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SWHS will launch new pre-kindergarten program

By HOLLY GASKILL
 Southern Wells High School will open a new pre-kindergarten program in August. The program will work alongside an early education course where high school students can participate in and learn about early childhood education. SWHS Principal Kim Conner said the program will offer a morning and an afternoon session on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Then, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, high school students will have a class with the director. To offer this program, the school will renovate its previous fax room, which included the installation of a child bathroom, an observation room, and a play-

ground. While the school is still taking bids for the construction, Conner stated the total cost should not exceed \$150,000, 20 percent of which will be covered through grant funding. Construction is expected to start in mid-March and finish by mid-April. Conner has tackled much of the planning for this project for the last several months but hopes the school will be able to hire a director in March to help build the program. The school will also hire an aide for instruction at a later time. With 20 students in either session, Conner anticipates the pre-K being self-funded after its first year. However, specific costs and

financial assistance options are still being determined. Conner is also working with the elementary to create a latchkey program for childcare. The school will begin accepting applications by the end of January, Conner said. Information will be available on the school district's website or in the office. "The biggest benefit for us is being able to start the students off on the right foot," Conner said. "We are going to be working with the kindergarten teachers to know exactly what they need to be doing and for them to transition right into our elementary." Having visited several schools with similar programs, Conner (Continued on Page 2)



The new pre-K program will take place just inside door 10 of Southern Wells High School. (Photo by Holly Gaskill)



Snow on the Plaza

Sunday brought with it more snow as winter stopped by again. A light dusting of snow covers the courthouse roof and PeeGee hydrangeas. (Photo by Carrie Penrod)

Report: Indiana ranks 43rd in the nation for overall electric utility performance

By ROBERT ZULLO
Indiana Capital Chronicle
 A nationwide comparison of electric utility performance by an Illinois consumer advocacy group found that customers in states that are heavily reliant on fuel oil and natural gas, as in the Northeast and South, tend to pay more than those with larger amounts of carbon-free generation, among other findings.

The report by the Illinois-based Citizens Utility Board ranked all 50 states and the District of Columbia for utility reliability, affordability and environmental responsibility using 2020 public data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Compared to its peers, Indiana ranked near the bottom - at 43 out of 51 - for overall electric utility performance, with its lowest individual scores in the environmental responsibility sector. In terms of affordability and reliability, the Hoosier state was closer to the middle - at 36 and 27, respectively.

The average residential electric bill is below the national average, with Hoosiers paying \$120 each month compared to \$125. However, the average annual electricity cost

as a percentage of median income is higher in Indiana than the national average. Hoosiers spend roughly 2.18 percent of their income on electricity, above the national average of 2.09 percent.

Indiana ranked 48th in environmental responsibility, with high emissions from the electric sector in terms of carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. Compared to other states, Indiana lags when it comes to generating clean energy, ranking at 40 out of 51.

For overall performance across those categories, the top 10 were, starting with the highest ranked, Washington, Nevada, the District of Columbia, South Dakota, Illinois, Colorado, Arizona, Minnesota, Oregon and Nebraska. The bottom 10, starting with the lowest ranked, were West Virginia, Alaska, Mississippi, Massachusetts, Louisiana, Michigan, Alabama, Georgia, Indiana and Connecticut.

It's the second year in a row the group has compiled the report, which started as a way to measure how Illinois compared to other states and morphed into a project it hopes will be useful for utility regulators, electric ratepayers and state policymakers. (Continued on Page 2)

Walmart shooting victim's mom: Gunman repeatedly threatened daughter's life

EVANSVILLE, Ind. (AP) — The mother of a Walmart employee who was shot and wounded by a former co-worker inside a Walmart store in Indiana says the gunman had repeatedly threatened to kill her daughter.

Jenny Couch told WFIE-TV that her daughter, 28-year-old Amber Cook, was targeted by Ronald Ray Mosley II because he was in love with her boyfriend. When the boyfriend told Mosley that he wasn't interested in him romantically, Mosley became angry with Cook and threatened to kill her, she said.

"He kept sending my daughter messages, anonymous, everything. He kept calling her, telling her that he was going to kill her, that he watched her walk her dog," Couch told the Evansville station Friday.

According to the Evansville Police Department, 25-year-old Mosley walked into a store break room where employees were meeting Thursday night and shot Cook in the face with a 9mm handgun. Another employee escaped the room and called 911. Law enforcement officers responded within minutes and fatally shot Mosley. There were

about 40 employees and 40 shoppers in the store at the time, but no one else was injured.

On Friday, Evansville Police Chief Billy Bolin praised as a hero a female employee who came to the victim's aid after Mosley left the break room in pursuit of a male employee who had fled. Bolin said she called 911, moved the victim to another room, locked the door and turned out the lights before Mosley returned looking for the wounded woman.

Mosley had worked at the southwestern Indiana store until he was fired last year after being charged with four misdemeanor counts of battery in May 2022 for attacking four co-workers, Evansville police said Friday. A probable cause affidavit in that case (Continued on Page 2)



Ronald Ray Mosley II

Police: suspect in California shooting killed self in van

By ANDREW DALTON and JAE C. HONG
Associated Press
 MONTEREY PARK, Calif. (AP) — The hunt for a gunman who killed 10 people at a Los Angeles-area ballroom dance club ended Sunday when authorities found him dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in the van he used to flee after people thwarted his attempt at a second shooting. Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna identified the man as 72-year-old Huu Can Tran and said no other suspects were at large. Speaking at an evening news conference, he added that the motive remained unclear for the attack, which wounded 10 more. Luna did not have the exact ages of the

victims but said they all appeared to be over 50. Seven of the wounded people remained in the hospital, he said.

The sheriff added that the suspect was carrying what he described as a semi-automatic pistol with an extended magazine, and a second handgun was discovered in the van where Tran was found dead.

Also speaking at the news conference, Congresswoman Judy Chu said she still has questions about the attack: "What was the motive for this shooter? Did he have a mental illness? Was he a domestic violence abuser? How did he get these guns and was it through legal means or not?"

Earlier Sunday, law enforcement officials swarmed and entered the van after sur-

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Outside

Cloudy today, tonight, as the winds return

Today	Tuesday	Wed.
High 35	High 35	High 33
Low 28	Low 30	Low 26

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SWHS pre-K program

(Continued from Page 1)

expects broad interest in the course since it partners classroom knowledge with hands-on experience.

When children are present, students will take turns doing hands-on instruction, lesson planning, preparing materials, and observation. The observation room — one of the primary additions in construction — will allow students in the CTE course to observe course instruction without crowding the instructional room. The course may also be available for dual

credit.

Conner believes it will be beneficial to garner student interest in education amidst the national teacher shortage.

Currently, high school students from Bluffton and Norwell high schools will be able to take the course in the morning, and SWHS students in the afternoon. However, more details will become available after a director is hired and class scheduling takes place.

Above all, Conner said she looks forward to seeing how this brings the

school corporation together.

“Little guys are just so fun,” Conner said. “They just always bring a smile to my face, and it’s great to see our students interact with them ... I fully anticipate letting them participate in our activities — pep rallies, dress-up days, things like that.”

In the meantime, the school is still seeking classroom materials, toys and other related items. Conner invited anyone with gently used items for donation to contact the school.

holly@news-banner.com

Electric utility performance

(Continued from Page 1)

ers across the country, said David Kolata, the board’s executive director.

“What we’ve tried to do here is provide as full a picture as we possibly can,” he said. “We view this as a conversation starter not a conversation ender. We do think it provides a convenient and accessible way to get at this data... Our hope is every state will improve in these categories.”

Affordability

Given the wide state-by-state variance in regulatory regimes, the difference in rates between customer classes and how their bills are put together, it can be difficult to compare electric prices across state lines. Also, climate and heating and cooling differences can make apples-to-apples bill comparisons tough. Electric customers in the South, for example, tend to rely on electricity for heating in the winter and face hotter summers that require more air conditioning than in the North, where gas is more common for home heating.

“Whereas households in warmer climates may consume more electricity on an annual basis to run air conditioning units than households in colder climates, those same households will not spend as much on natural gas, propane or other heating fuels during the winter,” the report says. Other states, like Alaska and Hawaii, are expensive by

virtue of their geographic isolation from the larger U.S. electric grid.

The top 10 for overall affordability — as measured by average household energy expenditures, total household electric costs as a percentage of income, electric cost per kilowatt hour, total cost electricity expenditures and cost of energy efficiency savings — were Utah, Washington, Idaho, the District of Columbia, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Oregon, Nebraska and Illinois. The bottom 10 states were Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Alaska, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

Though the study used 2020 numbers, those affordability problems in states that rely on gas will likely have gotten worse, Kolata said, given the huge spike in gas prices triggered in part by Russia’s war in Ukraine.

In November, the National Energy Assistance Directors’ Association said more than 20 million American families (roughly 1 in 6) are behind on utility bills and in total owed more than \$16 billion as of August, up from \$8.1 billion at the end of 2019, a problem expected to exacerbated by natural gas prices hitting a 16-year high. Power plants that burn natural gas provide about 38 percent of U.S. electricity generation.

Reliability

Though outages caused

by power plants tripping offline, as in Winter Storm Elliott, get a lot of headlines, only about 1 percent of outage minutes nationally are caused by generation or transmission problems. Much more common are outages that hit the delivery system, such as storms downing power lines, equipment failures and other problems, the report says.

Using three reliability performance indices created by the electric power industry, the report ranked states based on how well utilities performed during “major events” such as ice storms, hurricanes and wildfires, as well as under normal circumstances.

The top 10 for reliability were Arizona, Nevada, the District of Columbia, South Dakota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Maryland, Kansas, Minnesota and Florida. The bottom 10 were Louisiana, West Virginia, Maine, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Alabama, Alaska, Michigan and Tennessee.

