



## SPECIAL 2024 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE

## INCLUDING OUR ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE GUIDE!



**by Jeriel Clark  
Political &  
Organizing  
Director**

Each year, the Colorado Legislature comes with its own set of opportunities as well as unique challenges — and this year is no different.

A hundred legislators travel from across the state every year to convene for 120 days for Colorado’s General Session to pass new laws for the state of Colorado. Our legislators are divided into two bodies, the

House and the Senate. Legislative 101 right? Well, in recent years, Democratic members of the house have been inching their way closer and closer to achieving supermajority, and this year is the closest they’ve been. Of the 65 members of the House, 49 Representatives are Democrats. This means they have achieved a supermajority, giving them the power to pass any bill without Republican support or participation.

Over in the Senate, with 35 total members, Democrats are only one seat shy of a supermajority,

with 23 Democratic members.

With strong control of both chambers, and a Democratic governor, one might assume that any bill the Democrats want to pass will be an easy success...right? Not quite.

Like its party members around the state, the blanket term “Democrat” in Colorado’s Legislature doesn’t quite encompass the dynamic body we have representing us this year. Within the Democratic caucus at the legislature, a few members sometimes

identify as socialists, while many others hew to a pro-business moderate agenda.

This means that unlike in years past where Democrats were fighting Republicans to pass their political agenda, Democrats are challenging Democrats to get bills passed. Some say bills don’t go far enough, while others are concerned that some bills go too far.

With that, and a Governor who

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# Reflecting on 2023 and charting a course for 2024



by **Andreya Krieves**  
Alliance Chair

As we bid farewell to 2023, our Alliance proudly reflects on a year filled with local and regional victories that have propelled our Western Slope community forward. Today, I invite you to join us in celebrating these achievements and embracing the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in 2024.

Since 1980 our Alliance has been dedicated to collaboration and bringing people together to create positive change. Throughout the past year, we've witnessed the power of unity and grassroots efforts, turning dreams into reality for Western Colorado.

Because of the commitment and efforts of members in 2023, our Alliance achieved significant milestones that underscore the strength of collective action. Here are some highlights:

- *Passed the first in the nation legislation that allows local farmers and ranchers the right to repair agricultural equipment apart from the equipment manufacture.*
- *Won more precedent-setting rules to further reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector, holding operators accountable for the amount of air pollution they produce.*
- *Organized support for new oil and gas bonding rules which will save taxpayers \$838 million in clean-up costs for abandoned wells over the next decade.*
- *West Slope Youth Voice interns won the inclusion of a student health clinic in the construction of the new Grand Junction High School, overturning a previous school board decision and providing mental and physical health care to students.*

As we look ahead to 2024, our Alliance is poised to make an even greater impact. The challenges facing our community demand a united front, and we are building strength in numbers to address these challenges head-on. Whether you have been

part of our journey or are considering joining for the first time, your voice and passion are needed!

In the coming year, we will tackle pressing issues with the strength and passion of our members and allies, from addressing climate change to fostering economic resilience. Our shared vision is that right now, today, we have the ability and opportunity to create a future where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just, and self-reliant. We know that we are stronger when we work together. Our Alliance is not just an organization; it is a community of individuals who care deeply about the place we call home.



Western Colorado Alliance  
Chair Andreya Krieves

Check out the articles in this issue of **The Clarion** from our organizers to find ways that you can join us in the coming months on the issues that matter most to you. Together, we can amplify our impact, create lasting change, and ensure a brighter future for Western Colorado.

## Why is Western Colorado seeing so many solar moratoriums?



by **Tyler McDermott**  
Regional Organizer

Across America, solar infrastructure is on the rise, and at the state level, Colorado is seeking to be at the forefront of innovation and adoption.

Historic federal funding opportunities for rural communities like ours are being disbursed through the Inflation Reduction Act, numerous bills increasing solar opportunities are being introduced at the state legislature, and Colorado's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Roadmap is pushing

the state to decrease reliance on fossil fuels at a rate faster than almost anywhere in the nation.

But progress in America, for anyone who has paid attention to history, is never a linear process, and that remains true when we look at our energy transition in Colorado.

Despite the historic gains we have made, there are always going to be those who wish to stand in the way. What this has looked like recently in Colorado, especially Western Colorado, is the passage

of solar moratoriums by county commissioners who are, in some cases, seeking to delay the implementation of new solar infrastructure for our communities.

