

We are the Change.

SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE ISSUE!

INCLUDING A DIRECTORY OF EVERY
COLORADO LAWMAKER!

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“Wait and see!”

The head-spinning 2021 CO legislature



by **Jeriel Clark**
Political & Organizing Director

As packed and busy as it can be, the state Legislature is more-or-less reliable in its steadfast rhythm, with legislators working to determine the fate of hundreds of bills in just 120 days. While some days can make your head spin, this year we discovered something far worse than the busy hum of session was the “wait and see” mode that we sat in until February 16.

By early December, rumors were circulating that the 2021 Legislative Session would begin only temporarily, and then quickly adjourn for a time to let COVID-19 cases fall. That’s just what happened on January 13. Our legislators came together at the Capitol, new and returning lawmakers were sworn in, and then they got to work for three days to address several COVID-

related bills that couldn’t wait. By late Friday, the legislature recessed with a plan to resume session on February 16.

A one-month gap in session made this year odd. At the risk of messaging their bills too early, legislators were sitting in a cone of silence, and it was difficult for us to anticipate what legislation we would see introduced at the Capitol.

Important bills emerge

But despite this, our members were working hard to make sure at least three bills were introduced — some helping draft language and holding meetings with local lawmakers, and others sitting in coalition meetings to discuss strategy. And now that we’re here, a full month into session, we have already seen the fruits of those efforts start to grow.

Last year, our local Food



We may not be able to discuss the legislature in person quite yet — so we decided to do something different!

and Agriculture Committee members were following a bill that had passed through the Wyoming legislature. By the end of the year, our ranchers determined this is exactly what Colorado needed, and luckily, several legislators agreed.

Senate Bill 21-079 (coined the Animal Shares Act) would open up meat sales for local ranchers in our community to go directly to residents here in Western Colorado. So if you subscribe to a produce CSA from one of your favorite local farms, this bill

would allow you to subscribe to a local rancher too. Not only does this mean peace of mind in knowing where your meat comes from, it’s also vital for the survival of local ranchers who would benefit from better market access to consumers, higher compensation for their product, and shorter wait times for processing — all solving problems made worse by the pandemic. And ranchers and local food consumers are in luck! This bill has sailed

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2020's moments of awakening



by **Andreya Krieves**
Alliance Chair

2020 will be a year that none of us will forget. Looking back at all that has happened in our communities, across our state, and throughout the nation, we remember the countless moments that took our collective breath away. We've existed in crisis mode as the relentless events of the past year have exposed deep rooted problems, exacerbated inequities, and shown us just how divided we have become.

Fortunately, amidst the chaos there have also been moments of awakening and hope as people came together in common cause to make a change. The crises brought the clarity and

urgency to stand up and address what's broken and shined a light on the importance and effectiveness of organizing.

At home and across the country, we saw examples of ordinary people getting involved in organizing; from local mutual aid groups to innovative get-out-the-vote efforts that resulted in record-breaking voter turnout.

As you read through the articles in this issue of the Clarion, I hope you will be both inspired and invited to act in the many ways our Alliance continues to organize for positive change right here in our West Slope communities. For even more inspiration, I lift up the words and wisdom of

Amanda Gorman, the nation's first-ever National Youth Poet Laureate, in the final lines of her poem, "The Hill We Climb" that she read at this year's inauguration ceremony:

*We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful
will emerge,
battered and beautiful.
When day comes we step out of
the shade,
afraid and unafraid,
The new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave
enough to be it.*



Western Colorado Alliance
Chair Andreya Krieves

The path to homegrown prosperity



by **Emily Hornback**
Executive Director

As national politicians debate infrastructure spending bills and how to "build back better," Colorado has led the nation by creating a first-of-its-kind plan to transition communities dependent on coal generation and mining to a new economic future. In late 2020, the Colorado Final Action Plan for a Just Transition was submitted to the Governor's office, outlining the beginnings of what will likely be more than a decade's worth of work to help coal-dependent communities avoid a devastating economic bust. The plan explicitly advocates for a national strategy, citing the interstate and even international nature of the coal industry. But it also provides 12 other ways the state is going to support the switch away from coal.

The Colorado Just Transition Action Plan is the result a

year of work facilitated by the newly formed Just Transition Office (a collaboration between the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Local Affairs) and was required by legislation passed in 2019 to help fulfill Colorado's "moral commitment to assist the workers and communities that have powered Colorado for generations."

Colorado has seven remaining coal-fired power plants, several of which are in Western Colorado. Most or all are likely to close in the next 10-15 years due to increased competition from lower-priced sources of energy as well as laws and regulations to protect public health and counter climate change. As a result, some of Colorado's six operating coal mines are likely to close as well. Communities in 11 Colorado counties could be adversely affected, along with between 2,000 and 3,000 Colorado

workers and their families. Some of the proposed actions from the plan include:

- **Bringing grant-funded programs to coal communities**
- **Helping coal industry workers and their families plan for potential job changes**
- **Creating plans for programs to help workers retrain and find new jobs**
- **Collaborating with utilities and mining companies to help cover the expense of transition**

The plan includes many other starting points for policy, economic investment, rural economic diversification, and workforce development. It's expensive though, with a \$100 million price tag that will require federal action to support.

