

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

BUDGET POLICY AND PRIORITIES

(Arizona News Connection) - The state's voters passed a temporary one-cent hike in the sales tax to cover about half of the expected budget deficit for the next three years. Arizona's overall taxes remain among the nation's lowest.

(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) - Both houses of the state Legislature rejected Governor Schwarzenegger's proposed cuts to childcare included in his May revised budget, but with a \$19-billion dollar state budget deficit child care advocates are still concerned. Had the CalWorks program been eliminated California would have become the only state in the nation without a welfare-to-work program.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - The US Senate passed its version of a financial regulatory reform bill -- which aims to limit what has been deemed as risky behavior from financial institutions. A last minute vote in favor of the bill from Senator Scott Brown helped the historic bill to pass narrowly. House Financial Services Chairman Barney Frank stated that he thinks the president will sign it before the fourth of July.

(New York News Connection) - Unions representing state workers fought back against an emergency budget bill passed in May that would authorize Governor Paterson to furlough more than half the state's work force, leaving them without pay for one day a week until a budget is passed in Albany. Later in the month a federal judge granted a preliminary injunction, saying the furloughs were unconstitutional and would irreparably harm the workers by denying them salaries and raises they were entitled to under collective bargaining agreements. In response, the Paterson administration has begun preparing for layoffs that would go into effect Jan. 1, the expiration date of the no-layoffs pledge that Mr. Paterson made to public employee unions last year in exchange for an agreement to reduce the state's long-term pension costs.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM/MONEY IN POLITICS

(Connecticut News Service) - Even while a circuit court ruling against Connecticut's historic public campaign funding law is being appealed to the U.S. Circuit Court, advocates of the law have successfully maintained funding for this year's elections, while also advocating for changes to bring the law into alignment with the Constitution (so it doesn't discriminate against third parties).

CHILDREN'S ISSUES

(Wyoming News Service) - A freebie for Wyoming kids - bicycle helmets. The Wyoming Trial Lawyers Association is distributing helmets to any child in the state who needs one, and holding educational events to make sure kids wear them when they get them.

(Oregon News Service) - The State of Oregon is ahead of schedule on its goal to enroll 80,000 uninsured children in the "Healthy Kids" insurance plan by the end of this year. That also puts the state ahead of many others still struggling to figure out how to get kids covered. If the 80,000 goal is met, 95 percent of all Oregon children will have health insurance.

CITIZENSHIP/REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

(Connecticut News Service) - Connecticut legislators promoted a bill to make it easier for state residents living abroad or stationed in the military to vote. It passed unanimously in the House but the session ended before a Senate vote. The proposed changes would bring CT law in line with a new federal law.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Montana's primary election is less than a month away, and to help make sure folks are registered to vote and know where to vote, a new Voters Rights web page is being launched. The website and hotline are sponsored by the Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund.

CIVIL RIGHTS

(Oregon News Service) - Oregon's new Workplace Meetings Law survived its first court challenge when a U.S. District Court judge dismissed a lawsuit filed against the State Labor Commissioner, Brad Avakian, as head of the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries. The law, which protects workers from retaliation if they refuse to participate in meetings that involve religion or politics, had been challenged by business groups that alleged it was unconstitutional and limited employers' rights to hold meetings.

CONSUMER ISSUES

(Virginia News Connection) - Consumer advocate groups cautiously applauded as Governor McDonnell signed a bill into law which will place new regulations on Car Title Lenders. Some of the provisions include: capping the amount of interest which can be charged, lenders must give a borrower ten days notice before repossessing a vehicle, no electronic debiting from borrowers accounts and there will be no open-ended loans, and terms will be shorter.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

(New Hampshire News Connection) - A bill aimed at reducing recidivism rates in New Hampshire passed the house and will become law. SB 500 calls for increased community treatment services, and supervision for parolees and those on probation, with a focus on substance abuse and mental health issues. The initiative was funded in part by a grant from Pew Center on the States.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Washington News Service) - Washington's Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECEAP) met 9 of ten benchmarks set by the National Institute for Early Education Research for quality, including teacher training, class sizes and availability of such support services as screenings for hearing, vision and other health-related concerns. More than 8,100 children from lower-income families participate in ECEAP.

