



911 CONFIDENTIAL

North Dakota may be the next state to restrict public releases of 911 recordings. Representative Lawrence Klemin has introduced a bill that would bar public disclosure of a 911 recording or transcript unless the caller agrees to its release. Current law treats 911 recordings as public records. “We aren’t allowed to grab people’s medical records, but yet we can grab their entire life in a brief moment of time and make them listen to it over and over and over again,” Representative Todd Porter told the Associated Press. Newspapers and broadcasters in the state oppose any restrictions, arguing that they provide important information to the public. A compromise might be to allow the release of transcripts rather than audio recordings of calls. Six states—Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Wyoming—keep 911 call recordings confidential. Georgia, Maine, Minnesota and South Dakota place some restrictions on the release of 911 calls or call information.

SIZE MATTERS

Nebraska is the only state with a unicameral Legislature, and lawmakers there are debating what size it should be. Competing bills call for increasing or decreasing the number of seats. Senator Bob Krist would like to decrease the number from 49 to 45 in order to save money. But Kate Sullivan would like to see Western Nebraska acquire an additional seat, making the Legislature an even 50. Minnesota, too, is debating its size. Bills in both chambers would eliminate 11 Senate and 22 House seats; currently the House has 134 seats and the Senate 67.

WOMEN’S HISTORY

In 1981, Congress designated the second week of March as National Women’s History Week but soon realized that a week was too short to celebrate the achievements of more than half the country’s population. So, in 1987, Congress expanded it to the entire month. Why March? The answer dates to March 8, 1857, when women from New York City factories staged the first protest over working conditions, according to the Census Bureau. Every year, Congress passes a resolution for Women’s History Month, and the president issues a proclamation.

NULL AND VOID

Idaho is leading a charge to nullify the federal health reforms by citing the “Kentucky Resolutions,” believed to be written by Thomas Jefferson in 1798. Jefferson was protesting the Alien and Sedition Acts passed by Congress when he wrote “whosoever the general government assumes undelegated powers, its acts are unauthoritative, void, and of no force.” Lawmakers in Idaho and six other states are contending this doctrine gives states, not the U.S. Supreme Court, the authority to be the final arbiters over controversial federal laws. South Carolina used this argument in the early 1800s against federal tariffs that Southerners felt were discriminatory against slave states. Wisconsin, several years later, tried to nullify the federal Fugitive Slave Act in 1854 that required northern states to return escaped slaves. Arkansas chose to nullify the federal government’s order to desegregate public schools after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The high court rejected Arkansas’ position, citing Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, which subordinates state laws to federal ones. “Laws of the United States which shall be made in Pursuance thereof; and all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby.”



IRISH MONTH

March is Irish-American Heritage month, and here are some facts from the Census Bureau to consider. There are 36.9 million U.S. residents who claim Irish ancestry—more than eight times the population of Ireland. America produced 26.1 billion pounds of corned beef and 2.3 billion pounds of cabbage in 2009. There are four towns named Shamrock: in Indiana, Oklahoma, Texas and West Virginia. Nine states boast a town named Dublin, Ireland’s capital. North Carolina has Emerald Isle, Illinois has Irishtown and lucky Minnesota has the township of Cloverleaf.

ADJUSTING TERMS

Arguing that the current system isn't the best for the state, Florida lawmakers are considering bills to ask voters to increase representatives' terms from two to four years and senators' terms from four to six years and to extend term limits from eight to 12 years. Representative Rick Kriseman is concerned that the continual campaigning is "not what I think legislators' primary focus should be. It should be on legislation and good policy and moving the state forward," he told the St. Petersburg Times. Senator Mike Bennett said that, while he supported the citizens' constitutional amendment to limit terms in 1992, he now believes lawmakers need more time learn how government works and to become effective. The ideas have bipartisan support.

HAVE A GOOD DAY

Wyoming representatives know how to start the day off right. Every morning right after the roll call, opening prayer and Pledge of Allegiance, Republicans and Democrats shake hands and even sometimes give each other hugs and backslaps. "Basically, everybody's just saying, 'Have a good day,'" Representative Pat Childers told the Associated Press. This isn't new to the Wyoming House. The 60 lawmakers have been doing it since 2001, although no one seems to be sure exactly why. It's a reminder, Representative Bernadine Craft says, that "we're all here really for the same purpose. And even though we disagree on many of the issues ... we really are citizens of Wyoming trying to do the best we can." The practice hasn't caught on yet in the Senate.



THE BEST

There's a blog you might want to check out that lists what every state is No. 1 at. According to "What's Your State Good At?" Delaware has the highest percentage of scientists and engineers with Ph.Ds. Maine has the lowest rate of incarceration per capita. North Carolina produces the most sweet potatoes, and Utah has the highest literacy rate. Other statistics that aren't so surprising: Iowa produces the most corn, Wisconsin has the most cheese makers, California has the largest economy, and Michigan has the longest freshwater shoreline—in the world.

GUN LAWS RECONSIDERED

Since the shooting in Tucson, public support for a nationwide ban on assault weapons has risen from 54 percent in 2009 to 63 percent in mid-January, according to a CBS News/New York Times poll. The survey also found that 63 percent of Americans (including 58 percent of gun-owning households) favor a ban on high capacity clips that hold dozens of rounds, while 34 percent oppose it. Handguns find more support, with 65 percent of Americans opposing any ban on them, about the same percent as in 2000. Overall, the survey found that 46 percent of Americans think gun laws should be stricter, 38 percent want them to stay the same, and 13 percent want them less strict. According to Stateline, however, for every bill seeking new limits on guns this year, there have been just as many seeking broader access to them. The New Hampshire House voted in January to allow concealed guns in the statehouse and surrounding legislative buildings; nine states already do. Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell acted to permit the open carry of firearms in state parks. As of the end of January, lawmakers have introduced bills to allow guns in the statehouse (Montana), to eliminate the need for a permit to carry a concealed weapon (Utah and Wyoming), to allow teachers and administrators to carry concealed guns to school (Nebraska), to allow guns on college campuses (Arizona, Florida, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas), to allow concealed weapons in cars parked on company property (Texas), or to roll back many of the restrictions on where concealed pistol permit holders can lawfully carry (Mississippi).



VERY GIDDY-UP

A public service advertisement in Montana has people there wondering, "Can you be charged with driving under the influence when riding a horse?" The answer? No, not in Montana, where the law does not apply to vehicles that are moved by "animal power." The ad was meant to encourage people not to drive, but instead find a friend (even if it's a horse) to take them home after drinking.