

Politics

Trump administration halting \$10 billion in social service funding to 5 Democratic states

By Sara Cook, [Melissa Quinn](#)

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Washington — The Trump administration plans to halt billions of dollars in federal funding for social services programs in five states led by Democrats following allegations of fraud, a Department of Health and Human Services official said Tuesday.

The move will freeze \$7 billion for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, nearly \$2.4 billion for the Child Care Development Fund and roughly \$870 million for social services grants that largely benefit children. The states affected are Minnesota, New York, California, Illinois and Colorado.

The New York Post was [first to report](#) that HHS would withhold the funding.

"For too long, Democrat-led states and Governors have been complicit in allowing massive amounts of fraud to occur under their watch," Andrew Nixon, an HHS spokesperson, said in a statement. "Under the Trump Administration, we are ensuring that federal taxpayer dollars are being used for legitimate purposes. We will ensure these states are following the law and protecting hard-earned taxpayer money."

The Illinois Department of Human Services said it has not yet received any notification or communication about impacts to its federal funding.



Fallout grows from Trump administration's freezing of Minnesota child care funds
(02:40)

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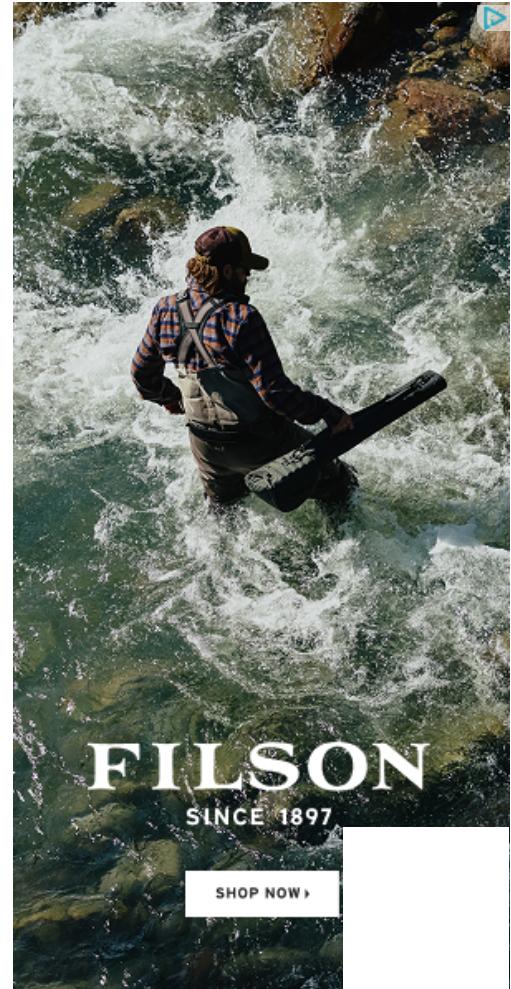
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"This is yet another politically-motivated action by the Trump Administration that confuses families and leaves states with more questions than answers. IDHS will provide an update if it is made aware of program or funding changes," the agency said in a statement.

The decision by the Trump administration comes after HHS announced last week that it froze federal child care funding for Minnesota because of "blatant fraud" in public-assistance programs.

More than 90 people face federal charges as a result of fraud schemes that have been uncovered in Minnesota since 2021. Prosecutors estimate the the total amount of fraud could reach \$9 billion. The scandal started with a \$250 million COVID-era scheme involving a nonprofit called Feeding Our Future, which was accused of stealing from the Federal Child Nutrition Program.

Since then, federal prosecutors have uncovered "large-scale fraud" in a housing program for seniors and people with disabilities, and a program that provides services to children with autism. The Trump administration is also probing claims of fraud by day care centers in Minnesota, which gained national attention after a conservative YouTube personality named Nick Shirley posted a video that showed him visiting federally backed child care centers around Minneapolis and finding no children there.



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CBS News [visited several of the centers](#) named by Shirley and found that all but two of the facilities have active licenses, according to state records, and all active locations were visited by state regulators within the last six months.

President Trump has criticized Minnesota leaders for its handling of the scandal and attacked Somali immigrants, claiming they have "ripped off" the state. Many, but not all, of the defendants charged in the fraud schemes are of Somali descent.

Mr. Trump has attacked California, led by Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, as "more corrupt" than Minnesota. He said Tuesday in a [Truth Social post](#) that "the fraud investigation of California has begun." The president has not provided evidence of wide-scale fraud in California social services and did not provide further details about a probe involving the state.

Beyond Minnesota, the Trump administration has also not put forth evidence of sweeping fraud schemes in social services in New York, Illinois and Colorado.

Still, over the past several months the Trump administration has turned off the spigot of funding to Democrat-led states and cities, particularly during the historic government shutdown last year.

Mr. Trump [paused billions of dollars for infrastructure](#) and climate projects, and slashed disaster preparedness grants.

Democrats have accused the administration of playing politics with money that has been approved by Congress.

[Sara Tenenbaum](#) contributed to this report.

