

# The Legislature launches under pandemic and inflation



by Joel Dyar  
Community  
Organizer

On January 12, the Second Session of the 73rd General Assembly of the people of Colorado was gavelled into action. Sixty-five elected State Representatives and 35 elected State Senators began their annual five-month service under Colorado’s Golden Dome on the cusp of a new year defined by a continuing pandemic, surging costs of living and worrisome price inflation, and a large one-time influx of \$2.6 billion in federal recovery dollars to stretch as far as they can.

Over the coming months, our elected officials will introduce and debate thousands of bills, make decisions in hundreds of committee hearings, and bargain, battle, and cajole for votes on the House and Senate floors. Our Governor and the legislature’s Joint Budget Committee will work to balance the state’s checkbook and tackle difficult decisions about what is possible with state revenues and what is not. Collectively, they’ll hear from tens of thousands of everyday Colorado citizens on our hopes, dreams, and priorities on every policy topic imaginable — people, hopefully, including you.

You’ll have many chances to shape Colorado legislation on things you care about this year — and the Western Colorado Alliance Legislative Committee is here to help! For decades, our Legislative Committee has



brought an all-volunteer group of members together to write, impact, and pass legislation on our issues. Last year saw us bring home major wins in areas ranging from mental and youth health to agriculture and clean energy. This year, Committee Chair Gretchen Nicholoff, our beloved lobbyist Sol Malick, and I will carry this work forward. As part of that, we will be bringing a group of Western Colorado

residents to personally connect with legislators in Denver as part of our annual People’s Lobby Day, on March 6-8.

Our Legislative Committee meets once weekly by Zoom to track, prioritize, and take action on bills, cooperating with the Alliance’s many issue committees and West Slope Youth Voice. We send you emails on the big priorities we together

select and ways you can make a difference. You can apply to join this committee if you’re interested! If you’re looking for other ways to help shape Colorado policy, check out the “Action You Can Take Now!” above.

### What’s Coming?

We expect a 2022 Legislative Session dominated by basic cost-

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**ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE NOW!**

- Support the annual **People’s Lobby Trip!**
- View and track state legislation at:  
**[leg.colorado.gov/bills](https://leg.colorado.gov/bills)**
- Find your State Representative’s and Senator’s contact info at:  
**[leg.colorado.gov/legislators](https://leg.colorado.gov/legislators)**
- View Legislative Committees and watch discussion of bills or sign up to testify on a bill at:  
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# Flexibility and a healthy dose of optimism



by **Andreya Krieves**  
Alliance Chair

Things look very different now than they did two years ago. Remember the time when we could make plans for something like an event, travel, or — heck — even a meeting, and have reasonable confidence in keeping those plans? Plans feel different now, and maybe that's not such a bad thing. This pandemic has forced us to grow and change in ways that we might not have otherwise. In an era when we must always be ready to pivot in our plans, we've grown nimbler. We're more flexible with ourselves and others when plans need to change. This has certainly been the case at Western Colorado Alliance, and I would argue that we're stronger for it. This flexibility allows us to find new ways to connect and organize within our communities.

We are flexible and nimble in the ways we approach our plans and shared work, but our values

are unchanged. Our Alliance remains steadfast in our mission to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development and continues to work on issues most important to you, our members. We'll continue our focus on building people power through community organizing and legislative action. The pandemic has only underscored the importance of this work, and the urgency of coming together in solidarity with one another and the issues we face.

Looking ahead gives reason for optimism. We are building our network and amplifying member voices in multiple ways. With an expanded (and still growing!) staff, our Alliance will be able to create new connections with community members and decision makers across our state. We will be kicking off our deep listening/deep canvassing initiative to cast a wider net, to grow in our understanding of diverse perspectives, and to build new relationships, bridges, and



Western Colorado Alliance  
Chair Andreya Krieves

power across communities. We are also looking to expand our Board of Directors to include more diverse voices and perspectives. These things, along with a healthy dose of flexibility, and 40+ years of organizing

experience will increase the impact we can make together to realize our vision of creating a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just, and self-reliant.

## Waiting for a GMUG decision



by **Nick Allan**  
Community Organizer

The sound of a hard slap upon a creek was our welcoming call into the Kelso Mesa hiking trail. Our greeter was a beautiful brown beaver that most likely heard our arrival far before we saw them.



As we approached the running water, the beaver seemed to sprint across it, using its massive tail as a propellor against the water. Joy and surprise ran across the faces in our party of hikers. It was a small glimpse into the beauty and power of nature, one that is not witnessed often, and one that needs to be preserved.

