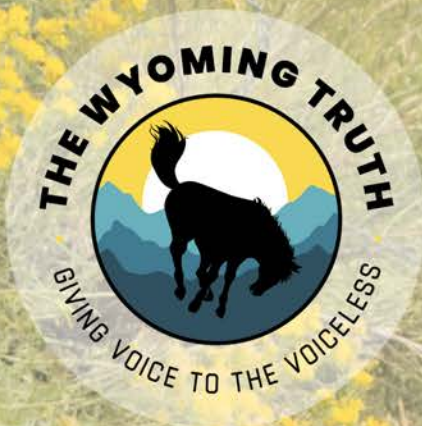


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ABOUT US

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The Wyoming Truth, a nonpartisan news nonprofit, adheres to the principles of fair, accurate and thorough journalism. We follow the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, which means being accountable and transparent, minimizing harm, acting independently and seeking the truth and reporting it. We strive to publish impartial, informative stories that matter to local citizens, serving as a watchdog for the community.



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By Shen Wu Tan
May 30, 2022

Rally attendees called for the removal of Rep. Liz Cheney and expressed support for Trump-backed candidate Harriet Hageman

Casper, Wyo. – For Joey Thompson, the most pressing issue for Wyoming voters in the upcoming midterm election is the struggling oil, gas and coal industry – a common sentiment expressed by other Donald Trump supporters at the Save America rally on Saturday.

The 39-year-old Casper resident, sporting a “Trump 2024” baseball cap and a sweater that featured a cartoon of the former president urinating on the name “Biden,” recalled how he was forced to leave his job as an oil field hand in 2016 when rigs around the state started to shut down. He exited the industry altogether as a result, switching to a job removing trash for a small sanitation company.

But his current employer, Shirks Sanitation, is now hurting from the higher prices for diesel. Thompson said it costs about \$400 to fill up a trash truck, and with three trucks to fill, the sanitation company paid about \$7,700 for diesel in April. Due to the higher operational costs, he said he has had to forego annual raises since 2020.

“It’s triple the price to fill my work truck every day, and we’re really feeling that pinch at work,” Thompson said, while waiting for Trump to take the stage as arena speakers blasted Barbra Streisand’s rendition of the song “Memory.” He attended the Trump rally, which was his first, with his sisters, niece and nephew.

“We just don’t feel like things in America are really right right now,” Thompson added. “We feel like there’s a lot of turmoil.”

The Wyoming native said he will support Harriet Hageman, the Trump-endorsed candidate for the state's lone U.S. House seat and former gubernatorial candidate, because he agrees with her policies. Hageman, an attorney from Cheyenne who was raised on a ranch near Fort Laramie, has advocated for an "energy independent" America that doesn't have to rely on other countries for oil and gas supplies.

"I think it's time for [Liz] Cheney to go," Thompson added. "I don't think she's done much while she's been in office. I don't think she's represented Wyoming very well, and I believe it's time we get somebody to do that."

Rally Goers: It's Time to Give Cheney the Boot

That was a recurring message at the Trump rally hosted at the Ford Wyoming Center, a seven-hour event that attracted a crowd of around 8,000 and featured speeches by notable Republicans, including Arizona Rep. Andy Biggs, Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, Colorado Rep. Lauren Boebert, and MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell. The Casper rally was the latest stop on Trump's cross-country tour to promote his slate of endorsed candidates that ranged from Rep. Jody Hice for Georgia's Secretary of State to Dr. Mehmet Oz for Pennsylvania's seat in the U.S. Senate and Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin for Idaho governor.

"Over the next six months, the people of Wyoming are going to vote to dump your RINO [Republican In Name Only] congresswoman Liz Cheney," Trump told the cheering crowd at the rally, referring to

Pictured right: Joey Thompson, a 39-year-old Casper resident, attends his first Trump rally Saturday with his family. Thompson, a former oil field hand who was forced to leave the industry, says the struggling oil, gas and coal industry is one of the most pressing issues for Wyoming voters. (Wyoming Truth photo by Shen Wu Tan)

Wyoming as a majestic state and MAGA [Make America Great Again] country. "This August, we're going to vote out this atrocious RINO, and we're going to replace her with a conservative warrior from a place called Wyoming. Harriet Hageman will be a true champion for the people of this state."

Trump also took the opportunity onstage to criticize Democrats, including President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"But in many ways, worse than the terrible Democrats, are the backstabbing RINO Republicans who are helping them with their act," Trump added. "And there is no RINO in America who has thrown in her lot with the radical left more than Liz Cheney."

Trump held the rally to raise funds for Hageman, who lags behind in millions in campaign financing, in an effort to unseat Rep. Cheney. The former president first announced his endorsement of Hageman last year.

"I know Wyoming, I love Wyoming, I am Wyoming," Hageman said onstage during her Trump rally speech. "I have fought for Wyoming, and I will fight for you in Washington, D.C. And I will be taking that fight to D.C. just as soon as I defeat Liz Cheney."





Harriet Hageman enters the Ford Wyoming Center, the venue of the Trump rally, shortly after clearing security. (Wyoming Truth photo by Shen Wu Tan)

“I am going to reclaim Wyoming’s lone congressional seat from that Virginian who currently holds it,” Hageman assured the hooting, cheering and applauding crowd. “We’re fed up with those types of Republicans who work harder to deflect attention from the failures of the current administration than they work to protect us from it, and we’re fed up with Liz Cheney.”

Cheney, a vocal critic of Trump who voted to impeach him and who serves on the select committee investigating the Jan. 6 storming of the Capitol, has become a target of the former president. In addition to Hageman, Cheney also faces competition for her seat from three other Republican candidates: state Sen. Anthony Bouchard; veteran Denton Knapp; and paralegal Robyn Belinsky, according to a final primary election candidate roster from the Wyoming Elections Division.

On the Democratic side, three candidates have thrown their names into the race for the House seat: Fort Washakie resident

Lynnette Grey Bull who previously ran for the position in 2020; Rock Springs resident Meghan R. Jensen; and Casper resident Steve Helling.

The general election is Nov. 8.

Political analysts have labeled Hageman as Cheney’s most serious challenger. A recent poll from the WPA Intelligence on behalf of the Club for Growth PAC gave Hageman a 30-point lead over Cheney among Wyoming Republican primary voters. The poll, conducted May 24-25, found that 56% of primary voters would support Hageman compared to 26% who would support Cheney.

“The primary isn’t until August 16, but a 30-point gap will be a lot for the incumbent to make up,” said J. Miles Coleman, associate editor of Sabato’s Crystal Ball, a nonpartisan political newsletter of the University of Virginia Center for Politics. “The reality is that Trump is likely still very popular with Wyoming Republicans, and Cheney is just on the wrong side of her party...Cheney has been one of his harshest critics in Congress, and she represents the state that gave him his best showing in both the 2016 and 2020 general elections.”

Cheney Says She Puts the Constitution First

Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, won her first term in Congress in 2016 with 62% of the vote. In 2018, she was elected with nearly 64%. And in 2020, she won the general election with 69% of the votes.

“I do wonder how far along in electoral politics she’d have gotten if she had a different last name -- this isn’t to take away from her own accomplishments, but many

of her father's allies have also supported her," Coleman told the Wyoming Truth. "Also, in retrospect, she may have been better off running for the open Senate seat in 2020. If she had been elected, she wouldn't face another election for six years - perhaps some of the Trump-inspired opposition to her would have died down by 2026."

Cheney, who serves as the vice chair of the select committee to investigate the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol, was removed from a top leadership role in Congress for her criticism of Trump and censured by the Wyoming GOP in February 2021 for her vote to impeach him. The state party also voted in November to no longer recognize Cheney as a Republican.

"I know I don't want Liz," said Colt Rauterkus, a 29-year-old Laramie resident who left his home at 4:30 a.m. for the rally and waited in line from 7 a.m. until the doors opened around 11 a.m. "She doesn't



Colt Rauterkus, a 29-year-old Laramie resident, arrives at the Ford Wyoming Center around 7 a.m. to attend the Trump rally, which opens its doors to the public around 11 a.m. (Wyoming Truth photo by Shen Wu Tan)

represent Wyoming. She doesn't represent us. She really doesn't represent the United States of America, but that's just one man's opinion."

