

CLARION

Vol. 45 No. 1 Spring 2025



FINDING OUR **PATH**

In a Challenging Budget Landscape



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.

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Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County

Arlo Miller, *Grand Junction*

Uncompahgre Valley Alliance

Mel McKelvey, *Grand Junction*

Director Emeritus

Peggy Rawlins, *Grand Junction*

Solidarity is the answer

Thank goodness the 2024 election is history. Now the real work begins.

According to Governor Polis, we won't "allow the disagreement, division, or disorder in Washington, D.C. to deter us in Colorado. That's simply not how we roll."

As a multi-issue organization, that's not how we roll either. Our mission and vision allows us to cast a big net and be a welcoming place for people from all walks of life to organize on a range of social, environmental, and economic justice issues.

Often our members get involved because they care deeply about one issue. Each member has their own unique story and reasons for joining our Alliance, what community organizers refer to as self-interest.

Self-interest is a prime motivator of human behavior and what we legitimately bring to public life. The English word "interest" is a combination of two Latin words, *inter*, meaning "among," and *esse*, meaning "to be." In other words, healthy self-interest lies in our relationship with others.

Our members who live near oil and gas facilities might describe their self-interest as having rules in place to protect human health and the environment.

Our West Slope Youth Voice members might describe their self-interest as having access to adequate mental health support.

Our family farm and ranch members might describe their self-interest as expanded markets for local food.

Our members with young children might describe their self-interest as being able to afford and obtain quality child care.

Self-interest means knowing when and how to assert your concerns effectively. However, it also means being willing at times to set aside your own individual self-interest and support others. If student mental health services are being threatened, we all need to stand together and support the next generation. If our immigrant neighbors are fearful of being deported, we need to stand with them and say, "Not in our town." If polluters threaten the air we breathe or water we drink, we need to speak as one and demand that they "do it right."

Plenty of uncertainty hangs over the next four years. We reject

efforts to divide us, and we will not be deterred from working together in solidarity to improve the lives of everyday people in western Colorado, no matter their race, age, gender, or class.

I will leave you with this quote from Heather McGhee, who currently chairs the board of Color of Change, a nationwide online racial justice organization: "The plutocrats have always known that solidarity is the answer, [and] that the sum of us can accomplish far more than just some of us."



Kevin Williams
Chair of the Board

UPCOMING Board Meetings

Saturday April 5 12 pm-1:30 pm *via Zoom*
Saturday June 6, 12 pm-1:30 pm *via Zoom*
Saturday August 16 *at the Alliance Annual Conference in Montrose*
Saturday Oct 4, 12 pm-1:30 pm *via Zoom*
Saturday Dec 6, 12 pm-1:30 pm *via Zoom*



FINDING OUR PATH IN A CHALLENGING BUDGET LANDSCAPE

Jeriel Clark-Dyar,
Organizing Director

The 2025 Colorado legislative session will go down in history as a year of budget cuts. With a billion-dollar budget shortfall caused by rising Medicaid costs, voter-approved policing expenditures, property tax cuts, and TABOR, many well-intended bills have had to be put on hold.

But what does this mean for us and our work at the Legislature? Organizations working on issues like education, environment, energy, and agriculture have all been grappling with the same question: “How do we get creative this year so we can move our work forward without putting the burden of cost on the state?” For some organizations, including our own, the answer ends up being... We can’t.

Over the past year, we have worked tirelessly to reintroduce a bill that would support Colorado’s agricultural producers and local restaurants while advancing sustainable farming practices. However, despite broad bipartisan support and strong backing from the agricultural community, we have made the difficult decision to pause the bill’s introduction in 2025 due to the state budget deficit. This decision was not made lightly. While legislative hurdles are nothing new, the fiscal impact of this bill has never been the primary concern — until now. Colorado’s current financial situation has forced us to reassess our strategy.

A STRONG START WITH UNEXPECTED BARRIERS

In 2024, we introduced **SB24-152, The Regenerative Agriculture Tax Incentive** bill that aimed to support Colorado’s agricultural producers and local restaurants while advancing sustainable farming practices. This bill would have incentivized restaurants to purchase from local regenerative farmers and ranchers by offering a tax write-off for those purchases. The goal was simple: Reward businesses that source sustainably while supporting Colorado’s agricultural economy.

