

Public News Service recognizes that we are merely one part of the puzzle when it comes to affecting change, but we also know that our coverage (with your support) has had a measurable impact! The following positive policy developments from across the nation, demonstrate progress and victories on issues we have covered.

#### ANIMAL WELFARE

(California News Service) - A CANS story discouraging parents from giving kids live bunnies for Easter was aired nationally on America in the Morning. Animal shelter officials say the pets often end up back at the shelter.

(Ohio News Connection) - The Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board took the final step to advance significant welfare reforms for farm animals. In April, the board voted unanimously to advance the care standards to the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review for final approval before becoming law. The standards phase out veal crates and gestation crates for breeding pigs, and they prohibit new egg operations from confining laying hens in cages.

(Ohio News Connection) - Governor Kasich has put in place temporary measures to crack down on private ownership of dangerous wild animals while tougher laws are written this fall. The order comes in the aftermath of the recent slaughter of 48 exotic wild animals in Zanesville, Ohio in October. Some animal owner groups welcomed the order, though others have blasted it as not going far enough.

(Texas News Service) - After receiving press coverage from Texas News Service and other media outlets, a petition to save wild burros in Big Bend State Park became one of the most popular petitions ever on Change.org. Texas Parks and Wildlife reinstated an extermination policy toward the burros after suspending it in 2007 because of public outcry. Media attention to the petition left animal advocates hopeful that the state will again back off its policy. A retired Big Bend park supervisor, meanwhile, has defended the burros, saying they cause no more harm to the environment than humans

#### BUDGET POLICY AND PRIORITIES

(Arizona News Connection) - Thirteen state parks slated for closure will stay open, thanks to a number of local public-private partnerships that have come up with the necessary funding.

(California News Service) - Governor Jerry Brown introduced a state budget that includes calling for a special election to ask voters to approve temporary tax increases to help fill the budget gap. The governor says tax increases would save the state from having to cut 12-billion dollars more in social services.

(Colorado News Connection) - A lawsuit in federal court is attempting to strike down TABOR, the Colorado Taxpayer Bill of Rights. The legislation limits state spending and doesn't permit lawmakers to increase most fees and taxes in the legislative session. Critics claim TABOR prevents lawmakers from governing, while opponents of the lawsuit say it is an attack on the principle of constitutionally limited government.

(Colorado News Connection) - Petitions are being gathered statewide in support of a ballot measure to temporarily increase state income and sales taxes by fractional amounts, with the money going to K-12 and the state university system. The signatures must be gathered by August 1 for the measure to be placed on the November ballot.

(Commonwealth News Service) - Infrastructure projects in The Bay State got a boost as Governor Deval Patrick, transportation officials, local legislators and construction workers kicked off the Dorchester Avenue Reconstruction Project this month. The Governor announced \$931 million in road and bridge projects in communities across the Commonwealth. Which he says will create thousands of jobs. The program includes \$550 million from the Statewide Road and Bridge Program, \$208 million from the Administration's historic Accelerated Bridge Program, and \$173 million in federal American Recovery and Reinvestment funds.

(Florida News Connection) - Florida News Connection broke a story about 4,000 Department of Corrections officers forced into working for a for-profit company, taking over 30 south FL prisons - who were entitled to State compensation amounting to \$25 million. The day after we broke the story, the newly-appointed Dept. of Corrections chief was forced to resign by Governor Rick Scott. One reason cited in the Governor's news release was publicity about the \$25 million SNAFU.

(Illinois News Connection) - The governor signed legislation that raised income taxes. Social service providers and many of organizations, as well as citizens, had called for the increase, saying that it was the responsible way to provide a stable source of funding for teachers, police officers, firefighters and services to families and others who have suffered in the recession.

(Iowa News Service) - The Iowa Senate was taking up legislation to restore funding for some of line items, such as smart growth funding, that were vetoed in the Governor's budget. And the Governor has decided not to impose the millions of dollars in budget cuts required by the last legislature on the state's mental institutions.

(Iowa News Service) - The longest stand-off in recent memory over a state budget seems close to be resolved as Republicans have given in to Democrats demand that education funding be restored. If a budget deal can be reached soon it will head off a state government shutdown at the end of the month.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - Thousands gathered at the state capitol in Harrisburg for a "Rally for a Responsible Budget." Their message--that budget cuts alone aren't the way to address an estimated \$4 billion deficit. Pennsylvania needs to make investments in key programs in its next state budget.

(Missouri News Service) - The Missouri Legislature is debating a bill that would eliminate the state income tax and replace it with a 'mega' tax or 'fair' tax. It's in response to another budget shortfall this year. Opponents of the bill such as the Missouri Budget Project say it will actually cost families more money and possible hurt businesses. Opposition to this bill, which is still in committee, is growing.

(Texas News Service) - After drawing a line in the sand against tapping into the state's emergency reserves, Gov. Rick Perry reversed his own course, endorsing a plan to use part of the \$9.4 billion rainy-day fund. While the governor did not agree to use the fund for shortfalls in the next biennial budget, he acquiesced to using \$3.1 billion to help cover a deficit in the current budget.

(Texas News Service) - After a last-minute filibuster by state Senator Wendy Davis (D - Ft. Worth), Governor Rick Perry was forced to call the Legislature back for at least one special session. Opponents of education cuts had been advocating for a special session so that there could be more time for the public to be involved in deciding how to cut state aid to school districts. While Democrats did not fully succeed in their efforts to ensure chronically less-wealthy districts be spared the funding cuts, legislators did agree on a compromise: after one year the across-the-board cutting strategy would revert to one in which districts with greater per-student aid would absorb a greater proportion of the cuts.

(Wisconsin News Connection) - Jobs have been the focus of Gov. Scott Walker's administration in Wisconsin, but a story that was produced by the Wisconsin News Connection in January pointed to the ways that conservationists and businesses can work together to foster the new "Wisconsin is Open for Business" theme supported by the governor. The story focused on eco-tourism in the state as one way natural resources are playing a critical role in job creation.

(Washington News Service) - A state lawmaker, Rep. Gary Alexander (R-Olympia), has introduced a constitutional amendment that would require the state to reduce elected officials' salaries whenever state employee salaries are also reduced due to budget cuts. HJR 4201 would have to be approved by voters if it gets through the legislature and is signed by the governor.

(Washington News Service) - Funding for the Washington Department of Tourism was eliminated this year, but the state Agriculture Dept. has pitched in to help create and publicize new summer vacation opportunities. The campaign, called "Savor Washington," includes 14 itineraries for self-guided tours of farms, wineries, restaurants and artisan food producers. Download the maps at [www.agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm/SavorWA.aspx](http://www.agr.wa.gov/Marketing/SmallFarm/SavorWA.aspx).

(Wyoming News Service) - The Office of State Lands and Investments has been looking at the possibility of raising the state royalty rate and adjusting allowable deductions when calculating the amount due. Laramie County and private landowners are garnering higher royalties.

(Iowa News Service) - The latest budget estimates from the Revenue Estimating Conference indicate a 4 percent increase in revenue for the last 12 months. That news has prompted the Senate Majority leader to indicate that schools will likely get the 2 percent increase in funding they had requested instead of no increase in funding House Republicans had proposed.

(New York News Connection) - The state legislature agreed with Gov. Cuomo on an on-time budget for the first time in decades. While it contained major cutbacks in aid to education and health care, advocates for some social services were able to save them from the budget axe. A full restoration of funds for home visitation programs, which groups like Fight Crime Invest in Kids had fought hard for, came through.

(Texas News Service) - The Senate Subcommittee on Education Funding voted to lessen the severity of education budget cuts. The initial draft Senate budget had called for \$10 billion in cuts, but the subcommittee lowered that to \$4 billion. Chairwoman Florence Shapiro (R-Plano) also took a stand in opposition to Gov. Rick Perry's insistence that the state budget shortfall not be addressed with the help of the rainy-day fund.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - A new study from a Pennsylvania non-profit research group shows the state created more jobs in 2010 than just about any other state in the nation. Keystone Research Center says Pennsylvania added more than 65,000 jobs last year, third-highest among all states. The group says lawmakers in Harrisburg need to make sure that new revenue initiatives accompany funding reductions so recent job gains seen in the state aren't lost.

(Minnesota News Connection) - February 10, Governor Mark Dayton exercised his first veto as MN Governor, vetoing HF130, the Republican attempt to balance the state budget, and close the \$6.2 billion dollar budget deficit by a cuts-only proposal.

(Washington News Service) - Gov. Gregoire has signed the "Discover Pass" into law, a new way to raise money for strapped state agencies that keep public recreation sites and lands in shape. It's a vehicle pass, \$10 per day or \$30 per year, with the funds used to fill budget holes at the Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, Dept. of Natural Resources, and State Parks & Recreation Commission. The new law also allows the agencies to share law enforcement responsibilities on state land, which is expected to improve public safety.

(Wisconsin News Connection) - The Wisconsin News Connection had a presence at the State Capitol in Madison during the recent massive protests over workers' rights. In February WNC produced a total of five stories dealing with the budget repair bill in Wisconsin. The stories ranged from the protests at the State Capitol to how the bill would impact people with disabilities. These reports have been aired by stations across the country and access by many on the Internet. The WNC continues to cover this fluid story as the workers' rights issue has now been thrust into the national spotlight by events in Wisconsin.

#### CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM/MONEY IN POLITICS

(Arizona News Connection) - A proposed ballot measure to end Arizona's public campaign finance system is being challenged by a citizen's advocacy group. The Arizona Advocacy Network says the measure (which was referred to the ballot by the legislature) would not only repeal Clean Elections, but also voter education efforts by the state's Clean Elections Commission, thus violating the "single-subject" rule in the Arizona Constitution.

#### CENSUS

(Texas News Service) - Hispanic lawmakers filed a federal lawsuit against Governor Perry for trying to use "inaccurate" 2010 Census data in remapping the state's political jurisdictions. The Mexican American Legislative Caucus alleges that the census undercounted Hispanics, especially in border regions, adding that Latinos will be shortchanged in their representation at the Legislature and the State Board of Education as a result. The caucus is trying to block Republican efforts to limit the number of Latino-majority districts in the state.

### CHILDREN'S ISSUES

(Colorado News Connection) - State Senator Keith King drafted an amendment which restored funding to the state Smart Start program for the rest of the school year. The program provides free breakfasts to needy Colorado schoolchildren. The amendment passed on February 9th 2011.

(Ohio News Connection) - New data released in May showed that Ohio is a national leader when it comes to keeping children out of foster care or group homes. According to the Public Children Services Association of Ohio's 10th biennial Factbook, Ohio had a 42% reduction of children in out-of-home care. Legislative director Greg Kapcar says Ohio has achieved the reduction through a multi-pronged effort that includes flexible funding, support for relative caregivers, risk and safety assessment tools, and preventative services that avoid children coming into care.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - The Annie E. Casey Foundation recognized New Hampshire as the best place to raise a child; this is the fourth year in a row that New Hampshire placed first. Governor Lynch commented on the report noting that in order to stay at number one, New Hampshire must continue to invest in children's health care and continue to ensure young people stay in school, and also keep working to help parents earn better jobs.

(Arizona News Connection) - A state task force has recommended 10 changes to Arizona law to improve the child-welfare system. The proposed changes include a specially-trained investigative unit, quicker response to calls for help and more comprehensive treatment for victims of child abuse.

### CITIZENSHIP/ REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

(California News Service) - A study from PEW finds California's cash-strapped counties and local governments could save millions of dollars on their elections if they provided election materials online, instead of mailing to each individual voter. A new state laws allows for voter info guides and sample ballots to be delivered this way. The PEW study reveals California counties spent up to 46-percent of their total election costs mailing paper sample ballots in the 2008 general election.

(Iowa News Service) - The Iowa legislature passed, and the Governor has signed, a redistricting bill that opens up three districts to possible Democrat wins next year. Congressman Bruce Braley has the first district to himself, the second district gives Congressman Dave Loebsack an open seat and Congressman Leonard Boswell has a good shot in the new 3rd district where he has already represented a large section.

(Ohio News Connection) - An Ohio Senate panel decided to remove a requirement from an election bill for Ohio voters to show photo identification in person before casting a ballot.

(Oregon News Service) - Under an ethics bill that made its way through the Oregon Legislature in April, for one year after they leave office, state legislators can't jump to non-elected positions in the executive branch. It sets a mandatory one-year waiting period for former lawmakers to be eligible for state jobs and/or positions as lobbyists.

(Texas News Service) - The state House committee charged with redistricting acknowledged the need to address an exploding Hispanic population. The number of Latino-dominated districts are tentatively set to increase from 29 to 30 - less than what Latino advocates are calling for, but greater than an earlier GOP proposal which offered only 28. Under the current plan, seven of eight new seats would be in Republican-dominated areas; however, 14 Republican incumbents statewide would find themselves battling each other in redrawn district races, as opposed to only two Democrats (in Houston).