Cheney's campaign did not reply to numerous requests for comment. At an event in Jackson in March, Cheney defended her vote to impeach Trump for the Jan. 6 riot as a way to protect the Constitution, arguing that the former president went to war with the rule of law and provoked the mob that attacked the Capitol.

"The stakes of this race could not be higher," said an emailed update from Cheney's campaign sent May 26. "We're at a perilous moment and are forced to confront some key questions: In this time of testing, will we do our duty and elect leaders who are serious and willing to tell the truth? Or will we look away from the danger, ignore the threats, and embrace the lies? We are here to ask for your support as we kick off this campaign so that Liz may continue to represent the great people of Wyoming in a principled and responsible way, and ensure that we have a voice in Washington who will always put Wyoming values and allegiance to the Constitution first."

Dean Ferguson, a spokesman for the Wyoming Democratic Party, described it as "pretty appalling" that every Republican in Washington, D.C., hasn't endorsed the work of the committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection. "Cheney is behaving with a basic kind of decency that would not even be remarkable if she weren't surrounded by those who can't muster that ordinary level of moral courage," he said.

While Ferguson noted he respects Cheney for standing up to Trump, he said Democrats think Cheney is too conservative and that he is glad there will be a Democratic primary for the state's lone U.S. House seat this election season.

"It gives people a reason to pay attention to races like the same dynamic you're seeing in the Cheney-Hageman race," Ferguson said. "People now have a good reason to watch the race and go to candidate events and try to pick who the best one is to run against the Republican."

He added, "The thing about the electorate is you see that really strong support for Republicans in recent years, but it's also not that many years out that they were also voting for a Democratic governor. The electorate really hasn't changed that much. So every year marks an opportunity for a candidate to break out and get in front of an electorate that isn't so hardened to partisanship that they won't consider voting for a Democrat or an Independent over Republicans."

Republicans make up about 70% of registered voters in Wyoming as of May 2022, data from the Wyoming Secretary of State show. In the 2020 presidential election, Trump received 69.5% of the votes in the state, according to Ballotpedia.

Trump Takes Shots at Cheney, Media and Democrats

Since leaving office, Trump has continually claimed that the 2020 election was stolen from him and asserted that some politicians are out to get him, including Cheney.

Pictured right: Micki Larson-Olson travels 15 hours from Abilene, Texas to attend the Trump rally in Casper. Larson-Olson previously has attended several other Trump rallies. (Wyoming Truth photo by Shen Wu Tan)

"Liz Cheney hates the voters of the Republican Party, and she has longer than you would know," Trump said during his rally speech. "Our greatest danger is not from outside of our country. Our greatest danger is these sick people from within."

"Wyoming deserves a congresswoman who stands up for you and your values," he added. "And you're going to send the incredible Harriet Hageman to Congress."

Trump made his usual, occasional jabs at media organizations, referring to them as "fake news" and eliciting some boos from the crowd for the journalists who sat near the back of the stadium. Some rally goers even paraded around in shirts that read "Fake media is the virus."

Rally attendees occasionally interrupted Trump's speech with thunderous chants of "USA, USA, USA" and awarded him multiple standing ovations. Toward the end of his 90-minute speech, Trump pronounced the 2022 election as the "most important midterm election in the history of our country" and again took aim at the Biden administration and Democrats.

"Biden and the radical left have turned calm into chaos, competence into incompetence, prosperity into poverty and security into a





A vehicle promoting former President Donald Trump for office in 2024 sits near the media parking lot during the Save America rally. (Wyoming Truth photo by Shen Wu Tan)

total catastrophe,” Trump said. “Now our country is being destroyed, and our country is paying the biggest price imaginable.” He also claimed Democrats and the Biden administration are against the “liquid gold” right under the feet of Wyoming residents, warning they will rapidly turn Wyoming into a “very poor state.”

Thompson, the former oil field hand, couldn’t agree more about the need to harness Wyoming’s energy resources—and to turn the country around starting with the midterm election.

“I would like to see us using our minerals and resources that we have,” Thompson said. “I feel like we’re not doing that very much. I feel like we have a poor economy because we’re a smaller state and we need to use what we have... And I feel like we need the right person to be in office.”



HOT WATER FOR A GROUP OF TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS WHO FIND LITTLE MERCY

By Alec Klein
June 2, 2022

The Heavy Hand of the Law Reaches into the Mormon Community; 'Come on, dude'

JACKSON, Wyo. — Packed in a Subaru Outback, they crossed the red bridge shimmering in Christmas lights under light snowfall. Then they turned left, hugging the edge of the craggy mountains in pitch black. And there it was: steam emanating from pools of water, defying the shuddering frost of winter. It was about 8:30 p.m. on January 7 last year, at the Astoria Hot Springs Park carved out of the wilderness, and everything was about to change.

“It was kind of mystical,” Josh Dawson, now 22 years old, recalls of the rising mist.

It all started out innocently enough. There were six of them—Josh and his older brother, Theo, and sister, Stormy, along with their two cousins and a friend—all teenagers

or in their early 20s. They wanted to spend one last evening relaxing together before the end of their winter break.

So, in their bathing suits, they climbed into the hot springs pool. “Just hanging out, talking,” says Allysa Johnson, now 20 years old, a friend of the Dawsons who had just moved to Jackson.

The following day, Josh would head back to Snow College in Utah where he played middle linebacker. Not long before, he had returned from Bolivia, where he had served on a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, often referred to as the Mormon Church.

His brother, Theo, would also return to school, Brigham Young University, where he, too, played middle linebacker. Theo, who is 24, had also served as a missionary, in Chile. Allysa would be heading back to BYU as well.

For about 45 minutes, they swapped stories and regaled each other with jokes. No alcohol. No drugs. No intimacy. No vandalism.

No matter.

At 9:23 p.m., Tristan Shockley, the co-manager of the Astoria Hot Springs Park, texted a message to his friend, Ted Dawson, the father of Josh, Theo and Stormy. Tristan wanted to let Ted know that someone had called the sheriff's office, complaining that poachers had trespassed at the hot springs pools.

When the manager checked the security video feed, Tristan instantly recognized one of the people in the pool: It looked like Theo. "It's no biggie," Tristan texted Theo's dad, Ted.

Tristan declined to comment for this article.

Moments later, a harsh spotlight caught the six in the pool. A sheriff's squad car pulled up.

"Whoa," Josh thought.

"We tried to hide for a second," Theo says sheepishly.

But submerging under water was not an effective plan.

Pictured right: From left to right are Ted Dawson, Josh Dawson, Theo Dawson and Allysa Johnson. Josh, Theo and Allysa, along with three others, were charged with criminal trespassing for soaking in the Astoria Springs after hours.

Get out of the pool, one of the sheriff's deputies ordered; you're trespassing.

They complied, stepping out of the pool, dripping wet in freezing temperatures. Two other squad cars arrived in short order. About five officers in all stepped out.

At first, the officers told the group that they would simply receive a ticket and fine and be on their way with a warning; Astoria Hot Springs and Park, after all, is a nonprofit owned by a conservancy, with regular hours, which were over, and an admissions fee, which hadn't been paid in this instance.

The six of them stood there, shivering in their bathing suits for several minutes, while the officers checked their identifications.

"Our hair was all frozen," Allysa says.

About 20 minutes later, one of the officers came back with a different take on the situation: He informed them that they were now facing criminal trespassing charges. What had started as a little lark among family and friends had become decidedly more serious.

A crime?



Josh worried what this kind of legal trouble would mean for his status on the college football team. His brother Theo wondered the same thing. “My heart literally dropped in my chest,” he said, concerned he might get kicked off the team. Stormy, Theo’s twin, fretted she would be removed from her nursing school program. All three were also blaming their little brother, Colter, now 18, who wasn’t with them at the hot springs but had given them the idea in the first place.

And they wondered how a ticket and small fine had turned suddenly into a criminal charge.