Our Alliance has long worked for responsible mining laws that protect our lands, water quality and landowner rights. We also continue to support policy and practices that limit greenhouse gas emissions and protect our climate. At the same time, we fully recognize that many of our rural Western Colorado communities have been driven by the coal economy for decades and we do not want to leave our neighbors or communities in an economic hole caused by the sudden loss of their economic base. As such, we have supported the creation of the Just Transition Action Plan and will continue to organize to influence its implementation and execution to benefit our Western Slope Communities.

To learn more about the Office of Just Transition and the Action Plan, visit:

<https://cdle.colorado.gov/the-office-of-just-transition>



brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development.

Our Alliance's vision for the future is one where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just and self-reliant.

Our Alliance's Staff

2481 Commerce Blvd., PO Box 1931
Grand Junction CO 81502
(970) 256-7650

Emily Hornback, Executive Director
Jeriel Clark, Political & Organizing Director
Nick Allan, Community Organizer
Joel Dyar, Community Organizer
Brian Williams, Community Organizer
Arn McConnell, Communications Coordinator

WesternColoradoAlliance.org
info@WesternColoradoAlliance.org

Our Alliance's Board of Directors

Officers

Andreya Krieves, Chair, Grand Junction
Kevin Kuns, Vice Chair, Montrose
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Brenda Bafus-Williams, Secretary,
Montrose

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“Wait and see!” — The head-spinning 2021 legislature

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through the legislature and has already passed the Senate and its first House committee. In fact, by the time you read this, it may have passed the House entirely and be headed to the Governor’s desk. We’ll send an email update as soon as it has, but pull out your phonebooks folks, look up your favorite rancher, and get ready to buy some meat.

Also moving smoothly through the legislature is House Bill 21-1131. This bill is being championed by a coalition of clean energy partners from around the state, with our very own clean energy staff and committee members at the forefront of the work. Among the bill sponsors is the West Slope’s very own Rep. Marc Catlin. Over 70% of Colorado’s geography is powered by Rural Electric Co-ops (or RECs), including much of Western Colorado. Rural electric co-ops are member-owned cooperatives, making you the boss of your electricity — supposedly.

In Colorado, most RECs purchase their electricity from the power supplier Tri-State under long-term contracts. Over the years, many of our co-ops have leveled criticism of some of Tri-State’s practices and those co-ops have recently begun to win major reforms.

This bill tackles a number of Tri-State and REC reform priorities, including ending Tri-State’s practice of requiring board members to vote exclusively in Tri-State’s best interests instead of the best interests of their own communities. Among other things, this bill would enable co-ops to conduct electronic voting for board of director elections, and require the reporting of key co-op financial information to the public. This bill has passed the House and is headed to the Senate, with lots of opportunities for members to show their support.

Our final priority bill, House Bill 21-1119, was drafted with input and support from legislative committee members, former West Slope Youth Vote interns, and several other West Slope community members. It’s a devastating truth that Western Colorado communities experience higher-than-average suicide attempts and deaths

year over year. For every life lost to suicide, there are 25 people who survive a suicide attempt. Responders, providers, students, and other suicide survivors suffer elevated risk themselves. This bill’s sponsors include three West Slope legislators (Senators Don Coram and Kerry Donovan, and Representative Janice Rich) and challenges the state to rethink suicide prevention to include suicide intervention and postvention. But what does this mean? Did you know suicidal thinking can be a direct result of common medical conditions, and only 46% of suicides are mental health-related? This bill would improve conditions for attempt survivors, their families, loss survivors, and medical professionals. It would ensure that all those affected are brought into the conversation when studying our historic self-harm related deaths, including working to understand what needs to be done differently to protect lives in our communities.

These three bills are really just the tip of the iceberg for bills introduced this session, and some of the state’s biggest affordable health care option, are yet to come. Bills addressing farmworker’s labor rights, universal representation for our immigrant community, sustainability grant programs, and the creation of an outdoor equity fund for students without access, have our heads spinning again, but in a really good way.

To help us keep track of all of these bills, we’ve even hired our first legislative intern, Daniel Haas, who’s really helped us kick this session into gear. [See sidebar, *this page.*]

We Are The Change

This year, we won’t be heading to Denver for our annual People’s Lobby Trip, but we still plan to smash our record and bring the Capitol to Western Colorado and more folks than ever. This year, we’re hosting a bi-weekly webinar series, **We Are the Change: Your Guide to Engaging with the Colorado State Legislature.** This is a chance for us, for you, to make a real impact at the Capitol. Here’s how it works:

Every other week on Thursdays at 5:15, for just 45 minutes, staff and members present a brief



Meet our new legislative intern, Daniel Haas!

Daniel has joined us as our first legislative intern and has already proven to be a huge boon to our legislative work this year!

Daniel is a local Colorado Mesa University student who was born and raised in Grand Junction, Colorado.

Throughout his college career he has taken several leadership and involvement roles, including being the current Vice President of the Associated Student Government, Special Projects Coordinator of the Sustainability Council, as well as a peer mentor within the Office of Student Success and Engagement.

He is majoring in Political Science, with minors in History and Classical Studies, and plans on pursuing a PhD in Political

Science after graduating. In the long term, Daniel wants to become a professor of political science, as well as continue to be involved in whatever local community he lives in.