EDUCATION

(Florida News Connection) - The Governor vetoed SB6, which would have tied teacher pay to standardized test scores. Protesters argued that this system would not consider a teacher's education or experience, and would unfairly penalize those in poorer schools or teaching special needs children. The end result would be the best teachers only wanting to work in the best schools and with the brightest students, therefore depriving the children who need skilled teachers the most.

(Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - Nearly half of likely voters in the Republican primary election interviewed in the Idaho Statesman/KBOI Channel 2 poll disagreed with budget reductions for public schools in 2010-2011 that were adopted by the Legislature this year. They call the cuts "too deep."

ENDANGERED SPECIES/WILDLIFE

(Washington News Service) - The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture approved Washington's proposal for a sage-grouse and sharp-tailed grouse State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program in Douglas County, one of a handful of spots in the nation where endangered sage grouse numbers have not declined in the last 30 years. SAFE is a voluntary conservation program that pays private landowners for maintaining wildlife habitat.

ENERGY POLICY

(Illinois News Connection) - Demand for utility company subsidies for rooftop solar panels has been so strong that the state's two largest utilities are scaling back their programs because they are running out of money. Corporation Commission chair Kris Mayes says it's a great problem to have because it shows a strong solar industry has emerged in the state.

(California News Service) - Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger withdrew his support for a controversial new offshore oil drilling project off the Santa Barbara coast in the wake of the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

(Commonwealth News Service-MA) - Massachusetts became the first state in the union this month to get the go ahead on a full scale wind turbine project. Nine years in the making, the project known as Cape Wind was approved by US Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. The project has some opposition—mainly from groups and legislators concerned with the visual impacts that the 130 turbines will have on the tourist laden Cape, however many in environmental circles applaud the effort as a great first step in creating clean energy, as well as jobs.

(New Mexico News Connection) - The state is prioritizing energy efficiency over new power plant construction. New rules from the Public Regulation Commission acknowledge the importance of squeezing as much energy as possible from existing energy production and pass that mandate on to utilities.

(Ohio News Connection) - Several Ohioans made an important trip to Washington in April with the mission of helping to rescue the climate and energy bill from Limbo. They made the case that addressing climate change is also a national security issue, and that moving towards a cleaner energy economy will mean more jobs for Ohioans helping to build those energy sources of the future, with many wind turbines already manufactured here.

(Washington News Service) - Seattle is one of 25 communities in the nation selected to receive "Retrofit Ramp-Up" awards from the Department of Energy totaling \$450 million dollars. It was picked for its proposal to create 2,000 living-wage jobs while retrofitting buildings to save energy.

(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.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - The New Hampshire legislature passed HB 1554 which will allow municipalities to establish energy efficiency and clean energy districts. The legislation affords homeowners and businesses the opportunity to access financing for clean energy efficiency.

(Wyoming News Service) - One week after U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced reforms for offshore drilling, reforms for onshore oil and gas development have been finalized. There will be changes for Wyoming in terms of how leases are granted, and conservation groups applaud the move.

(Missouri News Service) - Missouri homeowners are being offered help in "going green," and making their homes more energy efficient, thanks to a bill the legislature passed at the end of the session called Property Assessed Clean Energy, or PACE. Homeowners apply for municipal loans and pay it back over 20 years through their property taxes.

(Washington News Service) - May 12 was the first time Northwest wind farms used a new mechanism to sell excess energy created in high-wind conditions. Typically, they're asked to shut down turbines when they generate more than the system can handle. Now, with Bonneville Power Administration's switch to "intra-hour scheduling," the 27 wind projects connected to BPA's grid can adjust their power sales to better match wind shifts, making it easier to sell extra electricity and stay profitable.

ENVIRONMENT

(California News Service) - In celebration of Earth Day, a new e-waste program started in CA that will guide consumers to recyclers who recycle responsibly and not dispose of their e-waste in a way that harms people or the environment.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - This month marks the 10-year anniversary of an agreement between the nation's only platinum/palladium mine (Stillwater Mining Company) and conservationists to resolve differences by meeting face-to-face instead of going to court.