“We don’t know,” Allysa says.

The bedraggled bunch trudged their way home to let Ted know what had happened at the hot springs. But Ted already knew, having already received the text from the hot springs manager.

What’s more, Ted knew the owner of the hot springs. The two were family friends. Ted, 53, who owns a real estate firm with six offices in the area, figured his kids and the rest of the group would apologize for the pool excursion and that would be the end of that.

“I was laughing,” Ted says, when he greeted the scofflaws.

“Hey, what’s up, you Shawshank convicts?” he quipped, referring to the classic movie, “The Shawshank Redemption,” about a man who endured years of torment in prison.

“It can’t be that big of a deal,” Ted surmised of the situation with his children and friends.

Ted was right—in theory.

Todd Seeton, the hot springs manager, didn’t want to press charges. Todd was frustrated because others had been trespassing lately, including one person who had been arrested after being caught being high on drugs and skinny dipping in the pools. Todd just wanted the group to apologize and pay the entry fee (\$14 for local adults; \$10 for local kids under the age 13).

“The Dawsons are great people and certainly they’re an asset to community,” Todd says. “Unfortunately, it all happened at a time when we were experiencing night trespass swimmers.”

Ted readily agreed to make amends—and offered even more. His three kids and the others involved would trek back to the hot springs weeks later on their next break from school—a trip of some five hours—and, in the dead of winter, drain, scrub, bleach and clean the cavernous pools of algae. What’s more, they would participate in a social media campaign to stop poaching the pool.

As it turned out, all of that wasn’t enough—at least not for the Teton County prosecutor’s office.

The long arm of the law intended to move forward with criminal charges, even though the owner of the hot springs reached out to the prosecutors, explaining that he was satisfied with what the group had done to make amends and didn’t want to press charges.

The prosecutors were unmoved. Ted was perplexed; to him, this was a minor matter involving young people, making a small mistake that could be handled well in a neighborly way. Why would the prosecutors



Astoria Hot Springs Park is based in Jackson with facilities located on the aboriginal land of several Indigenous tribes, including Shoshone-Bannock and Eastern Shoshone. The park spans 95 acres along the Snake River. (Wyoming Truth photo by Sargent Schutt)

want to pursue this case when there were serious crimes to bring to justice?

“This is what nobody knows,” he says.

Indeed, Ted reached out to a friend, a former Teton prosecutor who is now a judge in another county, seeking his opinion about the situation. “The stupidest thing.” That’s what Ted said his friend remarked about the prosecutors’ criminal pursuit of the matter.

Ted figured he would appeal to reason, emailing Erin E. Weisman, the elected Teton County and prosecuting attorney, and James L. Radda, the circuit court judge before whom the matter was set to appear.

In a Feb. 22 email to authorities, Ted acknowledged the group had made “a silly mistake” when they had gone to the hot springs. “This was not a malicious offense,

but a bad judgment,” he wrote. Ted also made the point that, “All the kids realized they had screwed up, as you know 3 of them grew up here and never so much as had a ticket through their time in Jackson.”

Ted’s kids have been known not just for their prowess on the gridiron but for their positive community involvement. For instance, back in 2015, Josh, his brother Theo and their sister Stormy all fought to reinstate “America Day,” a homecoming event, at Jackson Hole High School. Apparently, some students felt “America Day” carried anti-immigrant connotations. Josh, Theo and Stormy fought in favor of the patriotic, flag-waving event.

In his February email to the prosecutor and judge, Ted appealed for mercy for the pool incident, saying he wanted to “free up the courts time and handle this internally...”

What Ted received were formal responses with little recourse.

Judge Radda replied in an email, “In Wyoming, a judge has no authority to dismiss a case under the circumstances you have described. Plea negotiations have to occur, if at all, with the prosecuting attorney.”

Plea negotiations for a pool event?

Judge Radda declined to comment for this article.

Weisman, the top elected prosecutor, emailed Ted as well, noting, “It would be wholly inappropriate for me to discuss any of these cases, or any other criminal cases for that matter, with you.”

Weisman did not respond to requests for comment for this article.

Ted was even more baffled. Weisman had known him and his family for years, and in her email, she not only seemed clinically cold to him but only vaguely aware that this matter involved his children—“defendants who I believe may be your sons,” she remarked.

Even more, Ted emailed Weisman back, asking, could they “hopefully avoid potentially wasting the courts time if it could be handled outside of the courts?”

No such luck.

Ted had to hire a local attorney, Dick Mulligan. As part of the back-and-forth between lawyers, the prosecutors said that if the group pleaded guilty to criminal trespassing, a misdemeanor, their convictions would be expunged later. Fine. They relented—until another unexpected complication arose.

The mother of Kirsten Marstella, now 20 and an attendee of the hot springs pool event, called Ted in a panic.

Kirsten was planning to go on an 18-month mission to Chile to spread the word of Jesus Christ and serve the community. But the Mormon Church said she couldn't go if she had a criminal conviction.

The lawyers conferred again. Another solution was reached: Kirsten and the others would receive a deferred adjudication, where they admitted to the charge but the conviction would not be entered for the time being; the court could place the

defendants on probation for a period. But the church said Kirsten couldn't go on her mission while on probation.

The lawyers conferred yet again. Yet another solution was reached: The probation would be pushed two years into the future, so Kirsten could leave for her mission in Chile before she incurred a rap sheet.

So much for that plan.

COVID-19 scuttled the overseas trip, trumping the prosecution. Instead, Kirsten went to Tacoma, Wash., where she's still on her mission.

The prosecutors, however, extracted a bit more proverbial flesh from the pool trespassers. They paid court fees and each agreed to 10 hours of community service. They were also banned from the hot springs for a year. By mid-March, the matter was finally over.

Well, not completely.

A gnawing sense prevails among Ted and the group that none of this should have happened. In another time, in another place, they believe reasonable people would have handled this in a reasonable way, without turning it into a criminal court case.

“Yeah, they broke the law,” Ted says, “but at the end of the day, was it malicious and [with an] intent to hurt? Not at all. If anybody needs a break, after these last 14 to 16 months, it's the kids.” He was referring to how COVID-19 had wiped out events like prom and the football season. “Are you serious? This is the way you're going to punish kids?”

Allyssa calls the prosecutors' actions "super frustrating. It's too much, super blown over. I don't understand. I think we're good kids."

When Josh looks back on what happened, he says, "It's kind of one of those, 'Come on, dude, what are you trying to prove? What's going on?'" He shrugs. "Just gotta do the time."

Could a hardened criminal have said it any differently?

"It's just annoying," says his brother Theo. "Yeah, what we did, we shouldn't've done, but at the end of the day, we did more than retribute for what we did and we're still on probation."

Theo has earned something of a rep, too. His football teammates teasingly call Theo, who maintains a perfect 4.0 grade point average, the "convict."



A young man from Afton who made national headlines last year for landing a plane on a bridge in New Jersey recovers from injuries after plane goes down in New Mexico

By Kristi Eaton
June 1, 2022

“Impossible.”

It’s a tattoo on Landon Lucas’ wrist, and it’s what medical officials used to identify him as a passenger in a deadly plane crash in rural New Mexico in April. The “im” are crossed out, making it read “possible,” a sentiment that the 19-year-old who grew up in Wyoming is embracing as he regains bodily movement and starts to recover from the accident.

Lucas was alive but seriously injured when the Taylorcraft BL-65 plane crashed on April 9 near Counselor, N.M., according to a preliminary investigation report. The owner

and pilot of the aircraft, 77-year-old Dalton Lofton, did not survive. Lofton had hired Landon to help start the plane at each point along the way from Wyoming to Texas.

“It began on April 9, when I got a phone call from an unknown number in Albuquerque, and I knew my son was flying in that area,” said Rita Lucas, Landon’s mother, in an in-depth interview with the Wyoming Truth. “Of course, I pulled over and braced for impact.”

