

INDEPENDENT

Inking

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INDEPENDENCE
INSTITUTE.ORG



Our Womens' Luncheons Are Back!

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THINK FREEDOM

WE ARE AN ACTION TANK AND A PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM FOR LIBERTY.

A central role of an effective think tank is to produce quality research and analysis. Since 1985, we have provided research resulting in changes in law and policy. But we have never been content with just research. We are more than a think tank. We are an “action tank.” We put our ideas into action through groundbreaking litigation, coalition building, work on ballot initiatives, new media and investigative reporting. We don’t just fight on paper. We fight for freedom on the streets, in the statehouse, in the media, on the ballot, and in the courts.

The mission of the Independence Institute is to empower individuals and to educate citizens, legislators and opinion makers about public policies that enhance personal and economic freedom.



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Letter from the President

By Jon Caldara, President



Hollywood is coming to my hometown. By now you've heard the Sundance Film Festival is moving to Boulder. What a relief! Finally, some common folk are coming to town. As you know, Boulder is home to the state's most smug elite. But starting in 2027, for one glorious week a year, Hollywood types, with their humble, live-and-let-live, limited government views will descend on my little hamlet of progressive hate.

People with more common sense and basic American values will finally be walking the streets of my neighborhood. Boulder's level of arrogance should be cut in half.

For one week my hometown won't be all about virtue signaling. My little metropolis will be visited by normal folks like George Clooney who, next to the average Boulderite, doesn't need to constantly emote his beliefs and political desires.

Sundance said they moved to Boulder because of its "welcoming environment." Don't need to be a codebreaker to read between the lines. They wanted to move out of a red state to a pronoun-policed, righteousness-infatuated city nestled in a Trump Derangement Syndrome state.

And I don't mind my whacky town getting wackier for a week. Tens of thousands of mega-wealthy, moralistic, image-obsessed progressives will descend upon the town of mega-wealthy, moralistic, image-obsessed progressives. Maybe I'll Airbnb my house and make a few bucks. After all, the governor's office says this party will bring in \$2 billion of revenue over 10 years. That's a lot of cheddar.

In fact, that's why he signed a bill to give Sundance \$35 million out of our massively underfunded state budget. Wow! Only \$35 million to bring in \$2 billion! We should make that deal all day long. That's a 57-fold return on investment. How many of your investments are paying 5,700%? I'm guessing less than half?

A 5,700% return is known as "economic development math," which also goes by the street name "complete fiction." But wait a second. If the economic benefit is going to bring in \$2 billion, why would taxpayers have to put in a penny? Boulder hotels, restaurants and movie houses would be more than happy to scrape together the kickback for that kind of payout. For \$2 billion it's a no-brainer. So, either they don't want to pay it because they can use other people's money, or they know the return on investment might not actually be 5,700%. (It's both.)

Diffused taxpayers getting their money confiscated and bundled, then given to concentrated politically tied special interests is how cronyism works. Thus, the code name "economic development."

Among all the economic development scams, subsidies to filmmakers are notoriously the worst. Analysis from New Mexico's own government discovered their "films subsidies have a negative return on investment." Now, I'm not a mathematician, but a "negative return on investment" sounds like less than a 5,700% return.

New Jersey found out the \$430 million in taxpayer subsidies was more than the \$300 million earned by all film and video production employees. But then again, Jersey isn't known for math. Well, maybe the mob accountants.

On behalf of the governor and all the economic winners in Boulder, I like to thank the taxpayers from all the far-flung corners of Colorado who will get almost nothing out of this corporate welfare except some pictures of celebrities in the news. Taxpayers in Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Grand Junction and every little town in between are paying Robert Redford's organization to make the state's richest city just a little more wealthy.

Sounds fair.

Think Freedom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Caldara". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light-colored background.

“It is much more important to kill bad bills than to pass good ones.” – Calvin Coolidge.

