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Losing elders to COVID-19 endangers Indigenous languages

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Indigenous Leaders Count on Biden to Help Save Amazon Forest From 'Brink of Collapse'

Trump Administration Pushes to Sell Alaska Oil Leases Pre-Biden Inauguration

If There's Something Valuable Under the Soil, Life Aboveground Can Be Hard

Remote Canadian town programs radar to detect approaching polar bears

Joe Biden's Education Department will move fast to reverse Betsy DeVos' policies



[National Native American Heritage Month](#)

Shoshone from Wind River

“Do you know the difference between education and experience? Education is when you read the fine print; experience is what you get when you don't.”

—Pete Seeger (born 1919) American Folk Singer

Losing elders to COVID-19 endangers Indigenous languages

“We worry a lot,” says one Indigenous leader. “They have so much more to tell.”

Read in National Geographic: <https://apple.news/Aj1BY3mohTUSnRDpY6zUNYw>



Dee Numa

Carrie Bethel with First Place Basket

Yosemite Mono Lake Paiute

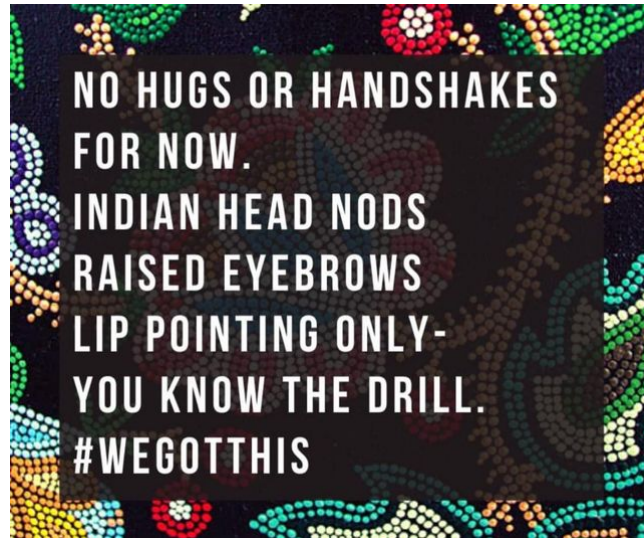
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[UN summit in December to push action on COVID-19 pandemic](#) (AP)

Indigenous Leaders Count on Biden to Help Save Amazon Forest From 'Brink of Collapse'

Anastasia Moloney and Fabio Teixeira, Thomson Reuters Foundation

Excerpt: "For decades, indigenous leader Nemonte Nenquimo has been battling to keep her Amazon rainforest home in Ecuador safe from exploitation by oil companies - now she hopes U.S. President-elect Joe Biden will become an ally in that fight."

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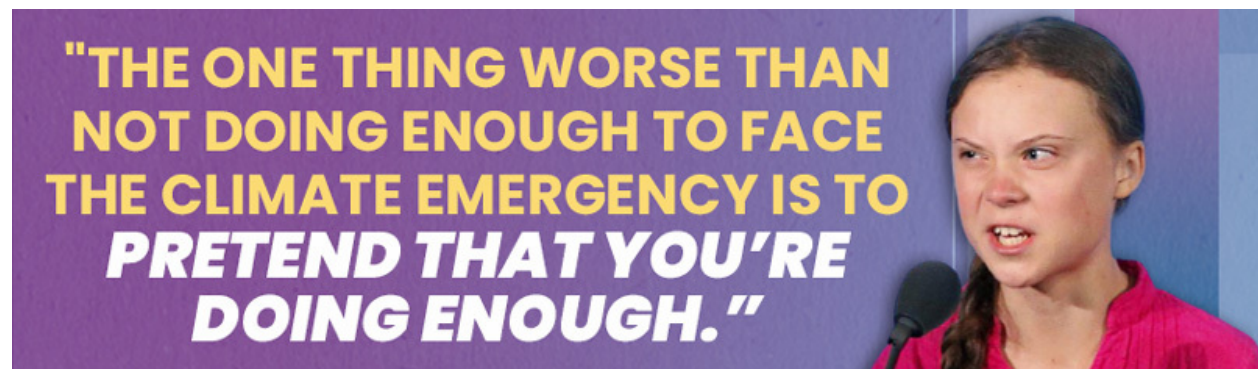
"Elections belong to the people. It's their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters." — [Abraham Lincoln](#)

