

## 2023 SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE ISSUE!

Check out the **LAWMAKER DIRECTORY** on pages 4 & 5!

# A decisive year at the Colorado Capitol



by **Joel Dyar**  
Political Director

At this point, Colorado stands one third of the way through our annual state legislative session. Hundreds of bills are flying through committees, floor readings, mock-ups, and votes. Western Colorado’s seven State Representatives and four State Senators are doing their darndest to represent and fight for our many needs amidst 89 other lawmakers from other parts of the state.

This year’s session may have started slower than normal, but one thing is clear — this will be a decisive year for Colorado.

The life-changing impacts of the COVID pandemic are, at least for now, fading into our rearview mirror. The transformative legislation of recent years on healthcare costs, climate pollution reduction, overhauls of Colorado’s social and behavioral health services systems, and cost of living relief is taking hold. Voters’ passage of 2022 ballot items including a large new state affordable housing fund and healthy meals for school students have brought funding and stability to those vital aspects of life. The passage at the 2022 ballot of yet another state income tax reduction means that the legislature is wrestling with \$400M in cuts and virtually no discretionary funds for new policy ideas and public needs.

These shifts herald a legislative session unlike anything we’ve seen in years. This session looks to be defined by a few major, seminal pieces of legislation — among them new oil and gas regulations and next-generation policies on decarbonization and reducing climate pollution - alongside several smaller pieces of legislation that do their best to advance solutions on key issues without costing much if anything.

Here are the highlights so far:

### SB23-006 | Rural Opportunity Office

From a stellar bi-partisan lineup of Western Colorado lawmakers Sen. Dylan Roberts, Sen. Janice Rich, Rep. Marc Catlin, and Rep. Barbara McLachlan, this bill streamlines a host of state programs, grants, and technical assistance towards a single coordinating office.

The bill codifies a Rural Opportunity Office and tasks it with helping communities better access resources for coal community transition, rural economic development, small business growth, and other rural social development needs.

### SB23-016 | Greenhouse Gas Emission Reduction Measures

This sweeping omnibus bill, from Colorado’s famous MIT and

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# Our Alliance's "unlikely power centers"



by **Andrey Krieves**  
Alliance Chair



On the event of this, our annual legislative issue, we find the Colorado Assembly at an unusual moment in its history, as you can read in Political Director Joel Dyar's legislative run-down elsewhere in this issue of the Clarion.

But while we know there is important business for our Alliance inside the Capitol, we're also mindful that much of our work on behalf of healthy, just, and self-reliant Western Colorado communities is enacted far from the corridors of power.

For instance, in this issue, you'll also read some facts about the deep listening work we have engaged in for much of the past year — and that work continues as we move past simple door-knocking and begin a series of local community meetings in three counties to determine what problems are going unaddressed by politicians, and what we can do about them as a community.

Our work as an Alliance takes us other places not typically thought of as power centers as

well — like the halls of local high schools, where the students of West Slope Youth Voice (WSYV) are beginning to poll their classmates and getting students registered to vote. You can read more about the numerous activities of WSYV in organizer Tyler McDermott's story elsewhere in this issue.

Whether in the halls of a high school or the Colorado State Capitol, our Alliance is on the move in 2023. We look forward to pushing forward with you at our side.

## A decisive year at the Colorado Capitol

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Oxford graduate **Senator Chris Hansen**, introduces a package of next generation climate action policies. Large insurance companies in Colorado are required to assess and publish climate risks to their operations, as is PERA, Colorado's large public employees retirement fund. The bill updates Colorado's greenhouse gas emission reduction goals to add a 65% reduction goal for 2035, an 80% reduction goal for 2040, and a 90% reduction goal for 2045 compared to 2005 pollution levels. And in a small and significant provision, the bill creates income tax reduction credits for the purchase of electric lawnmowers.

### HB23-1005 | New Energy Improvement Program Changes

This bill expands Colorado's Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (CPACE) program to offer up-front financing options for building and agricultural property improvements that make properties more climate change, wildfire, and earthquake resilient.

### HB23-1003 | School Mental Health Assessment

This bill creates an option for middle and high schools to offer student mental health assessments, just as many schools offer dental and vision health assessments. Qualified healthcare providers are selected by the Department of Public Health and Environment. Where student mental health needs are identified, students and parents are referred to resources with some key important exceptions for protecting student privacy.

