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TUESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2024 | BLUFFTON, INDIANA • Wells County's Hometown Connection | \$1.00

Three arrested in connection to Wells County kidnapping

By SYDNEY KENT

A missing 11-year-old girl from Zanesville was found safe in Barneveld, Wisconsin on Sunday. Three suspects were arrested and face charges of kidnapping out of Wells County, according to a press release from the Iowa County Sheriff's Office.

A Silver Alert was issued for the child on Saturday. Initial reports indicated that the child went missing from her home at approximately 3:30 p.m. and may have been picked up in a White Dodge Caravan. No license plate information was available.

The following day, the Iowa County Communications Center was notified that a vehicle, possibly involved in the Silver Alert, was spotted at a Kwik Trip in Barneveld, Wisconsin.

The child was "safely removed" from the vehicle during a traffic stop on the vehicle. Sarah Gaudino, 23, Isaiah Schryvers, 24, and Zachary Delozier, 27, all from South Dakota, were taken into custody immediately.

According to Wells County Sheriff Scott Holliday, the suspects will eventually be extradited to Wells County to be prosecuted for their crimes.

The press release advised that further details are not yet available. The News-Banner will continue to follow this story.

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'So help me God'

City officials, upper photo from left to right, Mayor John Whicker, council members Sarah Reed and Rick Elwell, Clerk-Treasurer Michelle Simon, council members Blake Fiechter and Janella Stroncsek, Bluffton City Court Judge Robert Bate and council member Josh Hunt were sworn in to office on Monday. Wells Circuit Court Judge Kenton Kiracofe led the oaths. More photos on. (Photos by Jonathan Snyder)

IREAD top of Lehman's docket for 2024 session

By HOLLY GASKILL

Republican leaders have advised to keep the upcoming legislative session brief, and local State Rep. Matt Lehman intends to keep things "laser-focused."

In speaking with The News-Banner last week, Lehman said he is looking at items largely technical in nature for the upcoming session, and first among them, IREAD.

Nearly one in five students failed the state's third grade reading test in 2023, and Lehman says that signals something needs to change. In speaking with some educators, Lehman feels third grade may be too late to measure literacy. "If you can't read by third grade, you're going to have problems," he says.

Locally, 89.9 percent of third graders passed the IREAD test at Southern Wells, 87 percent at Norwell, and 82.7 percent at Bluffton-Harrison.

Lehman wants to examine how

the state monitors proficiency, particularly in hitting certain benchmarks in first and second grade. "I think we test them plenty. We test kids all the time — I don't think testing is the answer," he says. "We've got to get a better grasp on how we measure and how we test."

That said, Lehman expressed a strong desire to take certain things off educators' plates, particularly regarding reporting and paperwork. He thinks there's room to streamline certain processes to benefit both sides.

However, Lehman is also apprehensive about making big moves, recognizing that part of

(Continued on Page 2)



Matt Lehman

Holdman talks taxes, upcoming 2024 session

By MARK MILLER

Wells County's representative in the Indiana State Senate, Travis Holdman, has a few brief thoughts about the upcoming 2024 legislative session, a year which falls into the "short session" category and must conclude by March 14.

He'd like for it to be "as short as possible," he said.

"We," referring to the Republican leadership team on which he serves as Majority Caucus Chair, "have decided there will not be any controversial topics," he said. After a pause and a grin, he adds, "which guarantees there will be at least one controversial topic that will pop up."

When quizzed on what that might be, he referenced school library and curriculum issues, particularly any teaching or support for "CRT — Critical Race Theory," he explained. "There have already been several bills filed

on those issues."

There will definitely be some tweaks to managing property tax issues, he continued. While he has chaired an interim study group — the State and Local Tax Review task force — that is reviewing and will continue to review all of Indiana's tax structure, property taxes continue to be one of the most talked-about issues by constituents.

One exemption for homeowners age 65 and over will continue to be monitored by the senate, he indicated. The income threshold,

(Continued on Page 2)



Travis Holdman

N. Korea's Kim: military should 'annihilate' U.S., S. Korea if provoked

By HYUNG-JIN KIM
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said his military should "thoroughly annihilate" the United States and South Korea if provoked, state media reported Monday, after he vowed to boost national defense to cope with what he called an unprecedented U.S.-led confrontation.

North Korea has increased its warlike rhetoric in recent months in response to an expansion of U.S.-South Korean military drills. Experts expect Kim will con-

tinue to escalate his rhetoric and weapons tests because he likely believes he can use heightened tensions to wrest U.S. concessions if former President Donald Trump wins the U.S. presidential election in November.

In a five-day major ruling party meeting last week, Kim said he will launch three more military spy satellites, produce more nuclear materials and develop attack drones this year in what observers say is an attempt to increase his leverage in future diplomacy with the U.S.

In a meeting Sunday with com-

manding army officers, Kim said it is urgent to sharpen "the treasured sword" to safeguard national security, an apparent reference to his country's nuclear weapons program. He cited "the U.S. and other hostile forces' military confrontation moves," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Kim stressed that "our army should deal a deadly blow to thoroughly annihilate them by mobilizing all the toughest means and potentialities without moment's hesitation" if they opt for military confrontation and provocations

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Outside

Blowing in the new year and some clouds

Today	Wed.	Thursday
High 38	High 37	High 34
Low 26	Low 23	Low 19

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Vol. 95 No. 51
TUESDAY
January 2, 2024

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Lehman's docket

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the IREAD and reporting processes were established for a specific purpose. "There's a reason it's there," he says. "It's going to be navigating through that ... it's just a matter of doing it the right way."

While it's not a budget year, there will be some items the legislative body addresses, particularly in covering the nearly \$1 billion Medicaid shortfall in last year's budget session. Lehman expects this will contribute to a larger discussion about healthcare and how new budget items are being implemented, like the \$75 million allocated through Health First Indiana.

Wells County did not opt-in to the new program, but Lehman says he "totally understands" the local perspective. "(Wells) has a (health) department that's in flux, and the last thing you want to do for a department that's in flux is say, 'OK, by the way, here's some grant money, (and) you've got to put a program together, you've got to do these things,' when we're really just trying to give some stability."

Lehman noted that Wells would have the opportunity to sign onto the program for next year. The state has budgeted \$150 million for Health First Indiana in 2025.

From his constituents, Lehman said he's hearing questions about the future of marijuana in the state, given its recent legalization in Ohio. While he doesn't expect the item to take center stage this session, "there's a collision course we're going to have to address sooner than later."

Lehman also recognized the influence of the upcoming gubernatorial race but hopes lawmakers will stay focused on the items at hand and respect the short session. He adds, "That's not why we govern, and we shouldn't make laws based on who our governor may or may not be."

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Holdman talks taxes

(Continued from Page 1)

which had been set for a number of years, is now tied to Social Security increases.

That income level to qualify for the exemption is currently set at about \$32,000 for individuals and \$43,000 per household.

Meanwhile, one the property tax control mechanisms, the Maximum Levy Growth Quotient, will definitely be a topic of discussion.

That number limits how much local governmental units can increase the money they raise via property taxes. That increase is currently frozen at four percent, but that freeze is slated to disappear in 2026.

"The projection for '26 right now would be a 5.6 percent increase," if the MLGQ reverts to the old formula, Holdman explained. "If we thought taxpayers groused about their tax bills in the last 18 months, it would be even worse in 2026" if the legislature does nothing. He expects that freeze to be extended and does not expect that to create any unmanageable problems for cities, counties and other local units.

"I have not heard any of the local government units in my district say that the four percent limitation is a problem," he added.

With the expected increase in electric vehicles and

hybrids on the state's roads and highways, there is a general expectation in the state-house that changes will have to be made to equalize how road repairs and construction is funded. There is also a two-year study group looking at this and Holdman expects an increase in excise fees to be enacted in the 2025 session for EVs and hybrids.

"The bottom line is we're not assessing enough to these owners for their use of the highways," he said.

With the growing acceptance of the legalization of marijuana, even in Indiana's neighboring states, Holdman, who has long opposed such a move, is beginning to see it as

"inevitable. But it's not going to happen this year," he said.

The state senate will be watching the 2024 race for the Indiana governor's office with at least as much interest as the public. There are six Republicans vying for the nomination in the May primary. The victor will then likely face former Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Jennifer McCormick in November.

While he may share an opinion privately about the Republican race, "it's a crowded field," Holdman replied when asked about his perspective. "That's all I'll say."

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North Korea

(Continued from Page 1)

against North Korea, KCNA said.

In his New Year's Day address Monday, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said he will strengthen his military's preemptive strike, missile defense and retaliatory capabilities in response to the North Korean nuclear threat.

"The Republic of Korea is building genuine, lasting peace through strength, not a submissive peace that is dependent on the goodwill of the adversary," Yoon said, using South Korea's official name.

At the party meeting, Kim called South Korea "a hemiplegic malformation and colonial subordinate state" whose society is "tainted by Yankee culture." He said his military must use all available means including nuclear weapons to "suppress the whole territory of South Korea" in the event of a conflict.

South Korea's Defense Ministry warned in response Sunday that if

North Korea attempts to use nuclear weapons, South Korean and U.S. forces will punish it overwhelmingly, resulting in the end of the Kim government.

KCNA said North Korean officials held talks on Monday to implement an order by Kim to disband or reform organizations handling relations with South Korea to fundamentally change the principle and direction of the North's struggle against the South. There was no immediate explanation of how that might alter inter-Korean relations, which have been stalled for an extended period.

Experts say small-scale military clashes between North and South Korea could happen this year along their heavily armed border. They say North Korea is also expected to test-launch intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of reaching the mainland U.S. and other major new weapons.

In 2018-19, Kim met Trump in three rounds of talks on North Korea's

expanding nuclear arsenal. The diplomacy fell apart after the U.S. rejected Kim's offer to dismantle his main nuclear complex, a limited step, in exchange for extensive reductions in U.S.-led sanctions.

Since 2022, North Korea has conducted more than 100 missile tests, prompting the U.S. and South Korea to expand their joint military exercises. North Korea has also tried to strengthen its relationships with China and Russia, which blocked efforts by the U.S. and its partners in the U.N. Security Council to toughen U.N. sanctions on North Korea over its weapons tests.

KCNA said Kim and Chinese President Xi Jinping exchanged New Year's Day messages on Monday on bolstering bilateral ties. North Korea faces suspicions that it has supplied conventional arms for Russia's war in Ukraine in return for sophisticated Russian technologies to enhance the North's military programs.

Israel pulling thousands of troops from Gaza in possible precursor to scaled-back offensive

By JOSEF FEDERMAN, WAFAA SHURABA and SAMY MAGDY

Associated Press
JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military confirmed Monday that it was pulling thousands of troops out of the Gaza Strip, a step that could clear the way for a new long-term phase of lower-intensity fighting against the Hamas militant group.

The confirmation of the planned troop drawdown came the same day that Israel's Supreme Court struck down a key component of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's contentious judicial overhaul plan.

While the plan is not directly connected to the war effort, it was the source of deep divisions inside Israel and had threatened the military's readiness before the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that triggered the ongoing war.

Politicians warned against reigniting those divisions and harming the national unity that has prevailed throughout the Israel-Hamas war.

Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the military offensive until Hamas is crushed and the more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed.

But Israel has come under growing international pressure to scale back an offensive that has led to the deaths of nearly 22,000 Palestinians. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has repeatedly urged Israel to do more to protect Palestinian civilians, is expected in the region next week.

In its announcement, the army said that five brigades, or several thousand troops,

would be taken out of Gaza in the coming weeks. Some will return to bases for further training or rest, while many older reservists will go home. The war has taken a toll on the economy by preventing reservists from going to their jobs, running their businesses or returning to university studies.

The army's chief spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, did not say whether the withdrawal of some troops reflected a new phase of the war.

"The objectives of the war require prolonged fighting, and we are preparing accordingly," he told reporters late Sunday.

The But the move is in line with the plans that Israeli leaders have outlined for a low-intensity campaign, expected to last for much of the year, that focuses on remaining Hamas strongholds and "pockets of resistance."

Israel has said it is close to operational control over most of northern Gaza, reducing the need for forces there. Yet fierce fighting has continued in other areas of the Palestinian territory, especially the south, where many of Hamas' forces remain intact and where most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have fled.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' military and governing capabilities in the ongoing war, which was sparked by the militant group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people were killed and took 240 others hostage.

Israel responded with an air, ground and sea offensive that has killed more than 21,900 people in Gaza, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in

the Hamas-ruled territory, which does not differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count. The Israeli military says 173 soldiers have died since it launched its ground operation.

Israel also says, without providing evidence, that more than 8,000 militants have been killed. It blames Hamas for the high civilian death toll, saying the militants embed within residential areas, including schools and hospitals.

The war has displaced some 85% of Gaza's population, forcing tens of thousands of people in overcrowded shelters or teeming tent camps in Israeli-designated safe areas that the military has nevertheless bombed. Palestinians are left with a sense that nowhere is safe.

With tensions remaining high across the region, the U.S. announced Monday

that it would be sending an aircraft carrier strike group home and replacing it with an amphibious assault ship and accompanying warships.

BATTLES IN THE SOUTH

In Khan Younis, a city in southern Gaza that Israel says is a key Hamas stronghold, residents reported airstrikes and shelling in the west and center of the city. Combat was also reported in urban refugee camps in central Gaza, where Israel expanded its offensive last week.

An Associated Press reporter saw at least 17 bodies, including those of four children, at a hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah after a missile struck a house.

"It's our routine: bombings, massacres and martyrs," said Saeed Moustafa, a Palestinian from the Nuseirat camp.