(Texas News Service) - A federal panel announced it would put Texas' redistricting case on a fast track, saying the trial would likely be limited to about nine days. Plaintiffs against the GOP-drawn political maps want a speedy resolution so that candidates can plan for the March 2012 primary elections. If the latest maps stand, some high-profile Democrats will be pitted against each other.

(Washington News Service) - Washington tops the nation in a new survey of how states treat younger voters. The group Rock the Vote compiled a 100-point scorecard and tracked what each state is doing to make voter registration - and voting - easy and accessible, and whether civics is taught in high school. Washington's grade was 68 points.

(Wisconsin News Connection) - In a move which would allow more sunshine into the judicial branch of state government, State Supreme Court Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson has proposed opening judicial conferences to the public and the media.

(Texas News Service) - The U.S. Department of Justice has delayed implementation of a new Texas law requiring voters to present government-issued photo identification at polling locations on the grounds that the law might interfere with "the right to vote on account of race, color, or membership in a language minority group." Because of its past history of voter suppression, Texas is required to seek federal approval before it can change its election laws. Opponents of the new law say it could make it less likely that some students, minorities, and elderly citizens will participate in elections.

(Washington News Service) - Washington gets high marks for retaining and improving voter access - at a time when many states are trying to restrict it by requiring photo identification or proof of citizenship, or changing registration and early voting rules. The survey released by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University says Washington is one of only a few states that managed to sidestep those debates so far.

(Illinois News Connection) - A new poll of Illinois voters taken in October found opposition to the Tea Party movement is growing. The poll conducted by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute asked voters if they would be more likely or less likely to vote for a candidate affiliated with the Tea Party. 60 percent said they'd be less likely to vote for such a candidate compared to 46 percent last year.

(Texas News Service) - Democrats on the US House Judiciary Committee have called for hearings on whether new state voting laws - such as a photo-ID requirement passed recently in Texas - can disenfranchise certain populations and generally make voting harder. Thirteen states have new laws on the books that Reps. John Conyers (D-MI) and Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) fear will reverse years of voting-rights progress. Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) is currently considering their request for hearings.



(Texas News Service) - After various civil-rights and minority groups sued to block new political maps approved this summer by Texas' Republican-dominated legislature, a San Antonio federal court issued replacement maps designed to better reflect Hispanic and black population growth. The move will almost certainly lead to greater minority representation.

(Ohio News Connection) - Thanks to the hard work of dedicated individuals, the repeal of HB194 will officially be on the November 2012 ballot. Secretary of State Jon Husted certified 307,358 valid signatures, over 75,000 more than were needed. The measure would severely limit early voting, prohibit poll workers from assisting voters completing forms, and make it more difficult for local boards of elections to promote early voting to all registered voters.

#### CLIMATE CHANGE/AIR QUALITY

(Kentucky News Connection) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed rules in mid-March that would for the first time regulate toxic air emissions from coal-fired power plants, including limiting mercury, lead, arsenic and acid gas pollution. Environmental and medical groups praised the move, which came in response to a court-ordered deadline, saying the new regulations will remove toxins from the air that contribute to respiratory illnesses, birth defects and developmental problems in children.

(Prairie News Service) - The EPA announced that it is requiring two long-time polluters in North Dakota to install Selective Catalytic Reduction systems, which reduce emissions of nitrogen oxide.

(Prairie News Service) - The Environmental Protection Agency is trying to step in to address pollution from 4 North Dakota power plants. A hearing on the EPA's proposal will be held in October.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - The power of the pen was praised by Democrats, environmentalists and many others when Governor Lynch used it to veto a bill that would have opted New Hampshire out of The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative. (RGGI) The Governor said had the bill passed, it would have ended energy efficiency efforts - eliminating jobs and eliminating efforts to help businesses and families cut their energy use.

(Virginia News Connection) - Virginia's largest utility, Dominion Resources announced it will phase out two of what environmental organizations have called its oldest and dirtiest coal-fired power plants. The Chesapeake and Yorktown plants, both located in coastal Virginia will end coal operations by 2016. Northern Virginia is also breathing a little easier, as GenOn also announced it will phase out the Potomac Generating Station.

(Washington News Service) - In March, the State of Washington reached an agreement with the owners of its only coal-fired power plant to transition to cleaner power forms and eventually shut down by 2025. The TransAlta plant in Centralia, the state's largest producer of nitrogen oxide (NOX) pollution, has also agreed to install additional pollution control technology in 2013 to reduce the haze caused by NOX.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - Legislation was recently introduced to reverse new EPA rules to limit air pollution from coal-fired power plants. The argument from mostly Republicans is that those regulations would cost jobs and raise utility bills. But a new poll of

voters across the country shows Republicans support the rules, as do Democrats and Independents. An Idaho Republican advisor says the GOP should drop the push.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - A coalition of clear air advocates, including NPCA and Sierra Club Montana, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have filed a legal settlement that establishes firm, enforceable deadlines for action on plans to clean up regional haze pollution in 43 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands. If approved by the court, the consent decree will require states and the EPA to issue enforceable plans to curb haze-causing pollution from the nation's largest and oldest coal-fired power plants. Yellowstone National Park is listed as one of the sites affected by haze.

(Prairie News Service) - Great River Energy of Maple Grove, MN, plans to shut down a coal-burning power plant in North Dakota, due to slowed demand and declining power prices. Plant will be off-line until 2013 or longer.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has unveiled the final Mercury and Air Toxics Standards rule, which is aimed at reducing emissions of mercury, acid gases and other toxics emitted from coal-burning power plants. Montana set limits on mercury in 2006.

(Indiana News Connection) - Duke Energy will be shutting down two coal burning units at its Gallagher generating plant in New Albany by February 1, 2012. The closures are the result of a settlement of a federal lawsuit requiring the company to reduce pollution.

(All News Services) - More than 20-years in the making, the Environmental Protection Agency announced the first-ever nationwide standards for mercury and toxic air pollution from power plants. J Drake Hamilton at Minnesota-based Fresh Energy says the standards are expected to reduce pollution from power plants by 91-percent, with significant health benefits expected.

(West Virginia News Connection) - The percentage of electricity generated from coal - especially the older, dirtier coal fired power plants - continues to decline. A few years ago it was over fifty percent. Soon that number will be close to forty percent. WVNS has also been covering this issue extensively, and is one of the few outlets in West Virginia paying steady attention to the rise of commercially viable clean energy.

#### CONSUMER ISSUES

(Illinois News Connection) - On September 12, Governor Quinn vetoed the so called "smart grid" legislation that would have increased electric bills to pay for an upgrade of the electrical grid in Illinois. This is a victory for AARP and other consumer groups which opposed it saying that it would have been too expensive for consumers and would have usurped the oversight of state regulators.

(Missouri News Service) - The Missouri Senate rejected a provision that would eliminate more than 105,000 Missouri seniors, veterans and people with disabilities from eligibility for a modest circuit breaker tax credit that is critical to keeping them in their homes. The provision, which was included in a wide-ranging tax bill, was unnecessary to pay for new tax incentives included in that bill during the September special session.



(New York News Connection) - A bill that would limit access to prepaid cell phones in Suffolk County came before the county legislature, generating strong reaction. It would have required that anyone purchasing one present two forms of identification to a retailer, and would have authorized the creation of a consumer database maintained by retailers and available to police. The phones serve as a lifeline for low-income residents, undocumented immigrants, tourists, and domestic violence survivors. With the Long Island Immigrant Alliance, SEPA Mujer, and the Suffolk chapter of the NYCLU leading the way, it was defeated, 11-7.

(North Carolina News Service) - Governor Beverly Perdue vetoed Senate Bill 33, after months of pressure from patient rights groups, saying it could cripple North Carolina patients injured as a result of their doctor's negligence in the emergency room.

(Texas News Service) - The state House moved several short-term lending-reform bills designed to curb abusive lending practices (such as high interest, high fee, "payday lending"). HB 2592, HB 2593, and HB 2594 would provide state oversight and protections to make it easier for consumers to avoid cycles of debt.

(Nevada News Service) - Local consumers gained a new national resource in April. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) website, [www.SaferProducts.gov](http://www.SaferProducts.gov) allows Nevadans to file alerts on defective products and also learn about unsafe products that are still on the shelves. Graham Galloway with the Nevada Justice Association says the new website is an important step in giving consumers timely information about unsafe products.

(Wyoming News Service) - Jackson Mayor Mark Barron and the Jackson Town Council have sent a letter to Teton County School District (TCSD) Superintendent Pam Shea, "The Town Council of the Town of Jackson wishes to support the Teton County School District in their efforts to make school children aware of potential hazards associated with cell phone use."

(Wyoming News Service) - Safety needs to become a part of the workplace culture in Wyoming, and that will take a team effort from employees, employers and state government. The Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association is calling for that "safety first" approach in light of an annual report from the AFL-CIO that shows Wyoming consistently ranks highest in the nation for its worker fatality rate.

(Ohio News Connection) - Some utility customers in Ohio will be paying less for their electric next year, thanks to the work of consumer groups, including Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy. An agreement was reached with Duke Energy Ohio that will result in multiple competitive auctions to set the price for electric generation service from January 2012 - May 2015.

#### CRIMINAL JUSTICE

(Connecticut News Service) - A bill to repeal the death penalty has been approved by the Judiciary Committee and is expected to pass in the General Assembly, and Gov. Malloy has stuck by his campaign pledge to sign it.

(Kentucky News Connection) - The Kentucky Supreme court has refused to lift a temporary ban on all executions until a lower court judge can decide whether Kentucky's lethal-injection procedures meet necessary standards.

(Texas News Service) - The U.S. Supreme Court granted a 30-day stay of execution to Cleve Foster to allow time for petitions of innocence and constitutional inadequacy of state habeas counsel (as well as ineffective counsel) to be heard.

(Texas News Service) - US Solicitor General Donald Verrilli filed an amicus brief in the US Supreme Court asking for a stay of execution for Texas death-row inmate Humberto Leal Garcia (scheduled to be executed July 7). After the Leal case drew international attention because Leal was convicted without consular access, Verrilli determined national interests will be jeopardized if the execution proceeds without further judicial review.

(Michigan News Connection) - Michigan Governor Rick Snyder introduced the Executive Budget for fiscal years 2012 and 2013. Overall, the Department of Corrections received a slight increase for FY 2012 and 4.3 percent increase for 2013. Included in the budget were several viable options for the state to save money, including putting a larger emphasis on the state's prisoner reentry initiative, better known as The Michigan Prisoner ReEntry Initiative (MPRI).

(Texas News Service) - The U.S. Supreme Court granted a 30-day stay of execution to Cleve Foster to allow time for petitions of innocence and constitutional inadequacy of state habeas counsel (as well as ineffective counsel) to be heard.

(Kentucky News Connection) - State taxpayers could save as much as \$147 million over the next decade under an overhaul of the state's penal code that the Governor will soon sign into law. House Bill 463, sponsored by Rep. John Tilley, D-Hopkinsville, is the result of a multi-year task force that examined the state's anti-crime efforts in collaboration with the Pew Center on the States. The reform package is the first comprehensive examination of the state's criminal laws since 1974.

(North Carolina News Service) - The Racial Justice Act continues to stir up controversy in North Carolina and those who oppose the RJA are using every available resource to fight it. In February, a Winston-Salem Superior Court heard arguments about whether the RJA is unconstitutional. In late February, the judge found the law constitutional, allowing death row inmates who feel that race played a factor in their sentence to seek life in prison without the possibility of parole.

(Tennessee News Service) - A lawsuit filed in federal court could create a new roadblock for upcoming executions in Arizona and other states, including Tennessee. Lawyers for three Arizona death row prisoners filed suit seeking to force the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to stop foreign imports of a drug used in lethal injections. Nearly all states that have a death penalty require the drug, and because it is in short supply inside the U.S., Arizona and others have quietly turned to foreign suppliers so that executions can proceed.

(Virginia News Connection) - Three new pieces of legislation aimed to help the Commonwealth in its fight against human trafficking were signed into law this month. One aims to improve communication between state agencies. Another requires the Department of Social Services to devise a plan to help victims and the third law makes abduction of a minor for the purpose of the manufacture of child pornography or prostitution a Class 2 felony.

(Oregon News Service) - Gov. John Kitzhaber placed a moratorium on all executions in Oregon, offering a heartfelt plea to the State Legislature to reform the state's sentencing

laws and reevaluate the capital punishment system. He called the current system expensive and unworkable, full of contradictions and inequities. Kitzhaber added that he agonized over the two executions carried out during his previous term as governor and, in his words, “I simply cannot participate once again in something I believe to be morally wrong.”