The details of the aftermath were difficult for any mother to hear: The plane was in such horrible condition that Landon had to crawl to escape the wreckage and then passed out. He suffered more than a dozen fractures - including legs, pelvis, spine, ribs -



Landon Lucas spent several weeks in the ICU following a plane crash in New Mexico. The 19-year-old is recuperating now at his home in Afton, Wyoming. (Photo courtesy of Rita Lucas)

and lost more than 10 teeth due to impact. Witnesses saw the accident and called for help.

The next 18 days were a blur, as Landon was heavily sedated and treated in the intensive care unit at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. He underwent several surgeries to repair his broken bones and an exploratory surgery to make sure there was no internal bleeding. After the surgeries in mid-April, Rita Lucas, a nurse, and Landon took a medical flight back to Afton, Wyoming, so Landon could recuperate at his home, which, he says, is more wheelchair-accessible than his family's ranch in Jackson.

"I see photos of the plane, and I don't understand how anyone could have survived it," Rita Lucas said. "Neither does anyone else."

The crash occurred at 12 p.m. Mountain Time on April 9 near Counselor, N.M., about 45 minutes after takeoff from Four Corners Regional Airport in Farmington, N.M., en route to Kerrville, Texas, the report stated, according to a preliminary report from the National Transportation Safety Board.

"The wreckage was located in a dirt field surrounded by sage brush at an elevation of about 7,100 ft mean sea level," the report said. Further examination will take place.

This isn't the first time Landon has been in the news for an aviation mishap. Last summer, while working a three-month job for Cape May Aerial Advertising, he made national headlines after he safely landed a small plane on a bridge of a causeway connecting Ocean City to Somers Point, N.J., following engine failure. Landon was toting a banner on a Piper J3 plane when its engine started to malfunction over the Atlantic Ocean. No one was hurt or injured in that case.

"I was just hanging out and doing what I usually do: I kind of just stare out at the people on the beach as I go up the beach, and I remember, [the engine] just immediately just shut off," Landon Lucas told the Wyoming Truth in an interview, recalling the incident a year later.

Landon said he wasn't fearful about returning to the sky following that incident, but that it "definitely felt a little weird."

Landon's love of aviation dates back to childhood. Growing up, he watched as planes soared over his family's ranch in

Jackson and enjoyed being a passenger in a family friend's airplane, one that he believes may have come from a kit. "I couldn't tell you what kind of kit it was or anything, but I remember [the friend] taking us flying and going over our house and how cool everything about it was," he recalled.

When Landon was 14, his mom gifted him a discovery flight, which is typically a participatory flight with a certified instructor. He was hooked. "It's just kind of cool being up there," Landon said. "Not many people get to just stare down at the world. You've seen the world a million times from the ground, but who gets to go up and see everybody's house from the sky?"

After the discovery flight, Landon wanted to become a certified pilot right away, but he was too young to get his license. The minimum age to get a private pilot's license is 17. From that point on, he dedicated himself to aviation. At 16, he stopped going to public school and turned to online instruction so he could study aviation and also work to pay for it.

"And so aviation was the No. 1 thing from his 16th birthday," Rita Lucas said. "He was able to get his license on his 17th birthday." Landon did dual high school and college enrollment, and within days of his 18th birthday, he graduated with both a high school diploma and an associate degree in aeronautics from Northwest College in Powell, Wyoming.

Though Landon is a flight instructor for Afton Flight Services, he wasn't providing instruction to Lofton on the flight that crashed in New Mexico. "[Lofton] more or less had me along to help start the

Pictured right: Landon Lucas enjoys flying because it gives him the opportunity to experience the world from a different perspective. He plans to teach flying again once he has recovered from his injuries. (Photo courtesy of Rita Lucas)

airplane," he said, "because the starting procedure for that airplane... it's one person asked to stand outside the airplane and spin the propeller and get their hands out of the way right away as the propellers spin up - as the engine starts and the propeller starts to spin while you're outside the airplane. It's really a lot safer to have somebody inside the airplane who's sitting on the brakes and could stop that airplane."

Though Landon's recovery process from the most recent incident is expected to take some time, he hopes to return to the sky eventually. For now, he spends his time watching "Yellowstone," sleeping and, of course, watching airplanes soar overhead.

"I plan to go back and keep instructing," he said. "It's a really fun job to teach people how to fly - the kind of job where right now I miss going to work."

But first, Landon has to recover. He was on his way for an abdominal X-ray after a phone interview, and he still needs to undergo dental surgery. But it's unclear as to whether he will need other procedures to make a full recovery.

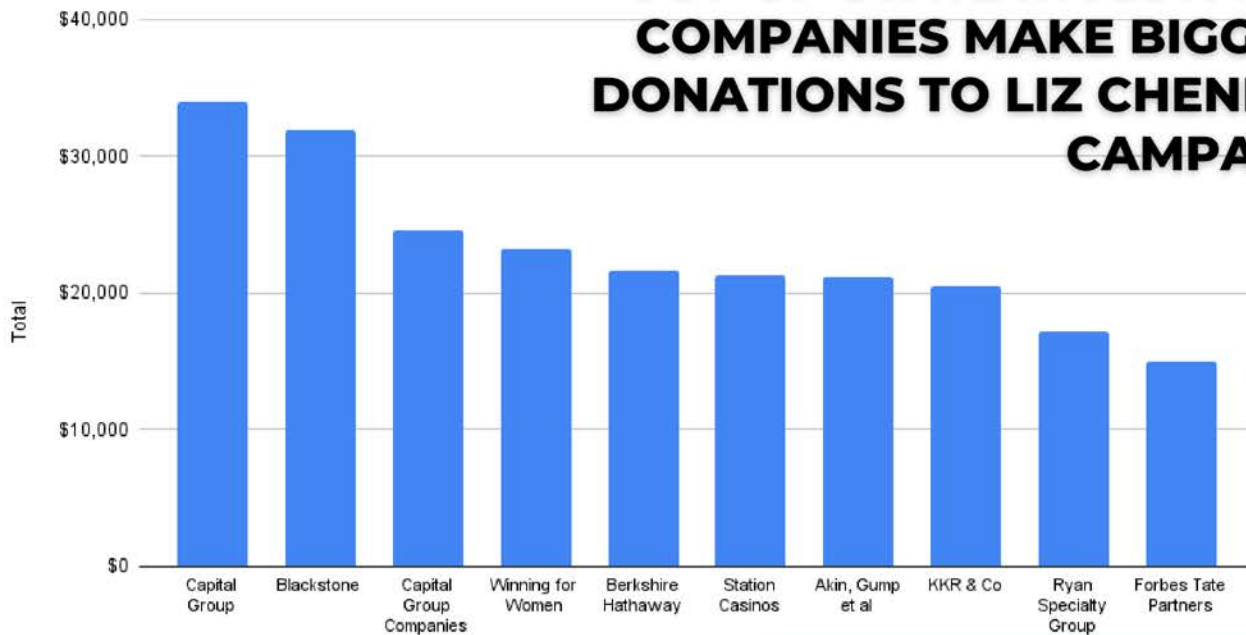
Still, Landon remains upbeat despite the physical, mental and emotional setback.

Call it making the impossible possible.



CONTRIBUTORS FROM TWO GIANT OUT-OF-STATE INVESTMENT COMPANIES MAKE BIGGEST DONATIONS TO LIZ CHENEY'S CAMPAIGN

Total vs. Donor



Donor

By Shen Wu Tan
May 2, 2022

Blackstone of New York calls donations "strictly personal," while Capital Group of Los Angeles is mum, but both firms have financial ties to Wyoming

Individuals from two giant investment companies based outside of Wyoming have contributed the most money to Rep. Liz Cheney's re-election campaign, according to an analysis of federal records and other sources. Why people from global financial companies from the coasts are jumping into the financial fray of Wyoming politics remains opaque, though the two massive companies have economic ties to Wyoming. What is clear is that Cheney's race has national implications.

Contributors from Blackstone, headquartered in New York City, donated \$31,900 to Cheney's campaign, while donors from Los Angeles-based Capital Group

contributed \$33,950, according to data from OpenSecrets, which shared this information with the Wyoming Truth.

Data from OpenSecrets, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., that tracks data on campaign finance and lobbying, also reveals an additional \$17,100 came from other individuals affiliated with Capital, in addition to \$7,500 in Capital Group PAC funds.