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Outlook

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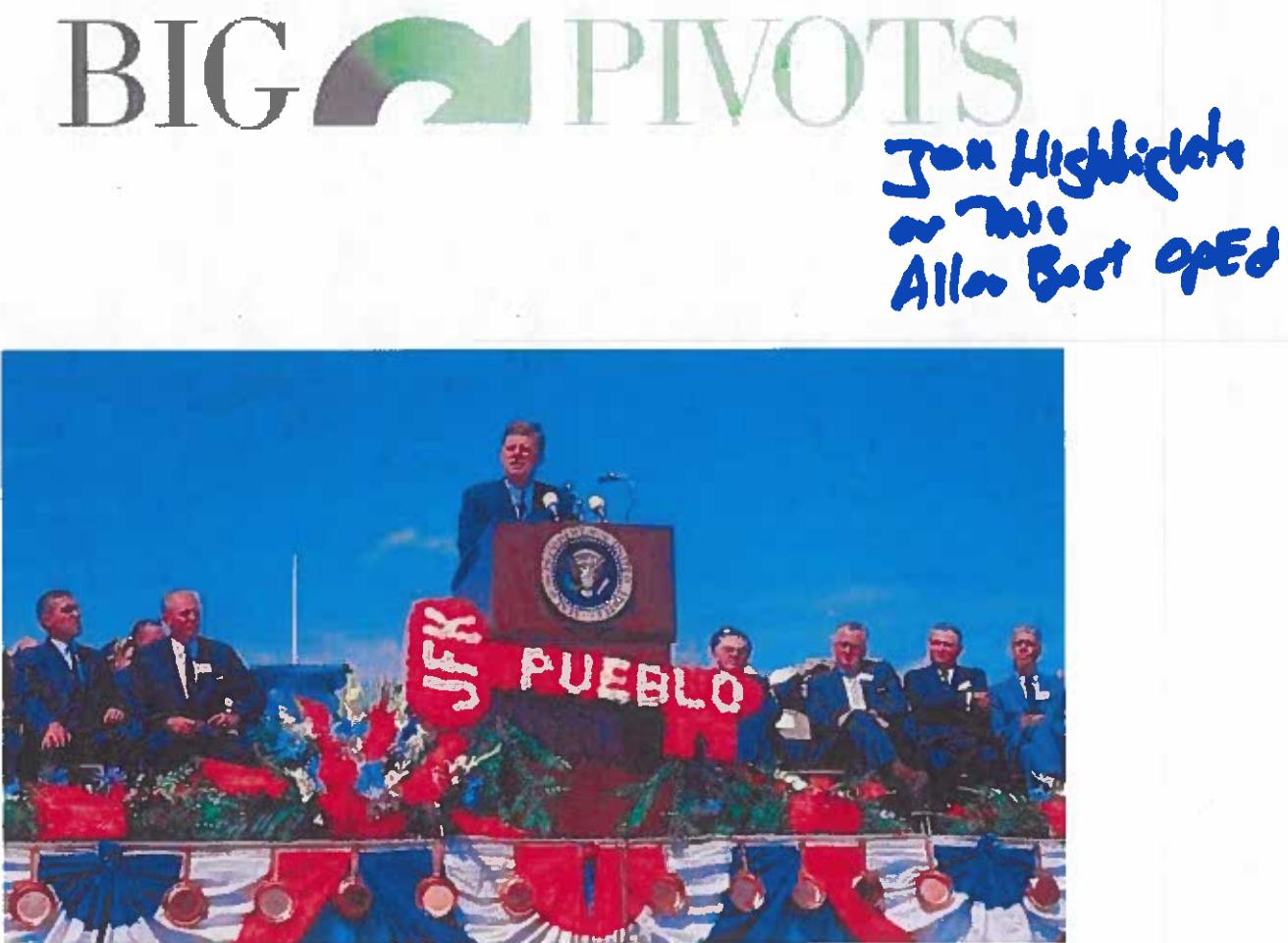
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Trump and Colorado: People are very afraid of how the president might muck everything up

In autumn of 2024, before the presidential election, Cathy, my companion in life, had a dream. It was at once hilarious and faintly disturbing. Something I had written had offended somebody very powerful. I had been stripped of my Big

Pivots mission, and the two of us together were exiled to a pig farm. There, I was told to produce something called the Swine Review.

That dream was remembered again this past week as I flirted with what I would say in response to the latest smackdown of Colorado by President Donald Trump. The theme has become abundantly clear. **Trump wants to punish Colorado.** He can dress up the excuses in formal language, but the truth emerges in his social media posts. The president has a compulsive way of scratching his vengeful itch. He cannot abide a state that stands up to him.

Colorado has pockets of Trump country, mostly in rural places. This is part of the national rural vs. urban divide that has sharpened during the last 15 years. The state altogether has become predictable for Democratic presidential elections since 2008. That, of course, is a black mark in Trump's thinking.

