



No Ordinary Election, No Ordinary Column

This is normal: A peaceful transfer of power. Across the country a few weeks from now, voters will place ballots in drop boxes, stand in line to vote or “mail-it-in.” At some point, the counting of ballots will pass through various oversight processes and will be deemed complete. Ballots will be certified. Vote tallies made public. Candidates will call each other to concede, console and congratulate each other just like athletes shake hands at the end of a game. Yup. Normal election.

This is normal: Partisans jockeying for advantage. It is normal for rhetoric to be enflamed between opponents running for office. Bending the truth about an opponent is par for the course. Flat-out lying is less common. It is normal for those in power locally to manipulate some voting laws to their partisan advantage like reducing drop box locations in opponents districts, or as in [Florida outlawing giving water bottles to voters standing in line](#). The system bends. Legislators gerrymander districts. These things are simultaneously underhanded and unethical while also being **perfectly legal** and unfortunately also a norm. Mail-in ballots would be the norm and Voting Day would be a national holiday if leaders in some states didn’t want voting to be cumbersome and limited for some citizens in some places. Leaders bend the rules, but when they break the law, they typically get caught. Penalties are steep. Ask the [Mesa County clerk who is going to jail for 9 years over election interference](#).



This is very abnormal: Voter Fraud. Recent rhetoric to the contrary, the U.S. has *extraordinarily low instances of voter fraud* or non-citizens voting. These are [phantom issues](#), and [myths](#) intended to provide cover for efforts to restrict voter access. People across the U.S. rarely attempt to cheat the system. Again, penalties are steep. You can check out [this data base from the conservative Heritage Foundation](#) to study each case of voter fraud and note that most cases lead to convictions. Across the U.S. with a population of over 350 million citizens, recent instances of voter fraud equal less than the population of Kremmling. None has been known to impact an election outcome.

This too is normal: Voting Day is a Celebration of our 250-year old Democracy. US elections instill comraderie not violence. Most of us are upstanding people who do our duty and observe the rule-of-law. Voting, paying taxes and serving jury duty are three of the most patriotic things Americans do. National elections disguise the fact that most candidates will start the election as neighbors who live not far apart and will remain neighbors who see each other around the community for many years afterward. Election sites in the U.S. are peaceful places that reinforce community and don’t require armed security by self-appointed militias or incels. Election workers and paid county election staff and those in office do not require security details to protect them or their families. Armed people at polling places have one purpose, showing power to intimidate voters. Candidates inciting or encouraging violence is not normal.

This also is normal: When Power Demands Loyalty -That’s not Democracy. In many places around the world, dictators will hold “elections” while leveraging their power behind the scenes to determine a favorable outcome for themselves. Losing is not an option. Depending on their degree of power,

opponents will be discredited. The “law” will be exercised to force dissent while those who continue to pose a real threat to power will be assassinated or simply disappear. Voting is a kind of kabuki theater in such places to hold a patina of freedom and appearance of choice. Citizen votes do not actually decide their leadership via popular vote or a Byzantine structure like the Electoral College; they are subjects who have no rights under an independent system of laws. Their fate is fragile, determined by loyalty to the tribe and to a person. Think this is rare? Nope. Across the world, those governed are manipulated by untruths because independent media does not exist countering falsehoods. There is no legitimate debate about issues or policies. If they dissent or protest, they can count on a violent, state-directed military enforcing loyalty. The traits of autocrats are not so mysterious. They persist to retain power, and gain wealth. Such leadership is having a heyday across the world today, in part because American banks and U.S. rule-of-law and stability allow them a safe harbor for their spoils. Read [Ann Applebaum](#), *Autocracy Inc* if you want your mind blown away about how dictators across the world work together to undermine U.S. stability today through misinformation and surrogates. “You are not free if you have been lied to,” says author of *On Freedom*, Timothy Snyder.

Upholding norms is normal: *Every Election needs a Loser.* Conceding an election lost is [not written anywhere in law](#), it is just something that has become another norm, [tradition](#), [“all-but-official-touch points”](#), or “customary.” It is the kind of top-drawer leadership we have come to expect from Police Chiefs and Generals who step down when something terrible happens on their watch. The questioning of a peaceful transfer of power did not seriously arise in this country until 2020. Incumbent showed up for Incoming President’s inauguration (like every sitting President before), but then that outgoing President did not show up for next President’s inauguration. Below the very top of this November ballot the democratic norms above will be respected far and wide. There are encouraging Presidential examples of leadership exhibiting forbearance and epic restraint. President Biden stepped down after the June 27th debate with in which he looked flummoxed and too over-the-hill to govern. Shortly thereafter he did something abnormal by conceding power. Question his motives, but would-be dictators do not concede power. Reluctantly, but patriotically, Biden passed the torch. Al Gore conceded an effectively tied election for the good of the country on December 13, 2000 (Florida remained a statistical tie) because recounting would imperil the democratic process, [“for the sake of our unity as a people and the strength of our democracy, I offer my concession.”](#) George Washington declined to run for a third term, setting a norm that was respected until FDR broke it. In 1951 the two-term limit was solidified from a norm into law.

