

# News From The States

## EVENING WRAP

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By [Kate Queram](#)

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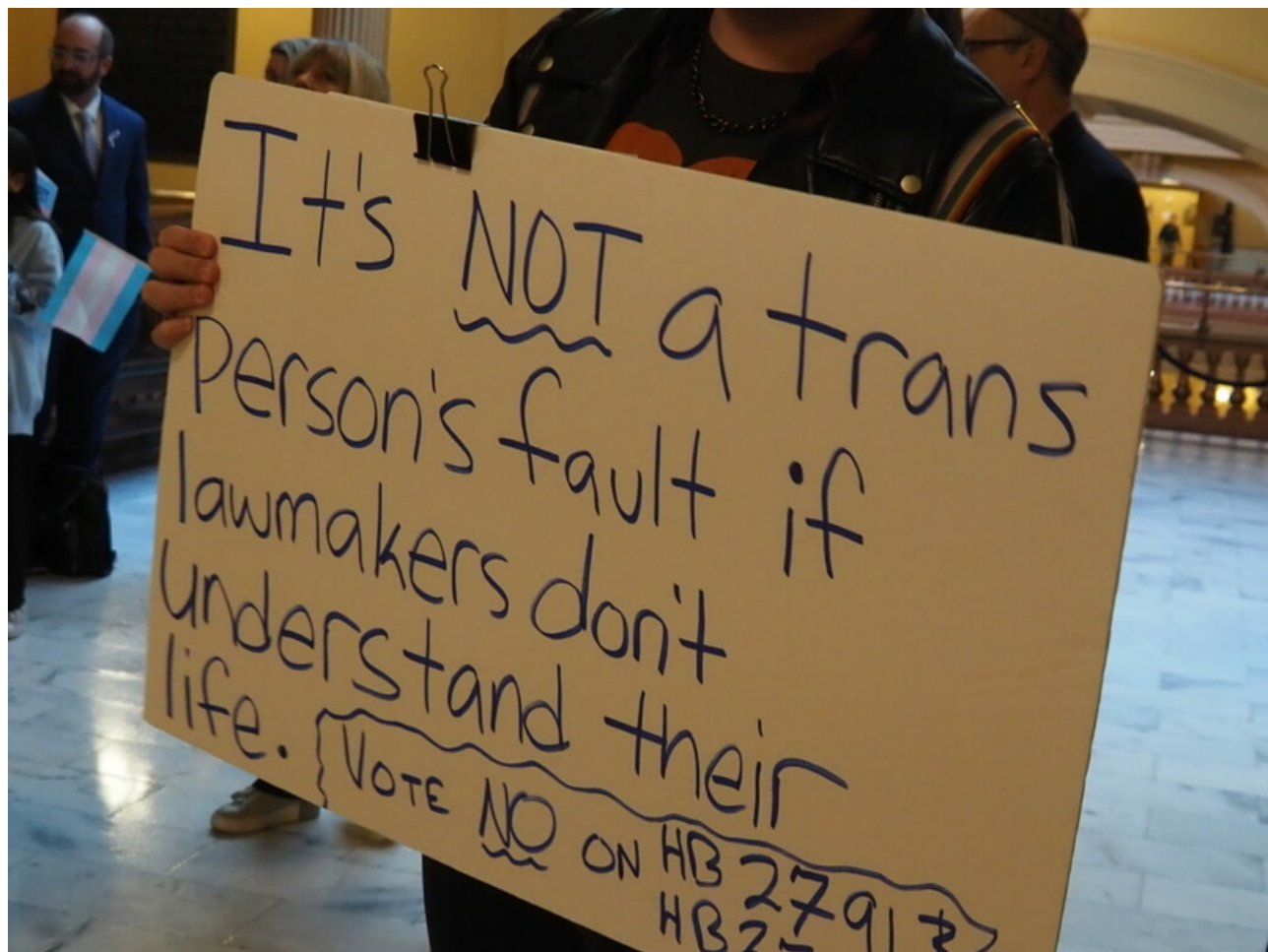
I spent most of today convinced it was Friday, but I was wrong, and it is not Friday, no matter how much I might wish it were. Take note, anti-LGBTQ+ lawmakers. Seems like a nice little lesson for you.



### The Big Takeaway

Kansas Republicans on Wednesday approved [a bill](#) banning gender-affirming care for transgender minors, arguing that puberty blockers and hormone therapy are inherently unsafe (unless they're needed to treat developmental disorders or other health conditions in cisgender children, in which case they're perfectly fine). The proposal, approved by the House on [an 80-40](#) party-line vote, was expected to clear the Senate Thursday ahead of [a likely showdown](#) with Gov. Laura Kelly, who vetoed a similar proposal last year, [the Kansas Reflector reported](#).

Four House Republicans were absent Wednesday, precisely the number of additional votes needed to override a second veto.