Trump Administration Pushes to Sell Alaska Oil Leases Pre-Biden Inauguration

Yereth Rosen, Reuters

Rosen writes: "The Trump Administration will take key steps to finalize a sale of oil drilling leases in the sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska just before Democrat Joseph Biden, who opposes drilling there, becomes president, a government spokeswoman said on Friday."

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If There's Something Valuable Under the Soil, Life Aboveground Can Be Hard

By Bill McKibben, The New Yorker

14 November 20

The election is over, and I've [given my thanks](#) to all who fought so hard—we'll spend the next months, and the next four years, understanding what it all means. But it's also worth remembering that we're a part of a larger world, united by certain commonalities. That includes the fact that it's usually a curse to be born in a place with something valuable beneath the surface.

In a remarkable [Twitter thread](#) last week, just before the endless vote-counting, Latif Nasser, a co-host of WNYC's "Radiolab," recounted the history of a stretch of territory that runs through Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and into the Carolinas. Every election, it votes Democratic, a slash of blue across the red rural south. At the height of the Cretaceous era, a hundred million years ago, this land was covered by saltwater—a great sea of plankton, which, as it died, dropped to the bottom and formed the basis for what eventually became the belt of incredibly rich soil that made growing cotton so fantastically profitable. As Booker T. Washington wrote, "The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally rich soil was, of course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers." The descendants of those enslaved people have—since they won the vote in the nineteen-sixties—turned out for Democrats. It is a regular reminder of the centuries of misery that rich land produced.

I'd been thinking of that phenomenon this week, because Tuesday marked twenty-five years since the execution by hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Nigerian novelist and playwright who was a leader of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta, a place cursed by the pools of oil beneath the ground. Those pools of oil attracted the interest of outside companies, notably Shell, who turned the region into a nightmare landscape of polluted rivers, contaminated soil, and leaking pipelines. Though oil production has mostly ceased in recent years, the blighted land remains. A Friends of the Earth [report](#) from last year states, "We meet Chief Saint Emma Pii who confirms that oil spills in 2008 and 2009 'totally destroyed the environment for agriculture and fishing. The whole ecosystem was destroyed.' He takes us to the river banks, where abandoned wooden fishing boats are slowly sinking into the oily mud. 'This place was our livelihood, we fished and traded from here. This was a living place.' He gestures to the horizon. 'All of these? What you see were mangroves, living mangroves. Before the spills, animals were living here: lizards, even lions and elephants.'"

Saro-Wiwa dared to protest this kind of destruction. The Nigerian government hanged him (and eight compatriots) in 1995, with the alleged complicity of Shell, the largest economic force in the country. He'd won the Goldman Prize and the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes called the alternative Nobel, for his work defending Ogoni territory against environmental despoliation, but the honors were not enough to protect him: two supposed witnesses to his crimes (he was charged with the murder of Ogoni chiefs) later recanted, [saying](#) at an international court in the Hague that they'd been promised money and jobs, with Shell representatives in the room. In 2009, the company offered millions of dollars to his family, but no admission of guilt: the money was for "reconciliation."

Every commodity of value—cotton, rubber, sugar, gold, diamonds, cobalt—has brought with it great human suffering, as a few attempted to grab the profits and impose the inevitable costs on others. Coal, gas, and oil have simply added to that horror by also wrecking the atmosphere of our one, shared planet. Earlier this month, a communications staffer at Shell sent out a [Twitter challenge](#): “What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions?” Designed, one supposes, to produce confessions about driving too much, or turning the thermostat too high, the tweet instead provoked an outpouring of fury. A group of English youth in the Extinction Rebellion movement replied, “We’re willing to shut you down before you murder any more environmentalists who get in the way of you extracting oil.”