In the spirit of Silent Cal’s prescient maxim, and with the 2025 legislative session just having wrapped up, it’s worth celebrating the demise of two terrible pieces of energy legislation under the Gold Dome this year.

Up first is the contemptuous House Bill 25-1277. Sponsored by Democratic lawmakers Junie Joseph, Jennifer Bacon, and Lisa Cutter, the bill proposed mandating that retailers who sell certain fuel products like gasoline or propane tut-tut their own customers out of buying their products with a first-in-the-nation warning label requirement. With mandates specifying the font size, color, and location of the label—as well as punitive daily fines for anything but perfect compliance—it would have had to state:

“Warning: Use of this product releases air pollutants and greenhouse gases, known by the state of Colorado to be linked to significant health impacts and global heating.”

Bewilderingly, this exercise in legislative condescension and consumer shaming cleared the state House of Representatives. However, its Senate sponsor was forced to voluntarily kill the bill in its first Senate committee hearing in the final days of the session after it became clear that the state’s upper chamber didn’t share the same contempt for Coloradans who still have the audacity to drive the most common form of personal vehicle on the road today. Good riddance.

The other failed measure is one that never actually made it as far as formal introduction. In the waning weeks of the legislative session, the Governor’s Energy Office began circulating a 64-page draft late-bill that would have dramatically accelerated the timeline on the state’s already rigorous decarbonization mandates. Even though major Colorado utilities are already raising red flags over the expense and reliability implications of going green, the Polis administration proposed requiring them to completely eliminate all of their greenhouse gas emissions by 2040—ten years faster than current requirements.

Predictably, this last-minute proposal to shift the state’s environmental goalposts once again ignited a firestorm. Independence Institute spoke out about how devastating the move would be for ratepayers and their access to reliable electricity. Separately, most of the state’s major utilities, along with both business and labor groups, also made their displeasure with the proposal known. That proved to be enough to see the draft bill pulled until next session.

Policy stability will prevail, if only for a year.

Finally, and with respect to Mr. Coolidge, the passage of good bills can be quite satisfying too.

HB25-1040, a bill to classify nuclear fission as clean energy, finally made it out of the legislature and was signed into law by Governor Polis this session. This policy has been a multi-year priority for the Independence Institute and is a big step for energy realism in Colorado.

The new law will shield nuclear power from being excluded should the General Assembly choose to increase the state’s renewable portfolio standards requirements (which some in the Colorado Democratic party have pushed for) and will allow utilities to count nuclear as helping them meet the state’s decarbonization benchmarks. More importantly, it will also serve as a signal of openness to utilities and would-be power plant builders that Colorado is no longer hostile to the country’s largest source of carbon-free power.



Jake Fogleman

Jake Fogleman is Director of Policy at Independence Institute. He is a cum laude graduate of Metropolitan State University of Denver, where he studied political science and economics. Jake is a Colorado native.

The Constitution and Colorado's Conversion Therapy Ban

By Rob Natelson

May Colorado constitutionally ban counselors from encouraging patients to identify with their biological gender—while allowing counselors to encourage patients to change gender? On March 10, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to review a case posing that issue. The case is *Chiles v. Salazar*. It is the latest of several Supreme Court cases in which the justices have reviewed efforts by leftist Colorado officials to suppress viewpoints on gender and sexuality with which the officials disagree.

In 2019, the legislature banned licensed counselors from uttering politically-disfavored speech while administering therapy. Specifically, it prohibited “conversion therapy” for minors. The legislature allowed counselors to assist patients who wish to depart from their biological gender, but prohibited them from assisting patients in reclaiming their biological gender.

Kaley Chiles, a licensed counselor and traditional Christian, claims the 2019 law violates the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment. She argues it is unconstitutionally vague and a “viewpoint based” restriction. Under the Supreme Court’s twentieth century First Amendment precedents, a viewpoint-based restriction is void unless the state can show it is “necessary to further a compelling governmental purpose.” After losing in the lower federal courts, Chiles successfully petitioned the Supreme Court for review.