So deeply, deeply true.  
(Photo by Rachel Mipro/Kansas Reflector)

**House leaders celebrated the bill's passage in a misleading statement** that equated gender-affirming medical treatment with age-restricted vices like cigarettes, alcohol and gambling “that can lead to sustained, negative outcomes for vulnerable youth.” We don’t let kids do *those* things, so *obviously* we cannot let them access *medical care that best suits their needs*! This is a completely relevant comparison!

“One of our jobs as legislators is to ensure the right protections are in place for the well-being of Kansas kids,” House Speaker Dan Hawkins, House Majority Leader Chris Croft and Speaker Pro Tempore Blake Carpenter said in a joint statement, because apparently it took three Republicans to conjure up this *spot-on* logic. “Kids’ brains aren’t fully developed to the point they can make these life-altering decisions.”

**Someone’s brain is a problem here, sure.** This statement is a pile of crap dressed up to look like concern, and the ruse falls apart once you spend five seconds on Google. Because for transgender kids, gender-affirming care *is* a

protective measure. It's endorsed by virtually every major medical organization, including the [American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry](#), the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) and the [American Medical Association](#). A boatload of research [has shown](#) that gender-affirming care — medical or behavioral — improves mental health and overall well-being among trans and nonbinary kids, which is a big deal for a community that is [already more at risk](#) for depression, self-harm and social isolation. Restricting access to that care doesn't protect trans kids. It actively harms them.



*We see you, still.*  
(Photo by Getty Images)

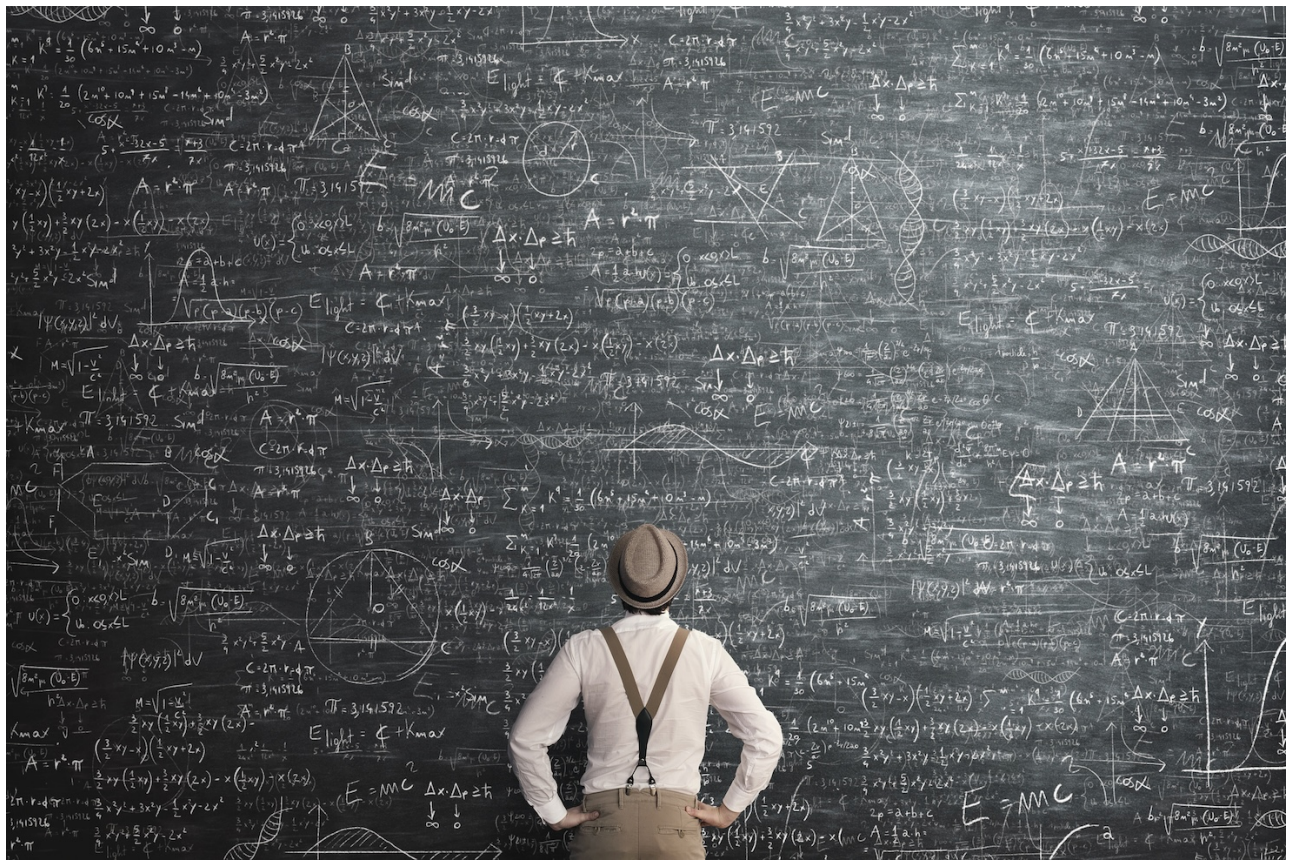
**And the bill doesn't stop there.** It also threatens medical providers, who could lose their licenses for continuing to offer gender-affirming care to minors. Doctors would also be subject to legal action related to that treatment for 10 years *after* the patient turns 18. The legislation also bars the use of state funds and resources for gender transition services, even those that do not require medical or surgical intervention. A separate provision would prohibit state employees who work with children from “promoting the use of social transition,” a concept so vague it could plausibly prevent social workers, teachers and public health employees from using a child's preferred pronouns. Nothing good

