

**SPECIAL  
ISSUE!**

**PERSPECTIVES**

The 42nd Annual Conference of  
Western Colorado Alliance

**CLARION**

Vol. 42 No. 2 - Summer, 2020



# Crossing the national divide one conversation at a time



by **Jeriel Clark**  
Organizing Director

This summer, our Alliance is doing something different. We're going to connect to residents in our communities using our ears as our primary tool. It's called "deep listening," and we're finally getting started.

Recent years, made difficult in numerous ways, have widened the national political divide that was already growing. This division has seeped into our communities, clouding our daily conversations and interactions. We've forgotten that, while our lived experiences are diverse, we all have so much more in common than we have

in difference – a desire to love, be loved, protect our families, and have real opportunities to achieve the great American dream we've all been promised.

So, this summer, we're removing our own barriers and talking to our neighbors, our friends, and our community members. We're knocking on their doors, asking them to share their stories and how they connect to local issues that impact them the most right here at home. We're not going to tell them what we think, we're just going to listen. Our goal is to identify the root needs in our lives that, if addressed,

would create healthier and more supportive communities for us all.

We're going to connect with people who have historically not been asked what issues matter to them, those who have been overlooked by traditional outreach systems. These are people who may feel as though the democratic process doesn't respond to their needs and as a result, civic participation



or community engagement is not a priority for them. People who are in survival mode on a daily basis and struggle to self-advocate without time and resources. Maybe it's the single mom in the apartment down the hall, the family of five down the street working multiple jobs to make ends meet, or the single neighbor next door whose weeds have grown too tall because mobility is difficult, and money is tight. We want to knock on their doors this summer.

Beyond deep listening, we want to build trust among residents in our communities. After we have one-on-one conversations at their doors,

we'll invite them to neighborhood meetings later in the year, and we'll knock on their doors again in the fall to let them know what measures are on the ballot that may have a direct impact on the issues they identified as most important.

This is an "all hands on deck" effort, and we need you to make it work. We've got the tools and the plan — now we just need people. Maybe you've never knocked on a door, but you see the value in what we are attempting to do. We want as many folks as possible to know exactly what to expect so we can work together to create an army of ears.

## WANT TO HELP?

**We need members to join this effort!**

If you are interested, please contact one of these organizers for more information:

Mesa County:

**MARÍA LUIZA PERÉZ CHAVÉZ**  
maria@westerncoloradoalliance.org

Montrose County:

**BIANCA DIAZ**  
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Garfield County:

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# A shared vision to guide us forward



by **Andreya Krieves**  
Alliance Chair

Picture this: 500 people from across Colorado's Western Slope coming together for an event highlighting the power of grassroots organizing. The venue is packed with ordinary people from diverse identities and neighborhoods who are pumped up and ready to lead communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just, and self-reliant.

Can you see it?

This group is big and bursting with energy. There are babies in arms, kids, teenagers, working adults, and seniors sharing the space to support each other and to take action. While many may be holding signs or wearing shirts representing their latest project, they all belong together.

Can you hear it?

This group is loud, excited, and positively buzzing. People are sharing ideas and exchanging strategies. They are giving hugs and high-fives, collec-

tively building the stoke.

This isn't just a feel-good gathering. This is a powerful coalition convened to get stuff done. They work together knowing that a group 500 strong cannot be ignored. This group has the knowledge, skills, and power to influence decision makers and make the people's voices heard.

Sounds pretty good right about now, doesn't it?

This is a vision for Western Colorado Alliance's near future presented by Carol Keeney from the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance. It is a vision shared across our Alliance as we work on different projects across the Western Slope. It's a vision we share when it seems like new and ever higher hurdles appear on the landscape.

There's no denying that we're living in a time of historic change; a seemingly non-stop reel of events that rock us to our core with impacts that will be felt for generations. The list of injustices, battles to fight,

and wrongs to right can feel overwhelming. However, we know the antidote to helplessness is action that is taken one step, one conversation, and one person at a time.