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Weather

Tuesday, January 2, 2024

(24-hour observations at 9:05 p.m. Monday)

High: 36; Low: 32; Precipitation: None

Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 1.24 feet at 9:45 p.m. Monday

Wells County forecast

Today: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 38. Southwest wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 26. Southwest wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Wednesday: Partly sunny, with a high near 37. Southwest wind around 10 mph.

Wednesday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 23. Northwest wind around 10 mph.

Thursday: Sunny, with a high near 34.

Thursday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 19.

Friday: Partly sunny, with a high near 36.

Friday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 24.

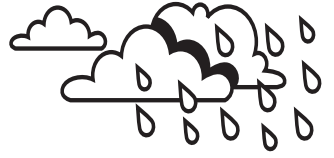
Saturday: A 40 percent chance of snow showers, mainly after 1 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 38.

Saturday Night: A 40 percent chance of snow showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 25.

Sunday: A 20 percent chance of snow showers. Partly sunny, with a high near 37.

Sunday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 25.

Monday: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 41.



Powerful earthquakes leave at least 4 dead along Japan's coast

By HIRO KOMAE and YURI KAGEYAMA
Associated Press

NANAO, Japan (AP) — A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, leaving at least four people dead and damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes.

Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas a day after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area on Monday afternoon.

Four people were confirmed dead in Ishikawa, according to prefecture officials. Police said they were investigating two other reported deaths. Public broadcaster NHK reported at least eight deaths and 30 injuries, including people who fell while trying to flee.

"Saving lives is our priority and we are fighting a battle against time," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Tuesday. "It is critical that people trapped in homes get rescued immediately."

A quake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.6 shook the area as he was speaking.

Japan's military dispatched 1,000 soldiers to the disaster zones to join rescue efforts, Kishida said, stressing they were facing "large-scale damage." Details of damaged homes were still under investigation, he said.

Firefighters continued to battle a fire in Wajima city which reddened the sky with embers and smoke.

Nuclear regulators said several nuclear plants in the region were operating normally. A major quake and tsunami in March 2011 caused three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.

News videos showed rows of collapsed houses. Some wooden structures were flattened and cars were overturned. Half-sunken ships floated in bays where tsunami waves had rolled in, leaving a muddied coastline.

On Monday, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, as well as for the northern island of Hokkaido.

The warning was downgraded several hours later, and all tsunami warnings were lifted as of early Tuesday. Waves measuring more than 3 feet hit some places.

The agency warned that more major quakes could hit the area over the next few days.

People who were evacuated from their homes huddled in auditoriums, schools and community centers. Bullet trains in the region were halted, but service was being restored in some places. Sections of highways were closed, water pipes burst, and cellphone service was out in some areas.

U.S. President Joe Biden said in a statement that his administration was "ready to provide any necessary assistance for the Japanese people."

Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes because of its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

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OBITUARIES

Donald E. Gerber, 91

Donald "Don" E. Gerber, 91, of rural Decatur, passed away Monday morning, Jan. 1, 2024, at Bluffton Regional Medical Center.



Don was born in Adams County on Jan. 6, 1932, to Elmer and Emma (Sinn) Gerber. He married Mary L. Wagenbach in Tremont, Ill., Mar. 11, 1956; she survives.

Don attended Kirkland High School and served in the United States Army from 1952 to 1954 during the Korean War. He worked at the Decatur Post office as a clerk until becoming the Postmaster at the Preble Post Office, which he did for 20 more years until retiring in 1999. Altogether, Don served 38 years with the United States Postal Service.

Don was a member of the Apostolic Christian Church. He was an avid stamp and coin collector, and also loved doing Sudoku puzzles. In his spare time, he enjoyed gardening and helping his family members with their farming businesses. He was devoted to his Lord and Savior and will be remembered for his love, kindness, and unwavering commitment to both his family and his faith.

In addition to his wife, Don is survived by three daughters, Deb (Larry) Reinhard of Craigville, Cheryl (Rex) Gerber of Bluffton, and Cindy Gerber of Decatur; a son, Alan (Joli) Gerber of Craigville; 12 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren; a brother, Dale (Carol) Gerber of Ossian; three sisters, Carolyn Roberts of Bluffton, Pauline (Larry) Gerber of Fort Wayne, and Lois (Harry T.) Gerber of Bluffton; three sisters-in-law, Rosemary Gerber, Mary Jo Gerber, and Pat Gerber; and a brother-in-law, John Clough.

Aside from his parents, Don was preceded in death by five brothers, Earl, Carroll, Lester, Paul, and Elmer Gerber Jr.; and a sister, Kathy Clough.

Visitation will be Sunday, Jan. 7, 2024, from noon until 7:00 p.m., at Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel. Services will be held Monday, Jan. 8th, at 10:30 a.m., at the Apostolic Christian Church East, with one hour of visitation prior to the service at the church. Lynn Fiechter and John Reinhard will officiate. Burial will follow at the Apostolic Christian Cemetery, with military rites conducted by the American Legion Post 111 in conjunction with the United States Army Honor Guard.

Memorial contributions may be directed to Christian Care Retirement Community. Online condolences can be made at www.goodwincaleharnish.com.

Sally J. Dillon, 72

Sally J. Dillon, 72, of Bluffton, died Friday, Dec. 29, 2023, at Lutheran Hospital following a short illness.

Sally was born in Bluffton, April 16, 1951, to George W. Davis Sr. and Julia M. (Flowers), both parents preceded her in death. She married John H. Dillon in Bluffton on Aug. 7, 1982, he preceded her in death on Oct. 10, 2019.

She is survived by her daughter, Lisa S. Dillon of Bluffton; three sisters, Karen (John) Conrad, Bonnie Peeper and Betsy Davis, all of Bluffton; and one brother, Frank (Ruby) Davis of Bluffton.

Sally was preceded in death by her husband; parents; a sister, Connie Johnson; and four brothers, George Jr., Freeman, Rick and Gary Davis.

Receiving of friends will be held Monday, Jan. 8, 2024, from 4:00 until 7:00 p.m. at Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel in Bluffton, followed immediately by a Celebration of Life service at 7:00 p.m., at the funeral home. Pastor Lyle Breeding will officiate.

Online condolences can be made at www.goodwincaleharnish.com.

Steven C. Evans, 71

Steven C. Evans, 71, of Bluffton, died Saturday morning, Dec. 30, 2023, at River Terrace Retirement Community.

Funeral arrangements are pending with Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel in Bluffton.

After landmark legislation, Indiana Republican leadership call for short, 'fine-tuning' session

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Keep it short. That has been the directive from leadership in Indiana leading up to the 2024 legislative session.

But with the approaching 2024 general election and following landmark conservative legislation in recent years, including a near-total ban on abortion, a wide expansion on school vouchers and a law restricting the use of students' preferred pronouns in schools, that might not take place.

It's likely legislation on similar social issues will reach the floor again, even while leaders of the state's Republican trifecta say they want a session of "fine-tuning" policy.

"We'll have a more limited and focused agenda," House Speaker Todd Huston, a Republican, told reporters in November.

Here is what is and isn't expected this year.

The session beginning Jan. 8 must adjourn by March 14 and will be closed to items with a fiscal impact. Indiana holds longer, budget-making sessions during odd years.

The consistent top priority across the statehouse and political aisle this year is improving literacy and education outcomes following significant setbacks from the pandemic. About 18 percent of third graders did not pass Indiana's reading test last year, according to the Department of Education.

Indiana policy is to hold back students who do not pass the test, but GOP lawmakers say exemptions allow students to easily move on to the next grade and want to tighten the regulation. More than 96 percent of students who did not pass the reading test were advanced to the fourth grade, the education department reported.

Critics say class sizes are at risk of becoming unmanageable and schools will not have the appropriate staff or resources to keep up should legislation cause more students to repeat grades.

Truancy also has been a focus for lawmakers going into the new year. About 1 in 5 students were chronically absent from Indiana schools during the 2022-2023 year, meaning they missed about three and a half weeks of class, according to department data.

Bipartisan concern has been leveled at the cost and availability of early childcare in Indiana. Republican leaders have indicated interest in easing regulations to make it easier to open and operate childcare facilities, while Democratic lawmakers have called for a childcare tax credit.

Huston also put antisemitism on college campuses in his top priorities in light of the Israel-Hamas war.

He wants to pass a mea-

sure to define antisemitism as religious discrimination and "provide educational opportunities free of religious discrimination." A House bill with the same language died in the Senate during the 2023 session.

"Our Jewish students should know they will be safe on campuses throughout Indiana and not be subjected to antisemitic teaching or materials," Huston said during a speech in November.

Gov. Eric Holcomb plans to announce his agenda in the upcoming weeks. His term will end in 2024 because Indiana law does not allow governors to serve more than two successive terms.

The Republican governor who received widespread attention for his 2023 public health proposal allowing counties to opt in for funding on services, such as chronic disease prevention, has hinted at early education and workforce development priorities for his final legislative session.

Republican leaders have been quiet on a number of hot button subjects on the heels of recent laws that made national headlines. With half of the state's senators and all of its representatives up for reelection in 2024, some lawmakers may attempt to raise their profiles with bills addressing topics such as reproduction or gender that have been similarly enacted in other Republican-led states.

Indiana's primary election is May 7.

State Senate Democratic leader Greg Taylor said his party will keep "social issues" off the table.

However, Republicans continue to enjoy supermajority control in both chambers as they have since the 2012 elections.

Hoosiers can expect no movement on two subjects: gambling and marijuana legalization.

Top Republican leaders said gambling measures are off the table after a former lawmaker recently pleaded guilty to accepting the promise of lucrative employment from a casino company in return for favorable action in the general assembly in 2019.

Marijuana legislation is also unlikely to see any movement in the upcoming year, even as Indiana becomes increasingly marooned by pot-friendly states including Ohio, where voters approved adult recreational use in November through a citizen initiative.

VISITATION & SERVICES

Julia Ann (Pond) Osborne

Calling: 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Wednesday, January 3.

Service: 1 p.m.
Wednesday, January 3 at the funeral home.

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www.thomarich.com

17 abortions meet exceptions under state ban, new report shows

By NIKI KELLY
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Seventeen women had abortions in Indiana since the state ban officially went into effect Aug. 21 - with the majority falling under an exception for a lethal fetal anomaly.

The Indiana Department of Health posted the third quarter terminated pregnancy report Friday afternoon, finding 764 abortions occurred between July 1 through Sept. 30.

But only 17 of those happened since Aug. 21, when the Indiana Supreme Court decision upholding the new law was certified. Previously abortion clinics stopped providing the procedure on Aug. 1.

Lawmakers returned to the Statehouse in the summer of 2022 to pass a near-total ban following the overturning of Roe v. Wade. It outlaws all abortions except in the case of a fatal fetal anomaly and cases of serious health risk to the mother. One part of the law says these exceptions are up to 20 weeks but another part says they can be used anytime. Rape survivors can get an abortion up to 10 weeks post-fertilization.

Abortions can now only be done in hospitals.

Nine of the 17 abortions since Aug. 21 cited a lethal fetal anomaly; seven were due to a serious health risk or life of the woman and one was due to rape or incest.

To use one of these exemptions, the attending physician must certify in writing to the hospital that in the doctor's reasonable medical judgment, performing the abortion is necessary to prevent any serious health risk to the pregnant woman or to save the pregnant woman's life; or the fetus has been diagnosed with a lethal fetal anomaly. All facts and reasons supporting the certification shall be set forth by the physician in writing and attached to the certificate, the law says.

The 764 abortions over the three-month period compares to 2,967 over the same time the year before. The majority of the abortions - around 72 percent - were nonsurgical, using prescription medications.

There were 698 abortions in July, when it was still legal. Then in August there were 52 and 14 in September.

About 97 percent of the abortions were fetuses up to 14 weeks of gestational age.

The majority of the abortions were done in clinics before they stopped providing the service. Only 6 percent - or 45 - were performed in a hospital.

There were 18 at the Riley Health Maternity Tower; 11 at the Sidney & Lois Eskenazi Hospital; and 15 at Indiana University Health University Hospital. All of those are in Indianapolis.

One abortion was performed at Schneck Medical Center in Jackson County.

Obituary Policy

The News-Banner and Ossian Journal publishes "basic" obituaries free of charge for "local" deaths. "Basic" obituaries will include the deceased's name, age, community of record, date and place of death, basic genealogical information, the date, time and location of calling hours and services and the name of the funeral home handling arrangements.

If additional information and/or a photo is desired to be included, or if the deceased does not meet the definitions of a "local" person, there is a charge.

Area funeral homes will provide details on the policy and will coordinate obituary publication.

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Leaving behind Dickensian poverty

Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol" was an important book of the 19th century. It spoke to the power of redemption and can be credited for focusing concern for the poor during Christmas season. Worry for the poor wasn't new, but was renewed during the early Victorian age. One example is the carol "Good King Wenceslas," which told the story of a king (and later saint) who served the poor. That song was penned 10 years after Dickens' wrote "A Christmas Carol," not 500 years earlier when the events occurred.



Michael Hicks

Hoosier Opinions

Other religious traditions have similar considerations at wintertime holidays. Of course, the giving of Chanukkah gifts to children and the poor predates Christmas. Islam does not celebrate Christmas, as they recognize Jesus as a prophet, not messiah. Still, residents of the small village of Hussayah, Saudi Arabia greeted my men with gifts of cakes and tea on Christmas 1990.

Among these three Abrahamic religions, concern for the poor is a clear duty for believers. But, the description of the poor in the Old and New Testaments and the Qur'an are radically different from poverty in the Victorian age. And, the poverty of Dickensian London is even more radically different from poverty today. These are blessings about which we should understand and be thankful.