will come from any of this, warned House Minority Leader Vic Miller.

“Not only does the Republican Party think they have the right to tell parents how to best raise their children, but they’re criminalizing health care workers during a time when we struggle to find enough doctors in the state for basic care,” Miller said. “They just can’t help themselves, as proven by the annual iterations of bills like this. Let parents parent and let health care workers provide care.”

**Some parents — the anti-LGBTQ+ ones — would have new protections** in Tennessee under a proposed bill that would bar the state from denying prospective foster and adoptive parents based solely on their “sincerely held religious or moral” objections to the existence of non-cisgender humans. [The legislation](#), approved this week by both Senate and House committees, would also bar the Department of Children’s Services from requiring those parents to accept or affirm a child’s gender identity or sexual orientation, [the Tennessee Lookout reported](#).

**But don’t worry** – the policy “does not preclude” the state from considering “the religious or moral beliefs” of an adoptive or foster child or their family of origin. In other words, the department *can* consider the specific needs of each child — but it doesn't *have* to. That’s a stark departure from the state’s [current policy](#), which explicitly protects against harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. I’m sure that’s heartening news for the 6,000+ kids currently in foster care in Tennessee, a disproportionate number of whom [likely identify as LGBTQ+](#).



*See we protect the kids by protecting the parents who may not want to protect the kids and by doing that we protect the kids, get it?*

*(Photo by fran\_kie/Adobe Stock)*

Proponents of the measure said it was intended to expand the state's dwindling pool of foster families, which has apparently been hamstrung by a pesky perception that you shouldn't open your home to an LGBTQ+ child if you "sincerely" believe it's immoral to be anything other than cisgender. Once prospective parents understand that it's actually just fine to care for a child whose identity they abhor, they'll be rushing to sign up, according to state Rep. Mary Littleton, a Republican and the bill's sponsor.

"This bill aims to protect the moral and religious beliefs of adoptees and foster parents," she said Wednesday during a hearing before the House Civil Justice Committee hearing.

But it "does not disregard the values and beliefs of the child," she added. Those factors will remain part of a "comprehensive list of factors" considered by the Department of Child Services during the placement process, she said.

**Obviously, the proposal was not a hit with LGBTQ+ and child legal advocates**, who said it did nothing to prevent LGBTQ+ kids from ending up in foster (or permanent!) homes with people who will ("sincerely") ignore, denigrate

or even attempt to change their identity or sexual orientation. That's a lot to put on a child, particularly one who has been removed from their family due to neglect or abuse, said Nanette Clark, a Nashville attorney who has served as a court-appointed child guardian and special judge.

“When you require DCS to place an LGBTQ child in a placement that will refuse to support their sexual identity, not only are you creating additional adverse childhood experiences and trauma, you’re creating situations where children will find a way to escape that placement, either through running away, a suicide attempt or making false allegations against the foster parents or adoptive parents,” she said. “They will find a way to escape that situation.”



*Pride.*

*(Photo by Getty Images)*

**Nex Benedict, an Oklahoma nonbinary teen whose death sparked nationwide outrage over anti-LGBTQ+ bullying,** died by suicide after ingesting a fatal mix of Benadryl and Prozac, the state medical examiner confirmed Wednesday. Benedict, 16, died after a physical fight in the bathroom at their high school that began with teasing by other students, [the Oklahoma Voice reported](#).

“They were talking about us in front of us, and so I went up there and poured

water on them,” Benedict said in body camera footage released by the Owasso Police Department. “They came at me. They grabbed onto my hair. I grabbed onto them.”

Benedict visited a hospital after the fight and was discharged the same day. Their mother called 911 the following day, telling a dispatcher that Benedict was breathing shallowly with their eyes rolled back in their head. They were later pronounced dead at St. Francis Hospital in Tulsa.

Police said Tuesday their investigation had uncovered “many indications” that Benedict’s death was a suicide but chose to withhold them until the medical examiner’s office completed its report.