Our Alliance has a new opportunity for members to take important steps toward this vision.

We've launched a deep listening and deep canvassing initiative in the next few months to connect us with the hearts and minds of those in our community to whom we don't normally talk. We'll be reaching out to listen, learn, and build bridges. We'll be taking steps toward building the diverse and bustling coalition that cannot be ignored.

Training and information sessions for Deep Listening /



Western Colorado Alliance  
Chair Andreya Krieves

Deep Canvassing are starting this summer across Western Colorado. It's a great time to get involved or re-engaged with our Alliance. The more people we have, the more powerful we'll be.

I hope to see you at an upcoming training session, or at our Annual Conference in August when we'll outline the process further. Let's take these steps toward our shared vision together!

# Members who have changed our world



by **Joel Dyar**  
Political Director

In the past two years, two Alliance members stand out for having won big policy reforms. Their stories are wonderful examples of what everyday people and an organization like ours can achieve.

Grand Junction resident Erica Kitzman is a mom and youth mental health advocate active in the local community. In 2019, Erica identified a serious gap in how Colorado provides suicide prevention services. State policy

had significantly neglected suicide postvention — important services at the individual and community level that are vital after a suicide attempt and in deterring future local attempts.

Erica worked with our Legislative Committee to connect with state lawmakers and with mental health policy stakeholders



around the state. From these conversations came several specific ideas that became House Bill 21-1119, Suicide Prevention, Intervention, & Postvention. Erica won bill sponsorship — legislators that introduce the bill — from Western Colorado Rep. Janice Rich, Sen. Don Coram, and Sen. Kerry Donovan.

The bill empowered a Youth Advisory Council to consult on Colorado mental health services. It changed the mission of the Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention to focus on suicide postvention alongside prevention. It created new information resources, service provider best practices, and front line school and first responder education.

The bill passed through several House and Senate committees, where Western Colorado Alliance youth and

*Continued on page 8*



**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

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## Our Alliance's Board of Directors

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Steve Allerton, Grand Junction

### Director Emeritus

Peggy Rawlins, Grand Junction

# An action-packed year at the Colorado Capitol



by Joel Dyar  
Political Director

In 2022, Colorado lawmakers were called to fight fires on multiple fronts. From an economy struggling through pandemic recovery to Colorado's cost-of-living crisis, our legislators stepped up with bold and, in many cases, bipartisan action across dozens of issue areas.

Western Colorado Alliance members were there with them along the way, helping to craft solutions for our families back home here.

## Economy and Affordability Bills

In 2021, legislators created several task forces to go deep on issues like housing and healthcare. They toured the state, worked on ideas, and produced several big bills this year.

**HB1006**, from Western Slope legislators Rep. Dylan Roberts and Sen. Kerry Donovan, reduces the cost of operating a childcare facility to lessen the childcare shortage.

**HB1282** targets Colorado's housing shortage by investing in \$40M of grants for Colorado businesses building prefabricated and nontraditional homes.



urban infill housing.

**SB086**, Homestead Exemption And Consumer Debt Protection, came from Western Colorado Alliance member Don Bell. (See **Members who have changed our world**, page 2). This bill raises Colorado's debt and bankruptcy protections to modern levels, improving the social safety net and allowing individuals to protect more of their wealth in the event of a crisis. This bill will change and save lives and we are

levels released into Colorado air and allows the state to set health-based limits.

**HB1345** tackles Perfluoroalkyl And Polyfluoroalkyl Chemicals, the common "PFAS" plastics that have shown up at alarming rates in human and animal tissues and waterways. This bill requires sellers of products to indicate PFAS content and bans a list of products.

**HB1348** requires the oil and gas industry to report the use of certain pollutants and creates a state website for the public to view these.

