), [Missouri](#) and [West Virginia](#). Most were presented with the same set of talking points: The video is *scientific!* If you don't believe us, just ask [a few very specific](#) doctors!

**But you'll probably get a different take if you seek a second opinion.** The video presents as fact a whole bunch of things that (...most) doctors don't agree with, from descriptions of the fetus (by 11 weeks post-fertilization, "Olivia" is

“playing” and “exploring her environment”) to the non-medical question of when a fetus becomes a person (a “new human being has come into existence” at the moment of fertilization). These are not facts. These are Easter eggs for anti-abortion extremists that have no basis in medicine — and no place in schools, said state Rep. Molly Buck, a Democrat.

“The question of when life begins is deeply personal,” said Buck. “It varies among individuals, it varies among families, and honestly it varies among faiths. And it’s not the role of our chamber to prescribe what people believe, or require teachers to influence young people with propaganda. Our focus should be on nurturing an educational environment that values independent thinking, a teaching environment that supports educators, and an environment that prepares students to engage thoughtfully with complex issues.”



*Come on in, kids!*  
(Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

**Or they could engage thoughtfully with capitalism!** That’s the goal of a proposed bill in Alabama, which would allow 14- and 15-year-olds to find jobs without submitting a school permission form. A version of the legislation passed the Senate [on Tuesday](#), but a House committee paused deliberations amid concerns that removing the requirement would make it harder for schools to

know if a student’s job is negatively impacting their academic performance, [the Alabama Reflector reported](#).

[The bill](#), held for potential amendments by the House Children and Senior Advocacy Committee, removes from state statute any mention of work eligibility forms, along with an entire section that bars anyone under the age of 16 from obtaining a job without it. Businesses would still need to obtain special child labor certificates to employ younger teens, and those jobs would remain contingent on school attendance and performance. But it’s not clear how that would work without the permission form, lawmakers said.

The legislation is one of [dozens of proposals](#) seeking to weaken child labor laws across the country, particularly in the South and the Midwest. The push is mostly driven by right-wing advocacy groups who favor employment deregulation that broadens the worker pool with fewer guardrails — and potentially lower cost, critics said.

“We are seeing a resurgence in a labor movement where people are not willing to work for minimum wage that isn’t enough to pay for housing, that isn’t enough to cover medical bills and a decent cost of living,” said Skip Mark, assistant professor and director of the Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies at the University of Rhode Island. “One option would be to pay people more, and the other option is to hire children who are willing to work for less.”

### **Social studies or something**

- [Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority faces accusations it mismanaged federal student loan forgiveness program](#)
- [In wake of sweeping school funding rulings, New Hampshire lawmakers seek legislative fixes](#)
- [Ohio Senate passes higher ed bill after adding more than \\$1.4 billion in state spending proposals](#)
- [School safety bills to beef up security, give teachers firearm training pass Utah Legislature](#)
- [What’s the best approach to school disruptions? Virginia Democrats and Republicans disagree.](#)



South Dakota lawmakers this week abandoned a proposal to criminalize threats against election workers, an [established](#), [yearslong](#), [widespread](#) problem they said simply does not exist in South Dakota, [per South Dakota Searchlight](#).



*Caption: Credit your images*

Susan Kiepke begs to differ.

“I hate that elections have gotten so negative,” the Davison County auditor [wrote last month](#). “I used to look forward to them. They were fun and people were happy. Now people come to my office and verbally attack myself and my staff.”

“I never know when folks will show up,” she continued, “to try to convince our commissioners that the DS850 scanner and tabulator that we use to count ballots has a microchip in it that feeds information to Russia.”

**They get those questions in Gregory County, too.** Auditor Julie Bartling wouldn’t describe them as threatening, necessarily. Intimidating? Sure. Frustrating? *Absolutely*, particularly when the conspiracy theories are coming from people you’ve known for *years*.

“And they point-blank say, ‘I don’t believe you,’” Bartling said. “They don’t believe that what I’m saying is true, that state law dictates that the machines cannot be connected to the internet, and they’re not, but they don’t believe me. And they tell me that.”

**At first, lawmakers seemed to understand this.** [The bill](#), which would have made it a Class 1 misdemeanor to threaten or intimidate election workers, sailed through the Senate, garnering an 8-0 vote in committee before passing the chamber 23-10. A House committee gave a similarly favorable report, advancing the proposal 8-5. And then state Rep. Rebecca Reimer brought the bill to the floor. As she was speaking, Rep. Bethany Soye posed a question.

“Did you say that this has been happening in our state?” asked Soye, a Sioux Falls Republican. “That poll workers are being threatened?”

Well. No, Reimer said.

“But they have in other states,” she added. “And no, I do not have an example for you.”

A bit later, Rep. Liz May circled back.

“We haven’t had any of this in South Dakota,” she said. “None of this.”

**And then Rep. Phil Jensen derailed the train completely.** The bill is *rather vague*, he said. Not a fan of vagueness, Jensen. Reminds him too much of Jan. 6, 2021, when “hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of fellow American patriots” were “imprisoned” because they were “in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Some were incarcerated without any evidence,” Jensen continued. “Just dug up, pulled out of thin air by the prosecutors in D.C.”

Speaker Hugh Bartels cut him off at that point, but the damage was done. The bill failed [24-46](#).

**Good thing it’s not a big problem!**

- [Sandra Day O’Connor is an Arizona icon, but is too ‘undistinguished’ to warrant a statue, Republicans say](#)
- [Idaho Secretary of State’s Office launches revamped Vote Idaho website](#)



- [Open-carry gun ban at polling places clears the Michigan Senate, faces battle in House](#)



## From The Newsrooms

### Gov and Politics

- [A day ahead of shutdown, Congress works on advancing stopgap spending bills](#)
- [Illinois judge orders Trump removed from GOP ballot but holds decision pending appeal](#)
- [Judges question the new North Carolina GOP law on Board of Elections appointments](#)
- [Last-minute South Dakota bill would require earlier voter registration due to 'perceived' election concerns](#)

### Health Care

- [Alabama Legislature passes bill aimed at protecting in vitro fertilization](#)
- [A Kansas senator heard debate on an anti-trans bill after short notice for the public to prepare](#)
- [CVS, Ohio regulator settle claims of critical understaffing](#)
- [Bill banning vaccine mandates, limiting remedies South Carolina could offer in future pandemics advances](#)

### Courts and Justice

- [Maryland House grants preliminary approval for juvenile justice bill](#)
- [Man wrongly accused in Kansas City shooting weighs defamation suit, demands](#)
- [Opponents of death penalty decry Nebraska proposal to use nitrogen gas for executions](#)
- [Another Tennessee legal battle brews over bill preventing challenge of House rules in state court](#)



## One Last Thing

I have been down the Kate Middleton rabbit hole this week ([LYKYK](#)) and my curiosity was *not at all helped* by [this terse statement](#) from the palace that just repeated what they said before and offered no information, such as why a royal woman would be forced to trot out in heels hours after giving birth so the press can photograph her newborn but would not be forced to pose for a proof of life photo to dispel conspiracy theories about the lack of proof of life photos.

Anyway, she's "doing well."

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