Colorado's Evolution Toward Marriage Equality Has Been Incremental, But Quick

By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 26, 2015
Current and former Colorado state Democratic lawmakers are praising the U.S. Supreme Court's decision legalizing same sex marriage nationwide. In the 5-4 decision, the court ruled that same-sex couples have a right to marry under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.
"Today is an amazing day for America and equality, said
Democratic former Speaker of the House Mark Ferrandino, who served as Colorado’s first gay speaker and helped pass a bill to make civil unions legal in the state. "I knew we would get to this day in my life time, but never thought it would come so quickly. I am so proud of our nation's ability to move towards full equality for all people. The work is not done to end all discrimination but today was a gigantic step forward."

Construction Changes to Cause Loss of Pueblo Levee Mural Sooner than Expected

By SHANNA LEWIS • JUN 24, 2015
A lot of dirt needs to get moved to repair the Arkansas River levee in Pueblo, and plans for the repairs are changing so that dirt can be put to use on other projects. Those changes may affect efforts to preserve historic sections of the murals painted on the levee.
Originally plans called for reducing the height of the levee by 12 feet in phases, but now other projects can use the dirt quicker than first thought. Pueblo Conservancy District consulting engineer Kim Kock said that means they need to keep moving forward.

Colorado's IUD Program Remains Confident On Continuing, Still Seeking State Support

By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 24, 2015
Despite state lawmakers failing to pass a bill to fund the effort, a program to provide long acting reversible birth control to young, low-income women in Colorado is being extended for another year. The long acting contraceptives, according to state figures, have helped cut teen pregnancy rates in the state by 40 percent. Abortions have gone down too.
High Water Levels Prompt State Park Restrictions

Record-breaking rains leading to high water levels have prompted Colorado Parks and Wildlife to restrict access in some recreational areas.

Boat ramps, shoreline access points and parking areas are limited at Lake Pueblo State Park. The department isn’t sure when they’ll reopen.

Near Lake George, the South Platte River is running usually high, resulting in the closure of Spinney Mountain State Park’s river access lot. The department is discouraging fishing along many areas of the river.

From the Statehouse to the Ballotbox

By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 18, 2015
It's been more than a month since Colorado lawmakers wrapped up their annual legislative session at the state capitol, but the work is far from over. Many of the bills that failed this year will likely be back next year, and some long-standing issues may already be poised to go before voters in 2016. "I've worked on issues that have taken a couple of years to get through," said Representative Don Coram (R-Montrose).

Shooks Run Planning Kicks Off With Meeting

By MADELEINE SCHMIDT • JUN 17, 2015
The City of Colorado Springs is looking at the future of Shooks Run, a corridor located east of downtown between Fountain Creek and Patty Jewett Golf Course. The first of several public workshops takes place on Thursday, kicking off a 16-month collaborative planning process called Envision Shooks Run. The project will create a plan to address issues like drainage, multi-modal transportation, and urban planning to help improve infrastructure and enhance the corridor.

Survey: Nearly 14% of Colorado Adults Use Pot

By MADELEINE SCHMIDT • JUN 16, 2015
In a newly released survey, the state Health Department says nearly 14% of Colorado adults currently use marijuana. Of those who currently use pot, one third use it every day. About 19 percent drove after using. Slightly more than half of Colorado adults have never tried marijuana.

The survey also showed young adults aged 18 to 24 are ten times more likely to use pot than older adults over the age of 65.

**Record Breaking Rain in Colorado Springs; Sandbags Available**

By ANDREA CHALFIN • JUN 16, 2015
The National Weather Service in Pueblo says Colorado Springs received a record breaking 3.16 inches of rain Monday. The old record, set more than a century ago in 1914, was 2.27 inches. The record-breaking day comes after a record-breaking month of May, which, for the most part, removed southern Colorado from lingering drought conditions.

