

— News From The States —

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From Kate Queram

GOT QUESTIONS? ASK KATE

At least 30 state legislatures are [in session](#) as I write this, a third of which are expected to adjourn by the end of April. Key word: *Expected*. Because as any casual observer of Congress can attest, politics rarely go as planned.



The Big Takeaway

Scheduling is for suckers in Idaho, where lawmakers continued to squabble over a major transportation bill on Thursday — a full six days past the legislature's slated adjournment date, [the Idaho Capital Sun reported](#).



Another day in paradise. (Photo by Otto Kitsinger/for the Idaho Capital Sun)

Lawmakers gave up on that deadline last week, pushing adjournment to Friday amid budget negotiations and leadership drama in the House. That target was in doubt by Tuesday, when the Senate sent a proposed transportation budget back to a joint finance committee due to lingering disagreements over the sale of a flood-damaged property that previously housed the Department of Transportation.

As written, the budget would have revoked the state's authority to sell, allowing for renovations that supporters claimed would be more cost-efficient than relocating the agency. That didn't fly in the Senate, which protected the sale Thursday by killing the bill altogether. It was a matter of integrity, according to state Sen. Rick Just, a Boise Democrat.

"The sale of the property followed all existing rules and was widely publicized," he said. "If we overturn the board decision [to sell] with this budget, we are saying that you can't trust the word of the state of Idaho."

You also can't trust the legislative calendar, which remained in flux as of Friday afternoon. Lawmakers can't adjourn without approving a transportation budget, which can't be amended by the Joint Finance-

Appropriations Committee until the House and Senate agree on a solution for the property. Around and around we go. These are the days of our lives (...or Idaho's life, anyway).



There is a stock photo for everything. (Photo by Getty Images)

Budget talks went somewhat better in Kentucky, where lawmakers on Thursday approved a \$128 billion spending plan that increased school funding by 3% and funneled millions of dollars to one-time investments in local infrastructure projects, university initiatives and pension programs, among other things, [per the Kentucky Lantern](#).

The GOP-backed plan won praise from GOP lawmakers, who hailed it as a reflection of their “dedication to efficiency and accountability.” It should “instill confidence in the state’s ability to navigate through challenges and take advantage of opportunities,” Rep. Jason Petrie, a Republican and chair of the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee, said in a statement.

Democrats were less enthused. As a whole, the budget has “gotten better,” Gov. Andy Beshear said Thursday. But it still fell short of several key spending priorities, he added, such as funding for universal pre-kindergarten and pay increases for teachers and school employees.

“We have got to get our educators a real raise if we’re going to be competitive with other states,” Beshear said.



Beshear is trying! (Photo by Sara D. Davis/Getty Images)

Democrats made similar points during debate on the House floor, arguing that the budget could have at least shored up the funding formula to ensure it could support salary bumps in the future. As is, the funding will not [keep pace with inflation](#), according to an analysis by a progressive think tank.

But tough cookies, you know? Budgets aren't wish lists and Republicans aren't Santa Claus, according to Rep. James Tipson, a Republican and chair of the House Education Committee.

"We're not here to get everything we might want," Tipton said. "We're here to come up with a compromise and work together for the good of the commonwealth."

The greater good prevailed in Georgia, where a pair of anti-trans proposals died Friday morning in the final hours of the [2024 legislative session](#). The measures — one to ban gender-affirming care for minors, the other to restrict bathroom usage and sports participation for trans kids — were shoehorned into unrelated bills that passed the Senate on party-line votes but did not receive a vote in the House, where Republicans apparently lacked the appetite for pointless cruelty, [the Georgia Recorder reported](#).



WE CHOSE THE LESS TERRIBLE OPTION (Photo by Ross Williams/Georgia Recorder)

“We know there’s some issues — social issues, if you will — that are important to Georgians,” said House Speaker Jon Burns. “And there’s some of them that we embrace, but they’re also – we know there’s a time. And timing was maybe not right today for some of those issues that came over from the Senate.”

“We’ll continue to work with the Senate and look at those issues and make some determinations on what’s good for all Georgians in every walk of life,” he continued. “And so we’re conscious of those issues. They’re priorities – many of them are, but they’re maybe not the same ones as the Senate.”

The crisis of conscience was a big fat bummer for Cole Muzio, president of a conservative lobbying group, who said it was a “missed opportunity” to enact the kind of “bold action” voters expect from Republican lawmakers.

“Georgia needs to turn in the right direction. We have a lot to do heading into 2025,” he said. “We’re excited to add those onto our agenda then and we’ll be back tomorrow.”

Alas, nobody else will be there. The legislative session is history, and as

far as Democrats are concerned, it ended quite nicely, thank you very much.

“I’m happy that we did not pass legislation that would have caused a lot of real harm for a very vulnerable population, transgender youth,” said state Rep. Sam Park, Democratic Caucus whip and the first openly gay man elected to the General Assembly. “It’s a reminder that despite the polarized political environment that we’re in, that we can still come together and move Georgia forward by, again, not passing a very dangerous and harmful piece of legislation. It’s been a tough legislative session, but yeah, I think we ended just fine.”