Agriculture has been one of Governor Polis's top priorities, and the bill had strong bipartisan support in the legislature. The issue was never about whether lawmakers supported the idea — many did. Instead, the challenge arose from the bill's fiscal impact. Due to Colorado's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) cap, any revenue reduction or tax incentive program contributes to state budget limitations. Even though the financial footprint of our bill was small in comparison to other state expenditures, it would contribute to pushing the state budget beyond its allowable limit. Ultimately, this led to the bill's failure in 2024.

Determined not to let this setback define the bill's fate, we spent the summer and fall refining our approach, gathering additional support, and preparing for a stronger reintroduction in 2025. But as we navigated the process, it became increasingly clear that the state was facing a significant budget deficit. Even though our fiscal note was relatively small compared to larger projects, it was still too high to overcome in the current financial climate.

SHIFTING STRATEGIES: FROM TAX INCENTIVES TO A GRANT PROGRAM

Recognizing the budget constraints, we made a strategic pivot. Instead of a tax incentive program, we restructured the bill as a grant program, hoping that this approach would alleviate the burden on the state budget and allow us to begin collecting funds through creative mechanisms. This shift, however, brought new challenges.

Since the change was significant, we had to pull a new bill title, which meant introducing it as a late bill rather than a priority bill — meaning our legislative bill sponsors would need to seek leadership permission to introduce an additional bill beyond their usually allocated five. Additionally, while shifting to a

grant program reduced some fiscal concerns, it did not eliminate them entirely.

The final straw came in discussions with the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA). Since the bill's inception, the CDA has been a strong supporter and was set to oversee the program. CDA would determine which producers qualify as regenerative partners for restaurants to receive the incentive. However, even minimal oversight adds a fiscal impact, requiring dedicated staff time. Just by simply naming the



Colorado Department of Agriculture in our bill as the oversight entity, estimates placed this cost between \$145,000 and \$175,000 in the first year. While this is a relatively small amount in the grand scheme of state budgeting, there was no guarantee that the cost wouldn't derail the bill's progress once again.

MAKING THE STRATEGIC DECISION TO WAIT

Rather than risk a second failure due to fiscal constraints, we made the strategic decision to pause the bill and reintroduce it in 2026 when

the state's financial outlook may be more favorable. While this decision is disappointing, it is also practical.

In the meantime, this pause gives us the opportunity to engage in robust, statewide conversations about the definition of regenerative agriculture in Colorado. By focusing on education and consensus-building in 2025, we can ensure that the bill has strong odds in 2026.

A CHALLENGE FACING MANY ADVOCACY EFFORTS

We are not alone in facing this dilemma. Across the issues (housing, environment, energy, and more), organizations are asking the same question: How do we move our work forward in a year when the state's financial resources are constrained?

While our bill will wait until next year, there are still important bills moving through the legislature. Several of our committees are actively engaging in housing, energy, and youth-focused legislation. We will continue to keep our membership updated on how they can stay involved, as West Slope voices remain relevant and necessary despite the challenging budget landscape.

Just weeks ago, we took our largest-ever cohort of West Slope Youth Voice students to the Capitol where they advocated on student issues ranging from reducing food waste in schools, to school districts leasing land for solar and affordable housing projects, to protecting library resources from unnecessary book bans to protect freedom of information for students.

For regenerative agriculture, the delay is not a defeat — it is a necessary step so we can deliver the well-deserved benefits to Colorado's agricultural community in the smartest and most strategic way possible.

Western Colorado Alliance demands air quality protections for entire state

Emily Hornback, *Executive Director*

Right now, Colorado’s Air Quality Control Commission (AQCC) is deciding on new rules to further reduce methane emissions and hazardous air pollutants from oil and gas facilities in Colorado. These new rules will bring Colorado into compliance with federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidance. In many ways, Colorado is leading the nation in rules to protect our air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, more can be done.

