

Public News Services gathered dozens of positive policy developments from around the country in the last quarter, demonstrating progress and victories on the issues we cover. Here are some positive developments on issues we've been covering in the following news service states:

BUDGET POLICY AND PRIORITIES

(Washington News Service) - In July, Gov. Gregoire's staff held four jam-packed public meetings around the state. After a short presentation about how the state budget process works, they were opened up to comments about where to spend - and where to cut - state dollars in the next biennium. A new website also was launched for suggestions: <http://transformwabudget.ideascale.com>. By month's end, it had more than 1,800 comments, as well as votes 'for' and 'against' them.

CHILDREN'S ISSUES

(New Hampshire News Connection) - Cyber-bullying is now against the law in New Hampshire. Governor John Lynch signed a new bill into law which expands the anti-bullying statute to address bullying through the use of electronic devices including: telephones, cellular phones, computers, pagers, electronic mail, instant messaging, text messaging and web sites. The enhanced anti-bullying legislation also requires school districts to educate staff and volunteers so they can recognize and address bullying.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - Corrections officials, educators, childcare providers and social workers are among those who gathered to talk about the "Strengthening Families" framework to prevent child abuse and neglect. It's been proven to work, and interest in the approach has been growing since the abuse and death of an 8-year old boy in Boise (Robert Manwill) who was reported missing a year ago.

CITIZENSHIP/REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

(Wyoming News Service) - Wyoming now has a model law to follow to make it easier for military and overseas residents to cast ballots in time to be counted. Wyoming and many other states have faced problems in setting up timelines and a process for overseas voting, and the new "model law" just approved by the Uniform Law Commission will help election leaders and the state legislature.

DISABILITIES

(Oregon News Service) - The Legislative Emergency Board found money in a special purpose fund to restore - at least temporarily - in-home care services for about 16,000 Oregonians who had been told that they would end as part of state budget cuts. Such services as Oregon Project Independence allow homebound seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their homes instead of in assisted living or nursing care facilities.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/SEXUAL ASSAULT

(Tennessee News Service) - Nashville government announced a plan to develop a center to coordinate services for victims of family violence. The Nashville Family Connections Center will coordinate the work of multiple government and nonprofit agencies to try to reduce the number of children and youth exposed to family violence. The center was recommended by a

52-member task force that Nashville mayor Karl Dean appointed to develop strategies for ensuring the well-being of children and youth. The group's five working committees looked at health, safety, out-of-school time, education life cycle, and mobility and stability.

(Virginia News Connection) - Fourteen new public safety laws went into effect at the beginning of the month, including one that extends protections to victims of domestic violence and stalking. The new laws will allow victims to extend protective orders without an additional visit to the courthouse.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Tennessee News Service) - After last minute debate and a legislative threat to cut funding, the Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination was continued for the next fiscal year. With Tennessee ranked 47th in infant mortality rates and Memphis leading the nation in the same category, the program works to lower the infant death rate in Tennessee. The three million dollar program was saved in last minute budget talks.

(Connecticut News Service) - Two dozen communities around Connecticut—from small towns to the state's biggest cities—have completed blueprints for quality early care and education programs for children from birth to eight. Nineteen more communities are working on their blueprints. These detailed plans are important not just for providing child care; they also provide support and education to the whole family.

EDUCATION

(Tennessee News Service) - Tennessee school districts are planning to hire new teachers and staff and make technology upgrades that would otherwise be unthinkable in tight budget times after getting a surge of cash this fall from the federal Race to the Top program. Half of the \$500 million in federal education department funds was awarded to Tennessee for winning the school reform competition and will go to local school districts; the other half will be spent at the state level. Tennessee and Delaware were the first winners in the national contest, created by the Obama administration to encourage radical change in public school policy.

(New York News Connection) - U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced on July 27th that New York is one of 18 states and the District of Columbia which are the finalists for more than \$3 billion available in the second round of funding in the Race to the Top program. Duncan said the applicants "submitted bold blueprints for reform that bear the signatures of many key players at the state and local level who drive change in our schools." Race to the Top is a federal investment in education reform, with \$4.35 billion available to support states in their comprehensive reforms. The Department intends to announce the winners of the competition in September.