Traditionally, American political liberals have distinguished between civil liberties (which they count as important) and economic freedom (which they count as less important). But *Chiles v. Salazar*, like some other recent Colorado cases, shows that freedom is not so easily divisible.

You can see this in the application of Colorado civil rights laws. On their face, those laws seem to restrict only economic freedom. But by forcing those in business to serve those they do not wish to serve, they also infringe on the right of free association. As the number of Colorado’s protected categories has grown, enforcement has increasingly clashed not only with the right of free association but with freedom of speech, press, and religion.

A lower court ruled that Colorado’s ban on conversion therapy merely prohibits a particular kind of professional conduct, to which speech is only incidental. The court added that “speech made in a professional context is distinguishable from, for example, political speech.”

Of course, in today’s environment any discussion of issues such as “gender identity” is necessarily “political speech.” Moreover, the lower court’s holding is problematic for several other reasons as well:

First: The Constitution makes no distinction between political speech and other kinds of speech. On the contrary, the historical record shows that when the Bill of Rights was ratified, “the freedom of speech” included all forms of oral communication, aside from a few specific exceptions such as treason, sedition, and slander.

Second: Labeling the speech prohibited by the Colorado statute as “incidental to professional conduct” proves too much: It would allow government to ban certain newspaper comments on the pretext that those comments were published only “incidentally” to the conduct of the newspaper profession. Not surprisingly, therefore, in two other recent Supreme Court cases arising out of Colorado, the justices implicitly rejected that argument.

Third: There is a dangerous trend in which government censors justify suppression by labeling disfavored comments as “unprofessional” or “professional misconduct. Some lower courts have acceded to the trend, but the Supreme Court should not.



Rob Natelson

Rob Natelson is Senior Fellow in Constitutional Jurisprudence at Independence Institute and a former constitutional law professor at the University of Montana. He is the author of *The Original Constitution: What It Actually Said and Meant* (3rd ed., 2015).

A New Innovation to Expand School Choice in Colorado

By Pam Benigno

Texas has proudly adopted the largest day-one school choice program in the nation. Though K-12 school choice has been controversial in Colorado, voters have supported preschool choice. Denver has successfully implemented a preschool voucher program since 2006, and the state has a preschool choice program as well.

In our latest education publication, *Municipal-Level Tax Credit Scholarships: A Way to Build on Existing Success*, Education Senior Fellow Ross Izard proposes an innovative municipal school choice program aimed at enhancing the chances of student achievement by helping students enrolled in private preschools remain in their school as they transition to kindergarten and possibly through third grade. Let me start by sharing important background information.



SCAN TO READ

The Denver Preschool Program (DPP) was approved by voters in 2006. It is funded by a sales tax increase to help Denver families cover preschool tuition costs, including at private and faith-based preschools. While the program is available to all families, the amount of tuition assistance is based on family income. In 2023, DPP provided credits worth nearly \$20 million to just under 5,000 students. The average credit value per student was \$594 per month.

Additionally, Denver supports afterschool and extracurricular activities for PK-12 students through My Spark Denver, a nonprofit partnership. The program offers \$1,000 debit cards to families for activities with over 100 approved providers. The City and County of Denver allocated \$3.5 million in 2023-24. My Spark highlights the city's commitment to supporting students beyond early childhood.

Colorado's Universal Preschool Program (UPK) provides all four-year-olds with 15 hours of free preschool weekly. UPK is funded by taxes on nicotine products approved by voters through Proposition EE in 2023. As with DPP, families can choose from public, private, or faith-based providers.

Many non-public preschool providers offer higher-grade levels, but taxpayer funding ends when the child turns five. Therefore, children attending these preschools experience a disruption in their education unless families can afford tuition costs or benefit from scholarships from the school or scholarship-granting organizations.

Research shows that moving to a new school can be disruptive and negatively affect student performance. With more aid, let's say, from a scholarship-granting organization, children enrolled in some non-governmental preschools could remain in the school for kindergarten.