For 2020, Hurricane-prone Louisiana had far and away the longest average duration of power outages due to major events, at 3,624 minutes per customer, while Arizona, the best state, only averaged 72 minutes. In the U.S., 2020 set a record for the number of named storms (11) that made landfall, per the Weather Channel. Three hurricanes hit Louisiana that year.

Without major events,

Nevada was the top state (behind only the District of Columbia) with an average outage duration of 55 minutes per customer. The worst was West Virginia at 468 minutes.

Environment

The report also ranked states by their sources of electricity and emissions data, giving consumers, policymakers and others a “bird’s-eye view of each state’s renewable, clean energy and fossil fuel mix” as well as data on how aggressively utilities are deploying energy efficiency programs.

The overall environmental ranking includes a combination of carbon and other emissions, renewable electricity (including biomass) generation, clean energy (defined as all renewables, plus nuclear and excluding biomass) and residential energy efficiency program savings as a percentage of residential electric sales. The top 10 were Washington, South Dakota, Oregon, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, California, Idaho, Maine and Oklahoma. The bottom 10 were West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, Missouri, Mississippi, Wyoming, Utah and Alaska. There were some interesting contradictions.

— — —
This story was provided to the News-Banner by the Hoosier State Press Association’s Information Network.

Weather

Monday, January 23, 2023

(24-hour observations at 7:43 p.m. Sunday)

High: 31; **Low:** 28; **Precipitation:** 1.3 inches of snow
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 2.45 feet at 9:45 p.m. Sunday

Wells County forecast

Today: Cloudy, with a high near 35. West wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 28. Southwest wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

Tuesday: Cloudy, with a high near 35. West wind 5 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Tuesday Night: A 50 percent chance of snow after 1 a.m. Cloudy, with a low around 30. Light and variable wind becoming east 5 to 10 mph in the evening.

Wednesday: Snow, possibly mixed with rain. The snow could be heavy at times. High near 33. Chance of precipitation is 90 percent. New snow accumulation of 3 to 5 inches possible.

Wednesday Night: A slight chance of rain and snow before 1 a.m. Cloudy, with a low around 26. Chance of precipitation is 20 percent.

Thursday: A 20 percent chance of snow after 1 p.m. Cloudy, with a high near 31.

Thursday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 19.
Friday: A 20 percent chance of snow after 1 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 34. Breezy.

Friday Night: A 20 percent chance of snow. Cloudy, with a low around 24. Breezy.

Saturday: Cloudy, with a high near 30.

Indiana shooting

(Continued from Page 1)

states Mosley told police he had issues with people at work and “lost control.” A man who was one of those victims told police that before the attack Mosley was “mad at him” because he told Mosley he had no romantic interest in him, according to the affidavit.

After the 2022 attack at the store, Mosley pleaded guilty to the battery charges, and the case was referred to Vanderburgh County’s mental health court, the county’s prosecutor, Diana Moers, said Friday. Moers said Mosley had been complying with court-ordered mental health treatment.

Couch said her daughter has life-threatening injuries after being shot in the head but described her daughter as “very strong. Strong-willed, strong-headed.” She said Cook is surrounded by

loved ones at an Indianapolis hospital but is frightened.

“My little girl, laying up here, wondering if she’s even going to wake up. She’s scared to go to sleep because she’s scared that she’s not going to wake up,” Couch said.

Sgt. Anna Gray with Evansville police said Friday that the woman was in stable condition after being taken by helicopter to the hospital in Indianapolis. She said Saturday that police did not have an update on her condition.

Walmart said in a statement on Saturday that the store has not reopened.

“The store remains closed while we provide support to our associates and determine next steps. An appropriate reopening date has yet to be finalized,” the Bentonville, Arkansas-based retail giant said.

Dance club shooting

(Continued from Page 1)

rounding it for hours before going in. A person’s body appeared to be slumped over the wheel and was later removed from the vehicle.

Luna previously released photos of an Asian man who was believed to be the suspect.

The manhunt came after the gunman opened fire at the ballroom dance studio late Saturday amid Lunar New Year celebrations in the predominantly Asian American community of Monterey Park. He likely tried and failed to target a second dance hall, authorities said.

The van was found in Torrance, another community home to many Asian Americans, about 22 miles (34.5 kilometers) from that second location.

The shooting sent a wave of fear through Asian American communities in the Los Angeles area and cast a shadow over Lunar New Year festivities around the country. Other cities sent extra officers to watch over the celebrations.

“The community was in fear thinking that they should not go to any events because there was an active shooter,” Chu said, adding that she hopes residents now feel safe: “You are no longer in danger.”

Luna said the shooting at the Star

Ballroom Dance Studio in Monterey Park left five women and five men dead and wounded another 10 people. Then 20 to 30 minutes later, a man with a gun entered the Lai Lai Ballroom in nearby Alhambra.

The suspect entered the Alhambra club with a gun, and people wrested the weapon away from him before he fled, Luna said.

Hours earlier, Luna said authorities were looking for a white van after witnesses reported seeing the suspect flee from Alhambra in such a vehicle.

Members of a SWAT team entered the van a short time later and looked through its contents before walking away.

The massacre was the nation’s fifth mass killing this month. It was also the deadliest attack since May 24, when 21 people were killed in an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

Monterey Park is a city of about 60,000 people on the eastern edge of Los Angeles and is composed mostly of Asian immigrants from China or first-generation Asian Americans. The shooting happened in the heart of its downtown where red lanterns decorated the streets for the Lunar New Year festivities. A police car was parked near a large banner that proclaimed “Happy Year of the Rabbit!”

The celebration in Monterey Park is one of California’s largest. Two days of festivities, which have been attended by as many as 100,000 people in past years, were planned. But officials canceled Sunday’s events following the shooting.

Tony Lai, 35, of Monterey Park was stunned when he came out for his early morning walk to learn that the noises he heard in the night were gunshots.

“I thought maybe it was fireworks. I thought maybe it had something to do with Lunar New Year,” he said. “And we don’t even get a lot of fireworks here. It’s weird to see this. It’s really safe here. We’re right in the middle of the city, but it’s really safe.”

The shooting occurred at Star Ballroom Dance Studio, a few blocks from city hall on Monterey Park’s main thoroughfare of Garvey Avenue, which is dotted with strip malls of small businesses whose signs are in both English and Chinese. Cantonese and Mandarin are both widely spoken, Chinese holidays are celebrated and Chinese films are screened regularly in the city.

The business offered dance lessons from tango to rumba to the fox trot, and rented its space for events. On Saturday, its website said, it was hosting an event called “Star Night” from 8 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.

Brazil’s new president working to reverse Amazon deforestation

By **FABIANO MAISONNAVE** and **DIANE JEANTET**
Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Shaking a traditional rattle, Brazil’s incoming head of Indigenous affairs recently walked through every corner of the agency’s headquarters — even its coffee room — as she invoked help from ancestors during a ritual cleansing.

The ritual carried extra meaning for Joenia Wapichana, Brazil’s first Indigenous woman to command the agency charged with protecting the Amazon rainforest and its people. Once she is sworn in next month under newly inaugurated President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Wapichana promises to clean house at an agency that critics say has allowed the Amazon’s resources to be exploited at the expense of the environment.

Environmentalists, Indigenous people and voters sympathetic to their causes were important to Lula’s narrow victory over former President Jair Bolsonaro. Now Lula is seeking to fulfill campaign pledges he made to them on a wide range of issues, from expanding Indigenous territories to halting a surge in illegal deforestation.


To carry out these goals, Lula is appointing well-known environmentalists and Indigenous people to key positions at Funai and other agencies that Bolsonaro had filled with allies of agribusiness and military officers.

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OBITUARIES

Ronald G. Coffield

Ronald G. Coffield, of Bluffton, passed away at 8:25 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 21, 2023 at his home. Arrangements are pending with Walker & Glancy Funeral Home in Montpelier.

Indiana legislators make contentious issues a priority

Bills focus on gender identity, so-called 'harmful' materials, partisan board elections

By **SUE LOUGHLIN Tribune-Star**
An Indiana bill that would require schools to report to parents if a student "has conflicted feelings" about their gender identity or gender expression is being described as "dangerous" by an LGBTQ advocate.

Senate Bill 354, authored by Republican Sen. Jeff Raatz, (Richmond) chair of the senate education and career development committee, would require public schools to notify parents if a minor student discloses to an employee that the student "has conflicted feelings about or is having difficulty handling or coping with the student's gender identity or gender expression."

It's one of several conservative-backed measures filed or re-introduced for the 2023 Indiana General Assembly, despite some education groups asking for a pause on socially contentious issues.

Gender identity and transitioning

Senate Bill 354, which deals in part with school accreditation, also states that parents must be notified if the student "changes, expresses, or indicates a desire to change, or makes a request to change the student's name, attire, pronoun, title or word to identify the student in a manner that is inconsistent with the student's biological sex at birth."

Meanwhile, House Bill 1220 prohibits a physician or other practitioner from knowingly providing gender transition procedures to an individual who is less than 18 years of age that are intended to alter the gender of the minor or delay puberty.

It provides for certain medical exceptions and establishes civil enforcement actions. The bill was authored by Republican Rep. Michelle Davis, R-Whiteland.

Partisan school board elections

Also resurfacing are efforts to make school board elections partisan.

Among those filing bills are State Rep. Alan Morrison, R-Brazil, who has filed House Bill 1074, which would require school board candidates to state their political party or status as an independent on the petition of nomination and on the ballot.

In a news release, Morrison states the change "would help parents be more informed when selecting the candidate that best aligns with their values."

Some of Morrison's colleagues have said they'd be

more likely to support the bill if it was an option rather than mandate, he said in an interview.

Morrison believes voters "need as much information about (candidates) as possible. Information is power."

A similar bill has been filed in the Senate. Senate Bill 188 is authored by Jack Sandlin (R-Indianapolis).

ISBA opposes a measure that would mandate partisan school board elections.

