



From the Director's Desk

Protect this House, Our House

The suffering from COVID has entered our house, making what is national more intensely personal.

My 21-year old son contracted COVID in late September with minimal impact. Within a month a progressively severe outbreak of ulcerative colitis set in, and then myocarditis, which felt like a heart attack. The first is not widely associated with COVID, the second is increasingly recognized as a COVID-triggered health condition. One attacked the G.I tract, the other his heart. For the past two months, he has been in-and-out of the hospital three times.

Though the treatments for the flare-ups are evolving, it is very clear in talking with many medical professionals that we still do not know much about this virus. There are layers of chance involved in his situation, a genetic condition, probably latent until triggered by COVID. I am grateful for the expertise and scientific approach guiding his care. I appreciate the good-faith efforts of many specialists and generalists working together. As the medical staff navigate his treatments, through fits and starts of experimentation, I have occasionally thought about how their peers in public health navigated the COVID crisis this past year. His doctors work without opinion-bloviators in the media who would portray this imperfect treatment process to reinforce their own biases. In both realms there are human beings doing their best in good faith. In one though, a theater of constant opinion undercuts progress with little actual analysis or humility. Those opinions meant to reinforce ideology now pass as news, substitute for the search for fact and truth. We allow this noise to undermine important work being done. I have renewed anger that our national well-being has been so cynically treated like a game by so many this past year.



The first days of the new administration are making many things clear. For one, this didn't have to be such a deadly or dysfunctional year. There didn't need to be so much distracting background noise. From the start, a national plan, and a mask mandate could have called upon our patriotic duty to protect each other from the virus and saved many lives. A coordinated national response could have pulled us together, reinforced our faith in the problem solving power of science, in the importance of an effective government response to common crises.

Many will remember January 6th for its' disgraceful infamy of the U.S. Capitol nearly being overrun, encouraged by a lying president trying to hold onto power, and the most dangerous, sycophantic of his enablers coming perilously close to violently halting an election process. For me, that day marks when our son was readmitted for the third time as his condition had withered him by 30 lbs. He wasn't absorbing fluids or nutrients as a holiday bedridden at home was winding down. He has been at Valley View Hospital for three weeks now, and is on leave from college. It was clear to me how close we were coming to losing him. As time passes, I'm not sure we Americans are clear what we are so close to losing.

Not all of the 25 million cases of the virus nationwide are resulting in symptoms, let alone lingering effects such as

my sons'. After 400,000 deaths (and counting), the U.S. President has publicly recognized the cost of this virus with a sea of flags on the national mall, and launched [an actual plan](#) to address it. Sure to be modified, a proposed plan can be debated. The plan will have flaws. So will it's implementation. The lack of a plan, or good faith effort towards a national plan is no longer acceptable. After January 6th, a lot of things should no longer be acceptable. For a year, national leadership led us into a nosedive, denying the threat, choosing to make a mockery of truth, empowered by the complicit, egged on by enablers. They succeeded in making a national health crisis politically divisive in an attempt to motivate "the base."

So too with the wall of lies about election fraud, climate change, whistleblowers, the deep state, and the explosion of conspiracy theories. This approach to governance, and to truth is deeply corrosive of our institutions, our trust, and our humanity. The Washington Post, dutifully tracked the presidents lies over four years finding that "[Trump made 30,573 false or misleading claims as president. Nearly half came in his final year.](#)" In response the ex-president referred to the press as "the enemy of the people" and claimed it to be "fake." This is not just "politics" as usual. This was a deliberate approach to sewing chaos so that disrespect for the law, for institutions, so that rampant cronyism, corruption and ineptitude would disappear behind all the bluster. Lies have consequences. The repeated pattern of those actions and the lack of checks to it have had a real impact on our lives.

This war on truth nearly overturned an election, prevented a peaceful transfer of executive power, and upended this democracy. With COVID, lies and inactions led to untold suffering. While the suffering continues, there appear to be few consequences other than some arrests among those who stormed the Capital, a heavily armed inauguration, and another impeachment trial which is sure to be another circus of deflective cowardice unless there are secret ballots. Many hope to just "move on" as if we dodged a bullet pretending that the threat just left the building. Well, folks, it hasn't.