The hike at Kelso Mesa was our final site visit of areas within the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, Gunnison (GMUG) Forest Plan area. Within the 90-day period for public comments, our Alliance organized two hikes, and two virtual writing workshops.

We had plans for more site visits; sadly, the weather was not willing to cooperate for some of our planned events.

In total, over 50 members engaged directly on these activities. In addition, our Alliance sent hundreds of emails and public statements into the Forestry Department, all in the final push to wrap the GMUG Forest Plan, 20 years in the making. On November 26, the Forestry Department wrapped up accepting public comment on the four alternatives presented by the department.

A special thank you goes

out to members Lisa Eckert, Jim Riddell, Andy Goldman, Sherry Schenk, Roze Evans, and Diane Thompson for their work in helping present our issues around the GMUG Forest Plan. In total, we had 47 members attend our two public comment writing workshops. At the end of the workshops, each was assigned to submit three public comments. That, along with our outreach to membership at large, resulted in 150 public comments generated as a result of our Alliance's efforts.

Now, like in many government

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brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development.

Our Alliance's vision for the future is one where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just, and self-reliant.

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# ARPA kidding me? Be in the know!



by María Luiza  
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We're two years in and COVID continues to be woven into our daily lives. Our communities continue to suffer hardships due to the loss of jobs, loss of employees, family needs, and overburdened health systems. With so many contributing factors, support from the government was vital. So far we have seen that support with stimulus checks, child care credits, and more. And another form of support to come out of this is the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 or ARPA.

ARPA, also referred to as the COVID -19 Stimulus Package, is a \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill that was passed by the United States Congress and was signed into law by President Joe Biden on March 11, 2021. This bill sends relief to states and local governments affected by the impact of the Covid

pandemic, allowing them to respond with better efficiency to the resulting public health needs and many of the economic hardships that have arisen in the community, and that we continue to experience nationwide.

Mesa County and the city of Grand Junction are both receiving funds. Mesa County has received \$29.9 million from ARPA and Grand Junction will receive approximately 10.4 million according to the city treasury. The funds are meant to be used in certain ways. For example, as determined by the legislation and guidance from the U.S. Treasury, the use of the funds include:

- **Replacement of Public Sector Revenue Loss**

- **Support for the Public Health Response**
- **Address Negative Economic Impacts**
- **Premium Pay for Essential Workers**

- **Water, Sewer, and Broadband Infrastructure**

As of right now, Mesa County and the City of Grand Junction are tackling the allocation of this funding in very different ways.

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## The Legislature launches

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of-living issues, with action on housing, child care, and transportation costs up for debate. The legislature will decide how to spend \$2.6B in federal recovery funds under the guidance of four special task forces on affordable housing, behavioral health, economic recovery and workforce investment that have been hard at work since last year. We also expect significant bills on mental and behavioral health, debt relief, coal closure community transition, residential solar and energy efficiency financing, and hazardous air toxics protections. Lastly, we are bracing for a flood of “messaging bills” — highly political bills that are impossible to pass but favored by some legislators seeking talking points for their Fall elections. It'll be an action-packed year. Here are specific current or forthcoming bills top of our radar right now:

**Just Transition:** In 2019, Colorado became the first state in the country to launch a state-level office for coal closure community transition. With coal plant and coal mine retirements occurring across the state, the

new Office of Just Transition worked with communities to develop a list of policy options to help workers and towns. We are awaiting a bill that would fund these important tools.

**Debtor Protection (Senate Bill 22-086):** Over one in four Coloradans currently have debt in collections, as do nearly one in two Coloradans of color. Life-changing financial crises, the collapse of a small business or loss of a job, and stifling medical and student loan debt can easily drive anyone into bankruptcy, where creditors then descend on individuals to seize assets. Colorado has some debtor protections on the books, but they are fairly weak compared to other states. Senate Bill 086 substantially raises the values of a person's home, vehicle, household goods, and farm equipment that are protected from seizure by creditors.

**Investment Water Speculation (Senate Bill 22-029):** There are some big money investors and unscrupulous locals who want to turn Colorado water rights into a new horizon for Wall Street-style casino capitalism. Senate Bill 029 creates several protections and

consequences will real teeth to guard against water speculation.