### SB23-162 | Increase Access To Pharmacy Services

This bill from Western Colorado **Senator Perry Will** takes aim at the frightening pace of rural and semi-rural pharmacy closures with provisions that empower supervised pharmacy technicians to perform more work and services.

### To Be Introduced: Oil and Gas Reform Bills

Several new bills on oil and gas industry regulation include provisions that 1) require reporting on water use by industry operations and

encourage recycled water use; 2) allow residents who document environmental safety noncompliance by oil and gas operations to access more concrete and responsive investigations of their evidence by regulators; 3) empowering the Colorado Oil & Gas Conservation Commission to regulate a type of well that would allow carbon from oil and gas operations to be stored underground.

### Our Work and Growing Lobby Trips!

Today the Western Colorado Alliance Legislative Committee, made up of volunteer members, is working hard to track and make sense of hundreds of bills. We digest new bills, dig deep into research, chat with legislators, suggest improvements, vote on priorities, and offer every day people ways to make a difference on key priority moments during the legislative session. We've already won some big changes to bills that will help build the healthy, just, and self-reliant Western Colorado communities our families deserve.

For decades, Western Colorado

Alliance has brought our membership to the capitol in Denver each year to discuss key bills, values and priorities face to face with our legislators. This year, we've grown so big that we need two trips! **This last week of February, Alliance staff will journey to Denver with our West Slope Youth Voice leaders, followed by an adult Lobby Trip the first week of March.** Look out for email updates with photos, videos, and reports from these big upcoming trips.

### Where is the Western Slope Delegation?

Legislative power — and the ability to get our priorities heard — often comes down to committee power. Thanks to years of untiring work, several Western Colorado legislators of both parties have risen to command important committee and leadership positions that we want to celebrate. We're grateful for their service and their willingness to often work across party lines. Collectively, our delegation is now able to cover most of the vital

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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.

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## Mental health care is on the mind at West Slope Youth Voice

 by Tyler McDermott  
Regional Organizer

While West Slope Youth Voice (WSYV)'s annual survey of student issues is still being collected and compiled, a key topic has yet again risen to the top — access to youth mental and physical health care. This has consistently been a priority for the WSYV students, and it has been for a reason.

Youth mental healthcare has been woefully inadequate across the state, resulting in some of the highest rates of youth suicide anywhere in the country. This has been a prominent problem in the Western Slope.

Exacerbating the high suicide rates is the fact that access to mental health care is hard to come by, with many communities starved for affordable therapists and open crisis care beds. These issues, combined with social stigma and an increased use of social media, are helping to fuel one of the top 5 leading causes of death of young people — suicide.

For years, our students have made significant gains on this front, supporting bills that require the creation of a resource bank for mental health education literacy, and that allow students to take up to five excused absences a year due to mental and behavioral health concerns.

In the 2021 session, the Colorado State Legislature passed House Bill 21-1258 which established the I Matter program that provides access to mental health and substance use disorder services for youth aged 18 and under or 21 and under if they receive special education services and allocated \$9 million to cover the costs. That program has been very successful, and provides for up to six free therapy sessions for youth that are reimbursed to

therapists through the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration. But there is still much to be done, as the I Matter program is mainly an online service that students access through tablets and computers and misses some of the human element and lacks a screening program meaning only students who seek the care out have access.

One bill set to be voted on in 2023 that our students plan to lobby for is **House Bill 23-1003**, the School Mental Health Assessment bill, that would create a system for yearly, voluntary mental health assessments for students in sixth grade up to seniors in high school. These assessments would be conducted through the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and would only take place in schools who opt into the program.

Schools that do choose to participate would be required to issue written notice to parents within the first two weeks of school starting so parents can make the decision if they wish for their child to be evaluated for mental and/or behavioral health issues. (Although parental consent is preferred, Colorado state law gives children aged 12 and up the right to consent to assessments and health care on their own.)

Our students feel strongly that this bill will help to close the gap in access and give students the ability to seek the help they need, when they need it.

### Local Healthcare Efforts

More locally, the school board of School District 51 (SD51) has recently taken up the topic of school based health care as the plans for the new Grand



2022 West Slope Youth Voice intern **Kenya Contreras** addressed a packed house on behalf of a health care clinic at Grand Junction High School at a special school board meeting on February 21, 2023.