He became very active over the summer in local organizing efforts, including Right And Wrong and Solidarity Not Charity, where he realized a passion for pursuing social, economic, and environmental justice movements. He is also a high school football coach within the local community.

When not in class or involved, Daniel enjoys spending time working out, reading, or finding other learning opportunities.

Please join us in welcoming Daniel to our Alliance’s legislative efforts!

overview of what’s going on at the Capitol in real time. We’ll give an update on what bills are coming up in Committee, and hand you tips, tricks, and talking points to connect with legislators so we can help good bills get passed. Just like many of our Lobby Trip attendees from years past, this might be your first time engaging with legislators and we’re making it easy.

During the webinar, whether you’re making dinner or sitting on the couch, we don’t mind how you tune in. What matters is what you do after. We’ll send you away with a choice of actions you can take that will influence legislation in our state to help create healthy, just, and self-reliant communities for all of us in western Colorado. It might look like sending an email

to your representative, perhaps submitting written testimony, sending in a Letter to the Editor, or even, on occasion, like signing up to provide video testimony. We’ll explain the importance of each of these tactics, why we’re utilizing them, and show you how to participate. You won’t need to be the expert — you can be the storyteller. Legislators need to hear personal stories from real West Slope people! I hope you’ll join us on this never before embarked on mission to do just that.

The pandemic continues, but during this legislative session, we can still come together.

For more information, please email me at jeriel@western-coloradoalliance.org or join a webinar and I’ll see you on the other side of the screen!

Jeff Bridges (D, SD26)

303-866-4846

jeff.bridges.senate@state.co.us

Janet Buckner (D, SD28)

303-866-3432

janet.buckner.senate@state.co.us

James Coleman (D, SD33)

303-866-2909

james.coleman.senate@state.co.us

John Cooke (R, SD13)

303-866-4451

john.cooke.senate@state.co.us

Don Coram (R, SD6)

303-866-4884

don.coram.senate@state.co.us

Jessie Danielson (D, SD20)

303-866-4856

jessie.danielson.senate@state.co.us

Kerry Donovan (D, SD5)

303-866-4871

kerry.donovan.senate@state.co.us

Stephen Fenberg (D, SD18)

303-866-4872

stephen.fenberg.senate@state.co.us

Rhonda Fields (D, SD29)

303-866-4879

rhonda.fields.senate@state.co.us

Leroy Garcia (D, SD3)

303-866-4878

leroy.garcia.senate@state.co.us

Bob Gardner (R, SD12)

303-866-4880

bob.gardner.senate@state.co.us

Joann Ginal (D, SD14)

303-866-4841

joannginal52@gmail.com

Julie Gonzales (D, SD34)

303-866-4862

julie.gonzales.senate@state.co.us

Chris Hansen (D, SD31)

303-866-4861

chris.hansen.senate@state.co.us

Dennis Hisey (R, SD2)

303-866-4877

dennis.hisey.senate@state.co.us

Chris Holbert (R, SD30)

303-866-4881

chris.holbert.senate@state.co.us

Sonya Jaquez Lewis (D, SD17)

303-866-2920

sonya.jaquez.lewis.senate@state.co.us

Barbara Kirkmeyer (R, SD23)

303-866-4876

barbara.kirkmeyer.senate@state.co.us

Chris Kolker (D, SD27)

303-866-4883

chris.kolker.senate@state.co.us

Pete Lee (D, SD11)

303-866-6364

pete.lee.senate@state.co.us

Larry Liston (R, SD10)

303-866-2937

larry.liston.senate@state.co.us

Paul Lundeen (R, SD9)

303-866-4835

paul.lundeen.senate@state.co.us

Dominick Moreno (D, SD21)

303-866-4857

dominick.moreno.senate@state.co.us

Brittany Pettersen (D, SD22)

303-866-4859

brittany.pettersen.senate@state.co.us

Kevin Priola (R, SD25)

303-866-4855

kpriola@gmail.com

Bob Rankin (R, SD8)

303-866-5292

bob.rankin.senate@state.co.us

Robert Rodriguez (D, SD32)

303-866-4852

robert.rodriguez.senate@state.co.us

Ray Scott (R, SD7)

303-866-3077

ray.scott.senate@state.co.us

Cleave Simpson (R, SD35)

303-866-4875

cleave.simpson.senate@state.co.us

Jim Smallwood (R, SD4)

303-866-4869

senatorsmallwood@gmail.com

Jerry Sonnenberg (R, SD1)

303-866-6360

senatorsonnenberg@gmail.com

Tammy Story (D, SD16)

303-866-4873

tammy.story.senate@state.co.us

Faith Winter (D, SD24)

303-866-4863

faith.winter.senate@state.co.us

Rob Woodward (R, SD15)

303-866-4853



rob.woodward.senate@state.co.us

Rachel Zenzinger (D, SD19)