(Texas News Service) - Thanks to a new state law loosening access to post-conviction DNA evidence, convicted murderer Hank Skinner was granted a stay of execution by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. For more than ten years Skinner had been claiming that DNA evidence could prove his innocence. His case was cited by lawmakers as an example of why the new legislation was needed. The court had denied previous requests for new tests, saying, until now, the law narrowly defined when such testing was allowable.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - A report by the Death Penalty Information Center shows a drop in new death sentences and executions nationwide. The report notes that it's part of a trend over the past 10 years. A bill to abolish the death penalty in Montana is planned for 2013, after the State Senate said 'yes' to a similar bill earlier this year.

#### DISABILITIES

(Illinois News Connection) - The Illinois Department of Human Services unveiled a new federally funded program that helps employers hire workers with disabilities through financial incentives to the employers.

(Missouri News Service) - The Missouri Safe Schools Coalition is building support for a 'Safe Schools Act,' introduced in the legislature this month. Disability advocates have rallied behind this bill, saying youth with disabilities are a high risk group for bullying, and this bill will offer them the protection they need.

(Ohio News Connection) - Groups including the Autism Society of Ohio are applauding President Obama's signing of crucial legislation renewing the landmark Combating Autism Act for another three years. The legislation continues the federal commitment for autism research, services and treatment at current levels, authorizing \$693 million over the next three years. The original act provided \$945 million over five years.

(Washington News Service) - The Department of Social and Health Services launched a new website in May to help Washingtonians with disabilities find employment without risking their health care and/or disability-related benefits. The development of “Pathways to Employment” was paid for by a federal grant.

(Illinois News Connection) - A groundbreaking Consent Decree approved in Federal Court in December gives Cook County residents a meaningful choice about where to live. Because of the ruling thousands of people with physical disabilities and mental illnesses who have been living in nursing homes because of the structure of Medicaid funding will be able to live in their own homes and participate in the community. The ruling came in the case of Colbert v. Quinn originally filed in 2007.

#### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/SEXUAL ASSAULT

(Kentucky News Connection) - There are two bills in the cache this legislative session that would expand state domestic violence laws to allow people who are dating to seek protective

orders. Supporters unsuccessfully sought to have that provision added last year to "Amanda's Law," named after Amanda Ross, a murder victim in a high-profile domestic violence case in Lexington. Two bills would expand the law to dating partners: SB 49, filed by Sen. Denise Harper Angel, D-Louisville, and HB 35, sponsored by Rep. Jody Richards, D-Bowling Green.

(Kentucky News Connection) - State Senator Denise Harper Angel of Louisville has pre-filed a bill extending domestic violence protections to dating couples to be considered in the upcoming legislative session that begins in January. More than 40 other states recognize dating partner relationships in laws that offer greater protection for battered victims through domestic violence or emergency protective orders.

#### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Iowa News Service) - While the education budget includes major cuts, the preschool funding was saved by the Iowa Senate.

(North Carolina News Service) - Governor Beverly Perdue issued an executive order directing state agencies to admit all qualifying children into pre-k programs. State budget cuts had prompted the legislature to cut pre-k education to low-income children - an issue challenged in the courts since January.

(Minnesota News Connection) - One bright note from a tough legislative session of budget cuts, after hearing testimony on the need for child care assistance, while some cuts were left in, both House and Senate removed the cuts to the child care assistance grant for college students from the bills.

(New York News Connection) - Supporters of a statewide ratings system for early education, pre-K and Head Start programs received the support of Gov. Cuomo in their bid for 100 million dollars in federal Race to the Top funding. As a result they are optimistic about the state's chances; winning would allow expansion of QUALITYstarsNY.

#### EDUCATION

(Arizona News Connection) - Gov. Brewer vetoed a bill to increase private school tax credits at the expense of the state's general fund.

(New York News Connection) - The chancellor of the state's largest school system was a lightning rod from the moment New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg appointed her late last year. Cathy Black, a former Hearst Magazines executive, had an approval rating of just 17 percent in a poll in early April. Her sudden, forced resignation brought praise from some quarters, along with shock and surprise.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - New Hampshire is set to receive \$1.47 million to assist its lowest-achieving schools through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program. The funds are part of \$546 million available to states for the SIG program in fiscal year 2010.

(Texas News Service) - The Senate Subcommittee on Education Funding voted to lessen the severity of education budget cuts. The initial draft Senate budget had called for \$10 billion in cuts, but the subcommittee lowered that to \$4 billion. Chairwoman Florence Shapiro (R-

Plano) also took a stand in opposition to Gov. Rick Perry's insistence that the state budget shortfall not be addressed with the help of the rainy-day fund.

(Texas News Service) - House Bill 400, the so-called "school mandate relief bill" - which would have allowed school districts greater leeway in cutting teacher pay, enacting furloughs, and increasing class sizes - was successfully blocked by Democrats using procedural maneuvers. Teacher advocates said the measure was an attempt to use a budget crisis as an excuse to permanently remove essential protections.

(Oregon News Service) - Some education bills made major progress in the Oregon Legislature during March. They include SB 742, allowing in-state college tuition for Oregon high school graduates regardless of their immigration status; a requirement for school districts to offer full-day kindergarten (SB 248) with no tuition fees by the 2015-2016 school years; and offering an enhanced student loan forgiveness program for middle-school teachers who work in low-income schools (SB 670). We'll continue to follow their progress.

(Washington News Service) - Community college students are championing a legislation (HB 1568) that would allow students to serve as members of their schools' Boards of Trustees, something that is allowed at four-year universities but not at community colleges in Washington. The bill would give trustee boards the option of including a student member. Labor groups and the League of Education Voters are backing it; some community college presidents and trustees oppose it.

(Oregon News Service) - Legislation to set benchmarks for higher education in Oregon (SB 253) passed the state Senate with bipartisan support in February. The bill sets a goal that at least 40 percent of Oregonians have a bachelor's degree or higher; 40 percent earn associates' degrees or post-secondary credentials; and 20 percent receive a high school diploma or the equivalent, by 2025.

(Minnesota News Connection) - Minnesota was awarded \$45 million in federal grants in the "Race to the Top" early education program. Advocates say the funds will be used on infrastructure and access to get more children ready for kindergarten.

(New York News Connection) - In a year filled with layoffs and cutbacks throughout New York's public school systems, many talented teachers still managed to gain recognition for exemplary work - 165 earned the profession's highest credential, National Board Certification. It's a jump of 14.5 percent over last year.

#### ENDANGERED SPECIES/WILDLIFE

(California News Service) - California lawmakers are considering a bill that would ban the possession and sale of shark fins, including shark fin soup. Proponents of the bill say the practice of hacking off the fin of a live shark, and then leaving it to die in the ocean, is contributing to the decline of the species.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - A new poll on wildlife management, the Endangered Species Act and wolves shows strong public support for all three. The Continuing Budget Resolution being debated in the U.S. Senate would remove ESA protections for wolves.

(Florida News Connection) - Endangered sea turtles have a right to a home too... that's the gist of a new settlement between groups including the Florida Wildlife Federation and federal agencies including FEMA. FEMA will now need to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies before issuing federal flood insurance in coastal areas used by turtles for nesting.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - They like it and they want it to be bigger. Blaine County Commissioners want to see the Wood River Wolf Project on the ground again this grazing season, and have it cover more acreage. The project has been demonstrating non-lethal methods of managing sheep in wolf country for three years.

**\*\*MAY BE CONTROVERSIAL\*\*** (Wyoming News Service) - A bill that provides compensation for livestock losses due to wolves and funding for non-lethal wolf management methods, is on its way to the Oregon Governor's desk - where it's expected to be signed. Could Wyoming consider a similar plan? Comments from Oregon Cattlemen's Association president Bill Hoyt, and Defenders of Wildlife wolf specialist Suzanne Stone. Both participated in crafting the bill.

(California News Service) - Governor Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 376 into law, meaning the sale, possession or distribution of shark fins is banned in California.

(Virginia News Connection) - Chesapeake Bay Foundation and other groups applaud an historic vote in Boston by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to set new fishing limits for "the most important fish of the sea." The new rules will allow the menhaden to rebound from a dangerous population decline and will boost the health of the coastal ecosystem and fishing industries that depend on the fish.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is moving quickly to amend land management plans in Montana and throughout the West, to add policies to protect sage grouse. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has found the bird is a candidate for Endangered Species Act listing unless populations recover.

(California News Service) - The San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to transfer the management of city-owned Sharp Park and its 18-hole golf course to the National Park Service. Environmental groups applaud the decision, saying it will protect the endangered San Francisco garter snake and the California red-legged frog.

## ENERGY POLICY

(Arizona News Connection) - Arizona's second-largest utility, Salt River Project, has increased its goal for energy production from renewable sources and conservation to 20-percent by the year 2020, up from 15-percent. SRP also announced it will buy power from a 100-megawatt wind farm being built in northwest Arizona.

(Arizona News Connection) - The first commercial charging station for electric vehicles is open for business in downtown Tempe. A program funded by federal stimulus money will build up to 12-hundred charging stations in the Phoenix and Tucson areas.

(Arizona News Connection) - Surveys by Arizona's two largest utilities have found widespread support for increasing the use of solar power. A majority of those surveyed say they're okay with higher utility bills to support solar generation.



(Colorado News Connection) - The new DOD funding bill increases goals for renewable energy on military bases. Colorado Senator Mark Udall's plans would wean the military off of billions of gallons of fossil fuels, creating huge annual savings. CNC reported on the "greening" of Colorado bases earlier this year.

(Kentucky News Connection) - Bowling Green, Kentucky, should have its first large-scale solar generating facility by the end of June. Earlier this month developers were installing poles that will hold up some of the 7,000 solar panels planned for a 10-acre site at Scotty's Development. The poles will have a metal fulcrum that allows the panels to move with the sun and collect the maximum amount of solar energy.

(Commonwealth News Service-Massachusetts) - The sometimes controversial Cape Wind Project got the green light from the federal authorities, and construction could begin as early as this fall for the country's first offshore wind farm.

(Nevada News Service) - A bill to support rooftop renewable energy was approved by the State Senate by a vote of 13-8.

(Nevada News Service) - The Silver State became the first in the nation to pass "Smart from the Start" legislation. Under the new law (AB307) energy companies that propose renewable energy projects will have to collect a fee that will fund planning as well as mitigation efforts to protect Nevada wildlife.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - A groundbreaking ceremony took place this month for a renewable energy power plant project at the Glenclyff home in Benton. A new wood chip boiler will replace current boilers at the long-term nursing facility which provides care for New Hampshire residents with mental illness and developmental disabilities will continue to generate all its own heat, hot water and electricity more efficiently while also benefitting the environment. The funds for the project came in part from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

(New York News Connection) - Lawmakers passed a measure that should help New York homeowners be able to spend money to save money by making their homes more energy efficient. The measure is projected to create 14-thousand new construction jobs, and supporters say it also will prevent "dirty" power plants from being located in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

(New York News Connection) - With Congress spending much of the summer focused on deficit reduction, supporters say the Power New York Act signed into law should provide a jobs jolt just when the Empire State needs it most – while at the same time, tackling climate change pollution.

(Illinois News Connection) - To help support people using more "green" forms of transportation, Governor Quinn announced that the state will start tracking "dooring" accidents between cars and bicycle riders. The idea is to look for ways to making biking safer.

(Illinois News Connection) - Governor Pat Quinn has signed two bills into law that advance clean wind energy in Illinois. The new laws create a council to study offshore wind energy projects in Lake Michigan and clear the way for more wind energy projects throughout Illinois.

(Connecticut News Service) - A bill passed in the session ending May 5 creating a Chemical Innovations Institute at UConn Health Center (House Bill 5126) puts Connecticut at the forefront of green chemistry and clean technology development.

(Washington News Service) - Gov. Gregoire has signed much-anticipated legislation to transition the state's only coal-fired power plant off of coal. The bill requires TransAlta to significantly reduce haze pollution from its Centralia plant by Jan. 1, 2013; phase out coal use between 2020 and 2025; and provide \$30 million for economic development and another \$25 million for clean energy technology development in the state.

(Arizona News Connection) - Another federal grant is providing free training and certification for 500 Arizonans to help them find jobs in the renewable-energy industry. 400 slots in the program have already been filled.

(Minnesota News Connection) - Minnesota Congressman Tim Walz announced the formation of the House Energy Working Group, a bipartisan group that will introduce a clean-energy independence plan that creates a new energy infrastructure and rebuilds our country's aging roads, bridges, locks and dams.

(Washington News Service) - Washington's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) says it managed to save \$3 million in costs last year by eliminating 125 vehicles from its agency motor pool and reducing employee travel. Going forward, it predicts annual savings of \$300,000, as fewer vehicles will mean lower operating costs. The agency is also looking into the use of biofuels for the heavy equipment it operates to save money and curb emissions.

(Ohio News Connection) - The Buckeye State is blazing some trails in green energy. According to the Department of Energy, more than 300-thousand homes have been weatherized through stimulus funding... and the Buckeye State is in the lead with 23-thousand homes weatherized. And when it comes to job creation in Ohio, the wind and solar energy supply chain is a generator. A new report from the Environmental Law and Policy Center says at least nine-thousand jobs in the state are tied to the wind and solar energy sectors.