Moratoriums on new solar infrastructure have been placed in counties such as San Miguel, Delta, and Montrose already, with Mesa County as the newest to pass a moratorium. Each county has different reasons for passing a solar moratorium, and some are more reasonable than others.

It is important to highlight that short-term moratoriums on solar are not inherently a bad thing, and there are valid concerns that need to be addressed if we want to move forward with new clean energy infrastructure in the most responsible way that respects our diverse communities and their needs.

The moratoriums that have been adopted so far have been put in place for numerous reasons, including a fear that key agricul-

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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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# CO Legislature 2024: Opportunities & challenges

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has a history of standing up to his own party, this year will require organizations like ours to cut through the noise to refocus our lawmakers on the strength of the good bills before them.

On the first day of session on January 10, lawmakers walked past crowds of people protesting the war in Gaza at the Capitol. This point of tension has not only continued outside the building, but made its way inside the building as well. So much so that some legislators taking a position on the issue have found themselves in hot water when their actions were noted as going a step too far.

For example, during the Special Session at the end of last year, Representative Elisabeth Epps joined pro-Palestine protestors in the galley, shouting down at a fellow colleague as he discussed a potential amendment to a bill. Before returning to the Capitol for the General Session this year, House Speaker, and a Representative of Western Colorado, Rep. Julie McCluskie issued Rep. Epps a letter of reprimand, admonishing her for her conduct, with explicit expectations that the General Session move forward without similar interruption. A reminder that moments of tension like this can run high even for legislators when impassioned about an issue to which they feel deeply committed.

In addition to international conflict showing up at our legislature, looming before us is the 2024 Presidential Election, during which many of our state lawmakers will be up for re-election. This will undoubtedly lead to political posturing from both parties as they use the legislative session to make a statement of their values and priorities to their electorate back home.

Luckily, our legislators overall continue to exemplify that they serve with the mission to pass good legislation for all Coloradans. Our West Slope legislators are no exception, and much of the time, whether Democrat or Republican, our representatives work across the aisle to get things done.

**At Western Colorado Alliance, we are feeling optimistic about the session, and are already faced with several oppor-**

**tunities to pass meaningful legislation. And this year, it will be our mission, as a non-partisan organization devoted to creating healthy, just, and self-reliant communities across Western Colorado, to help prioritize the bills that would have a lasting impact on our West Slope communities.**

Let's take a look at one of the bills we're set to prioritize this year:

**In late 2023, our Local Food and Agriculture committee and our Legislative team were approached and asked to support West Slope farmers and ranchers in passing the bill now designated as SB24-152.** After in-depth discussion, we eagerly agreed and have been hard at work on it, both before and since it was introduced on February 7.

*What will this bill do?*

This bill would provide a tax incentive to Colorado food and beverage (F&B) businesses like restaurants and breweries, to purchase produce and animal products from local farms and ranches that are utilizing, or transitioning to, regenerative practices.

*But what does this mean?*

Right now, when confronted with purchasing decisions, most restaurant and beverage businesses must consider their bottom line before they can prioritize where their food is sourced from. This bill would help close the financial gap for businesses when deciding between purchasing from a corporate seller or a local producer by creating a tax incentive to offset the cost.

For our local producers, many of which are already enrolled in programs that encourage regenerative agriculture practices, this could be huge. A tax incentive to stimulate demand from the F&B industry would help producers stabilize cash flow via systems like crop-planning, which would increase profitability for existing producers and encourage new agrarians to enter the field.

*So what is regenerative agriculture (RA)?*

RA restores, retains and creates Soil Organic Matter through

methods such as holistic planned grazing, cover crops, low-to-no till, reducing/eliminating chemicals and synthetic fertilizers, and diversification. This in turn helps to boost Colorado's resiliency and offsets the negative effects of climate change by sequestering carbon, retaining and building water resources, and creating more healthy local water cycles. As a result, Colorado's vulnerability decreases in regards to wildfires, drought, erosion and intense storms.

This bill incentivizes F&B businesses to shift their purchasing power towards local, regenerative food, and its passage would generate a ripple effect of positive benefits like:

- Supporting our local farmers and ranchers by creating a higher market demand and reliable income
- Providing better nutrition and health for Colorado residents who spend an average of 49% of their food budget eating and drinking out
- Building and protecting soil health, biodiversity, and the environment in Colorado
- Deepening community awareness and commitment around local food and creating strong business relationships within Colorado, both of which would keep more money

of bipartisan sponsors, we stumbled into setback just a few days after session began.