Junction High School (GJHS) are being hammered out.

Within the existing building plans for the school are several thousand square feet set aside for a school based health center, much like what students already have in Central High School with their highly successful Warrior Wellness Center. The program at Central is a partnership between the school and Marillac Clinic, just like what is proposed at the new GJHS, and has been in place since the start of the school year of 2020. The program has since provided nearly 5,000 medical, dental, mental, and behavioral health services to over 2,000 students including over 1,000 depression screenings. This is of particular importance in a school district like SD51, where there are many students living in poverty and a higher than average number of students eligible for Medicaid and Child Health Plan Plus who otherwise may not have any access to health care services.

The school board has expressed several concerns, including that accessing services through the school based health care system in the summer months may not be possible. However, this is something that would be determined by a planning committee the school board would later create.

The students of WSYV stand in support of approving the GJHS health clinic, as the concerns are far outweighed by the community benefits the program would offer.

Several of our students have interacted with Central's Warrior Wellness program or have peers who have taken advantage of the health care offered. To them, it has become an indispensable part of the school. Schools which offer access to affordable and readily available health care has been proven to help alleviate some of the greater mental, behavioral, and physical health issues facing us here on the Western Slope.

**As the students are preparing to head to the Capitol on February 28 for their annual Lobby Day, they look forward to meeting with the sponsors of House Bill 23-1003 School Mental Health Assessment and urging its passage, as well as having continued conversations about the need for expanded funding for school based health care programs like we have the opportunity to obtain in Mesa County.**

If you, or someone you know, is struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call the National Hotline at

**988**

## Western Colorado Alliance's offices have moved!

Western Colorado Alliance has moved! While our old Commerce Blvd. headquarters served us well for three years, we are extremely excited to be back in downtown Grand Junction again!

Our new address is:

601 North 1st Street, Grand

Junction, CO 81501

(Some long-time Grand Junction residents will recognize this building as the old 1st Street Pizza Hut location.)

In addition to a much more accessible location, our new offices also offer new meeting

and organizational possibilities, so don't be surprised if you see a lot more in-person events at our new location!

We'll host a more formal open house event sometime in the spring. (Watch for that announcement.) And please feel free to drop by and check out our new space!



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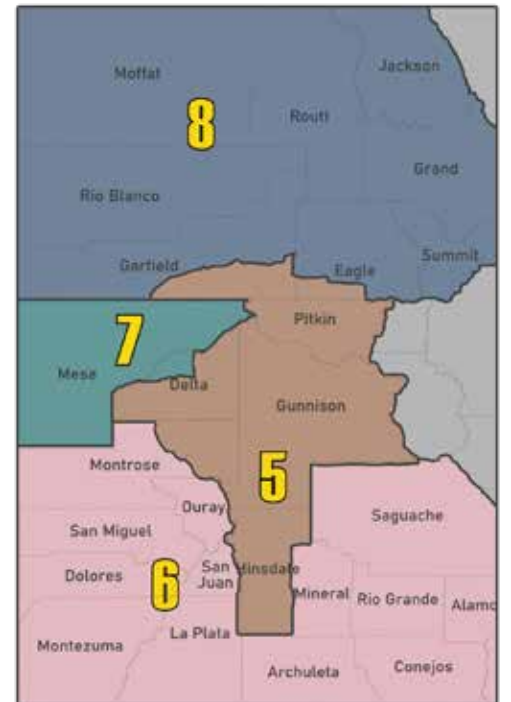
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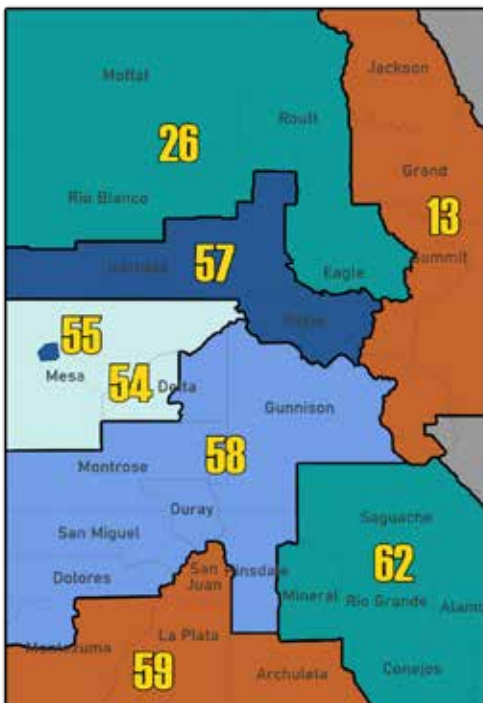
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Note: Contact information is from www.leg.state.co.us. The information is accurate as of Feb. 2023.