Passing the Mic

As we contemplate a country whose health and economy have been ruined by the inept response to [covid-19](#), and whose political life desperately needs to be restored to something resembling normalcy, it seemed a good week to talk with Sandra Goldmark. She is a professor at Barnard College and its director of campus sustainability and climate action, and the author of a new book, “[Fixation: How to Have Stuff Without Breaking the Planet](#).” Since 2013, she has operated Fixup, a pop-up repair shop that employs local theatre artists, stagehands, and technicians to repair broken household items—so far it has diverted more than ten thousand pounds of goods from landfills.

When you do go out to buy something new, how do you figure out if it’s going to be good for the long haul?

When buying new goods (which for me is very, very rare), I check first for good materials and good design. Is the item made of durable materials, like real wood instead of particleboard? Are those materials sustainably and ethically sourced and manufactured? This part can be tricky, since there are no international standards and relatively few certifications for durability, quality materials, fair wages, and repairability. You can look for the certifications that do exist, like [U.S.A. Fair Trade](#), [F.S.C.-certified](#) lumber, [Greenguard](#), or [iFixit’s Repairability Scorecards](#), to name a few. But usually there is no indication of what goes into a product, or how it is made. In that case, you can look at the product itself. Does it have joints or stress points made out of plastic? Can it be opened easily for repair, or is everything all glued shut? Finally, price is sometimes—though not always—an indicator. If something is too cheap to be believed, don’t believe it. It’s much better to get a higher-quality item secondhand whenever possible.

Does the mind-set of repair help us get in a different attitude about the planet itself?

You might well ask, while the planet is burning, why we should bother to fix our toasters or chairs or lamps. After seven years spent running pop-up repair shops, I realized that repair is about much more than reducing waste or emissions from manufacturing, though those are, of course, benefits. Repair is about really understanding what we have, how it is designed, who makes it, and under what conditions. In short, it’s about rethinking what we value. We live in a society that drastically undervalues *care* of all kinds, from repairing toasters to maintaining subways to caring for children. In the U.S., care workers, who are predominantly women and people of color, typically earn [at least ten dollars less than the average hourly wage](#). The pandemic has made the costs of this mentality all the more evident. So, yes, fixing stuff is

actually part of a much larger and much-needed shift towards really *seeing* and *caring* for the incredible blessings all around us, from toasters to each other all the way up to our shared planet.

When you think about new appliances that save a bunch of energy (induction cooktops, say), how do you make the call?

This is an important question. Manufacturers and government agencies encourage us to think in terms of savings on our utility bills, but we also need to consider the [embodied energy](#) of the appliance—that’s the energy that went into extracting and processing the raw materials, manufacturing, and transporting it. For example, a new refrigerator might embody energy equivalent to about sixteen hundred kilowatt-hours: about as much energy as it consumes in two and a half years of normal operation. A new, more efficient appliance should [pay for itself over time](#), but first it needs to break even in terms of embodied energy. And that means that a lot depends on how often you use it. A fridge, running twenty-four hours a day, might recoup its embodied energy in a year; an induction cooktop at a couple hours per day might take four to six years; a washing machine at a couple hours per week might take twelve years. So, yes, when it’s time to replace an appliance, energy efficient designs are much, much better, but that doesn’t mean we should all rush out and replace all of our appliances for the latest model: it’s worth considering the total impact of the item.

Climate School

Young activists in Norway are [suing](#) to try and prevent the country from continuing to grant new oil-exploration licenses. They argue that, by continuing to back new fossil-fuel development, the country has breached its constitutional obligation to insure a clean environment.

Vladimir Putin last week [signed](#) a decree saying that Russia should try to meet the targets it agreed to during the Paris climate talks, with the rather large caveat that any action must be balanced with economic development. This seems unlikely to amount to much: earlier this month, Putin’s energy minister [told the Guardian](#) that Russia does “not see that we will achieve a peak in [gas] production anytime soon.” He added, “I believe natural gas to be an eco-friendly energy source.”