Colorado Supreme Court: Yes, You Can Fire Someone Over MMJ

By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 15, 2015
The Colorado Supreme Court ruled unanimously on Monday that companies can legally fire employees for using medical marijuana, even off duty.
The decision is based on the case of Brandon Coats. He is a quadriplegic who takes medical marijuana to control muscle
spasms in his legs. Dish Network fired him from his job as a customer service representative in 2010 after he failed a random drug test. Coats then sued for unlawful termination. Business groups praised the court's decision.

Officials Urge Changes to Wildfire Prevention, Suppression Funding

By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 15, 2015

After a mild and wet spring, temperatures along the Front Range are expected to soar this week and that has fire managers on edge. The Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture are using this lull in the fire season to call for changes in how the federal government funds wildfire suppression. While Colorado has experienced much needed rain, fire officials are still expecting an average fire season.

Developing Colorado with Water
Finding enough water to meet the demands of the booming Front Range has city planners closely looking at how new developments can be built with water conservation as a key component. With the second draft of the State Water Plan scheduled for release in July, many water advocates are hoping to see the issue of land use addressed.

Colorado has experienced massive population growth in the last few years, and that trend is projected to continue.

The deadline for bills that passed during the state's legislative session to become law or get vetoed was Friday. Measures are
either signed by the Governor or become law without his signature. Some proposals have large signing ceremonies, while others are done quietly. Bente Birkeland talks to state capitol reporters about some of the measures.

Expanded Training at Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site Receives Approval

By ANDREA CHALFIN • JUN 4, 2015
The Department of Defense has approved plans to modify and
increase training at the Army's Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site in Southern Colorado. The Record of Decision [.pdf], signed May 1 and made available last week, approves what's being called "Enhanced Readiness Training," to include brigade-size exercises an

**New Law Waives Immunity for Public Schools**

*By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 4, 2015*

A measure to eliminate immunity for public schools for shootings, deaths, sexual assaults and other serious injuries that happen to students on school grounds was signed into law on Wednesday. Previously schools had absolute immunity. The law would cap damages at $900,000 for multiple injuries per incident. Governor Hickenlooper says the state has experienced its fair share of tragedies in schools and hopes the law will make students safer.

**Pueblo Nature and Raptor Center Cares for Rare California Condor**

*By ANDREA CHALFIN & MADELEINE SCHMIDT • JUN 3, 2015*
A member of the endangered California condor species was found far from home in a backyard near Colorado Springs. The large bird was taken to the Nature and Raptor Center of Pueblo after being picked up by the Ellicott Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and transported via Colorado Parks and Wildlife volunteers. Diana Miller, director of the Pueblo Nature and Raptor Center, said the bird was in good condition, despite being a little thin. It was sent Tuesday morning to the Peregrine Fund in Arizona to be reintroduced into the wild.
Suthers Sworn in as Colorado Springs' Newest Mayor

By ANDREA CHALFIN • JUN 2, 2015

Colorado Springs' newest mayor was sworn into office Tuesday with a ceremony outside the Pioneers Museum.

Former state Attorney General John Suthers took the oath of office as city council, employees, residents and military representatives watched.

Oil & Gas Issues Still Simmer after Task Force, Session

By BENTE BIRKELAND • JUN 1, 2015
Energy development is always a hot topic at the statehouse, but 2015 was oddly quiet. Even with recommendations from a task force studying the issue, state lawmakers did little this past session where oil and gas drilling is concerned. As a result, some of the more long-standing issues as local control and public health concerns are still simmering.

Feds Announce New Plans For Sage Grouse Protection

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 28, 2015
The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service has announced a new plan to protect the greater sage grouse from extinction, while hoping to prevent the bird from being added to the endangered species list.

The sage grouse population has dropped from 16 million birds to less than half a million, mainly due to lost sagebrush habitat. The
bird's range spans 11 western states including Colorado. "As land managers of two-thirds of greater sage grouse habitat, we have a responsibility to take action that ensures a bright future for wildlife and a thriving western economy," said Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell at the announcement in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

**Governor Responds to Human Services Criticisms**

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 28, 2015
Governor John Hickenlooper joined the head of the Department of
Human Services in their first public appearance together since lawmakers called for Hickenlooper to overhaul the department, and possibly fire the executive director.

