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## O'Donnell: Economy shows growth amidst 'scars'

**By HOLLY GASKILL**  
While some numbers show growth, Jim O'Donnell is far from satisfied with current economic indicators — and even less with some cultural factors. "I think we're at a crossroads, not just financially, not just economically," O'Donnell opened his presentation. "We're flirting with a different kind of nation, a nation that is much more dependent on government and a nation that is, in many ways, stagnating in dynamic areas of community growth (and) of business development. We're sitting in an environment where economics are simply not as important as I wish people saw them to be."

O'Donnell delivered his annual economic forecast Thursday morning at the Wells County Commerce and Visitors Centre. O'Donnell has an extensive history in business and economics, publishing several books and holding the position of emeritus executive-in-residence at Huntington University.

His assessment was broken down into nine positive indicators

and 13 negative, although they didn't carry equal measure. For example, while the stock market shows some growth, O'Donnell expressed concern with taking these numbers at face value — only seven companies accounted for the vast majority of growth in the S&P 500.

By and large, O'Donnell believes these slow growth markers to be "scars" of the last two years. However, he also finds reasons for caution — a changing cultural landscape high among them.

The younger generation, O'Donnell observed, seems to have a higher pessimism toward the U.S. and capitalism at large. He added, "Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy has been deeply influenced by changing cultures, by a seeming willingness to involve government more and more and more in how we run our lives."

O'Donnell later compared this cultural battle to going to the doctor for a broken leg while having metastatic cancer. "We're dealing with something that needs to be



O'Donnell (pictured) speaks to the Thursday morning audience about the economic outlook for 2024. (Photo by Sydney Kent)

dealt with," he said. "But there's bigger issues that we don't seem to be dealing with."

Additionally, O'Donnell is

concerned with current geopolitical events, namely the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. While making no particular

claims, he advised, "This could explode in the markets."

O'Donnell is also keeping his

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Indiana Education Secretary Katie Jenner testifies before the Senate education committee on Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024. (Photo by Casey Smith from Indiana Capital Chronicle)

## Indiana literacy overhaul bill advances to Senate chamber with concerns from officials

**By CASEY SMITH**  
**Indiana Capital Chronicle**

Indiana lawmakers are moving forward with a GOP priority bill that requires earlier interventions for students struggling with literacy despite concerns from some education experts and district officials over a provision they said would require more third graders to be held back.

Senate Bill 1, authored by Sen. Linda Rogers, R-Granger, would require IREAD testing to begin a year earlier, in second grade, and allow those who pass at that stage to be exempt from taking the test again in the future. Around 60 percent of Hoosier schools are already testing students early.

Students who do not pass must receive targeted support during third grade to help them improve their reading skills. After a full year of remediation — and three chances to take the IREAD test — lawmakers want schools to retain students who do not pass the test by the end of third grade.

The bill advanced from the Senate education committee in a 9-4, party-line vote and now heads to the full chamber.

The issue drew nearly three hours of discussion and testimony at the Statehouse on Wednesday. Although many who spoke said they support other elements of the bill — especially those that seek to increase read-

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## State senators approve child care, prior authorization bills

**By WHITNEY DOWNARD**  
**Indiana Capital Chronicle**

Lawmakers on the Senate health committee weighed two measures Wednesday to relax certain child care regulations and sharply restrict the prior authorization process, passing both unanimously.

Both bills are priorities for the Republican Senate caucus, giving them the substantial support of leadership and fast-tracking the legislation.

Republican Leo Sen. Tyler Brown, an emergency physician, detailed his bill to limit prior authorization, a process used by insurance companies to guarantee payment for services. He said that while the initial impetus behind

prior authorization was to save money, it has become "blatantly wasteful" and "(gets) in the way of good patient care."

"What we see, every day, is that prior authorization has become a huge hurdle to patients getting the care that they need. At the end of the day, the people who are affected most are Hoosier patients, because prior (authorization) slows down or even stops their ability to get care," Johnson said.

But insurers and employers' associations balked at the measure, concerned that health care costs would grow and the expenses would be passed onto the plan sponsors.

"Prior authorization acts as a filter, ensuring appropriate utilization

of expensive treatments and medications. It helps weed out unnecessary procedures and promotes cost-effective alternatives, putting the brakes on runaway health care inflation," said Ashton Eller, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce's vice president of health care and employment.

"We would like to see ... carriers working together, employers working with providers and all working together to get these processes more streamlined and modernize them to make sure that these types of prior authorizations can still happen but having a time-efficient manner ... so that denials can be addressed more rapidly," he continued.

**Details of the prior**

**authorization bill**

Johnson, in particular, targeted the use of algorithms by insurers to process prior authorizations, including denials, rather than human physicians. The bill requires insurers not only use practicing doctors but that reviews of prior authorization requests be conducted by a physician in the same medical specialty.

"(Senate Bill 3) would eliminate prior (authorization) altogether for emergency services, routine care and common prescription drugs. It would also set an overall cap on prior (authorizations) so that the insurer could require prior (authorizations) for no more than 1 percent of providers and 1 percent of any given service," Johnson said.