The 2022 general election illustrates why it isn't needed, Spradlin said. There was a higher level of attention and scrutiny associated with school board races, many candidate forums and much press coverage.

Only three states have partisan school board elections, Connecticut, Louisiana and Pennsylvania.

Ending protection for 'harmful' material

Another revived proposal would allow K-12 educators and librarians to be held criminally liable for distributing material deemed harmful to minors.

A similar bill failed in the 2022 session.

This year's legislation, Senate Bill 12, is authored by Republican Sen. James Tomes of Wadesville. The bill specifies that only college and university librarians would be able to claim legal protections from the law for disseminating or displaying material deemed harmful, according to Chalkbeat Indiana.

In an emailed statement, Tomes said the bill does not ban or censor any books; it only removes the "educational" defense a school or library can use if the presence of an inappropriate book accessible to children comes into question. Legitimate literary works, books and novels are not affected, he says.

This legislation only applies to K-12 libraries and doesn't include colleges or universities.

Chad Heck, advocacy co-chair of the Indiana Library Federation, is also a Pike High School librarian.

The bill "removes the defense for schools and libraries for providing content harmful to minors and would allow prosecutors to prosecute teachers and libraries for providing certain content to minors," Heck said, adding emphatically, "We don't have that content. We don't have obscene material in schools and libraries."

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This story was provided to the News-Banner by the Hoosier State Press Association's Information Network.

INCIDENTS

County:
Thursday, 9:40 p.m., Ind. 3 between 1000S and 1100S. Tree blown down in the roadway. Sheriff's deputy responded and was able to remove the tree.

Friday, 4:14 a.m., 500E south of 1200N. Report of men in a white pickup truck and a green sport utility vehicle going door-to-door. One of the men asked a resident for gas. The vehicles then left driving east on 1100N. Sheriff's deputy checked the area but saw no vehicles matching the description.

Ossian:
Thursday, 10:20 p.m., Ind. 1 north of the Ossian town limits. Officer attempted to pull over someone riding a

Police Notebook

black cafe-style motorcycle after clocking the motorcycle at 89 mph-55 zone. The officer tacked it into Allen County but then terminated the pursuit. Allen County Sheriff's Department notified of the speeding biker.

ACCIDENTS

City:
Thursday, 5:05 p.m., Market Street at Marion Street. Bridgette E. Ewart, 37, Bluffton, was driving a 2015 Chevrolet Silverado pickup truck east on Market Street. James A. Jamison, 69, Bluffton, was driving a 2011 Toyota Camry west on Market Street. Ewart made a wide birth for the vehicles parked in the angled parking spaces on Market and crossed the center line. Her Silverado sideswiped

Jamison's Camry causing more than \$2,500 damage.

County:
Thursday, 5:01 p.m., Ind. 1 at 350S. Jason L. Stone, 45, Portland was northbound on Ind. 1 in his 2008 Ford Mustang. The hood latch on the car kept popping loose so he pulled over to the side of the road to try and fix it. Ella L. Doll, 18, rural Dunkirk, was driving a 2009 Honda Civic north on Ind. 1 when she reached down to change the song on her phone, drove off the road and slammed into the back Mustang causing more than \$2,500 damage to the two vehicles. Bluffton Fire Rescue and Wells County EMS were initially dispatched to the crash because the passerby who phoned

in the crash was not sure if anyone was trapped or injured. No one was injured so both rescue and the ambulance were advised to disregard.

Friday, 7:24 a.m., 300W south of 1100S. Brandon A. Logan, 42, Albany, hit a deer with his 2018 Chevrolet Cruze. Damage to the car exceeded \$2,500.

FIRE RUNS
Thursday, 3:32 p.m., Lot 3 in Lancaster Estates mobile home park, 1211 W. Lancaster St. Caller believed mobile home hit by lightning but there did not appear to be any fire or smoke. Bluffton Fire Department dispatched but did not find any evidence that the structure had been hit by lightning.

Wells Court Docket

Wells Superior Court Criminal Cases

One-day jury trial set for 9 a.m. June 13 for Donald Lee Ludington, 48, Bluffton, charged with possession of marijuana, a Class B misdemeanor, and possession of drug paraphernalia, a Class C misdemeanor.

— — —
Kyle Douglas Davis, 35, Fort Wayne, pleaded guilty to failure to register as a sex or violent offender, a Level 6 felony.

Sentenced to one year in prison. The term of the sentence is to be served consecutively to whatever term is meted in Huntington Circuit Court for violating probation from a Feb. 21, 2022, sentencing for sexual misconduct with a minor, a Level 5 felony.

Ordered to pay \$185 in court costs.

Davis was charged with failing to register his new place of employment with the Wells County Sex Offender Registrar.

— — —
One-day bench trial set for 9 a.m. June 16 for Bradley J. Richardson, 29, Bluffton, charged with operating a vehicle while intoxicated endangering a person, a Class A misdemeanor, and operating a vehicle with an alcohol concentration equivalent of more than .08 percent but less than .15 percent, a Class C misdemeanor.

— — —
Sentencing set for 8:30 a.m. March 24 for David L. Cruz III, 19, Bluffton, who pleaded guilty to dangerous control of a firearm, a Level 5 felony; unlawful carrying of a handgun, a Class A misdemeanor; and possession of marijuana, a Class B misdemeanor.

— — —
Gavin P. Lane, 23, Fort Wayne, pleaded guilty to driving while suspended with a prior conviction for the same offense, a Class A misdemeanor.

Sentenced to a year in the Wells County Jail, all suspended, and placed on probation for one year. Probation shall terminate upon Lane obtaining valid driving privileges.

Ordered to pay court costs and probation fees.

On Dec. 3, 2022, Bluffton police received a report that a man in a white Chev-

rolet Trailblazer had just been inside and left a vacant residence. An officer spotted a vehicle matching the description southbound on Union Street near Wabash Street while he was responding to the call.

The officer turned around his patrol vehicle and noticed the Trailblazer was continuing south on Union Street. The officer headed east on Market Street and saw the Trailblazer come to a stop at the Union/Market intersection. Apparently the driver, Lane, realized he had been spotted by police because at this point he turned the vehicle off and started to exit the Trailblazer — just as a second police officer had pulled in behind the Trailblazer.

The second officer ordered Lane to stop, which Lane did. Upon questioning by the officers, Lane reportedly explained that he had come to Bluffton from Fort Wayne hoping to meet a girl he had contact with on Tinder, an online dating and geosocial networking application.

Lane said he had been given the address of the Bluffton residence and was told to walk into the house, which he did, but then realized something was not quite right.

It turned out that Lane had fallen for a prank played on him by male acquaintances who knew the residence they had sent Lane to was vacant.

Upon further investigation, the officers discovered Lane had driven to Bluffton with a driver's license that had been suspended since May 5 following a conviction for driving while suspended in Allen County Superior Court.

— — —
Hector L. Muñoz Carattini, 60, Bluffton, pleaded guilty to resisting law enforcement, a Class A misdemeanor, and operating a vehicle while intoxicated endangering a person, a Class A misdemeanor.

Sentenced to a year in the Wells County Jail on each of the counts with the terms of the sentences to be served concurrently.

All but 30 days of each sentence were suspended. Carattini was credited for six days spent in confinement awaiting disposition of his case.

Placed on probation for

335 days.

Ordered to report to a substance abuse program, pay a \$200 Countermeasures fee, pay all costs associated with his blood test, court costs and probation fees.

Driver's license suspended for one year.

As part of a plea agreement, charges of resisting law enforcement by use of a vehicle, a Level 6 felony; exceeding the speed limit, a Class C infraction; failure to signal a turn or lane change that causes a traffic accident involving bodily injury, a Class A infraction; open alcoholic beverage container during operation of a motor vehicle, a Class C infraction; and driving left of center, a Class infraction, were all dismissed.

While patrolling Main Street at 1:25 a.m. July 9, 2022, a Bluffton police officer clocked a southbound 2015 Hyundai Tucson at 62 mph-30 zone. The officer tried to catch up to the vehicle but was unable to do so before the Tucson made a right turn onto Wabash Street, swinging so wide that it reportedly was driving westbound in the eastbound lane of the street.

The Tucson reportedly continued westbound on Wabash Street at 65 mph-30 zone and at Oak Street, made a left turn to head south. The officer had activated the emergency light package on his patrol vehicle and then realized that they had turned off on their own.

He reactivated them but by this time, the Tucson was heading east on Washington Street.

The lights stopped work-
(Continued on Page 10)

Financial Focus
Open the (back) door to a Roth IRA
If you'd like to contribute to a Roth IRA, but your income is too high, do you have any options?
A Roth IRA is an attractive retirement savings vehicle, because earnings and withdrawals are tax free, provided you've had your account at least five years and you don't start taking money out until you're 59½. Also, with a Roth IRA, you won't be required to take withdrawals when you turn 72, which will give your account a chance to potentially keep growing.
So, if you'd like to take advantage of this investment, you might want to consider using what's known as a "backdoor Roth IRA."
Essentially, this strategy involves moving money from a new or existing traditional IRA to a Roth IRA. The process is straightforward, but you'll need to consider potential tax implications.
Consult with your tax advisor to determine if a backdoor Roth makes sense for you — if so, it could be a valuable addition to your financial strategy.

JEREMY M. TODD
CFP® AAMS®
Financial Advisor
1169 N. Main St.
Suite 2
Bluffton, IN 46714
260-824-0686

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China is a threat to more than just Taiwan

SYDNEY - Last July, the U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. Mark Milley, visited Jakarta where he said China's military has become significantly more aggressive and dangerous over the past five years.

While the U.S. has seemed fixated on China's growing verbal threats and military maneuvers around Taiwan, Milley and others, including some in Australia, are concerned that China's expansionist goals do not end with attempts to take over that free island nation.