Senator Cleave Simpson (R) of Durango was set to introduce the bill, and we were well into our drafting phase, when we became aware of a fairly new rule in the legislature that stipulates bills with a tax incentive must be introduced in the House, and not the Senate.

This was news not only to us, but also to our Senate sponsors. Luckily, we already had a few House Representatives excited to carry this bill, and Representative Karen McCormick, Chair of the Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources committee took up the mantle.

This pivot means we'll have to introduce the bill late after securing House Leadership permission to do so. Every year, each legislator is guaranteed five bills to introduce, and once their docket is full, permission is required to introduce any additional bills.

For us, this means we have a few extra hoops to jump through before the bill will be in front of the legislature. But by the time you are reading this, it's possible the bill will already be introduced, and once it has made its way through the House, Senator Simpson and Senator Jeff Bridges (D) look forward to taking it across the finish line in the Senate.



Senator Cleave Simpson (R, SD6) was set to introduce the tax incentive bill for regenerative agriculture in the Senate — until a last-minute monkey wrench in the rules caused a sudden change of plans...

in our home state

With all this in mind, it was a no brainer to take on the bill to help make it a reality. But even with an exciting cohort

While this is our biggest bill for the year (because it likely wouldn't move forward without us), we've got our eye on plenty

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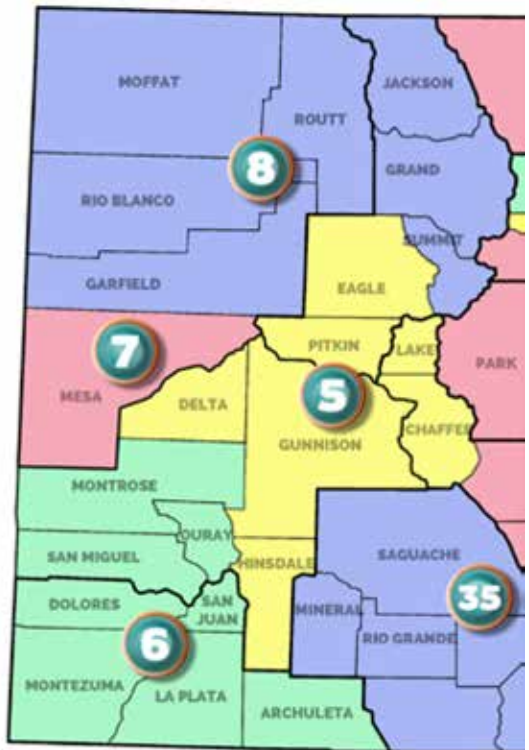
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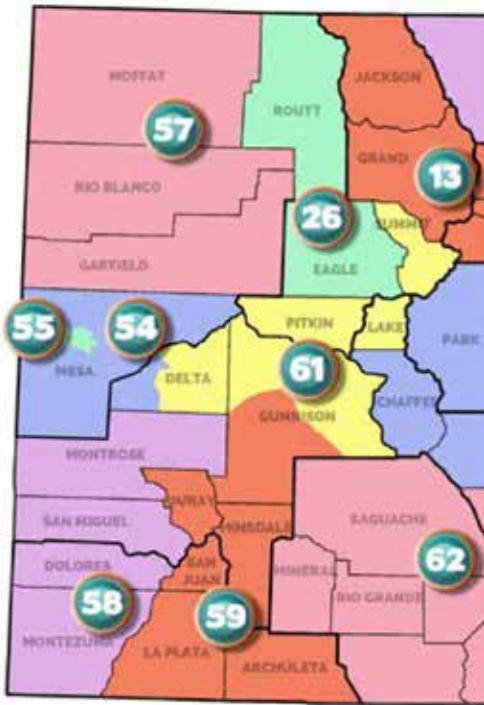


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- BUSINESS AFFAIRS & LABOR**  
**CHAIR:** Amabile; **VICE-CHAIR:** Ricks; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Armagost, Clifford, English, Frizell, Lieder, Lindstedt, Lynch, Mabrey, Mauro
- EDUCATION**  
**CHAIR:** McLachlan; **VICE-CHAIR:** Martinez; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bacon, Bradfield, Hamrick, Hartsook, Lukens, Pugliese, Story, Wilson, Young
- ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT**  
**CHAIR:** Kipp; **VICE-CHAIR:** Willford; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bottoms, DeGraaf, Evans, Froelich, Joseph, Rutinel, Titone, Valdez, Velasco, Vigil, Winter
- FINANCE**  
**CHAIR:** Snyder; **VICE-CHAIR:** Joseph; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Frizell, Garcia, Hartsook, Kennedy Kipp, Lindstedt, Marshall, Soper, Weinberg,