I’ve had the pleasure of being on the advisory board for [Round Weather](#), a gallery that takes the proceeds from selling high-quality art and donates them to a variety of climate-action efforts. An upcoming show, “Creative Reverence,” features works from, among others, Colter Jacobsen and Terri Loewenthal.

Scoreboard

Hurricane Eta did enormous damage to Central America, triggering floods and mudslides across Guatemala, Honduras, and parts of Nicaragua. More than a hundred are dead. As CNN [reported](#), “The scenes out of the country are heartbreaking. People leaving their flooded homes, walking to safety in waist-deep water, some carrying the few belongings they were able to save.” It’s worth remembering that no one in Central America did much to cause the climate crisis.

Numbers from a new study in the journal *Science* make [clear](#) that, even if we stopped burning coal and gas and oil, the food system could still produce enough emissions to eventually heat the planet past the targets set in Paris. Persuading a lot of people to eat a lot less beef would be a place to start.

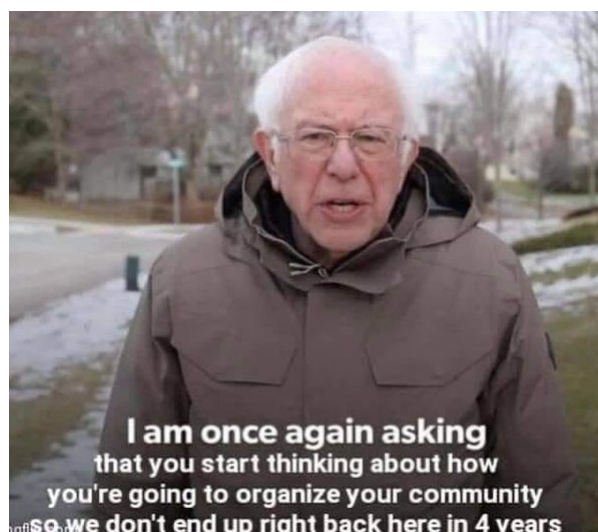
An excellent [survey](#) by the *Colorado Sun* finds that communities are having to spend lots of money to make the infrastructure changes that a deteriorating climate demands. In the wake of extensive wildfires, for instance, there's less forest left above the resort city of Glenwood Springs, in the Rockies, to hold back mud after rainfall. So the city is installing sensors to monitor debris flow, and plans to spend two and a half to four million dollars to "buttress the city's water system." Multiply that by every place on earth.

On Thursday evening, perhaps jazzed by a press conference so full of lies that the networks cut away from it, President Trump also [deposed](#) the chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Neil Chatterjee. Appointed by Trump in 2017, Chatterjee apparently erred by voting for a plan that would have let regional power administrators put a price on carbon. He's not exactly a radical—his former job was as energy adviser to Mitch McConnell. But his support for even modest carbon pricing "aggravated somebody at the White House, and they make the switch," Chatterjee told the [Washington Post](#). "I'm quite proud of that, and will wear it as a badge of honor."

A new [study](#) from the University of California, San Francisco, finds that global warming will dramatically increase rates of cancer and other diseases around the world, because, the authors state, "extreme weather events such as storms and flooding can destroy or damage health-care infrastructure, reducing health care quality and availability."

Warming Up

The great Nigerian singer Nneka is, like Ken Saro-Wiwa, from the Niger Delta, and she's in the same lineage of protest and courage. Check out [this](#) interview and performance.



[Remote Canadian town programs radar to spot approaching ... approaching ...](#)

[nypost.com › 2020/11/10 › remote-canadian-town-pro](#)

Along the frosty coast of Hudson Bay, hundreds of *polar bears* have been wandering for weeks, waiting for the wintertime sea ice to form so ...

- [ld News](#)

Joe Biden’s Education Department will move fast to reverse Betsy DeVos’ policies

By Erica L. Green

The New York Times |

Nov 13, 2020 at 11:34 AM

Like most federal agencies, the Education Department followed President Donald Trump’s lead in seeking to undo the legacy of his predecessor, and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos diligently tore into President Barack Obama’s policies.