Rural Communities, and the Ebb and Flow of Severance Taxes

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 26, 2015
As a result of Colorado's booming oil production, energy companies are paying more in severance taxes – money they pay the state for taking minerals out of the ground. Half of it is supposed to go back to local communities, both directly and through grants. But thanks to market forces and political conditions
in Denver, it's not always a stable source of funding.

CDOT Approves $1 Million for the Southwest Chief

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 21, 2015
The Colorado Department of Transportation Commission voted
unanimously to approve $1 million to help preserve the Southwest Chief rail line in southern Colorado. It's part of a route that stretches from Chicago to Los Angeles. The aging track needs major upgrades or Amtrak will have to reroute the line out of Colorado and parts of New Mexico and Kansas. The train stops in Lamar, La Junta and Trinidad, in southeastern Colorado.

Farmers Step Up To Solve Rocky Mountain National Park's Pollution Problem

By STEPHANIE PAIGE OGBURN & LUKE RUNYON • MAY 21, 2015
It’s May in Rocky Mountain National Park, but on a mountainside 10,829 feet above sea level, snow is falling. It’s pelting Jim Cheatham, a biologist with the National Park Service. Shrugging off the cold, Cheatham seizes a teachable moment. This snow, he said, holds more than just water.

“Chances are it’s carrying the excess nitrogen we’re talking about,” mused Cheatham.

For the past eight years, the biologist has spent most of his time thinking about how nitrogen pollution is changing the park’s forests, wildflowers, and alpine lakes. He’s also been looking for a way to stop it.

Bike Master Plan Subject of Community Meetings

By DANA CRONIN • MAY 20, 2015

A series of workshops this month looks to discuss the future of bicycling in Colorado Springs. KRCC’s Dana Cronin reports. The forums will help update the Colorado Springs Bike Master Plan, which lays out a ten-year strategy for the improvement of bicycling conditions in the city.

Brian Shevock is the Bicycle Coordinator for the city. He says his biggest challenge is the spread out nature of Colorado Springs.

John Suthers Elected Mayor of Colorado Springs

By ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 19, 2015
Former Colorado Attorney General John Suthers will be the next mayor of Colorado Springs. Suthers soundly defeated former Colorado Springs mayor Mary Lou Makepace in a runoff election by a two to one margin. He said Tuesday night that he was humbled by the response, but there’s work to be done. "The challenge is very, very significant," Suthers said. "And so I take delight in the political victory tonight, but tomorrow, we hit the ground running and working very very hard."

Colorado Springs, El Paso County Officials Seek Disaster Assistance

By ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 19, 2015
Colorado Springs officials are seeking disaster assistance after rain in early May caused an estimated $8.2 million in damages to public infrastructure, including roads, stormwater, and parks and trails. The local disaster declaration covers rainstorms and flooding from May 3 to the 12th. Initial reports indicate an estimated $281,000 for sinkholes, 5 million for stormwater damages, including landslides and erosion, and nearly 3 million for parks and trails.

Election: Colorado Springs' Next Mayor

By ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 18, 2015

Colorado Springs voters will elect a new mayor on Tuesday in a runoff race featuring former Colorado Attorney General John Suthers and former Colorado Springs mayor Mary Lou Makepeace. As of late last week, 37% of residents who received ballots have cast their votes. Around 7000 ballots mailed to voters were deemed undeliverable.
Q & A: Director of New Aerial Firefighting Research Facility
By AMY HADDEN MARSH • MAY 14, 2015

FLICKR / CREATIVE COMMONS
The new aerial fire fighting research center in Rifle opened this week with a ribbon cutting. Melissa Lineberger is the director of the Center of Excellence for Advanced Technology Aerial Firefighting, and recently spoke with KDNK’s Amy Hadden Marsh about her experience with wildfires and her vision for the program.

Colorado Springs Bypassed for Cycling Race
By TUCKER HAMPSON • MAY 13, 2015
The USA Pro Challenge recently announced the route for this year’s bicycling race, and as expected, Colorado Springs was not among the stage cities. KRCC’s Tucker Hampson reports.