### AGRICULTURE, WATER & NATURAL RESOURCES

**CHAIR:** McCormick; **VICE-CHAIR:** Catlin; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Holtorf, Lindsay, Luck, Lukens, Martinez, McLachlan, Parenti, Story, Titone, Velasco, Winter

### APPROPRIATIONS

**CHAIR:** Sirota; **VICE-CHAIR:** Bird; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, R. Bockenfeld, Boesenecker, Bottoms, Bradley, Frizell, Herod, Jodeh, Velasco

### BUSINESS AFFAIRS & LABOR

**CHAIR:** Amabile; **VICE-CHAIR:** Ricks; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Armagost, English, Frizell, Lieder, Lindstedt, Mabrey, Mauro, Taggart, Weinberg

### EDUCATION

**CHAIR:** McLachlan; **VICE-CHAIR:** Martinez; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Bacon, Bradfield, Hamrick, Hartsook, Lukens, Michaelson Jenet, Pugliese, Wilson, Young

### ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

**CHAIR:** Kipp; **VICE-CHAIR:** Willford; **OTHER MEMBERS:** DeGraaf, Dickson, Evans, Froelich, Valdez, Velasco, Vigil, Weissman, Winter



### FINANCE

**CHAIR:** Snyder; **VICE-CHAIR:** Joseph; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Daugherty, Frizell, Hartsook, Kipp, Lindstedt, Marshall, Taggart, Weinberg, deGruy Kennedy

### HEALTH & INSURANCE

**CHAIR:** Daugherty; **VICE-CHAIR:** deGruy Kennedy; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Brown, Garcia, Hartsook, Lieder, McCormick, Ortiz, Soper, Titone, Weinberg

### JUDICIARY

**CHAIR:** Weissman; **VICE-CHAIR:** Bacon; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Armagost, Daugherty, Epps, Evans, Garcia, Luck, Marshall, Sharbini, Snyder, Soper, Woodrow

### PUBLIC & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

**CHAIR:** Michaelson Jenet; **VICE-CHAIR:** Young; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Amabile, Bradfield, Bradley, English, Gonzales-Gutierrez, Hamrick, Holtorf, Jodeh, Story

### STATE, CIVIC, MILITARY, & VETERANS AFFAIRS

**CHAIR:** Woodrow; **VICE-CHAIR:** Ortiz; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Armagost, Boesenecker, Bottoms, Brown, DeGraaf, Epps, Ricks, Sharbini, Willford

### TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**CHAIR:** Froelich; **VICE-CHAIR:** Lindstedt; **OTHER MEMBERS:** Boesenecker, Catlin, Dickson, Lindsay, Mabrey, Mauro, Parenti, Taggart, Vigil, Wilson, Winter

# Our Alliance hears from local farmers



by **Paula Knighton**  
Alliance Member

What do you get when you bring together more than 30 ranchers, farmers, producers, and consumers from Montrose, Delta, and Mesa Counties to talk about the problems they face? On November 29, 2022, Western Colorado Alliance organizer Nick Allan was about to find out, as he gave the 2022 Western Colorado Alliance Agricultural Workshop into order.

In the past few years, the Alliance's Local Food and Agriculture Committee has worked with local farmers and ranchers to achieve big victories for family farms in Western Colorado. In the past few years, they worked with state legislators and community leaders on both sides of the aisle to achieve the Cottage Foods Act and Animal Shares legislation, both of which make it possible for local growers and producers to sell locally.

Wanting some clarification on what local farmers and ranchers need the Alliance to work on for 2023 and the future, Nick and committee members Adriane Moline and Karen Rose organized the 2022 Western Colorado Alliance Agriculture Workshop. They contacted and invited as many ranchers, farmers, producers, and consumers from the Montrose, Delta, and Mesa County areas as they could to join them in



Western Colorado Alliance Local Food & Agriculture Committee member **Adriane Moline** addressed more than 30 local farmers, ranchers, and consumers as part of our Alliance's 2022 Agricultural Workshop.

the workshop and share their concerns, needs, and ideas for the farming community.