(Colorado News Connection) - Colorado played host to a first ever summit on a little known environment disaster in May. Scientists from around the country gathered in Boulder to work on a first-ever nitrogen assessment for the nation, a major type of pollution that doesn't often get much attention but carries many public health and environmental threats.

GLBTQ ISSUES

(Colorado News Connection) - Many in Colorado's GLBT community showed solidarity with GLBT youth like the Mississippi teen who saw her prom canceled because she planned to attend with her girlfriend. The GLBT Community Center of Colorado hosted its annual "Queer

Prom" in Denver, giving youth from around the state a place to have a memorable night while feeling comfortable.

HEALTH ISSUES

(Arizona News Connection) - Lawmakers have resurrected the state's KidsCare health insurance program, after being threatened with the loss of \$7-billion in federal funding if they didn't. An enrollment cap remains in place. Lawmakers also reversed enrollment cuts to AHCCCS, the state's Medicaid program.

(Connecticut News Service) - Four foundations have contributed more than \$300,000 toward the smooth implementation of the state's 2009 health reform law known as SustiNet. It will be brought into synch with the federal law passed earlier this year.

(New Hampshire News Connection) - Two senate bills designed to protect health care consumers both passed the house and senate. Senate Bill 392 protects uninsured people from being charged substantially more for the same hospital services than people with insurance. And Senate Bill 455 enables the Insurance Commissioner to guide the implementation of federal health reform in New Hampshire.

(New York News Connection) - A bill was passed that requires insurance companies to obtain approval from state officials before raising rates, a step that the industry had vigorously opposed. Lawmakers contend that the provision will save the state \$70 million a year because fewer people will be forced off of private insurance and into public programs.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

(Minnesota News Connection) - The Minnesota House of Representative's Housing Finance Committee approved the Housing/Jobs bill in April. This will set aside a new dedicated funding stream for affordable housing - which could result in 1,000 units of new affordable housing per year, starting in 2012.

(Oregon News Service) - Oregon is one of five states now eligible for more federal dollars for areas reeling from the one-two punch of lower property values and high unemployment. The state will receive \$88 million from a new "Hardest Hit Fund," to be administered by Oregon Housing and Community Services for "innovative housing initiatives" to help families remain in their homes.

HUNGER/FOOD/NUTRITION

(Minnesota News Connection) - The Minnesota Legislature approved a \$400,000 one-time emergency allocation to food shelves this year. There will also be an addition of \$63,000 to the base funding for next year. This was one of the only - if not the only - proposed state budget increases approved this year. The MN legislature also eliminated the \$7,000 asset limit for food support and raised the gross income test from about \$24,000 for a family of three to \$30,000. The new measure is 165% of poverty. These policy adjustments are in line with many other states.

IMMIGRATION

(Arizona News Connection) - Arizona's new law targeting illegal immigrants spawned several developments in May:

--The federal government is considering a rare legal intervention to stop the state law

- Several lawsuits have been filed to block implementation, including one financed by a local weekly newspaper
- The Rev. Al Sharpton vowed to bring "freedom walkers" to the state to engage in non-violent civil disobedience if the law takes effect
- The Phoenix Suns used the stage of the NBA Playoffs to denounce the new law, wearing "Los Suns" jerseys during one home game to emphasize their opposition

(New York News Connection) - In a move that could affect thousands of people in New York, Governor Paterson has taken a step to make it harder for harsh federal laws to be used to deport legal immigrants who have been rehabilitated after serving time for minor crimes.

LIVABLE WAGES/WORKING FAMILIES

(Illinois News Connection) - Under Gov. Pat Quinn's recently launched "Put Illinois to Work" program, 349 employers have so far hired more than 2,800 workers. The program -- funded through the federal stimulus bill -- seeks to provide jobs to 15,000 Illinoisans with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

(Colorado News Connection) - Governor Ritter signed a bill into law in May creating a permanent state Pay Equity Commission whose mission will be to close the pay gap between what a white male makes versus what a woman or minority earns doing comparable work.