President-elect Joe Biden’s administration is planning to return the favor.

The contrasts in Trump-era education policy and the incoming Biden administration’s agenda are stark. DeVos, a lifelong booster of private schools and longtime opponent of teachers' unions, set out to reduce the Education Department’s footprint by proposing cuts to public school funding and narrowing the department’s enforcement role of federal education laws and civil rights.

The incoming first lady, Jill Biden, is a community college professor and member of the National Education Association. The Biden administration has promised to drastically increase resources for public schools, expand its civil rights advocacy for marginalized students and reassert the department’s leadership in policymaking.

And on the most pressing issue facing education, reopening schools during the pandemic, the Biden administration has signaled an about-face.

The Trump administration has demanded that schools reopen, despite severe budget constraints and confusing public health guidelines, while the Education Department has all but absolved itself of tracking the virus’s impact and offering solutions. The Biden campaign has promised deep federal involvement to help schools secure more relief funding and navigate the effects of the pandemic, which has devastated the academic trajectory of the most vulnerable students.

But the president-elect’s closeness with the powerful teachers' unions has raised concerns. Unions have come under fire from parents and school leaders who say their opposition to in-person instruction conflicts with science and students' well-being. DeVos has seized on the tension, posting a series of articles on Twitter that have questioned the unions' roles.

“When unions win, kids lose,” she said this week.

With a likely Republican Senate and a narrow Democratic majority in the House, Biden will struggle to muster the support he needs in Congress to accomplish some of his loftiest policy goals. He has promised to bolster funding for special education, institute universal prekindergarten and triple funding for a federal program that helps schools serving high

concentrations of students from low-income families, devoting some of that funding to increasing teacher salaries. In higher education, he has promised free public college, expanding the amount of federal financial aid grants for low-income students and canceling some student debt.

Stef Feldman, the Biden campaign's policy director, told reporters last month that the administration was "confident" Biden would "be able to get some big, bold education legislation passed and certainly immediate relief for our schools and our educators, but that doesn't mean that we're not also going to take executive action within the existing authority."

Those actions could come quickly.

Biden has promised to appoint a secretary with teaching experience and deep knowledge of the challenges schools face and the students they serve.

In his victory speech Nov. 7, the president-elect referred to Jill Biden as he declared: "For America's educators, this is a great day. You're going to have one of your own in the White House."

The Biden administration plans to restore Obama-era civil rights guidance — rescinded by DeVos — that offered transgender students the right to choose school bathrooms that correspond with their gender identity, that addressed the disproportionate disciplining of Black students and that pressed for diversity in colleges and K-12 classrooms. The restoration of those guidance documents can be done immediately because they were not put through the regulatory process or enacted into law.

Undoing what is arguably DeVos' most formidable accomplishment — how federally funded schools should investigate cases of sexual assault — could be tougher. The incoming administration has vowed to dismantle those rules. As vice president, Biden had personally helped introduce the Obama-era guidelines on campus sexual misconduct that DeVos reversed through a formal and protracted rule-making.

But unlike guidance documents, which do not carry the force of law, and other DeVos regulatory measures that have been overturned by courts, the sexual misconduct rules have already held up against legal challenges. The rules would have to be overturned through legislation or rewritten through the regulatory system, a process that could take years.

[Biden's team is also eyeing DeVos' formal rules](#) that significantly tightened Obama-era rules on loan forgiveness for students defrauded by their colleges and that eased oversight of for-profit colleges. Those rules could also require regulatory action if they survive continuing court challenges.

The administration is likely to prioritize the immense backlog of loan forgiveness claims that the Trump administration allowed to pile up, and the mass denials of assistance that the department has issued to students who claim they were cheated by their colleges, according to officials familiar with the plans. Among the thousands of students awaiting relief are those who attended

Corinthian Colleges, a now-defunct for-profit college chain that Vice President-elect Kamala Harris sued when she was the attorney general of California.