The workshop was a great success with about 30 local people joining us. We broke into groups and tried to narrow down our most serious concerns. There were a lot of suggestions, and everyone was very willing to present their ideas.

We also had a speaker, John Miller, the State Soil Health Program Coordinator, tell us about programs to aid farmers and ranchers in improving their productivity by improving their soils. This is a fairly new program, so they are still setting it up and figuring out financing support and programs that will most benefit Colorado farmers.

After his talk and lunch, we all gathered to discuss what our smaller groups thought was important. So many ideas! There

was no way we could narrow it down and come up with a plan by the end of the workshop. But we had a lot of welcome input and scheduled several Zoom meetings for follow-up.

There was a lot of support for the phrase Nick used in his 2023 Local Food Operating Plan, (which is a compilation from the workshop and the Zoom meetings): "Local food feeding local people." There was also a lot of concern for making local food available to lower-income people, and as outreach to young people "assisting the next generation of farmers." Young farmers need help with getting access to resources and navigating government paperwork for starters.

The primary goals from all the feedback we received:

- Expand market access by building stronger relation-

ships between producers and low-income consumers.

- Leverage resources to assist current and next-generation producers.
- Advocate for agricultural land protections
- Meet with county commissioners in each county — Delta, Montrose, and Mesa.

Further discussion brought up that Proposition FF had passed in the November election, extending the Covid-era state rule giving all Colorado kids free lunch and encouraging the use of made-from-scratch meals using locally sourced food. We are hoping we can help financially, and provide training, equipment, and farmer access to help the schools actually prepare locally grown healthy food to feed all students.

## Mr. Allan goes to Washington

Our Homegrown Prosperity organizer, **Nick Allan**, has experienced a blur of excitement in the past few months. In December, Nick joined **United Today Stronger Tomorrow** for a meeting with White House advisers to discuss how Inflation Reduction Act monies can benefit our community.

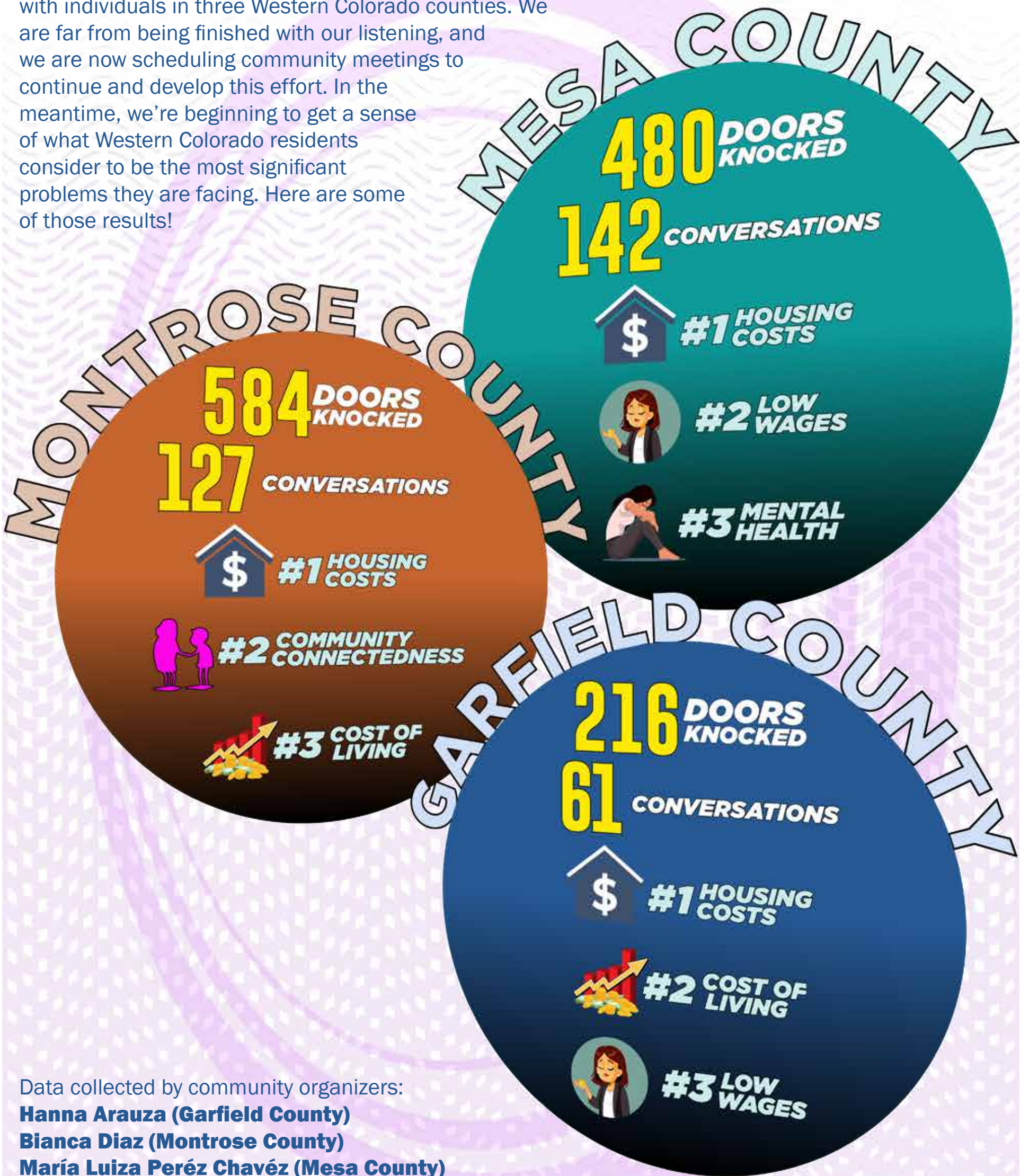
While in Washington, who should Nick run into but **Lili Flanigan**, our own former **West Slope Youth Voice** intern, who's currently working with Senators Hickenlooper and Bennet!