**Behavioral, Mental, and Youth Health (House Bill 22-1065, Senate Bill 22-010, and Senate Bill 22-021):** A triad of new bills tackle major facets of how state agencies and service providers engage health issues. The first addresses the standard under which individuals can be committed to 72-hour mental health treatment. The second expands pre-trial diversion programs for individuals living with behavioral health issues, a chance to avoid the court and prison system that has proven successful in Colorado trials. The third expands legislative oversight and study of the treatment of people and juveniles who are living with mental health issues in our criminal justice system.

**Equitable Energy Upgrade and Acceleration Program (EEUAP):** A forthcoming bill seeks to establish a EEUAP program in Colorado that attacks the biggest barrier for people wishing to access residential solar or energy efficiency upgrades: the upfront cost. To get people a chance to install energy upgrades and reap the savings over time,

this program allows utilities to provide the capital themselves. It is estimated that this program would allow 10,000 Coloradans to go solar and 30,000 to obtain energy efficiency upgrades every year and catalyze \$350M in annual economic activity.

**Air Toxics:** Current and forthcoming bills will tackle major unresolved regulatory gaps in Colorado air pollution. Policy options will likely range from creating publicly monitorable air toxics maps to requiring greater disclosure by polluters and initiating new state-level rulemakings on the regulation of certain toxics. These bills would impact a broad swath of industries and polluters and may become the major environmental battle of this year's session.

We'll be keeping you in the loop by email and social media as we track all this action. Look out for future emails and timely alerts on special moments to make a difference or join our potential People's Lobby Day. If you're considering joining our Legislative Committee, get in touch with me at [joel@westerncoloradoalliance.org](mailto:joel@westerncoloradoalliance.org).



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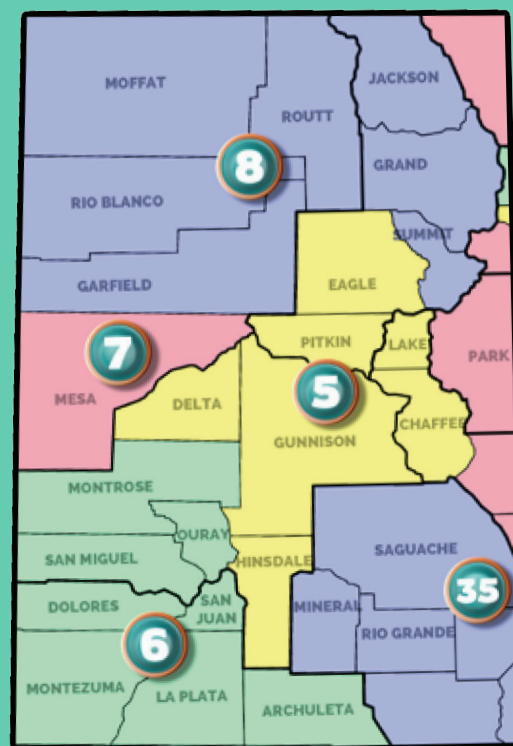
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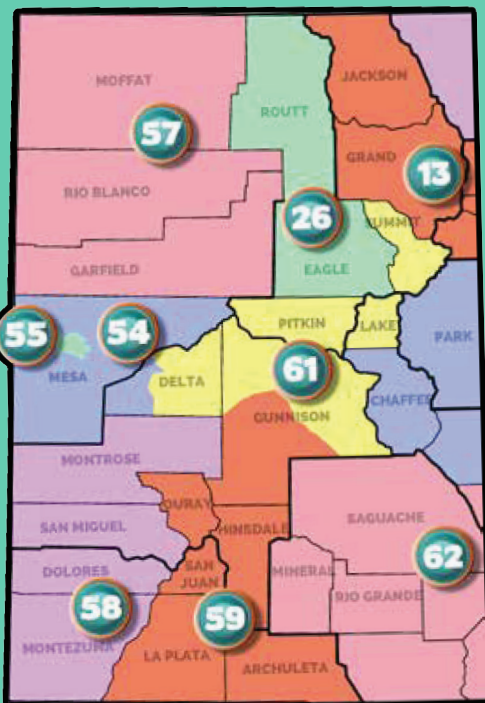
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# Special Legislative Guide 2022 HOUSE

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### AGRICULTURE, LIVESTOCK, & WATER

**CHAIR:** McCormick; **VICE-CHAIR:** Catlin; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Holtorf, Lindsay, Lontine, McLachlan, Pelton, Roberts, Titone, D. Valdez, Will

### APPROPRIATIONS

**CHAIR:** Herod; **VICE-CHAIR:** McCluskie; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Daugherty, Duran, Hanks, Jodeh, Kipp, Larson, McCormick, Ransom, Rich