Among those keeping an eye on China's activities here is Tom Switzer, executive director of the think tank Center for Independent Studies (CIS). Switzer believes Australian leaders are wrong when they think their policies determine what China does. "The truth is," he says, "most great powers are ruthless beasts: they play hard ball at every turn; and the stronger China gets, the more it's likely to throw its weight around."

Switzer calls what China is doing "wolf warrior diplomacy," where it uses its growing economic power to coerce or harm weaker states that implement policies not to Beijing's liking.

Some commentators here claim Australia can rebuild trust with Beijing without acquiescing to its demands. Switzer disagrees and asks some important questions the government should consider: "How do our leaders restore a dialogue with a hyper-nationalist China that wants us to kowtow? Doesn't that represent a serious threat to our sovereignty? Doesn't Beijing's long list of demands as a prerequisite to improving relations make it harder for Canberra to do more to reboot relations with Beijing?"

On its webpage, CIS asserts that China "has been waging a global influence campaign across the globe. It is better understood as a strategic use of media technology and government resources allocated by the Chinese Communist Party in seeking to effectively influence media content and industries in targeted countries. It aims at changing global opinions and policy discourses in favour of its development model, patterns of managing inter-state relations, and justification of its prospective hegemonic status worldwide. Pushback actions against this effort of China have been occurring across many countries, however."

It is no secret how this influence works. We've seen it in the U.S. where corporations and individual spokespersons for companies that manufacture products in China have been reluctant to criticize the communist regime for fear of losing money. At what point does it become a patriotic duty to start making products in America (and Australia) again instead of putting profits above the best interests of free nations? Journalists should ask this question of President Biden, congressional Republicans and GOP presidential candidates in 2024.

There is also the issue of propaganda. People of a certain age associate propaganda with Nazi Germany (Joseph Goebbels), Japan (Tokyo Rose) and the Soviet Union. But China's use of especially social media - TikTok being just one of many examples - has taken propaganda to a new and more highly sophisticated level.

One of the few media outlets that responds to Chinese disinformation and propaganda is The Epoch Times, denounced by some as a far-right newspaper associated with the Falun Gong quasi-religious movement. Yet it consistently presents information that counters what is coming from Beijing and its ideological allies.

One of the great seductions, especially in free societies, is that when one evil is defeated - Nazism, Japan, the collapse of the Soviet Union - it can't become incarnated in new regimes and new dictators.

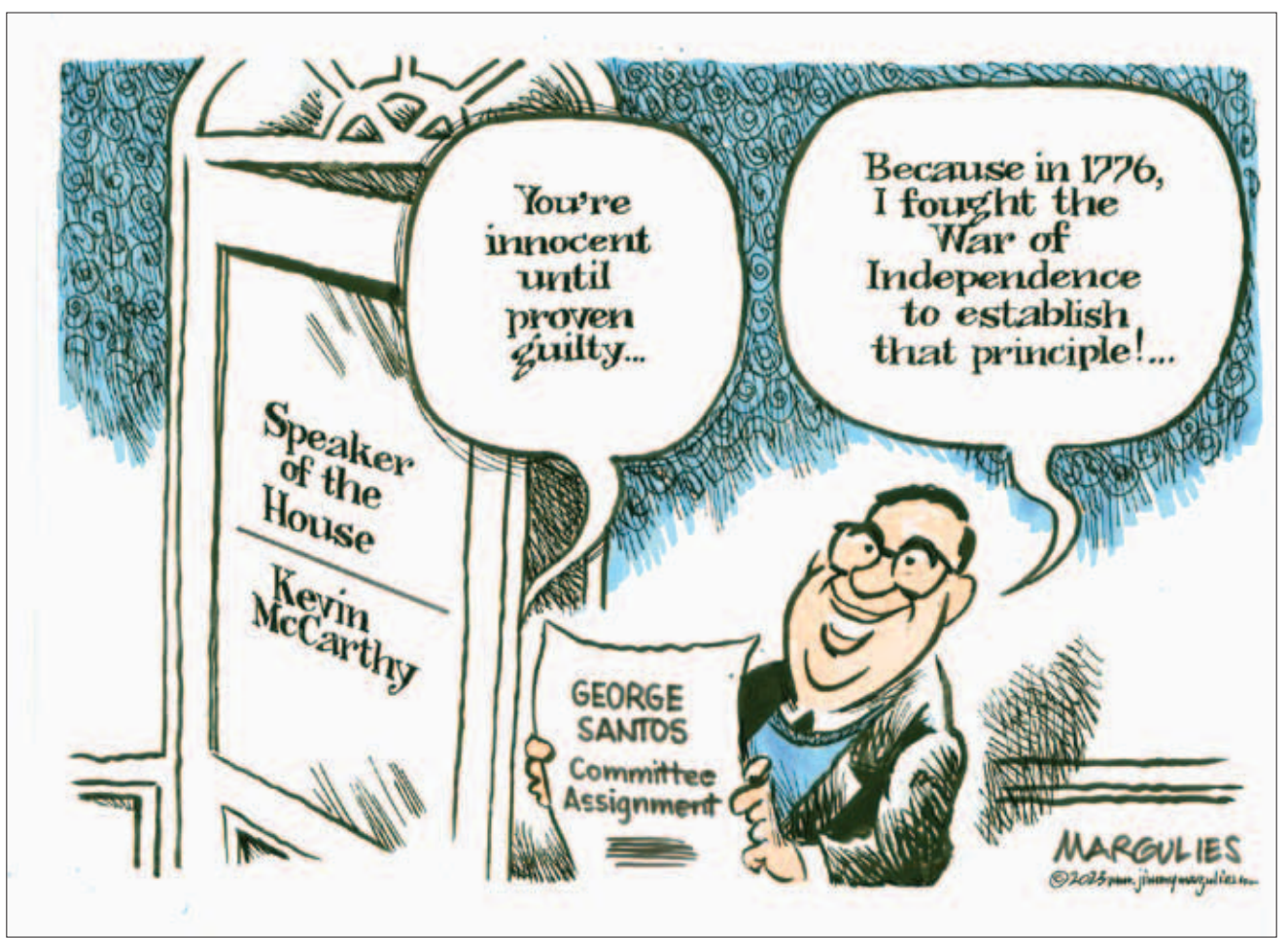
Eternal vigilance and the opposition to tyranny are the price free people must pay to maintain their freedom, which is not the natural state of humankind if one looks around the world.

That is true for Australia, Europe (Russia's war against Ukraine) and the United States.

tcaditors@tribpub.com



Cal Thomas



Rep. Banks take a preemptive swing at Mitch Daniels

In the coming days or weeks, Mitch Daniels will make a decision about whether to return to politics by running for the Senate seat Mike Braun is vacating to seek the open governor seat.

After serving as White House budget director, then two terms as Indiana governor followed by a decade at the helm of Purdue, where he froze tuition for a decade (saving families \$1 billion), raised billions of dollars and ignited a research corridor on the west side of campus, Daniels appears poised for a Senate run where he could redefine conservatism after the era of Donald Trump.

If Daniels runs in this 2024 cycle race, he will likely face U.S. Rep. Jim Banks. The Columbia City Republican had predicted a GOP tsunami last Spring, but after that gusher was reduced to a trickle in November, this ambitious lawmaker has been on a demolition derby course.

He had flirted with a run for governor, but deferred to Sen. Braun when the latter declared for that open seat in November. He dabbled in U.S. House leadership in December and early January, losing a whip race to Rep. Tom Emmer, and then received a vote for speaker during his ally Kevin McCarthy's tortured 15-ballot squeaker.

Then late last week with a toxic blast of political-legal gas, Rep. Banks signaled he would enter the brewing 2024 U.S. Senate race. Teaming up with Club for Growth President David McIntosh, the pair did something we've never seen before: Running a preemptive TV ad designed to keep a rival - Mitch Daniels - out of the race.

The same Mitch Daniels who never ran a negative TV ad during his two gubernatorial runs in which he defeated an incumbent Democrat, and then recorded a landslide reelection on the same day Barack Obama carried Indiana's 11 Electoral College votes in 2008.

But in the eyes of Club for Growth, a PAC of billionaires, it said in the TV Ad, "After 50 years in big government, big pharma and big academia, Mitch Daniels forgot how to fight. An old guard Republican clinging to the old ways of the bad old days."

Long-time GOP operative Mark Lubbers responded to the Club for Growth TV ad, telling me, "These are the same people who cost us Republican control of the Senate. Sad to see that Banks has thrown in with them."

The Wall Street Journal's conservative editorial board weigh in: "It's bewildering to see the Club for Growth, whose reason for being is promoting growth economics, smack a politician for working in private industry at Eli Lilly. Even more odd is the higher-ed slam: He stepped down at the end of 2022 as the most successful college president in the country."

According to Lubbers, Daniels and Banks had a phone conversation on a recent Saturday and, reportedly, Daniels did not attempt to dissuade Rep. Banks from making a Senate bid. "Apparently they think it's political genius to

poke the bear with a sharp stick," Lubbers said. "We'll see how that works."

Donald J. Trump, Jr., then tweeted on Jan. 13: "The establishment is trying to recruit weak RINO Mitch Daniels to run for US Senate in Indiana. The same Mitch Daniels who agreed with Joe Biden that millions of MAGA Republicans are supposedly a danger to the country & trying to 'subvert democracy.' He would be Mitt Romney 2.0."

This was the first time anyone had described Daniels as a "weak RINO."

Lubbers responded to Trump the younger: "You think the progressive left needs to be fought; we think it needs to be BEATEN. That requires optimistic positive conservatism that builds majorities, wins elections & makes policy. Not just foaming at the mouth, counting tweets, and grifting contributions. Hit the road."

So, what are the chances of a "U.S. Sen. Mitch Daniels?"

The two strongest Hoosier political dynasties in the last 30 years have been run by Democrat Evan Bayh and Daniels. It was Daniels, along with then-Republican Chairman Eric Holcomb, who created the modern GOP dynasty.

