Straight Outta Michigan
Michigan is the latest state to eliminate straight-party voting—the popular, convenient option of supporting an entire ticket of one party’s candidates with a single mark. “It’s time to put people over politics,” Governor Rick Snyder (R) said in a statement after signing the bill. The new law requires voters to mark their choices for each office individually. Responding to concerns from clerks that removing the straight-vote option will cause longer lines at the polls, lawmakers included $5 million for additional voting booths and tabulators. Lawmakers also made the law immune from a referendum. Voters have twice preserved straight-ticket voting in referendums, most recently in 2001. Forty other states have ended straight-ticket voting.

A Tale of Two Users
Not all cannabis users are alike, according to a new survey by the RAND Corporation. Whereas past studies have focused on special groups—cancer patients, for example—the RAND researchers looked at use among the general population in four states that have legalized medical marijuana: Colorado, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington. Among the findings: About 86 percent of people who report having used cannabis for medical purposes also use it recreationally. Medical users consume more of the drug (in grams) and spend more money on it per month than recreational users. Medical users also are more likely to vaporize the drug or consume it in edibles, such as cookies or brownies. They are less likely than recreational users, however, to consume cannabis and alcohol simultaneously, which some studies have shown increases the likelihood of driving drunk. Twenty-three states, the District of Columbia and Guam allow marijuana to be used for medical purposes.

Sooner Suds
A group called Oklahomans for Modern Laws wants to make strong beer and wine available in the state’s grocery and convenience stores. Members are gathering signatures to place a state question on November’s ballot. If voters approve, the change would be a boon to the Sooner economy, the group says. A trade association for independent beer wholesalers hasn’t formally backed the proposal but supports the expanded sale of strong beer; the state’s retail liquor association, however, says the measure would hurt package stores. In the Legislature, a group is working on a separate, yet-to-be-finalized constitutional amendment that would modernize the state’s alcohol laws yet “have a broad base of support from across the industry,” Senator Clark Jolley (R) says. Regardless, a quick change is unlikely: It was 1959 before Oklahomans ended Prohibition in their state—though they weren’t the last to do so. Mississippians held on until 1966.
Milk in the Raw
A raw deal is a good deal for some folks. Maryland lawmakers, led by Delegate Dan Morhaim (D) and House Minority Leader Nic Kipke (R), are considering a bipartisan measure that would let dairy farmers sell raw milk, but only to consumers who are partial owners of the cows. Maryland and 18 other states currently prohibit the sale of raw milk to consumers—that is, milk that hasn’t been pasteurized to eliminate Salmonella, E. coli, Listeria and other dangerous bacteria. In 31 states, consumers can buy unprocessed milk at a farmers market or store, or through a cow share program. Supporters say raw milk is more naturally nutritious and can help those with digestive issues; however, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report no nutritional difference after pasteurization. Some farmers worry that an outbreak of foodborne illness could hurt their industry.

Culling the Harvest
Concerned that efforts to collect early ballots and turn them in to elections officials—sometimes known as “ballot harvesting”—are susceptible to fraud, Arizona Representative Michelle Ugenti-Rita (R) proposed a bill that would make it a felony for anyone but a family member, roommate, caregiver, postal worker or candidate to collect early ballots from another person. “It protects the integrity of our electoral process,” she said. Critics say the measure would limit voter participation, exclude poor and Latino voters and turn volunteers collecting early ballots into felons. The measure resurrects part of a 2013 election law that was overturned by voters. At least 14 states restrict who can return a ballot and how many ballots they can collect.

Phantom Memorabilia
The actor Mark Hamill has seen it all too often: movie fans with posters or other memorabilia they bought believing the items were signed by him. Hamill, who portrayed Luke Skywalker in four “Star Wars” films, including last year’s “The Force Awakens,” says the signatures often are fake. “The public is being swindled on a daily basis and the numbers are huge,” he told the Los Angeles Times. Now, like a Jedi fighting for justice, Hamill is teaming up with California Assemblywoman Ling Ling Chang (R) to extend a law that currently applies only to sports memorabilia to all autographed collectibles. The bill would require dealers to provide certificates of authenticity for signed memorabilia sold in the state, and allow conned consumers to recoup up to 10 times the cost of a forged item in court. For wary fans, this could be “A New Hope.”

‘Ban the Box’
Among the many challenges people face when trying to re-enter the workforce after serving time in prison is “the box”—the one on employment applications next to the question about having a criminal history. If they’re honest and check the box, they fear employers won’t give them an interview. A measure in Colorado would extend the ban on asking about criminal history on state government job applications to the private sector. Background checks would be delayed until after an applicant has been offered an interview, though employers required by law to do checks would be exempt. Seven states have similar “ban the box” laws.