"It also gives providers a break for a year if they meet an 80 percent threshold and get approval for their prior (authorizations)."

Several doctors testified about the limitations upon their practices placed by prior authorization requirements, detailing delayed care and denials. In a 2022 survey of members from the American Medical Association, 33 percent of physicians reported delayed care due to prior authorizations and spent an estimated 14 hours weekly dealing with prior authorizations. Hospitals, meanwhile, dedicate whole departments to navigating the complex process.

Eller acknowledged the need for reform, but said the occasional

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## Congress votes to keep the government funded into early March

**By MARY CLARE JALONICK and KEVIN FREKING**  
**Associated Press**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress sent President Joe Biden a short-term spending bill on Thursday that would avert a looming partial government shutdown and fund federal agencies into March.

The House approved the measure by a vote of 314-108, with opposition coming mostly from the more conservative members of the Republican conference. Shortly before the vote, the House Freedom Caucus announced it "strongly opposes" the measure because it would facilitate more spending

than they support.

Nevertheless, about half of Republicans joined with Democrats in passing the third stopgap funding measure in recent months. The action came a few hours after the Senate had voted overwhelmingly to pass the bill by a vote of 77-18.

The measure extends current spending levels and buys time for the two chambers to work out their differences over full-year spending bills for the fiscal year that began in October.

The temporary measure will run to March 1 for some federal agencies. Their funds were set

to run out Friday. It extends the remainder of government operations to March 8.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the president would sign the resolution and urged Republicans to quit wasting time on partisan spending bills.

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**Outside**

**Morning snow and freezing wind gusts return**

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High 22	High 17	High 19
Low 6	Low 2	Low 12

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# Economy shows growth

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eye on several other matters, specifically the federal monetary policy, lending rates and the yield curve. While these are no sole markers of instability, they're shown "interesting" patterns, O'Donnell remarked.

Separately, O'Donnell expressed skepticism of cultural leanings toward artificial intelligence and electric vehicles, which he finds have not proven their profitability long-term. While

emphasizing he is not opposed to green energy and finds AI to be a "trick pony," O'Donnell cautioned against putting the cart before the horse.

In contrast to previous years' presentations, O'Donnell did not make many assertions about the economy's direction. He touted no obvious warning sirens nor claimed any strong growth forward.

However, O'Donnell did recommend investing more in the stock

market over bonds. O'Donnell advised he currently has roughly 50 percent of his own portfolio in the market.

O'Donnell summarized, "We're going through a rough patch. We've been here before. American business people, like you guys, can fix things, adapt, (and) we can grow again. But culturally, politically, we are in a crisis."

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# Literacy overhaul bill

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ing support for the state's youngest students — push-back centered around language to codify a statewide third grade retention policy.

"There is a 60-year body of research around retention that has shown lots of negative impacts, especially social and emotional, for those students who are involved," said Fortville Elementary School principal Vincent Edwards, who has studied Indiana's retention policies in-depth. "As a principal, I've been a part of decisions to retain students before, and that is an extremely high-stakes decision for those students and those families."

Rogers maintained her "Every Child Learns to Read" bill "is not a retention bill." Instead, she said the legislation models aggressive literacy policy enacted in Mississippi a decade ago. Mandatory science of reading curriculum and tougher third grade retention rules boosted the state being ranked the second-worst in 2013 for fourth-grade reading to 21st in 2022.

"Retention is the absolute last resort after we have exhausted all other methods to help struggling readers," Rogers said. "But, simply put, if a child hasn't learned basic reading skills by (third grade), they are going to struggle to learn almost any other subject."

**Can Indiana replicate the 'Mississippi miracle'?**

Indiana third graders who fail the statewide reading exam can already be held back, but deciding how to implement the state policy is ultimately left up to schools.

Test data show that in 2023, 13,840 third graders did not pass IREAD. Of those, 5,503 received an exemption and 8,337 did not. Of those without an exemption, 95 percent moved onto 4th grade while only 412 were retained.

Exceptions are carved out in Rogers' bill for students who have been retained in third grade before, special-education students, certain English language learners, and students who pass the math portion of the statewide assessment and receive remedial reading instruction.

The measure could cause thousands more students to repeat third grade, even though its wording is almost identical to Indiana's existing administrative rule, which mandates that kids who fail the third grade IREAD test should be held back.

New in Rogers' proposal is an exception for students who pass the ILEARN math exam in third grade. Indiana Department of Education data indicates there were 583 such students in 2023.

The GOP-backed legislation additionally mandates summer school to be offered to students who are not reading proficient in third grade — or are at-risk second graders behind in literacy. Language in the bill does not require students to actually attend or participate in summer school, however.

The proposal also does not currently allow parents to appeal a school's decision to retain their child, but Rogers suggested, "perhaps," such a provision could be amended in later.

Kymyona Burk, senior policy fellow at ExcelinEd and the former literacy director at the Mississippi Department of Education, told the Senate committee that her state's literacy improvement plan, adopted in 2013, included a similar retention policy. But she doubled down that intervention before that time can — and should — keep students from repeating third grade.