303-866-4840

senatorrachelz@gmail.com

LEGEND

-  = WESTERN COLO. LAWMAKER
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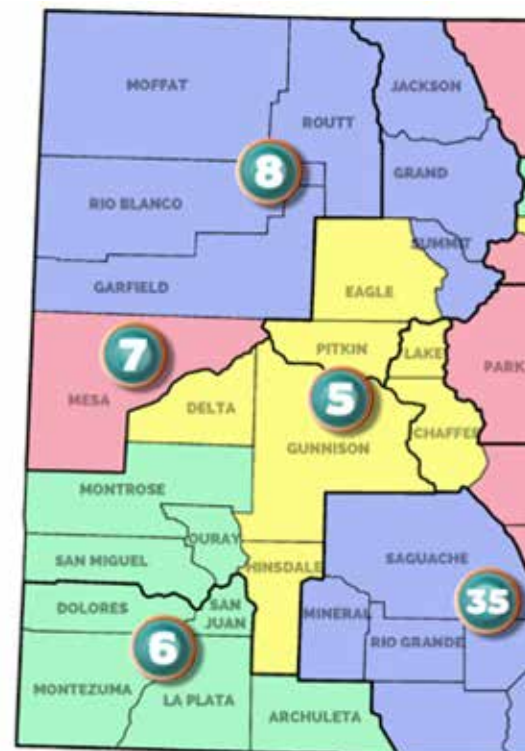
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FEDERAL/STATE CONTACTS

PRES. JOE BIDEN (D)The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500
Switchboard: (202) 456-1414
Comments: (202) 456-1111
www.whitehouse.gov**U.S. SEN. JOHN HICKENLOOPER (D)**354 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
Phone: (202) 224-5941
Fax: (202) 224-6524
hickenlooper.senate.gov**U.S. SEN. MICHAEL BENNET (D)**400 Rood Avenue, Suite 220
Grand Junction CO 81501
Phone: (970) 245-9553**GOV. JARED POLIS (D)**136 State Capitol
Denver, CO 80203-1792
colorado.gov/governor
(303) 866-2471 Front Desk
(303) 866-2885 Constituent
Services**U.S. SEN. MICHAEL BENNET (D)**261 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
Phone: (202) 224-5852
Fax: (202) 228-5097
bennet.senate.gov

225 North 5th St., Suite 511

Grand Junction, CO 81501

Phone: (970) 241-6631

U.S. REP. LAUREN BOEBERT (R)Longworth House Office Bldg., 1609
Washington, DC 20515-0603

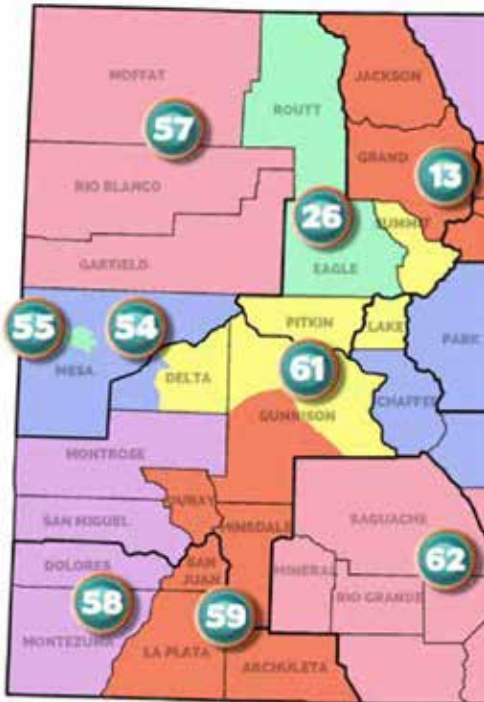
Phone: (202) 225-4761

Fax: (202) 226-9669
boebert.house.gov743 Horizon Court
Grand Junction, CO 81506
Phone: (970) 208-0460

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Toll-free number outside Denver, January-May: 1-800-811-7647
 Capitol mailing address for all: 200 E. Colfax, Denver CO 80203

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|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| D13
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| D55
JANICE RICH (R) | D62
DONALD VALDEZ (D) |
| D57
PERRY WILL (R) | |

- Judy Amabile (D, D13)**
303-866-2578
judy.amabile.house@state.co.us
- Jeni James Arndt (D, D53)**
303-866-2917
jeni.arndt.house@state.co.us
- Jennifer Bacon (D, D7)**
303-866-2909
jennifer.bacon.house@state.co.us
- Mark Baisley (R, D39)**
303-866-2935
mark.baisley.house@state.co.us
- Adrienne Benavidez (D, D32)**
303-866-2964
adrienne.benavidez.house@state.co.us
- Tracy Bennett (D, D12)**
303-866-2920
tracy.bennett.house@state.co.us
- Shannon Bird (D, D35)**
303-866-2843
shannon.bird.house@state.co.us
- Rod Bockenfeld (R, D56)**
303-866-2912
rod.bockenfeld.house@state.co.us
- Mary Bradfield (R, D21)**
303-866-2946
mary.bradfield.house@state.co.us
- Yadira Caraveo (D, D31)**
303-866-2918
yadira.caraveo.house@state.co.us
- Terri Carver (R, D20)**
303-866-2191
terri.carver.house@state.co.us
- Marc Catlin (R, D58)**
303-866-2955
marc.catlin.house@state.co.us
- Lisa Cutter (D, D25)**
303-866-2582
lisa.cutter.house@state.co.us
- Lindsey Daugherty (D, D29)**
303-866-2950
lindsey.daugherty.house@state.co.us
- Monica Duran (D, D24)**
303-866-5522
monica.duran.house@state.co.us
- Daneya Esgar (D, D46)**
303-866-2968
daneya.esgar.house@state.co.us