**HB1355** creates one the nation's most ambitious recycling programs. It creates a 13 member new board with industry, recycler, and local government stakeholders that will determine fees on the sale of recyclable products to fund integrated statewide recycling services.

## Western Colorado Issues

A number of bills tackled issues close to home here.

**HB1052**, led by Western Slope Rep. Barbara McLachlan, puts crisis services helpline information onto every school-issued student ID.

**HB1394**, led by Rep. Dylan Roberts and Sen. Kerry Donovan, allocates an additional \$15 million to help coal mining

communities transition their economies away from coal.

**HB1301**, from Rep. Dylan Roberts and Rep. Matt Soper, reclassifies large greenhouses in a more favorable tax category, encouraging greenhouse agriculture that is often more energy- and water-efficient.

**HB1327**, from Rep. McLachlan and Sen. Don Coram, funds a study into the troubled history of federal Indian boarding schools in Western Colorado and supports the exhumation of children buried at schools in collaboration with Colorado native governments.

**SB209**, from Rep. Roberts and Sen. Donovan, creates a grant and loan program for small livestock producers.

## Do Regular People Matter in Legislation?

The lengthy list of bills above is a testament to what a healthy, productive legislature can achieve. Critically, many of the ideas above came from Colorado residents asking legislators for solutions to practical, everyday problems. Many bills featured sponsoring legislators working across party lines. In some cases, big portions of bill content was written by everyday people themselves — including some of our Alliance members!

**HB1287** is a bill of rights for mobile home park tenants, many of whom have faced rapid cost increases.

**SB160** creates a revolving loan fund for mobile home park residents who wish to purchase their own park — a growing movement in Colorado.

**HB1304** (Rep. Dylan Roberts again) puts over \$150M to work with two new grant programs for affordable housing and

tremendously proud of all our members who took action and won its passage. Thank you.

## Pollution Bills

Since 2020, lawmakers have already acted on state greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets (80% by 2030) and clean energy. In 2022, they turned to air pollution and recycling issues.

**HB1244** requires emitters of certain air toxics to report chemicals and pollution

You can learn more about any of these bills by visiting  
**LEG.COLORADO.GOV**

After two years of Zoom and online meetings, our Alliance is thrilled to announce that we will be hosting the **42nd Annual Conference** of Western Colorado Alliance in person!

We hope you can join us **Saturday, August 20** at the **DoubleTree By Hilton** in Grand Junction for an Alliance reunion full of celebration, reflection and learning. The theme of this year's conference is **Perspectives**, where we will be lifting up stories and learnings from a summer's worth of deep listening conversations across Western Colorado.

As always, there will also be workshops to learn new skills, compelling stories to grow our minds and analysis, as well as honoring the hard work of our members and electing the leadership of our Alliance. **Please see below for details!**

At our last Conference, we committed to growing a grassroots movement in Western Colorado to build healthy, just, and self-reliant communities in the Western Slope. Together, we envisioned a day in the not-too-distant future, where 500 people of all different walks of life would join together in common purpose and action to affect change in our region. We look forward to continuing to build this vision with you and chart next steps together in August.



To register or for more information, visit  
[westerncoloradoalliance.org/annual-conference-2022](https://westerncoloradoalliance.org/annual-conference-2022)  
 or call  
**(970) 256-7650**

## WORKSHOPS

### ONE STORY, MANY AUTHORS

After knocking on doors through the summer, we've heard from residents across the West Slope about the issues impacting their lives. Now it's your turn. We'll ask questions about how the issues we've surfaced relate to you, how can our upcoming election address some of these needs, and ask what you hope our Alliance can do about it.

### FROM THE INSIDE OUT: ALLIANCE 101

We've organized in Western Colorado for 42 years, and our mission has shifted to meet evolving needs. Come meet with our leadership to learn more about our recent and ongoing work to create healthy, just, and self-reliant communities across Western Colorado through grassroots organizing and leadership development.