History will look back on each of our currently overlapping crises—inaction on COVID, the economy, climate, inequality, threats to democracy, science and truth as an amalgamation of serious issues made ridiculous though our twisted politics. I no longer have patience for the excuses, nor for framing certain issues as "political" as a means to justify inaction and excuses.

PROTECT our health workers and loved ones. Protect my son, who will likely emerge from this with a compromised immune system, we are told. Our current state of politics, and what we allow to pass as news has weakened our national immune system.

Wake up about the fragility of our democracy and our planet. And for the many people around you, whose stories you don't know, be a protector of the air that we breathe. Put your damn mask on—please!

Jon Stavney
Executive Director
jestavney@nwccog.org

Stakeholder Message for Today, January 27 - NTAS Bulletin Released Due to Heightened Threat Environment

Today the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security issued a [National Terrorism Threat Advisory \(NTAS\) Bulletin](#) due to a heightened threat environment across the United States, which DHS believes will persist in the weeks following the successful Presidential Inauguration. Information suggests that some ideologically-motivated violent extremists with objections to the exercise of governmental authority and the presidential transition, as well as other perceived grievances fueled by false narratives, could continue to mobilize to incite or commit violence.

For additional information about the [Bulletin](#), as well as resources available to support enhancements to your critical infrastructure security posture please visit CISA.gov/Hometown-security where you will find a variety of resources.

New Energy Program Partnership is electrifying

Eagle County has a new BEECH, and NWCCOG is a key partner in the effort. The program takes low income homes completely off of gas utilities, replacing with more efficient electric appliances and heating.

Beneficial Electrification of Eagle County Housing (BEECH) is a collaboration between Eagle County, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG), Energy Smart Colorado, Holy Cross Energy (HCE), and the Colorado Energy Office (CEO). The idea of Beneficial Electrification is to remove all fossil fuel appliances and heating systems from the home and replace them with high efficiency electrically powered appliances and heating systems. Improving the insulation and the performance of the building shell is also a key component.

The project began with Eagle County's Environmental Manager, John Gitchell, and the Energy Efficiency Manager, Seth Bossung, reaching out to the NWCCOG Energy Program to gauge interest and ability to

provide Beneficial Electrification to low-income homes in Eagle County. Specifically, manufactured homes. Eagle County has over 1,500 manufactured homes. Most are located in parks. After evaluating housing stock and potential availability of clients the mobile home park just north of the Dotsero I-70 exit was chosen for the initial pilot program of 3 homes.

Through the initial planning phase of this project more entities became aware of it and expressed their interest in collaborating on the project. Holy Cross Energy is the electric utility provider for that park. Mary Weiner and other staff from HCE provided valuable insight in the initial planning. Because HCE has a goal of being "100% Clean Energy by 2030" they already had a rebate structure in place for many of the upgrades that were envisioned. Walking Mountain Science Center's Energy Program Director Nikki Maline and Energy Programs Coordinator Matt Parker, in conjunction with Energy Smart Colorado, also contributed funding through their rebate structure and were valuable partners in planning. Their coordinated outreach efforts with the MIRA bus contributed greatly to the level of saturation able to be achieved in that park.

"Our goal is to grow this program and the Dotsero Mobile Home Park has also been a wonderful partner. The owner of the park has been more than receptive to it and the Manager and staff at the park have been extremely helpful during this initial rollout" said Nate Speerstra, Energy Program Manager at NWCCOG. He went on to say, "There are dozens more homes in the park. They are all heating with either propane or expensive electric resistance heaters. Our internal outreach efforts coupled with Walking Mountains and the park staff ensure that when this program expands in the coming year other residents of the park will be eager to sign up. The fact that so many partners came together for this round 1 of BEECH made it a very positive and rewarding venture to embark on."