The race provides an economic boost to all of Colorado, bringing in over $100 million statewide. Director of Communications with the Colorado Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau Chelsy Offutt says the event continues to grow, with a 12% increase in revenue last year. Offutt says Colorado Springs did put in a bid to host the Pro Challenge this year, but didn’t make the cut.

EPC Commissioners Approve Settlements

By ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 12, 2015
El Paso County Commissioners have voted to approve two settlements in claims brought against the Sheriff’s office, former Sheriff Terry Maketa, and former Undersheriff Paula Presley. The claims allege lost income and benefits due to a hostile work environment.

County Attorney Amy Folsom said at Tuesday morning’s commissioner’s meeting that her office has analyzed the risk of liability and evaluated the potential cost of litigation in each case.

Severe Weather Across Colorado

By ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 9, 2015
UPDATE 5:08 PM: Watches and warnings continue to evolve as the weather system continues to move eastward. A tornado watch remains in effect for much of southern and eastern Colorado, including Pueblo and El Paso Counties until 9:00 PM. Flood warnings remain in effect for portions of El Paso, Pueblo, Otero and Bent Counties. Winter storm warnings are in effect for northeastern El Paso County, Teller County, and north into Douglas County, among other regions.
Rainfall Stalls Roadwork on Kiowa and Bijou

By TUCKER HAMPSON • MAY 8, 2015

Rains this week have stalled roadwork on Kiowa and Bijou streets in downtown Colorado Springs. KRCC’s Tucker Hampson reports.

The roads were milled and ready for paving when the recent heavy rainfalls hit, causing them to deteriorate. Colorado Springs Street Division Manager Corey Farkas says while they can’t plan for the weather, it hasn’t affected the project timeline.

Capitol Conversation: End of Session

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 8, 2015

Colorado’s state legislature wrapped up its work on Wednesday. Lawmakers covered a host of topics during their four months under gold dome. It was also the first session since Republicans regained controlled of the state senate. Bente Birkeland talks to reporters about the session as part of our capitol conversation series.
Road Closures in Northern El Paso County
By ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 8, 2015

UPDATE: Vollmer has reopened. Tapadero and Green Mountain Rds. remain closed.
El Paso County officials have closed several roads:

Trinidad Hit Hard by Layoffs
By DANA CRONIN & ANDREA CHALFIN • MAY 7, 2015

Trinidad is reeling from a mass layoff. KRCC's Dana Cronin reports.
Around 100 people are losing their jobs at the Pioneer Natural Resources branch in Trinidad. The Texas-based oil and gas company was the largest employer in the city, says Gabriel Engeland, Trinidad's City Manager, who adds that the layoffs are devastating both economically and socially.
Colorado's Legislative Session Comes to an End

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 7, 2015

BENTE BIRKELAND / RMCR
State lawmakers waited until the last minute to decide some of the biggest issues hanging over the capitol for the 2015 legislative session. They worked overtime to get everything wrapped up before a midnight deadline Wednesday night.

Lawmakers Approve Pay Raise
By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 6, 2015

A bill to raise the salaries of state lawmakers and other elected officials quietly made its way through the state house in the final days of the legislative session. It passed on the last day of the session clearing the House with the minimum number of required votes. It had virtually no debate in either chamber.

“People in my district, whenever I tell them how much we make as lawmakers up here, are astounded. They are kind of appalled,” said Senator Kevin Grantham (R-Canon City). He voted for the measure in the Senate where it passed with a wider margin.

Felony DUI Bill Heads to the Governor
By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 6, 2015
Colorado will soon have a felony DUI law on the books. On the final day of the legislative session, the Senate passed House Bill 1043 [.pdf] to create a felony DUI for habitual drunk driving offenders. It passed the Senate 34-1.

Office Of Consumer Counsel's Future Hinges On Debate In The Final Day Of The Session

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 6, 2015
The debate over continuing the Office of Consumer Counsel won't be decided until the final day of the state's annual legislative session. The Office represents taxpayers when utility and telecom companies go to the state to ask for rate hikes. Without Senate Bill 271 [.pdf], the Office of Consumer Counsel would sunset and go away altogether.