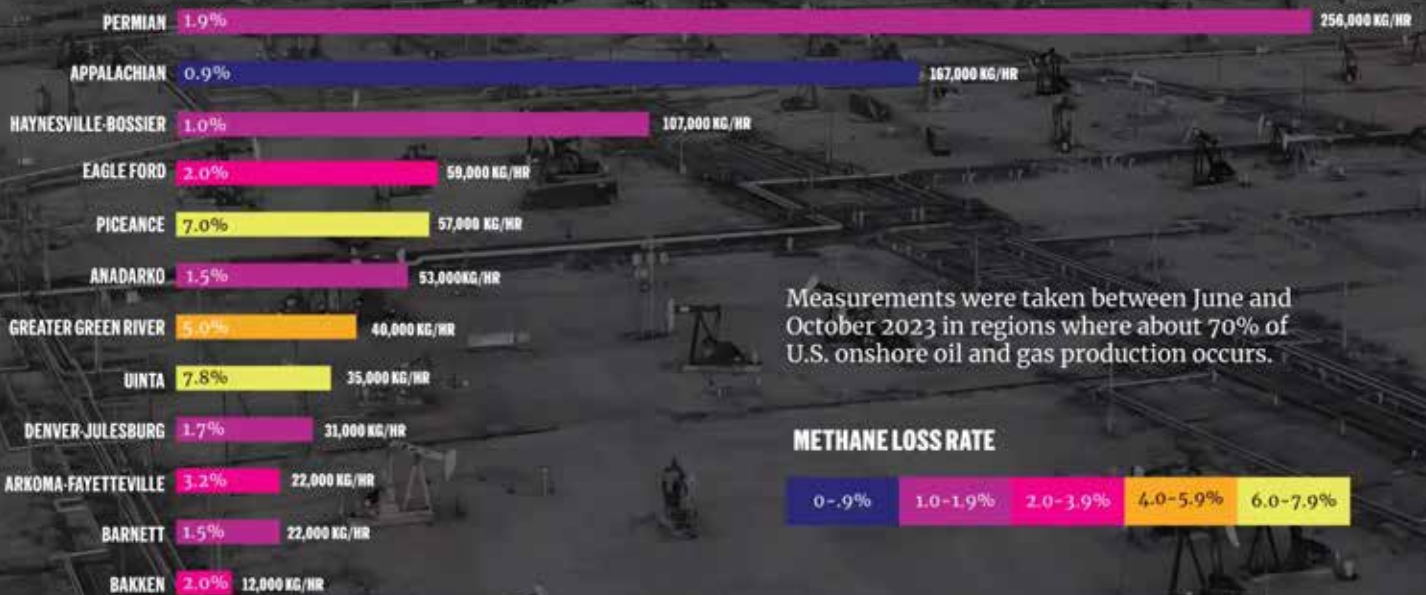
The rulemaking will be a chance for the Air Pollution Control Division (“APCD” or “Division”) to pass state-level provisions that will reduce methane emissions and comply with certain parts of the EPA Methane Rule. Once passed by the AQCC, it can incorporate these state regulations into its methane state plan, which is due to the EPA

by March 2026. Specifically, the rule will reduce oil and gas pollution from a small device called a pneumatic controller, a valve in oil and gas operations that currently leak large amounts of methane and ozone precursors. While the Commission is proposing to retrofit these devices with non-emitting alternatives, the current rules will not go into effect in Western Colorado for four years, prioritizing oil and gas facilities on the Front Range — even though recent data shows that Western Colorado has one of the largest methane pollution problems from oil and gas sources in the country!

Recent data and research demonstrate that the Western Slope has a bigger methane problem than the Front Range. According to Colorado’s 2023 state emissions inventory data,

Comparing methane emissions across major U.S. oil and gas basins

MethaneSAT technology provides detailed snapshot of methane emissions



approximately 70% of methane emissions from pneumatic controllers occurred outside the Denver Metro/Northern Front Range ozone nonattainment area.

Significantly, Environmental Defense Fund's 2023 MethaneAIR data shows that methane emissions from oil and gas in the Piceance Basin is almost three times greater than in the Denver-Julesburg Basin. This makes Western Colorado one of the top 5 emitters of methane from the oil and gas industry in the country.