### BUSINESS AFFAIRS & LABOR

**CHAIR:** Roberts; **VICE-CHAIR:** Sullivan; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Bird, Carver, Duran, Lynch, Mullica, Ricks, Sandridge, Snyder, Van Beber, Van Winkle

### EDUCATION

**CHAIR:** McLachlan; **VICE-CHAIR:** Young; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Baisley, Caraveo, Exum, Geitner, Kipp, Larson, Michaelson Jenet

### ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

**CHAIR:** A. Valdez; **VICE-CHAIR:** Hooton; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bernett, Cutter, Froelich, Hanks, Pico, Sirota, Soper, Titone, Weissman, Will, Woog

# 2022 HOUSE COMMITTEES

### FINANCE

**CHAIR:** Bird; **VICE-CHAIR:** Snyder; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Benavidez, Daugherty, Gray, Kipp, Luck, Rich, Sandridge, Soper, Tipper

### HEALTH & INSURANCE

**CHAIR:** Lontine; **VICE-CHAIR:** Ortiz; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Baisley, Kennedy, McCormick, Mullica, Neville, Sirota, Soper, Titone, Williams

### JUDICIARY

**CHAIR:** Weissman; **VICE-CHAIR:** Tipper; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bacon, Benavidez, Bockenfeld, Carver, Daugherty, Luck, Lynch, Roberts, Woodrow

### PUBLIC & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

**CHAIR:** Michaelson Jenet; **VICE-CHAIR:** Sirota; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Bradfield, Cutter, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Hanks, Holtorf, Jodeh, Pelton, Ricks, Williams, Young

### STATE, CIVIC, MILITARY, & VETERAN AFFAIRS

**CHAIR:** Kennedy; **VICE-CHAIR:** Woodrow; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Bacon, Bernett, Bockenfeld, Boesenecker, Bradfield, Neville, A. Valdez, Woog

### TRANSPORTATION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**CHAIR:** Exum; **VICE-CHAIR:** Froelich; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Boesenecker, Catlin, Gray, Hooton, Lindsay, Pico, Rich, Sullivan, D. Valdez, Van Beber, Van Winkle



## A breath of fresh air: New rules in the AQCC



by **Emily Hornback**  
Executive Director  
and **Brian Williams**  
Community Organizer

Last December, Western Colorado Alliance and allied organizations from across Colorado achieved another victory for clean air and healthy communities. In the latest of a series of historic decisions at the Air Quality Control Commission, Alliance members won the toughest protections

The leak detection and repair rules going forward require oil and gas operators to conduct more frequent inspections, especially for low-producing wells, and make repairs when emissions are discovered. The largest facilities within disproportionately impacted communities and within 1,000 feet of homes will now be inspected monthly with optical gas imaging cameras. All new oil and gas facilities will also be inspected monthly.

The final rules are designed to curb emissions of methane, ozone and other gasses from oil and gas facilities statewide. It is estimated these new rules will result in a 51% reduction in methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by 2030, helping Colorado meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets set by state law in 2019.

In addition to requiring more frequent inspections for leaks within 1,000 feet of dispropor-

that are the site of intensive oil and gas development, and often less prosperous and more racially diverse. Battlement Mesa in Garfield County and Commerce City outside Denver are examples of such communities. Ultimately, they recognized that disproportionately impacted communities across the state deserve greater protections.

“Everyone wants to breathe clean air free from pollution and industry should do the work to ensure people living next to these facilities are safe,” says Leslie Robinson, Chair of the Grand Valley Citizens Alliance. “These are commonsense rules, people on the Western Slope deserve the same level of protection as people living on the Front Range.”

These new protections are important not only for Coloradans, but everyone in the country as they set a new bar for regulators to follow. As the Environmental Protection Agency seeks to strengthen nationwide emission standards for oil and gas development, the latest AQCC rule provides a strong benchmark for the agency to follow.

Thank you to all of the Alliance members who have rallied, testified and worked for this victory over the past ten years. It has been a long and winding road but we are now on the path to meeting Colorado’s greenhouse gas targets and protecting our communities.



in the country to limit methane and toxic emissions from oil and gas facilities in our region.

These new protections included increased leak detection and repair rates for oil and gas sites across the state, creating the nation’s toughest program to limit oil and gas facilities from leaking greenhouse gas and air toxics. We also prohibited the venting of these emissions during maintenance activities and secured greater protections for impacted communities living near gas wells.