Elected state officials have not been shy in pushing back. **Trump most prominently has demanded that Tina Peters, the former county clerk of Mesa County, be transferred from a state prison to a federal prison, where he could pardon her.** Gov. Jared Polis, of course, has refused. Peters broke state laws governing the integrity of elections in her attempt to play along with the goofy and deeply dishonest story Trump concocted to explain why he lost the 2020 election. And it is worth noting yet again that Peters was convicted by a jury of her peers in a county that voted for Trump by a wide margin.

Harsh measures

Trump began his free-Tina campaign in May, issuing vague threats about "harsh measures" if Colorado did not turn over Peters. In August, he repeated his threats. Then, on his social media site on New Year's Eve, he had this to say: "I wish them only the worst," he wrote, referring to Polis and the district attorney in Mesa County who obtained the conviction of Peters. "May they rot in Hell."

*Vetoed
Pipeline
financing*
This was a day after he vetoed the bill passed unanimously by Congress that would improve financing of the pipeline to deliver fresh water from Pueblo Reservoir to 39 communities in southeastern Colorado. The bill had been passed without dissent in both the House and the Senate. Yes, Lauren Boebert linking arms with Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, and Mike Lee doing a legislative handshake with Michael Bennet. How strange is that?

Afterward, Rep. Boebert had some snippy things to say about Trump's veto. You might get the idea that she sees some political value in having just a bit of

political distance from Trump as she faces re-election in November even in her "ruby-red" congressional district, as the New York Times described it.

Trump's veto message recounted some of the history of this water delivery project, which was part of the Fryingpan-Arkansas Project approved by Congress in 1962. The recent pipeline bill, if it were to become law, "would continue the failed policies of the past by forcing Federal taxpayers to bear even more of the massive costs of a local water project — a local water project that, as initially conceived, was supposed to be paid for by the localities using it."

That strikes me as a legitimate argument, if an extreme one. To be consistent, though, the federal government would need to end much what it does. Money for airports and sewage treatment plants? No more. Scrap the interstate highway system. No more federal money in education, either. Federal dollars are everywhere.

This would put the onus on states, some better able to foot the bill than others. California delivers far more to the federal treasury than it gets back, as does Texas. Virginia, Alabama, and South Carolina are on the receiving end. Colorado comes up \$10 billion short in this federal-state equation, according to this chart from USA Facts.



Vindictiveness

What clearly matters more than a political philosophy of governance is Trump's streak of vindictiveness. These communities between Pueblo and Lamar are part of Colorado. It does not matter whether they are affluent or poor, Republican or Democrat. They are part of a state that refuses to bend its knee to Trump's ego-driven narrative of election triumph in 2020.

Trump did not lose the election! He will allow nothing — *nothing!* — to interfere with this falsehood swaddled in vanity. If people die, so be it. That was demonstrated in his incitement of an attack on the Capitol six years ago this Tuesday. Police officers died of stroke and suicide in the hours and months afterward. On his first day in office during his second term, Trump issued pardons and commutations to 1,600 of the rioters, including hundreds who had injured police. The New York Times in its editorial posted Dec. 31 said the pardons deliver a message: "If you break the law to protect me, you will be supported, and if you uphold the law to restrain me, you will be persecuted."

That's exactly what we have in Colorado with the Tina Peters case.

Most remarkable about Trump's actions has been who they have hurt. It's one thing to **strip the national laboratory in Golden of the name "renewables"** and **alter its mission.** And **gutting the National Center for Atmospheric Research hits Boulder hardest**, although that institution during the last 50-plus years has delivered many national and even international benefits. But the veto of the water bill hits people in places that have overwhelming supported Trump.

Rural Colorado will also be impacted by the Trump administration order in the final hours of 2025 to keep the coal-burning unit at Craig burning. Who will absorb the extra costs? Well, of course, members of the electrical cooperatives who get their power from Tri-State. Residents of those rural electrical cooperatives have in almost every case voted for Trump by wide margins. (See: ["Oh the irony of Craig No. 1!"](#))


Trump's team in December also **refused to grant federal funds for relief from the September flooding in southwest Colorado** that inflicted \$13 million in damage, and **wildfires in northwest Colorado that covered more than 150,000 acres and caused \$27 million in damages.** Most of the counties in question had supported Trump by wide margins.

"Meet what might be President Trump's newest enemy: the State of Colorado," said Jack Healy, the Denver-based correspondent for the New York Times in a [story on New Year's Eve.](#)


Healy reported that **Interior Department employees were asked on Dec. 17 to compile a list of all Department of Interior grants planned for Colorado.** The grant funding of about \$140 million would go to combat climate change, develop water management plans and improve parks and sanitation, among other efforts. They might be terminated.

More smiting ahead?

What will come next in Colorado? On New Year's Day, I asked others: "How might Trump smite Colorado?"

I got a range of answers. "He has cancelled snow for this season, obviously," was one response, obviously in jest. A way of saying that there was some overreaction in Colorado to Trump's rhetorical and other excesses.

From an elected local official, I got a darker take, a comparison of Trump to a giant Godzilla-like beast stomping around. "It doesn't act rationally, so you try to keep out of striking distance and not be noticed."