The new rules must help us fix this problem by eliminating natural gas-emitting pneumatic controllers by March 2029 and adopting a retrofit schedule that is equitable for all Colorado communities. The Commission must act with urgency to replace emitting pneumatic controllers as quickly as possible statewide.

Our Alliance also encourages the Commission to improve its air sampling process by ensuring sampling periods are short and accurate; otherwise, data could be diluted. Quality of data collection is critical for measuring the success of any new rules and for enforcing them. Lastly, we are also pushing the Commission to consider more protective leak detection and repair at gas processing plants.

Our Alliance has been pushing Colorado to be a leader on methane emission reduction for decades and we have seen much progress. By becoming an early adopter of these requirements, Colorado has the opportunity to further solidify this leadership by being one of the first states to phase out methane-emitting pneumatic devices in a way that is equitable and rapid for all communities statewide.

SOME CHANGES IN THE ALLIANCE'S OFFICES

With the new year comes some staffing changes at Western Colorado Alliance!

Our Alliance is very happy to welcome Adriane Moline as our new Development Associate. Adriane has already been an integral member of the Alliance team for the past few years. Adriane moved to the Grand Valley in 2020 and soon thereafter, her interest in healthy agriculture led her to a position on our Local Foods and Agriculture Committee. It wasn't long after that that Adriane joined our Board of Directors. Since then, Adriane has been the principal person responsible for seeking Mountainfilm sponsorship, building new giving channels for the Alliance — and she's also been part of the team helping shape our Alliance's data operations. In those roles, Adriane has already proven immensely important in keeping our Alliance healthy and growing. But now, she is switching from her board position to a part-

time staff position, helping us hone our appeals and fundraising operations. Adriane says she loves living on the Western Slope, and believes in the transforming power of relationships with one another and the world around us. We're very happy to have her as part of our team!

Meanwhile, another beloved member of our staff will be switching positions. Due to changing personal circumstances, María Luíza Pérez Chavéz, our Community Organizer for Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County, will move from that position to become our new Office Administrator, and will also be an important part of our continuing language justice efforts.

At press time, Western Colorado Alliance was interviewing to fill two organizer positions, one of which will replace María. We'll have news on that front soon, so watch your email and our Facebook page!



Adriane Moline
Development Associate



María Luíza Pérez Chavéz
Office Administrator

Affiliate Update



María Luiza Pérez Chavéz,
Community Organizer

Our Mesa County team is gearing up for what is to come this year. Both the Coordinating Committee and the Just Housing team have finished their campaign planning for 2025 with excitement and motivation. Just

Housing also rang the bell for all our accomplishments in 2024 and throughout the years!

Our big plan this year is to bring Western Colorado Alliance to the community. We

began our Just Housing group in response to the community's rising need for affordable housing, which prompted Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County to act. Now the Coordinating Committee wants to reinforce and stabilize the Just Housing team using the tools available to us. The Deep Listening tactics our Alliance adopted a few

years ago allowed us to go door-to-door and find those directly affected by the lack of affordable housing in our area. We, as a committee, will be going door-to-door again to those who showed interest in the issue and invite them to join our Just Housing group.

We want our community to know we are here, we want to listen, and we need their help, because we are dedicated to making Mesa County housing affordable, sustainable, equitable, and safe.

Also, the Coordinating Committee and Just Housing group will be gathering to host a candidate forum for the upcoming Grand Junction City Council elections. We will bring the City Council candidates



Just Housing here ringing the bell for our accomplishments!

ates

together to ask them questions on current ballot issues, community concerns, and housing issues. These questions will reflect our campaigns focusing on rent control and the implementation of Proposition 123. It was proposed we work on rent control by our allied organization, Colorado Homes for All, who intend to run a bill in 2026. Our

Just Housing group will begin to ask our local elected officials about the subject to understand their positions on the issue.

We have our work cut out for us and hope this year brings together more of our community to engage the people of Mesa County in finding and realizing

solutions to our housing crisis.

Watch your emails or our Facebook page for more information on our upcoming City Council candidate forum, and fundraising events, including our annual meet-and-greet which will bring together all Mesa County members. We hope to see you there!