In total, individual and PAC contributions to Cheney's campaign from Blackstone and Capital amount to \$90,450 through the first quarter of this year, records show.

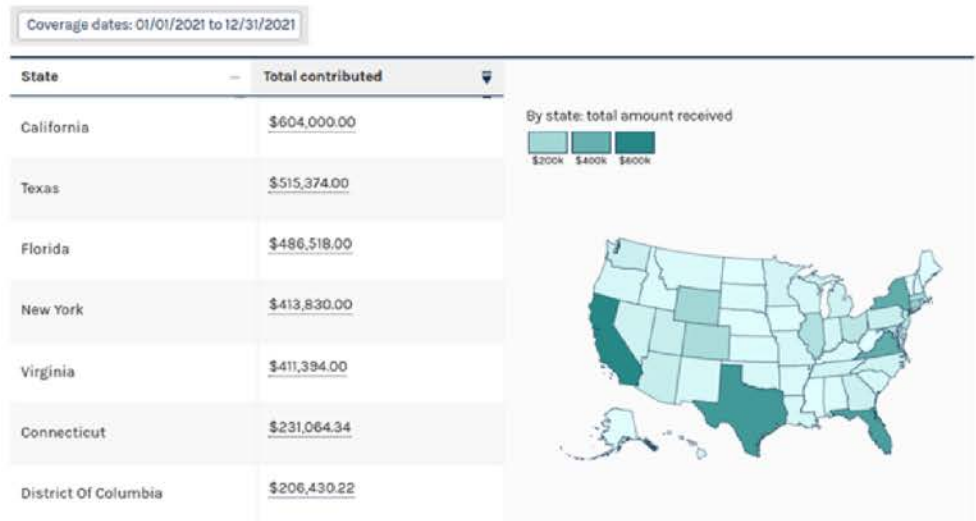
Eight donors from Blackstone contributed to Cheney's campaign, with amounts ranging from \$2,900 to \$5,800. Fourteen people associated with Capital contributed to Cheney's campaign, with donations

ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,800, according to data from the Federal Elections Commission.

Two other major financial firms, Berkshire Hathaway and KKR, also ranked as top contributors to Cheney’s campaign. Berkshire Hathaway, a multinational conglomerate holding company based in Omaha and headed by billionaire Warren Buffett, donated a total of \$21,658 in individual contributions and PAC funds, data from OpenSecrets show. KKR, a global investment company headquartered in New York City and cofounded by Henry Kravis and George Roberts, donated \$20,500 in individual contributions. Station Casinos, a hotel, gaming and entertainment company founded by Frank Fertitta, Jr. also made it into the top 10 contributors, with individual donations totaling \$21,300, data shows.

Cheney has garnered a bulk of her financial support from outside of Wyoming, with residents from California, Texas, Florida, New York and Virginia contributing the most to her campaign as of the end of last year, FEC data shows. Residents from California donated the most to her campaign, with \$604,000 in contributions, while Wyoming residents contributed only about a third as much, \$202,360.

Cheney, the daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, is facing numerous political rivals vying for Wyoming’s sole



Rep. Liz Cheney has received most of her campaign contributions from outside of Wyoming. Data shows residents from California, Texas, Florida and New York have contributed the most money to her campaign. (Graphic courtesy of Federal Elections Commission)

House seat even as she continues to wrestle with the shadow of former President Donald Trump nearly a year and a half after he left office. Cheney serves as vice chair of the select committee to investigate the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, and she was removed from top leadership in Congress for her criticism of Trump. The Wyoming GOP also voted in November to no longer recognize Cheney as a Republican.

Although many Republicans have given her the boot, Cheney has raised millions for her re-election campaign with the help of contributions from individuals connected to major corporations such as Blackstone.

Blackstone is a global investment firm that was founded in 1985 by billionaire CEO Stephen Schwarzman, a philanthropist with political ties past and present with such figures as Trump and former president George W. Bush. Schwarzman’s firm has about \$915 billion in assets under management and investments in private equity, hedge funds, credit and real estate,

according to public records. The company sold the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas for \$5.65 billion in September.

Blackstone’s portfolio companies include Servpro, a fire and water cleanup company with numerous locations in Wyoming. The financial firm made an equity investment of about \$3 billion in energy company Invenergy, according to a January Blackstone press release. Invenergy has a couple of wind power projects in the state, the company’s website shows. Blackstone also secured oil pipeline company Tallgrass Energy for its portfolio in 2020 in a \$6.3 billion deal, according to the “Private Equity’s Dirty Dozen” report by the database LittleSis and the nonprofit Private Equity Stakeholder Project. Tallgrass Energy co-owns and operates the Rockies Express Pipeline, one of the largest pipelines in the United States that runs through Wyoming.

“Our employees’ political donations are strictly personal,” Matthew Anderson, a spokesperson for Blackstone, told the

Wyoming Truth. He added the company has never had a corporate PAC or made corporate donations to political candidates.

Capital also invests in companies with ties to Wyoming, records show, including: General Motors; Chevron; energy technology company Baker Hughes; and Linde, an industrial gas and engineering company. Capital was founded in Los Angeles in 1931 by Jonathan Bell Lovelace and manages about \$2.6 trillion in assets.

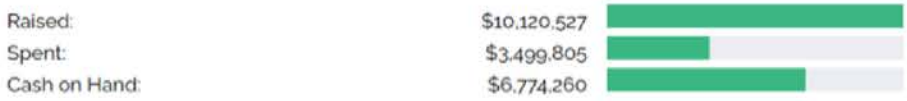
Capital did not respond to multiple requests for comments regarding the contributions.

Individual campaign contributors from Blackstone and Capital also did not respond to requests for comments.

“In general, we find that for-profit corporations, through their political action committee, where at the state level sometimes they can make direct corporate contributions to candidates, will make contributions to incumbents across the board,” said Pete Quist, deputy research director of OpenSecrets. “They just want to give to somebody who is in office, making decisions, and who is likely to win re-election.”

Quist added sitting members of Congress or another political office win re-election at least 90% of the time. “So those contributions are pretty safe,” he said. Also, if organizations are trying to

Liz Cheney (R) • Incumbent



Source of Funds

Type of Contribution	Amount	Percentage
Small Individual Contributions (≤ \$200)	\$1,792,999	17.72%
Large Individual Contributions	\$6,299,399	62.24%
PAC Contributions*	\$832,645	8.23%
Candidate self-financing	\$0	0.00%
Other	\$1,195,485	11.81%

Rep. Liz Cheney has raised more than \$10 million for her re-election campaign through the first quarter of this year, outpacing rival Harriet Hageman by about \$8 million. Although Cheney boasts more in campaign funds, political analysts say Hageman remains a serious challenger. (Graphic courtesy of OpenSecrets)

lobby, he said they are more likely to be able to set up meetings with elected officials to which they've donated.

Cheney has raised \$10,121,33 for her re-election campaign through the end of March, according to FEC data released mid-April. Her fundraising prowess puts her in seventh place among all candidates nationwide running for a U.S. House of Representatives seat. In the first quarter of this year alone, Cheney raised more than \$2.5 million for her campaign.

Trump-backed candidate Harriet Hageman ranks second in campaign contributions among candidates running for the Wyoming House seat. She has raised \$2,067,149 as of the end of March, of which she added about \$1.3 million during the first quarter of this year, according to the FEC.

Hageman has received the most in donations from Wyoming residents compared to other states, with \$363,430 in contributions as of the end of last year, followed by Texas and Florida.

Hageman has received more than 21,000 donations since announcing her candidacy in September, with an average contribution of \$84, says a statement on her campaign website.