It’s not clear whether, or how much, the alleged bullying contributed to Benedict’s death. At least two investigations are underway — one helmed by the U.S. Department of Education’s civil rights office, and one by Benedict’s family. Suicide is relatively common among transgender and nonbinary youth, particularly teens and young adults, who in 2023 attempted to take their own lives [at nearly twice the rate](#) of their cisgender peers. And it’s not because of their identities.

“LGBTQ+ young people are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized in society,” according to the Trevor Project.

### **Sounds familiar**

- [Transgender Kansans appeal court order blocking changes to driver’s license gender markers](#)
- [Former Ohio teacher, State Board of Ed member sees literacy as ‘key civil rights issue’](#)
- [U.S. Senate confirms Rhode Island’s first Black or LGBTQ+ judge](#)



**State of Our Democracy**

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem disparaged Native American parents and political leaders Wednesday in an attempt to demonstrate her commitment to helping

Native American students succeed (or something). After signing a pair of education bills, Noem told attendees at two separate town halls that Native American students are struggling because their parents aren't around and their tribal leaders are too busy reaping the rewards of being in cahoots with the Mexican drug cartels, [South Dakota Searchlight reported](#).

“My next step would be to do what I can to get a tribe to participate with me to help their kids be more successful,” Noem said at the [first event](#). “Because they live with 80% to 90% unemployment. Their kids don’t have any hope. They don’t have parents who show up and help them. They have a tribal council or a president who focuses on a political agenda more than they care about actually helping somebody’s life look better.”



*The cartels did not appear to be in attendance.  
(Photo by Makenzie Huber/South Dakota Searchlight)*

**Native American students are struggling in South Dakota.** Chronic absenteeism among those attending public school increased from 31% to 54% from 2018 to 2023 — the highest among all South Dakota student

demographics. A third of Native American public school students don't complete high school, 84% are not considered college and career ready, and only 7% take the ACT, [according to the latest data](#) from the state Department of Education. But there's no evidence their parents, or tribal leaders, are to blame for those inequities. And even if there were, I doubt disparaging them publicly would help the situation, you know?

There's also no evidence that tribal leaders and tribally enrolled legislators are somehow profiting off of drug cartels or concealing their presence on reservations, but Noem keeps saying it anyway, even after the remarks got her [banned](#) from the Oglala Sioux Tribe's Pine Ridge Reservation. [At first](#), the drug stuff seemed like a set of talking points designed to show off Noem's border security bonafides for a certain orangeish, VP-seeking criminal defendant, but now she's just expanding on it randomly at political events, so honestly, who knows what's happening?

"We've got some tribal leaders that I believe are personally benefiting from the cartels being here, and that's why they attack me every day," she said Wednesday at her [second town hall](#) of the day.

Searchlight requested comments from several Native American legislators and a tribal president, some of whom were not pleased with Noem's initial speech. None had responded as of press time, probably because they, like most of us, prefer to spend their time not thinking or talking about Noem.

## **Punching out**

- [Conservatives rally against ranked choice voting in Louisiana](#)
- [Michigan Dems want to shine a 'BRITE' light on elected officials' finances and political nonprofits](#)
- [More scrutiny coming over use of Nebraska legislative space after Bible study held in hearing room](#)
- [Controversial bill to revamp New Jersey public records law pulled from hearing for amendments](#)



**From The Newsrooms**

**Courts & Criminal Justice**

- [Alabama legislator seeks to eliminate nitrogen gas executions](#)
- [Senate Judiciary Committee forwards omnibus Kentucky crime bill without chairman's vote](#)
- [Public defenders underpaid, overworked, North Dakota report says](#)
- [Emotional support dog at center of legal battle can stay home for now, New Jersey Supreme Court rules](#)

## Labor

- [Republicans in Louisiana Legislature file bills targeting public sector unions](#)
- [Maryland Board of Public Works approves millions to settle wage theft claims](#)
- [Minnesota workers sue manure management company over wage theft, poor living conditions](#)
- [Trapped on Wisconsin farms: The hidden plight of trafficked workers](#)

## Health Care

- [U.S. House Speaker Johnson says IVF should be protected — just not by Congress](#)
- [Alabama prescription drug bill sparks debate over price impact](#)
- [HIV no longer a death sentence, but Louisiana laws target people who live with it](#)
- [New way for states to cover pricey gene therapies will start with sickle cell disease](#)



## One Last Thing

Jennifer Lopez [canceled a handful of tour dates](#) due to lagging ticket sales after her album (and two related movies) debuted at a disappointing no. 38 on the Billboard 200. The “This Is Me... Now” project is apparently a love letter to her journey with Ben Affleck, which probably would have performed better if it was just an extra-long cut of [the Dunkings commercial](#). (BOSTON!)

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1414 Raleigh Rd #127

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