- Tony Exum (D, D17)**
303-866-3069
tony.exum.house@state.co.us
- Meg Froelich (D, D3)**
303-866-2921
meg.froelich.house@state.co.us
- Alec Garnett (D, D2)**
303-866-2911
alec.garnett.house@state.co.us
- Tim Geitner (R, D19)**
303-866-2924
tim.geitner.house@state.co.us
- Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez (D, D4)**
303-866-2954
serena.gonzales-gutierrez.house@state.co.us
- Matt Gray (D, D33)**
303-866-4667
matt@matthewgray.us
- Ron Hanks (R, D60)**
303-866-2747
ron.hanks.house@state.co.us
- Leslie Herod (D, D8)**
303-866-2959
jeff.bridges@senate@state.co.us
- Richard Holtorf (R, D69)**
303-866-2398
richard.holtorf.house@state.co.us
- Edie Hooton (D, D10)**
303-866-2915
edie.hooton.house@state.co.us
- Dominique Jackson (D, D42)**
303-866-3911
dominique.jackson.house@state.co.us
- Iman Jodeh (D, D41)**
303-866-2919
iman.jodeh.house@state.co.us
- Chris Kennedy (D, D23)**
303-866-2951
chris.kennedy.house@state.co.us
- Cathy Kipp (D, D52)**
303-866-4569
cathy.kipp.house@state.co.us
- Colin Larson (R, D22)**
303-866-2927
colin.larson.house@state.co.us
- Susan Lontine (D, D1)**
303-866-2966
susan.lontine.house@state.co.us
- Stephanie Luck (R, D47)**
303-866-2905
stephanie.luck.house@state.co.us
- Mike Lynch (R, D49)**
303-866-2907
mike.lynch.house@state.co.us
- Julie McCluskie (D, D61)**
303-866-2952
julie.mccluskie.house@state.co.us
- Karen McCormick (D, D11)**
303-866-2780
karen.mccormick.house@state.co.us
- Hugh McKean (R, D51)**
303-866-2947
hugh.mckean.house@state.co.us
- Barbara McLachlan (D, D59)**
303-866-2914
barbara.mclachlan.house@state.co.us
- Dafna Michaelson Jenet (D, D30)**
303-866-2945
dafna.michaelson.jenet.house@state.co.us
- Kyle Mullica (D, D34)**
303-866-2931
kyle.mullica.house@state.co.us
- Patrick Neville (R, D45)**
303-866-5523
patrick.neville.house@state.co.us

- David Ortiz (D, D38)**
303-866-2953
david.ortiz.house@state.co.us
- Rod Pelton (R, D65)**
303-866-3706
rod.pelton.house@state.co.us
- Andres Pico (R, D16)**
303-866-2937
andres.pico.house@state.co.us
- Kim Ransom (R, D44)**
303-866-2933
kim.ransom.house@state.co.us
- Janice Rich (R, D55)**
303-866-3068
janice.rich.house@state.co.us
- Naquetta Ricks (D, D40)**
303-866-2944
naquetta.ricks.house@state.co.us
- Dylan Roberts (D, D26)**
303-866-2923
dylan.roberts.house@state.co.us
- Shane Sandridge (R, D14)**
303-866-2965
shane.sandridge.house@state.co.us
- Emily Sirota (D, D9)**
303-866-2910
emily.sirota.house@state.co.us
- Marc Snyder (D, D18)**
303-866-2932
marc.snyder.house@state.co.us
- Matt Soper (R, D54)**
303-866-2583
matthew.soper.house@state.co.us
- Tom Sullivan (D, D37)**
303-866-5510
tom.sullivan.house@state.co.us
- Kerry Tipper (D, D28)**
303-866-2939
kerry.tipper.house@state.co.us
- Brianna Titone (D, D27)**
303-866-2962
brianna.titone.house@state.co.us
- Alex Valdez (D, D5)**
303-866-2925
alex.valdez.house@state.co.us
- Donald Valdez (D, D62)**
303-866-2916
donald.valdez.house@state.co.us
- Tonya Van Beber (R, D48)**
303-866-2943
tonya.van.beber.house@state.co.us
- Kevin Van Winkle (R, D43)**
303-866-2936
kevin.vanwinkle.house@state.co.us
- Mike Weissman (D, D36)**
303-866-2942
mike.weissman.house@state.co.us
- Perry Will (R, D57)**
303-866-2949
perry.will.house@state.co.us
- Dave Williams (R, D15)**
303-866-5525
dave.williams.house@state.co.us
- Steven Woodrow (D, D6)**
303-866-2967
steven.woodrow.house@state.co.us
- Dan Woog (R, D63)**
303-866-2906
dan.woog.house@state.co.us
- Mary Young (D, D50)**
303-866-2929
mary.young.house@state.co.us
- Note: Contact information is from www.leg.state.co.us. The information is accurate as of Feb. 2021.*

APPROPRIATIONS

CHAIR: Herod; **VICE-CHAIR:** McCluskie; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Baisley, Bradfield, Daugherty, Duran, Jodeh, Kipp, Ransom, Rich, Tipper