In our paper, Ross proposes an Educational Stability Tax Credit Program designed to allow individuals and businesses to offset a city's occupational privilege tax (OPT) liability. This can be achieved by OPT taxpayers donating to K-12 scholarship-granting organizations in exchange for an OPT tax credit.

Four cities in Colorado impose an occupational privilege tax (OPT) on individuals who work or do business within their jurisdictions. Denver, for instance, collects almost \$57 million from its OPT.

Denver residents have clearly shown their support for using tax revenues to fund education and may favor expanding assistance for children enrolled in non-public preschools through DPP by utilizing the OPT. This would help many children make a smoother transition to kindergarten and, if funding permits, continue through third grade.



Pam Benigno

Pamela Benigno is Director of the Education Policy Center. A tireless advocate for both public and private school choice, she works with education organizations, policymakers, and community leaders to expand school choice opportunities.

Transparency Coalition Scores Wins for Open Government

By Shayne Madsen

Independence Institute has been remarkably successful on the policy front this Colorado Legislative Session in advocating for open government and protection of our First Amendment rights by proposing proactive legislation and opposing new anti-transparency legislation. Even though Colorado is controlled by Democrats in the House, Senate and Governor's office, we scored wins through a combination of solid research, participation in broad interest coalitions, combining ideological strange bedfellows and strategic communications with decision makers.

Our first step was to draft and introduce a proactive bill to repeal the 2024 Bill restricting public access to legislative proceedings and propose new reforms of the Colorado Open Records Act to promote transparency. Ultimately, HB25-1242 was introduced by two Republican legislators from northeast Colorado—Rep. Lori Garcia Sander and Senator Byron Pelton. Although the Bill was defeated in its first Democrat-controlled committee, we achieved our goal of announcing the new coalition and testing reform provisions.

Unfortunately, in this Session, local governments and school districts requested the introduction of SB25-077 by Senator Kipp (D), Fort Collins. This Bill proposed to amend the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) to increase the costs for requesters to access public records, provide a statutory “excuse” for any government in Colorado to slow down the timing of disclosure and perhaps prevent disclosure altogether, and finally to let the government define who is a “journalist” to disadvantage true citizen requesters seeking to review the government records.

Acting in concert with our Transparency Coalition members, Independence Institute provided regular commentary to legislators and discovered in the process that communications from Jon Caldara and Independence Institute have over a 75% open rate which is unheard of in general political communications. Because the Bill passed with all Democrats and a sprinkling of Republican support, we and our coalition turned our attention to requesting a veto from Governor Polis. When Governor Polis finally vetoed SB 77, his veto message highlighted the efforts of Independence Institute and our coalition partners stating that he “supports more, not less, openness and transparency”. When the Bill sponsors recognized that they did not have the votes to override the Polis veto, they capitulated and issued a public statement indicating their desire to work with our coalition to draft new future legislation.

The coalition is now commencing the hard work of drafting an initiative measure to reform both CORA and Open Meetings laws, including provisions concerning criminal and judicial records for the 2026 Ballot. We anticipate continuing to work with Governor Polis as well as legislators and local governments and school districts.



Shayne Madsen

Shayne M. Madsen is the General Counsel and Director of our Political Law Center, where she is a leading voice on donor privacy issues. She previously led the Public Policy and Regulatory Affairs Practice Group in the Denver office of law firm Jackson Kelly PLLC.

Complete Colorado's 2025 Legislative Session Coverage

By Mike Krause

As a news site focused on state and local politics, goings on under the gold dome are of particular interest for Complete Colorado coverage, and this Spring was no exception as we published over 60 pieces of reporting, commentary and analysis of the 2025 legislative session, which wrapped up May 7. We looked at everything from lower taxes on premium cigars (sadly snuffed out) to new restrictions on gun shows and ammo sales (those bills unfortunately passed) and from lower penates for attempted murder (thankfully killed off, pun intended) to construction defects reform (passed after several previously failed attempts).