(Colorado News Connection) - A lawsuit was filed January 19th by a coalition of groups, including Earthjustice and the Sierra Club, challenging the Sunflower Coal Plant expansion in Kansas. It's an issue long on the radar of environmental groups sounding the alarm about pollution and questioning whether the plant is needed to meet energy demands.

(Minnesota News Connection) - U.S. Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) announced that seven Minnesota biofuel producers will receive over \$748,000 to expand advanced biofuel production. The funds, authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill, will be administered by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels.

(Arizona News Connection) - Buckeye schools will soon have solar panels on every one of its six campuses and district office without having to spend any money. 60-percent of the \$20-million cost comes from APS energy credits. The rest is from three construction-related businesses that will sell bonds. The panels are expected to cover 70-percent of the district's total energy needs.

(Oregon News Service) - Portland now has 600 residential solar electric systems that total 1.6 megawatts, and residents in North and Northwest Portland are starting the year with

workshops so more homeowners can learn about how to “go solar” and even band together for discounts on purchasing the equipment. The effort is called Solarize Portland.

(Oregon News Service) - State lawmakers also passed “Cool Schools,” the bill to finance energy-efficiency projects to make public schools less expensive to heat and cool, while putting people to work repairing and retrofitting the buildings.

(Arizona News Connection) - The state’s job outlook improved in February, with a new solar generating station announced for Gila Bend, and a solar equipment plant for Surprise. A solar panel plant is being considered in Mesa. Intel has announced a new chip-manufacturing factory for Chandler. And Arizona bioscience jobs grew 7 percent in 2008 and 2009 even as Arizona's unemployment rate was growing. Federal research grants also posted a healthy gain in 2010.

(Illinois News Connection) - Governor Pat Quinn and Mitsubishi Motors North America (MMNA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to support the advancement of electric vehicle and renewable energy technologies in Illinois. As part of the agreement, Illinois will receive a limited number of Mitsubishi Motors “i” battery electric vehicles (i MiEV) on a temporary basis to evaluate the new electric vehicle (EV) technology on the state’s fleet. Saves 1200 jobs at Mitsubishi plant in Normal, IL.

(Illinois News Connection) - The state will invest \$1 million of Illinois Jobs Now! capital funding to install state-of-the-art electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure throughout the Chicagoland area. This project is expected to be the largest concentration of DC quick-charge stations in the world.

(Kentucky News Connection) - Members of the House Tourism Development and Energy Committee considered how a how Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards could also mean an economic boost for Kentucky's economy. A renewable and efficiency portfolio standard (REPS) would require electric utilities to generate a minimum portion of their electricity from clean, renewable sources and energy efficiency. Twenty-nine states have passed clean energy portfolio standards.

(Kentucky News Connection) - A coalition of 24 governors from both major parties and each region of the country, including Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear, asked the Obama administration to take a series of steps to encourage and facilitate the development of wind energy. Among other things, the letter calls for an extension of tax credits for the wind industry, currently slated to expire next year, and the establishment of an inter-state task force on wind development. Kentuckians for the Commonwealth has long pressured the Beshear administration and Kentucky legislators to increase the seriousness with which the state approaches the development of all renewable resources, including wind.

(Missouri News Service) - The CWIP (Construction Work In Progress) bill being pushed by an investor-owned utility company would have ratepayers front the cost for the construction of utility plants before they're operational. This bill repeals a portion of a consumer protection law voters overwhelmingly passed in 1976. This is the second time there's been a push for this bill. The House bill is slowly stalling after being voted out of committee.

(New Mexico News Connection) - Following a loss in the state Supreme Court over separate sets of rules and regulations, the Martinez administration relented in the face of a lawsuit

from the Rio Grande Chapter of the Sierra Club, agreeing to publish new, "greener" building codes that were approved last year.

(Tennessee News Service) - The U.S. Department of Energy has cleared construction of a 5-megawatt solar array in West Tennessee, ruling that the project will have no significant impact on the surrounding environment. Energy officials approved the solar farm near I-40 in Haywood County under the National Environmental Policy Act, the state Department of Economic and Community Development.

(Washington News Service) - The Environmental Protection Agency announced new rules for coal-fired power plants to help curb the air pollution that has marked the eastern United States for years. The new regulations will affect power plants in 28 states and are scheduled to go into effect in 2012. They will cut millions of tons of soot and smog emissions from power plants at a cost of less than \$1 billion per year to utility companies.

(Florida News Connection) - FNC ran a two-part series detailing links between sugar industry interests and off-shore duty free import of sugar based ethanol--- under-cutting US produced corn based ethanol. The stories likely helped spawn an inquiry by the Federal Trade Commission regional office in Atlanta.

(Virginia News Connection) - Virginia landed a collaborative project to establish a facility for the testing and certification of large offshore and land-based electricity-producing wind turbines. The project, called "Poseidon Atlantic" will be the first such facility in the United States and will fill a growing need for facilities that test and certify wind turbines. The initial phase of the project is to be developed on Virginia's Eastern Shore in Northampton County. The project is expected to create 25 new jobs within two years.

(Colorado News Connection) - Senator Mark Udall introduced legislation allowing clean energy development on federal lands, such as wind or solar energy. It's called the Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act.

## ENVIRONMENT

(Arizona Connection) - A ban on new uranium mining in the vicinity of Grand Canyon National Park has been extended until December, and may last much longer. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar says he's leaning toward a 20-year moratorium on new mining claims near the canyon.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Judge Dayton ruled that there is "sufficient likelihood of irreparable harm" to warrant a restraining order to halt all further permitting of Exxon's modules (known as megaloads), along with all road work and utility line modification to facilitate Exxon's project until the lawsuit is resolved. Unfortunately, test load will be allowed to proceed.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - District Court Judge Joe Hegel has ruled that a lawsuit against the State of Montana and Arch Coal can go forward. The suit alleges the state should have taken environmental, economic and public health concerns into account before leasing the coal tract.

(California News Service) - A newly-approved pesticide used in strawberry fields may be banned. Lawmakers are discussing alternatives to methyl iodide after hearing from critics

who say the California Department of Pesticide Regulation ignored the recommendations of a science-review panel that found the chemical unsafe to farm workers and the water supply.

(Colorado News Connection) - Fracking continues to be a big issue in the region. A shareholder's group has approached major oil conglomerates asking them to back off of fracking in the mountain West because of its lack of sustainability as a petroleum source and its ecological impact.

(Kentucky News Connection) - The Sierra Club has sued a coal company, alleging environmental violations at a large surface mine in Leslie County. The lawsuit charges that ICG Hazard LLC has discharged selenium and other pollutant into creeks near the Thunder Ridge mine in violation of federal law, state standards and its own permit conditions. The complaint seeks several remedies, including orders for the mine to stop discharges that violate clean water standards, and install adequate treatment facilities.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - The Environmental Protection Agency held a hearing in Philadelphia on Tuesday (5/24) to get public input on a new plan to reduce mercury, arsenic, dioxin and other toxic air pollutants coming from the nation's coal- and oil-fired power plants.

(New Mexico News Connection) - The State Supreme Court says Governor Martinez is not above the law. The High Court ruled against the administration in a case brought by the New Mexico Environmental Law Center, ordering that new rules to control pollution from dairies and to begin reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the state be published. Martinez had put a 90 day hold on all new rules, but the court ruled from the bench that the Governor was violating the separation of powers.

(New York News Connection) - Absent from the blizzard of complaints following the release of Governor Cuomo's Executive Budget were many environmentalists. After several conservation groups sent the Governor a package of green policy recommendations designed to spur economic development, or save taxpayers in long-term environmental costs, many were thankful that Cuomo didn't want to "sweep" or pull unused funding from the \$134 million Environmental Protection Fund, which pays for things such as land acquisition, farmland preservation, recycling, municipal parks and other measures. "Governor Cuomo has effectively targeted cuts to inflict the least amount of pain," Marcia Bystryk of the NY League of Conservation Voters told the Albany Times-Union. "The governor has made good on his campaign pledge," added Ned Sullican, president of Scenic Hudson, a group that advocates on behalf of the Hudson River.

(New York News Connection) - Backers of a new comprehensive water management program for the state saw it moving toward approval in the Senate. The measure would - among other things - require anyone withdrawing more than one hundred thousand gallons of water a day to first get a permit from the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and could possibly impact the spread of hydraulic fracking for natural gas, which is currently under a moratorium. The bill advanced to a third reading on May 10.

(New York News Connection and all eastern states.) - The Environmental Protection Agency announced new rules for coal-fired power plants to help curb the air pollution that has marked the eastern United States for years. The new regulations will affect power plants in 28 states and are scheduled to go into effect in 2012. They will cut millions of tons of soot



and smog emissions from power plants at a cost of less than \$1 billion per year to utility companies.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID, Big Sky Connection-MT) - North America's largest nonprofit cycling organization formally wheeled into the ranks of big rig opponents. The board of Adventure Cycling voted overwhelmingly to oppose the use of rural highways for massive oil industry modules. They say those are bike-friendly mountain highways in Idaho and Montana - that would be far less bike-friendly if the roads become industrial shipping routes.

(Arizona News Connection) - A new, state-of-the-art recycling center has been opened northwest of Phoenix by Waste Management. The \$20-million plant uses new technology like optical sorters to process 400 tons of recyclables a day.

(Virginia News Connection) - A coalition of several statewide organizations applauded Governor Bob McDonnell's establishment and appointment of an Independent Bipartisan Commission on Redistricting. Governor McDonnell established the advisory commission through executive order to create and review proposed redistricting plans for the House of Delegates, the state Senate and Virginia's 11 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

(Virginia News Connection) - Eight new pieces of environmental stewardship legislation were signed by Governor Bob McDonnell this month. One new law would prohibit the sale, distribution or use of lawn maintenance fertilizer containing phosphorous, which will kick in at the end of 2013. Another would regulate fertilizers and institute penalties for those not in compliance. New studies have also been commissioned to aid in Chesapeake Bay Watershed quality improvements.

(New York News Connection) - Hundreds rallied in Albany to ask Governor Cuomo and state lawmakers to give priority to water and air quality when it comes to "fracking" - the extraction method to get to the gas in the Marcellus Shale formation. The blowout of a natural gas well in Pennsylvania, across the border from Binghamton, further raised concern. In mid-month, State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman announced he has given the federal government one month to commit to "conducting a full environmental review."

(Washington News Service) - The PCC Farmland Trust inked its ninth conservation easement agreement in June. It's a contract that pays landowners to keep farming and ensures that when they retire, the next owners of the property will also farm rather than selling the land off for development. The new easement is on the Williams Hudson Bay Farm near Walla Walla.

(West Virginia News Service) - Although regulation of fracking at the state level seems slow or stalled, and in spite of disappointing moves by the White House on other environmental rules, the EPA is moving ahead with much needed controls of air pollution connected to natural gas production. (5-17 "Residents Say Marcellus Air Pollution a Problem")

(Wisconsin News Connection) - Massive pushback from Wisconsin environmental groups caused the state Department of Natural Resources to halt the process of approving a huge new open-pit iron ore mine near Crandon, and the DNR Secretary now says it will be up to the full state legislature this fall to decide whether Wisconsin's mining laws need to be rewritten.



(New York News Connection) - Critics of fracking for natural gas considered it a victory when the DEC announced it needed more time to gather more input before issuing an advisory report that could lead to the issuing of permits to drill in the state's Marcellus shale formation.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The U.S. State Department announced the environmental review of the Keystone XL pipeline project will undergo a reevaluation - along with consideration of rerouting the pipeline to avoid environmentally sensitive areas.

(California News Service) - Environmental groups may have lost a regulatory battle to keep the controversial pesticide methyl iodide off the California market, but it now appears they may be winning the ground war against the chemical. Only six California growers have used methyl iodide to kill pests and weeds before planting crops like chili peppers, strawberries and walnut trees. That's compared to more than 8,500 soil fumigations that took place in California in 2009.

(Colorado News Connection) - The Colorado Oil and Gas Commission adopted a law which would require oil and gas drillers to disclose all chemicals used in hydraulic fracking.

(Wyoming News Service) - Governor Matt Mead sent a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) today. That letter expresses the Governor's deep concern about the proposed water pipeline from the Green River in Wyoming to Colorado's Front Range. Governor Mead's comments are meant to protect Wyoming's economy and resources and show the project is not feasible.

(Wyoming News Service) - The EPA has released an initial finding that links groundwater pollution in the Pavillion area to fracking. Families affected by pollution have seen their land values plummet and have to use bottled water and special venting to avoid in-home explosions.

#### GLBTQ ISSUES

(All News Services) - The military's policy of Don't Ask, Don't Tell was officially repealed, allowing for gays to openly serve in the military.

(Arizona News Connection) - A federal court panel has ruled that Arizona must continue providing health insurance to partners of gay and lesbian government workers. The action blocks a 2009 law that would have eliminated coverage for same-sex partners.