ENDANGERED SPECIES/WILDLIFE

(Northern Rockies News Service) - Keep sheep safe on grazing lands while in the daily presence of wolves - and do it with non-lethal methods. That's the order again this year for the Big Wood River Project in Central Idaho, a collaboration involving conservation groups, ranchers and game managers, that has successfully guarded sheep in the area over the past few summers. The project kicked off again in June.

ENERGY POLICY

(New York News Connection) - Should NY Lawmakers Close Pay Loophole for Utility Companies? It's a measure that would require gas and power utilities to pay prevailing wage to security guards, cleaners and other service workers...and it has been passed by the Assembly.

(Washington News Service) - Interstate 5 will become the nation's first "electric highway" with the help of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money. Washington expects as many as 300,000 electric vehicles on roadways in the next 10 years; the federal funds will be used to create a network of fast-charge stations, including some on I-90 to include central Washington. The first Washington sites will be north of Everett and south of Centralia.

(Nevada News Service) - Bills are pending in Congress that would make Nevada the pilot program state for a new concept in energy royalties. "The genius in this is that we are going to move away from the kind of disasters we have in the Gulf and move toward locally generated energy." John Wallen with the Nevada Wilderness project says those royalties will provide resources for wildlife habitat in the same area."

(Arizona News Connection) - Arizona's Luke Air Force Base is expected to self-generate most of its own power by the end of next year with construction of a 17-megawatt solar project. The array of solar panels will be among the largest in the nation.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The Montana State Legislature's Interim Energy and Telecommunications Committee gave its stamp of approval to an energy blueprint, which outlines ways to guide state policy on energy efficiency, fossil fuel development and renewables.

(New Mexico News Connection) - New building codes to make new buildings in New Mexico more energy efficient moved forward in July, despite efforts from real estate and construction industry lobbyists to derail the plan. The new codes will save businesses and households big bucks in energy costs while also making substantial gains towards lowering the state's contribution to climate change.

(Ohio News Connection) - The Summer Crisis Program kicked into high gear in July. The program provides cooling assistance for low-income or elderly households, up to \$175 towards a utility bill or to purchase a new fan. According to the Ohio Department of Development, 42-thousand families were helped by the program last year.

(Tennessee News Service) - The State Building Commission approved Chattanooga-based Signal Energy as the design/build contractor for the West Tennessee Solar Farm to be located along Interstate 40 in Haywood County. The proposed five-megawatt, 30-acre power generation facility is part of Governor Phil Bredesen's Volunteer State Solar Initiative, funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and will be one of the largest solar installations in the Southeast.

(New York News Connection) - Majority Leader Harry Reid said the Senate will hold procedural votes on two energy bills the first week of August, one proposed by Democrats and one by Republicans. The competing measures are aimed at stepping up regulation and oversight of offshore drilling operations and increasing oil companies' liabilities in the event of an oil spill. Neither of the two bills have attracted support from any members of the opposite party, so

passage of either this week is unlikely. Reid has left open the possibility that the Democrats' bill could be resurrected in September or after the November elections.

ENVIRONMENT

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester, President Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Steven Harper have announced that the U.S. and Canada will begin negotiations between the two countries, at the federal, state and provincial levels, in efforts to establish an international agreement and permanent protection for the Flathead River Basin.

(Oregon News Service) - Portland Mayor Sam Adams has introduced a draft ordinance to ban single-use plastic grocery bags citywide. It would require stores to offer reusable bags and charge 5 cents apiece for paper bags.

(Washington News Service) - A federal judge has issued a temporary restraining order to ban the shipment of hundreds of thousands of tons of Hawaiian garbage to Longview for at least 30 days. The Yakama Nation and several environmental groups filed a lawsuit outlining their concerns that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has not fully studied the impact of bringing tropical trash - and the possibility of invasive pest and plant species - into the Columbia Gorge. The trash was bound for a landfill in Klickitat County.

GLBTQ ISSUES

(Arizona News Connection) - A federal judge has struck down a new Arizona law meant to deny employee health insurance to the families of gays and lesbians. The court said the law violates the equal-protection clause of the U.S. Constitution.