That’s a wrap

- [Fear of rogue convention deters Kansas Senate from aiding crusade to alter U.S. Constitution](#)
 - [Ultra-conservative lawmakers target Louisiana libraries with legislation as culture war rages on](#)
 - [Can Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo break the Democrats’ Assembly supermajority? Here’s a look at the terrain.](#)
 - [Pennsylvania House tackles child welfare, crowns a state candy, and axes an old law on bridge safety](#)
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State of Democracy

A Republican legislative candidate in Arizona appears to be ineligible to vote under state law, a massive problem that could curtail his campaign and leave him liable for up to 16 felony charges — one for every potentially fraudulent ballot he’s cast in the past 12 years, [the Arizona Mirror reported](#).



He can't vote but he voted so that means he can vote, you see? (Photo via the Arizona Mirror)

The trouble began for Neil DeSanti in 2010, when he pleaded guilty to felony endangerment stemming from a 2004 drunk driving arrest. Less than three months later, DeSanti pleaded guilty to felony possession of burglary tools after he and his cousin were caught stealing a metal ramp from a commercial yard near downtown Phoenix. A single felony conviction is enough to lose your right to vote in Arizona, though it's restored automatically once you complete your sentence. But once you rack up two or more felonies, you have to petition the court to regain your voting rights. And there's no record of DeSanti doing that.

“It does not appear that Mr. DeSanti submitted an Application for Restoration of Rights (Civil and/or Firearm) in either case,” confirmed Jessica Fotinos, the general counsel for the Clerk of the Maricopa County Superior Court.

DeSanti acknowledged as much Wednesday, saying first that he believed his rights were automatically restored seven years after his conviction (they weren't) and then that he was “under the impression” that his plea agreements indicated he could vote after completing his sentence (they did not). Finally, DeSanti threw his hands up and settled on a logical fallacy: He has voted, thus, he is allowed to vote.

“I must have them restored, because I can vote and possess a firearm,” he said. “I’ve voted numerous times.”

Yeah, so, successfully doing something illegal does not magically make the thing legal. In Maricopa County, where DeSanti lives and votes, election officials routinely check voter eligibility by comparing lists of existing voters to lists of newly convicted felons. But they don’t do that for newly registered voters, who are required under state law to vet themselves by providing accurate information about their criminal history, felony convictions and, if applicable, whether they’ve had their voting rights restored. Failing to do so is (somewhat ironically) [a class 6 felony](#), punishable by up to 5.75 years in prison.

And that’s a problem for DeSanti, who checked the box indicating he was “NOT a convicted FELON or my civil rights are restored” when he first [registered to vote](#) — and also each of the four times he [updated his registration](#), most recently [in October 2021](#).

All of which opens the door to new felony charges. There’s the false registration, plus a potential [class 5 felony charge](#) for each of the 16 ballots DeSanti cast while ineligible. It also precludes him from running for elected office in Arizona, where state legislative candidates are required to be “[qualified electors](#),” a role that includes an active voter registration.

Not that he’s particularly concerned. If this was really an issue, he said, somebody would have brought it up before, like in 2022, when he lost a court case challenging his candidacy.

What, me worry?

- [Republican with history of vulgar, anti-gay online attacks files for Missouri Senate](#)
- [Nebraska state senator asks colleagues to uphold ‘justice and decency’ and censure Sen. Halloran](#)
- [Judge bars county line in June’s primaries, a blow to New Jersey’s party leaders](#)
- [In North Carolina gubernatorial race, Mark Robinson exposes Republican fault lines](#)



ENVIRONMENT

- [In the central U.S., an electric grid bottleneck persists](#)
- [Plan to end new oil and gas drilling by 2030 rejected by Colorado Senate committee](#)
- [Tornado that hit southwest Kansas town ahead of snowstorm wasn't obvious on radar](#)
- [Maine environment committee approves open-pit mining exemption submitted past deadline](#)

REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

- [Contraception access bills meet mixed support in states around the country](#)
- [U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor doesn't approve of Florida Supreme Court's 'stalling tactics' on abortion rights](#)
- ['Right to birth control' bill stalls in Louisiana Legislature over anti-abortion concerns](#)
- [Poll finds Missourians want better access to birth control. Bipartisan bill could grant it](#)

WORKFORCE

- [Disabled workers can be paid less than the minimum wage. Some states want to end that.](#)
- [Farmworkers in Maine one step closer to gaining state minimum wage guarantee, other labor rights](#)
- [Rhode Island Senate approves expanded family leave bill in 31-3 vote](#)
- [New Jersey, Lyft at odds over employment status of drivers](#)



One Last Thing

Famous groundhog/seasonal prognosticator Punxsutawney Phil and his wife Phyllis [are parents](#), the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club announced Wednesday. Phyllis gave birth to two healthy groundhog pups and is currently hanging out with them at the Punxsutawney Memorial Library, where patrons can sneak a peek if they peer through a viewing window at the right time. The names and sexes of the pups are TBD, but I'm choosing to believe they're twins, mostly because it means Phyllis and I have something in common and would probably be friends if we were seated together at a (strange) dinner party.



hello we're all twins (via [Giphy](#))

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