BUSINESS AFFAIRS & LABOR

CHAIR: Roberts; **VICE-CHAIR:** Sullivan; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Bird, Carver, Duran, Lynch, Mullica, Neville, Ricks, Sandridge, Snyder, Van Winkle

EDUCATION

CHAIR: McLachlan; **VICE-CHAIR:** Young; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Baisley, Caraveo, Exum, Geitner, Kipp, Larson, Michaelson Jenet

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

CHAIR: A. Valdez; **VICE-CHAIR:** Hooton; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bennett, Froelich, Jackson, Pico, Sirota, Soper, Titone, Van Beber, Weissman, Will, Woog

FINANCE

CHAIR: Bird; **VICE-CHAIR:** Snyder; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Benavidez, Bradfield, Daugherty, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Gray, Kipp, Luck, Rich, Sandridge



HEALTH & INSURANCE

CHAIR: Lontine; **VICE-CHAIR:** Caraveo; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Baisley, Hanks, Jackson, Kennedy, McCormick, Mullica, Ortiz, Soper, Titone, Van Beber, Williams

JUDICIARY

CHAIR: Weissman; **VICE-CHAIR:** Tipper; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bacon, Benavidez, Bockenfeld, Carver, Daugherty, Luck, Lynch, Roberts, Woodrow

PUBLIC & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

CHAIR: Michaelson Jenet; **VICE-CHAIR:** Sirota; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bradfield, Cutter, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Holtorf, Jodeh, Larson, Ortiz, Pelton, Ricks, Woog, Young

RURAL AFFAIRS & AGRICULTURE

CHAIR: Arndt; **VICE-CHAIR:** McCormick; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Catlin, Cutter, Holtorf, Lontine, McLachlan, Pelton, Roberts, D. Valdez, Will

STATE, VETERAN & MILITARY AFFAIRS

CHAIR: Kennedy; **VICE-CHAIR:** Woodrow; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Bacon, Bennett, Bockenfeld, Duran, Geitner, Hanks, A. Valdez, Williams

TRANSPORTATION & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

CHAIR: Exum; **VICE-CHAIR:** Gray; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Arndt, Catlin, Froelich, Hooton, Pico, Rich, Sullivan, D. Valdez, Van Winkle

A year of major oil & gas victories!



by **Brian Williams**
Community Organizer

As the spring of 2021 draws near, our Alliance finally has the opportunity to catch its breath after an intense year of engaging with state regulators to reform rules concerning the production of oil and gas in a manner that is protective of public health, safety, welfare, the environment, and biological resources.

Such was the mandate set forth by the Colorado State Legislature in Senate Bill 19-181, which changed the mission of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC). The result of this effort, which has been decades in the making, has been unmitigated success for our Alliance, including a new 2,000 foot setback requirement for new wells from homes and schools, ending the practice of venting and flaring in Colorado, compulsory analysis of alternative locations and cumulative impacts, and automatic standing to provide input on permitting decisions for residents living near proposed drilling locations.

Though it is important to recognize and celebrate these achievements, our work is far from over. It isn't enough that oil and gas is extracted in a safer manner—if it is to occur, it must be done in such a way that ensures that taxpayers are fairly compensated for parting with the resource, and that they aren't stuck with the bill for clean up once the operation is over. Under the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) current leasing rules, operators are paying a mere \$1.50 per acre on over 10.4 million acres of federal land that, despite being leased for production, is presently sitting idle, and cannot be used for other beneficial uses such as conservation and recreation as long as the lease remains in effect. In Colorado, of the over 2.4 million acres of federal land that has been leased, just 1.8 million acres are considered to have moderate or high potential for production, and some 1.4 million acres is sitting idle in the hands of speculators and operators.

In the short time that he's held office, President Biden has kicked off a sweeping reform of the way the federal government



thinks about and engages with the production of oil and gas on federal lands, including a temporary pause on federal leasing. Predictably, the move has drawn the ire of the oil and gas industry and its allies, who contend that such action will result in job losses, increase America's energy dependence of foreign powers, and create a vacuum in supply that will drive production to take place outside of the United States and its regulatory oversight.

Upon closer inspection, however, there is little cause for concern; operators throughout the nation have stockpiled millions of acres of leases, production on federal lands accounts for only 10% of the nation's oil and gas supply, and the Biden administration's decision to rejoin the Paris Agreement once again positions America to become a world leader on addressing the climate crisis — a role that it can only fulfill if our nation leads by example.

The decision to pause federal leasing also presents an opportunity to examine another financial problem posed: financial assurances. When an operator secures a permit to drill on federal lands, they are required to post a bond with the BLM. These bonds are held until

production is completed, and the well is plugged. However, the bonds that operators are required to post are a fraction of the cost to properly plug a well and restore the land on which it

(such as what we experienced at the onset of COVID) have the potential to cause a waves of bankruptcies, leaving well orphaned and unplugged. If left unchecked, these wells will leak methane into the atmosphere, and the aging infrastructure could corrode, resulting in the pollution of groundwater and surrounding land.