GLOBAL WARMING/AIR POLLUTION

(all states) - The EPA has denied petitions from those who had asked the agency to reconsider its scientific finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health and the environment.

HEALTH ISSUES

(California News Service) - San Francisco's Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance that requires mobile phone retailers to provide information about cell phone radiation exposure at the point-of-sale. The ordinance is the first of its kind in the nation.

(all states) - The Department of Veterans Affairs announced it will ease requirements for service members to qualify for post traumatic stress disorder benefits.

(Colorado News Connection) - Colorado demonstrated leadership in rolling out new health care reforms this month. The Centennial State was one of the first nationwide to announce its new high-risk pool for patients with pre-existing conditions. The program uses funds from the health reform law to provide coverage until reform is fully implemented in 2014.

(California News Connection) - San Francisco became the first city in the nation to require cell phone retailers to provide point-of-sale information about radiation levels of their cell phones. The ordinance went into effect in July.

(Iowa News Service) - For the first time ever, the percentage of insured children in Iowa has risen to 37 percent thanks to state expanded Hawk-I coverage and more spending on Medicaid.

(Missouri News Service) - A new federal high-risk insurance pool is available for Missourians with pre-existing conditions. This is in addition to a state high-risk pool that's been available in Missouri for almost 20 years. It's a short term fix until provisions of the health care reform law that would bar insurance companies from denying coverage for people with pre-existing conditions begin in 2014.

(Ohio News Connection) - Ohio is leading the pack when it comes to helping recent college graduates and other young adults access health insurance. Under a law that takes effect in July, parents can purchase health care coverage for their adult children up to age 28, and the child does not have to be financially dependent or living with the parent. According to state estimates, the new Ohio law should help an additional 20,000 young adults access health insurance.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - Governor Patrick attended an event to celebrate the completion of phase two of the project known as "Olmsted Green." Fifty new affordable housing units were completed at the abandoned State Hospital in Dorchester, which is now a 42 acre mixed-use, mixed-income community. The project is a partnership between state and local governments. According to the Governor's office, the project so far has created more than 200,000 hours of construction labor jobs with 67 percent of the workforce being people of color and several contracts have gone to minority-owned businesses, many of them from the community.

HUMAN RIGHTS/RACIAL JUSTICE

(North Carolina News Service) - In early August, lawsuits were filed under the Racial Justice Act, which allows criminals sentenced to death row to use racial discrimination as an argument against the death penalty. The RJA was passed last year and those convicted had a year before they had to file their case.

IMMIGRATION

(Iowa News Service) - Executive Order 22 signed by the Governor requires all state departments and agencies to consider using Project Labor Agreements on large-scale construction projects over \$25 million. The Iowa Board of Regents is the first state agency to use it for a project at the University of Iowa.

(Arizona News Connection) - A federal judge has blocked key parts of SB 1070, Arizona's tough new immigration law slated to have taken effect July 29th. The ruling stops mandatory immigration checks by police and warrantless arrests while immigration status is determined.

(Arizona News Connection) - Nineteen business groups from across Arizona have stepped forward to urge the federal government to take action on immigration reform. The groups, which include chambers of commerce from the state's major cities, say the immigration battle is "tearing at the fabric of Arizona's sense of community."

LIVABLE WAGES/WORKING FAMILIES

(all states) - Congress has restored federal extended unemployment benefits. The action means 64,000 Arizonans are again receiving weekly checks after their benefits had lapsed nearly two months earlier.

PHILANTHROPY

(Washington News Service) - Even in this economy, Washingtonians have been generous. The Washington National Park Fund raises private money to augment park projects and programs. In July, grants totaling \$285,000 were made to Mount Rainier, North Cascades and Olympic National Parks. They'll fund a variety of projects, from climate change and fish monitoring activities, to outdoor classroom presentations and family events for first-time campers.

PUBLIC LANDS/ WILDERNESS

(Colorado News Connection) - After years of struggle and long, hard-fought campaigns, BLM announced in June that it will close the Vermillion Basin, its striking landscapes and critical habitat to all future oil and gas leasing.