### A CLOSER LOOK

This workshop focuses on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity at home. The West Slope has a history of erasure, and it can be easy to forget the daily challenges others face. Who is it we've been talking to at the doors, and what do our communities and residents really look like when you take a closer look?

### STORIES THAT WON, STORIES THAT WIN

This workshop takes a look at three case studies of how Alliance members and staff have used powerful, authentic stories to win change from local elections to state legislation. Then we'll look to the future to plan how we can win on recent top local issues with you!

# Our 2023 Draft Platform

*From 1983 through 2017, Alliance members adopted resolutions at our annual conference to shape the organization's policy and issue work. While the resulting 100+ resolutions covered a wide range of topics, they did not easily convey our values and purpose which are bigger and more inspiring than any one issue or position.*

*At our 2016 annual conference, we adopted a resolution to transition from this resolution-based process to a platform that would be reviewed and reaffirmed each year.*

*The 2022 Platform was ratified at the Western Colorado Alliance's 41st Annual Conference on August 14, 2021.*

1. We believe in an authentic GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY where each one of us has an equal right and opportunity to impact public decisions that affect our lives, and where government is open, honest and responsive to the needs of the people. More specifically, we support:

a. Reducing the influence of moneyed interests in elections and the legislative process.

b. The protection of individual voting rights and fair representation practices (e.g., in drawing legislative district boundaries and in reforming the Electoral College).

c. The protection of a free press as an integral part of any democracy.

2. We believe that global CLIMATE CHANGE is the most important world-wide environmental crisis of our time. Science has shown that human activity is a major cause of climate change and, as such, we have an immediate and urgent responsibility to act to address its causes and impacts. We recognize that while climate change affects the entire world, it has a disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities and so any solution must be based in CLIMATE JUSTICE. Specifically, we support:

a. Pro-active policies, regulations, and practices that:

- promote biologic carbon sequestration (See also planks under Local Foods & Agriculture and Public Lands);

- minimize the emission of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases;

- minimize the environmental, economic and social impacts of climate change (climate justice); and

- foster societal and ecological resiliency to adapt to and survive climate change.

b. Genuine consideration of the cumulative impacts of climate change in all decision-making in every sector of our society.

3. We believe in the inalienable right of individuals and communities to a CLEAN AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT including air, water, land, and food supplies. More specifically, we support:

a. The protection of the world's water quality and availability, as well as the integrity of aquatic ecosystems.

b. The protection of our air quality, including the reduction of toxic emissions and those that contribute to climate change.

c. The principles of "reduce, reuse, share and recycle" to conserve the world's limited resources and limit the harmful effects of production and disposal of consumer products.

d. Establishing a program with adequate ongoing funding to clean up "legacy" pollution sources including orphaned oil and gas wells, abandoned mines and contaminated former industrial sites.

4. We believe in SOCIAL JUSTICE that respects human rights, uplifts all people to their potential and values everyone's participation in their communities and in decision-making processes. Our belief in Social Justice requires us to not only support equitable policies but also to eliminate systemic

oppression and racism. More specifically, we support:

a. Systems that equitably value the contributions and dignity of all workers, including the right to collective bargaining, substantial paid family and medical leave, and an adequate living wage.

b. A comprehensive approach to creating health equity that encompasses a wide range of social and economic factors such as education, social welfare, housing, income, environmental conditions, nutritious food, social and emotional health care, and universal access to health care.

c. Environmental justice policies that protect poor and minority communities from bearing an inordinate burden on their health from industrial development.

d. Comprehensive and thoughtful reform of our nation's immigration and refugee policies to reflect the values of the United Nations' Global Compact for Migration.