(Colorado News Connection) - Obama Administration announced that it will stop defending the discriminatory federal "Defense of Marriage Act" (DOMA) in court. The Colorado bill to recognize civil unions is set for a Senate committee hearing on March 7th.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick issued two executive orders, which extend nondiscrimination protections to state employees on the basis of gender identity and expression, and apply to all state agencies and programs, as well as businesses that contract with the state.

(Illinois News Connection) - Governor Quinn signed legislation legalizing civil unions in Illinois. This was seen as a major human rights victory by LGBT civil rights organizations, and the ACLU.

(Iowa News Service) - The Iowa Senate has voted to keep the proposed ban on same-sex marriage in Iowa from coming to a vote.

(Missouri News Service) - Missouri lawmakers on both sides of the aisle say they would love to stop bullying in Missouri schools. They stood together on Valentine's Day to raise awareness about bullying and the bills filed this session to address this social issue. This is the first time there has been a bipartisan effort to improve bullying laws in Missouri in recent years.

### HEALTH ISSUES

(Arizona News Connection) - Three public-interest law groups are suing the state over its plans to cut up to 250,000 people from Arizona's Medicaid program. The groups allege the action would violate a 2000 voter-approved ballot measure extending coverage to adults earning less than the federal poverty level, and a constitutional amendment forbidding lawmakers from altering measures approved by voters.

(California News Service) - The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has launched an initiative to support a program that helps reach the nation's underserved Hispanic/Latino communities and educate them about the availability of health services and insurance. A program launched in California four years ago by L.A. Care Health Plan, has already trained nearly 70 Health Promoters.

(California News Service) - A state bill that would require most hospitals have a policy in place to provide education about breastfeeding to new moms, has passed its first hurdle. Proponents say breastfeeding has been shown to help prevent the onset of chronic health conditions and diseases and that for many women, especially low-income women, assistance in hospitals may be the only help that they receive.

(California News Service) - Burlingame became the second city in California and the United States to adopt precautionary health warnings regarding cell phone use. The guidelines adopted by the Burlingame City Council on August 15, 2011, state that the World Health Organization lists cell phones as "possibly carcinogenic," and that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandates that all cell phone manuals caution users to hold the phone a short distance from the body. Although the ongoing research and debate within the scientific community about the health effects of cell phones is recognized, the Council makes six recommendations to minimize "exposure to cell phone emissions."

(California News Service) - The San Francisco Department of the Environment has announced that the nation's first cell phone ordinance is now in effect. The Department will conduct extensive outreach in October to distribute materials and educate local cell phone retailers about the ordinance. Retailer compliance with the ordinance is required by the end of October.

(Connecticut News Service) - An organization of small business owners (Small Businesses for Health Care Reform) has formed to promote federal health reform and state reform (SustiNet), in a state where other business groups oppose it.

(Connecticut News Service) - The state is changing the way it provides health care for 400-thousand low-income children and parents in the Husky program, and 200-thousand seniors and people with disabilities. It hopes to improve access while saving at least fifty million dollars a year. The program covers families on HUSKY Primary Care, the state's Medicaid program. It aims to remove the "middleman" in health insurance—insurance companies or managed-care companies that take extra fees and make decisions about what medical care people may or may not receive—and put those decisions in the hands of a doctor. It's due to go into effect Jan. 1, 2012.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - After two years of debate, Governor Patrick put legislation forward aimed at taking the next step in health care reform in Massachusetts, which is cost containment. The plan, in part would change the "fee for service" system by encouraging better coordination of care and focus more on preventive medicine.

(Colorado News Connection) - The Colorado Health Exchange bill was approved by the state senate and is currently under review by the house. The Exchange would provide a way for Coloradans to comparison shop for insurance, getting the best coverage at the most affordable price. We've extensively covered this issue, which is a part of Federal Health Care reform and is considered by many state health advocacy groups to be a crucial part of protecting health care for Coloradans.

(Colorado News Connection) - Colorado Governor Hickenlooper signed into law SB11-200, which establishes insurance exchanges in Colorado. Seven other states have passed similar exchange laws. The exchanges are part of the Affordable Care Act.

(Connecticut News Service) - Sustinet, Connecticut's health reform legislation, continues to move through the General Assembly, having been approved by three committees so far. It is expected to pass both the House and the Senate, but Gov. Dannel Malloy, who supported it as a candidate and when first elected, now says it may be too expensive.

(Florida News Connection) - the Florida's efforts to move low-income Medicaid patients into HMOs is getting a thumbs-down from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. A pilot program in five Florida counties has been plagued with lack of access, abuse and fraud. The Governor signed a law expanding the plan state-wide, but it needs a federal waiver to take effect - a waiver that is now unlikely.

(Florida News Connection) - FNC Broke the story that Florida's efforts to move low-income Medicaid patients into HMO's is getting a thumbs-down from HHS in D.C. A pilot program in five Florida counties has been plagued with lack of access, abuse and fraud. The Governor signed a law expanding the plan state-wide, but it needs a federal waiver to take effect. HHS has said no waiver is likely.

(Illinois News Connection) - Governor Pat Quinn signed new laws designed to improve the quality of life for those needing behavioral health services and ensure equal access to necessary treatments. The laws build upon Illinois' efforts to ensure equal access to health care for Illinois residents and coordinate care to improve outcomes.

(Kentucky News Connection) - The Democratic-led Senate on Wednesday, May 25th, rejected a Republican plan to overhaul Medicare, defeating it by a 57-40 vote, with five Republicans breaking with their party to vote against the proposal.

(Oregon News Service) - Oregon is making real progress on establishing a state health insurance exchange. Even Republicans in the Legislature, who have been hesitant to accept any portion of the federal health care reform law, indicated in April that they'd go along with accepting a \$48 million federal grant to create the exchange. They say they'd rather have the state do it than the feds.

(Missouri News Service) - The federal government had issued a sanction against the state of Missouri for what's called overly-restrictive home health standards for Medicaid recipients. The state subsequently took action, which senior and disability advocates in Missouri are applauding.

(Minnesota News Connection) - In his first official action as Minnesota's governor, Mark Dayton signed two executive orders on Wednesday, January 5, to extend Medicaid coverage and bring the state more than \$1 billion in federal funds. The action effectively scraps former Gov. Tim Pawlenty's August order barring state agencies from accepting the federal dollars.

(Minnesota News Connection) - U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar joined Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and four other senators to introduce legislation that would strengthen criminal penalties against individuals and corporations who knowingly violate food safety standards and endanger American lives. The Food Safety Accountability Act would increase the sentences that prosecutors can seek for individuals who knowingly contaminate the food supply from a maximum of three years in prison to up to 10 years. These offenses, now considered misdemeanors, would be felonies under the bill.

(New York News Connection) - A slimmed down, less restrictive insurance exchange bill was agreed upon by the Cuomo administration and the state Legislature. The exchange, a component of President Obama's health care overhaul, would create a system for individuals and small businesses to get health insurance. While it passed in the Assembly, it was not addressed in the Senate. Senate staffers said they may return to tackle the exchange issue later in the summer during a brief "cleanup" session.

(Nevada News Service) - Nevadans would know a lot more about the safety of local hospitals under five "transparency" bills that are pending in Carson City. Three of the bills are sponsored by State Senator Shirley Breeden, and will make public details like infection rates at Nevada hospitals and how often Nevada doctors perform a particular surgical procedure. (The Bills are SB 209, 264, 338, 339, and 340).

(Washington News Service) - In March, the State of Washington reached an agreement with the owners of its only coal-fired power plant to transition to cleaner power forms and eventually shut down by 2025. The TransAlta plant in Centralia, the state's largest producer of nitrogen oxide (NOX) pollution, has also agreed to install additional pollution control technology in 2013 to reduce the haze caused by NOX.

(Maine News Service) - The Maine Legislative Council of party leaders in the House and Senate, recently met to decide what bills to consider in the session that begins in January, and several of the measures address changes to the recently passed health care reform

package. The need to revisit that package was highlighted in a story produced by the Maine News Service in October. The story focused on the latest research released by the U.S. Census American Community Survey which says Maine still has about 10% of the population without healthcare coverage. The figures put Maine behind Massachusetts and Vermont in the percentage of residents covered.

(Arizona News Connection) - Federal officials have rejected several proposed cuts to Arizona's Medicaid program, including a special fee on smokers and a cap on enrollment for low-income parents. A proposal to reduce reimbursement rates for medical providers is still undecided.

(Illinois News Connection) - A new report released by Georgetown University says the number of Illinois children who are uninsured has dropped by nearly one percentage point. That means since 2008, more than 24 thousand Illinois children who would have gone without, have been given access to health care because of the Affordable Care Act.

(Prairie News Service) - The percentage of uninsured children in North Dakota dropped from 7.1% to 6.5% from 2008 to 2010.

(Michigan News Connection) - On Dec. 19, federal regulators denied a request from Michigan's Republican governor, Rick Snyder, to waive new limits on profits and administrative costs for the state's health insurers. To the outrage of consumer advocates, the state had attempted to file for a waiver from the Medical Loss Ratio, which requires that no more than 20% of premiums can go toward administrative costs. Michigan becomes the second-largest state to have such a request turned down by the Obama administration. The government rejected a similar request from Florida on Dec. 15.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - A new report from the Georgetown University Health Policy Institute's Center for Children and Families shows the number of kids in America without health insurance is down - and Pennsylvania is among the states showing signs of improvement. The report shows just over five percent of kids in Pennsylvania are without coverage, one of the best rates in the nation.

#### HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

(Arizona News Connection) - The federal government has renewed a \$22.5 million grant for programs that provide housing and support services for homeless people and families in Maricopa County. The grant helps fund 53 homeless programs. The number of homeless families without shelter in Maricopa County rose 28 percent last year.

(Arizona News Connection) - Major Arizona banks have agreed to begin offering mortgage loan modifications for homeowners struggling to make their payments. The foreclosure-prevention program is funded by federal dollars.

(Nevada News Service) - Advocates for Nevada homeowners prodded state lawmakers into doing the right thing and passing a measure this session which prohibits debt collectors from going after Nevadans who are unlucky enough to lose their homes, but still have debts that were not covered in the short-sale of their homes.

(Oregon News Service) - Compared to many states, Oregon has made amazing progress in battling homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness says between 2008 and

2009, the number of chronically homeless individuals statewide decreased 15 percent, and the number of homeless families is down by almost 25 percent.

(Oregon News Service) - SB 827 would require that homeowners facing foreclosure receive timely, standardized information about how to request loan modifications - and gives them recourse for violations, adding teeth to the current law. It also allows the state foreclosure law reforms passed in 2009 to remain in effect rather than being subject to sunset. Both bills will see their House votes in June.

(Washington News Service) - There is some good news about Washington's homeless population in the most recent figures from the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of chronically homeless individuals decreased 15 percent. However, almost 23,000 people statewide are homeless, or about three of every 100 residents.

(Illinois News Connection) - Governor Pat Quinn in December launched the Welcome Home Heroes program to promote homeownership for Illinois Veterans, active military personnel, reservists and Illinois National Guard members. The financing package is available statewide, and provides a forgivable grant up to \$10,000 toward the purchase of a new home, as well as an additional mortgage tax credit up to \$20,000 over the life of the loan. It also creates hundreds of jobs statewide.

(Prairie News Service) - A recently established fund to help provide more affordable multi-family housing in North Dakota, without state monies, surpassed \$5-million in total donations in December. All donations are from residents and businesses, which get a tax credit, dollar-for-dollar, in return. Developers can then apply for low-interest loans from the fund, with projects where affordable multi-family housing is scarce given priority.

#### HUNGER/FOOD/NUTRITION

(California News Service) - Wal-Mart has made a commitment to promote good nutrition by selling healthier foods in its stores and lowering the price of fresh fruits and vegetables. The retailer is also promising to provide more support to California groups that help low-income adults make healthy and affordable choices at the supermarket.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - Governor Deval Patrick announced the establishment of the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, which aims to bring healthy and local foods to all residents of the Commonwealth. The council will be to address hunger in the state, increase production, sales and consumption of Massachusetts-grown foods and protect land and water resources for sustained local food production. Training, retaining and recruiting farmers will also be a priority.

(Minnesota News Connection) - Hunger Solutions Minnesota and Senator Tom Bakk hosted the 5th Annual Stock the Shelves event in December. The event raised \$65,000 dedicated to Arrowhead regional food shelves.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS/RACIAL JUSTICE

(Illinois News Connection) - The Governor Quinn signed the bill that abolishes the death penalty.



(Illinois News Connection) -The State of Illinois has created a Muslim American advisory council to advise the Governor on appropriate policy developments, official directives, and other issues of significance impacting Illinois' Muslims. It will bring important faith-based issues based on factual findings to the Governor's attention and make recommendations to address those issues. It will also strengthen communication between the state and Muslim leadership and the general community.