(Colorado News Connection) - More wilderness protections for the rugged high country of the San Juan Mountains took another step forward in June. Rep. John Salazar's bill cleared committee and now moves to the House floor

(New Mexico News Connection) - More wilderness protections for some treasured areas near Albuquerque could be on tap. A bill to protect parts of the Eastern Mountains including the Sandias and Manzanos got a hearing in DC in June. At the same time, revisions to a bill to safeguard the Organ Mountains and other parts of Dona Ana County was praised for striking a balance between conservation and national security concerns along the border.

(Northern Rockies News Service) - The Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act, often referred to as the Boulder-White Clouds bill, had a hearing before a Senate subcommittee. The hearing is considered a key step in getting the bill moving in Congress.

(Oregon News Service) - Bills were introduced in June in both the U.S. House and Senate to expand protections of southwest Oregon's Chetco River, to restrict suction dredge mining that threatens salmon and steelhead habitat. The Chetco has been identified by American Rivers as one of the nation's "most endangered" rivers; the legislation was introduced within weeks of that announcement.

(Oregon News Service) - Summer tree thinning projects are putting Oregonians to work and should also improve the health of our state parks. They are joint efforts of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Dept. and the U.S. Forest Service, and involve removing dead and dying trees to reduce fire danger and the chance of insect infestation. The work will continue through October.

(Wyoming News Service) - The Forest Service has canned its proposal to build a Green Rock Picnic Area snowmobile parking lot. Hundreds of signatures and letters were sent in objecting to dangerous conditions, noise, and pollution.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Using \$1.5 million from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, along with funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust, the first 1,160 acres of the 6,200-acre Bair Ranch in Montana was sold to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, which then transferred the property to the U.S. Forest Service to become part of the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

(New Mexico News Connection) - A bill to protect New Mexico's iconic Organ Mountains and other wild areas along Dona Ana County's Frontera region moved out of a Senate committee in

July and awaits a floor vote. The bill would mean new protections for over 300,000 acres and has been hailed for provisions that satisfy both border security and wilderness conservation concerns.

(Oregon News Service) - Add the Forest Service to the list of those trying to protect the Chetco River in Southwest Oregon from new gold mining claims. In July, the Pacific Northwest Region office made a formal request to the Bureau of Land Management, asking to withdraw new mineral rights while Congress decides whether to designate more of the area as federal wilderness.

(Wyoming News Service) - The Bureau of Land Management has a healthy toolbox when it comes to ways to reduce environmental impacts of oil and gas drilling on public lands, even after development leases are issued. That's the finding of an in-depth analysis of BLM regulatory powers.

SMOKING PREVENTION

(Wisconsin News Connection) - In July, Wisconsin became 27th state to enact a state-wide ban on smoking in public places. Smoking is now not permitted in bars, restaurants, private clubs, or other workplaces. There was widespread support for the ban, with over two-thirds of Wisconsin voters supporting the new law.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

(New Hampshire Connection) - New Hampshire received a \$44.5 million dollar federal grant to expand broadband. Governor John Lynch announced that this will help with economic development and provide affordable broadband to every community in the state.

WATER

(Missouri News Service) - The Gulf oil spill has renewed calls for better regulation on all waterways, even here in Missouri. The Show Me State battles other pollutants in its waterways, specifically E coli, a bacteria that can make people sick and is used as an indicator for other viruses and disease-causing organisms in waters that may be polluting waters with human or animal sewage.

(Virginia News Connection) - An important hurdle for clean water in Virginia was cleared. The Senate Committee passed the Chesapeake Bay Clean Water Act which will allow the Federal government to set pollution standards for the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, and ask each state to come up with a plan that would over the next 15 years bring pollution down to those acceptable levels. The legislation now heads for a full vote by the US Senate.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - A bill to clean up the Chesapeake Bay Watershed was unanimously approved by a Senate committee Wednesday. Pennsylvania has a major stake in the Chesapeake Clean Water Act since it provides half the fresh water to the bay and has to adhere to federal standards on pollution levels of those contributing waterways.