Hanna Arauza, *Community Organizer*

In Garfield County, we're starting the new year by doing what we do best — listening to people. Our goal is to produce a detailed Community Transportation Needs Assessment that can be presented to local decision-makers and stakeholders. We wanted this report to be thorough and compelling so we can start steering the conversation from "Wouldn't it be nice?" to "We have an actionable plan to make this happen!"

To get to this point, we're spending the first months of the year talking with folks across

our communities. We have a community bus survey available in English and Spanish online, but we'll also be going door-to-door in impacted neighborhoods asking folks to fill it out. And while surveys are great for gathering

large quantities of specific information, they don't capture the whole story. That's why we'll be hosting a series of house meetings. These meetings will be fun and interactive. Participants can expect a solutions-focused conversation with friends and neighbors.

And food. Always food.

We really want to hone in on personal stories, what barriers people face to utilizing public transportation currently, and what it would look like if we crafted a system that really worked for the folks living in

western Garfield County. Beyond our work on the Down Valley Transportation Campaign, we continue to show up in community spaces and build relationships. We know that transportation isn't the only issue that folks in Garfield County want to see addressed. Our team is happy to collaborate on other initiatives when we can. Please reach out to me at hanna@westerncoloradoalliance.org, because even if we aren't working on something directly, we might be able to connect you with the people who are. Community voices are essential to making the system work for us. And on that note, keep an eye out for some public workshops focusing on civic engagement as the weather warms up. Everyone deserves to have the tools and confidence they need to speak up!



Affiliate Updates



Bianca Diaz, *Community Organizer*

On December 7, the Ridgway Ouray Community Council (ROCC) held its annual meeting and potluck. (Yum!) ROCC takes this time every year to gather with its members, elect new officers, and celebrate the year.

Two new co-presidents are at the helm in 2025. Linda Browning was the previous ROCC secretary and attended the Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training in Billings, Montana last year. Kristen Arnold is newer to

the ROCC scene but brings fresh energy and experience to the affiliate. Congrats to Linda and Kristen!

Additionally, the public lands and social justice committees have hit the ground running in the first quarter. Check out the ROCC website (roccnet.org) to keep up-to-date with any upcoming meetings. And finally, mark your calendars: the well-loved ROCC Summer Picnic is coming back on June 6!



Bianca Diaz, *Community Organizer*

“Collaboration is in the air.” This is a quote from one of our attendees that spoke up at our Nonprofit Network event on January 30. It is something that the leadership of Uncompahgre Valley Alliance has felt for a while — and we are finally doing something about it.

When thinking about 2025 and what we wanted to accomplish as an affiliate, connection and collaboration were the words that stood out the most. There are a plethora of nonprofits in Montrose County. (If you know, you know.) We want to move through the separation and begin a process to integrate with others by mindfully planning events throughout the year. After all, our current



campaign of improving public transportation is an issue that requires all of us to be ready to talk.

As we continue to dig into transportation, we realize all the intersections of an efficient transit system. It can connect people to their work, grocery stores, and their healthcare needs. It reduces reliance on personal vehicles. It cuts emissions. Did you know that transportation creates almost 500 million tons of greenhouse gases locally? If you don't believe that, chat with the folks of the local Citizens Climate Lobby-Montrose! And think of the seniors, folks without licenses, and those who are differently abled who would be able to connect with their hometown with more

independence. We know how unifying transportation can be.

Do you see the local power that we can tap into with groups that are already organized? The opportunity to connect groups with our Alliance's other focus areas is also incredibly exciting. Not to mention all the new leaders that can be developed through this entire process!

Thirty community members gathered last month because they also felt this urge to band together. It was a wonderful evening, one that exceeded expectations. As folks were entering and creating their name tags, I turned to Mel McKelvey (your Uncompahgre Valley Alliance Chair) and said, “We are going to need another table!”

A bright light in Montrose County: solar moratorium coming to an end

Tyler McDermott, *Regional Organizer*

For the past two years, our Alliance's Clean and Renewable Energy and Sustainability Team (CREST) has been laser-focused on working with county governments as they have sought to revise their land use codes to reflect the increased demand for locally produced clean energy, especially solar. Many counties have passed temporary bans on new solar projects as they go through the revision process, and there has been a great deal of concern that these revisions would result in counties passing codes that are prohibitive to critically important energy infrastructure development in Western Colorado. As energy costs and demand continue to rise, populations continue to grow, and Western Colorado experiences some of the most severe climate change impacts, the need for counties to be forward-thinking and welcoming to new clean energy projects is greater than ever. That's where we come in!