#### IMMIGRATION

(Arizona News Connection) - A federal appeals court upheld an injunction against key parts of Arizona's SB 1070 immigration law. Supporters of the law say they'll ask the Supreme Court to overturn the ruling.

(Arizona News Connection) - Arizona Governor Jan Brewer issued a number of vetoes, including the so-called "birther" bill that would have required a candidate to submit a long-form birth certificate to get on the ballot. If that document was not available, then items like a baptism or circumcision certificate or hospital birth record.

(Arizona News Connection) - State lawmakers have rejected five bills intended to further crack down on undocumented immigrants. A bill creating a "flat" state income tax has also been withdrawn after it was pointed out that the result would be higher taxes for the 88-percent of taxpayers making less than \$100,000 a year.

(Arizona News Connection) - Opponents of a "birthright-citizenship" bill scored a temporary victory when the measure was held in a state senate committee when it became apparent it didn't have the votes to pass. However, senate president Russell Pearce assigned the bill to another committee over which he has more influence. The measure faces an uncertain future in the full senate.

(Arizona News Connection) - Facing a federal lawsuit, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio has agreed to release records being sought in a racial-profiling probe after refusing for nearly a year. The Justice Department is investigating whether sheriff's deputies engaged in targeted enforcement against Latino residents.

(Illinois News Connection) - Illinois Governor Pat Quinn sent a letter to Immigration and Customs Enforcement notifying the agency that because of its indiscriminate use of the "Secure Communities" deportation program, the State is ending its participation in the program. The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights praises the Governor's action for taking the state of Illinois one step forward toward sensible solutions for our country's broken immigration system.

(Illinois News Connection) - The Illinois DREAM Act has been passed and signed into law creating a privately-funded scholarship program for high school graduates from immigrant families who wish to attend college.

(New York News Connection) - Rallies and vigils were held around the state in May - and covered by New York News Connection - as Gov. Cuomo was urged to follow the lead of Illinois and pull NY out of the Secure Communities Program which required the state to send fingerprint data of all arrested persons to immigration authorities. On June 1st, the governor

announced he was suspending the state's participation in the program because, he said, it had not only failed to meet its goal of deporting the most serious immigrant criminals but was also undermining law enforcement and compromising public safety.

(New York News Connection) - Two developments in New York are being cheered by those following immigrant issues. First, Governor Cuomo's move to suspend the state's involvement in the controversial national fingerprint data base known as the "Secure Communities Program." Next, the decision to end an "English Only" law for public employees in the upstate town of Jackson, which opponents say could have hurt public safety efforts in tornados and other disasters.

(New York News Connection) - Two developments were hailed by those following immigrant issues. First, Governor Cuomo's move to suspend the state's involvement in the controversial national fingerprint data base known as the "Secure Communities Program." Second, the decision to end an "English Only" law for public employees in the upstate town of Jackson, which opponents say could have hurt public safety efforts in tornadoes and other disasters.

(New York News Connection) - Legislation introduced in Albany by State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins would prevent online job-search companies like Monster.com, CareerBuilder and Craigslist from posting help-wanted ads that prohibit unemployed people from applying.

(Oregon News Service) - In Lane County, the mayors of Eugene and Springfield are among those who have pledged their support for Oregon's immigrant population in their quest to get driver's licenses and in-state college tuition for Oregon residents despite their citizenship status. A wide range of religious groups also voiced support for these aims at a community meeting in Eugene.

(Texas News Service) - The "Sanctuary Cities" bill (HB 12) - an Arizona-style immigration-enforcement measure - was blocked by twelve lawmakers: Senators Wendy Davis, Rodney Ellis, Mario Gallegos Jr., Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, Eddie Lucio Jr., Jose Rodriguez, Carlos Uresti, Leticia Van De Putte, Kirk Watson, John Whitmire, Royce West and Judith Zaffirini. Opposition to the bill included police chiefs and sheriffs, faith leaders, business associations, and human rights activists across the state.

(Texas News Service) - Immigration reform advocates were pleased with the Obama administration's decision to allow non-violent illegal immigrants to remain in the country for the time being. The Department of Homeland Security plans to review hundreds of thousands of deportation cases in an effort to prioritize the deportation of violent criminals, dismissing cases against students and others who are not considered threats.

(New York News Connection) - The Board of Regents made it a top priority to push Congress to pass the DREAM Act. The measure would provide a path toward citizenship for young immigrants who are in the United States illegally through no fault of their own, making them eligible for college tuition assistance.

(Texas News Service) - Just a few weeks after being interviewed by Texas News Service about his dissatisfaction with Governor Rick Perry's changing positions on immigration reform, the Texas head of Somos Republicans quit the Republican Party. Lauro Garza, who had been a lifelong conservative Republican, said he felt betrayed by his party's "extremism" on immigration issues. He remains head of the Texas branch of Somos Republicans, the nation's

largest GOP Latino organization, but he says the group is reevaluating its future in light of what he describes as today's Republican Party "catering to Tea Party ideology."

(Arizona News Connection) - The author of Arizona's SB 1070 immigration bill, Senate President Russell Pearce, was defeated in a recall election. His replacement, Jerry Lewis, immediately called for a moderate approach to immigration reform as a way of reversing Arizona's "dismal image on civil-rights and immigration issues.

(Arizona News Connection) - A poll from Arizona State University found that Arizonans strongly favor allowing undocumented immigrants who have been living in the state for many years to earn citizenship.

(Arizona News Connection) - A report from the U.S. Justice Department accuses the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office of rampant discrimination against Latinos in its police and jail operations, Sheriff Joe Arpaio was given 60 days to reach a court-enforceable agreement to reform his agency and put an end to the practices. If Arpaio does not comply, the state faces the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.

(Arizona News Connection) - The Department of Homeland Security has revoked the authority of Maricopa County sheriff's detention officers to perform immigration screening of county jail inmates. 50 federal agents will be assigned to perform that task.

#### LIVABLE WAGES/WORKING FAMILIES

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - The Patrick Murray administration joined several community organizations to launch a statewide effort to promote the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a federal and state income tax credit available to low and moderate income working families and individuals. The Massachusetts EITC Coordinated Campaign partnered with Community Action Agencies in Boston, Fall River, Lawrence, Springfield and Worcester for a series of events to inform families and communities about the tax benefits of the EITC program.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - Governor Deval Patrick signed legislation to ensure that Massachusetts unemployed workers remain eligible for federal unemployment benefit extensions. The bill prevents Massachusetts from potentially losing eligibility for federally extended benefits. After unemployed workers exhaust their state benefits, many are eligible for federally funded benefit extensions.

(Kentucky News Connection) - State Rep. Darrl Owens of Louisville filed bill for consideration by the 2011 Kentucky General Assembly to put a 36-percent cap on payday loans in Kentucky. The chairman of the House Banking and Insurance committee has publicly announced the bill will be given a hearing in his committee within the next two weeks.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - A new study from a Pennsylvania nonprofit research group shows the state created more jobs in 2010 than just about any other state in the nation. Keystone Research Center says Pennsylvania added more than 65-thousand jobs last year, third-highest among all states. The group says lawmakers in Harrisburg need to make sure that new revenue initiatives accompany funding reductions so recent job gains seen in the state aren't lost.

(New York New Connection) - Legislation introduced in Albany by State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins would prevent online job-search companies like Monster.com, CareerBuilder and Craigslist from posting help-wanted ads that prohibit unemployed people from applying.

(Ohio News Connection) - Thousands of low-and middle-income working Ohioans received larger tax credits in 2009 due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Changes to the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit brought an additional \$376 million into Ohio. Eligible residents can receive free help with their 2010 taxes through the Ohio Benefit Bank or their local Community Action Agency.

(Ohio News Connection) - According to the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute, Senate Bill 5 would easily be repealed by Ohio voters if the referendum were held now. The poll found the measure to strip many collective bargaining rights from state and local government workers would be rejected by 18 points, 54 percent to 36 percent. A group circulating a petition to repeal the measure has until the end of June to gather approximately 230,000 valid signatures of registered Ohio voters to qualify for the November ballot.

(Ohio News Connection) - The group leading the effort to repeal Senate Bill 5 delivered more than 1 million petition signatures to the Ohio Secretary of State's office. At least 231,149 valid signatures are needed to place a referendum on the measure restricting collective bargaining on the November ballot.

(Oregon News Service) - Oregon's new National Career Readiness Certificate is a skills-based certification launched in January, to help job applicants prove they are ready to work. It's a test that assesses a worker's skills in applied math, reading comprehension, and ability to locate, summarize and analyze information. Test scores result in a bronze, silver, gold or platinum rating. WorkSource Oregon has more information about the testing.

(Oregon News Service) - Migrant workers won an important court decision in April, as the Ninth Circuit Court ruled that an Oregon employer could not deduct housing costs from their paychecks. Last fall, about 350 workers from Arizona were relocated to Oregon for a month. Their employer had charged them so much for housing that they didn't make minimum wage.

(Oregon News Service) - The Senate passed two bills to help struggling Oregonians. SB 863 sets out a plan to require utility companies to collect a little extra from customers (about 35 cents per month) whenever some specific conditions are met - for instance, if the unemployment rate tops 10 percent, the state poverty rate exceeds 12 percent, or the number of families receiving food assistance tops 20 percent. The money goes to the Oregon Low-Income Energy Assistance Program.

(Oregon News Service) - People who provide care for Oregonians with mental and developmental disabilities voted in June to join the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503. The new members say it's a way to improve care-giving practices and raise public awareness of their work. The vote makes the union the largest in the state.

(Oregon News Service) - More than 19,000 state agency workers have a new contract with the State of Oregon. About three-quarters voted to ratify the collective bargaining agreement in August. The bargaining committee for SEIU Local 503 called it the "best agreement possible in the current environment," referring to continued state budget woes. The union continues to push for greater efficiency in state agencies overall.

(Oregon News Service) - After eight months of intense negotiation, nearly 4,000 classified workers in the Oregon state university system reached a new contract agreement in September with the state. If ratified by members of SEIU Local 503, it will mean a 1.5 percent cost-of-living wage adjustment on December 1.

(Oregon News Service) - SEIU Local 503 released a report in March that spells out opportunities for Oregon to save up to \$332 million by trimming the manager-to-worker ratios in state agencies, reevaluating its contractor costs and relationships, and doing a better job of collecting unpaid taxes, to name a few. "Moving Oregon Forward: A Better Way" got an enthusiastic nod from the governor, who promises the state will take the recommendations seriously.

(Texas News Service) - Both houses of the Legislature passed two bills that start to bring licensing and oversight (and improved fee disclosures) to Texas' payday lending industry. While HB 2592 and HB 2594 do not address "cycle of debt" issues, proponents say they provide a strong initial foundation that can be built upon for regulating payday and auto-title lenders.

(Texas News Service) - A legal-aid funding measure passed (as an amendment to SB 1811) the Senate; it addresses a chronic shortfall in funding for state legal-aid programs. Less than a quarter of those whose low incomes qualify them for legal aid are currently able to access the help they need. Past legislatures have addressed the problem with stop-gap funds; the measure is an attempt at a permanent solution by raising around 35-million dollars a year primarily from two- to ten-dollar fees added to the cost of traffic tickets, misdemeanor convictions, and court filings.

(Texas News Service) - The Legislature approved a last-minute funding provision that would steer \$17 million to the state's legal-aid programs - preserving civil-court access to an estimated 25,000 low-income Texan coping with issues such as child custody disputes, consumer fraud, home foreclosures, and loss of benefits. The free (or reduced-cost) legal assistance will aid the elderly, the disabled, military veterans, and victims of domestic violence.

(Washington News Service) - In September, the Seattle City Council voted to pass a landmark ordinance that requires most businesses to allow employees to earn paid sick days. It is considered one of the strongest such policies in the nation, and makes Seattle the third city in the nation with a paid sick leave policy. The Seattle Coalition for a Healthy Workforce, made up of more than 100 local organizations and small businesses, pushed for the measure, which is expected to benefit almost 190,000 people who had been at jobs without paid sick days.

(West Virginia News Service) - The controversial PATH powerline has been indefinitely delayed by the agency that handles the nation's power grid. WVNS has covered the PATH debate. In the wake of the Upper Big Branch mine disaster federal prosecutors and mine safety officials have cracked down on dangerous mine operators, including criminal charges against one mine official.

(Wisconsin News Connection) - The Wisconsin News Connection did a total of 14 stories in March that covered the historic labor protests and collective bargaining issues that drew protests as large as 100,000 people to the State Capitol. These stories featured a wide range



of subjects from the budget repair bill to the plight of public workers in Wisconsin. WNC had a presence at the Capitol during the protests. The bill that sparked the protests has been put on hold by a judge examining the manner in which the law was passed and possible violations of the state's open meetings law. Labor groups are claiming a victory on slowing the process down to give the public more time to examine the measure.