A number of researchers have attempted to measure economic growth from antiquity through the current age. This can be accomplished by examining the archeological record or trade and possessions and by examining surviving texts. The earliest of these are accounting ledgers found in modern day Iraq. Poetry may have been passed through an oral tradition; debts were written in clay and stone.

This research tells a pretty clear story. From the earliest recorded human experiences, say 6,000 years ago, through the 16th century, there was scant economic progress. The average person worldwide produced less than \$1,000 a year in goods and services, as measured in today's dollars. Most of this was agricultural, though there was also some manufacturing. Services, like education and healthcare, were scantily produced.

That meant that a healthy adult man with some skills as a plowman or blacksmith could perhaps produce \$4,000 worth of goods each year. This included the value of their homemade and homegrown goods. That meant everyone worked, from before adulthood until death. Food was grown, animals tended, and yarn spun throughout the day. For almost all the world, this averaged to about \$2 per day at today's prices. So, imagine living this year only on what you can buy at a local grocery for \$2 per day.

Today the United Nations definition of poverty is the consumption of just over \$2 per day. Just under 10 percent of the world's population live under that definition of poverty. Prior to 1700, nearly everyone worldwide did. Yes, there were kings and royalty, whose wealth was increased by skimming a share of the daily \$2 from their subjects. The great monuments of earlier ages—the Pyramids of Giza, the Great Zimbabwe, the Ziggurat of Ur and Windsor Castle—were built by emperors and kings who extracted their wealth from desperately poor peasants.

Beginning in about 1700, economic growth in Europe started to increase, then it accelerated. There is no clear consensus why this happened. Some theories are plainly wrong. Imperialism and colonization cannot explain it. Places without empires grew briskly, often more robustly than the large imperial powers. It wasn't just technology. China and northern Africa were awash in modern science and mathematics long before the Scots discovered trousers and a written language. Both algorithm and algebra are named after Arab mathematicians.

The best explanation of this stunning explosion of economic growth comes from Professor Deidre McCloskey. My summary of her work is simple. European cities that began to trade slowly became prosperous. That prosperity created a new class of people, a merchant class, whose wealth permitted cultural and political influence. Where that influence spread, so did prosperity.

Nowhere was that more obvious than in America. In the colonies that permitted a Ben Franklin to flourish, growth followed. In places where labor was owned, like South Carolina, growth languished. At the start of the American Revolution, the South was richer, and more productive than the North; by 1860, per capita GDP in northern states were 50 percent higher than in the South. Slavery was an economic catastrophe for the South; its moral and political failings were far worse.

All of this brings us back to Charles Dickens. Had he written in 1643 rather than 1843, the fine distinctions on poverty would've been silly. Nearly everyone was poor. There wasn't even a publishing industry to deliver his work to middle class families, because there really weren't middle class families, and most Europeans were illiterate. Yet, Dickens characters and audience of 1843 were mostly middle class, a relatively new distinction.

In 1700, the typical European, Asian, African or American produced about \$2 per day. Today, the average U.S. citizen produces \$191 per day in goods. That is close to a hundred-fold increase in 300 years. I apologize for all this math. There's an easier way to explain this.

In 1700, a man would have to work eight to 10 hours each day to earn enough income and grow enough food to feed each member of his family about \$2-worth of food at today's prices. Today, the average American produces and earns almost \$24 per hour. That means that adult could feed a family of four the same amount of food with only 20 minutes of work each day.

There is much to pray for as we move into a new year, using the old, clear language. Deliverance from evil, abundance of peace and bounty for the poor. At the same time, we must recognize and give thanks for the economic miracle that has lifted so many from despairing poverty.

Michael Hicks is the George and Frances Ball Distinguished Professor of Economics and the director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at Ball State University.

The News-Banner

(USPS 059-200)

Evening News est. 1892 • Evening Banner est. 1899 • Consolidated 1929

News-Banner Publications, Inc.

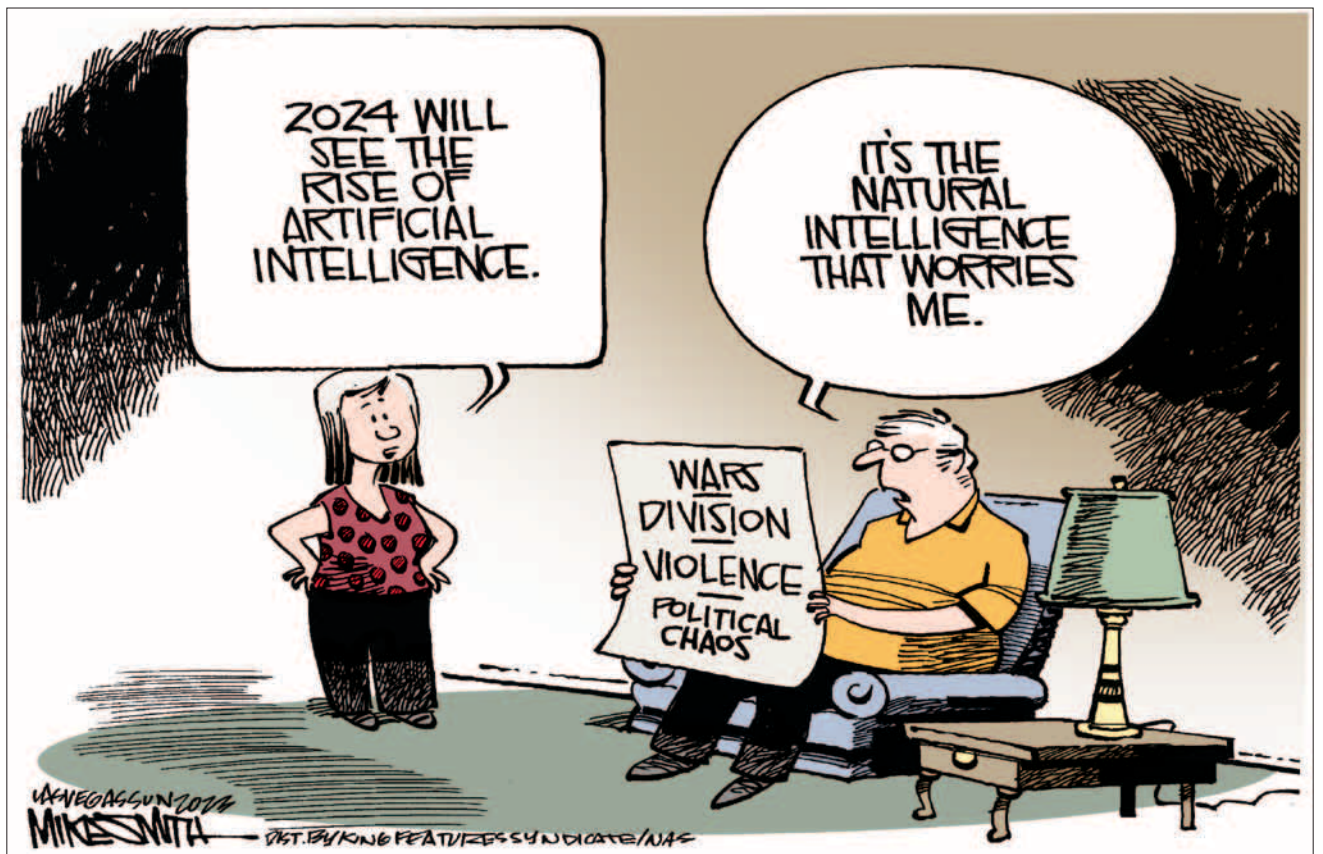
George B. Witwer, Chairman of the Board
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Periodicals Postage Paid at Bluffton, IN 46714. Published every day except Sundays and principal holidays at 125 N. Johnson St., Bluffton IN 46714, Post Office Box 436

Holly Gaskill, Editor

Mark Miller, Opinion Page Editor

Opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily represent the views of this newspaper.



'Swinging for the fences' with the Bears and White Sox

HAMMOND, Ind. — The Chicago Bears and White Sox are looking for new stadiums. The NFL franchise has purchased property in Arlington Park but is reportedly looking at sites from Waukegan (just south of the Wisconsin line), Naperville and Rockford as well as just south of Soldier Field. The Sox have been linked to Nashville.

I asked Brad Chambers, the former state Commerce secretary running for the Republican governor nomination, whether Indiana should make a play for the two franchises.

"Why don't we swing for the fences in Indiana?"

Chambers asked in response. "That's exactly the line of thinking we should have. We are a great state with a great product. We should absolutely dream those big dreams. We have never been at this level of capital investment in state history. We proved it's doable. Let's shoot higher. Let's shoot for the stars. I believe we could get them if we put our mind to it. The northern part of our state has enormous potential; enormous untapped potential."

Chambers, who is facing U.S. Sen. Mike Braun, Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch, Eric Doden and Curtis Hill for the GOP nomination, has some credibility for his "let's shoot for the stars" rhetoric. In the two years he spent at Commerce and the Indiana Economic Development Corp, he says he attracted a record \$51 billion in investments to the state. As this May primary race heads into the homestretch, Chambers and Doden will both face questions about how much of these proposed investments panned out under their watch at IEDC.

If you want to get Gov. Eric Holcomb animated about economic development, just mention to him the double tracking of the South Shore line from South Bend to Chicago, as well as the West Lake extension to Munster. "The double track is just the start," Chambers said. "It just takes someone outside of politics to really inject that confidence into this great product."

Earlier this month, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin announced the Washington Wizards and Capitals will be moving to a sprawling mixed-use stadium and entertainment district across the Potomac in Alexandria. Similar projects have been proposed in Atlanta, Las Vegas, Baltimore and St. Petersburg.

While LA's SoFi Stadium is viewed as the beginning of a new trend in these mega attractions, one of the first such complexes was created in Chicago. Jon Niemuth, director of Gensler Sports, observed, "A great example is what the Chicago Cubs have done in and around Wrigley Field. They made targeted enhancements inside and outside the ballpark with new housing, new commercial spaces, and new amenities. They transformed what has been for years an organic collection and made the idea of 'Wrigleyville' an integrated hub within Chicago. It's now a cohesive district, a destination for more than baseball, and a true live-work-play center within the larger city."

I asked Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr., about whether Indiana should seek these two pro fran-

chises. "I'm as bullish on Northwest Indiana as they come, but realistically, I doubt we could accommodate the Bears," he said. "For that type of project you would need hundreds of acres. Maybe in the area of Gary you could find that kind of acreage available, but then again the Bears probably wouldn't want to invest in that type of brownfield development."

But, McDermott acknowledges, that type of acreage is available in south Lake County where the West Lake Corridor spur could be

extended beyond Munster and Dyer. Or as the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District website explains, that corridor is "more than just a train. Benefits include: Faster, less expensive, and more reliable access to higher-paying jobs in Chicago and surrounding areas; encouragement of business investments in station areas to create growth in local jobs; live/work/play lifestyle development around station areas."

Chambers is bringing sprawling issues to his gubernatorial race. While at Commerce, he conceived the proposed Lebanon LEAP Innovation District in Boone County, that has resulted in Eli Lilly & Company's biggest expansion in Indiana. It's controversial because it relies on tapping water from the Wabash River watershed.

"We have a strategic advantage in water compared to the (American) West," Chambers told me. "It's a strategic advantage that can power our economy. You want to manage that asset. That's why you need a strategic water study that identifies where the abundance is, where it needs to be, and how to get there."

He notes that Boone County has depleted water sources, but its location between Purdue University and Indianapolis make it a prime economic development site. "We can solve that problem by using in-bound economic development," he explained. "Let's take the burden off taxpayers. Let's use in-bound new incremental revenues and economic development to solve that water problem; that water transportation problem, if the studies concluded that no one would be negatively affected."

That kind of thinking may be viewed as reckless by some, and bold by others. A generation ago, Indianapolis Mayors Richard Lugar and Bill Hudnut had the audacity to plan and build a stadium — the Hoosier Dome — before there was an NFL team ready to play there.

That gamble brought in the Baltimore Colts, then the NCAA headquarters, Big Ten and collegiate championship games, and a sprawling sports portfolio that, along with the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, has become the city's modern identity.

It was the proverbial swing for the fences.

Brian Howey is senior writer and columnist for Howey Politics Indiana/State Affairs. Find him on Facebook and X @hwypol.



Brian Howey

Politicking

Looking back, looking forward

At the end of the year, we hear predictions about the future, many of which have been proven wrong — from the end of the world due to climate change, to the telephone is just a toy. (There is a story, probably apocryphal, that in 1876, the President of Western Union, William Orton, dismissed phones as a "toy" when Alexander Graham Bell offered to sell him the patent for \$100,000).

The past is a better teacher if we will pay attention to successes and mistakes that we might avoid one and embrace the other.

A hundred years ago, the '20s were roaring and President Calvin Coolidge did things the current president and Congress would do well to emulate. Coolidge won a landslide victory running on a platform of limited government, reduced taxes, and less regulation. He followed through on all three, creating an economic boom. (Where have you gone, Silent Cal, our nation turns its lonely eyes to you).

Coolidge also signed an immigration law that regulated the number of foreigners who could come to America. Asian people were especially targeted, but one must understand the challenges of the time which involved civil war in China and growing unrest in Japan. According to Denso Encyclopedia, the announced motivation of the legislation was the "widespread fear of



Cal Thomas

radicalism that contributed to anti-foreign sentiment and exclusionist demands. Supporters of immigration legislation stressed recurring themes: Anglo-Saxon superiority and foreigners as threats to jobs and wages." Sound familiar?