Those of you who follow our work closely will remember our involvement in the Mesa County Land Development Code revision process last year, where we worked alongside the Mesa County Commissioners, Planning Department, and members of the community to craft a code that is now being held up across Colorado and neighboring states as a prime example of good governance and rule-making. This code both respects the concerns of community members while also opening the door to Mesa County being a regional leader in responsible clean energy production, and it was all done in just over four months.



Today, CREST is working to replicate last year's success in Montrose County, which has been in the midst of a solar moratorium and land development code revision process since mid-October of 2022. Montrose County Commissioners have taken FAR longer to complete their revisions for a variety of reasons, extending their moratorium not once but three separate times, with the latest extension running through June 16, 2025. This latest extension was due to a new Board of Commissioners taking office last November, and the old Board wanting the decision to be made under the newly elected leadership.

At this point in the process, CREST has attended every meeting since the first draft land development code was first released in October of 2024. Upon its release, our team had a great many concerns with the rules being proposed and worried that it would be among the most over-prescriptive, over-regulated codes anywhere in

Western Colorado. Montrose was attempting to thread a needle, not wanting to be as open to solar as Mesa County, but not wanting to be quite as restrictive as San Miguel County, and ended up leaning much more heavily on San Miguel's example.

Thanks to our member's direct involvement over the past few months where public comment was accepted, we have been able to persuade the commissioners to adopt several new policies that will make Montrose a discerning-but-welcoming partner in the clean energy transition. The new proposed code, while protecting prime farm ground and respecting neighbors of large-scale solar developments, will create an energy environment that is more locally-produced, cheaper, and cleaner for all residents.

We anticipate a final vote on the solar codes to take place in May 2025, ahead of the moratorium deadline in June.

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW IN COLORADO



See pages 12 and 13 for more information on Colorado's legislature and executive branch!

THE COLORADO LEGISLATURE

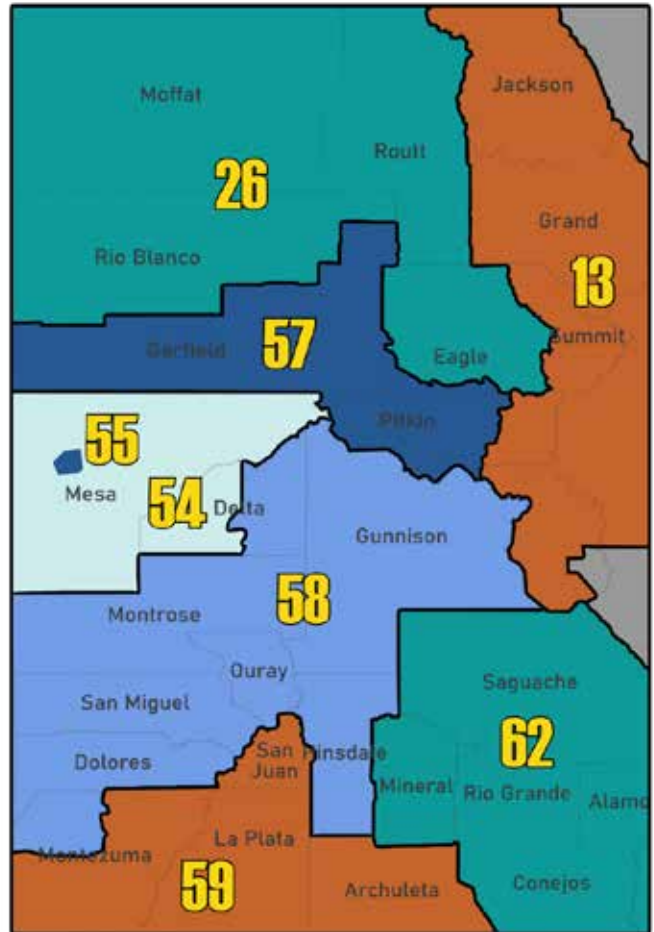
The Colorado Legislature is made up of two chambers, the Senate and the House.