This was what advisors had told this elected official and colleagues. **Federal grants might be at stake.** Look at what Trump had done to the universities. Most of them have groveled. And if you look at local governments, both those in places of prosperity and those of poverty, they greatly depend upon federal largesse. It was, to a small extent, true in the time of Lincoln, but particularly since the time of Franklin Roosevelt. **All local governments, be they farming communities of northeastern Colorado or the ski resorts of the Western Slope, depend heavily on grants for everything from water-treatment plants to airport upgrades to subsidies for agricultural production.**

Pike

Might Trump, as one of my semi-confidantes suggested, decide to relocate the western headquarters of the BLM from Grand Junction — the place that convicted Tina Peters — to, Cheyenne, say, or maybe Boise?

This same individual suggested that Trump might try to yank federal military installations from Colorado Springs. In September, the move of the U.S. Space Command to Huntsville, Ala., was announced. NORAD remains at Cheyenne Mountain, along with Petersen Air Force Base.

My own speculations had me thinking of Pikes Peak. Who would have thunk that the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. would be given Trump's name by his handpicked board? The Wall Street Journal editorial board, never one to rush in defense of liberal causes, said it was inclined to consider the name change "ignorable as familiar Trumpian news," and added: "But there is the matter of the law." In the editorial, **"The Donald J. Trump Center for Everything,"** the Journal said authorizing legislation was clear that Congress alone could modify the name.

We similarly have processes and procedures in the naming of landmarks on federal land, including a prohibition of naming features for living person. But that was in the old days. Might Trump spike Pike from the mountain presiding over Colorado Springs in favor of his own? I cannot imagine that happening, frankly — but this Trump presidency has produced much that was unimaginable.

The Colorado River negotiations are particularly sensitive. The seven basin states have infamously been unable to agree about how to share this shrinking river. The federal officials involved seem to be highly regarded by many in the basin, and given the impasse now, there has been a call for federal intervention. **But what if Trump himself gets involved, using the river to settle scores, most prominently with Colorado and California?**

Hard telling what that might look like. But then, it's hard to come up with any rational explanation for much of what Trump does. The only clear principle is that

it must benefit Trump's ego or pocketbook.

"His volatility has everyone scared," somebody told me, and I think that's accurate. That has people averting their eyes when in public, hoping the beast doesn't notice them. **And it has them telling me: "Don't write about this."**

Free Tina

My original plan was to deliver a 750-word column on this question that I would then distribute to newspapers and others. These are almost all smaller, more rural publications. Please, please do not write about this, I was told. Some of these ideas might get back to Trump and his aides, and he then might act on them.

I was astonished to think that little old me could have such impacts. But maybe, like the butterflies flapping in Beijing, I do.

This essay departs from my usual work devoted to the energy and water transitions provoked by climate change. But it matters immensely. And so I decided to split the difference, sending this out to the 1,417 subscribers of Big Pivots, including you, but no broader audiences.

On the other hand, maybe I'll dip into the Big Pivots' treasury to produce a T-shirt that says Free Tina!

I'll put it on when the feds come knocking to take me to the pig farm.

— **Allen Best**

About the photo: President **John F. Kennedy** commemorated the **Fryingpan-Arkansas Project** in Pueblo in 1962. At Kennedy's left was **U.S. Rep. Wayne Aspinall**. Also on stage: **Interior Secretary Stewart Udall** and **U.S. Senator Peter Dominick**. No women were to be seen. Photo: Robert Knudsen/White House Photographs, via John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.



Big Pivots

5705 Yukon St, Arvada

From The Sum & Substance Newsletter, Ed Sealover, Colorado Chamber of Commerce

Dec 22, 2025

Already-skeptical legislators could derail Pinnacol disaffiliation by considering sale of company



Gov. Jared Polis explains his budget proposal on Oct. 31 while standing beside Lt. Gov. Dianne Primavera.

POSTED BY: ED SEALOVER DECEMBER 19, 2025

As the latest plan to privatize Pinnacol Assurance again is engendering skepticism, it also is producing suggestions by legislators that could ground negotiations to halt — that state officials essentially raffle off the workers' compensation company to the highest bidder.

For the second legislative session in a row, Gov. Jared Polis has pinned his budget-balancing proposal partially on the idea of disaffiliating the state-chartered mutual insurance company and allowing it to operate without government controls. The deal,

Polis says, could generate \$400 million for a Legislature looking to try to close an \$800 million budget gap next year, and it would free Pinnacol to sell policies in other states, which is viewed as key to the company recovering its lost market share.

While state and Pinnacol leaders still would have to agree on the final details of any transaction — assuming legislators approve a change in law allowing the privatization — a seemingly acceptable price appears to have emerged. A Joint Budget Committee memo from earlier this year noted that Pinnacol officials said they are willing to consider any price that did not cost them more than \$600 million, including costs beyond the disaffiliation fee that are needed to repay the state's pension system.

Should state demand more than “halfsies”?