Not normal. Counties issuing bullet proof vests to election workers, schools declining to be voting locations for [safety reasons](#). One candidate for U.S. president in 2024 vows to only respect the outcome of this election if he wins and is preparing to incite violence if he loses again, as he did on January 6th. As Susan Rice said recently, “he is running on a platform of civil war.” **That, folks, is not normal.**

This presidential election is not normal. The mere fact that a past president who lost the popular vote and the electoral college 4 years ago, who lied about losing (losing 62 legal challenges to the election, 30 of which were dismissed immediately for lack merit, and most others dismissed as frivolous); who *knowingly* lied about losing [NBC News](#), [Forbes](#), and admitted so in this [CNN interview](#); who then incited an insurrection on January 6th at the U.S. Congress in spite of knowing the truth that he lost because he sought to interrupt the peaceful transfer of power and remain in power, that man who [encouraged supporters to kill](#) his sitting Vice President, acts for which [232 members](#) of the House of Representatives voted to for impeachment for “incitement of insurrection;” who is the only President in 234 years to be [indicted 4 times](#) for crimes including breaking election law, falsifying business records, who was further found guilty by a jury in New York on [34 Felony counts](#) who as President made [30,573 false or misleading](#) claims over 4 years as president, is desperately running for President to have the power to Pardon himself and [pardon all the January 6th rioters](#), and avoid his own likely jail time also plans “only on day one” to use the power of the Presidency to imprison his political “enemies” ([USA Today](#), [New York Times](#)) which he now calls “the enemy within” (meaning all Democrats), and those in his own party that he perceives as being DISLOYAL to him while stating that [he will only accept the election as legitimate](#) IF HE WINS; that man who prides himself equally for firing people as he does his business acumen, chose a cabinet that [saw more turnover than any recent president](#); that man now has [Sixteen of those top officials who worked closely with him who are opposing his candidacy using terms such as “threat to democracy,” “erratic,” and “delusional” to describe his leadership.](#)

That candidate is not normal and this election is not in any way normal.

Judging the Judges-There's a Commission for That

One luxury of Mail-in Ballots is time to research. That could mean calling or texting someone you know who might actually understand what that special district plans to do with future revenues from the scrabbled ballot language, or to do on-line searches. For those of us who are curious, this can lead make



voting more fun and informative. You can even call the candidate while the ballot is open on your kitchen table.

Even so, I find the most obscure, and often skipped section of many ballots is the question of whether a sitting judge that you've never heard of should be retained or not. This Denver Post article does a good job explaining why Colorado does that and where to get information, "Colorado has an evaluation process that offers information and evaluations on judges.

Nonpartisan commissions assess all the judges on the ballot and issue simple recommendations about each judge or Colorado Supreme Court justice who is up for retention, along with more information if you're willing to study up." That system was developed in 1988 specifically to provide voters with information about standards. The article notes that this year, all but one of the 116 judges evaluated by the non-partisan commission "met performance standards." Of note, the article names the judge, "The one outlier, Garfield County Court Judge Angela Roff, did not meet performance standards because "the majority of the commission found her legal knowledge and administrative performance in need of further development."

That may sound a little naïve to some, but across the United States, just over a month from now, literally thousands of candidates will accept the election process in which they were on the same ballot as the U.S. President and accept the results of their race as entirely legitimate. Losers will regroup and move on without the words "peaceful transfer of power" crossing their minds.

Advocating for Middle Mile Funding

At the Digital Infrastructure Investment Summit on September 19, 2024, Nate Walowitz, Regional Broadband Program Director for the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, urged for more public funding for middle mile infrastructure to connect rural communities. He stressed, "It's going to take an effort of the whole to be able to solve the middle mile access challenges." While the Infrastructure Act allocated \$1 billion, over 230 applications requested nearly \$7.5 billion, highlighting the funding gap. Walowitz emphasized that additional federal support could expand NWCCOG's Project THOR without requiring extra local or state funding. "This summit was important because it brought voices together... expressing the need for more federal funding for broadband middle mile networks," he said.