(Wisconsin News Connection) - Republican Governor Scott Walker announced that he supports President Obama's American Jobs Act, and says Wisconsin would receive approximately \$1.5 Billion if the Act is passed. Walker says the money would create or save as many as 20 thousand jobs in WI, and the state's schools would be in line for an additional 368 million dollars in funding. Walker has been a staunch critic of the Obama administration but says he will support this idea.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The Montana Board of Regents is expected to give its stamp of approval this month to contracts recently ratified by MEA-MFT members in the Associated Faculty of Montana State University. They're the first faculty contracts ever at the campus.

(Minnesota News Connection) - Governor Dayton ordered a unionization vote for some at home day care providers in Minnesota.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - The battle to turn New Hampshire into a "right to work" state continued this month, and proponents of the bill received a mighty blow when the house fell 13 votes shy of the two-thirds mark to override the Governor's veto of the right to work legislation. The legislation, had it passed, would ban unions from collecting fees from non-union members.

(Ohio News Connection) - The hard work of Ohio groups, including education, family, public policy and public service, paid off in November as voters defeated Issue 2 by a nearly two-to-one margin. It means Senate Bill 5, which stripped the collective bargaining rights of so many Ohio workers -- including nurses, teachers, and firefighters -- has been repealed.

(West Virginia News Connection) - A record federal settlement in the wake of Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster, which killed 29 West Virginia coal miners in April 2010. The settlement announced on December 6, requires Alpha Natural Resources, the company which bought Massey Energy, to pay \$210 million in fines and restitution.

(Minnesota News Connection) - An additional \$14.1 million in federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds were allocated to Minnesota. That money will help about 19,000 more households with their heating bills this winter.

(New York News Connection) - 2011 came to a close with a major victory for union office cleaners in New York City. Commercial building owners had been pressing for a two tier waged system with a lower tier that would never make current union wages. But, faced with a New Year's Day strike threat by 22 thousand members of local 32bj of the Service Employees International Union, the building owners dropped that and other demands and have tentatively approved a four year pact that will provide cleaners with a 6 percent pay raise.

(Oregon News Service) - At year's end, the Oregon Business Plan touted by Gov. Kitzhaber had created more than 18,000 jobs in 2011. The idea behind the plan is to move away from



economic “booms and busts” and focus on more sustainable and innovative industries - and to boost exports of Oregon-made finished goods instead of raw materials.

#### MEDIA REFORM

(All News Services) - The Justice Department filed suit to stop the takeover of T-Mobile by AT&T, saying it would “substantially lessen competition” in the wireless phone market. Consumer groups and media reform activists had fought the merger as a job-killer, as well as an anti-trust violation.

(All News Services) - The Justice Department has filed suit to stop the takeover of T-Mobile by AT&T, saying it would “substantially lessen competition” in the wireless phone market. Consumer groups who oppose the merger on grounds it will particularly hurt underprivileged Americans - among other reasons - hailed the administration's move.

(Kentucky News Connection) - Telecommunications companies in 16 states (including KY) will share more than \$103 million in federal funding to help expand broadband Internet access to those areas of rural America that haven't been reached by the high-speed service or are underserved, the U.S.

(Texas News Service) - After reading a Texas News Service story about a proposed takeover of T-Mobile by AT&T, a regional AT&T representative asked to meet with Ron Rogers, of the South Texas Adult Resource and Training Center, who was quoted in the story as being concerned about job losses in the Rio Grande Valley - a region with some of the worst unemployment rates in the country. Two major T-Mobile call centers are situated in the Valley, and Rogers was concerned that they would have been jeopardized by the merger. While the merger has since been blocked, Rogers says he was glad that a story highlighting the region's employment needs caught the attention of a possible future employer. (The meeting had not yet occurred as of this writing.)

(All News Services) - The Federal Communications Commission voted unanimously to take \$4.3 billion from an \$8 billion subsidy for telephone connections in hard-to-reach rural areas and put it into a new initiative to expand broadband Internet service to an estimated 18 million people. The long-discussed initiative is part of an effort to increase economic growth through increased access to broadband. Chairman Julius Genachowski said this program could create hundreds of thousands of jobs in rural areas. Genachowski said the shift in subsidy money will help cut the number of people without broadband in half over the next five years. The new program will be called the “Connect America Fund” and will be capped at \$4.5 billion.

(All News Services) - Consumer groups hailed the collapse of a plan by AT&T to take over T-Mobile and create what was criticized as a duopoly that would have reduced competition in the wireless marketplace and harmed consumers.

#### MENTAL HEALTH

(New Hampshire News Connection) - The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Bureau of Behavioral Health (BBH) will receive a \$220,000 grant that will assist in improving the delivery of mental health services in the State. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) selected New Hampshire as one of 13 states to receive an award.

## OCEANS

(California News Service) - Northern California's newest underwater state parks celebrated their one-year anniversary of having greater protections under the Marine Life Protection Act. Not only are the fish in the protected areas expected to increase in numbers, but a park ranger says the MPAs are just beginning to attract divers, beach-goers, kayakers, birders, and tide-poolers who know wildlife viewing is best in protected areas.

(Florida News Connection) - Overfishing off Florida's Atlantic Coast is blamed for the devastation a number of fish species, but a comeback kicked off on January 31st, with the implementation of a new plan and limited closures designed to specifically help 9 threatened species. Combined with efforts to protect other species like the Red Snapper, it's part of a large push to combat overfishing in the Southeast.

(West Virginia News Service) - The controversial PATH powerline has been indefinitely delayed by the agency that handles the nation's power grid. WVNS has covered the PATH debate. In the wake of the Upper Big Branch mine disaster federal prosecutors and mine safety officials have cracked down on dangerous mine operators, including criminal charges against one mine official.

## PHILANTHROPY

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - A new report from a watchdog group shows money raised and invested by nonprofits in Pennsylvania has translated to some major community benefits. The report from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy points to more than three billion dollars in benefits generated in the past few years for low-wage workers, public school funding, affordable housing and other projects.

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## PUBLIC LANDS/WILDERNESS

(Arizona News Connection) - The National Park Service is seeking public comment on a draft plan to reduce aircraft noise at the Grand Canyon.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - A U.S. District Judge has upheld the Forest Service "travel plan" for the Badger-Two Medicine area of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Motorized groups sued because ATV, dirt bike and snowmobile access was banned in most of the area. The Blackfoot Tribe lists it as a sacred site.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Montana Senator Jon Tester's (D) "Forest Jobs and Recreation Act" was examined by a Senate Energy and Natural Resources subcommittee yesterday. A hearing is seen as a positive step for the legislation, which would designate wilderness as well as working forest projects.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has signed the "check" - which means millions are on the way the Southwestern Crown of the Continent Restoration Project in Montana.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Montana Senator Max Baucus has re-introduced a bill for full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with a 1.5 percent provision added by Senator Jon Tester that will be dedicated to additional access to hunting and fishing opportunities on public lands.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The America's Great Outdoors initiative has been unveiled, after months of public listening sessions around the country. The first stop on that tour was in Montana, to learn more about local efforts to preserve landscapes, recreation access and water quality. Blackfoot River Valley rancher, and chair of the Blackfoot Challenge's Forestry Committee, was on hand when the plan was unveiled this week in Washington, D.C., and he says it's obvious that officials really did listen to what locals had to say.

(Big Sky Connection) - MT, New Mexico News Connection, Colorado News Connection) - A new report from Headwaters Economics takes a look at oil, gas and coal development, and the role of those industries in state economies for Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah. The findings show that the economic benefits to states are limited - accounting for less than three percent of both total employment and total personal income.

(California News Connection) - There's a "silver lining" in the recession in CA and across the country. The poor economy is allowing public land trusts to buy more land for conservation. These public trusts have been snapping up large tracts of land or buying conservation easements - agreements in which landowners essentially promise not to allow development on their land in exchange for money - while developers have been sitting on the sidelines or going out of business.

(California News Service) - Legislation to protect California's San Gabriel Mountains and Beauty Mountain and Agua Tibia in San Diego County were introduced on the first day of the 112th Congress. CANS featured a story of how a local church supports protection for the San Gabriel Mountains because they consider the area sacred and a place where they go to retreat. A San Diego County businessman says the protection will also help the desert tourism economy.

(Colorado News Connection) - Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennett introduced legislation to increase the San Juan Wilderness, protecting water supplies and helping to preserve recreational opportunities for Coloradans. Some of the land would be new wilderness, and other acreage would merely be protected from invasive procedures like mining. This is a bill which was shaped by community input - a grass roots effort mostly supported by locals.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - The Patrick-Murray Administration announced \$602,525 in Conservation Partnership Grants that will enable nine nonprofit organizations to preserve 136 acres of open space throughout the state -- including 57 acres of working forest. Conservation Partnership grants are designed to help nonprofit organizations purchase land or interests in land for conservation or recreation.

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - The Obama administration is releasing its 'America's Great Outdoors' initiative, and Pennsylvania streams and rivers stand to gain much in the way

of additional preservation and restoration. The group American Rivers says it shows a willingness to invest in clean water and healthy rivers for future generations.

(Maine News Service) - Several environmental advocacy groups breathed a collective sigh of relief when the U.S Senate rejected a House passed funding bill that would have blocked the EPA from updating and enforcing limits on a variety of pollutants. It also would have cut funding for Acadia National Park.

(Maine News Service) - Maine environmental groups cheered President Obama for including Acadia National Park in his Great Outdoors Initiative. The administration held several listening sessions around the country, including one in Bangor last year. Environmental groups rallied concerned citizens from around the state and gathered hundreds of signatures to highlight the importance of protecting the park.

(Nevada News service) - The Bureau of Land Management was listening to Nevadans in February, getting local input on how big a footprint solar energy projects should have on Public Lands. Meetings were held in Las Vegas, Goldfield and Caliente to help the BLM set guidelines for the state's solar energy zones. Groups like The Wilderness Society and Nevada Wilderness Project say the zones will help developers by reducing time and cost for solar development, while at the same time minimizing impact on wildlife and the environment.

(New Mexico News Connection) - More federal wild lands are now set to be protected in New Mexico. A controversial Bush-era rule was reversed, allowing the Bureau of Land Management to once again survey lands with wilderness characteristics and set them aside until Congress has a chance to determine whether or not to designate official wilderness.

(New York News Connection) - New York State has purchased a conservation easement protecting 89 thousand acres of Adirondack forestland in a deal that's designed to increase revenue from hiking, fishing and snowmobiling and preserve lumbering jobs at the same time. This was hailed by everyone from The Nature Conservancy to the New York State Snowmobilers Association.

(Oregon News Service) - Members of Oregon's Congressional delegation have reintroduced legislation to protect several "natural treasures" on public lands. It would create a new Devil's Staircase Wilderness area, expand the Oregon Caves National Monument and add additional protections for the Chetco Wild and Scenic River.

(Oregon News Service) - There are no less than five Oregon public lands bills in Congress, and they were the focus of a mid-May subcommittee hearing chaired by Sen. Ron Wyden. They include designating wilderness for the Devil's Staircase, Cathedral Rock, and Horse Heaven areas; a land transfer from the BLM to Deschutes County; and the Eastside Forest Restoration and Old Growth Protection Act, the historic agreement between timber industry and conservation groups in eastern Oregon.

(Oregon News Service) - May brought a reprieve for the McKenzie River watershed, a primary source of drinking water for the Eugene area. A federal judge ruled that the Trapper Timber Sale cannot take place on U.S. Forest Service land because of possible threats to endangered wildlife in the area. The sale has been the subject of controversy since it was first proposed in 1998. Conservation groups are pleased, because it involved 155 acres of timber that had not been logged before.

(Washington News Service) - It's "try, try again" for more Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Rep. Dave Reichert (R-WA, 8th Dist.) have reintroduced their bill in Congress to expand the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and designate both the Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers as Wild and Scenic. It passed in the House last year, but the session adjourned before further action was taken.

(Washington News Service) - Three state agencies in Washington have suggested a way to keep state lands open for recreation despite severe budget cutbacks. The Department of Natural Resources, Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, and State Parks and Recreation Dept. want to offer a \$30 annual pass or \$10 day-use pass, with money used to maintain recreation access. The same legislation allows any of the agencies to have law enforcement power on the others' lands, stretching public dollars further.

(Wyoming News Service) - The Bureau of Land Management has reversed course on five oil and gas leases auctioned a year ago in the Red Desert's Adobe Town. The area is considered sensitive for environmental and cultural reasons.

(Wyoming News Service) - The Bridger-Teton National Forest released its final decision regarding the fate of 44,720 acres of contested oil and gas leases along the eastern front of the Range. Supporters of keeping development-free zones say the U.S. Forest Service has listened to the public - the citizens of Wyoming and of the nation - who said this place is too special to drill.

(Wyoming News Service) - An oil and gas company based in Oklahoma has submitted paperwork to withdraw its request for the Desolation Road drilling project in Adobe Town. The Biodiversity Conservation Alliance had filed a legal challenge on the project.