**2024 HOUSE COMMITTEES**

- HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**  
**CHAIR:** Daugherty; **VICE-CHAIR:** Young; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bradfield, Bradley, Brown, English, Hamrick, Hernandez, Holtorf, Lieder, McCormick, Ortiz, Weinberg
- JUDICIARY**  
**CHAIR:** Weissman; **VICE-CHAIR:** Bacon; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Armagost, Evans, Garcia, Herod, Mabrey, Snyder, Soper, Woodrow

- PUBLIC & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**  
**CHAIR:** Michaelson Jenet; **VICE-CHAIR:** Sirota; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bradfield, Cutter, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Holtorf, Jodeh, Larson, Ortiz, Pelton, Ricks, Woog, Young
- AGRICULTURE, WATER & NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**CHAIR:** McCormick; **VICE-CHAIR:** Catlin; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Holtorf, Lindsay, Lukens, Lynch, Martinez, Marvin, McLachlan, Story, Titone, Velasco, Winter
- STATE, CIVIC, MILITARY & VETERAN AFFAIRS**  
**CHAIR:** Woodrow; **VICE-CHAIR:** Boesenecker; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bottoms, Bradley, Brown, DeGraaf, Epps, Parenti, Ricks, Rutinel, Willford
- TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT**  
**CHAIR:** Froelich; **VICE-CHAIR:** Lindsay; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Boesenecker, Catiin, Frizell, Jodeh, Mauro, Parenti, Valdez, Vigil, Wilson

Note: Contact information is from **coleg.gov**. The information is accurate as of **February 2024**.

# West Slope Youth Voice sets its sights in 2024



There were several victories that came out of West Slope Youth Voice's Lobby Days trip at the end of January. One notable victory came when students were invited to testify on behalf of **SB24-034, "Increase Access to School-Based Health Care."** At least one senator changed her vote to support the bill following the testimony.



by Tyler McDermott  
Regional Organizer

West Slope Youth Voice is entering 2024 with high hopes and big plans for the future!

Our exciting youth program to engage students and young people in our democracy and advocate for youth issues with elected leaders has grown and accomplished so much in the last year, from winning a new school-based health center at the new Grand Junction High School to hosting our first ever youth-led candidate forum. The students are really hitting their stride and stepping into their power.

As we now celebrate the victories we just won during the recent Student Voices Lobby Day at the end of January, the students have begun to set their priorities for the new year

and are eyeing some new ways to engage more youth with elected leaders and in the 2024 General Election in November.

One of the first steps the students want to take to expand their voices is to invite more students from more parts of the Western Slope to make their own voices heard. We have developed a winning strategy in Mesa County, and we want to share that with students in additional counties across the Western Slope. Every county in Western Colorado has unique issues and unique perspectives, and we are eager to see those shared with our elected leaders at all levels to ensure their needs are being met and their opinions are valued.

Toward that end, West Slope Youth Voice hosted a Youth Summit in Garfield County in January encouraging students

in that critically important county to not only join our current students at West Slope Youth Voice, but to create their own program specifically aimed at youth priorities across their county.

Later this year, we are hoping to develop yet another chapter of West Slope Youth Voice in Montrose County and are looking forward to involving students there in our important work. If you know of any students interested in getting involved in either Garfield or Montrose counties, please connect them with us as all youth are welcome!

As for the ongoing work happening in Mesa County, the students have outlined their priorities for the year and are setting the stage for a big 2024.

The students engaged heavily in 2023 with their school board, fighting for a school-based health center in the new Grand Junction High School, organizing a candidate forum for the 2023 school board elections, and meeting individually with each school board member. They hope to continue the relationships they have built and make sure youth voices are a priority with the board by creating new policy for the board to consider including allowing youth to speak first at all school board meetings, organizing quarterly meetings with the school board members, creating a youth advisory committee made up of students from across the district to work with the council regularly on policy decisions, fighting potential book bans, and creating a new system for students to report teacher misconduct.

This year is also a major election year, and we are aiming to turn out youth voters in the 2024 General Election. We will be working hard to register students to vote and speak with youth about the importance of their vote in not only the November election, but also the primaries and caucuses. Gen Z and Millennial voters now comprise the largest voting block in the country and it is important that young voters take to the polls to ensure they are getting the representation they both need and deserve.