But on Wednesday, as the Joint Budget Committee discussed the potential for such a move, several legislators asked whether the state, rather than letting Pinnacol purchase its freedom, could sell the company and bring in more money instead. Sen. Jeff Bridges, D-Greenwood Village, particularly pushed that line of questioning, saying he has heard from “folks in the market” that some are willing to pay more than the \$400 million price that the Democratic governor has floated for the company to pay the state.

“Why are we going halfsies when we could get a lot more money by just selling that outright?” Bridges asked during a hearing on the Pinnacol proposal.

Mark Ferrandino, director of the governor's Office of State Budgeting and Planning, replied that while Polis is not opposed to such a plan, Pinnacol does not support that idea, so the administration is focusing on a simple financial transaction for disaffiliation. He added that allowing Pinnacol to continue operating as it is but without state oversight also would create more consistency in the market, which the businesses that make up Pinnacol's customer base would prefer.

But when asked by The Sum & Substance about the possibility of being sold by the state, Pinnacol responded in no uncertain terms that the idea is not only unacceptable but is flat-out illegal, in the company's view.

“The state does not own Pinnacol. The state cannot accept bids or sell Pinnacol outright because Pinnacol's assets belong to employers,” said Wes Parham, vice president of public affairs for the insurer.

Pinnacol history

Legislators created a workers' compensation division to sell insurance in 1915 but gave it autonomy in the 1980s to act like a private firm, even as the governor appointed its board and oversaw the charter determining what policies it could sell and how it could sell them. Wanting to eliminate the state's financial risk and liability in the company, legislators agreed to transfer \$80.8 million to Pinnacol in 2002 and allowed it to operate

as an independent mutual company under the ownership of its members, as it does today.

Still, the state continues to hold power over its board appointments and its operating rules, including provisions that Pinnacol cannot sell policies to workers in other states and that it can't sell other lines of insurance. And those restrictions, combined with the state's budget crunch, have married Pinnacol's long-standing interest in privatization with the state's newfound interest and have brought discussions to the point where they are today.

Both Polis and Pinnacol officials believe the company's future is a lot murkier if it can't start selling policies outside of Colorado. Once the holder of a 60% market share, Pinnacol has fallen under 50% — including a drop last year from 52% to 49% — in part because it can't serve companies with workers beyond Centennial State borders unless it contracts with other insurers to handle those out-of-state policies, typically at much higher prices. As a result, it now serves only 5% of Colorado companies with multistate workforces at a time when roughly half of all companies have workers in other states.

Pushback against idea of privatizing Pinnacol

While 49% share isn't chump change — Pinnacol still serves some 50,000 companies, and the next closest competitor has a 3% share, Colorado Insurance Commissioner Michael Conway said — the more business Pinnacol loses, the more its finances are imperiled. That's because it serves as the insurer of last resort, meaning it writes policies for the highest-risk companies that private insurers won't take. And the higher percentage of its business that those companies make up, the lower its operating margins will get, forcing it to cut service or raise premiums, Ferrandino said.

While Polis and Pinnacol officials support disaffiliation at the right price, JBC members, who have the responsibility for writing the state's annual budgets, are more skeptical.

Several of them, along with unions like the Colorado AFL-CIO, have expressed concern that privatizing Pinnacol would shift its focus away from customer service and toward expansion instead. They also worry such a move would send construction-firm or outdoor-recreation-company premiums soaring without there being a state-chartered insurer of last resort, though Ferrandino detailed several ways the state could handle last-resort policies.

Rep. Kyle Brown, D-Louisville, and Sen. Judy Amabile, D-Boulder, suggested that Pinnacol could be permitted to sell policies out of state or to sell other lines of insurance without the state having to go so far as to privatize the company. But Ferrandino responded that Pinnacol doesn't want to have to sell other lines of insurance, and he noted that 25 states ban workers' compensation insurers who are part of another state's government because they have unfair tax advantages. (Pinnacol, for example, pays no premium tax in Colorado.)

Required PERA payment another potential sticking point

Pinnacol officials reiterated Wednesday in a statement, as Ferrandino did in his conversation with the JBC, that they would prefer to reach a deal in which they paid the state to disaffiliate.

“Pinnacol agrees that a full separation from the state is the most seamless way to modernize its structure and meet the needs of its members,” Parham said. “Pinnacol would remain a mutual company, owned by its members with no outside shareholders. Pinnacol is not seeking private equity, outside investment or to be sold outright to another company in its conversion.”

Yet, there is another snag that threatens the deal — the amount of money that the Public Employees’ Retirement Association is seeking to cover the unfunded liability created by Pinnacol withdrawing its roughly 500 workers from the public pension plan.

Using a discount rate of 5.25% to factor in the revenue it will lose over time from the loss of those workers in its plan, PERA has suggested it would require payment of \$320 million from Pinnacol. Pinnacol officials suggested that PERA use the same 7.25% discount rate that it uses to estimate long-term earnings on its investments, which would bring the cost down to about \$180 million. Ferrandino told the JBC he prefers something in between.

Is there enough time to get deal done?