A lot happened in 1924. Vladimir Lenin died at 53 from a stroke. Lenin's body was embalmed and put on display in Red Square for public viewing. He seems to have been reincarnated as Vladimir Putin.

Adolf Hitler is sentenced to five years in prison for his role in the Beer Hall Putsch. He is released after just nine months, but uses his time while incarcerated to write "Mein Kampf," which, among other things, describes how he became antisemitic. His poison still infects us.

J. Edgar Hoover is named head of the FBI. George H.W. Bush was born in Milton, Massachusetts. Woodrow Wilson dies. Jimmy Carter was born in Plains, Georgia.

Actor Marlon Brando, who would change the way many actors performed, was born in Omaha, Nebraska.

Also born this year is American novelist and playwright James Baldwin in Harlem, New York, as is Truman Capote.

The comic strip "Little Orphan Annie" debuts in the New York Daily News. In the 1970s it would become a hit musical on Broadway and a movie.

The first newsreel pictures of American presidential candidates are taken, forecasting the age of television and its use during election campaigns.

The first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is held in New York.

In sports, Dallas Cowboys head coach Tom Landry was born, and the Washington Senators won their first World Series. It would be 95 years until they win another one under a different name (Washington Nationals).

Johnny Weissmuller sets the 100-meter world freestyle record at 57.4 seconds. His fame would increase when he played Tarzan in the movies.

Carol Taylor invents the ice cream cone rolling machine. Yum.

The first crossword puzzle is published, offering distractions from daily concerns to millions of people over several generations.

At the end of 1924, Judy Garland made her acting debut as a 2-1/2-year-old.

As with any other year, 1924 contained the good, the bad and the ugly, but it also contained lessons we should learn, because we sometimes repeat too many of the bad ones.

May those good lessons lead us to a happier, peaceful and prosperous 2024.

tcaeditors@tribpub.com

What's happening at the Wells County Public Library

The Wells County Public Library takes its mission to "provide the community with access, knowledge and growth" very seriously and offers a variety of events each week for kids, teens, and adults.

Registration is preferred at most events. To sign up, go to www.wellscolibrary.org, click on the Library Event Calendar, navigate to the date of the event, and view more to get to the registration screen. Alternatively, call 260-824-1612 (Bluffton) or 260-622-4691 (Ossian) to register.

Library Closed for the Holidays

The Main Library (Bluffton) and Ossian Branch will be closed on Monday, Jan. 1 for New Year's Day.

Most Popular Books of 2023

The books that were checked out the most for the entire year of 2023 at the library were the following titles.

Fiction:

- "Verity" by Colleen Hoover
- "Dreamland" by Nicholas Sparks
- "The Last Thing He Told Me" by Laura Dave
- "Reminders of Him" by Colleen Hoover
- "Without a Trace" by Danielle Steel

Non-fiction:

- "Spare" by Prince Harry
- "Taste of Home Annual Recipes"
- "So Help Me God" by Mike Pence
- "101 Greatest Soups on the Planet: Every Savory Soup, Stew, Chili and Chowder You Could Ever Crave" by Erin Renouf Mylroie
- "A Fever in the Hartland: the Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and

the Woman Who Stopped Them" by Timothy Egan

Children's and Teen Book Clubs

- At the Main Library (Bluffton)
- Grade 1-2 Book Club: Tuesday, Jan. 2 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
- Grades 3-4 Book Club: Tuesday, Jan. 9 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.
- Grades 5-6 Book Club: Thursday, Jan. 11 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Pick up a copy of the book-of-the-month when you sign up at the library. Talk about the book and enjoy an activity or craft based on the book.

Family Block Days

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Wednesday, Jan. 3 from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Thursday, Jan. 4 from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

All ages. Enjoy several different types of blocks for kids of various ages in the Children's Room. Drop-in event. No registration needed.

Genealogy/Local History Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, Jan. 4 from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

Ages 12+. Members help each other learn new things and obtain a greater appreciation for local history and genealogy research. Bring your own laptop or share one of ours. Registration appreciated.

Bingo with Jason

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Monday, Jan. 8 from 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Adults. Enjoy a lively game of Bingo for a chance to win a candy bar with everyone's favorite librarian named Jason! Registration

required.

Teen Gaming Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Monday, Jan. 8 from 6 to 7 p.m.

Grades 6-12. Enjoy a variety of different games each month, including video games, trading card games, and board games. No registration needed.

Teen Book Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, Jan. 11 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Grades 6-12. Join us as we discuss the book-of-the-month, which is "The Faithful Spy" by John Hendrix and then enjoy an activity in which you will need to use deductive reasoning skills to decipher a code. Pick up a copy of the book when you register at the library.

Bluffton History Talk with Alan Daugherty

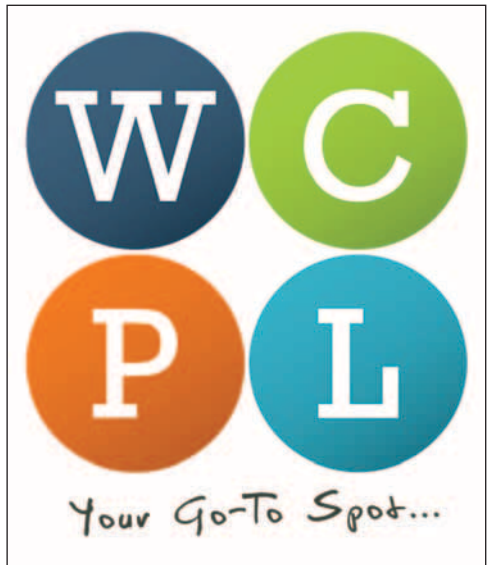
At the Main Library (Bluffton): Tuesday, Jan. 16 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Adults. Alan Daugherty will be sharing information from his new book on Edward Bruce

Williamson and Bluffton History. E.B. Williamson was a renowned naturalist with a particular interest in dragonflies and damselflies, as well as, a botanist and iris breeder. Learn more about his life from the early 1900s and how he ties into Bluffton's history. Registration appreciated.

Fort Wayne Philharmonic Performance

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, Jan. 25 to 7 to 8 p.m.



All ages. The Fort Wayne Philharmonic will be at the library for this Stories in Music community ensemble show. Join us as we musically explore the children's book "Where the Wild Things Are" through music, featuring the Calhoun Brass Quintet. The book will be narrated by Philharmonic staff member, Abby Cleveland. Registration appreciated.

Library Hours

At the main library in Bluffton — Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

At the Ossian branch library — Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon.

Access the library online at www.wellscolibrary.org for digital books, magazines, online databases, event info, and more.

Zanesville News

by Melba Edwards

There is not much town news as this is the end of the year 2023 and when you read this it will be 2024. When years change it is always hard to remember at least through January to write the number of the new year!

This week, I think, the Coffee Cafe will be open at the Zanesville Community Church of God.

This week the Zanesville Lions will be returning to Ouabache State Park to remove the display at the Wonderland of Lights. Thanks to all of you who drove over to Bluffton to view this drive through as this is a large fundraiser for the Ouabache Friends group. Thanks to all the volunteers who make this a yearly affair.

Thanks also to all of the Zanesville residents who lit

up their houses and yards. The judging is over but not tabulated yet so watch for winners.

I am writing this column the day after Christmas and so this week I will be viewing the lights in town and the Living Lights at the Tower Life Center as I have been too busy to make those must see displays. As I went though things that happened at Christmas time here in Zanesville through the years I found lots of other activities.

Several years we had a Christmas Walk when you would go to all the churches and view their displays inside and maybe get a bite to eat. Some residents during the walk also opened their homes and served a snack. Even lots of the homes lighted your way with candles in grocery bags

set along sidewalks. In these busy times it seems we just don't have time for the real meaning of Christmas. I have good intentions to get my decorations up but I just seem to have too much to do. In January I am going to try to decorate for next year!

For many, many years the churches got together and we had Christmas cantatas and plays. The talent was overflowing. I'm sure the talent is still there so let's think about reviving some of these long ago happenings.

Our grandson Skip Edwards is on the board of Wells County's "Friends Who Care Cancer Relief Foundation". This organization began in 2012 with a first concert in January 2013 and then in 2016 it was named Friends Who Care. This year the Gospel concert

and auction will be held on Saturday, Jan. 6, at the 4-H Community Building in Bluffton. The event is free. There will be concession from Uncle Matt's BBQ for donations and a silent auction and a live auction will be held for you to participate in. The doors open at 4 p.m. with the music starting at 5:30 and a live auction around 7 p.m. There is still time for you to donate items for both auctions. The evening features eight singing groups for your entertainment. All proceeds go to assist those battling cancer in Wells County. This is a worthwhile and wonderful fundraiser allowing you to be a part of helping cancer patients and their families.

Friends Who Care Gospel Concert & Auction Jan. 6

By BARBARA BARBIERI

This will be the 11th year for the Gospel Concert and Auction, sponsored by the Friends Who Care Cancer Relief Foundation, to be held on Saturday, Jan. 6, at the 4-H Community Building in Bluffton. Platinum sponsor of the event is Outdoor Concepts.

Doors will open for the free event at 4 p.m. when concessions from Uncle Matt's BBQ will be available. Silent auction tables also will be ready for shopping. Musical entertainment by eight

local singing groups will begin at 5:30 p.m. with an active auction to be conducted during intermission at about 7 p.m.

Over the years 450 local residents have been granted financial aid totaling over \$580,000. All proceeds from the evening will be used to assist those battling cancer in Wells County.

Anyone needing assistance may contact 260-307-1074 or board members including: Jeff Adams, Skip Edwards, Steve Esterhai, Larry Peeper, Cheryl Buckland and Cindy Gordon.

Boys & Girls Club 'Making a Difference' event

The Wells Community Boys & Girls Club will be hosting its 7th annual "Making a Difference" banquet on Monday, Jan. 22, with Wayne Barker, Superintendent of the Northwest Allen County Schools and former Superintendent of the Bluffton-Harrison M.S.D., as the keynote speaker.



Wayne Barker

The program will begin at 6 p.m. at the club located at 1410 South Wayne St. with dinner to be followed by Supt. Barker's remarks and a fund-raising auction. Reservations are necessary for this event and may be made by calling the Boys & Girls Club at 260-824-5070 or email to: genebell.wells-bgc@gmail.com.

Resource Development Officer Dr. Gene Bell explains "We are looking forward to having Mr. Barker return and share with us."



Flagstar Bank and employees are among the sponsors of the Wells Community Boys & Girls Club including Jayleen Smith, Jill Clark, Cassandra McJury, Wendy Beeks, Chase Tackett and Danielle Thompson (bank manager). (Photos provided)



Mick Cupp of Cupp Real Estate, at right, is another sponsor of the Boys & Girls Club pictured here with Dr. Gene Bell, Resource Development Officer for the club, at left.



Cyndee Fiechter of North Eastern Group Realty, at right, also is a sponsor of the Boys & Girls Club, pictured here with Vicki Bell, club director.



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Jets defeat Knights, ending a seven year drought

By RICK SPRUNGER
MONROE — No, that score wasn't a misprint. Adams Central snapped a seven-year losing streak against Norwell and beat the Knights for just the second time in 21 years Saturday night by the startling score of 62-30.

"We got kicked," said Norwell head coach Mike McBride candidly. "We had very little defensive intensity. They were better prepared than we were, and they came out ready to play."

Did Norwell underestimate an unranked Class 2A team that it had beaten by an average margin of over 23 points per game over the last four years?

"I don't know why we would have," countered McBride. "They won 20 games last year and have just about everybody back."

Norwell had a whole host of problems Saturday night, and they started with 6-7, 210-pound Adams Central senior Isaac Schultz, who scored 24 points on 11-for-15 shooting and grabbed eight rebounds.

"Isaac Schultz was the best player on the floor tonight," declared McBride. "They could just throw it into him, and we couldn't stop it. He must have had five, six, seven offensive rebounds."

He had six of them, actually. And that was despite Schultz picking up two fouls in the game's first four minutes.

He was never whistled for a third.

"The best thing I ever picked up at the clinics was to play a kid with two (early) fouls," said Adams Central head coach Aaron McClure of his decision not to pull Schultz out of the game at that point. "If you sit him down for several minutes and he never ends up fouling out, then you haven't played him as much as you could have. If you play him and he does end up fouling out, at least he was on the court for the maximum time possible."

Playing the full 32 minutes with white-hot intensity, Adams Central connected on 27 of 41 field goal attempts for a blistering .659 shooting percentage.

Little wonder — of the Jets' 24 two-point baskets, 20 came from within five feet of the hoop.

"We were able to get out and run in transition," explained McClure. "We wanted to play fast. We took good shots and shot the ball well."

But Norwell's problems didn't end with Adams Central's inside game. It was also the Knights' shooting woes.

Norwell hit on a mere 10 of 35 shots from the floor for a paltry .286 field goal percentage.

And the Knights were completely shut out from three-point range, not getting a single one to fall all night.

Three Norwell starters went scoreless.



"We had a lot of opportunities where we didn't take shots because we were overpassing," observed McBride.

Then there were the 16 Norwell turnovers and the 26-17 Adams Central rebounding advantage, one that saw the Jets virtually playing volleyball off the offensive glass until their few misses from the field went in.

"You cannot commit 16 turnovers and expect to win," said McBride, ticking things off on his fingers. "You cannot give up 11 offensive rebounds and expect to win. You cannot go 0-for-12 on three-pointers and expect to win."

Norwell got off to a bad start, and it got worse from there.

A 9-0 Adams Central run in the first quarter staked the Jets to an early 14-3 lead, and Norwell never got closer than nine points after that.

The last time the Knights were even that close was at 34-25 after a bucket by Cade Shelton with 4:27 left in the third quarter.