IIJA and IRA Funding: A Look at Benefits and Future Concerns

I have been fortunate to serve as the Regional Grants Navigator for NWCCOG for nearly two years now which has provided me a unique angle into how this historic funding has already impacted, and will continue to positively impact our Region and the state. Below are a few highlights.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) have provided [significant financial resources for the State of Colorado](#) and NWCCOG region. We have seen large and small successes in grant applications and the potential for much more. These federal programs have facilitated projects aimed at improving transportation, expanding broadband access, combating climate change, and fostering renewable energy. While the initiatives under these programs are secured by acts of Congress, the potential the uncertainty of the 2024 elections could jeopardize the progress and continued impacts made under these programs.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)

Signed into law by President Joe Biden in November 2021, the IIJA represents one of the most ambitious infrastructure investment efforts in modern U.S. history. The act allocates \$1.2 trillion to various [infrastructure projects](#) nationwide. For Colorado, this has translated into critical investments in transportation, broadband expansion, clean water, and renewable energy infrastructure.

1. **Transportation:** Colorado received approximately \$4 billion in federal funding to improve highways, roads, and bridges across the state. The I-70 corridor, a critical artery for our NWCCOG communities [received a \\$100 million dollar INFRA grant](#) for the Floyd Hill rebuild. [Glenwood Springs received the Rural Surface Transportation Grant for \\$49.5 million](#) for their regional South Bridge connection. The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority and CDOT

[received a RAISE](#) (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity) Grant for \$24.2 million to connect Bustang with regional mass transit option in Mesa and Garfield Counties. Achieving a passenger mountain rail extension from Winter Park to Craig will be nearly impossible without the support of a successful IJJA grant application.

2. **Water Infrastructure:** IJJA has allocated \$688 million for water infrastructure in Colorado, addressing aging infrastructure and ensuring access to clean, reliable water sources. The Shoshone water rights cost \$99 million dollars as the state and local governments have contributed \$56 million, while an IRA Environmental Drought Mitigation Bucket 2 grant for the remainder [has been submitted](#). Additional funding opportunities include water treatment facilities, pipe replacement, and watershed restoration.
3. **Renewable Energy and Electric Vehicles:** Colorado has been a leader in renewable energy, and the IJJA's focus on clean energy projects has accelerated the state's progress toward its sustainability goals. [RFTA](#), [Summit Stage](#), [Eco Transit](#), and [Breckenridge](#) all received federal passthrough grants of over \$45 million from the Low or No-Emissions program for electric busses and infrastructure. The act has directed over \$300 million in investments into expanding electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, helping to create a robust network of EV charging stations across the state. Just last month NWCCOG submitted for a \$15 million dollar, seven county regional CFI (Charging and Fueling Infrastructure) grant application.
4. **Further Initiatives and opportunities:** There are tens of billions of federal dollars remaining for direct grants, and state allocated pass through opportunities. Nearly \$100 million has been allocated to improve high-speed internet access in rural Colorado. With broadband becoming essential for education, healthcare, and business, these investments aim to close the digital divide that rural Colorado faces. There are programs for the power grid, airports, environmental and climate resiliency, and passenger rail to name but a few.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

The Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law in August 2022, has further reinforced Colorado's environmental initiatives. The IRA allocates \$369 billion nationwide for climate and energy investments, making it the most comprehensive climate legislation in U.S. history.

The IRA is not as large or sweeping as the IJJA, but it has a number of opportunities that can impact our sunny, windswept region. Much of the funding from the IRA is dedicated to small business and resident consumers directly, such as EV rebates and incentives. The IRA also funds large scale clean energy development community projects which are perfect for our collection of local power companies.

Another key area where the IRA can benefit our region is in promoting energy efficiency in homes and businesses. The act provides tax credits and rebates for energy-efficient appliances, home insulation, and energy-saving retrofits. This is particularly beneficial in the high country, where energy costs can be high during the winter months. Last year [Eagle County received an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program award of \\$1.4 million](#) to invest in staff capacity, targeted outreach, and local workforce training programs to perform energy retrofits and electrification projects that will cut greenhouse gas emissions and improve cost-of-living for low- to moderate-income households across 18 rural counties.

Jonathan Godes, NWCCOG Regional Grants Navigator

COG Quirks: Mobility Director Proves Up at Altitude



Dana Wood, NWCCOG's Mobility Director (pictured on the left) is no stranger to long distance running. In fact, she's an ultra runner and was attempting a very unique run this last September. Dana Wood's finish in the 2024 Pikes Peak Marathon took place during a notably challenging year for the race. The event, held on September 22, 2024, faced poor trail conditions due to inclement weather, which led organizers to shorten the usual 26.2-mile course to 14.93 miles. "I had mixed feelings about the course getting shortened. I was mentally and physically prepared to do the full marathon, but was also a bit thankful that the weather forced us into a much different race," said Dana. Despite these changes, runners like Dana faced the typical high-altitude ascent and rugged terrain that makes this race renowned as "America's Ultimate Challenge". She finished the course in 3 hours and 28 minutes, gaining over 4,200' in elevation.



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