The money owed to PERA will be in addition to whatever disaffiliation fee that Pinnacol pays the state, which currently has suggested the aforementioned \$400 million figure. But the March 17 JBC memo makes it clear that Pinnacol believes the costs should not exceed \$600 million combined, which they would be roughly \$120 million under PERA’s \$320 million ask.

Ferrandino also told the JBC that if the discount rate ends up close to the 5.25% that PERA is seeking, that could mean that the state gets a lower payment in the deal — something around \$300 to \$350 million. And that would mean that legislators would have to find other ways to plug a portion of the current budget hole.

Rep. Rick Taggart, a Grand Junction Republican and retired businessman, said he agrees with the privatization strategy, rather through disaffiliation or sale. But with the JBC needing to have a budget draft by mid-March and so many questions hanging over this proposal, he questioned whether such a deal can happen this session.

“To me, the elephant in the room is the 400 million dollars as it relates to the budget,” Taggart said during the JBC hearing. “And it seems to me the reaction to this could make it hard to get this done in time.”

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NEWS SERVICE: HOUSING

Democrats, local governments are gearing up for another round of battles over housing in Colorado

One of the bills, called the HOME Act, would make it easier for public schools and universities, local public housing authorities and certain nonprofit organizations to build residential units on their land



Lucas Brady Woods

3:14 AM MST on Dec 22, 2025



New housing construction in Ridgway, Colorado, in the San Juan Mountains, June 3, 2024. (Hart Van Denburg, CPR News)

The Unaffiliated
All politics, no agenda.

Colorado Democrats plan to introduce a pair of bills during the upcoming legislative session that aim to boost the state's housing stock by making it easier for homeowners to subdivide and sell off their land and giving organizations with large properties the ability to usurp local zoning laws to build homes.

The forthcoming measures are setting up another round of battles between lawmakers and local governments, who complain that the legislature is eroding their ability to design their communities.

One of the bills, called the HOME Act, would make it easier for public schools and universities, local public housing authorities and certain nonprofit organizations to build residential units on their land. The nonprofits would have to have a proven history of building new housing in order to qualify.

According to a recent draft viewed by KUNC, the bill would require local governments to allow the qualifying organizations to build housing on properties up to five acres in size, whether or not the land is zoned for residential construction, that is up to three stories tall or as tall as the area's zoning rules allow.

"I haven't been to a single community in the state of Colorado that hasn't identified housing and housing affordability as a top issue," said state Rep. Andrew Boesenecker, Democrat from Fort Collins and one of the bill's lead sponsors. "This issue is not one that simply lives within one municipality or one county, it's a regional and also a statewide issue that continues to affect folks across our state, and so I believe the state has a vested interest in trying to figure out ways to bring more housing to bear."



This story was produced as part of the Colorado Capitol News Alliance. It first appeared at kunc.org.



House Speaker Pro Tempore Andrew Boesenecker, D-Fort Collins, speaks before Gov. Jared Polis signed a housing bill into law on Tuesday, May 13, 2025, in Denver, Colorado. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

The bill will include some exemptions, including for parcels that don't have access to water or sewer infrastructure, or those that are subject to conservation easements, are part of airport exclusion zones or are classified as historic. Organizations would also have to go through an approval process, and local governments would be allowed to impose standards for utility access, health and environmental safety, historic district and inclusionary zoning.

The proposal is backed by Gov. Jared Polis, who has made increasing housing inventory a top priority as he enters his last year in office.

"In Colorado, we are taking action to tackle our housing needs from every angle to build more homes, lower costs and save Colorado families money, and this proposal does exactly that," Polis said in a written statement.

The legislation is modeled in part on a bill that failed last year, with some key differences.

Along with schools and universities, last year's bill included religious institutions in the list of qualifying organizations and did not include housing authorities or nonprofit organizations with a history of housing development.

Also, like the upcoming HOME Act, last year's bill would have overruled local zoning laws, drawing opposition from municipalities and counties. The bill was passed by the Colorado House, but didn't have the support it needed to pass the Senate.

Boesenecker said the "diversity of perspectives around the faith communities" included in last year's bill made it challenging to come to a consensus around the policy, and that he

hopes the list of organizations included in this year's measure will allow that support to come together.

Another Democrat-backed affordable housing bill planned for the upcoming legislative session would aim to make it easier for homeowners to sell off a portion of their property.

"If I create for you an opportunity to split off a portion of your lot to be able to secure your long term financial future in your home, and also create a homeownership opportunity for somebody else, I think that's a win," Boesenecker said.

The proposal builds on **legislation passed in 2024** that made it easier for Coloradans to build accessory-dwelling units, also known as granny flats, on their properties, Boesenecker said. It would apply to high-density areas of the state.

The two proposals are already drawing criticism from the **Colorado Municipal League**, which represents the interests of towns and cities at the state Capitol.

The group's executive director, Kevin Bommer, argued the measures would undermine the rights of local communities to make decisions for themselves and could violate self-governance powers of home rule cities granted by the Colorado constitution.