Of particular focus were policy issues of interest to Independence Institute. For example, Complete heavily covered House Bill 1140—adding nuclear to the state's statutory definition of clean energy—as it made its way through the legislature, and eventually to Gov. Polis' desk for approval. It was a hallmark moment for Colorado energy policy after several previous failed attempts at passage, as well as a decade of work by Independence Institute's energy policy crew.

We also kept a close eye on the Democrat-dominated legislature's ongoing crackdown on government transparency. Senate Bill 77, for example, slapped onerous new burdens on citizen access to public documents, then added insult to injury by exempting those the state defines as "journalists," essentially creating a tiered system of privilege for open records requests. While the bill passed with bi-partisan support, we were quite pleased to be able to report on Governor Polis' veto of the measure.

You may have read in the progressive press that heroic lawmakers struggled to come up with hundreds of millions in "cuts" to balance the state budget and that it was the fault of that dastardly Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) hamstringing well-meaning politicians. Thankfully, Independence Institute fiscal policy analyst Nash Herman took to Complete Colorado, setting the record straight that this year's budget gap was, as Nash put it, a "self-inflicted wound" caused by years of "relentless overspending," and that TABOR was simply fulfilling its role as a fiscal reality check.

There's little question that this year's legislative session was a disaster for gun rights, and Complete Colorado was there to chronicle the damage, including significant coverage of Senate Bill 3, which began as an outright ban and later morphed into an expensive and burdensome gun-buyer licensing scheme. Complete Colorado was the only place to find expert analysis showing the bill was much broader than proponents claimed, encompassing essentially all semi-automatic weapons.

Complete Colorado strives to be a one-stop shop for engaged Coloradans to get their daily fix of state and local political news. So tell a friend or two about us, and please, keep coming back.



Mike Krause

Mike Krause is Editor-in-Chief of *Complete Colorado*. A former ski instructor and construction carpenter, Mike was a Senior Fellow and editorial writer at II before heading up *Complete Colorado*.

John Andrews Hall

By Julie Mallon

More than half a century ago, John K. Andrews Jr. was wielding his mighty pen as a speechwriter for President Richard M. Nixon. Then, when the unfolding Watergate scandal presented him with a choice between truth and power, he chose truth and became the first man in the Nixon White House to resign.

Four decades ago, John and his brother-in-law David D'Evelyn created Independence Institute to proclaim the eternal truths of the Declaration of Independence. Under John, the Independence Institute became a beacon of liberty. Today, so many wonderful ideas that John's Independence Institute was the first in Colorado to promote have become the law of our land.

The people of Colorado twice elected John as a state senator, and his peers chose him as President of the Senate. Every day in his eight years at the Capitol, he labored as a watchman on the wall, defending truth, justice, and the American way.

But he wasn't finished yet. Next he founded a second think tank, the Centennial Institute at Colorado Christian University. Like the Independence Institute, the Centennial Institute is still going strong, in a third generation of leadership after its founding by John.

Many public policy organizations bloom for a while when led by the founder. But many fewer are so well-founded that they endure for the ages.

While John Andrews throughout his career fought in the present, his eye was always on the future, to preserve the best of our state and nation, and make life even better for the next generations. So the Independence Institute and the Centennial Institute became incubators not just for ideas, but also new scholars and leaders.

In over half a century of public service, John Andrews has fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. He has been a doer of the right and not a hearer only.

Today, we offer our own gratitude by naming Liberty Hall as Andrews Hall, but it's only another way of saying the name, for John Andrews has always been synonymous with Liberty. Andrews Hall will remind all of us of our gratitude for the blessing of knowing John and having been helpers in his great mission of liberty.

Thank you so much John.

On February 26, Independence Institute honored our Founder John Andrews, recognizing his enduring legacy in championing the freedom movement in Colorado and beyond.