Watching his 2004 and 2008 gubernatorial campaigns, what became clear was Daniels's strategic, tactical and messaging strengths. As a retail campaigner, he was with-out peer. We have seen this persist while at the helm of Purdue University this past decade.

As for the "strongest" president of Daniels's life, the answer would probably be his former boss, President Reagan, who repeatedly promoted his "11th Commandment: Thou shalt not criticize another Republican."

Having said that, Evan Bayh was once considered invincible, but he lost the 2016 U.S. Senate race 52-42% to Sen. Todd Young. You can be the right candidate, but in the wrong race at the wrong time.

That is a key question for Mitch Daniels: Is this the right race at the right time?

Banks, too, will cite his patriotic duty to save America, all while embracing Donald Trump, who since helping kick away another Senate GOP majority last November, has dined with a neo-Nazi, expressed solidarity with the Jan. 6 insurrectionists, and called for the termination of the U.S. Constitution so he could be "restored" to power after losing in 2020 by seven million votes.

If this race is enjoined and fought, it could define the coming political era in Indiana as well as the nation.

The columnist publishes at www.howeypolitics.com. Find him on Twitter @hwypol.



Brian Howey

Politicking

Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Monday, Jan. 23, the 23rd day of 2023. There are 342 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On Jan. 23, 1964, the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution, eliminating the poll tax in federal elections, was ratified as South Dakota became the 38th state to endorse it.

On this date:

In 1368, China's Ming dynasty, which lasted nearly three centuries, began as Zhu Yuanzhang (zhoo whan-zhahng) was formally acclaimed emperor following the collapse of the Yuan dynasty.

In 1789, Georgetown University was established in present-day Washington, D.C.

In 1845, Congress decid-

ed all national elections would be held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

In 1932, New York Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt announced his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

In 1950, the Israeli Knesset approved a resolution affirming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

In 1962, Jackie Robinson was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility.

In 1973, President Richard Nixon announced an accord had been reached to end the Vietnam War, and would be formally signed four days later in Paris.

In 1977, the TV mini-series "Roots," based on the Alex Haley novel, began airing on ABC.

The Trump-Biden embrace

America may not want a Trump-Biden rematch, but Donald Trump and Joe Biden sure do.

A CNN poll late last year showed that 6 in 10 Republicans and Republican-leaning independents want a different GOP nominee in 2024, and a roughly similar proportion of Democrats hope for a nominee other than Biden.

Not that either man is inclined to pay any attention.

Trump wants revenge against a president who humiliated him in 2020 and who, with an approval rating in the mid-40s, would seem ripe for the picking.

Biden wants to run against a persistently unpopular, controversy-plagued former president whom he beat once before and used to great effect as a foil in the 2022 midterms.

Trump's best argument is that his policies were better than Biden's.

Biden's best argument is that he's not Trump.

It's the weirdest, and most dispiriting, symbiotic relationship in politics. It's the career politician soaked in conventional politics versus the upstart developer with zero respect for rules. The establishmentarian versus the populist. Boring versus erratic. And ... unpopular versus unpopular, as well as, now that you mention it, old versus old.

If Biden stepped aside, Trump might feel a little less driven to run, whereas if Trump declined to run, Democrats would have to be much more nervous about how Biden would



Rich Lowry

match up against a younger, less toxic opponent.

As it is, the weakness of each is a motivator and prop for the other.

Just consider: It's probably a good rule of thumb not to run a presidential candidate who's under federal investigation for mishandling classified documents.

But does that rule hold when your candidate could well be running against another candidate also under federal investigation for mishandling classified documents?

Such are the imponderables that a potential Biden-Trump rematch presents.

Both can point at the other and try to argue, in effect, "Hey, your special counsel investigation is much worse than my special counsel investigation."

Trump tucked into this debate in his characteristic fashion. In a Truth Social post, he mocked Biden for having classified documents "on the damp floor" of his "flimsy, unlocked, and unsecured" garage, whereas Mar-a-Lago is "a highly secured facility." (Of course, Biden famously insisted that his garage was locked -- he has a classic Corvette to protect, after all).

Biden's team and allies have made the opposite case that, in contrast to Trump, his mistakes were inadvertent and immediately reported to authorities.

Regardless of the merits, there's no doubt that Biden's possession of classified documents materially assists

Trump in his case; it might save him from indictment.

By the same token, Trump's possession of classified documents materially assists Biden in his case; the discovery of the documents in Biden's various unsecured locations may be a fiasco, but not one as drawn out and legally fraught as the Mar-a-Lago drama.

It's a little like both parties running candidates in the 1972 campaign who had authorized break-ins, or in a 1980 campaign who had presided over double-digit inflation.

Now, it's entirely possible that the second season of Trump versus Biden never makes it to production. Despite all signs indicating that he wants to run again, Biden might pull up short because he doesn't feel up for it. For his part, Trump has a significant chance of winning the Republican nomination, yet it isn't a gimme, and it shouldn't help him that Biden and the Democrats so obviously want to run against him, just as they wanted to run against so many of his acolytes last November.

If the prospect of returning to 2020 is unappealing, look on the bright side: We never really left.

Trump has never let us forget that he lost to Biden (although he prefers to refer to it as getting the election stolen from him), while Biden has never let us forget that Trump is waiting in the wings.

Despite their enmity, both men want and need each other politically, whether that's what the country is interested in or deserves, or not.

Rich Lowry is on Twitter @RichLowry

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Gavin Hoepfner for Norwell draws a crowd as he splits New Haven's Darrion Brooks and Joseph Robertson before dishing off to a teammate in the third quarter Saturday night at New Haven. (Photo by Glen Werling)

Knights remain perfect in conference play with win over the Bulldogs

By RICK SPRUNGER

NEW HAVEN — Norwell cleared a major hurdle in its bid for the Northeast 8 Conference championship with a 77-65 win at New Haven in a brutally physical game Saturday night.

"We control our own destiny," said Norwell coach Mike McBride after watching his team win its fourth straight game without a defeat in conference play. "Leo, New Haven, and Columbia City are all strong teams, and we're having to play all three of them on the road. We've now beaten two of them. We'll be at home for East Noble and Huntington North, but we still have to go to Columbia City." The Eagles are also unbeaten in four conference outings.

Depending on your perspective, Norwell's win over New Haven was either easier or more difficult than the final score made it appear.

The Knights cruised through the first two and a half quarters, piling up a 55-31 lead, but then faltered a bit down the stretch and watched the Bulldogs come thundering back and cut that 24-point deficit all the way down to nine at 71-62. That followed back-to-back steals and layups by 6-1 freshman Korbyn Hammel with 1:12 still to play.

"Their pressure caused us issues (in the fourth quarter)," observed McBride. "They're athletic, they're strong, they're quick. We committed some turnovers and missed a front end of a one-and-one. We weren't as strong on rebounding in the second half, and they (the Bulldogs) were more aggressive."

"That let them get back in it a little bit."

But Lleyton Bailey connected on a free throw at the 0:55 mark, and Luke Graft alertly picked up a loose ball and fired a long upcourt pass to Jake Parker for an easy bunny that put it out of reach at 74-62 with 44 ticks remaining.

Still, for three quarters, Norwell put on a clinic.

Through those first three periods, the Knights were 21-for-34 from the field for a .618 shooting percentage, committed just six turnovers, and owned a 21-12 advantage on the boards.

From an early 5-5 tie, Norwell set sail on a 19-3 burst that threatened to blow New Haven right out of its

own gym.

Lleyton Bailey hit two three-pointers and Parker one in the first period.

And then there was the passing game.

Brody Bolyn hit Luke McBride knifing through the lane for one layup, Bailey lobbed an alley-oop pass to a back-cutting McBride on the baseline for another, and Luke Graft rifled a laser to Parker underneath for a third.

The quarter ended with a clock-aware McBride dumping a pretty pass to a wide-open Graft under the basket for yet another uncontested easy one at the buzzer and a 17-6 Norwell lead.

Then, after a New Haven bucket to open the second period, Ashton Federspiel got into the act with a pair of free throws and a three-pointer from the corner, and Bolyn redirected a Gavin Hoepfner miss back in for a 24-8 spread.

Time out, New Haven.

"We got off to a good start," acknowledged McBride later. "Jake and Lleyton shot the ball well early, and Luke McBride did a great job setting guys up. We handled their full-court press. Defensively, we were able to make them take some tough shots."

It was 36-22 at halftime; and when Parker started the third quarter with a three-point play underneath on another sharp feed from Lleyton Bailey and then drove the baseline for another hoop, it was a quick 41-22.

The lead peaked at the aforementioned 55-31 at the 3:18 mark of the third after back-to-back threes by McBride and Cohen Bailey.

It was at that point that New Haven regrouped and spun off a quick 10-2 burst of its own and pulled to within 16 points by the end of the period.

Then, with the clock moving like a calendar, Parker and Bolyn each picked up their fourth fouls early in the fourth quarter, Norwell committed four fourth-period turnovers, and New Haven went on another 9-2 spurt to cut the gap down to three possessions. Not to worry.

McBride knocked down a perfect 8-for-8 from the charity stripe down the stretch to keep the Knights out of harm's way.

McBride finished with a game-high 26 points on

6-for-9 shooting from the field, two three-pointers, and a perfect 12-for-12 from the line.

He also grabbed nine rebounds and dished out eight assists.

"Luke McBride was spectacular tonight," said his proud papa. "To play the kind of game he has against the caliber of athletes he's been playing against, well, that's Indiana All-Star caliber, if you ask me."

Parker added 16 points, and Lleyton Bailey and Federspiel nine each for Norwell, which improved to 13-2 on the season.

New Haven got 21 points from 6-4 senior Darrion Brooks, 18 from Hammel, and 12 points and eight rebounds from 6-3 junior James Hardy off the bench.