All 3 of the homes chosen for this initial phase also qualified for our Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). The audits and savings to investment analysis of all 3 homes was performed and each of the homes had their custom set of cost-effective measures installed. Starting in Program Year 20/21 CEO, who administers WAP at the state level, has added Air Supplied Heat Pumps (ASHPs) as a potential measure in homes. All 3 of these homes qualified for the ASHP retrofit through WAP funding. An ASHP transfers heat from outside to inside in the winter and can also do the reverse in the summer- inside to outside (air conditioner).



Air Supplied Heat Pump being inspected by NWCCOG Energy Program Team Member

With refrigerants and compressors and evaporators it pulls heat out of even sub-zero temperatures and transfer that heat into the home. It does this at an efficiency far greater than a furnace or appliance that uses fossil fuel. The water heaters were replaced with Heat Pump Water Heaters. Like the ASHP, these also have an electric backup for when there's a peak demand, but for the majority of the time the water will be heated with the same heat pump technology as the ASHP. The United States is one of the few countries in the world that hasn't embraced this technology to heat and cool their homes.

Eagle County, Walking Mountains, and Holy Cross Energy all contributed funding for the water heater upgrades, the necessary electrical upgrades, and in purchasing electric induction ranges and ovens for all 3 homes. The induction technology allows for a much more efficient transfer of heat. Because Indoor Air Quality is always a consideration Eagle County also contributed funding so that our crews could install proper exhaust systems.

The results are very preliminary. The work was completed in November of 2020 and can only be compared with December's utility bills to 12/19 bills. In all 3 homes the electrical usage had decreased, and the propane costs had been eliminated. That is only a small part of the story though. In all 3 homes the potential dangers of gas leaks, carbon monoxide poisoning, excessive and unhealthy moisture issues, explosions, or fires have been largely eliminated. One home had been heated with many small portable electric heaters. Because of their inefficiency and cost that homeowner never raised the indoor temperature above 63 degrees. When we did a return visit to the home, they were now able to keep the home at a comfortable temperature and their bill was still lower. The most intangible thing that may reap the most benefits in the long term was seeing their little girl comfortable, happy, and warm and knowing that at least one hurdle had been removed from her journey.

Jones underscores the overall benefits of the program saying, "The over arching goal of this collaboration is to help make the funding go farther, to provide better service to our clients, and to expand beneficial electrification funding for all of Colorado."

Speaking of potential in the future: John Gitchell has already approached the Eagle County Commissioners and secured funding for this to expand in 2021. When he made the proposal for 20 more homes, they asked him “why not go bigger?” Doug Jones, Energy Program Director and Speerstra have been asking their selves that very same question. Jones said, “Word of this project has already spread. Other counties have already inquired about it and there seems to be a great potential to expand it. The acronym could stay the same, but it could evolve into Beneficial Electrification of Every Coloradans Home.”



Electric Induction Range/Oven



Electric Heat Pump Water Heater

Gap Fund recipients send thanks

Last month we talked about Energize Colorado Gap Fund. The story was so well received, we added additional recipients here:



Higgles Ice Cream Breckenridge

Dear Scott,

I wanted to thank you and the NLF for granting me the Energize Colorado Gap Fund. The money has been used for many purposes and expenses which my small business has incurred during COVID-19.

Winter is not a super popular time for ice cream and my ice cream shop is very small for customers to congregate. To promote my business, I bought



Stacy Hill, and Bob Black Co-Owners
Soupz On, Breckenridge, CO

Soupz On has been operating in Breckenridge for 21 years. Covid caused Soupz On to offer soup out of a Velcro'd Plexiglass window serving soup to a line (average of 12 people) for 3 hours a day. The Energize Grant allowed them to install a permanent window for orders and plexiglass inside their door for pick up. Both have been permanently installed. This cut the outdoor wait time and allows them to serve more soup!