“The Air Quality Control Commission’s vote to increase the rate of leak detection and repair inspections for all impacted communities is critically important for Western Colorado,” says Rodger Steen, chair of the Western Colorado Alliance’s Oil & Gas Committee. “All wells need to be inspected for leaks and all people deserve protections from toxic emissions, no matter where they live. These rules protect people, keep our air clean, and reduce methane emissions to help us limit the impacts of climate change.”

tionately impacted communities, the new rules require yearly inspections of low-producing wells previously subject to just a single, once-in-a-lifetime leak detection inspection. There are thousands of low-producing wells in Colorado that have not been inspected since 2016.

Some of the Commissioners struggled with the broad definition of a disproportionately impacted community in HB21-1261, the state law that requires protections and mitigation for such communities

## Waiting for a GMUG decision

*Continued from page 2*

activities, we wait. The Forestry Department is tasked to review the over 2000 comments submitted to the department.

After the comment review, the Forestry Department will come back with their final recommendations. In forest plans past, there has been legal litigation and considerations following such a plan release.

No matter what the results or the future actions which might be taken after, members of Western Colorado Alliance should be proud of the work they, and

this organization has put in to make the process a reality. As an organization Western Colorado Alliance has had a hand in the process of this plan for over twenty years. This work will have an impact on the lives of countless generations to come — generations that we hope will also have the ability to connect with the beauty nature has to offer and a planet that is livable.

We want to give a special thanks to all who came before to bring us to this point, and those who gave their time and effort in finishing our commitment the right way.



Western Colorado Alliance members enjoy a beautiful Kelso Mesa path during an Alliance hike designed to bring attention to the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) Forest Plan.



# West Slope Youth Voice fights for accountability, visibility

 by Jeriel Clark  
Organizing  
Director

## Where is the Accountability?

We're halfway through our fourth year of the West Slope Youth Voice (WSYV) program and we've celebrated lots of wins — from senior graduations to the passing of statewide bills that were drafted and run with student support. Our biggest lesson learned so far is that we shouldn't underestimate our youth. They are powerful, capable, and going places to accomplish their goals.

Over the years, our WSYV students have impressed us with the number of students they've registered to vote, the voices they've collected to take to the Capitol, and the bills they've worked on at the State Legislature.

Take a look at just some of the bills the students have prioritized in recent years:

**HB19-1120: Youth Mental Health Education & Suicide Prevention.** This bill, among other things, allowed students 12 years or older to seek and obtain therapy at school without their parents' consent.

**HB19-1032 Comprehensive Human Sexuality Education** requires schools who include sex education in their curriculum to use comprehensive and fact-based human sexuality models that include teaching around consent and prohibits including religious ideology as the format for this education.

**HB19-1192: The Inclusion of American Minorities in Teaching Civil Government** asserts that students deserve the opportunity to receive a whole education in history and government and that includes historical, cultural, and social contributions of American Indians, Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, and LGBTQ individuals.

**SB20-014: Excused Absences In Public Schools for Behavioral Health** expands excused absences for students to include mental health needs as a valid reason to miss a day of school.



*West Slope Youth Voice students addressed members of the School District 51 School Board at a Board Coffee on Saturday, February 12, in Grand Junction. The students spoke in support of the "Healthy Kids" Health Survey, currently under attack by religious homeschool lobbying groups.*

But we've learned over recent years that these bills are virtually meaningless without oversight and implementation.

While aggravated parents are filling school board meetings with rage that students are being taught Critical Race Theory, students in the classroom aren't even receiving consistent teaching about the history and contributions of American minorities — which is currently a state-mandated law.

This summer, WSYV students realized even school administrators didn't know that students are currently able to take excused mental health days. It's become apparent that teachers and students were also unaware. Our students have begun highlighting that bill in their classroom presentations just to try to get the word out. They are met over and over again with shock from students and the response, "I can!?"

And while students across our districts are asking for sex education, the requirement that curriculum be comprehensive sex education only applies to schools that opt into teaching it at all. Most on the West Slope do not.

It's apparent now that passing bills is only the half of it. Accountability of the local government to implement these new bills is equally important. As

a result, our students increasingly focused locally to ensure they are getting the access and education that has been promised.

## We're In A State of Emergency

Beyond a need for accountability, the students are immediately at risk of losing their voices. Right now, students across the country participate in the "Healthy Kids" survey every two years. This survey is the only large-scale opportunity for students in grades 6-12 to give direct input about their own experiences.