"It is an honor to have such support and I pledge to always reflect the views and values of the people of Wyoming when I am

Harriet Hageman (R)

Raised:	\$2,049,949	
Spent:	\$986,606	
Cash on Hand:	\$1,063,343	

Source of Funds

Type of Contribution	Amount	Percentage
Small Individual Contributions (≤ \$200)	\$684,081	33.37%
Large Individual Contributions	\$1,267,182	61.82%
PAC Contributions*	\$79,500	3.88%
Candidate self-financing	\$6,000	0.29%
Other	\$13,185	0.64%

Harriet Hageman, the Trump-endorsed candidate vying for Wyoming's sole House seat, has raised more than \$2 million in campaign contributions through the first quarter of this year. (Graphic courtesy of OpenSecrets)

in Congress," Hageman said in the statement. "This is Wyoming's seat in the House, not one individual's."

Cheney's campaign did not reply to numerous requests for comments.

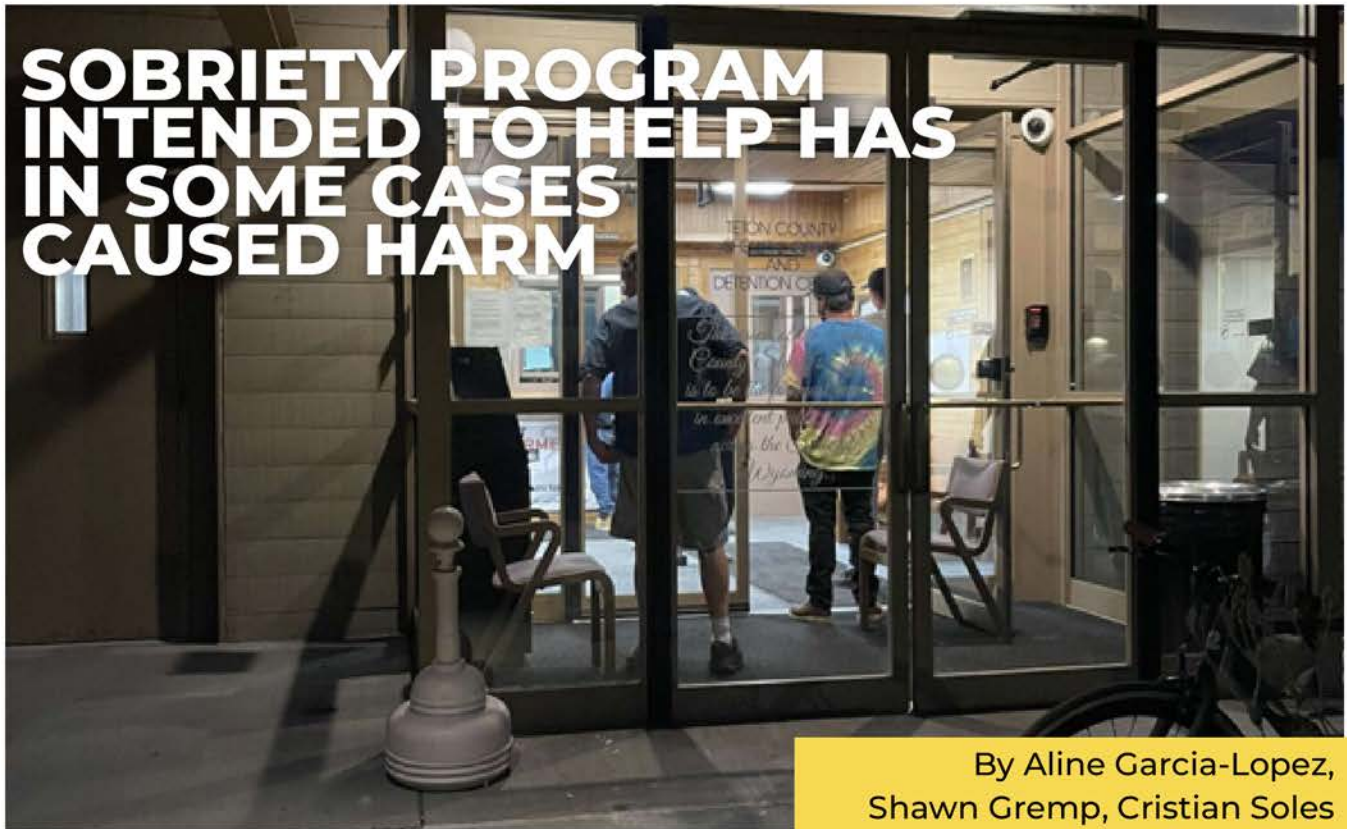
"A big reason as to why Cheney has raised so much is that, of the House Republicans who voted to impeach Trump last year, she's easily been the most visible," said J. Miles Coleman, associate editor of Sabato's Crystal Ball, a nonpartisan political newsletter of the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "With that, it's easy to see many anti-Trump donors coalescing behind her. In fact, a decent amount of her funding seems to be coming from Democrats: 10 years ago, it would've been hard to see Cheney being a favorite of Democratic donors, but sometimes politics can make for odd bedfellows. Though her donors may not agree with Cheney on every issue, her reelection would certainly be billed as a

black eye for Trump -- and in his best state, no less."

"As for Hageman, her candidacy presents a very real threat to Cheney's career," Coleman added. "She has raised \$2 million so far in the cycle. Even though that has been eclipsed by Cheney's \$10 million, that is still a very serious sum for a Congressional challenger -- especially one in a small state like Wyoming. There have been senatorial candidates this cycle who have raised less than that."

Jim King, a political science professor at the University of Wyoming, said, "This year's race, which the media are touting as a test of strength between two factions within the Republican Party, has brought national attention and contributors from across the country...Although she doesn't have as many contributors from California, Texas, and Florida as Rep. Cheney, Ms. Hageman does have a number of contributions from these states, which are the three largest in the U.S."

Although far more people are more familiar with Cheney than Hageman, Quist of OpenSecrets said, "That might change as we get further along in the election cycle, and the political machinery starts to raise the profile of the campaign, and it becomes a competitive race."



SOBRIETY PROGRAM INTENDED TO HELP HAS IN SOME CASES CAUSED HARM

By Aline Garcia-Lopez,
Shawn Grep, Cristian Soles
and Madeline Thulin
August 17, 2021

Teton County rules called unfair, unconstitutional

JACKSON, Wyo. —Last month, a single mother in her late 20s was arrested in Jackson for driving under the influence of alcohol. She said her Miranda rights to remain silent and to get an attorney were never read to her, and she was carted off to jail, while her car was towed away. And that's just when her real troubles began.

A first-time criminal offender, she was placed in the state-sanctioned 24/7 Sobriety Program, an alternative to incarceration for individuals charged with alcohol- and drug-related offenses.

One Sunday, the single mother got caught in a traffic snarl in the Jackson Hole area and showed up 43 minutes late. She blew into a Breathalyzer, which proved she was sober. But it didn't matter. She was placed under arrest for being more than 30 minutes late. Again, she said authorities didn't read her Miranda rights. She was placed in jail June 27 at 7:43 a.m. and was held for 31 hours. She was released a day and a half later, on June 28 at 2:55 p.m.

The result: Absent from her job as an operations officer at a local hotel, she was fired.



Pictured is a single mother who was arrested for driving under the influence and is now participating in the 24/7 Sobriety Program. She says that some requirements of the Teton County program are unfair. She showed up more than 30 minutes late for one of her twice-daily sobriety checks and spent 31 hours in jail because of it, causing her to lose her job. (Wyoming Truth photo by Cristian Soles)

Her situation was compounded by a series of medical conditions for which she takes medication — insomnia, depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. She wasn't only jailed. She didn't merely lose her job. In addition to the fees associated with the program, she also had to pay \$200 to get her car released from the tow yard and another \$300 in fines, along with another \$200 for a drug and alcohol evaluation.

"The sheriff's department does not care," said the single mother of two. She spoke to The Wyoming Truth as part of a months-long examination of the 24/7 Sobriety Program on the condition of anonymity because she said she is concerned about her reputation in the community.

Under the rules of the program run by the Teton County Sheriff's Office, the single mother was required to submit to

Breathalyzer tests twice a day -- once in the morning between 6 a.m. to 7 a.m. and once at night between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. The judge decides how long a participant remains enrolled, according to Sarah King, the Alternatives to Incarceration coordinator for the Teton County Sheriff's Office, adding that the average is 3 to 4 weeks with a maximum of 8 months. Surprisingly, the single mother said she was never given a time frame despite having been enrolled for several weeks now.