[What a Biden administration could mean for student loans »](#)

“There’s a lot of work to be done, but it will be nice to know there’s an education secretary who’s thinking about how to protect students from predatory schools instead of the other way around,” said Aaron Ament, president of the National Student Legal Defense Network, which has sued the department for its efforts to roll back Obama-era rules on loan forgiveness and consumer protection.

The team Biden has named to help the Education Department through the transition signaled the direction he intends to take.

Leading the team is Linda Darling-Hammond, president of the Palo Alto, California-based Learning Policy Institute, who also oversaw the education transition for Obama in 2008. Darling-Hammond, a veteran education researcher and policymaker in arenas like desegregation, school finance and teacher preparation, was considered a contender for Biden’s secretary of education, but took herself out of the running, saying she was committed to her work in California.

The transition team’s strong representation from former Obama-era officials and teachers unions has been met with mixed reactions.

In announcing the team, a transition official said its members had “deep backgrounds in key policy areas” with “a diversity of perspectives critical to addressing America’s most urgent and complex challenges.”

Keri Rodrigues, president of the National Parents Union, which represents low-income parents and parents of color, said the composition of the team made her worried that the Biden administration might stack the government with people who are “interested in fortifying the status quo that has been failing so many of our kids.”

“This is the biggest table right now,” she said of the transition team, “and I don’t see parent groups, family groups, community groups present.” She added, “It seems we’re back to the same old, ‘We’re going to do things to you, not with you.’”

Unions were not seen as key players in Obama administration’s coalition — the National Education Association called for the resignation of Obama’s first education secretary, Arne Duncan — and have been at odds with centrist Democrats on some policy issues, such as charter schools, which are supported by many Black and Latino families. Biden this summer reshaped the Democratic platform to embrace a ban on federal funding for for-profit charters, and to call for cutting funding to underperforming charters run by nonprofit organizations.

“He’s coming in saying he wants to unify people, and it’ll be interesting to see whether that holds for education policy,” said Charles Barone, director of policy at Democrats for Education Reform. “If you really respect the role of people who got you elected, are you going to come in and attack the choices they make for their children?”

Teachers' unions have curried favor by fighting DeVos at every turn, but Biden's alliance with them has raised concerns.

"If it looks like the teachers unions are now calling the shots, and not the people schools are supposed to be serving, the pendulum will swing the other way," said Neal McCluskey, director of the libertarian Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

Biden has echoed union concerns that the country needs to get the coronavirus under control to safely reopen schools, and that it will take a large infusion of cash to meet safety guidelines and the needs of students who have suffered academic and social setbacks.

"Schools, they need a lot of money to open," Biden said during the last presidential debate, citing the need for better ventilation systems, smaller class sizes and more teachers.

While Trump has emphasized low infection rates among children, Biden has also stressed concerns for educators. During one of the debates, after Trump accused him of wanting to keep the country locked down, Biden mocked the president: "All you teachers out there, not that many of you are going to die, so don't worry about it."

Becky Pringle, president of the National Education Association, said Biden's approach to the reopening debate illustrated his understanding that "no school system budget has a line item that says, 'coronavirus.'"

Pringle noted that Biden had always been a strong supporter of the labor movement and said she was proud that he had also "leaned in" to the association's playbook. She said the president-elect was particularly excited by the union's vision to "reclaim public education as a common good and transform it into something that it's never been — which is a system that is racially and socially just and equitable."

"He'll take the slings and arrows for being 'too close' to us, and he'll be able to say, 'not only did they help me get elected, they help me lead in a bold way,'" she said.

Union leaders top speculative short lists of contenders to be the next education secretary and will undoubtedly influence Biden's choice. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, and Lily Eskelsen García, a past president of the National Education Association, are among the names mentioned.

Other names include superintendents of districts like Baltimore and Seattle, and Rep. Jahana Hayes, D-Conn., a former National Teacher of the Year.

Weingarten said that she was honored by the mention, but that she would be "really happy to work with the Biden administration as the president of the AFT."

"The Biden-Harris administration has the potential to enable a renaissance in public education," she said.