OCEANS

(Oregon News Service, Washington News Service, California News Service) - Oregon, Washington and California are a step closer to their Ocean Health Action Plan, setting new management priorities for the Pacific coast. In May, governors of the three states released final implementation plans in eight areas, from climate change to polluted runoff, to sea-floor mapping. They have received \$500,000 in federal funds to continue and/or start on some of the projects outlined in the plans.

PHILANTHROPY

(California News Service) - A coalition of CA community organizations shows what can happen when non-profit organizations have the support of foundations and other grant-makers. The coalition was instrumental in the passage of a first-of-its-kind ordinance that will ensure taxpayer dollars are invested only in banks that are "good neighbors" -- whose policies and practices support communities and not undermine them.

PUBLIC LANDS/WILDERNESS

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - ConocoPhillips, the largest oil and gas leaseholder on land adjacent to Glacier National Park, has decided to voluntarily relinquish its interest in 108 federal oil and gas leases covering approximately 169,000 net acres in the Flathead watershed area of northwest Montana.

(Big Sky Connection-MT) - Many of Bozeman's backyard mountain biking trails along the Gallatin Crest have received safeguards in a new Wilderness Study Area plan released by the U.S. Forest Service. And a few areas have been declared "off limits."

(Big Sky Connection-MT, Northern Rockies News Service-ID) - Fingers crossed as a Montana forest restoration plan within the Southwestern Crown of the Continent region is considered for \$90 million in funding. The stream repair/weed whacking/fuel reduction/trail restoration

proposal is one of two nominated for the investment. (The other nomination is for a plan in Idaho's Clearwater Basin).

RURAL/FARMING

(Wisconsin News Connection) - Making more farm land available to beginning and disadvantaged farmers is the goal of changes announced in May in the Conservation Reserve Program. It will mean thousands of acres of Wisconsin land that is now idle will be available. The new rules will ensure that conservation practices will be kept in place on the land. The program used to be known as the "soil bank" because it was designed to protect and conserve the farmland that is still the backbone of the economy in much of Wisconsin.

SENIOR ISSUES

(Illinois News Connection) - A reform bill aimed at improving care for Illinois elders has passed both houses of the legislature. It will raise the minimum staff levels at nursing homes statewide -- to a minimum of 3.8 hours of care per day for residents who need skilled care and 2.5 hours per day for residents needing intermediate care.

SMOKING PREVENTION

(North Carolina News Service) - North Carolina is being saluted by a national smoke-free organization, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, for putting a smoke-free law for bars and restaurants on the books, despite strong tobacco connections. Pam Seamans, executive director of the North Carolina Alliance for Health, says the next step is a law that makes all workplaces smoke-free.

(Minnesota News Connection) - MN Governor Pawlenty signed the Tobacco Modernization and Compliance Act of 2010 into law. Also known as the Tic Tac Tobacco law, it limits children's access to all addictive tobacco containing products including those that resemble candy and breath strips.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

(New Mexico News Connection) - The FCC continued to show support for working on a plan to expand broadband access to an open Internet to all Americans. It's an issue of special importance to New Mexicans, because the state has many gaps in broadband access and the state's minority and immigrant communities rely on online technologies more and more.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

(Ohio News Connection) - There's clear growing demand for organic food, even in the midst of a recession. That's led more Ohio growers to become interested in making the switch to organic production. While the certification process can be demanding, a number of agencies and programs like the Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association are helping growers navigate the process.

TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION

(Keystone State News Connection-PA) - For the first time ever, a comprehensive sex education policy is headed for a full House vote in Pennsylvania. A House committee sent it to leaders' desks with a close vote along party lines. It would allow schools to teach both abstinence and age appropriate prevention information, and, require schools that don't do both to inform parents of that fact.

WATER

(Virginia News Connection) - Governor McDonnell announced that the Virginia Resources Authority issued over \$116 million dollars in bonds to finance wastewater and sewer system construction and upgrades for projects throughout the Commonwealth. A principal focus is to provide system upgrades to reduce nutrient pollution being discharged into tributaries that feed the Chesapeake Bay.

YOUTH ISSUES

(New Mexico News Connection) - Some New Mexico teens were able to take part in a new-to-New Mexico sort of training for at-risk youth. Organizers say the training on better communication and moving past negative experiences was a success and hope to bring it to more youth around the state in the future.