Friends and former colleagues, gathered to reflect on John's unwavering commitment to advancing freedom, his bold ideas, and his relentless energy in challenging the status quo. Through his leadership, Independence Institute became a powerful force for policy reform and civic education, influencing generations of thinkers and policymakers.

We were honored to celebrate the legacy of a true champion for freedom. John Andrews' vision laid the foundation for our ongoing mission, and his example continues to inspire all who believe in the power of ideas to change the world.



Julie Mallon

Julie Mallon is our Donor Relations Manager. She's re-joining Independence Institute's development team after working in the event planning world, where most recently she managed guest experiences at an upland hunting ranch in Northeast Wyoming.

Whine and Cheese Party

By Whitney Navarro

On May 15, Independence Institute hosted its much-anticipated W(h)ine and Cheese party, an evening where passionate policy lovers gathered to sip fine wine and air their grievances about the latest antics of the Colorado Legislature. True to tradition, the event combined sharp political commentary with sharp cheddar, offering guests a lighthearted yet pointed forum to express their frustrations and toast to liberty.

Set against the backdrop of our Freedom Embassy in Denver, the evening featured curated wines, an artisanal cheese spread, and no shortage of spirited conversation. From misguided bills to overreaching regulations, no legislative misstep was safe from scrutiny—or sarcasm.

Our fellow freedom fighters and policy directors took to the mic throughout the night to share their own “whines,” making for a cathartic blend of wit and policy insight. While the legislature may not have given us much to cheer about this session, our community came together to laugh, commiserate, and recharge for the fights ahead.

As always, W(h)ine and Cheese proved that while freedom isn’t free, complaining about bad policy can at least be delicious. Here’s to next year—and to making sure the Capitol hears our voices (and our groans).

At the event, we proudly honored Brandon Wark of Free State Colorado with the **Vern Bickel Award** for grassroots leadership and activism. Vern Bickel embodied the spirit of a free man—honor, dignity, rugged individuality, a zest for life, and an unrelenting pursuit of adventure. In that same spirit, Brandon—a dedicated political operative and passionate blogger in the defense of liberty—was recognized for his outstanding grassroots efforts to advance personal and economic freedom in Colorado.



Whitney Navarro

Whitney Navarro is our Development Associate. She is a graduate of Lake Forest College in Chicago where she studied Organic Chemistry along with Legal Studies. She has always had an interest in nonprofit fundraising and development which she puts to good use in managing all our many events.

II TV Premieres Two New Shows to Our Line-Up!

By Vanessa Rutledge

MANDY AND DEB

The Mandy and Deb Show is Colorado's boldest liberty-focused talk show, hosted by radio veterans Mandy Connell and Deborah Flora. Every other week, they tackle hot-button issues like education, parental rights, free speech, and government overreach—with sharp wit and zero tolerance for political correctness. Produced by Independence Institute TV, it's the unapologetic, freedom-loving conversation you didn't know you needed.



TWISTED VIEW

Twisted View is a fast-paced, irreverent talk show hosted by Leland Conway, featuring a rotating panel of liberty-minded guests like Ben Allbright, Christian Toto, and others. With sharp wit and unapologetic humor, the show takes on politics, culture, and government overreach from a fiercely libertarian perspective—skewering sacred cows on both sides of the aisle and always defending individual freedom.



Vanessa Rutledge

Vanessa Rutledge is our Communications and Marketing Manager. She comes to II from the tech world where she worked with everyone from Fortune 500 companies to small businesses wearing many different hats from programming to project managing.

Independent Women's Luncheon

A Big Success

By Whitney Navarro

On April 9, Independence Institute threw a party disguised as a luncheon — and if you missed it, well you're in luck because there are more to come. Our Independent Women's Luncheon was packed tighter than a Washington lobbyist's wallet—full of smart, fearless women, a lot of laughter, and one absolute firecracker: Jennifer Sey.

Jennifer didn't just spill the tea—she launched the whole kettle across the room. From ditching a cushy CEO gig at Levi's to slamming cancel culture with nothing but grit and good sense, she reminded us that bravery never goes out of style.

