

1

BYO Bud Clubs

The Colorado Senate passed a bill permitting marijuana clubs, as long as they do not serve alcohol or any food beyond light snacks, The Associated Press reports. Supporters of the first-in-the-nation measure say it could help towns regulate underground clubs, which have grown in number, and address a perception that Colorado's parks and other public areas have become havens for weed smokers since the state legalized recreational marijuana in 2012. The bill does not expressly ban indoor smoking at the bring-your-own clubs, which Governor John Hickenlooper (D) has hinted might make the measure a target for his veto pen.



2

Divided, but Not on Everything

For all our divisions, there's agreement among Republicans, Democrats and independents on what makes for a healthy democracy, the Pew Research Center reports. In a survey conducted in February, large majorities of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (92 percent) and Democrats and Democratic leaners (90 percent) said fair, open elections were very important to maintaining a strong democracy. Large portions of both parties (83 percent of Republicans, 85 percent of Democrats) also said a system of checks and balances dividing power among the president, Congress and the courts was very important. There was less consensus, however, on the freedom of the press to criticize politicians, which Democrats (76 percent) were far more likely than Republicans (49 percent) to view as very important.



3

Less Rest for the Weary

Are rest-stop picnics a thing of the past? Truckers, travelers and interstate drivers of all kinds already are covering greater distances between traditional rest stops, if they find them at all. With the growth of commercial travel centers and their gas stations and restaurants, not to mention the cost of staffing and maintenance, some states have shuttered their rest stops permanently, Pew's Stateline reports. Among the states closing rest areas in the last two years are Florida, Michigan, Ohio and South Dakota. Connecticut lawmakers are mulling a proposal to shut down all seven of the state's interstate rest stops to save money. Nostalgia aside, federal law limits the number of hours truckers can drive without rest, making the stops vital to drivers' safety, an industry trade group says.

4

'You Can Take Dat to da Bank'

"Don't do the crime if you can't pay for a special election," as 1970s TV Detective Anthony "Tony" Baretta might have said, if he'd worked the statehouse beat. A South Carolina measure, which is likely the first of its kind, could require elected officials convicted of felonies to pony up the costs of filling the seats they would be forced to vacate, The Associated Press reports. A special state Senate election can run about \$85,000, and a House election about \$35,000, a State Election Commission spokesman says.

5

Reining in Runoff

Enough of the runoff from Midwestern farms is making its way into the region's waterways that, in some areas, it threatens the safety of drinking water. Minnesota is taking the lead as the first state to require farmers to maintain a strip of grass, an average of 50 feet wide, along many of the state's streams, NPR reports. The strips help filter nitrates, phosphorous and other chemicals out of farm runoff. In Iowa, the effort to protect water has been more contentious. The Des Moines Water Works sued nearby counties to force them to clean up farm drainage flowing into the Raccoon River, which supplies drinking water to the city. Farmers were not happy, and a measure now in the Iowa Senate would dismantle the utility and replace it with a regional water authority that would likely drop the lawsuit.



6

So Close, Yet so Far

A mere 100 miles of the Gulf of Mexico separate the United States from Cuba. Miami is closer to Havana than it is to Jacksonville. Still, proximity and improved diplomatic relations at the close of the Obama administration haven't made it easier for Cubans to visit their northern neighbor. Cuba has the highest U.S. visa refusal rate of any country in the world, the website Statista reports, citing U.S. State Department data. The U.S. turned down 81.9 percent of all Cuban tourist and business applications (B visas) in fiscal year 2016. Afghanistan (73.8 percent), Mauritania (71.5 percent), Liberia (70.2 percent) and Gambia (69.9 percent) round out the top five.

8

Curbing Contributions

Lawmakers in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Washington are considering measures that would bar political spending by businesses in which non-U.S. citizens have a significant ownership stake, The Pew Charitable Trusts reports. The bills follow reports of ride-hailing companies Uber and Lyft, with their respective Saudi Arabian and Chinese investors, spending \$9 million on a 2016 ballot measure in Austin, Texas, and more general concerns about Russian election interference. Supporters say the measures would augment federal laws barring noncitizens and foreign companies from donating directly to candidates or political parties at the federal, state and local levels. Opponents question what amounts to "significant" ownership and argue that businesses with some, particularly minimal, foreign ownership shouldn't be shut out of the political process.

9

Time Expiring on N.D. Meter Ban?

So incensed was North Dakota farmer Howard Henry after getting a parking ticket that he led a successful effort to ban parking meters in the state. The ban, which went into effect in 1948, is still on the books, making North Dakota the only state to prohibit the meters on all but state or private property. Some, including Governor Doug Burgum (R), want to lift the ban to encourage more parking turnover, which they say will yield more sales for businesses and more revenue for communities and the state, the Bismarck Tribune reports. Not pleased is former state Senator JoNell Bakke (D), Henry's granddaughter, who said she will lead a fight to restore the ban if it's repealed.

7

New Supply of Lethal Drug

Having acquired a new supply of a drug used in executions, Arkansas was set to resume using the death penalty for the first time since 2005, The Associated Press reports. Eight inmates were scheduled to receive lethal injections last month. The state ran out of potassium chloride, one of three drugs used in the lethal injection "cocktail," in January. The new supply, and the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in February not to review the state's lethal injection law, cleared the way for executions to resume.



10

Unhealthy Return on Investment

Americans pay a lot more for their health care than the rest of the world does. At \$9,024 per capita annually, U.S. spending is twice that of other developed countries, the website Our World in Data reports, and nearly three times above the average (\$3,620) for countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. That spending has not led to greater life expectancy, which is 78.9 years in the U.S., nearly identical to that of the Czech Republic, which spends \$3,386 a year per capita. Nor has it helped certain segments of the U.S. population. For men with a high school diploma or less, mortality rates are up 130 percent from 1998, according to the Brookings Institution.