After that, Adams Central sped away, outscoring the beleaguered

Norwell team, 26-2, for a 60-27 spread with just two minutes remaining.

Adams Central's big first-quarter run started when Micah McClure splashed a three-pointer to put his team up, 8-3.

Cohen Bailey on a three-pointer, and Schultz took a feed from Trace Maller inside for two more.

Braylend Reber then rebounded an Ashton Federspiel miss and took it coast-to-coast right down Broadway for another deuce.

That drew a timeout from a fired-up McBride.

But after a traveling violation on Norwell, Schultz dropped a 17-footer from the left of the circle for that 14-3 edge.

Norwell really never made much of a run after that.

In fact, there were only three times all night when the Knights managed to score even four points in succession.

"We're a team that's going to struggle when we get down early because we don't have quick firepower," said McBride later. "We don't have the transition game or the three-point shooters for that. We need to stay close and give ourselves a chance to win at the end."

Federspiel scored 12 points and Shelton 11 to pace the Norwell offense, but no one else scored more than two.

Maller joined Schultz in double figures for Adams Central with 13 points.

The win was extremely satisfying for the Jets, who won for just the ninth time in 70 games in the series between the two schools.

Norwell won the junior varsity contest, 50-27.

Brady Smith scored 14 points to lead the Knights while Caiden Petrie and Garry Riley each added seven, Will Case and Ryne Thornton six apiece, Nick McBride five, Aedyn Quintanilla three, and Noah Comer two.

The Knights also took the C-team game, 40-26, with Trey Privett scoring 12 points to lead the freshmen.

sports@news-banner.com

ADAMS CENTRAL 62, NORWELL 30
at Adams Central
NORWELL (6-4): Cade Shelton 4-5 3-4 11, Adam McBride 0-4 0-0 0, Owen Wallis 0-0 0-0 0, Cohen Bailey 0-5 0-0 0, Ashton Federspiel 3-12 6-12, Kaedyn Quintanilla 1-3 0-0 2, Brady Smith 1-1 0-0 2, Caiden Petrie 1-2 0-0 2, Garry Riley 0-1 0-0 0, Nick McBride 0-2 0-0 0, Ryne Thornton 0-0 1-2 1, Trace Moser 0-0 0-0 0. **TOTAL: 10-35 10-14 30.**
ADAMS CENTRAL (5-1): Micah McClure 2-6 2-2 7, Ryan Tester 2-3 0-0 5, Trace Maller 6-9 0-2 13, Braylend Reber 3-4 1-4 7, Isaac Schultz 11-15 2-4 24, Kolton Litter 0-0 0-0 0, Max Hamilton 1-2 0-0 2, Marcus Bollenbacher 0-0 0-0 0, Carter Steele 1-1 0-0 2, Braden Dalrymple 1-1 0-0 2. **TOTAL: 27-41 5-12 62.**
Norwell 6 11 10 3 — 30
Adams Central 19 11 11 16 — 62
Three-point shooting: Norwell 0-11 (A. McBride 0-3, Bailey 0-3, Quintanilla 0-2, Petrie 0-1, Riley 0-1, N. McBride 0-1), Adams Central 3-5 (McClure 1-1, Tester 1-2, Maller 1-2). Rebounds: Norwell 17 (Federspiel 8), Adams Central 26 (Schultz 8, Reber 6, Maller 5). Turnovers: Norwell 16, Adams Central 9. Personal fouls: Norwell 10, Adams Central 10. Fouled Out: None. Technical fouls: None. Junior Varsity: Norwell 50, Adams Central 27. Freshmen: Norwell 40, Adams Central 26.

Braves' defensive pressure too much for the Tigers

By ANDREW FEEBACK
 Early on, the Bluffton Tigers' basketball team didn't show many signs of having not played in more than a week.

They took a 10-3 lead over the visiting Belmont Braves in the first four minutes and were getting good looks at the basket.

Then, it got ugly in a hurry.

"We started throwing the ball right to them," Bluffton head coach Doug Curtis said. "We knew they were going to do exactly the press that they did. I thought we did a decent job early of handling it. The key was, they were missing shots, and we were getting rebounds and not having to face their press. Then, they made a couple of baskets and got to set their press up, and we turned the ball over right away."

Bluffton dropped its second straight game and now stands at 12-3, while Belmont upped its

record to 11-3.

The Tigers made only three shots beyond the arc in this game, all of them coming in the first quarter. The last one came from Madyson Sonnigsen and gave Bluffton a 13-8 lead.

The Braves made only two shots from the field in the first quarter, but got to the free throw line eight times, and making those free throws allowed them to set up their press.

Bluffton held a 17-10 lead after buckets from Isabella Stout and Haley Gibson.

That was all the Tigers managed for the rest of the first half, as the Braves repeatedly forced them into

the corners and double-teamed the ball. With 14 turnovers in the first half, the Tigers suddenly found themselves trailing 23-17 at the break.

It didn't get much better for Bluffton in the second half, as the Tigers failed to score again until Maryn Schreiber's rebound basket ended a scoreless stretch of more than

nine minutes.

Although the Tigers were never really out of it, that was far too long without a point in a low-scoring, low-possession game such as this one.

It didn't feel like it, but the Tigers outscored the Braves by

a point in the third quarter and stayed within two possessions for much of the fourth. It was 34-28 after Stout's short jumper with 3:05 to play, but Bluffton failed to score again after that.

The Tigers finished with a season-worst 24 turnovers.

"The good thing is that's Game 15, and that's the first team that's made us turn the ball over like that," Curtis said. "We had four days off from basketball, and that obviously didn't help us at this point. Every time you scrimmage in practice, you've got to take care of the basketball and not make those type of turnovers. We've got to do a better job of that."

Gibson was the only Tiger in double figures with 13, while the Braves got 13 from Hailey Cole and 10 from Emily Bleke.

Bluffton will travel to North Miami Wednesday night.

The JV game went to Bell-

mont, 34-31. For the Tigers, Isla Gibson scored 17 points and Shak Eskridge added eight, while Madelyn Funk and Addison Kauffman both had three.

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BELMONT 38, BLUFFTON 28
at Bluffton
BELMONT (11-3): Kate Kitson 0-0 0-0 0, Lillian Garner 0-0 0-0 0, Ella Franze 0-0 0-0 0, Emily Bleke 5-11 0-0 0, Belle Laurent 2-5 2-2 7, Kamryn Jarvis 1-5 2-4 4, Lanie French 0-1 0-0 0, Brianna Converse 0-0 0-0 0, Gwen Laurent 2-6 0-0 4, Hailey Cole 4-12 5-6 13. **TOTALS: 14-40 9-12 38.**
BLUFFTON (12-3): Isabella Stout 2-7 0-0 4, Konley Ault 0-0 0-0 0, Marly Drayer 1-3 0-0 3, Maryn Schreiber 2-5 0-0 4, Haley Gibson 6-11 0-0 13, Tressa Renner 0-0 1-2 1, Madyson Sonnigsen 1-2 0-0 3, Cayah King 0-0 0-0 0, Sophie Eisenhut 0-2 0-0 0. **TOTALS: 12-30 1-2 28.**
Bellmont 10 13 5 10 — 38
Bluffton 13 4 6 5 — 28
Three-point Field Goals: Belmont 1-10 (Belle Laurent 1-2, Cole 0-3, Bleke 0-3, French 0-1, Jarvis 0-1), Bluffton 3-9 (Sonnigsen 1-2, Drayer 1-2, Gibson 1-3, Stout 0-2). **Rebounds:** Belmont 17 (Bleke 6, Jarvis 4, Cole 3, Gwen Laurent 2, Kitson 1, Belle Laurent 1), Bluffton 19 (Schreiber 6, Stout 5, Drayer 4, Sonnigsen 2, Eisenhut 1, Gibson 1). **Turnovers:** Belmont 14, Bluffton 24. **Fouls:** Belmont 8, Bluffton 12. **Fouled out:** None. **Technical:** None. **JV: Belmont 34, Bluffton 31.**

Michigan beats Alabama in OT on Blake Corum's TD run to reach national title

By GREG BEACHAM

AP Sports Writer
PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — Blake Corum rushed for a 17-yard touchdown on the second snap of overtime, and top-seeded Michigan advanced to its first College Football Playoff championship game with a 27-20 victory over fourth-seeded Alabama in the Rose Bowl on Monday.

Michigan's defense ended only the second overtime game in the 110 editions of the Rose Bowl when Alabama quarterback Jalen Milroe was emphatically stopped as he attempted to sneak up the middle on fourth down from the Michigan 3.

Coach Jim Harbaugh's Wolverines (14-0) will play for their school's first national title since 1997 against Washington or Texas on Jan. 8 in Houston, but only after a late comeback and a hair-raising finish to the Granddaddy of Them All.

Roman Wilson made a 4-yard TD catch with 1:34 left in regulation for the Wolverines, who hadn't scored in the second half until that gritty 75-yard drive led by J.J. McCarthy.

Corum then needed only two snaps to score in the first overtime period, breaking tackles and spinning wildly on his second carry into the end zone.

Milroe connected with Jermaine Burton at the Michigan 3 on third-and-goal in overtime, and Alabama leaned on its quar-

terback's athleticism on the final play call — but Milroe ran straight into a Michigan defense that was waiting for him. He was stopped 2 yards short of the goal line.

Jase McClellan rushed for 87 yards and two touchdowns for Alabama (12-2), which fell heartbreakingly short of the chance to play

for Nick Saban's seventh national title at the school. The Tide led 20-13 on Will Reichard's 52-yard field goal with 4:41 to play, but their defense couldn't preserve the lead.

The Alabama defense also couldn't step up at key moments to stop Corum, who caught an early TD pass and then rushed for 83 yards, capped by his overtime heroics. Corum has been at Michigan for three straight appearances in the CFP, but he barely played two years ago when the Wolverines were routed by Georgia, and he was injured when they were upset by TCU last year.

McCarthy passed for 221 yards and three touchdowns for Michigan, earning the Offensive Player of the Game award. Milroe passed for 116 yards and rushed for 63 for the Tide, whose 11-game winning streak ended.

The Wolverines also survived a handful of potentially disastrous mistakes that undercut their long stretches of superiority in this matchup — including a muffed punt by Jake Thaw, who was tackled at the Mich-

(Continued from Page 6)

Bluffton draws No. 7 Cowan in Round 1 of wrestling Team State

The Bluffton Tigers drew No. 7 Cowan in Round 1 of the IHSWCA 1A Team State Tournament.

Pairings were released Monday night.

Matches will be played at Rochester High School for the 1A bracket starting at 9 a.m. The winner will face No. 2 West Central in the quarterfinal.

Last year, Bluffton topped Cowan (42-34) and North Posey (40-34) in the Team State Tournament to finish 2-2 on the day.

The two losses were against South Adams and Adams Central.

The rest of the bracket from top to bottom include:

- No. 1 Adams Central vs. the winner of No. 8 North Miami/Cascade.
- No. 4 Tell City vs. the winner of No. 5 South Adams/Southmont.
- No. 3 Rochester vs. the winner of No. 6 Prairie Heights/Faith Christian.
- No. 2 West Central vs. the winner of No. 7 Cowan/Bluffton.

High School Calendar

TUESDAY, JAN 2
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Norwell at Carroll, 7:30 p.m.; Southern Wells at Daleville, 7 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, JAN 3
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at North Miami, 7:30 p.m.
 WRESTLING: Bluffton at Norwell, 6:30 p.m.
THURSDAY, JAN 4
 SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Norwell at East Noble, 6 p.m.; Bluffton at South Adams, 5:30 p.m.
FRIDAY, JAN 5
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at Jay County, 7:30 p.m.; South Adams at Southern Wells, 7:30 p.m.; Norwell at Leo, 7:30 p.m.
 SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Norwell, Bluffton at Jay County Dive Invite, 6 p.m.
SATURDAY, JAN 6
 BOYS BASKETBALL: Leo at Norwell, 7:45 p.m.; Woodlan at Bluffton, 7:30 p.m.; Southern Wells at Heritage, 7:30 p.m.
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Norwell at Leo, 7:30 p.m.
 WRESTLING: Norwell at Bill Kerbel Invitational (New Haven High School), 9 a.m.; Bluffton at IHSWCA Team State (Manchester High

School), 6 p.m.
 SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Norwell, Bluffton at Jay County Invite, 9 a.m.
 WRESTLING: Southern Wells at Huntington North Invite, 9 a.m.
MONDAY, JAN 8
 No events scheduled.
TUESDAY, JAN 9
 BOYS BASKETBALL: Norwell at Wayne, 7:30 p.m.; (ACAC Tournament Round 1) Bluffton at Southern Wells, 7:30 p.m.
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: (ACAC Tournament Round 1) Bluffton at Southern Wells, 6 p.m.
 SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): DeKalb at Norwell, 5:30 p.m.; Marion at Bluffton, 5:30 p.m.
 WRESTLING: Oak Hill at Norwell, 6:30 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, JAN 10
 GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bishop Dwenger at Norwell, 7:45 p.m.
 WRESTLING: Bluffton at Manchester, 6 p.m.
THURSDAY, JAN 11
 SWIMMING & DIVING (CO-ED): Bluffton at Manchester, 5:30 p.m.