Under the program, if a participant is 1 to 30 minutes late, this is considered a tardy; more than 30 minutes late is deemed a "missed test." According to the program's rules, if a participant fails a test, accumulates a total of three tardies, or has "missed" a test, that person is immediately arrested. All participants are required to pay a \$30 enrollment fee, along with \$10 per drug test and \$2 per Breathalyzer test; as a result, participants pay at least \$28 a week.

The Attorney General uses the fees collected from participants in the 24/7 Sobriety Program to pay the participating vendors. From the fees remaining, no less than 75 percent is returned to the Sheriff's Office. All funds collected are to be used to conduct and enhance the program, according to Sheriff Matt Carr of the Teton County Sheriff's Office. In Teton County, the majority of the funds collected go to distributing portable breath tests, a handheld device which tests for traces of alcohol.

What happened to the single mother is not unique. Stephen Collins, a resident of the Jackson area for almost 11 years, was arrested for driving under the influence in April 2020; this was his second DUI. Since

being placed in the program, Collins has passed all his Breathalyzer tests, but like the single mother, he was arrested and held for 24 hours in early June for showing up more than 30 minutes late.

Collins agrees with the single mother that the program is unfair and burdensome, but his biggest complaint was the treatment by officers. Collins suffers from a medical condition that causes sporadic numbness in his hands and feet. On the night of his initial arrest, when placed in handcuffs, he said he started to lose feeling in his hands. He explained this to the officers, and asked if he could see a nurse, but Collins said in an interview for this story, "they didn't care." As a result, Collins spent the next two months getting treatment on his hands to regain feeling.

National successes, local problems

The 24/7 Sobriety Program, which originated in South Dakota in January 2005, has reduced DUIs and related traffic fatalities in other states and communities. It started as a pilot program with five counties participating. Today, the program functions in the majority of South Dakota counties. Alaska, Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming also have implemented the 24/7 Program, while Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah are in the pilot phase.

South Dakota officials report that it has reduced the state's recidivism rates for DUIs by 12 percent and domestic violence by 9 percent. The Montana 24/7 Sobriety

Program, implemented in 2011, recorded a 30 percent decrease in alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities in 2013 despite overall highway fatalities increasing by 10 percent in the same time period.

Wyoming adopted the program in 2014, but only five of the state's 23 counties -- Teton, Campbell, Fremont, Sheridan and Sweetwater -- participate in the program. It launched in Teton County in September 2020.

Carr, the sheriff, says the program keeps the Teton County community safer, holds participants accountable and reduces the jail population. But Carr acknowledged that the program shouldn't be used for first-time offenders, such as this single mother. That decision is left up to the judges.

"The whole premise of the program is to keep people out of jail," he said in an interview for this story. "We're trying to hold them accountable, but we don't want to incarcerate them."

King, the program coordinator, agrees with Carr and says, "this program serves as a good deterrent, especially to repeat



Pictured right: From left to right are Sheriff Matt Carr of Teton County (Courtesy photo) and Elisabeth M.W. Trefonas, who serves as the head public defender for Teton and Sublette counties.

offenders.” She also acknowledged that forcing the participants to pay is a “big financial burden,” but she thinks the “positives outweigh the negatives.”

Questions, however, remain about the program.

What was intended to help people out of the wilderness of alcohol and substance abuse has done more damage than good, said the out-of-work mother. “Getting arrested for being late and losing my job... has not helped my life at all,” she said.

Several criminal defense attorneys in the region have echoed her concerns, maintaining that the program needs to be fixed immediately. Elisabeth M.W. Trefonas, a senior assistant public defender who serves as the head public defender for Teton and Sublette counties, said the program “detains and arrests defendants without due process and in violation of their rights when the defendant has not done anything dangerous or failed in their sobriety.” (Trefonas serves on the board of advisors of The Wyoming Truth.)

However, King believes these arrests are “fair to a certain extent and maintain the integrity of the program.” She also states that Teton County Circuit Court Judge James Radda works hard to make sure participants who are arrested on the weekends are released as soon as possible to help them maintain their jobs.

Natrona County used the program for two years but stopped in early 2019 as it was “too much of a hassle,” according to Lt. Gordon Clapp of the Natrona County Sheriff’s Office. Clapp said the program was “a good option

for getting people out of jail.” However, he added that the program was “too expensive,” was rarely used by the judge and therefore was discontinued.

The program’s goal is admirable by any measure — to decrease the number of people in jail and reduce the number of repeat offenders. The program allows individuals awaiting trial to be released back into the community provided they conform to the program’s rules.

In Teton County, if participants are arrested for failing a Breathalyzer test or missing an appointment while in the program, they are held until they are brought before a judge, which usually occurs at 1:30 p.m. every day except Tuesdays and Sundays. However, if you are unfortunate enough to be arrested on the weekend, you risk spending a couple of nights in jail, according to Richard D. Stout, a prominent local defense attorney who has represented many clients in the program. Stout said that as a result of the 24/7 Sobriety Program, individuals are arrested and detained more often compared to the previous system where someone charged with an offense would plead not guilty, be released on bail, then return to court for trial. In the previous system, while out on bail, the judge might require the individual to submit to regular alcohol or drug tests; however, if the individual failed, they would not be arrested unless the police could prove the participant had driven to the testing site intoxicated.

Fees can be another problem for participants as they are often too expensive for many Teton County residents. Ryann Linthicum, a counselor at the Curran-Seeley Foundation, a drug and alcohol center in



Participants in Teton County's 24/7 Sobriety Program must breathe into the white tube on this Breathalyzer tester to determine if they are remaining sober while enrolled in the alternative-to-prison program. (Wyoming Truth photo by Aline Garcia-Lopez)

Jackson, was unaware of the fees associated with the 24/7 program until recently. She said that while clients must pay their dues, "at some point or another, it becomes difficult to pay," creating another obstacle to their recovery.

Sheriff Carr can waive the test fee for individuals who struggle financially, but it is at his discretion. King points out that Teton County is the only program in the state that does not arrest individuals who cannot afford to pay for these tests.

Hearings can occur within 24 hours of an arrest, and if Trefonas, the public defender, cannot get there in time, the clients are left to represent themselves without an attorney.

That raises questions about the program's constitutionality, according to Stout, the local defense attorney. He said that forcing

participants to represent themselves before an attorney can be present in court may violate their Sixth Amendment right to counsel.

In addition, these arrests do not require a warrant, meaning that a judge has not signed off on the arrest, and the arrest may also be based on actions that are not even illegal, such as being late to a test. This raises issues regarding an individual's Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable searches and seizures.

Lauren McLane, director of the Defender Aid Clinic and assistant professor of law at the University of Wyoming, when asked about the constitutionality of these arrests, said, "defendants that are in a pretrial status who are presumed innocent, there is no probable cause to search or arrest them. We cannot just throw people in jail for 12 hours just for being late. It should really concern the judges that they authorize a program that is unlawfully searching and seizing people under the Fourth Amendment."

Stout said the program should not be used by first-time offenders, but rather those who have been charged with multiple DUIs and are potentially a danger to themselves and the community.

Wyoming wrangles with rules

Within the five Wyoming counties that have adopted the 24/7 Sobriety Program, testing rules vary. In Campbell County, which joined the program in 2017, a first violation results in the participant being jailed for 12 hours; a second violation results in 24 hours; and if someone violates the program a third time, they are jailed until seen by a judge. This



Participants in the 24/7 Sobriety Program line up at the Teton County Courthouse between 6 and 7 a.m. and again between 9 and 10 p.m. each day to get tested for alcohol and/or drugs. They must do this every day for several weeks or as long as 8 months to avoid going to jail for their drug or alcohol offenses. (Wyoming Truth photo by Aline Garcia-Lopez)

system is different than in Teton County, where all violations result in detention until seen by the judge.

In 2016, Sweetwater became the first county to adopt the program in Wyoming; however, the program is shut down due to COVID-19. Sgt. Gerald Carr of the Sweetwater County Sheriff's Office said he strongly believes in the program, saying only three people have failed the program over the past four years. Sweetwater's violation procedure is identical to Campbell County's.