As of 12/28/20:

The Soupz On window has been installed!

a couple of free-standing propane heaters for customers to wait outside and eat outside, as well as plexiglass for protection of my employees and customers. In addition, I now have two employees instead of one for half of the day to limit contact with customers during the busy times. It's is a lot to handle and we aren't at the end of this yet, but the money the Loan Fund gave Higgles has helped up tremendously through the slowest time of the year for us.

Thank you for all the work that you do.

Anna Higgles
Owner Higgle Ice Cream

"Our operation is already so much smoother. The transaction time is down from approximately 5-6 mins per customer to 1-2 mins, making it much more efficient for all" says Stacy Hill, Owner.

The business also now offers online and App ordering. They also updated their POS system to allow for client PIN pad transactions. Soupz On was proud to be able to retain all of their staff after being allowed to reopen.

Open Enrollment in the time of Covid

Jonah Glassman, Vintage SHIP Medicare Coordinator, completed her first Open Enrollment after having just been hired in August. While the number of counselling sessions was about 100 fewer than last year, not being able to see people in person or do things like they have been done in the past, made things more complicated. That said, throughout 25 different towns in the region, there were a total of 160 people who took advantage of the counseling services, with 158 hours spent on counselling.



As with so much this past year, the processes were modified and always included a strong focus on safety, convenience, and quality. Senior Centers within the region were as flexible with meeting arrangements as they could be given the circumstances, and some sessions even took place in Fire Departments, with most done over the phone. In person meetings were socially distanced with masks of course.

From the client perspective, folks were willing to make the adjustments needed to accommodate the situation. With Vintage attempting to keep the process as user friendly as possible, people were able to stick to the familiar by choosing to use paper intake forms or, if they had a higher comfort level, they could use digital intake forms. Additionally, some clients preferred shorter sessions, while other were eager for more contact. The volunteers sensitive to the client's needs.

An additional modification this year was the scheduling software which interfaced with the Vintage website. The software featured a pop-up page that allowed anyone with access to the site to use the calendar to schedule appointments. This took stress away from the staff which improved overall scheduling performance.

To Sum up Open Enrollment 2020

Like many things this year Open Enrollment was a little different during the times of COVID – 19. While the pandemic did impact numbers of clients this year, the team was down a counselor, as Glassman had been hired very recently and was directing efforts from her office.

Glassman pointed out, "Another challenge we faced was Rocky Mountain Health plan pulling out of all our communities creating a challenging navigation for our counselors. We spent a lot of time discussing this and how to navigate it."

When asked her assessment of the processes, she said, "Even though I wasn't able to counsel in person as the past SHIP Coordinator had in previous years, OE ran smoothly because I was in the office and able to navigate the calls, schedule clients, and answer incoming questions. We utilized the volunteers more than ever before and hope to continue to increase volunteer capacity with the growth of the program. We were able to unite several local SHIPS for monthly Zoom calls to help give each other with additional support. It was wonderful to be able to learn from other SHIPs best practices. Bringing a digital intake form, Calendly for scheduling, and additional resources to the website were over all a great addition and drove up visits to the Vintage website."

A huge THANK YOU to the SHIP Volunteers for being such a fluid team and doing everything needed to help

community members with their Medicare questions and concerns.

Glassman has big plans for 2021 including adding additional volunteers, increasing educational opportunities throughout the year, strengthening relationships with the HHS groups in the counties, and creating unique training for pre-Open Enrollments. 2021 is sure to be a strong year!

EPA Nonpoint Success Story



NONPOINT SOURCE SUCCESS STORY

Colorado

Restoration of Straight Creek along I-70 at the Continental Divide

sediment. Congrats to many QQ members who worked tirelessly on this and saw Straight Creek removed from the impaired listing in 2018, especially long-time QQ and SWQC consultant Lane Wyatt for his work over the years!

The restoration of Straight Creek along I-70 was recently featured as an EPA Nonpoint Source Success Story, [available here](#). QQ, Summit Water Quality Committee, NWCCOG, and many other partners worked for decades to get Straight Creek off the 303(d) list of impaired waters in Colorado for

Next Council Meeting:

Details TBD