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BASKETBALL High School

Saturday Boys' Scores
Arthur Christian, Ill. 23, Calumet Christian 20
Bellmont 38, Bluffton 28
Eastside 54, Edon, Ohio 38
Hancock Co., Ky. 69, Evansville Harrison 32
Indpls Cathedral 43, Indpls Chatard 37
Loogootee 53, Clay City 32
Morristown 54, Indpls Socina 32
New Washington 64, Paoli 54
Rock Creek Academy 67, Shoals 35
Shakamak 61, Mitchell 40
Shenandoah 63, Union (Modoc) 21
Union (Dugger) 35, Washington Catholic 23
Goshen Classic
DeKalb 33, Goshen 25
E. Noble 67, New Prairie 55
Grant 4 Tournament
Championship
Eastbrook 52, Oak Hill 32
First Round
Eastbrook 73, Mississinewa 50
Oak Hill 50, Madison-Grant 31
Third Place
Mississinewa 59, Madison-Grant 39
Huntington North Classic
Hamilton Hts. 52, Wawasee 25
Hamilton Hts. 59, Plymouth 24
Huntington North 38, Plymouth 26
Huntington North 43, Wawasee 36
Lakeland Christian Tournament
Championship
Bethany Christian 49, DeMotte Christian 29
Fifth Place
Hamilton 49, Clinton Christian 22
Third Place
Lakeland Christian 35, Granger Christian 27
Lawrence North Tournament
Championship
Lawrence North 71, Eastern Hancock

39
First Round
Eastern Hancock 60, Elkhart 49
Lawrence North 59, Westfield 42
Third Place
Westfield 50, Elkhart 32
Logansport Tournament
Championship
Northwestern 42, Wheeler 34
First Round
Northwestern 54, Argos 49
Wheeler 43, Logansport 36
Third Place
Argos 54, Logansport 50
Northridge Tournament
Championship
Northridge 74, Merrillville 51
Fifth Place
S. Bend St. Joseph's 54, Knox 37
Pool A
Ft. Wayne Dwenger 57, Knox 22
Northridge 63, Andean 19
Pool B
Merrillville 72, Rushville 31
NorthWood 47, S. Bend St. Joseph's

21
Seventh Place
Rushville 37, Andean 27
Third Place
NorthWood 48, Ft. Wayne Dwenger 34
Union City Tournament
Championship
Clinton Central 41, Blackford 31
Consolation
Adams Central 52, Southwestern (Shelby) 16
Union Co. 45, Blue River Valley 22
Fifth Place
Union Co. 39, Adams Central 37
Semifinal
Blackford 48, Ft. Wayne Blackhawk 32
Clinton Central 74, Union City 35
Seventh Place
Blue River Valley 65, Southwestern (Shelby) 37
Third Place
Ft. Wayne Blackhawk 60, Union City 40
Vincennes Rivet Tournament

Championship
South Knox 60, Evansville Memorial 54
Fifth Place
Lafayette Catholic 56, Vincennes Rivet 38
Third Place
Lanesville 54, Corydon 31
Wabash County Tournament
Championship
Wabash 51, Manchester 43, OT
Third Place
Northfield 55, Southwood 34
Whitefield Academy Tournament
Fifth Place
Marshall Co., Ky. 57, S. Central (Elizabeth) 20

Saturday Girls' Scores
Adams Central 62, Norwell 30
Central Noble 69, E. Noble 52
Evansville Memorial 68, Owensboro, Ky. 53
Floyd Central 64, Southwestern (Hanover) 63
Franklin Central 68, Southport 62
Franklin Co. 56, Oldenburg 44
Indpls Attucks 76, Brownsstown 51
Indpls Cathedral 66, Indpls Chatard 47
Kokomo 87, Brownsburg 58
Milan 76, Eastern (Pekin) 45
Muncie Central 55, Jay Co. 36
Owensboro Catholic, Ky. 65, Rock Creek Academy 48
Seymour 43, Martinsville 30
Union (Dugger) 73, Washington Catholic 48
Union Co. 37, Rushville 31
W. Noble 59, Eastside 13
Warren Central 72, Indy Brebeuf 70
Warsaw 67, Lafayette Harrison 65
Belfry (Ky.) Tournament
Championship
Avon 64, Paintsville, Ky. 38
Hall of Fame Tournament
First Round
Brownsstown 56, Brownsburg 48
Indpls Attucks 69, Kokomo 59
Lakeland Christian Tournament

Championship
Illiana Christian 54, Bethany Christian 52
Fifth Place
Westville 71, Clinton Christian 46
Third Place
DeMotte Christian 55, Lakeland Christian 28
Lawrenceburg Tournament
9th Place
Lawrenceburg 49, Beech Grove 48
11th Place
Beech Grove 58, Connersville 47
Championship
Newport, Ky. 79, Ft. Wayne Blackhawk 54
Consolation
Lawrenceburg 51, Jennings Co. 48
New Palestine 69, Bethesda Christian

49
Pike Central 90, West Morgan, Ala. 65
Fifth Place
New Palestine 91, Pike Central 48
Semifinal
Ft. Wayne Blackhawk 73, Whiteland

63
Newport, Ky. 69, Guerin Catholic 52
Seventh Place

Bethesda Christian 70, West Morgan, Ala. 46
Third Place
Whiteland 65, Guerin Catholic 59
Perry-Spencer Tournament
Championship
Heritage Hills 65, Corydon 31
Fifth Place
Benton Central 58, Crawford Co. 24
Seventh Place
S. Spencer 60, Tell City 52, OT
Third Place
Boonville 51, Perry Central 41
South Central (Union Mills) Tournament
Championship
Boone Grove 48, S. Central (Union Mills) 47
First Round
Boone Grove 64, N. White 46
S. Central (Union Mills) 60, W. Central

34
Third Place
W. Central 75, N. White 48
Switzerland County Tournament
Championship
Indian Creek 65, Christel House Manual 62

Fifth Place
Hamilton Hts. 71, Rising Sun 39
Seventh Place
Trinity Lutheran 68, Tri-Township 41
Third Place
Switzerland Co. 79, Hopkins Co. Central, Ky. 64
Wabash County Tournament
Championship
Wabash 50, Manchester 40
Third Place
Southwood 69, Northfield 46

College
Men's Basketball Scores
Saturday-Monday
Michigan St. 87, Indiana St. 75
Ohio St. 78, West Virginia 75
Kansas 86, Wichita St. 67

Women's Basketball Scores
Saturday-Monday
Iowa 94, Minnesota 71
Michigan 69, Ohio St. 60
Michigan St. 98, Penn St. 86
Purdue 89, Wisconsin 50
Indiana 77, Maryland 71

Michigan beats Alabama

(Continued from Page 6)

igan 1 with 43 seconds left in regulation and barely avoided what would have been one of the most spectacular safeties in football history.

Michigan is the sixth straight No. 1 seed to win its semifinal game in the CFP's 10 years of existence — but not many have been tested the way Alabama tested the Wolverines.

Michigan is one win away from reaching the primary goal set by Harbaugh when he returned to his alma mater in 2015 after his meteoric coaching career flamed out with the 49ers. The former Wolverines quarterback was determined to restore his school to national prominence and dominance, but he won no Big Ten titles in his first six seasons amid frustration from a fan base that expected things to happen sooner.

Michigan has been elite since 2021, winning three straight conference titles and advancing to three Playoffs. The Wolverines have finally reached their sport's biggest stage after their second consecutive unbeaten regular season.

The Wolverines' pristine record masked a profoundly messy season bookended by two three-game suspensions for Harbaugh — the first issued preemptively by the school amid an investigation of possible recruiting violations, and the second mandated by the Big Ten over allegations of sign-stealing and in-game scouting.

Harbaugh's players said the turmoil actually made them a better, more cohesive team. They needed every bit of that cohesion against the Tide, who were a couple of defensive stops away from their seventh trip

to the Playoff final.

Michigan was the dominant team for long stretches of the first three quarters of the Rose Bowl, yet Alabama hung in impressively with big plays and just enough defensive stops.

McClellan made an untouched 34-yard TD run in the first quarter for the game's first points. Michigan answered with a statement 75-yard drive capped by Corum's 8-yard catch for his FBS-leading 25th TD — his first on a reception.

The Wolverines went ahead 3:49 before halftime when Tyler Morris made a catch on a short crossing route and sprinted 38 yards through Alabama's vaunted secondary for a score — but Michigan botched the extra point snap.

Michigan's defense recorded five sacks of Milroe and seven tackles for loss in the first half alone, but Alabama trailed just 13-10 at halftime.

McClellan put the Tide ahead 17-13 with a 3-yard TD run on the second snap of the fourth quarter. Michigan's James Turner missed a 49-yard field goal attempt after Milroe fumbled near midfield on Alabama's next drive, and the Tide went up by seven on Reichard's second field goal.

Michigan finally got moving with its season on the line, starting when Corum took a 27-yard reception to midfield with 3:10 left. After Wilson moved the Wolverines to the Alabama 5 with a clutch 29-yard reception, he got wide-open for his 4-yard TD catch with 1:34 to play.

UP NEXT

Michigan: The College Football Playoff championship game in Houston on Jan. 8.

Agriculture

Foreign farmland ownership in U.S. rises 8 percent

By AGDAILY

The issue of who owns American farmland is an intensely debated topic, with concerns ranging from national security risks to proposals of limiting foreign farmland ownership.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's most recent report on foreign entities illustrates an 8 percent growth last year in farmland owned by foreign entities. Still, only 3.4 percent of U.S. farmland is held under foreign ownership.

There were 3.4 million acres of U.S. farmland purchased by foreigners last year, primarily located in Colorado, Alabama, and Michigan.

While Canadian investors still own the largest amount of reported foreign-held agriculture and non-agriculture land, China holds less than 1 percent of foreign-

held land (394,442 acres).

Despite their small percentage of ownership, there's considerable interest in the topic of Chinese-owned land. Brazos Highland Properties, LP and Murphy Brown LLC (Smithfield Foods) reported 102,345 acres and 97,975 acres, respectively — the largest Chinese reporters.

Other Chinese-owned reporters were Murphy Brown of Missouri (also Smithfield Foods), Harvest Texas LLC, and Walton International Group. Together, these five companies accounted for 86 percent of all Chinese holdings.

There are no filings directly by the Chinese government.

Since 2017, the rate at which land was sold to foreign companies has certainly increased by an average of 0.6 million acres per year to

an average of nearly 2.9 million acres.

On Friday, USDA also announced plans to update how it collects data with a proposal to update the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act Report form.

"USDA seeks to improve the information that we are collecting about foreign ownership and leasing of U.S. agricultural land," said Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation Robert Bonnie. "This process, which includes public input on changes to the form, will lead to more insightful reporting to Congress and the public."

The public can submit input through the Federal eRulemaking portal, docket FSA-2023-0017. All comments will be posted without change and will be publicly available here.

The proposed revisions

to the FSA-153 Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act Report form will:

- Capture additional data on long-term lessees who are required to report their transactions to USDA.
- Propose to collect data to assess the impacts of foreign investment on producers and rural communities, as required by AFIDA.
- Ask filers to voluntarily provide data that will help identify their land locations geospatially.
- The input collected from the public will assist in creating an electronic submission system for foreign filers and improve accuracy in data reporting.

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EPA reinstates banned chlorpyrifos for crops

By AGDAILY

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced this week its decision to restore the use of the pesticide chlorpyrifos on crops, including soybeans, following a recent ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

The court found that the EPA unlawfully revoked tolerances, ending the use of the insecticide in 2021.

EPA's decision aligns with the Nov. 2 ruling from the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which determined that EPA neglected to consider its own scientists' findings in ending what were found to be safe uses of chlorpyrifos. The court vacated the EPA rule, restoring all agricultural uses of the pesticide.

Amid pressure from environmental organizations, the EPA revoked all "tolerances" for chlorpyrifos in 2021, which established a level of pesticide allowed on food, rather than opting to modify the tolerances.

This ban on chlorpyrifos use on food and feed crops, stemmed from a Ninth Circuit

Court ruling that gave EPA the choice to prohibit all uses or make a finding on residue levels from safe uses within 60 days. EPA is expected to officially reinstate chlorpyrifos use imminently, pending the ruling from the Eighth Circuit going into effect.

In December 2022, the EPA issued a Notice of Intent to Cancel three chlorpyrifos pesticide products because they bear labeling for use on food.

Chlorpyrifos is a chemical class of insecticides that has been in use since the '60s, treating pests on over 80 different crops. On soybeans alone, it helps to mitigate leaf beetle, soybean aphid, caterpillars, grasshoppers, leafhoppers, and others. Farm groups have said that using chlorpyrifos has prevented up to 40 percent yield losses for soybeans in the Midwest.

Farmers rely on pesticides like chlorpyrifos to protect crops and uphold conservation practices. Congress has established science-based processes to ensure safe use without harm to people or the environment.

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Don't look back

Dear Annie: I've dated my boyfriend for more than 12 years. We got along fine when his grown kids were out of the picture, but now they're back living with him. His youngest is 21, yet he treats them like infants. The daughters are manipulating and controlling. When I bring up my feelings about the situation, he accuses me of being jealous and insecure. I feel I've wasted years in a relationship going nowhere.

I always helped him with rent, paying up to \$700 a month, even though his kids don't pay rent. Recently, I moved out. His response to my moving out was "We're glad you're gone!" — *Feeling Left Out*

Dear Feeling: I, too, am glad you're out of that house. Now you need to get out of the relationship. Having been in it for 12 years is not a justification to stay in it another second. Ahead of you is the rest of your life, and I believe the coming years can be your best. If you're having trouble finding the strength to seek out that better future, I encourage you to seek therapy. You deserve so much better than what you're getting now.

Dear Annie: Hurricane Irma hit my neighborhood two years ago. I need access to electricity for my CPAP, nebulizer and oxygen concentrator, and so I went to the hospital before the storm hit.