Jeremiah Cottrell, a 6-3 junior, tossed in 10 points for the Bulldogs, now 7-9 overall and 3-1 in the conference.

Norwell made it a clean sweep with victories in both the junior varsity and C-team games.

The Knights topped New Haven in the reserve contest, 53-46.

They got 15 points apiece from Kaedyn Quintanilla and Adam McBride, 12 from Caiden Petrie, nine from Brady Smith, and two from Owen Wallis.

Norwell won the C-team game, 36-24.

Will Case scored 14 points, Grant Shelton six, Noah Comer and Elijah Jacob five apiece, Noah Schamerloh four, and Quintanilla two for the Knights.

sports@news-banner.com

NORWELL 77, NEW HAVEN 65
at New Haven High School
NORWELL (13-2, 4-0 NE8): Jake Parker 6-10 2-3 16, Cohen Bailey 2-3 0-0 5, Lleyton Bailey 3-9 1-3 9, Luke McBride 6-9 12-12 26, Brody Bolyn 1-2 2-2 4, Luke Graft 3-3 0-0 6, Ashton Federspiel 3-4 2-2 9, Gavin Hoepfner 1-2 0-0 2. TOTAL: 25-42 19-22 77.
NEW HAVEN (7-9, 3-1 NE8): Jeremiah Cottrell 5-7 0-0 10, Mathias Garcia 0-3 0-0 0, Joseph Robertson 1-3 1-2 4, Korbyn Hammel 6-13 5-9 18, Darrion Brooks 7-18 4-5 21, Chris Stewart 0-0 0-0 0, Mylan Graham 0-1 0-0 0, James Hardy 6-10 0-2 12, Darrion Woods 0-0 0-0 0. TOTAL: 25-55 10-18 65.
Norwell 17 19 23 18 — 77
New Haven 6 16 21 22 — 65
 Three-point shooting: Norwell 8-19 (Parker 2-5, C. Bailey 1-2, L. Bailey 2-7, McBride 2-3, Federspiel 1-1, Hoepfner 0-1), New Haven 5-20 (Garcia 0-3, Robertson 1-2, Hammel 1-6, Brooks 3-9). Rebounds: Norwell 31 (McBride 9, Bolyn 7, Federspiel 5), New Haven 22 (Hardy 8, Brooks 6). Turnovers: Norwell 10, New Haven 3. Personal fouls: Norwell 15, New Haven 16. Fouled out: None. Technical fouls: None. Junior Varsity: Norwell 53, New Haven 46. Freshmen: Norwell 36, New Haven 24.

Jenkins has 30 points as Tigers end losing streak

By RYAN WALKER

There was a breath of fresh air over the Bluffton boys' basketball team with a 24-point home victory over North Miami Saturday afternoon — its first win since the season opener over South Adams on Dec. 2

Perhaps nobody was more relieved to get a victory after a 10-game losing skid than head coach Karl Grau.

"It's good for our guys," he said after the game. "They've been workin'. The one thing I like about this group is that they're sticking together and they keep working hard. It's always fun to be rewarded with a good, positive outcome."

The ending of the 10-game losing streak was led by a 30-point performance by Tucker Jenkins, who scored 26 Friday night against Adams Central. The junior forward added six rebounds to the night and has been a tough defender to get by.

Does Grau believe he has found a go-to guy in the

offense now?

"Oh yeah, no question," he said. "He's athletic. He's a big strong kid. He scores in the post. He does a lot of great things for us. He's an anchor for us, so it's fun to have him playing the way he is. It gives our guys confidence."

Even with a large margin of victory, it wasn't quite reflective of it until late in the third quarter due to a series of short comebacks from the Warriors.

Bluffton (2-10) took an early six-point lead in the first quarter before Jake Riley of North Miami (1-14) hit one of his three triples to keep the score close. Sam Baumgartner's three and Fletcher Wenger's bucket held the lead to five by the end of the first quarter.

The Tigers looked at a lead that got as high as double digits in the second, but the Warriors would fight back to keep their head above water. Riley's 10 points in the quarter would bring the score to a manageable 30-23 at the break.

What North Miami couldn't manage from that point forward was Jenkins, who had a second-half explosion despite the fact that he was held to just six points in the first two quarters.

In the third quarter alone, he scored 16 points on 8-12 shooting and eight free throws. Seemingly every time he got the ball, he got right to the basket and bullied defenders in the paint.

The only answer they had was to commit fouls, some of which were on made buckets. Before you knew it, the Tigers had a 13-point lead and never looked back.

He added eight more points in the fourth, while teammate Fletcher Wenger nailed a three-ball to add to his 10-point performance. Baumgartner tallied four points in the quarter, and Nolan Lambert hit a three of his own.

Overall, Bluffton's effort Saturday was a team effort, according to Grau, reducing turnovers from the previ-

(Continued on Page 7)



Bluffton's Tucker Jenkins squeezes between North Miami's Brayden Binnion, left, and Ray Pickett to score two more points in the third quarter Saturday afternoon at The Tiger Den. (Photo by Glen Werling)

Tiger girls fade in fourth quarter, fall to Patriots

By ANDREW FEEBACK

A poor fourth quarter cost the Bluffton Lady Tigers Saturday night as the visiting Heritage Patriots rallied to hand them a 38-34 setback.

Bluffton (8-10) took a nine-point lead into the final stanza, only to see the Patriots (5-14) surge in front in the final minutes.

It came as a bit of a surprise after a third quarter in which the Tigers had outscored the Patriots 13-5.

"The third quarter, I thought we played hard, we played more intense, we were more aggressive," coach Eric Mounsey said. "We just didn't put that together for four full quarters. You just can't play hard, like we know that we can, for just one quarter and expect to come out with a win."

The offense was a problem for Bluffton in this one. The Tigers finished 13 of 44 overall and missed their first nine shots. That allowed the Patriots to take an early 6-5 lead, which they widened to 13-7 early in the second.

The Tigers used a strong finish to end the first half and led 15-14 at the break.

Three straight buckets in the paint from Maryn Schreiber and a jump shot from Marly Drayer gave Bluffton a 28-19 lead.

In the fourth, the Patriots' Clair Bickel single-handed-

ly took over the game, scoring 13 of her team-leading 18 points.

Her two free throws and layup early on cut the lead to five. Then she got loose for a three-pointer that brought Heritage within 30-26.

She got fouled on a three-point shot the next possession, sinking two of the free throws. When an inadvertent whistle on the rebound after her third shot gave Heritage the ball out of bounds, she scored underneath to tie the game at 30 with 4:54 to play.

Raelyn Mullins' free throw put the Patriots in front. Schreiber tied the game by making one of two at the line.

Bickel drew another foul with 2:46 to play and made both shots to put the Patriots up 33-31.

The Tigers only made two shots in the fourth quarter and did themselves no favors at the foul line, missing two front ends of one-and-one bonuses.

Four straight Heritage free throws in the final minute from Kendall Zelt and Ava Pilon put the Patriots up six.

Isabella Stout's three-pointer with 13 seconds left cut the lead in half, but Pilon made another free throw, and the Tigers turned the ball over to end it.

"Heritage was more aggressive consistently

throughout the night," Mounsey said. "Bickel hit some big shots, and we didn't do a very good job of containing her. They just fed off of her and made plays. That's what it comes down to; their players made plays, and we did not."

Schreiber led the Tigers with 13 points, while Stout had eight.

Bluffton will travel to Manchester Tuesday night.

The JV game was two quarters, with Heritage winning 21-10.

sports@news-banner.com

HERITAGE 38, BLUFFTON 34
At Bluffton High School
HERITAGE (5-14): Ava Pilon 1-3 3-4 5, Claire Bickel 5-18 7-12 18, Kendall Zelt 1-5 2-2 5, Natalie Otte 0-1 0-0 0, Madilyn Scheumann 0-0 0-0 0, Lucy Buuck 0-3 0-0 0, Corinne Bowers 0-0 0-0 0, Danica Fuller 2-3 0-0 6, Lydia Schultz 0-1 1-2 1, Carly Gerardot 0-0 0-0 0, Grace Guenther 0-0 0-0 0, Raelyn Mullins 1-1 1-2 3. TOTALS: 10-35 14-22 38.
BLUFFTON (8-10): Isabella Stout 3-3 0-0 8, Lily King 0-7 1-2 1, Marly Drayer 2-5 0-1 5, Maryn Schreiber 6-10 1-3 13, Haley Gibson 1-10 3-4 5, Tressa Renner 0-2 0-0 0, Evie Schantz 0-0 0-0 0, Cayah King 0-0 0-0 0, Komey Ault 1-7 0-2 2, Kennedy Nash 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 13-44 5-10 34.
Heritage 6 8 5 19 — 38
Bluffton 5 10 13 6 — 34
 Three-point Goals: Heritage 4-16 (Fuller 2-3, Zelt 1-5, Bickel 1-5, Buuck 0-2, Pilon 0-1), Bluffton 3-10 (Stout 2-2, Drayer 1-2, Lily King 0-3, Gibson 0-2, Renner 0-1). Rebounds: Heritage 21 (Mullins 9, Bickel 5, Schultz 3, Zelt 2, Pilon 1, Scheumann 1), Bluffton 30 (Schreiber 8, Lily King 7, Stout 6, Drayer 4, Ault 3, Renner 1, Gibson 1). Turnovers: Heritage 12, Bluffton 13. Fouls: Heritage 13, Bluffton 18. Fouled out: Drayer. Technicals: None. JV: Heritage 21, Bluffton 10.