5. We believe in HOMEGROWN ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, reflected in a Western Slope that is home to diverse and resilient local economies that work for all of us while protecting the natural environment that makes our communities desirable places to live. To that end, we support policies and actions that:

a. Invest in local, community-based leaders to help communities plan and respond to changing economic conditions.

b. Invest in entrepreneurs and locally owned small businesses to grow diverse economic sectors that contribute to stronger, more resilient communities, improved public health, restored ecosystems and equitable opportunities for all people.

c. Provide a broad system of support for workers and viable pathways to quality, family-sustaining jobs.

d. Invest in physical and social infrastructure

to stimulate economic development and build a foundation for change.

e. Empower local communities by providing direct access to state and federal resources to make change possible.

6. We believe our communities have exciting opportunities to shape A SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FUTURE. We believe we can substantially reduce energy usage and, through the use of clean and renewable sources, reduce air pollution, eliminate the harmful effects of fossil fuel extraction, create new jobs and industries, and lessen our contribution to climate change. More specifically, we support:

a. Governmental policies that provide incentives for clean energy projects, and regulations that require/encourage energy conservation and efficiency practices in homes, transportation and industries.

b. Restructuring/scrapping of utility contracts that are prolonging fossil fuel use and discouraging increased renewables.

c. Regulation of public utilities in a manner that protects both consumer interests and environmental sustainability.

d. Proactive upgrades of energy delivery systems to anticipate changes in energy technology.

e. Distributed energy sources that are locally owned and small scale.

7. We believe that our nation's PUBLIC LANDS must be managed in ways that respect our collective histories and recognize the Native peoples who have called these lands home for millennia. These lands connect our cultures and communities and we all depend on them for a sustainable future. Public lands support healthy wildlife populations and their habitat and forests crucial to the health of our atmosphere. They protect the headwaters of many vital watersheds and

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# Our 2023 candidates

## Candidate for President:

### Andreya Krieves

Andreya Krieves has served as our Alliance's Board Chair since 2020 and has served on the board since 2016. Her professional background is in secondary education, having taught middle and high school in Colorado, Texas, and New York. Since moving to Grand Junction in 2013, she has worked on local campaign committees serving as Chair for the GJ Community Center Campaign and Volunteer Coordinator for the 2019 School District 51 Bond Campaign.

Andreya serves as one of our Alliance's representatives to the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) Board, and chairs the Grand Valley Parks and Recreation Foundation. Andreya enjoys exploring the outdoors with her husband and two young boys.



**Andreya Krieves**

## Candidate for Treasurer:

### Bill Wellman

Bill has served as our Alliance's Treasurer since 2020. Born and raised in North Carolina, Bill moved to the west in 1973 to work at Theodore Roosevelt NP in North Dakota. After a 41-year career with the National Park Service, he and his wife retired in Crawford, Colorado in 2012.

During his career, he served as superintendent of eight National Park units including Great Sand Dunes, Curecanti, and Black Canyon of the Gunnison here in Colorado. Most of the final years of his career were spent on the Mexican border at Organ Pipe Cactus NM and Big Bend NP, dealing with natural resource and international issues.



**Bill Wellman**

# Our 2023 Draft Platform

*Continued from page 5*

provide the safest refuge for essential biodiversity. These lands also sustain a strong and growing outdoor recreation economy that enhances everyone's quality of life and nourishes the human soul. More specifically, we:

a. Recognize that public lands are the ancestral territory of Indigenous peoples who have called them homes since time immemorial. For this reason, we insist on their involvement in the decision making for our public lands.

b. Insist that public lands remain public. Transfer of federal lands to states, or worse, private interests, compromises all of the values mentioned above.

c. Support responsible management of public lands that prioritizes ecological integrity and resilience of those lands and our climate.

d. Support maintaining the size and integrity of

existing wilderness areas, parks and monuments along with connecting wildlife corridors, as well as expanding such protections to other areas that have appropriate characteristics.