My nephew thought that I acted like a 3-year-old. We had a wonderful relationship before the storm, but Irma changed all that. Since then, I've read about noncompliant nursing homes and assisted-living communities whose residents died during the storm. How can I convince my nephew that I did the right thing? — *Safe Senior*

Dear Safe: Your nephew thought it was immature of you to seek shelter at a hospital during a hurricane? I'm flummoxed. But rather than continuing to try to convince him, let it be enough to know that you did nothing wrong, and divert your energy instead toward developing a thorough disaster preparedness plan. Start by letting your power company, local police and local fire department know that you are oxygen-dependent. The Red Cross offers a free downloadable guide on its website entitled "Disaster Preparedness: For Seniors By Seniors" that includes

some additional tips if and when the next storm hits.

Dear Annie: My mom was always focused on helping others and would gladly give whatever she had if she felt someone else would benefit.

She had serious health challenges as well. In late November a few years ago, we found out she needed surgery which was scheduled for right after Christmas. I wanted to give her something extra special for Christmas. I contacted family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers and the groups where she volunteered and asked them to tell me about the difference my mom made in their lives. I received phone calls, letters, emails and cards with wonderful stories full of love and gratitude about my mom.

For my mom, it was never about what she had or what she could get, but always about what she could give. I placed everything I received in a three-ring binder.

The night before her surgery, I read some of the stories with her. She smiled as I read, and we both cried. Mom got through the surgery and died a few years later. When my sisters and I were going through everything, we found the book. They gave it to me. I read it often. I am sharing this story with you hoping it will encourage others to share how someone has made a difference in their life before they leave this earth. — *Loving and Grateful Daughter*

Dear Loving: I absolutely love this idea. The holidays have come and gone, but all year long we have the opportunity to let loved ones know how special they are to us and how important they are to their communities. We need not wait until they're gone to express our gratitude for knowing them. Thank you for this reminder.

Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearannie@creators.com. © 2024 CREATORS.COM

My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



Christians find comfort in knowing that death is not the last of us

Q: Before my cousin slipped into a coma, he said that he was ready to die and did not want life-support measures taken. The doctors tell me that there may be a possibility he will come out of the coma and live. Does the Bible speak to the possibility of death being diverted and life extended beyond what seems possible? — *L.E.*

A: The definition of physical death is complicated to many. We know God may occasionally add time to a person's life, even when others determine life is over. What some may think is the conclusion of a life may only be the closing of a chapter, not the end of the book.

For instance, in the Old

Testament, King Hezekiah was mortally ill, but the Lord said He would heal him and add 15 years to his life. Jesus brought the daughter of Jairus back to life, and Lazarus was raised from the dead after being in his tomb for four days.

God may allow physicians to use modern technology to extend physical life today in a way that is unprecedented in human history. It is amazing to hear stories of tenacious qualities in the human spirit, and also of the ability of skilled physicians to treat crises after crisis and somehow manage to pull patients through. However, what is more important on Earth is to know where we're going when death knocks at our door.

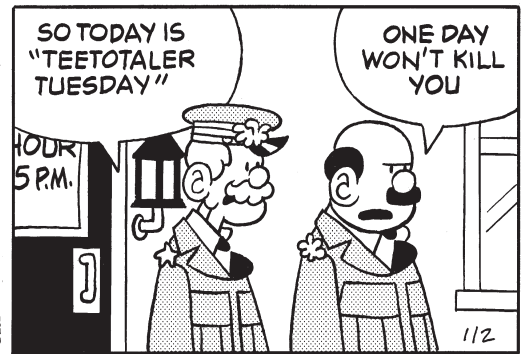
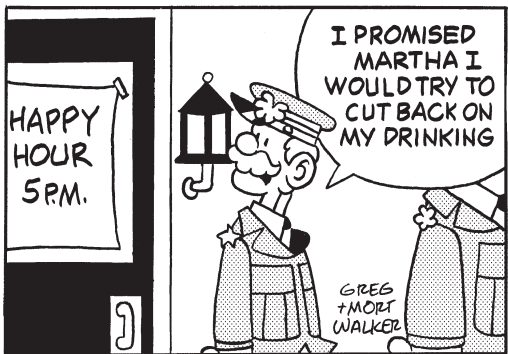
Christians find comfort in knowing that death here is not the last of us. We have assurance of eternal life that the Bible speaks about: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21, NKJV).

The testimony of a believer at the time of death can teach others how to die with hope. The resurrection of Jesus Christ alone blasts apart the finality of death, providing an alternative to the stifling, settling dust of death, opening the way to new life.

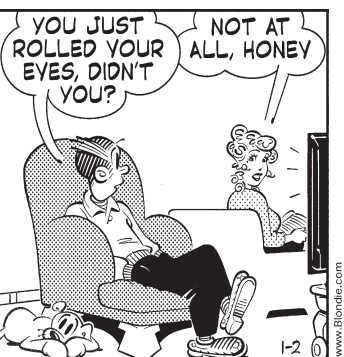
(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.) ©2023 Billy Graham Literary Trust. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

01/02	M	A	D1	D2	5 PM	5:30	6 PM	6:30	7 PM	7:30	8 PM	8:30	9 PM	9:30	10 PM	10:30	11 PM	11:30	12 AM	12:30	
WINM (12)	11	26	63		3D Woman	Julie & Friends	Movie				TCT Today	News-watch	Place for Miracles	James Robison	Dr. Robert Jeffress	Jewish Jesus	Andrew Womack	Ask the Pastor		Rabbi Lapin	
CBS WANE (15)	2	2	15	15	News (N)	Inside Edition (N)	News at 6 (N)	CBS News (N)	Wheel of Fortune (N)	Jeopardy! Fortune (N)	The Price is Right at Night (N)	Raid the Cage "Best Friends" (N)	FBI				Nightcast (N)	(35) Late Show-Colbert	(35) Comics Unleashed		
Antenna-2 WANE-2 (152)	106	20			Ch. Fire "Regarding This Wedding"		Chicago Fire "2112"	Chicago Fire "Sharp Elbows"	Chicago Fire "When Tortoises Fly"	Chicago Fire "Short and Fat"	Chicago Fire "The Beating Heart"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "Not of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"	Chicago Fire "The Path of Destruction"
ABC WPTA (21)	4	3	21	21	ABC21 News at 5 (N)	ABC21 (N)	ABC World News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)	ABC21 News (N)
NBC WPTA-2 (212)	7	8	14	14	Family Feud	25 Words or Less	News (N)	NBC News (N)	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud	Family Feud
MNT WPTA-3 (213)	10	9	56	34	The King of Queens	King "Head of Queens"	Modern Family	News (N)	Last Man Standing	Last Man Standing	Chicago Fire "A Dark Day"	Chicago Fire "One More Shot"	Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom	Mom
FOX WISE (33)	8	4	33	33	The Steve Wilkos Show		TMZ Live (N)		Dish Nation (N)	TMZ (N)	Inside the NFL (N)	Whose Line is Whose Line (N)	Dish Nation (N)	TMZ (N)	Family Guy	Family Guy	Family Guy	Family Guy	Family Guy	Family Guy	Family Guy
PBS WFVA (38)	13	5	39	39	Breakthrough "The Airplane"		PBS NewsHour (N)		BBC News America	Healthline (N)	Finding Your Roots (N)	Masters "HOPPER: An American Love Story" (N)	Citizen's Guide (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)
PBS WFPB (48)	3				Breakthrough "The Airplane"		Context	PBS NewsHour (N)	PBS NewsHour (N)	PBS NewsHour (N)	Finding Your Roots (N)	Masters "HOPPER: An American Love Story" (N)	Citizen's Guide (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)		Amanpour and Company (N)
FOX WFTT (55)	6	5	55	55	WFFT Fox News at 5 (N)		WFFT Fox News at 6 (N)		Big Bang	Big Bang	Name That Tune (N)	The Floor (P) (N)	FOX 55 News First at 10 (N)		Young Sheldon	Young Sheldon	Young Sheldon	Young Sheldon	Young Sheldon	Young Sheldon	Young Sheldon

BEETLE BAILEY



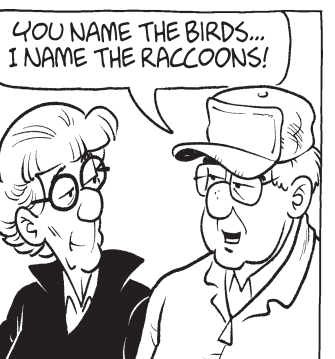
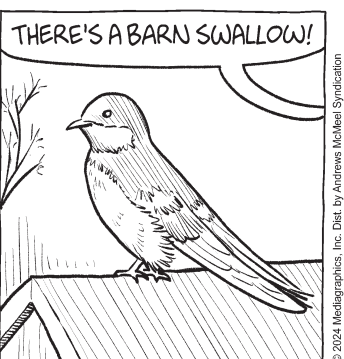
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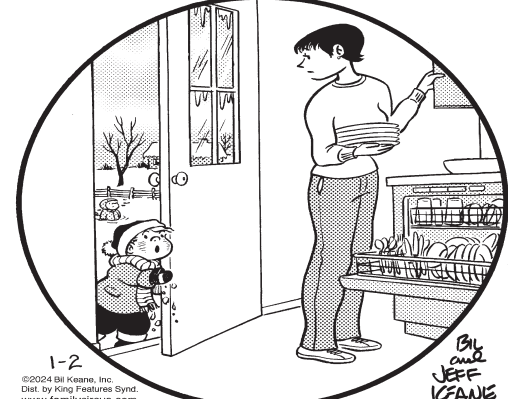


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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Idle or voiced

5 Nick and Nora's pooch

9 Deli meat

12 Rip

13 Italian cheese, for short

14 Super serve

15 Family reunion footage, e.g.

17 Skillet

18 Nitwit

19 Speedy

21 Sneeze sound

24 Sly

25 Greek consonants

26 Table protector

30 Comic Notaro

31 Kelly of "One Tree Hill"

32 Yale grad

33 Chat

35 Stated

36 Heath

37 Back street

DOWN

1 Ordinal suffix

2 Old Olds

3 "Spartacus!"

4 Beliefs

5 Per person

6 Feed the piggy bank

7 Part of TNT

8 "Barbie" actress

9 McDonald's offering for kids

10 Anti-oxidant berry

11 Repair call

20 Hearty quaff

21 Rental units (Abbr.)

22 Stylish

23 Kudos

24 Bit of merchandise

26 Indigent bank

27 Designer Claiborne

28 "I cannot tell —"

29 Spruced up

31 Sponges

34 Calendar abbr.

35 Santa's ride

37 USN bigwig

38 Rosary unit

39 News reporter Logan

40 Use scissors

41 "The — of March"

44 Ruckus

45 Tis-tac-toe loser

46 Mound stat

47 "Toy Story" dinosaur

Solution time: 22 mins.

Yesterdays answer 1-2

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12					13					14
15				16						17
21	22	23					24			
25				26	27					28 29
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33				34						35
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38	39						40	41		
42				43	44					45 46 47
48				49						50
51				52						53

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

King Classic Sudoku

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

Difficulty: ★★

1/2

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Help Wanted

HELOISE HINT: If your boss leaves the company and gets replaced with a new one. Have an overview of your job description at the ready and explain what you are responsible for within your department. You want to let your new boss know exactly what it is that you do, for an easier transition. Fax Heloise @ 210-HELOISE (435-6473).

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Lottery Numbers

Saturday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY
Cash 5 — 17-32-36-40-45
Cash4Life — 11-23-34-42-58, Cash Ball: 04
Lotto Plus — 06-12-29-35-39-42
Quick Draw Midday — 07-11-13-16-22-26-29-30-31-35-36-42-47-49-51-57-59-67-68-71, BE: 71
Daily Three-Midday — 03-00-02, SB: 09
Daily Three-Evening — 08-08-09, SB: 08
Daily Four-Midday — 07-03-06-04, SB: 09
Daily Four-Evening — 00-04-06-08, SB: 08
Quick Draw Evening — 03-06-16-23-28-33-42-43-47-49-50-52-53-54-55-57-61-62-65-68, BE: 43
Hoosier Lotto — 01-03-06-14-18-33
POWERBALL
10-11-26-27-34; Powerball: 07; Power Play: 4X

Sunday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY
Cash 5 — 03-14-26-29-39
Cash4Life — 16-17-22-36-54, Cash Ball: 03
Quick Draw Midday — 04-05-22-26-28-30-31-43-50-59-60-63-66-68-72-73-74-75-77-79, BE: 30
Daily Three-Midday — 00-03-06, SB: 00
Daily Three-Evening — 08-08-07, SB: 07
Daily Four-Midday — 05-03-09-03, SB: 00
Daily Four-Evening — 07-05-08-08, SB: 07
Quick Draw Evening — 06-09-12-18-20-25-29-30-35-40-41-42-43-50-53-54-67-71-74-76, BE: 43
POWERBALL
Estimated jackpot (for Wednesday): \$810 million

Monday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY
Cash 5 — 03-15-19-41-43
Cash4Life — 23-27-36-45-60, Cash Ball: 01
Quick Draw Midday — 03-05-07-12-16-19-20-21-24-27-30-32-37-40-43-45-54-61-62-70, BE: 20
Daily Three-Midday — 02-08-07, SB: 09
Daily Three-Evening — 05-07-02, SB: 01
Daily Four-Midday — 02-02-01-08, SB: 09
Daily Four-Evening — 09-02-08-03, SB: 01
Quick Draw Evening — 05-09-14-15-24-27-30-42-45-48-51-53-56-63-65-66-71-72-75-80, BE: 24
Hoosier Lotto — Estimated jackpot (for Wednesday): \$2.2 million
MEGA MILLIONS
Estimated jackpot (for Tuesday): \$114 million
POWERBALL
12-21-41-42-44-49 Powerball: 01; Power Play: 3X