The food? Fantastic. The crowd? Even better. The vibe? Purely feminine. We came, we ate, we conquered—and we didn't even *think* about asking for permission.

If you weren't there, you missed truth bombs, power outfits, and probably the best steak salad this side of the Mason-Dixon line. But chin up—knowing us, we're just getting warmed up.

Moral of the story? Freedom looks fabulous, sounds fearless, and smells suspiciously like victory and champagne vinaigrette.

Mark your calendars! We are excited to announce that our next Independent Women's Luncheon will be on October 29, with Anne Hyre, Executive Director of Bettering Human Lives, speaking on the foundation's work on sustainable projects that uplift the well-being of women, children, and communities in Ghana and Kenya. Registration will open July 2025. (Still no men allowed).



Citizen Power: How One Colorado Resident Made a Difference—and How You Can, Too

By Kathleen Chandler

In a time when government feels increasingly heavy-handed—when bureaucracy reaches into everyday life and top-down “solutions” seem more broken than the problems they’re meant to fix—it’s easy to feel powerless. But the truth is: YOU are the solution. Not another program. Not another agency. Not another politician. YOU.

Colorado is our home and no one knows how to protect it better than the people who live here. That’s the guiding philosophy behind Independence Institute’s Citizen Involvement Project (CIP), which, for over a decade, has empowered Coloradans to stand up, speak out, and act in their local communities. Because when hope turns into action, and citizens take the reins, we don’t just reform policies—we reshape the future.



SCAN TO LEARN ABOUT CIP

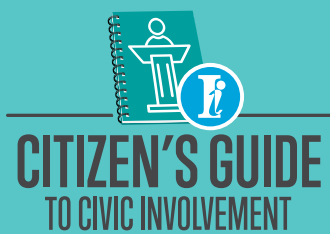
One Voice, One Victory

Consider the story of Samantha DaVito. Samantha attended one of our CIP workshops with a goal: to get involved in local government. She applied to serve on a commission but wasn’t selected. That setback could’ve been the end of her story but instead of stepping back, Samantha stepped up—starting with her local homeowner’s association (HOA).

Many don’t realize that HOAs operate like micro-governments. They collect dues (functionally, taxes), hold elections, and manage essential services. Samantha began reviewing the HOA’s financials and made a discovery: they were drastically overpaying on the community’s water bill. Thanks to her persistence and follow-up, the association corrected the error—saving each resident an average of \$180 per month. **That’s not small change. That’s impact.**

And it raises the question: what if Samantha hadn’t gotten involved? Would anyone else have spotted the overbilling? Maybe. Maybe not. But because *she* took action, her entire community benefitted—and a utility provider was held accountable. **Be the Next Samantha**

If just 10 hours a month could lead to real savings, more transparency, and stronger communities—wouldn’t it be worth it? This is what civic engagement looks like in practice. It’s exactly what the Citizen Involvement Project teaches through our workshop, Citizen’s Guide to Civic Involvement, see below for information on our next class.



CITIZEN'S GUIDE
TO CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

Thursday, June 19th

6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

Zoom format

Cost: \$15

Learn where and how you can make a difference in your community.

Do you know there are over 4,000 governments up and down the front range? We will discuss how to get appointed to these boards and commissions.

Come join us as we explore how you can take the initiative and curtail the maddening overreach of government.

Colorado belongs to all of us. Let's make sure our voices shape its future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
OR TO REGISTER:
i2i.org/local-gov



Kathleen Chandler

Kathleen Chandler is the Citizen Involvement Project Director and Future Leaders Program Manager for Independence Institute. She has a degree in Political Science from the University of Colorado and has been involved in politics since she was 18 years old.

2025 Budget Wrap-up

By Nash Herman

After six months of doomsday rhetoric surrounding this year's "\$1.2 billion budget shortfall," the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) balanced the budget without the sky falling. In fact, the sky was never going to fall. As usual, the General Assembly did not have a \$1.2 billion revenue problem, but a problem with prioritization and spending.