The Classifieds

SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

King Classic Sudoku

1			7	6	5	8	3	2
	8	3		4			6	5
			8		2	9		
4	9		7			2	8	
3	2	8		9				
6	5				3		9	
	4			5			2	
		2				9	6	
7	5	3		8			1	9

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Difficulty: ★ 1-23

Lottery Numbers

Saturday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY

Cash 5 — 03-08-13-17-36
Cash4Life — 04-21-28-32-36, Cash Ball: 1
Lotto Plus — 06-13-15-21-41-44
Quick Draw Midday — 01-03-05-15-18-22-23-27-30-36-42-51-55-56-57-62-69-71-75-79, BE: 55
Daily Three-Midday — 6-1-9, SB: 7
Daily Three-Evening — 6-3-0, SB: 4
Daily Four-Midday — 5-4-5-8, SB: 7
Daily Four-Evening — 0-5-5-2, SB: 4
Quick Draw Evening — 04-05-06-08-12-13-16-17-21-23-25-30-35-37-40-47-50-58-66-72, BE: 40
Hoosier Lotto — 09-11-20-37-38-46
POWERBALL
 05-14-19-46-64, Powerball: 22, Power Play: 4

Sunday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY

Cash 5 — 04-08-14-20-45
Cash4Life — 18-23-30-42-48, Cash Ball: 4
Quick Draw Midday — 02-05-07-20-22-25-27-34-38-40-46-49-53-60-64-65-66-71-76-78, BE: 60
Daily Three-Midday — 5-7-2, SB: 0
Daily Three-Evening — 5-9-6, SB: 9
Daily Four-Midday — 1-7-7-4, SB: 0
Daily Four-Evening — 8-9-0-5, SB: 9
Quick Draw Evening — 01-04-08-09-14-15-17-18-21-22-25-41-42-44-47-50-57-58-78-80, BE: 14
Hoosier Lotto — Estimated jackpot (for Wednesday): \$8.6 million

MEGA MILLIONS

Estimated jackpot (for Tuesday): \$31 million

POWERBALL

Estimated jackpot (for Wednesday): \$502 million

VEHICLES

Auto/Trucks

1994 CHEVROLET SUBURBAN, 2500, 184,000 miles, white/blue, 4x2, 6.5 turbo diesel, new paint, loaded, Reese hitch, trailer brakes, original, 260-450-2432.

HELOISE HINT: It's a good idea to give your vehicle a quick check every once in a while. Be sure there aren't any scratches, dings, dents or damage of any kind. You want to deal with any potential issues right away. Write to Heloise, P.O. Box 795001, San Antonio, TX 78279-5001.

EMPLOYMENT

Help Wanted

NEED MORE EMPLOYEES? Place a 20 word line classified ad for a month for \$52. Add a graphic or photo for an additional \$5. Contact the Bluffton News-Banner office at 125 N. Johnson St., 260-824-0224, or www.news-banner.com and click on classifieds.

THE NEWS-BANNER IS looking for a full-time bookkeeper to fill an immediate opening. Accounting experience preferred. Send resume and salary requirements to Doug Brown, dougb@news-banner.com or PO Box 436, Bluffton, IN 46714.

THE CITY OF Bluffton has an opening for 911 Emergency Services Dispatcher. Applicants must show proof of a high school diploma/GED and may be asked to work flexible shifts. Applications and a job description may be obtained in the Clerk Treasurer's Office, 128 E. Market St. between 8 am and 4:30 pm Mon-Fri or at www.blufftonindiana.net. The written skill test will be every other Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Bluffton Police Department, 204 E. Market St, Bluffton, IN.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT - Purdue Extension Wells County is now accepting applications for a full-time administrative assistant. Application and job description available online at www.extension.purdue.edu/wells or contact the Extension Office at 824-6412 or hoover21@purdue.edu. Application deadline January 31st.

HELOISE HINT: If you are older and looking for work. Experts suggest that when revising your resume, you shouldn't list all the jobs you've had. Highlight the most recent ones and focus on jobs relevant to the one you wish to apply to. Email HELOISE@Heloise.com.

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HELOISE HINT: How to safely clean your pet's ears. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals recommends that you pour a tiny bit of liquid ear cleaner on a cotton ball. Carefully wipe away any wax or dirt. Avoid going deeply into the ear canal. Email HELOISE@Heloise.com.

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 Feb. deadline is Tues., Jan. 24!



Public Sale Calendar

JANUARY 26 - 8 a.m.-7 p.m. ET - Online Only - Estate of Harold & Connie Kriescher, Farm. Property location: North of Hartford City, IN, at the intersection of West 600 N and North 200 W. 72.04+/- total acres, 68.27+/- tillable, 3.77+/- non-tillable, mostly tillable, Blackford Co., Washington Twp. Register prior to the auction at halderman.com. Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management, 800-424-2324, Scott Shrader, 765-348-6538, Rick Johnoz, 260-827-8181.

JANUARY 26 - 6 p.m. - Cora James estate (Mona L. Sink, executor), sellers. Wells County 4H Building, 1240 4H Park Road, Bluffton. 50.9 acres, 800 S/1100 W, Wells County, Jackson Township, NW 1/4 Sec 17, Township 25. Farm has 2 year lease left on it with current farmer. Call office for details. Heartland Auction & Realty, Inc., 260-724-3499, heartlandauctionrealty.com.

BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING JANUARY 27 - 10 a.m. EST - Various consignors. Online only truck equipment auction! Offering 400+ lots! 2012-2014 Freightliner M2106 box trucks, dump trucks, dry cabs, utility trucks, utility trailers, 60+ various skid steer attachments, 40' shipping container, tents, work benches/tool boxes and much more! Preview by appointment only, 815 Adams Street, Decatur. Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC, 260-724-7402, kjauction.com.

JANUARY 28-FEBRUARY 4 - (Online Only Auction) - Multiple consignors, sellers. 2008 Ford F150 with towing package, Red Line Hot Wheels, Lesney Matchboxes, antiques, vehicle memorabilia, baseball, basketball and football cards, coin and currency, Walt Disney Classic Collection, early crocks, mid century modern dresser, outstanding collection of oil lamps. Preview: Jan. 26 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Feb. 2 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. 102 S. Jefferson St., Ossian (Steffen Group Auction Gallery). The Steffen Group Inc., 260-824-3006.

auction. Native American Indian arrowheads, tools, pottery, antiques, taxidermy, much more. Open house Jan. 24 from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. or Jan. 28 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., 303 West Market, Bluffton. Isaac Stoller, sale manager, The Steffen Group Inc., 260-824-3006, www.steffengrp.com.

JANUARY 29-FEBRUARY 5 - (Online Only Auction) - Ormsby Trucking, sellers. Office equipment, M8950 Kubota tractor, power tools, truck parts, Sur Trac 7' enclosed trailer, Cole Z71 popper camper, lawn and garden tools, exercise equipment, much more. Open House: Feb. 2, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., 888 W. Railroad St., Uniondale, IN. Nick Huffman, sale manager, The Steffen Group Inc., <http://www.steffengrp.com>, 260-824-3006.

BIDDING STARTS CLOSING FEBRUARY 1 STARTING AT 10 A.M. EST - Owners name on file. Online only Gender Outdoor retail display auction! Large selection of various retail display shelving and racks, pallet racking, lighted glass display cases, clothing retail display, new full-size mannequins, office supply and furniture, 100+ new wood pallets, pallet jacks, floor scrubbers, ladders, much more! Preview Jan. 30, 1-3 p.m. EST, 6043 Lima Rd., Fort Wayne. Pick up Feb. 3 and 6, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC, kjauction.com, 260-724-7402.

BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING FEBRUARY 5 STARTING AT 4 P.M. EST - Fred & Sue Dahling, owner. Online only personal property auction! Household

furniture, kitchen items, vintage collectibles, antique décor, metal vintage toys, various holiday décor, yard & garden tools, porch swing & much more! Preview Feb. 2, 5-6 p.m. EST, 11006 Rose Ave., New Haven. Pick up Feb. 6, 1-5 p.m. & Feb. 7, 9 a.m.-noon. Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC, kjauction.com, 260-724-7402.

FEBRUARY 13 - 10 a.m. - Jim & Rosie Hill, sellers. 3282 N 300 W, Decatur. Machine & farm equipment. JD tractors, loader, 3010 gas NF restored, combine, 6 row corn head complete rebuild, hydroflex 20 ft. grain table, planters, rotary mower, field cultivator, Unverferth rolling basket w/harrow, grain wagons, 6 row IH cultivator, 15 ft. M&W rotary hoe, 3 pt Emco 8 ft. blade, 8" PTO grain auger, 21 ft. diameter 6 ring grain bin w/dryer, misc. Heartland Auction & Realty, Inc., heartlandauctionrealty.com, 260-724-3499.

Public Notices

NOTICE
 The City of Bluffton is accepting sealed bids for the purchase of street materials for 2023. Bidding specifications may be obtained from the Clerk Treasurer's Office, 128 E. Market St, Bluffton, IN, 46714, Mon-Fri, 8 am to 4:30 pm. Bids must be returned to the Clerk Treasurer's Office by 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 31st, 2023, to be opened and read aloud at the Board of Public Works and Safety on Tuesday, January 31st, 2023, at 4:30 p.m.

nb 1/16, 1/23
 hspaxlp

NOTICE
 The City of Bluffton will receive sealed bids for the construction of sidewalks/curbs and concrete repair.

Specifications and Notice to Bidders may be obtained from the Clerk Treasurer's Office, 128 E. Market St, Bluffton, IN, 46714, from 8 am to 4:30 pm Mon-Fri.

Sealed bids must be returned to the Clerk Treasurer's Office by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 31, 2023 to be opened at the Board of Works and Public Safety at 4:30 p.m. on January 31, 2023.

nb 1/16, 1/23
 hspaxlp

SUDOKU ANSWER

6	1	7	8	2	9	9	9	2
2	9	9	6	1	7	2	8	8
8	2	8	2	9	9	1	7	6
7	6	1	8	8	2	2	9	9
9	2	9	7	6	1	8	2	8
8	8	2	9	2	9	6	1	7
1	7	6	2	8	8	9	2	9
9	9	2	1	7	6	8	8	2
2	8	8	9	9	2	7	6	1

Wells Court Docket

(Continued from Page 3)

ing on the patrol car again, so the officer reactivated them but the Tucson reportedly turned southbound onto Jersey Street. The Tucson then pulled into the driveway of a private residence. The officer exited his patrol vehicle and recognized the driver as Carattini from prior incidents that the officer had investigated.