(Arizona News Connection) - An environmental impact study of uranium mining near the Grand Canyon recommends a 20-year moratorium on new mining claims. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar is expected to make the ban official at the end of November.

(Colorado News Connection) - At a meeting with Mark Udall, the proposed San Juan Wilderness expansions received broad and wide-based support from groups including local governments, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, sportsmen (hunters & fishermen) and homeowners from the region.

(Oregon News Service, Washington News Service, Big Sky Connection-MT, Northern Rockies News Service-ID, Wyoming News Service, Colorado News Service, California News Service, New Mexico News Connection) - The Roadless Area Conservation Rule was clarified and strengthened by a U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in October. Groups are calling it a victory that validates the concept of protecting roadless areas from logging, mining and road-building.

(Oregon News Service) - Oregon's Rep. Earl Blumenauer, Rep. Peter DeFazio and Sen. Jeff Merkley are among the 130 bipartisan cosponsors of the Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2011, introduced mid-November. It would codify the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, meaning fewer politically motivated policy changes guiding the use of Oregon's 2 million acres of public lands

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Ask first, and the job gets done. That's one of the successful components of the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), according to a new report from the U.S. Forest Service - which finds the program's goals in Montana are being met. And the new U.S. House budget bill recommends fully funding it for another year. (Oregon News Service) - Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, and Rep. Peter DeFazio, have introduced companion bills in Congress to expand the Wild Rogue Wilderness Area by an additional 60,000 acres. The legislation includes protection for 143 miles of Rogue River tributaries that are important spawning grounds for green sturgeon and salmon.

### RURAL/FARMING

(Kentucky News Connection) - The White House announced the establishment of the first White House Rural Council. While rural communities face challenges, they also present economic potential. The council will coordinate programs across government to encourage public-private partnerships to promote further economic prosperity and quality of life in rural communities nationwide.

(Minnesota News Connection) - U.S. Senator Al Franken introduced federal legislation to extend mandatory Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) to dairy products. The previous law, which went into effect last year, requires country of origin labeling for meat, produce and nuts.

(Wisconsin News Connection) - Sentiment appears to be growing in Wisconsin to save the "Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin" program. In May, the Wisconsin News Connection produced a story talking about efforts to eliminate the program. Under the governor's budget proposal, state support for the program would end. The report featured Dane County pork producer Bob Uphoff who said the program has been very successful in helping him get his products into local restaurants. The program provides grants to help connect Wisconsin farmers and producers with local markets such as grocery stores and restaurants. Supporters say the program keeps dollars in the local economy and helps create local jobs.

### SALMON RECOVERY

(California News Service) - Salmon are returning to CA. For the first time in 3 years, there's been an increase in salmon in the Delta and there may actually be a full fishing season this year. While this is good news, conservationist point to the need to continue to fight for responsible water policies in California so that these fish will have sufficient reproductive success.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - The world's largest organization of fisheries scientists announced it passed a resolution supporting removal of the four lower Snake River dams to facilitate recovery of wild salmon and steelhead in the Snake River basin. The resolution, passed by an 86.4 percent margin by the Western Division of American Fisheries Society, states: If society-at-large wishes to restore Snake River salmon, steelhead, Pacific lamprey and white sturgeon to sustainable, fishable levels, then a significant portion of the lower Snake River must be returned to a free-flowing condition by breaching the four lower Snake River dams.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID, Oregon News Service, Washington News Service) - The ride over the Columbia and Snake River dam system could be a little smoother this year for Idaho



salmon. The federal agencies that operate the dams have decided to keep spill levels high this year, sending more water over the dams to better protect fish as they make their way to the ocean...and the decision was made without a court order. In past years, higher spill levels have been ordered by a judge.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID, Oregon News Service, Washington News Service) - U.S. District Court Judge James Redden called the latest federal plan to protect endangered salmon from extinction "neither reasonable nor prudent." It's the third plan Redden has rejected in ten years. Fishing and conservation groups had argued the plan didn't do enough to mitigate harm from dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. The existing plan is still in place while federal agencies, headed by NOAA Fisheries Service, go back to the drawing board.

(Washington News Service) - On the Olympic peninsula, the long - and long awaited - removal process began mid-September for the Glines Canyon and Elwha Dams, which have been in place since 1927 and 1913, respectively. When completed, it will return about 45 miles of the Elwha River and its tributaries to their free-flowing state and is expected to boost native salmon numbers substantially. It's the largest dam removal process in U.S. history and had first been proposed in the 1970s.

(Washington News Service) - Demolition of the Condit Dam on the White Salmon River began in late October with a blast to drain its reservoir. It is the third dam removal project to begin in the state in the past two months, expected to eventually restore miles of salmon and steelhead habitat.

#### SENIOR ISSUES

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The Montana House of Representatives by a 59 - 31 vote amended HB 2 to restore current state funding of the Montana Veterans' Home and keep it open as a public institution. There was a proposal to cut funding and turn it over to a private company, which would have resulted in layoffs, and many say, a lower quality of care.

(California News Service) - Salmon are returning to CA. For the first time in 3 years, there's been an increase in salmon in the Delta and there may actually be a full fishing season this year. While this is good news, conservationist point to the need to continue to fight for responsible water policies in California so that these fish will have sufficient reproductive success.

(Kentucky News Connection) - , the General Assembly passed and Governor signed key pieces of legislation designed to protect vulnerable seniors from abuse and exploitation. House Bill 152 prevents people who abuse or neglect vulnerable or elderly adults from benefiting from their deaths and bars people convicted of felony abuse or exploitation from serving as that victim's guardian, executor or power of attorney.

(Wyoming News Service) - A new option is now available to help Wyoming residents find the aid they need to meet the challenges sometimes posed by those growing older or coping with a disability. The new Wyoming Aging and Disability Resource Center (WyADRC) provides statewide services to residents over the age of 55 and adults living with a disability, as well as family members, caregivers and healthcare providers. AARP Wyoming had advocated for the resource.

### SMOKING PREVENTION

(Kentucky News Connection) - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration Announced New Cigarette Warning Labels: Images of diseased lungs, a dead body, and rotting teeth among the new graphic images that will come with all packs.

(Oregon News Service) - The Oregon Public Health Division says tobacco-related cancers and deaths decreased statewide between 2002 and 2007 - 2.7 percent and 4.7 percent, respectively. And in the years between 1996 and 2009, the per-capita number of cigarette sales dropped by 48 percent in Oregon. They expect these trends to continue, at least in part because of the Smokefree Workplace Law that took effect in 2009.

(Washington News Service) - Efforts to discourage Washington kids from smoking have paid off, according to the Healthy Youth Survey taken by kids in more than 1,000 public schools. Since 2000, youth smoking rates have dropped by one-half. Fewer kids are drinking alcohol too, and thousands more say their parents have talked with them about the importance of not imbibing.

(Oregon News Service) - The Oregon Tobacco Quit Line has added new online coaching services in addition to its current telephone support program to help tobacco users "quit for good." The percentage of adults in Oregon who still smoke has decreased to just over 17 percent - and state public health experts say almost 70 percent of them want to stop using tobacco products.

### SOCIAL JUSTICE

(Arizona News Connection) - Four remote Arizona reservations will be getting cutting-edge Internet access, thanks to federal stimulus funds. The new connections are expected to improve education and business opportunities, and provide closer ties to the outside world.

(Virginia News Connection) - The Commonwealth released a new broadband availability map this month as part of an effort to ensure all residents have access to affordable and reliable internet access. The map is a collaborative effort of the Center for Innovative Technology, The Virginia Information Technologies Agency's Virginia Geographic Information Network (VGIN), and Virginia Tech's eCorridors Program.

### SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

(Connecticut News Service) - CT NOFA (Northeast Organic Farming Association) received a \$30,000 grant to promote winter crops in the state, which helps support both farmers and winter urban farmers' markets, which have begun spreading around the state.

(Ohio News Connection) - The Ohio Department of Agriculture reached an agreement to withdraw a controversial dairy labeling rule. The Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association is among the groups applauding the department's commitment to end pursuit of regulations that restrict a consumers' right to know and a farmers' right to inform consumers about their production practices.

### TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - The percentage of Montana births to teens has dropped about a percentage point over a year. At the same time, more parents say they're having "the talk" with their children.

### TOXICS

(California News Service) - The cosmetics industry's safety review board has weighed in on the popular Brazilian Blowout. They've concluded that cosmetic products containing formaldehyde should not exceed 0.2% because of health and safety reasons. Some of the hair-straightening products far exceed those levels, with some containing nearly 12-percent formaldehyde.

### URBAN PLANNING/TRANSPORTATION

(Michigan News Connection) - Secretary of Transportation, Ray LaHood announced that Michigan and the City of Detroit is getting 25 million dollars for light rail development.

(New York News Connection) - Governor Cuomo has signed a new "Complete Streets" measure into law that should eventually make it safer for pedestrians, bikers and moms with strollers to navigate New York streets. Locals say the new law is especially important on Long Island, where multi-lane highways were built with little thought to pedestrians.

### WASTE REDUCTION/RECYCLING

(Oregon News Service) - The state's biggest city has taken another step toward its ambitious goal of recycling 75 percent of its waste by 2015. In April, Portland unveiled Public Place Recycling, adding recycling containers next to downtown trashcans. The city estimates the effort could keep about one-third of the trash collected in the busy downtown area out of landfills.

(Texas News Service) - The Legislature responded to longstanding efforts by Texas Campaign for the Environment by passing a state-monitored television recycling program.

### WATER ISSUES

(California News Service) - The California drought may be over, but there's still an urgent need to find permanent solutions to fix the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta before the next drought. A Delta task force has come up with a plan to restore the Delta eco-system so fish will return and constructing facilities to capture surplus water.

(California News Service) - A bill moving through Capitol Hill has some predicting a new "water war" in the state. California lawmakers and environmental groups are calling on Congress to reject the "San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability Act" (HR 1837), saying it would dramatically undermine environmental protections for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

(Colorado News Connection) - National Parks along the Colorado River (and in the CO River basin) are being negatively impacted by water usage and policies from the River and its tributaries. But a collaborative agreement has been reached between Western Range communities and those on the Front Range, which will help to protect the river basin and also provide drinking water for the state.

(New York News Connection) - A bill creating a comprehensive water management program that has the support of the Nature Conservancy of New York among other environmental groups was passed in Albany. Backers say it will better protect fish, wildlife and drinking water.

(Ohio News Connection) - Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes were not forgotten in the budget deal reached on Capitol Hill. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is set to receive about \$300 million to continue work to clean up toxins, improve water quality, combat invasive species and restore wetlands in the region.

(Virginia News Connection) - Bipartisan legislation that will prohibit the Virginia sale of fertilizer containing phosphorus for use on lawns passed both the House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate. Once effective in 2013, the law could reduce phosphorus pollution running off into the Chesapeake Bay from Virginia by at least 230,000 pounds per year.

(Washington News Service) - A new Puget Sound Rockfish Conservation Plan has been unveiled. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has restricted commercial rockfish harvest, but says it's not enough to bring back the three species listed as endangered last year. About 1,100 public comments were considered in crafting the plan.

(Washington News Service) - On the anniversary of the BP Gulf Coast oil spill, Gov. Gregoire signed new, stronger protections into law for the coast and the Columbia River. HB 1186 requires oil companies to invest in enough response equipment and personnel for 24-hour cleanup activities in case of a spill in Washington waters, and also allows volunteers and commercial fishing vessels to participate if necessary.

#### WOMEN'S ISSUES

(Iowa News Service) - A bill that was passed by the Iowa House to prohibit late-term abortions has stalled in the Iowa Senate. It now appears that House File 657 won't pass this session.

(Maine News Service) - Pro-choice advocates in Maine won a lengthy battle against legislators who crafted stricter abortion bills. The House ultimately voted against measures that would have changed parental notification laws and also would require a woman who wants to get an abortion to wait 24 hours and read state issued materials.

(Missouri News Service) - As a result of the Affordable and Preventive Care Act, the Obama administration decided to eliminate co-pays for birth control and other preventive medicines for women. This is a victory for all women especially for those who face financial barriers. Reproductive health advocates and faith-based groups say it makes good economic sense and helps keep some women out of poverty.

#### YOUTH ISSUES

(Texas News Service) - The Legislature added funding to community-based juvenile justice programs, which is expected to reduce state reliance on remote lockups as all state juvenile justice agencies are merged into a single entity.

(Kentucky News Service) - A Lexington lawmaker has pre-filed legislation for the 2012 General Assembly that aims to reduce the number of incarcerations of young people who skip school, habitually run away or misbehave but don't commit criminal acts. The legislation from state Rep. Kelly Flood, a Democrat, deals with status offenses, generally defined as misconduct that would not be illegal if committed by an adult. In 2010, there were 1,541 bookings of youth in Kentucky into juvenile detention facilities for status offenses, accounting for 18.5 percent of all young people who were incarcerated, according to officials at Kentucky Youth Advocates.