There are **35** Senate members.

There are **65** House members.

WESTERN COLORADO SENATE DISTRICTS

WESTERN COLORADO HOUSE DISTRICTS



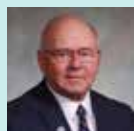
WEST SLOPE SENATORS

- SD5 • MARC CATLIN (R)**
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- SD7 • JANICE RICH (R)**
- SD9 • DYLAN ROBERTS (D)**

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- D26 • MEGHAN LUKENS (D)**
- D54 • MATT SOPER (R)**
- D55 • RICK TAGGART (R)**
- D57 • ELIZABETH VELASCO (D)**
- D58 • LARRY DON SUCKLA (R)**
- D59 • KATIE STEWART (D)**
- D62 • MATTHEW MARTINEZ (D)**

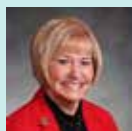
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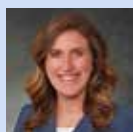


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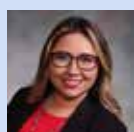
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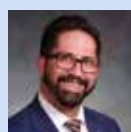
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What can the Governor do when a bill is passed in the Legislature?

When a bill passes through the Legislature (see **page 11** for that process), the Governor has three options:

1. The governor may **sign it** (at which point it becomes law).
2. The governor may simply **not sign it** (but then it automatically becomes law in 10 days).
3. The governor may **veto it**. (The bill then dies unless the two chambers re-pass it with a 2/3 vote in favor.)

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For much more information on your West Slope senators and representatives (including their committee assignments), as well as all other members of the Legislature, and current bills, visit:
leg.colorado.gov





NOT JUST LEARNING CIVICS, LIVING IT: West Slope Youth Voice Heads to the Capitol

Jeriel Clark-Dyar, *Organizing Director*

For the past few months, students in the West Slope Youth Voice (WSYV) program have been hard at work preparing for their trip to the Colorado State Capitol. Our interns have met bi-weekly since early January to discuss bills introduced in the state legislature that could impact young people across Colorado. Their goal? To ensure that legislators hear directly from the youth who will be impacted by these policies.

Each meeting has been a deep dive into policy, strategy, and personal storytelling. The students begin by reviewing the bills, breaking down key components, and debating the potential pros and concerns. They don't approach the legislation with a predetermined position. Instead, they rely on research, discussion, and direct input from their larger peer group. This includes the results of hundreds of surveys collected throughout the school year that represent fellow students' perspectives on a broad range of issues including education, mental

health, community connectedness, and more.

One of their challenges is learning to navigate differences in opinion. Not every student agrees on every bill, but through discussion and debate, they work toward a group consensus that reflects the diverse views of their schools and communities. They understand that policymaking is not black and white — sometimes, a bill that seems beneficial on the surface might have unintended consequences for young people. Their lived experiences within the systems these bills aim to address give them a unique and often overlooked perspective in legislative discussions.

After determining their positions, WSYV students identify key legislative targets who could be persuaded based on committee assignments, past votes, or their influence on a bill's movement through the process. They strategize who among them should take the lead on different bills, aligning students with issues that connect

with their personal experiences and passions.

The final step is crafting their personal stories. While our students aren't the experts on data and policy analysis, they understand that legislators are often most moved by real-life stories from the people their decisions impact. Whether it's a student who has experienced food insecurity advocating for school meal access, or someone who has witnessed the challenges of the juvenile justice system pushing for reforms, WSYV students are learning their voices are necessary when laws are being made.

Our students dedicate hours of their time to advocating for youth issues, engaging in a way that few high schoolers get the opportunity to experience. Their efforts ensure that lawmakers don't make decisions about young people without their direct input and insight.

Wish our students well as they head to the Capitol soon!



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Thank you!

The staff and board of Western Colorado Alliance want to send our sincere and deep gratitude to all our members who supported our Alliance during our end-of-year fundraising campaign! You really stepped up in a big way this year and helped us raise over \$50,000! Thank you for helping us start 2025 off from a place of strength, and remember — it's never too late to make a donation to our Alliance!