The result of this effort, which has been decades in the making, has been unmitigated success for our Alliance, including a new 2,000 foot setback requirement for new wells from homes and schools, ending the practice of venting and flaring in Colorado, compulsory analysis of alternative locations and cumulative impacts, and automatic standing to provide input on permitting decisions for residents living near proposed drilling locations.

was drilled. The problem, as the residents of Western Colorado know all too well, the oil and gas industry is inherently volatile; shocks to the energy market

The need to reform financial assurances for the oil and gas industry goes beyond the federal level. Here in Colorado, the COGCC is set to examine its own bonding rules in the Spring. Like the BLM, Colorado faces a staggering shortage of funds to plug and reclaim wells; despite the average well costing approximately \$82,500 to properly remediate, the state currently allows operators to post \$100,000 to bond an unlimited number of wells—a policy that has resulted in the average cost to plug and abandon an orphaned well, remediate impacts, and reclaim the well site being 14 times greater than the amount of financial assurance held by the state. As our state and federal government grapple with these challenges, our Alliance will continue to push for stronger rules on both financial assurances and federal leasing, and demanding that any development occurs responsibly, and that taxpayers are fairly compensated for the privilege.

Lightning-fast progress in clean energy



by **Joel Dyar**
Community Organizer

There's no understating the lightning-fast progress that clean energy policy, jobs, and opportunity have made in Colorado these past three years.

Though the pandemic has shaken the industry, Colorado entered 2020 as the nation's sixth largest employer of clean tech workers. Clean tech industries now employ nearly 30,000 more people than the state's legacy fossil fuel industries.

At the policy level, state lawmakers and agencies have crafted a policy ecosystem for the growth of these new industries that's among the best anywhere in the country — thanks to the long hard work of everyone reading this article. Recent state legislation has planted the seeds of future growth by creating a statewide climate action plan, investing in rural clean tech jobs projects through acronyms like DOLA and REDI and the new state Office of Just Transition, preparing for the massive generational transition to vehicle and building electrification, and forcing Tri-State to map out a

cleaner, cheaper future for rural ratepayers.

With these many seeds already producing so healthy a harvest, we might think that Colorado would take a step back this year and content itself with the gains. That's not how 2021 is shaping up. Here are the big plays in the Colorado clean energy world in 2021.

Throughout the year, Tri-State will continue its legislature-mandated Electric Resource Plan with the Colorado Public Utilities Commission. There, it will tackle major decisions about coal transition, new renewables, the social costs of climate pollution, and future investment — all impacting ratepayer pocketbooks across the Colorado rural electric cooperatives that it supplies. Ratepayers will need to make their voices and priorities heard during forthcoming public comment opportunities.

Tri-State has drafted proposals that foresee hundreds of megawatts — real big power — of new renewables being installed on the Western Slope in the coming decade. The question of where these new investments and jobs will be located is an existential one for many struggling communities. Local and regional elected officials and



co-ops need to work together to plan and make their case.

The legislature has tasked state agencies with implementing the nitty-gritty of Colorado's transition to new clean technologies and a low-carbon economy. Many advocates are unhappy with the planning results from these agencies under the Governor's watch so far. Expect new 2021 legislation that seeks to accelerate bold specific action and grassroots pushes to make priorities heard at state agency rulemakings.

New state legislation is also in the works to tackle big technical questions like Pay As You Save financing for utility customer rooftop solar and building efficiency, commercial building energy efficiency standards, socioeconomic and racial equity in access to renewable energy and cost-saving efficiency services, and more.

Across the Western Slope, rural electric co-op ratepayers will get to vote on Boards of Directors

elections for their co-ops in late spring and early summer — in virtually every case by mail ballot. This is a great chance to dialogue with candidates and help your community sort out the visionary from the merely comfortable.

At the federal level, the new administration and congress have come to power with an unprecedented populist vision for new cleantech and infrastructure jobs that can help revitalize opportunity in rural communities. Whether these goals become our future is up to you and me.

There's an often-circulated aphorism that, even if questionable in its attribution to some ancient Chinese source, seems to fit this moment: "May you live in interesting times." We're fortunate to be here at the cusp of a civilizational transition that many of you have sought for many long years. I hope you'll join us in rising to this moment and this work in the year to come.

An important step for local ranchers



by **Nick Allan**
Community Organizer

On the Western Slope and across Colorado, ranchers are waiting upwards of two years to get their cattle processed. The bottleneck created by COVID-19 continues to damage the already economically drained community ranchers. Wait times like this put many businesses in danger of closing. Local food and agriculture is a major driving factor on the Western Slope and key to homegrown prosperity. This crisis has created opportunity. Much like the Cottage Foods Act, which Western Colorado Alliance championed in 2015, our sights are set on opening the market for small, independent producers to thrive. Last year, the Wyoming legislature passed the Animal Shares Amendment. Our members want to pass one here. As of this writing, SB21-078 Colorado's

Animal Shares bill has passed the Senate. Animal Shares creates more access between consumers and ranchers, creating a rallying point for ranchers to flex their organized power, and to advance Our Alliance's mission of delivering home grown prosperity.

Sajun, a rancher here on the Western Slope, is waiting a year to get his current stock processed. Currently, wait times are connected to requiring a USDA inspector on-site. This is where the real divide comes into play. The large meat processing factories, Tyson, Smithfield, JBS, and Cargill, control 84% of the market. Each of these companies always has a USDA inspector on-site, with a literal office in their processing facilities. Our local processors cannot afford this practice. Large corporations are using this USDA rule to push down the local processors,

hamstringing possibilities of homegrown prosperity.