8. We believe that food production and marketing systems that prioritize LOCAL FOODS AND AGRICULTURE are best able to sustain healthy communities and economies, protect the environment and safeguard the rights of farm workers. The creation of a decentralized food system protects family and independent producers and processors who are the key to feeding local peoples with local foods. More specifically, we support:

a. Policies and practices that support soil health and regenerative agriculture to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, chemical use and water consumption, improve crop yields, drought and flood tolerance, and air and water quality.

b. An individual's rights to be able to make informed food choices through improved labeling on how and where their food is raised and processed.

c. Livestock production systems that are as humane as possible and minimize the need for antibiotics and other chemical intervention.

d. A Farm Bill that includes the programs and policies prioritized by the WORC Farm Bill Platform.

e. International trade and domestic policies that strengthen human and environmental health, food sovereignty, workers' rights and competitive marketplaces in all countries involved.

9. We believe that local communities should have a fair say in where, how, and if NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION occurs in their area, and that when these economic activities are permitted, they should employ

the best available technologies for protecting public and environmental health. Specifically, we support:

a. Comprehensive bonding and reclamation fees so impacted areas can be restored as much as possible to their pre-development conditions.

b. Requiring royalty payments from private industry that reflect the full worth of the public resource being extracted or harvested.

c. Stringently enforced regulation of all extractive practices using evidence-based safety and environmental standards, including setbacks from industrial activities and the emission of contaminants to air and water.

d. Transparent and inclusive processes for decision-making that genuinely and adequately address the concerns of the community in the final decision.

# Seeing the signs of healthy soil for ourselves



by Karen Rose  
Alliance Member

Farmer Lowell King welcomed us to the Soil Health Tour at his family’s farm on April 30 with a shovel in his hand. We were a group of about 30 from Mesa, Eagle, and Montrose counties at the King farm to learn about soil health and regenerative farming. Farmer King was holding the shovel because, as he says, it’s better to show, not tell, how regenerative farming works.

To do that he gave us our own shovels, and invited us to dig up some of the healthy soil in his fields. He let us see for

ourselves the abundant organic content, the strong root growth, and the well-fed worms that characterize good healthy soil on a regenerative farm. The soil was dark and moist and earthy smelling, roots were abundant, and worms were easy to find. Farmer King attributes that to his regenerative growing practices.

In brief, regenerative agriculture is about bringing soil into a state of natural good health and keeping it there season after season. Healthy soil has plenty of organic matter and is filled with life -- from worms to fungus to bacteria and much, much more -- all of it a part

of an elaborate ecosystem that feeds and is fed by the plants, and keeps both thriving.

Regenerative agriculture works on five basic principles. Often first mentioned is **KEEPING THE SOIL COVERED** with plants like cover crops, which prevents erosion, keeps the soil at an even temperature, and preserves moisture. **MINIMIZING SOIL DISTURBANCE** is usually achieved by the practice of “no-till,” which preserves the soil structure (“tilth”) and provides homes for the soil’s living organisms. **MAXIMIZING DIVERSITY** by planting different types of crops, or rotating them, is the best way to provide the soil organisms and plants with the diverse nutrients they need. **KEEPING LIVING ROOTS IN THE SOIL** means never leaving the soil bare to dry out, blow away, or starve soil organisms of the sugars that roots supply. And finally **INTEGRATING LIVESTOCK** completes the natural cycle of soil and plant life by providing fertility and the essential stimulus of grazing.

Healthy soil grows healthy plants, which need fewer chemical “inputs” like fertilizer and pesticides. The plants in turn feed the soil microorganisms, maintaining the critical ecological balance between them. Healthy soil also retains water much better—important in our dry climate—and benefits us in myriad other ways including

improving the nutritional content of the plants we eat, and often increasing a grower’s yields while decreasing input costs.

Thanks to farmers like Lowell King, the word is getting out about regenerative agriculture and its practices of incorporating



Farmer and rancher Lowell King demonstrates some of the principles of good soil health to a crowd of 30+ people.

cover crops and no-till planting techniques on large farms. Our attendees were impressed by what they saw and learned at the King family Farm Tour. And several were interested in finding out more about how the same concepts could be applied on smaller farms, and in their own backyard gardens.