Determining the scope of the office's role though has been contentious.

**Rains Provide More Relief to Dry Conditions in Southern Colorado**
Up to two inches of rain have fallen in parts of southern Colorado today, providing additional relief to some dry conditions in the plains. KRCC’s Dana Cronin reports.

As of the end of April, the U.S. Drought Monitor showed portions of southern Colorado were still classified as severe drought. Eric Petersen, a Meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Pueblo and says the rain is helping ease those dry conditions.
Prescribed Burn Classes Offered to Landowners

By DANA CRONIN • MAY 4, 2015

Private landowners can now sign up for classes focusing on how to conduct safer pile burns. KRCC’s Dana Cronin reports.

Those who complete the course become certified burners and will also be protected on a limited basis from civil liability.

"It’s not just a simple go out and light the match. There’s a lot of steps that go into prescribed fire," said Mike Frary, Unit Chief for Prescribed Fire for the Division of Fire Prevention and Control.

Capitol Conversation: End of Session Draws Near

By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 4, 2015

The state's annual legislative session adjourns on Wednesday May 6th. The last few days are hectic as state lawmakers try to push through final bills. Other bills fail on the calendar or die in committee.

Peter Marcus of the Durango Herald and Ivan Moreno with the
Associated Press sit down with statehouse reporter Bente Birkeland to discuss what's left to do and what measures are dead. Peter Marcus of the Durango Herald on reproductive rights legislation:

School Liability Bill Clears Committee
By BENTE BIRKELAND • MAY 1, 2015

A measure to eliminate immunity for public schools for school shootings, death, sexual assaults and other serious injuries that happen to students on school grounds cleared the House Judiciary Committee on Thursday. It passed on a vote of 10-3. Currently public schools are not liable. Legislative leaders in both parties are sponsoring the change, spurred in part by the death of Claire Davis in 2013. Davis attended Arapahoe High School in Littleton when a fellow student shot and killed her before turning the gun on himself.

Planners Discuss Recreation on the Levee
By SHANNA LEWIS • MAY 1, 2015

Work on the first phase of rebuilding the Arkansas River levee in Pueblo is complete, and the conservancy district that oversees the
levee is starting to at potential recreational opportunities as they plan the rest of the repairs.

In addition to a new pedestrian walkway on the top of the levee, the district is considering adding footbridges across the river, more access points and redoing the kayak park. Corrine Koehler leads district’s recreation committee. She says they want to be sure that ideas for recreation aren’t just coming from the engineers.

Audio: Colorado Springs Mayoral Runoff Candidates Debate
By ANDREA CHALFIN • APR 29, 2015

Current, Former Colorado Govs. Make A Pitch For School Testing
By BENTE BIRKELAND • APR 23, 2015
Two former governors, Roy Romer and Bill Owens, joined current Gov. John Hickenlooper at the state capitol to urge lawmakers not to go too far in reducing the numbers of standardized assessments school children take. This comes as legislators are debating several bills to lower the number of exams.
Republican Bill Owens said it's important to have standards and
test against those standards to see if students are learning what they should, and to evaluate schools and teachers.
"Our friends from the left and the right for differing reasons, don't want to test, don't want to measure, don't want to have accountability," said Owens. "This is stunning to me."

**KRCC Wins Regional Edward R. Murrow Awards**

*By DELANEY UTTERBACK • APR 23, 2015*
KRCC learned today that we received two Regional Edward R. Murrow Awards for work produced by KRCC News Director Andrea Chalfin and Noel Black and Jake Brownell, producers of KRCC's program *Wish We Were Here*.

**Southwest Chief Commission Continues Work Despite Legislative Setbacks**

By ANDREA CHALFIN • APR 17, 2015
Colorado’s Southwest Chief commission met Friday, just days after $1.5 million in funding amendments were stripped from the House’s state budget proposal and another funding bill was put on indefinite hold.