There is a way to eat healthy food, without restricting practices. If a consumer wants to purchase beef from their local rancher, they have the option of purchasing a whole, half, or quarter cow. These cows are processed under "custom exempt" not USDA, increasing the opportunity for processing. These quantities are both expensive and hard to store. Animal Shares allows a person to buy a share, like stock, of an animal which then classifies them as an owner. As an owner, once a cow is processed, you can select the cuts of meat you desire. This simple rule change will grant access to fresh food to a wider range of families and individuals and provide better incentives to our ranchers.

When organizing against

powerful interests, nothing is easy. While large corporations have the money, we have the people. We have spent the last several months speaking with producers across the Western Slope. After countless conversations, we have a team that is ready to push forward this legislation. Our mission now is to support organizing their collective power. We are supportive of SB21-079 and will work for its passage. Our team will provide testimony on the importance of this bill and the positive change to our local ranchers and processors. Their work will be vital to Animal Shares passage.

As our Alliance works to bring power back into the hands of those most impacted. Over generations corporations have become more dominant in agriculture. Animal Shares is a small step and important step in taking back that power.

A huge win for UVA & the grassroots organizing cycle!



by **Carol Keeney**
Community Organizer

In September of 2018, the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance membership approved a plan to systematically work through the organizing cycle in order to identify an actionable issue with enough energy behind it to follow it through to a victory. There were some doubts: Don't we need an issue first in order to attract and pull people together?

The UVA leadership began a relational meeting campaign. Over a year's time, over 100 of these meetings took place. These one-on-one conversations focused more on listening than talking, wanting to understand what is important to the other person and why. What are the stories that shaped their interest?

The spring of 2019 was spent rewriting bylaws and identifying officers, both of which were ratified by the UVA membership in May.

In September, UVA launched an issue identification conversation campaign, the next phase of the organizing cycle. Ten people were trained to lead these conversations specifically and intentionally crafted to listen to the experiences of Montrose residents in order to understand their concerns and also, whether they were willing to become a part of a team to work on those concerns. Between September

and November, over 100 Montrose residents were engaged in these conversations.

The challenge faced by young families in accessing affordable childcare was a theme heard over and over. Equally important, there were ten people who wanted to get together and go to work.

In January 2020, the Childcare Caucus was formed and held seven research actions, the third phase of the organizing cycle. Research actions are strategic meetings with agency leaders, city/county staff, someone with a specific area of expertise in order to learn about an issue. Through these meetings, the Childcare Caucus learned of the challenges faced by home childcare providers as they run a small business; about the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, and how another county had used an economic impact study to inform the changes in their community that could support families, providers and their local economy.

These research actions clarified an actionable issue. Partnering



with Bright Futures for Early Childhood and Families, UVA developed a plan to approach Montrose County and the city of Montrose to fund a childcare needs assessment to understand more concretely about parent's and provider's preferences and challenges as well as the impact of the childcare industry is having on the local economy.

Sadly, because of the pandemic, the fourth phase, the assembly was short-changed. UVA had to rely on email.

In November 2020, the Childcare Caucus entered into public action. Bright Futures was holding \$5,000 for such an assessment. The Caucus met

with Montrose County Commissioner Sue Hansen and then presented their proposal at a county work session. Montrose County committed \$15,000 toward the childcare needs assessment. The Childcare Caucus met with Montrose Mayor Barbara Bynum and presented their proposal at a city work session. On February 2, the Montrose City Council voted unanimously to invest \$18,950 in the childcare needs assessment, completing the necessary funds to contract the study.

On February 2, UVA celebrated its WIN! The slow, respectful work of the organizing cycle has paid off for UVA and for all of Montrose.

When Mesa County's Alliance fought for the GJ riverfront



by **Arn McConnell**
Communications
Coordinator

Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County spent over a decade working to ensure Grand Junction's Colorado Riverfront be quiet, clean, and unpolluted.

When entities could not provide

monies to secure property on the riverfront that was for sale, an industrial company that had the available funding bought it. The property was nearly all surrounded by parkland. Eagle Rim Park is across the river to the south, with Las Colonias Park and other park land adjacent.

Former Alliance Board Vice

President Penny Heuscher joined with members of Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County, including Janet Magoon, a school teacher and resident of Orchard Mesa with a clear view from her home of the Las Colonias site. Augmented by resources provided by Western Organization of Resource Councils, they built a formidable community group aimed at keeping industrial zoning off the riverfront.

Their road was uphill and winding and included many challenges — but ultimately, they were able to obtain mixed use zoning (retail and multi family) which ensured a more desirable way to develop this wonderful riverfront property. In 2019, the Grand Junction

City Council granted a request by a new owner to affirm the zoning for mixed use.

Many, many people contributed to this effort, but Heuscher, Magoon, Harry Griff, Bennett Boeschstein, and Candi Clark displayed special fortitude and perseverance to secure sensible land use policies and zoning for the Colorado Riverfront in Grand Junction. Many Alliance members (including Enno Heuscher and Claudette Konola) collected signatures enthusiastically, and the effort was buoyed by help and good wishes from people outside of Grand Junction.

The Riverfront Commission also deserves credit for their vision of a riverfront trail and greenway along our rivers.