"Legislators don't serve on planning commissions. Legislators aren't involved in zoning discussions. These are purely local issues," Bommer said. "Every one of these bills that attempts to say local government shouldn't have the right to determine these things locally is really aimed at cutting people out of the process."

The conflict between state and local control of land-use rules has dominated housing policy at the legislature in recent years. Proposals backed by Polis and Democratic lawmakers have faced significant pushback from counties, municipalities and lawmakers who say they amount to state overreach.

In 2023, lawmakers packed multiple land-use reforms into one sweeping bill that included requirements to increase density in certain areas, up-zone single-family neighborhoods in big cities, and implement state-prescribed housing plans in mountain towns.

The bill drew vehement opposition from local governments and ultimately **failed** after Democrats could not agree on how much the state should override local land use rules.

Since then, a number of proposals have become law despite local government opposition, including a pared-back measure to increase housing density around public transportation, as well as bills to ban residential occupancy limits and reduce parking requirements.

Six home rule cities sued Colorado earlier this year, arguing the measures violated the state constitution by preempting their authority to control land use rules.

The pending lawsuit specifically challenges the constitutionality of an executive order signed by Polis in May to deprioritize some grant funding to local governments that fail to

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NEWS: POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

House declines to override Trump veto of bill to complete water pipeline in southeastern Colorado

The vote was 248 in favor of overriding the veto and 177 opposed. It needed the support of two-thirds of those voting to pass.



Jesse Paul

1:26 PM MST on Jan 8, 2026



Nearly 1,000 feet of welded pipe lays next to the Arkansas Valley Conduit ditch in eastern Pueblo County. (Mike Sweeney, Special to the Colorado Sun)

The Unaffiliated
All politics, no agenda.

The Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday declined to override President Donald Trump's **veto of a bill** intended to help complete a pipeline to carry clean water to communities in southeastern Colorado

The vote was 248 in favor of overriding the veto and 177 opposed. It needed the support of two-thirds of those voting to pass.

Thirty-five Republicans joined all of the voting Democrats in supporting the override, but it wasn't enough. All eight U.S. House members from Colorado — four Democrats and four Republicans — voted to override the veto.

The **Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act** passed Congress unanimously last year. It would shift more of the cost of completing the Arkansas Valley Conduit onto the federal government and away from the communities in southeastern Colorado, many of them poor, it aims to serve.

The conduit, first approved in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy, is a 130-mile pipeline that is supposed to span Lake Pueblo to the Lamar area and carry clean water for municipal and industrial uses. The communities the pipeline aims to serve struggle to provide water to residents and businesses because of **naturally occurring salinity or radionuclide contamination** in their groundwater.

The counties served by the conduit — Pueblo, Otero, Crowley, Kiowa, Bent and Prowers — all voted overwhelmingly for Trump in 2024.

In vetoing the bill, Trump complained about shifting the cost burden onto the federal taxpayer.

“Ending the massive cost of taxpayer handouts and restoring fiscal sanity is vital to economic growth and the fiscal health of the nation,” he said in a letter explaining his decision.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated the bill would add less than \$500,000 to the federal government's cost of the project. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$1.3 billion shared between the federal and local governments.

But the decision also came as Trump is intensifying his **reprisals against Colorado** over the state's refusal to release Tina Peters from prison.

Peters, the former clerk in Mesa County, is **serving a nine-year state prison sentence** for **orchestrating a breach** of her county's election system as part of a failed attempt to uncover voter fraud. The president **vowed to punish** Colorado as long as Peters remains in prison — and he appears to be making good on that promise.

U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert, a Windsor Republican who was the main sponsor of the legislation, and whose district would benefit most from it, has been highly critical of the veto.

“Nothing says ‘America First’ like denying clean drinking water to 50,000 people in southeast Colorado, many of whom enthusiastically voted for him in all three elections,” Boebert said of the president when the veto was announced.



Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., left, speaks with Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., during a hearing of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on Capitol Hill, Wednesday, Jan. 7, 2026, in Washington. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

Boebert, normally a Trump ally, spoke on the House floor Thursday to implore her colleagues to override the veto.

“This is a piece of legislation that has gone through committee, has been negotiated, has been debated, has gone back and forth between both chambers — and we were able to pass this single-subject legislation all the way through with unanimous support in this body and in the Senate,” she said.

U.S. Rep. Jeff Hurd, a Grand Junction Republican whose district would also benefit from the bill, said the override was a test of whether the federal government was willing to honor its commitments.

“These are real families, real towns and real public health consequences,” he said. “Rural Colorado and rural America, more broadly, voted overwhelmingly for this president and for an agenda that promised they would not be forgotten. They expected Washington to keep its word, not abandon them midway.”

U.S. Rep. Joe Neguse, D-Lafayette, joined his Republican colleagues from Colorado in asking that the House override the veto.

“As you consider where you land on this particular vote, let me be abundantly clear: it does not matter if your community supported Donald Trump politically if we don’t take this step,” he said. “Trust me — no town is safe, no county is safe, no state is safe from political retaliation by the administration. We will be back here on the floor debating a veto for a project in Arkansas or in Texas or in Ohio.”