Since Teton County joined the program last year, more than 150 residents have participated with 47 enrolled. As of the end of June, the sheriff's office has administered 6,825 preliminary Breathalyzer tests with only 16 coming back positive; 844 drug tests have been administered, with 41 coming

back positive. According to the sheriff's office, 56 people have been arrested for not complying with the program's rules.

Carr started working for the Teton County Sheriff's Office in 1999 when the jail population held more than 40 people at a time, he said. Now that population is in the single digits. Carr attributes part of this decline to the 24/7 program and a similar program that was in place before. When asked if there is anything he would like to change to the 24/7 program, Carr said he would prefer that participants were not required to pay the various fees, given the financial burden for some residents. He also said he believes the Wyoming attorney general should set clearer rules for the sheriff's department to follow about how much discretion the department has in arresting someone who arrives more than 30 minutes late.

The single mother, who remains out of work, agrees with the sheriff that the fees are onerous. But she insists there is a broader problem with the 24/7 program: "It feels really unfair."



GORDON WRANGLES WITH MAJOR ISSUES - AND RIVALS FOR GOVERNOR - BUT EXPERTS SEE CLEAR PATH TO REELECTION

By Shen Wu Tan
April 15, 2022

Wyoming voters have not unseated a sitting governor in over half a century

Wyoming voters have not ousted a sitting governor for decades, and political experts say it's unlikely that will change this election season. But how the governor navigates pressing issues for voters is another matter.

Gov. Mark Gordon, a Republican, is seeking to retain his seat for a second term—a goal he is likely to accomplish, according to political analysts—although he faces challenges from multiple candidates. Gordon also faces a bevy of important state issues, such as a slowing economy, increasing gas prices and an ongoing drought. Public opinion polls also show voters in Wyoming are concerned with the loss of family farms and ranches; the quality

of public education; a lack of jobs that pay well and health insurance coverage; a decline in numbers of big game animals; and the loss of habitat for fish and wildlife.

Getting reelected may be the least of Gordon's troubles. "We rate the Wyoming gubernatorial race as 'Safe Republican,'" said J. Miles Coleman, associate editor of Sabato's Crystal Ball, a nonpartisan political analysis newsletter run by the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "Over the past decade or so, we've seen a strengthening correlation between how a state votes for president and its patterns for every other office. Wyoming was Donald Trump's best state in the nation in both 2016 and 2020, so

that would bode well for Republicans. As he seeks a second term, history also seems to be on Gov. Gordon's side: Wyoming has not ousted a sitting governor since the 1960s."

Gordon is running against at least two other Republican contenders who have announced their election bids ahead of the May 12 filing start date for candidates: veterinarian Rex Rammell and retired Marine Corp colonel Brent Bien.

"I expect Gordon to remain in office," said Jim King, a political science professor at the University of Wyoming, noting Gordon's job ratings have been low compared to other governors but still positive. "All the candidates will stress their opposition to federal interference in state matters and protection of various sectors of the state's economy. Republicans and candidates of the Libertarian and Constitution parties will oppose abortion and vow to protect the Second Amendment. The policy differences among the candidates will be few."

Gordon announced his re-election bid at an event in Buffalo last week. When asked about his re-election bid, Gordon's campaign spokesperson Tom Wiblemo declined to comment, instead referring to the governor's campaign website.

"We've cut taxes, passed a budget that is \$400 million less than 2020, reduced the size of state government to its smallest level in 10 years and strengthened our right to bear arms by enacting the Second Amendment Protection Act," Gordon said in a statement on his campaign website. "But there is more work to do."

He noted it is his priority to improve

Wyoming's education system with more parental involvement, streamline federal and state regulations on businesses and recommit to the goal of American energy independence.

Gordon was elected governor Nov. 6, 2018, and sworn into office Jan. 7, 2019. He served as Wyoming state treasurer prior to that.

Erich Frankland, a political science professor at Casper College, agrees that Gordon has a pretty good chance of retaining his seat, despite his handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

"His one 'hiccup' was the state's protective health measures on Covid, but he quickly moved to remove the measures as soon as he could," Frankland told the Wyoming Truth. "He has raised attention on a variety of important issues, from mental health, energy development, to missing and murdered indigenous women that resonate with many voters. He and the first lady have made many public appearances that have gone over well with attendees."

He added, "Some of the more conservative Republicans will likely search for another candidate but I believe that most Republicans will support Gordon's reelection."

Rammell, who has run for multiple offices, including state senator and Congress, campaigned for governor in 2018.

"I'm just not happy with the trend of Wyoming," Rammell told the Wyoming Truth. "By most metrics, Wyoming is not doing well...I'm worried about the economy and energy industry. I'm worried about the

public school system. I'm worried about property taxes. Property taxes just go up and up."

He also mentioned his concerns with crossover voters who participate in a primary election for a political party they do not usually affiliate with, a backlog of court cases, a shortage of court staff and government workers and the size of Wyoming's government, which he said is too large.

"I've been in politics for 20 years," said Rammell, a Rock Springs resident. "I've run for numerous high-level offices. This is my third run for governor, and I think I'm talking about things that nobody else dares talk about. Nobody talks about education reform. They just try to figure out how to keep funding it. Nobody talks about natural resource sovereignty issues. And I haven't heard anybody really talk about property tax reform. So, a lot of the issues I am comfortable speaking about, I seem to be the only one talking about them."

Another candidate challenging Gordon for his seat is political newcomer Brent Bien.

"I'm running on my goal to make Wyoming the freest state in the nation," Bien said. "I've seen a lack of leadership in the gubernatorial seat for a long time, in particular the last three and a half years."

If elected, the Sheridan resident said he would seek to protect freedoms, such as private property, rights of the unborn and Second Amendment rights; pursue government accountability, including ensuring voter integrity, and getting the state budget under control; and promote

state sovereignty, like enhancing the energy industry with market-driven green energy.

"Wyoming should be leading in a lot of these efforts and we're not," Bien said, noting his leadership skills from his years in the Marine Corps. "And there's too much at stake right now with the current administration...I do know how to lead. I do know how to bring people together from opposing views because I've had to do it so many times to accomplish whatever the objective was."

He added, "I do know how fragile freedom is. With freedom actually comes a lot of responsibility. We have to stand up for what we have, and it's really to preserve the freedoms today for tomorrow's generation."

Frankland of Casper College said there doesn't seem to be a particularly strong challenger against Gordon, with the death of Foster Friess, a prominent donor to the Republican Party who ran for governor in 2018.

In the 2018 primary, Gordon won 33.4% of the vote, followed by Friess with 25.6%, according to Ballotpedia.

Gordon went on to win the general election with 67% of the vote, data shows.

Democratic candidate Mary Throne trailed with about 27%. Rammell, who ran as a Constitution Party candidate, finished third with just over 3%.

"I'm interested to see how much of a vote Rammell ends up with in the GOP primary," said Coleman of the University of Virginia Center for Politics. "I'm not expecting him to actually win, but a 'protest' vote against

Gordon may materialize, as Rammell has tried to position himself to the governor's right. This has been something of a trend across the country this cycle: Of the 36 gubernatorial races on the ballot this year, 28 feature incumbents. Perhaps as a result of that, Republican governors, in particular, have been pushed in their primaries by challengers seeking to get involved in the electoral process."

He added Bien appears to be aligning himself with Harriet Hageman, the Trump-endorsed candidate running for the lone U.S. House of Representatives seat for Wyoming, and the more conservative wing of the state party, meaning he could garner some anti-Gordon protest votes in the primary.

Gordon may win a higher share of the votes in the general election than in the primary, depending on the volume of protest votes, Coleman said, which would be especially true if Democrats don't even bother to run a candidate.

A Democratic candidate has not announced an election bid for governor; however, candidates have until May 27 to file.



Republican candidate veterinarian Rex Rammell (Courtesy photo)



Republican candidate retired Marine Corps colonel Brent Bien (Courtesy photo)

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