Then, just a few short weeks after returning from Washington, Nick embarked on a new adventure when he and his wife introduced their first daughter, Rose, to the world! Congratulations to Nick and Casey — and welcome to little Rose!



# What we're hearing in our "deep listening"

Since Spring of last year, our Alliance has been engaged in an unprecedented campaign of "deep listening" to determine what problems our communities are facing. We've been trying to speak to people who are typically ignored by decision makers. In the course of this deep listening push, we've had hundreds of conversations with individuals in three Western Colorado counties. We are far from being finished with our listening, and we are now scheduling community meetings to continue and develop this effort. In the meantime, we're beginning to get a sense of what Western Colorado residents consider to be the most significant problems they are facing. Here are some of those results!



Data collected by community organizers:  
**Hanna Arauza (Garfield County)**  
**Bianca Diaz (Montrose County)**  
**María Luiza Pérez Chavéz (Mesa County)**

Want to know more about our deep listening program?  
 Contact **Jeriel Clark** at  
[jeriel@westerncoloradoalliance.org](mailto:jeriel@westerncoloradoalliance.org).

## Moratoriums threaten utility-scale solar on the Western Slope



by Tyler McDermott  
Regional Organizer

In recent months, the West Slope has been a hotbed of solar activity. In just the past year, new utility-scale solar projects have been approved in numerous Western Colorado counties: The 150-acre Nannie Blaine Solar Park near the Grand Junction Airport in Mesa County; a solar farm just south of Parachute in Garfield County; the Garnet Mesa Solar Project located in Delta County; and (the largest of all) the 1,052-acre, 140-megawatt Falcon Road Solar Farm located near Olathe in Montrose County. Altogether, these projects are expected to provide power for over 100,000 homes. All were approved or filed for approval in 2022.

But there has been a surprising amount of pushback from some County Commissioners — despite the tens of millions of dollars these projects will bring in through property tax revenue, job creation, and cheaper, more locally produced energy for their ratepayers (not to mention the climate and air quality consequences of shifting from gas/oil/coal to renewable, clean sources of power).

In March 2022, the Garnet Mesa Solar Project was on the fast-track to approval, having met all of the requirements of Delta County's Land Use Code and the requirements set by not just the County but by their rural electric cooperative, Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA). DMEA had worked closely with Guzman Energy, the group in charge of designing and installing the solar array, to ensure the energy needs of their service area were being met and the concerns of the local community around the aesthetics of having a large solar field as a neighbor were heard and addressed.