Why did these budget challenges occur this year? In short, the state is running out of federal COVID-19 funding, inflation is cooling (high inflation allows for faster budget growth, as permitted by TABOR), and the legislature passed a record number of tax expenditures over the last several years, which reduce revenue. All of these factors allowed the state to live beyond its means, but reality is finally catching up now that certain costs are increasing faster than the budget is sanctioned to grow by TABOR.

Healthcare spending is one significant contributor to the recent budget unsustainability. Alone, it accounts for a third of the state budget and is also the fastest-growing sector. Other high-velocity spending comes from K-12 and higher education, which together account for another 40% of the state budget.

However, despite the supposedly near-catastrophic budget scenario, the state's budget is still growing by almost 4%, or over \$1.5 billion, without significant cuts to healthcare, K-12, or higher education spending. In total, the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing will actually receive an approximately 8% budget increase.

So, how did they balance the budget? The JBC cut pet projects from the previous session before they could be implemented, transferred money from underutilized cash funds into the general fund, cut underutilized programs, and prioritized needs over wants. That sounds considerably better than what legislators and the media suggest.

For some perspective, most other near-one-hundred-year-old, multi-billion-dollar organizations would appreciate seeing such meritless revenue growth—growth that Coloradans generously grant via TABOR and in good faith. Additionally, unlike the state, businesses must serve more people or create better products to generate more revenue.



Nash Herman

Nash Herman is a policy analyst at Independence Institute. He graduated from the University of Denver with a bachelor's degree in International Studies and Political Science, and a master's degree in Global Economic Affairs.

Milestones for Team Parker

By Tracy Kimball Smith

I met Jon Caldara, president of Independence Institute in 2000 when I started doing volunteer graphic design. Jon quickly offered me a contract position and an office in their suite at the Denver West Office Park. It was only a few months later when I heard from one of the full-time staff members that Jon's infant daughter, Parker, was very sick. It was cancer, and it was bad, really bad. In fact, it turned out to be incurable and Parker was not going to survive. I had a hard time wrapping my head around that prognosis. In my experience, when someone received a cancer diagnosis, they just got surgery and maybe some chemo and that fixed the problem. My grandfather—who worked for many years at an asbestos company and smoked from age 15—had bladder cancer, kidney cancer, and colon cancer and he was still going strong. So hearing that this adorable little girl was not going to beat her cancer, was just unthinkable and heartbreaking.

I could not even imagine the pain and helplessness that Jon and Parker's mother, Mara, were going through. Somehow, they both managed to survive and went on to have two more children together, Piper and Chance.

In 2007, I was recruited by a friend to ride with Team Westword in the Courage Classic, a bike tour in the mountains of Colorado that raises money for Children's Hospital, the very place where Parker received her diagnosis and care. Children's Hospital is also the place where Parker's brother Chance, who has Down's Syndrome, has had multiple surgeries. For the first few years, I rode with Team Westword and wore a bib dedicating my ride to Parker. In 2010, I officially formed Team Parker to honor Parker's memory.

My colleagues from II, Damon Sasso and Amy Oliver Cooke, joined the team as riders, Hilleary Waters joined as a volunteer. Even Jon Caldara himself has ridden with us a few times. With the weight loss from his post-heart-attack diet of kale and celery, it should be much easier for him to haul his new svelte figure over the mountain passes this year, made even easier when riding an e-bike (his secret is safe with me.)

This year's Courage Classic will be from July 19th-20th and will be my 19th year riding. I am just shy of \$96,000 in fundraising. This year, I'm hoping to reach the \$100,000 milestone. Team Parker has raised more than \$230,000 cumulatively and we are shooting for \$20,000+ in donations to bring our total to a quarter of a million dollars raised for Children's Hospital. Not too shabby for a bunch of rag-tag freedom fighters!

Please consider donating to one of the riders of Team Parker. We really appreciate your support. Pedal on!





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