The survey's purpose is to respond quickly to youth health needs as well as support youth in making healthy choices. Questions in this survey concern age, school, race, sexuality, gender, disabilities, bicycle & automobile safety, sexual consent, bullying, self-harm, substance use, firearms, racism, hunger, and COVID-19 stressors.

The survey itself is anonymous, but the results of the survey are used by several state agencies to direct funding to support Colorado youth. These agencies include the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Public Safety.

Here's the problem: A large

religious homeschool lobbying group is organizing people across the state to take issue with this survey. They don't like that the survey asks students questions about sexuality, gender, or race. In some counties these efforts have already been successful, and the survey has been removed from schools. This issue has already been raised in West Slope school board meetings.

If students lose access to this survey, the state will experience erasure of student needs, and struggle to allocate funding appropriately. A few examples of how this could show up are: losing school lunch programs for impoverished kids; protections for students who are black, indigenous, people of color, or LGBTQ+; sexual assault education and services; tobacco/vaping education and remediation; and equity-based suicide prevention programs.

The state of Colorado has already deemed our youth's mental health needs as being in a "State of Emergency." And without up-to-date survey results, our students will suffer from lack of support.

I'm often asked how individuals can support the West Slope Youth Voice program, and if you're interested, this is the moment. Email me at [jeriel@westerncoloradoalliance.com](mailto:jeriel@westerncoloradoalliance.com) and let's get started.



# ARPA kidding me?

*Continued from page 3*

The City of Grand Junction has put together a committee to deliberate on where this money will be allocated.

The committee is formed by 11 Grand Junction business leaders, non-profit organizations, and economic officials, like Homeward Bound Director Bill Wade, who was assigned as the committee's chair.

So while the county and the city have financial transparency after the fact in terms of filing interim reports, their processes to determine where to spend the money varies. To view the allocation of the funds that

have already been allocated you can access their respective websites in the links below.

<https://www.mesacounty.us/>

<https://www.gjcity.org/1129/American-Rescue-Plan-Advisory-Committee>

Our Alliance's members in Mesa County have begun a campaign in an effort to help connect community voices to the allocation of these funds. While our committee is currently in the research phase of our campaign, the community — you — will come in next. Our next steps are to send out and collect surveys

to identify where residents in Mesa County feel these funds are needed the most. And the good news is we are not doing this alone! The surveys will be distributed with the support of United Today Stronger Tomorrow (UTST), an organization that has developed due to the ongoing pandemic.

UTST has already done work in La Plata county in Durango. As a result of this work, what started as a seemingly closed-door process turned into an open meeting where the community had a say on where the money should be spent. Our goal is to see similar outcomes, if not better here in

Mesa County, that can allow us to decide where we see the most need. Using UTST's services we hope to reach way more residents and derive the answers from the community to give our voice to the process.

Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County would like to ask you to join our efforts to help spread the word, and invite those who are interested in seeing positive change in their community!

If you are interested in joining, please contact me, María Luiza Pérez Chavéz, by email at [maria@westerncoloradoalliance.org](mailto:maria@westerncoloradoalliance.org) or give me a call at 970-256-7650 Ext. 109.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR **ACTION!**

This edition, we want to take a moment to highlight a few of our members for stepping up and leading the way toward more healthy, just, and self-reliant communities in Western Colorado. These members took time out of their day to tell our Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) how important it is to them that operators set aside enough money to clean up the mess they make when they drill for oil and gas.

*On behalf of our Alliance: Thank you!*

**Gretchen Nicholoff**

**Fred Malo**

**Karen Rose**

**Carol Phelps**

**Barbara Vasquez**

**Gabriel Otero**

**Allyn Harvey**

**Rodger Steen**

**Wayne Quade**

**Robin Nicholoff**

WE'RE  
HIRING

We are hiring a Development Coordinator to help our Alliance strengthen our grassroots fundraising muscles. If you believe in the power of people to fund healthy, just, and self-reliant communities in Western Colorado, this is the job for you! See [westerncoloradoalliance.org](http://westerncoloradoalliance.org) or call **Executive Director Emily Hornback** at **970-256-7650** for more details.



### UPCOMING BOARD EVENTS

**Board Meeting**

April 1, 2022

(via Zoom)

**Board Meeting**

June 3, 2022

(via Zoom)

**Annual Conference**

August 20, 2022

(In-Person)

**Board Meeting**

October 7, 2022

(via Zoom)

**Board Retreat**

December 8-9, 2020

(In-Person)