The officer observed in his report that Carattini appeared intoxicated, smelled of alcohol and blew a .168 percent alcohol concentration equivalency on a Breathalyzer test.

Carattini was reportedly also in possession of part of a ballpoint ink pen which had a white residue on it. He allegedly admitted to the investigating officer later in the investigation he used the end of the pen to "snort" crushed pain pills.

While he was being detained at Bluffton Regional Medical center, Carattini allegedly resisted attempts by a nurse to take his blood.

Order of conditional discharge entered for Xavier Bradley Fonvil, 20, Bluffton, charged with possession of marijuana, a Class B misdemeanor, possession of drug paraphernalia, a Class C misdemeanor, and speeding, a Class C infraction.

The duration of deferred proceedings is 180 days. If Fonvil follows the rules set for him by the Wells County Probation Department during that time period, the charges against him will be dismissed.

Ordered to pay \$100 in fees.

While patrolling north on Jefferson Street/Ind. 1 in Ossian Dec. 6, a sheriff's deputy clocked an oncoming southbound 2018 Nissan Altima at 45 mph-25 zone in downtown Ossian.

The deputy turned around his patrol vehicle and pulled the Altima over.

The deputy observed in his report filed with the court that the interior of Fonvil's Altima smelled

like marijuana. The deputy asked Fonvil when the last time was that he smoked marijuana and Fonvil reportedly asked the deputy in return, "It's because my car smells like 'weed' right?" Weed is a slang term for marijuana.

Fonvil reportedly also told the deputy that he had just moved to Indiana from Connecticut and in Connecticut "weed" is legal.

A second deputy who arrived to assist in the traffic stop and reported finding several items of drug paraphernalia, plastic zip-top bags of a green leafy plant material with the odor and appearance of marijuana, a black grinder, packages of cigarillos, a package of RAW brand tips normally used to filter marijuana cigarettes, a "pre-roll" — a slang term for a pre-made smoking tube to be filled with marijuana and a vape pen containing THC oil. THC is the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana.

Civil Cases

Writs of possession entered for Maple Grove Estates mobile home park, Bluffton, against tenants: Christine Bailey and Nathanael Matthew Smith.

Judgments for damages entered for Maple Grove Estates against former tenants: Gary Hurley, \$3,000; Timothy Hughes II, \$3,106; Lee Breedlove, \$3,000. Each were also ordered to pay \$115 in court costs.

Marriage Licenses

Gwyneth Roxene Coleman, 24, Bluffton, and Kyle Douglas Gearheart, 30, Bluffton.

Alyssa Marie Sponseller, 30, rural Bluffton, and Jeremy Robert Brown, 32, rural Bluffton.

Taylor Renee Nally, 29, Poneto, and Michael Phillip Benedict, 32, Poneto.

Alexsa Ryeane Potts, 24, Ossian, and Travis William Ladd, 27, Ossian.

File Reports

Reports of receipts and expenditures of political committees have been filed with the Wells County

Clerk's office by:

- Thompson for school board, Julie Ann Thompson, rural Bluffton, non-partisan for Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School Board of Trustees at-large position.

For the period beginning Oct. 15 and ending Dec. 31, the committee showed no cash on hand at the beginning of the reporting period, no itemized nor unitemized contributions or receipts, no expenditures, and ended the reporting period with no cash on hand.

The committee had no debt.

For the year-to-date 2022, the committee began the reporting period with no cash on hand, received \$808.05 in itemized contributions and receipts, received no unitemized contributions or receipts, made \$808.05 in itemized expenditures, made no unitemized expenditures and ended the reporting period with no cash on hand.

- Restoring America One Community at a Time, Peter Christopher Koener, Bluffton, Republican for Bluffton-Harrison Metropolitan School Board of Trustees at-large position.

For the period beginning Oct. 15 and ending Dec. 31, the committee showed \$85.99 in cash on hand, no itemized contributions or receipts, no unitemized contributions or receipts, no itemized expenditures and no unitemized expenditures. The committee concluded the reporting period with \$85.99 in cash on hand.

The committee owed no debt.

For year-to-date 2022, the committee began the reporting period with no cash on hand, logged \$810.03 in itemized contributions and receipts, \$25 in unitemized contributions and receipts, recorded \$749.04 in itemized expenditures, logged no unitemized expenditures, and ended the reporting period with \$85.99 in cash on hand.

- Vanover for Wells County, Michael "Mike"

K. Vanover, rural Keystone, Republican for Wells County Commissioner District 1.

For the period beginning Oct. 15 and ending Dec. 31, the committee showed \$7,813.27 in cash on hand, no itemized contributions or receipts, no unitemized contributions or receipts, no itemized expenditures, no unitemized expenditures and ended the reporting period with \$6,628.27 in cash on hand.

The itemized expenditures were \$185 to the Wells County Auditor and \$1,000 to Congressman McCarthy.

For year-to-date, the committee began the reporting period with \$15,981.52, no itemized contributions and receipts, no unitemized contributions and receipts, and finished the reporting period with \$14,796.52 in cash on hand.

- Hunt for City Council, Joshua Daniel Hunt, Bluffton, Republican for Bluffton Common Council District 2.

For the period beginning Jan. 1 and ending Dec. 31, 2022, the committee showed \$1,109.17 in cash on hand, no itemized contributions or receipts, no unitemized contributions or receipts, no itemized expenditures, \$60 in unitemized expenditures and ended the reporting period with \$1,049.17 in cash on hand.

The committee owed no debt.

- Barkley for Ossian, Joshua W. Barkley, Ossian, Republican for Ossian Town Council at-large.

For the period beginning Oct. 14 and ending Dec. 31, 2022, the committee showed \$7,412.62 in cash on hand at the beginning of the reporting period, \$1,000 in itemized contributions, no unitemized contributions, \$5,647.86 in itemized expenditures, and ended the reporting period with \$2,764.76 in cash on hand.

The committee owed \$10,000 in debt to the candidate himself.

Itemized contributions were: \$100 from Phil Dinovo, Ossian; \$100 from Rich-

ard T. Zeplin, rural Uniondale; \$100 from Stardette Reppert, rural Uniondale; \$200 from RTZ Services, Ossian; and \$500 from Jim Banks for Congress.

Itemized expenditures were: \$1,000 to Veronica Wilson, rural Markle for consulting fees; \$3,077.23 to New Haven Print, Fort Wayne, for mailings; and \$13.20 to the United States Post Office, Ossian, for postage.

For the year-to-date, 2022, the committee showed no cash on hand at the beginning of the reporting period, \$12,800 in itemized contributions and receipts, no unitemized contributions or receipts, \$10,035.24 in itemized expenditures, no unitemized expenditures, and ended the reporting period with \$3,764.76 in cash on hand.

- Committee to Elect Vicki Andrews, rural Warren, Republican for Wells County Council at-large.

For the period beginning Jan. 1 and ending Dec. 31, the committee showed no cash on hand at the beginning of the reporting period, \$320.24 in itemized con-

tributions and receipts, no unitemized contributions nor receipts, no itemized nor unitemized expenditures, and ended the reporting period with \$320.24 in cash on hand.

The committee owed no debt.

The itemized contribution was \$320.24 from Ryan Mounsey, Bluffton.

- Committee to Elect Rick Elwell, Rick Dean Elwell, Bluffton, Republican for Bluffton Common Council at-large.

For the period beginning Jan. 1 and ending Dec. 31, the committee showed \$220.35 in cash on hand at the beginning of the reporting period, \$10 in itemized contributions and receipts, no unitemized contributions nor receipts, \$200 in itemized expenditures, no unitemized expenditures, and ended the reporting period with \$30.35 in cash on hand.

The lone itemized contribution was from the candidate himself.

The \$200 itemized expenditure was \$200 to the Wells County Republican Party for Lincoln Day Dinner tickets.

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Minister: Germany won't block Poland giving Ukraine tanks

By **ANDREW MELDRUM**
Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The German government will not object if Poland decides to send Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, Germany's top diplomat said Sunday, indicating movement on supplying weapons that Kyiv has described as essential to its ability to fend off an intensified Russian offensive.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock told French TV channel LCI that Poland has not formally asked for Berlin's approval to share some of its German-made Leopards but added "if we were asked, we would not stand in the way."

German officials "know how important these tanks are" and "this is why we are discussing this now with our partners," Baerbock said in interview clips posted by

LCI.

Ukraine's supporters pledged billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine during a meeting at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday. International defense leaders discussed Ukraine's urgent request for the Leopard 2 tanks, and the failure to work out an agreement overshadowed the new commitments.

Germany is one of the main donors of weapons to Ukraine, and it ordered a review of its Leopard 2 stocks in preparation for a possible green light. Nonetheless, the government in Berlin has shown caution at each step of increasing its military aid to Ukraine, a hesitancy seen as rooted in its history and political culture.

Germany's tentativeness has drawn criticism, particularly from Poland and the Baltic states, countries on NATO's eastern flank that

feel especially threatened by Russia's renewed aggression.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said that if the fellow NATO and European Union member did not consent to transferring Leopard tanks to Ukraine, his country was prepared to build a "smaller coalition" of countries that would send theirs anyway.

"Almost a year had passed since the outbreak of war," Morawiecki said in an interview with Polish state news agency PAP published Sunday. "Evidence of the Russian army's war crimes can be seen on television and on YouTube. What more does Germany need to open its eyes and start to act in line with the potential of the German state?"

Previously, some officials in Poland indicated that Finland and Denmark also were ready to send Leopards to Ukraine.

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