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Public Sale Calendar

BIDDING ENDS JANUARY 1 - Online only auction - Various consignors, seller. Modeline MCM floor & table lamps and Art Nuevo, Presidential collection, advertising, toys, early Moxie thermometer, 25+ Nativity scenes, antiques, vintage primitives, artifacts, trains, Fenton, Haviland & Franciscan china, antique furniture, military items, salesman samples and miniatures, coins & currency. Sale manager, Rod Fetters. www.steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.
BIDDING ENDS JANUARY 7 - Estate of Mary Lynn Lautzenheiser, seller. Personal property online only auction. John Deere mower, lawn & garden, furniture, Christmas, books, household. Open houses: Jan. 4 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. to noon, 4917 E 100 N., Bluffton, IN. Isaac Stoller, sale manager, [The Steffen Group Inc.](http://www.steffengrp.com), <http://www.steffengrp.com>, 260-824-3006.
JANUARY 11 - 6 p.m. - Estate of Mary Lynn Lautzenheiser, seller. 4917 E. 100 N., Bluffton, IN. One-of-a-kind property w/quick access to Bluffton, Decatur, Fort Wayne. Main home was once township school building, and has covered porch walk through to previous dance studio that has potential to be fourth living unit. Property also offers detached two car garage and two-unit apartment building. Open houses: Jan. 4 from 4-6 p.m., Jan. 6 from 10 a.m.-noon. Isaac Stoller, sale manager, [The Steffen Group Inc.](http://www.steffengrp.com), <http://www.steffengrp.com>, 260-824-3006.
JANUARY 11 - 6 p.m. - Estate of Mary Lynn Lautzenheiser, seller. 4917 E. 100 N., Bluffton, IN. One-of-a-kind property w/quick access to Bluffton, Decatur, Fort Wayne. Main home was once township school building, and has covered porch walk through to previous dance studio that has potential to be fourth living unit. Property also offers detached two car garage and two-unit apartment building. Open houses: Jan. 4 from 4-6 p.m., Jan. 6 from 10 a.m.-noon. Isaac Stoller, sale manager, [The Steffen Group Inc.](http://www.steffengrp.com), <http://www.steffengrp.com>, 260-824-3006.
JANUARY 12 - 10 a.m. - Secured creditors & various consignors, owners. 815 Adams St., Decatur. Online only truck and equipment auction. Online bidding only. Offering 500+ lots! 2012-2014 Freightliner M2106 box trucks, dump trucks, day cabs, sleepers, utility trucks, bucket trucks, utility & semi trailers, SUV's, pickup trucks, 250+ various skid steer attachments, various truck parts, fencing, work benches, tool boxes and much more! Accepting consignments! [Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC](http://www.kjauction.com), 260-724-7402, [Kjauction.com](http://www.kjauction.com).
BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING JANUARY 16 - 10 a.m. EST - Carmel Wellness and secured creditors, owner. Liquidation of Carmel Wellness featuring decompression table w/tension machine, body and therapy tables, hydraulic tables, washer and dryer, folding tables, chairs, desks, office supplies, and much more! Auction pick

up Jan. 17, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. [Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC](http://www.krueckeberg.com), 260-724-7402, [Kjauction.com](http://www.kjauction.com).
BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING JANUARY 17 - 6 p.m. EST - Gary Meyer, owner. Online only commercial real estate auction! 1,376 sq. feet building, 2 bay service area, 15'x16' office space, paved parking lot, .46 acre triangle lot located on N. Main Street, (Hwy. 27) Zoned: Commercial. Year built: 1950. Wabash Township, Section 29, Adams County, Indiana, South Adams School Corp. Auction preview Jan. 8, 4-5 p.m. or by appointment, 617 N. Main St., Geneva. [Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC](http://www.krueckeberg.com), 260-724-7402, [Kjauction.com](http://www.kjauction.com).
JANUARY 23 - 2-6 p.m. ET - Online - Farm: Susan Dunn Estate. Property Location: Three miles southeast of Markle, IN and Wells Co., Rockcreek Twp. 207.3+/- total acres, high quality farmland, mostly tillable. Tracts 1 & 2: Located on both sides of 200 N between 200 W and 300 W. Tract 3: Located at intersection of 300 N and 500 W. Tract 1: 19.83+/- acres. Tract 2: 110+/- acres. Tract 3: 77.47+/- acres. [Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management](http://www.halderman.com), 800-424-2324, [halderman.com](http://www.halderman.com), Rick Johnloz, 260-827-8181.
JANUARY 30 - 2 p.m.-6 p.m. ET - Online - Farm: Mann Farm. Property Location: Three miles northwest of Craigville, IN; 1/4 mile south of US 224 along 500 E in Lancaster Township, Wells County. 36.75+/- total acres, 34.5+/- tillable, 2.25+/- non-tillable, high quality farmland, Wells Co. Soil Types: Pewamo silty clay loam, Bount Del-Rey silt loam; WAPI: 140.6 bu. corn, 43.8 bu. soybeans. Additional information, drone flight, photos available at [halderman.com](http://www.halderman.com). [Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management](http://www.halderman.com), 800-424-2324, Rick Johnloz: 260-827-8181, Neal Wolhete: 260-336-2219.

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

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More Americans think foreign policy should be a top U.S. priority for 2024, poll finds

By WILL WEISSERT and LINLEY SANDERS
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In this time of war overseas, more Americans think foreign policy should be a top focus for the U.S. government in 2024, with a new poll showing international concerns and immigration rising in importance with the public.

About 4 in 10 U.S. adults named foreign policy topics in an open-ended question that asked people to share up to five issues for the government to work on in the next year, according to a December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

That's about twice as many who mentioned the topic in the AP-NORC poll conducted last year.

Long-standing economic worries still overshadow other issues. But the new poll's findings point to increased concern about U.S. involvement overseas — 20 percent voiced that sentiment in the poll, versus 5 percent a year ago.

It also shows that the Israeli-Hamas war is feeding public anxiety. The conflict was mentioned by 5 percent, while almost no one cited it a year ago. The issue has dominated geopolitics since Israel declared war on Hamas in Gaza after that group's Oct. 7 attack on Israeli soil.

Four percent of U.S. adults mentioned the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as something for their government to focus on this year. That's similar to the 6 percent who mentioned it at the end of 2022.

Foreign policy has gained importance among respondents from both parties. Some 46 percent of Republicans named it, up from 23 percent last year. And 34 percent of Democrats list foreign policy as a focal point, compared with 16 percent a year ago.

Warren E. Capito, a Republican from Gordonsville, Virginia, worries China could soon invade Taiwan, creating a third major potential source of global conflict for the U.S. "They would love to have us split three ways," he said of China, and "we're already spread so thin."

Immigration is also a rising bipartisan concern.

Overall, the poll found that concerns about immigration climbed to 35 percent from 27 percent last year.

Most Republicans, 55 percent, say the government needs to focus on immigration in 2024, while 22 percent of Democrats listed immigration as a priority. That's up from 45 percent and 14 percent, respectively, compared with December 2022.

Janet Brewer has lived all her life in San Diego, across from Tijuana, Mexico, and said the situation on the border has deteriorated in recent years.

"It's a disaster," said Brewer, 69, who works part time after running a secretarial and legal and medical transcription small business. "It's crazy."

The politics of foreign military aid and immigration policy are entangled, with President Joe Biden's administration promoting a \$110 billion package that includes aid for Ukraine and Israel that remains stalled in Congress while Republicans push for a deal allowing major changes in immigration policy and stricter enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Brewer said she wouldn't vote for Biden or a Republican for president in 2024, and may opt for independent Robert F. Kennedy Jr. But she also questions whether a change in the White House would necessarily improve immigration policy.

As for foreign aid, she said: "I know that we need to help. But come on. We've done enough."

Even as immigration and foreign policy rose as concerns, those issues were no match for worries about the economy. Inflation has fallen, unemployment is low and the U.S. has repeatedly defied predictions of a recession — yet this poll adds to a string of them showing a gloomy outlook on the economy.

Some 76 percent of U.S. adults said this time that they want the government to work on issues related to the economy in 2024, nearly the same as the 75 percent who said so at this point in 2022.

About 85 percent of Republicans and 65 percent of Democrats name the economy as a top issue. But Republicans are more likely than Democrats to want the government to address some specific economic issues: on inflation 41 percent vs. 22 percent and on government spending or debt, 22 percent vs. 7 percent.

Meanwhile, 3 in 10 U.S. adults listed inflation as an issue that the government should focus on, unchanged from

2022. The economy is a top issue mentioned by 18- to 29-year-olds (84 percent), followed by inflation specifically (39 percent), personal finances issues (38 percent) and foreign policy (34 percent). In the same age bracket, 32 percent mentioned education or school loans as something for the government to address in 2024. That's despite the Biden administration trying new, more modest efforts to cancel debts after the Supreme Court struck down its larger original push.

Among those 30 and older, only 19 percent mention student loans. But Travis Brown, a 32-year-old forklift operator in Las Vegas, noted that he's back to getting calls seeking payment of his student loans.

"Right now, with the economy, wages are not matching," Brown said. "Blue collar's going away and I don't see how that's going to boost an economy. An economy thrives off the working class. Not off the rich."

Brown also suggested that the U.S. is too focused on shipping aid to its overseas allies.

"I care about others, I do," he said. "But when you sit here and say, 'I just sent \$50 million over to Israel' and then I go outside and I see half a neighborhood rundown ... you've got to take care of home."

One possible sign that larger sentiments on the economy could be improving slightly is that overall mentions of personal financial issues declined some, with 30 percent mentioning them now compared with 37 percent last year. Drops occurred for Democrats, 27 percent vs. 33 percent, and among Republicans, falling to 30 percent compared with 37 percent in 2022.

One-quarter of U.S. adults say 2024 will be a better year than 2023 for them personally, and 24 percent expect it will be a worse year. Some 37 percent of Republicans expect it'll be a worse year for them, compared with 20 percent of independents and 13 percent of Democrats.

Just 5 percent of U.S. adults are "extremely" or "very" confident that the federal government can make progress on the important problems and issues facing the country in 2024, with 7 percent of Democrats and 11 percent of independents being optimistic, compared with 1 percent of Republicans.

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'Wonka' ends the year No. 1 at the box office, 2023 sales reach \$9B in post-pandemic best

NEW YORK (AP) — Hollywood closed out an up and down 2023 with "Wonka" regaining No. 1 at the box office, strong sales for "The Color Purple" and an overall \$9 billion in ticket sales that improved on 2022's grosses but fell about \$2 billion shy of pre-pandemic norms.

The New Year's weekend box office this year lacked a true blockbuster. (This time last year, "Avatar: The Way of Water" was inundating theaters.) Instead, a wide array of films — among them "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," "The Boys in the Boat," "Migration," "Ferrari," "The Iron Claw" and "Anyone But You" — sought to break out over the year's most lucrative box-office corridor.

The top choice, though, remained "Wonka," Paul King's musical starring Timothée Chalamet as a young Willy Wonka. In its third weekend, the Warner Bros. release collected an estimated \$24 million Friday through Sunday and \$31.8 million factoring in estimates for the Monday holiday. That brings the film's domestic total to \$142.5 million.

That bested Warner Bros.' own "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom," which, like previous DC superhero films, is struggling. James Wan's "Aquaman" sequel starring Jason Momoa took in \$19.5 million in its second weekend to bring its two-week haul to a modest \$84.7 million including New Year's Day estimates.

The original "Aquaman," which ultimately surpassed \$1.1 billion worldwide, had grossed \$215.4 million over a similar period in 2018 — more than double that of the sequel. Internationally, "Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom" added \$50.5 million.

Weekend sales only tell part of the story this time of year. From Christmas through New Year's, when kids are out of school and many adults aren't working, every day is like Saturday to film distributors.

"The Color Purple," Blitz Bazawule's adaptation of the 2005 stage musical from Alice Walker's novel, debuted on Monday and led all movies on Christmas with \$18 million. Through the week, the Warner Bros. release has grossed \$50 million, including \$13 million Friday through Sunday. That's a strong start for the crowd-pleaser starring Fantasia Barrino, Taraji P. Henson and Danielle Brooks. Audiences gave it an "A" CinemaScore.

The roughly \$100 million production, which boasts Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg and Quincy Jones (all from the 1985 film) as producers, should play well through awards season. It's nominated for several Golden Globes and expected to be in the Oscar mix.

"We saw this opportunity to go wide at Christmas since there were so few movies and we were confident the movie would be well received," said Jeffrey Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. "Going into the competitive landscape that's so thin in January and February, the excitement of awards season could really help ignite a bigger box office."

Despite a blockbuster-less holiday frame, the last weekend of the year pushed the industry past \$9 billion in box office for the year in U.S. and Canadian theaters for the first time since before the pandemic. Ticket sales on the year were up 21% from 2022, according to data firm Comscore.

Still, it was a mark that seemed more easily within reach during the summer highs of Barbenheimer when both "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" were breaking box-office records.

The enormous success of those two films changed the trajectory of Hollywood's 2023, but so did the monthlong actors and writers strikes. Those forced the postponement of some top films (most notably "Dune: Part Two"), diminishing an already patchwork fall lineup with few guaranteed ticket-sellers. One exception was the last-minute addition of "Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour," which set a new record for concert films.

This year, Hollywood needed Swift and every penny to reach \$9 billion. It crossed that threshold Saturday, with one day to spare. That total, though, still

doesn't come close to the \$11 billion-plus years that preceded the pandemic. The number of wide releases in 2023 came about 20 films shy of those released in 2019.

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