Here at Western Colorado Alliance we plan to explore these ideas and questions at future events including more farm and garden tours. Please join us on this exciting journey!

# Cleaning up oil & gas's legacy in Western Colorado



by **Brian Williams**  
Regional Organizer

Thanks to the hard work of our Alliance's membership, Colorado is once again leading the way toward a healthier, safer, more responsible way of developing oil and gas in our state. In March, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) adopted new rules increasing the number of money operators set aside to clean up their oil and gas wells at the end of their productive life.

Plugging a well and reclaiming the land it was drilled on is an essential end final step to prevent the venting of toxic chemicals and climate-warming methane into our air, as well as to protect our water and soil from contamination. However, plugging and reclamation is expensive, costing tens of thousands of dollars per well. This has led to many operators walking away from their mess, leaving it for the public to live with the consequences and foot the bill for cleaning it up.

With input from our Alliance, the COGCC has taken several steps to solve this problem in Colorado. Operators are required to set aside the full cost of plugging and reclaiming most low-producing wells, establish a timeline for the



cleanup of potentially 10,000 such wells, and apply these new state rules to wells and sites on federally-owned lands. The rules also require the bonding of high-risk wells transferred between operators, and bolster the state's orphan well fund through operator-paid fees.

While the success our Alliance experienced is historical, opportunities to further improve the COGCC's financial assurance rules remain. In particular,

broad discretion still exists for the COGCC to approve permits for operators without clear and convincing evidence of their financial health. Also problematic is the existence of blanket bonds that allow large operators to have an unlimited number of oil and gas wells despite the bond amount potentially covering just a fraction of the price of clean-up.

Despite these challenges, Colorado and our Alliance have

taken major steps to protect public health, safety, welfare, wildlife, and the environment. Looking forward, the COGCC needs to substantially increase its staff to enforce its new regulations, and the state legislature must create an enterprise fund for the orphaned well program's finances. Our Alliance is looking forward to monitoring the state's progress, and doing our part to hold both operators and decision-makers accountable.

## Members who have changed our world

*Continued from page 2*

members testified, and was passed by both chambers and signed by the Governor.

Don Bell is another Alliance member who's made a big difference. Don is a bankruptcy attorney who helps Western Colorado residents encountering bankruptcy as a result of medical bills, job loss, and limited senior income.

Don was acutely aware of how poor Colorado's debt and bankruptcy protections are relative to modern living costs and the rest of the country. The National Consumer Law Center had given Colorado a "D" grade on these protections.

Don got together with a similarly-minded group of public-spirited bankruptcy attorneys and started working on some policy ideas. The group spent two years attempting



to speak with legislators and preparing a bill but hit several big political walls, including opposition from debt collection companies.

In 2021, Don's working group came to Western Colorado Alliance to begin developing a political strategy to create and pass a bill. We connected Don to several statewide stakeholders and influential legislators to get the bill ready. Together, Don worked with our Legislative Committee to create a storytelling campaign around the bill that saw Western Slope residents testify before important committee hearings and to mobilize hundreds of locals to contact their legislators.

Despite strong opposition from companies that profit from debt collections, the bill won some bi-partisan support from the Western Slope delegation and passed handily. Reps. Janice Rich, Dylan Roberts, Barbara

McLachlan, and Julie McCluskie voted for the bill. Reps. Matt Soper and Marc Catlin voted against it. Sens. Don Coram and Kerry Dovan voted yes. Sen. Bob Rankin voted no.

Erica and Don's stories are shining examples of how our democracy is supposed to work. Organizations like Western Colorado Alliance, where large numbers of everyday people get together to build power, are a key cornerstone of democratic policymaking.

Neither Erica nor Don could have won the change they wanted to see without the kind financial support of members like you, our professional staff, and all of you who answered the call to action to support their bills.