Trump’s veto of the Finish the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act was one of two the House declined to override Thursday. The other veto was of a bill that would have designated a site in Everglades National Park as a part of the Miccosukee Indian Reservation.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said leadership was not urging — or “whipping” — members on how to vote. He said he would personally vote to sustain the vetoes and the president’s message opposing the bills “sounded very reasonable to me.” He said he understood the concerns of the Colorado lawmakers about the veto and would work to help them on the pipeline issue going forward.

Boebert said she had been talking to colleagues individually about overriding Trump’s veto of the Arkansas Valley Conduit Act, but wasn’t sure about hitting the two-thirds threshold. Some colleagues “don’t want to go against the president,” she said.

The override’s failure in the House means it won’t make it to the Senate.

“This is Washington at its worst,” U.S. Sen. John Hickenlooper, a Colorado Democrat who worked on the bill. “Every single U.S. House member supported this bill to bring clean water to southeastern Colorado before Christmas — Democrats and Republicans. But today they refused to stick to their guns and override President Trump’s retaliatory veto. Rural Colorado is paying the price for these political games.”

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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NEWS: WATER

Colorado water regulators approve historic stream, wetlands protections

After three days of hearings and a late-night vote, officials gave the green light to rules that will protect Colorado's waters even as the EPA pulls back



Jerd Smith

3:25 AM MST on Dec 12, 2025



Wetlands along like these along Big Sandy Creek run the breadth of the May Cattle Ranch near Lamar, providing habitat to a wide variety of birds, from sparrows to eagles. (Mike Sweeney, Special to The Colorado Sun)

Colorado water regulators late Wednesday approved an extensive set of rules designed to protect thousands of miles of streams and vast wetlands, stepping up as one of the first states in the nation to do so.

“It’s a big moment,” said Kathy Chandler-Henry during the last day of hearings. She is a member of the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission from Eagle County.

The rules cover dozens of issues related to how the state will issue permits dictating how construction, homebuilding and farming activities that disturb waters and wetlands can occur.

The idea is to protect these natural resources while giving businesses the flexibility they need to operate.

The vote by the nine-member Colorado Water Quality Control Commission came after nearly 16 months of public hearings and meetings of environmental groups, water providers, farmers and other industry interests. The rules were written to regulate dredge and fill activities in state waters as authorized by [House Bill 1379](#), a hard-fought bipartisan measure approved by Colorado lawmakers in May 2024. The state commission oversees the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Water Quality Control Division, which will enforce the rules.

The fragile coalition that came together to approve the 2024 law [almost fractured](#) in the weeks leading up to the hearings, with industry groups charging that health regulators and environmental interests were trying to change the law in ways the legislature didn't intend and environmental groups issuing similar charges.

Ultimately, commissioners rejected inclusion of a broad public interest standard in the new rules, agreeing with industry that it wasn't necessary. But they approved clarifying language about wetlands that are close to irrigation ditches and water delivery canals, something that environmentalists fought for but which wasn't detailed in House Bill 1379.

In the end, major water providers who objected to some of the rules, such as Northern Water, said they were reasonably comfortable with the final rules.

"Through the hearing process we feel our concerns were addressed and appreciate the efforts of the WQCD to consider and resolve issues in the interests of all parties," said Chris Manley, senior water quality policy specialist with Northern.

Environmentalists said the rules meet most of their goals for protecting state waters and wetlands, although there was disappointment that the public interest standard was removed.

"We feel pretty good about the rules that were adopted," said David Nickum, executive director of Colorado Trout Unlimited.

Colorado leads the nation in completing rules that address a major gap created in 2023 when the U.S. Supreme Court, in its [Sackett v. EPA decision](#), wiped out a critical set of environmental safeguards contained in the Clean Water Act.



This Fresh Water News story is a collaboration between The Colorado Sun and Water Education Colorado. It also appears at [wateredco.org](#).

The Sackett decision said, in part, that only streams that flow year-round are subject to oversight. It also said only wetlands that had a surface connection to continually flowing water bodies qualified for protection.

Western states were hard-hit by the decision because few of their rivers and streams flow year-round, and wetlands often only appear after rain and snowstorms, leaving them unprotected under the revised Clean Water Act rules.

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After Sackett, Colorado moved quickly to begin studying how to create rules to replace what had been removed from the federal Clean Water Act.

In House Bill 1379, lawmakers said all state waters and wetlands should be protected. But they also included a list of waters that would be excluded from the new law to protect farmers and water providers and some industries. The law also contained exemptions for activities such as maintenance work on irrigation ditches and canals. And it specifies that work that disturbs less than one-tenth of an acre of wetland or a three-hundredths of an acre of a streambed also be exempted from oversight.

The rules will take effect early next year, according to CDPHE spokesman Brent Temmer.

Colorado's action comes just weeks after the **EPA proposed new rules** that would further reduce federal protections for wetlands and streams.