## Why is Western Colorado seeing so many solar moratoriums?

*Continued from page 2*

tural land will be usurped by massive solar farms, impacts to viewsheds, community impacts, neighbors who do not want to see them near their homes, impact to wildlife corridors, and misplaced fears that solar farms are not safe and can start fires.

Each of these concerns need to be addressed and included within Land Use Codes and Conditional Use Permitting processes, and as things stand, many counties have not updated their codes since the early 2000's to reflect the new clean energy boom happening in our state today.

With that in mind, I want to highlight Mesa County as being one of the counties who have passed a moratorium for the right reasons and the right way.

In late December, the Mesa County Board of Commissioners were confronted by members of the community in Palisade who were concerned about several proposed solar developments.

This development highlighted the need to revise the codes to reflect the concerns of the community while still remaining true to the county's commitment to the energy

transition stated in the Master Plan adopted last year.

The Board of Commissioners have been entirely open and transparent in the scope and scale of the moratorium they have enacted, hosting three meetings in just the last month seeking community input.

The commissioners have stated in no uncertain terms that this moratorium should take no longer than 6 months to complete the code revision process, and pushed back on a community member who asked that they deny all new solar projects for 2 years.

The commissioners have also actively sought to work with the community and our Alliance to ensure these codes are reasonable, they address the concerns brought forward, but also do not restrict solar development in a way that would be unreasonable.

We commend the Mesa County Board of Commissioners for their smart and well-founded approach to new solar codes and look forward to seeing a reasonable set of codes adopted for solar infrastructure so we can continue our energy transition in the fairest and most respectful way possible.

# A new Alliance is born in Garfield County!



by **Hanna Arauza**  
Community Organizer

After spending the last two years building the foundation and structure, we finally opened our doors! On February 4, Western Colorado Alliance of Garfield County hosted a public kickoff to welcome our community and share who we are and what we hope to accomplish.

Our Alliance is no stranger to Garfield County, but our local organizing efforts have historically focused on environmental issues. Through our Deep Listening campaign, it became clear: there is an appetite to expand the issues we organize around locally. And that is where this new affiliate group fits in. Western Colorado of Garfield County is dedicated to engaging in community organizing to build respectful, thriving, and equitable communities in our County.

The kickoff was planned and carried out by our wonderful Organizing Committee, made

up of nine dedicated and very community-oriented folks from Parachute, Rifle, Silt, and New Castle. They came from all walks of life and brought diverse experiences and perspectives to the table.

The committee met monthly through 2023 to develop everything from our mission and vision statements, to our operating procedures, to issue identification. The result is a community organizing group that we feel will truly represent the residents of Garfield County and support all of us in working toward a better quality of life and more connected community. Western Colorado Alliance of Garfield County will always prioritize inclusivity and accessibility.

The work went on all year. When February 4 finally came, it only remained to be seen whether the community would respond.



Well, respond they did! Close to 40 community members from up and down Garfield County came together to learn about our Alliance, how community organizing can affect change locally, and share their thoughts on our projected 2024 campaign efforts.

The highlight of the evening was community members coming together to weigh in on the direction of the first campaign. The question and answer session was robust, as were the small group discussions.

Ultimately, the folks who are impacted by local problems are the best people to devise solutions. Participants lifted up gaps in our current systems and possible solutions to improving transportation options for us.

Where are we going with this? Now, we move on to developing and launching a campaign. We need a coordinating committee and leaders to form a working group to drive the campaign forward and make decisions. Reach out to Hanna Arauza at [hanna@westerncolorado-alliance.org](mailto:hanna@westerncolorado-alliance.org) for more information!

## Montrose continues to advance its organizing game



by **Bianca Diaz**  
Community Organizer

Uncompahgre Valley Alliance in Montrose County has seen unprecedented growth and focus as plans set in motion over a year ago continue to fall into place.

In November, our Alliance offered a community organizing training, and began a campaign-

planning process that will drive our Alliance's efforts in 2024.

All we accomplished in the final quarter was defined by one event, our Community Conversation that took place on Thursday, December 7. Dozens of hours went into planning and preparation to bring this group of people together.

If you weren't there, I'll quickly summarize: It was spectacular!

This was the largest in-person gathering our Alliance has had in the past four years. Fifty-three people showed up and made this our dream event. We gathered to connect with old and new friends, to hear about the organizing process our Alliance's leadership

has carried out, and to be in conversation with our neighbors who also want a healthy, just, and self-reliant Montrose. Folks discussed the lack of affordable housing and inadequate public transportation. These were two problem areas we heard about in our deep listening work and felt could serve as the first campaign following the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance revitalization effort.