The commission is tasked with finding money for the route, including needed repairs to the tracks and for possibly adding a
Colorado’s Senate president introduced a fetal homicide bill this week. As written, it would define a person as an unborn human being from conception until birth for the purposes of homicide and assault cases. It’s expected to draw vigorous debate at the statehouse.

Senate Bill 268 [.pdf] would allow prosecutors to file a murder charge if an unborn baby is killed or dies during an assault or murder of the mother.

Rules for Repainting Pueblo Levee Mural Under Discussion

By SHANNA LEWIS • APR 15, 2015
Repair work on the Arkansas River levee in Pueblo is destroying the world’s largest mural. KRCC's Shanna Lewis reports on the discussion about repainting it. The Pueblo Conservancy District board oversees the levee. It’s preparing guidelines to cover design, approval, and maintenance
for new artwork. They got mixed comments from the couple of dozen people at a public meeting last night.

Mascot Bill Delayed at Last Minute
By BENTE BIRKELAND • APR 14, 2015

UPDATE 04/15/15 - The House passed the bill; it's expected to fail in the Senate.

ORIGINAL POST 04/14/15: Democrats in the House unexpectedly delayed a vote on an American Indian mascot bill after they realized Republicans had enough votes to kill it.

Southwest Chief Funding Amendment Initially Passes House
By BENTE BIRKELAND • APR 9, 2015
UPDATE 04/14/15: The Joint Budget Committee, charged with negotiating the differences between the House and Senate budget proposals, stripped this funding amendment from the budget. The eventual budget plan will still need approval from both chambers.

ORIGINAL POST 04/09/15: Lawmakers in the House initially passed the state's annual budget yesterday. After hours of debate, the chamber decided to set aside money to help preserve a passenger train that runs through southeastern Colorado. Bente Birkeland has more from the state capitol.

Colorado Springs Mayoral Race Heads to Runoff; Other Election Results

By ANDREA CHALFIN • APR 8, 2015

Former Attorney General John Suthers and former Colorado Springs mayor Mary Lou Makepeace are headed to a runoff election next month to be the city’s next mayor. Colorado Springs voters yesterday gave Suthers 46% of the vote, while Makepeace came in with 24%. Among the other leading candidates, Joel Miller received 16% of the vote, while Amy Lathen received 12%. The runoff election is scheduled for May 19.

Public Engagement and the Colorado Water Plan

By MAEVE CONRAN • APR 6, 2015
It's been just over three months since Coloradans got a first look at the state's water plan. The draft that was submitted to Governor John Hickenlooper came after more than 800 public meetings held all across the state. But despite an extensive education and outreach campaign, just how involved is the general public in planning Colorado's water future?

In his 2015 state of the state address, Governor John Hickenlooper lauded the process that brought people from around Colorado together to create the state's water plan:

**Capitol Conversation: Budget**

*By BENTE BIRKELAND & IVAN MORENO & JOHN FRANK • APR 2, 2015*

The annual Colorado budget is making its way through the statehouse. It cleared the Senate on a vote of 21 to 14 passing largely along party lines, with three Democrats joining Republicans to support it. We asked John Frank with the Denver Post and Ivan Moreno with the Associated Press to talk about the dynamics at play.

**Water Transfer Prompts Early**
The projected growth of Colorado’s Front Range has water planners looking ahead to meet the demands of the population influx. One way to meet the growing need is for utility companies to buy water rights from farmers and ranchers and then divert that water to cover the city’s needs, commonly called “Buy & Dry.”

Checking in on Colorado Springs' Water Supply at Homestake Reservoir

By ANDREA CHALFIN • APR 1, 2015
High up in the Colorado Rockies, across the Continental Divide and northwest of Leadville, is the Homestake Reservoir, and lately, things have been looking good up there. Colorado Springs Utilities put together a press tour of the region in mid-March to show where that water comes from and how they measure it to predict the year in water.

As winter’s grip begins to fade along the Front Range, water managers with Colorado Springs Utilities are closely monitoring what’s happening hundreds of miles away.