However, upon the conclusion of the March meeting to assess the project, DMEA, Guzman Energy, and the community were shocked when the commissioners voted 2-1 to deny the application based on concerns about land usage.

Commissioners raised concerns over the fact that Delta County was surrendering too much acreage of high-quality, arable agricultural land to a solar farm. Many saw this as an attempt to thwart a proposal that had met all of the standards set

by the County's Land Use Code. There was substantial community uproar over the denied proposal, and Guzman Energy with DMEA went back to the drawing board and returned with a first-in-the-West-Slope plan to turn the plot into not just a photovoltaic farm, but one that had irrigation and allowed 1,000 sheep to graze in the shade provided by the panels in a practice called agrivoltaics.

Commissioners reconvened in August to hear the revised proposal before a packed room of residents, most of whom were in support of the project. Commissioners had no choice but to approve the project. At the end of the day, the Commissioners voted 3-0 to approve it. But that wasn't the end of the opposition.

Just two weeks later, the Commissioners met again and implemented a moratorium on all new utility-scale solar projects in the county for six months. Commissioner Wendell Koontz had initially proposed a 12-month moratorium, but Commissioners Don Suppes and Mike Lane both said they believed a 12-month moratorium would be an

unnecessary barrier to development. However there is still a chance that the moratorium could be extended.

Next door, in Montrose County, a similar story was playing out. Just weeks after Enel Green Energy made a proposal for the massive Falcon Road Solar Farm south of Olathe, the Montrose County Commissioners passed another moratorium on new utility-scale solar projects for six months "or until appropriate facility standards are incorporated into the Montrose County zoning regulation."

The West Slope is poised to become a standard bearer in locally-produced and controlled energy. But twice now, we have seen West Slope County Commissions take this same step to delay or halt the approval of new utility-scale solar projects. The solar moratoriums in Delta and Montrose are set to expire in March and April of this year respectively. Our hope is that County Commissioners on the West Slope do the right thing — create more opportunity for utility-scale solar, not less.

## A decisive year at the Colorado Capitol

*Continued from page 2*  
committees that impact our lives.

**Senator Dylan Roberts** (Steamboat) is now Chair of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. Roberts also serves on the Local Government and Housing Committee, Judiciary Committee, and Committee on Legal Services.

**Senator Perry Will** (Rifle) serves on the Health and Human Services Committee and Business, Labor, and Technology Committee.

**Senator Janice Rich** (Grand Junction) serves on the Education Committee, Health and Human Services Committee, and Local Government and Housing Committee.

**Senator Cleave Simpson** (Alamosa) serves on the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, the vital Finance committee, the Transportation and Energy

Committee, and the Capital Development Committee.

**Representative Julie McCluskie** (Dillon) secured a winning majority to serve as the State House Speaker, becoming the first from our region in over 20 years.

**Representative Meghan Lukens** (Steamboat) is serving on the Agriculture, Water, and Natural Resources Committee, alongside the Education Committee.

**Representative Elizabeth Velasco** (Avon) serves on the vital Appropriations Committee, the Agriculture Water, and Natural Resources Committee, and the Energy and Environment Committee.

**Representative Rick Taggart** (Grand Junction) serves on the Finance Committee, Business Affairs and Labor Committee, and Transportation, Local Government, and Housing Committee.

**Representative Matt Soper** (Delta) is Vice Chair of the Committee on Legal Services and serves on the Health and Insurance Committee and Judiciary Committee.

**Representative Marc Catlin** (Montrose) is Vice Chair of the Agriculture, Water, and Natural Resources Committee and serves on the Transportation, Local

Government, and Housing Committee as well as the Capital Development Committee.

**Representative Barbara McLachlan** is Chair of the Education Committee — a big deal for a rural legislator — and also serves on the Agriculture, Water, and Natural Resources Committee.

**Together, we make change.**

COME LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR WORK WITH  
**THE COLORADO LEGISLATURE**

AT AN **alliance 101**  
EVENT!

Come see how our Alliance works! Alliance Political Director Joel Dyar will be joined by some special guests and will explain how our Alliance lobbies and works with the Colorado Legislature to fashion new laws.

This is a free, online event.



**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 6 PM**

Register with the QR code or at:  
<https://bit.ly/alliance-101-legislature>