We carried our research actions and combined that with the input community members provided in the Community Conversation. With these two ingredients, the committee felt confident moving forward with one of the aforementioned problems. A new year was ushered in and since then we have been lining up all the important pieces to bring this campaign to Montrose. Our official announcement is imminent, thank you for your support and patience. We are very encouraged by the planning process so far and cannot wait to bring it to life!



# Rousing ballot box win with Just Housing!



by **María Luiza Pérez Chávez**  
**Community Organizer**

While our affiliate group Western Colorado Alliance in Mesa County was engaged in Deep Listening work, we knew we couldn't wait to get to work on Affordable Housing, a topic that was coming up over and over in conversations at the doors, and also community-wide. As a result, we started the Just Housing Committee, a campaign

awareness of Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County's presence in the community! 2023 brought some great wins for Just Housing; not only did we connect to more people, but we gained a friendly face in our city council that has offered much needed hope. We have also been recognized and approached by organizations like the statewide coalition group Colorado Homes for All, and elected city council members to help run campaigns on affordable housing issues.

rising property taxes, and brought down or stabilized costs for homeowners and renters alike. We partnered with several organizations to bring this measure to folks' doors; unfortunately the messaging was muddled, the bill was complex, and the money was pouring in for the opposition, making a statewide win virtually unattainable. It failed easily on election night, prompting Governor Jared Polis to call a special legislative session

25 years to 99 years, specifically for the purpose of bringing in more affordable housing development projects to the Grand Valley. Similar to years past, there was a small group, but no grassroots team behind the measure that could help reach the community on the ground, so we developed the campaign.

Our tactics included:

- *Holding an informational Open House which educated the community and brought out people to help support the issue.*
- *Sending out postcards*
- *Going door-to-door in support of the measure, making sure we were reaching people where they were at so that when the ballot arrived, they knew exactly what the city was asking.*

With a narrow win of 114 votes in favor, we believe that had it not been for all of the Just Housing team's work, the amendment would not have passed. We ended 2023 in celebration and planning for the next year!



*The Just Housing committee of Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County, meeting in 2023..*

team within Mesa County in order to respond to the housing injustices occurring within our community. Not only did we see more outside developers coming into Mesa County, but the stories of people becoming homeless, not able to afford their homes, and the lack of progress from those in power motivated the Just Housing team into action.

This team has not only achieved its goal of bringing more awareness of the lack of affordable housing in Grand Junction, but has also brought

## **Leading the effort on the November 2023 ballot**

In the months leading up to the election, our campaign team in Mesa County was approached by local and state leaders, asking us to help champion West Slope wins on the ballot for affordable housing.

Senator Dylan Roberts asked us for support in spreading the word about the purpose and details of the statewide measure Proposition HH, a measure that would have addressed the urgent issue of

and pass temporary pieces of the measure in individual bills through the legislature.

On the other hand, we helped secure a sweeping local win for Mesa County. GJ City Councilmember Randall Reitz approached the Just Housing campaign committee for help with local measure 2B. 2B was the third iteration of an attempt to pass a local measure that would update a city charter amendment allowing the city to extend the lease of land for private building projects from

Of course, the issue of affordable housing is still clearly prevalent, but we hope to continue our momentum in the new year, to bring on new members and continue to shed light on the issue. Western Colorado Alliance in Mesa County, through the Just Housing team, will continue to shed light on the issue of affordable housing. We invite you to join us in meeting our goals for the year ahead. Just Housing's vision is to bring affordable, sustainable, equitable, and safe housing to Mesa County!

## CO Legislature 2024: Opportunities & challenges

*Continued from page 3*

more bills that we look forward to supporting. Included in this list are a community solar co-op bill that will support net metering and allow folks to have larger arrays. Another bill would end tax exemptions on "stripper wells" (wells near the end of their useful life which produce very little oil or gas). This would have a large impact for residents in Garfield County since 70% of the county's 12,000 wells are stripper wells. These bills, and others that

focus on affordable housing, healthcare, water, public transportation, and more, are what we will be actively engaged on this year. And that makes our presence at the Capitol for the People's Lobby Trip even more important.

This will be an exciting year. If you've been on the fence about joining in, this is a great year to do so. Reach out to me at [jeriel@western-coloradoalliance.org](mailto:jeriel@western-coloradoalliance.org) with any questions and to learn more about how to get involved!



*Western Colorado residents meeting with lawmakers during the 2023 People's Lobby Trip.*