"When we think about a third grade policy, we know that this is not just a third grade teacher's responsibility, but that begins in kindergarten — for some, even as early as pre-K," Burk said.

Edwards remained more skeptical and echoed similar concerns from other local officials.

He said Indiana's current policy provides schools an ability to promote students to fourth grade — with the understanding that they will receive continued instruction in third grade reading material — when it's the "best choice" for a child.

"I am not surprised that the number of students being moved on (from third to fourth grade) is high, because there is currently that flexibility," Edwards said. "And

I believe most schools are probably saying — without other factors that would prevail on a retention decision — we'd rather not retain."

He suggested the state should collect more data about Indiana's current statewide retention practices before approving new policy. Others recommended the retention mandate's effect date should be delayed until the 2025-26 school year, when all Hoosier teachers are supposed to be trained up on science of reading instruction.

### More required coursework?

Also in contention this session is a new K-12 computer science course requirement.

House Bill 1243, an omnibus measure authored by Rep. Bob Behning, R-Indianapolis, includes a provision requiring computer science coursework to be completed by students before high school graduation.

The mandate was part of Gov. Eric Holcomb's 2024 legislative agenda, and Indiana Secretary of Education Katie Jenner has rallied behind the proposal, too.

She noted Wednesday that although 91 percent of Indiana's public high schools currently offer computer science, only 7 percent of students are actually taking the class.

"It's highly important that our students are ready with these skills — not just in the tech industry, but in all industries," Jenner said, emphasizing the bill's contribution to increased career-readiness efforts.

Even so, some lawmakers and local school officials expressed concerns about the addition of another diploma requirement.

In 2021, the General Assembly mandated a semester-long civics education class for middle schoolers. Last year, requirements for separate financial literacy and career-awareness courses were additionally adopted.

"Anytime you add courses, it does make things tricky," said Tim McRoberts, associate executive director of the Indiana Association of School Principals. "Honestly, under the current diploma requirements,

# Indiana child care

(Continued from Page 1)

"hiccup" didn't undermine the system's "fundamental value." He noted that the General Assembly passed a pilot in 2023 attempting to reduce prior authorizations for certain procedures in the state health employee plan.

"I think it's prudent to see the financial impact that these changes will have ... before making employer-sponsored plans subject to the provisions of Senate Bill 3 that you're discussing today," Eller said.

But Sen. Liz Brown, the author of that legislation, said more action was needed, referring to a physician example where insurers delayed care for a patient with kidney stones through the prior authorization process.

"I believe in 2018 I tried to go down this path with prior (authorization). I remember, at the time, 90 percent of denials were paid but they took up to a year," said Brown, R-Fort Wayne. "Let's use, as an example, our suffering kidney stone patient. Care's denied, initially. Patient eventually receives care. How do we manage costs (here)? Because we're stretching out payment and reimbursement? Or have costs somehow gone down as we've stretched out the patient's literal pain and treatment?"

She pointed to moves in the private insurance indus-

try to reduce prior authorizations amid ongoing federal pressure to address delays to care.

Johnson argued that maybe prior authorizations added costs, as opposing testimony couldn't identify specific savings.

"The patient needs to be at the center of this discussion ... it's really easy to see that this puts a big burden in front of a patient getting care and adds a huge administrative cost to the system," Johnson said. "We're just adding more and more costs to health care."

The bill passed the committee unanimously.

### Incremental progress on child care

Sen. Ed Charbonneau's child care bill passed with the support of over a dozen advocacy organizations, child care provider associations and government officials.

Under Senate Bill 2, child care workers will be categorically eligible for public child care subsidies, CPR training will become biannual — rather than annual — and age restrictions for certain workers are lowered to 18 for younger children and 16 for older children.

The hope is that by reducing regulation it will help with staffing shortages in the child care industry.

"I don't want anyone to walk out of this room today thinking that we're sacri-

ficing safety in any respect whatsoever," Charbonneau, R-Valparaiso, said. "Because we're not."

Several testified that the eased restrictions on child care workers will increase workforce retention and recruitment to a field that earns an annual median income of \$25,730.

Additionally, it establishes three micro centers in a pilot program testing the framework for providers caring for less than 30 children. According to the fiscal note for the bill, the administrative oversight for such centers will cost between \$80,000 and \$130,000.

The bill includes some new responsibilities for state agencies.

The Family and Social Services Administration, the agency tasked with overseeing many of the state's child care programs, will be tasked with creating a dashboard of available subsidies for providers and parents. The Indiana Economic Development Corporation will provide updates related to 2023 efforts to incentivize businesses to offer child care support for their employees. Last year, the General Assembly established a tax credit for companies that either provide child care or offer subsidies to offset the cost and FSSA distributed over \$18 million in grants late last year.

# Weather

Friday, January 19, 2024

(24-hour observations at 9:52 p.m. Thursday)  
**High:** 27; **Low:** 21; **Precipitation:** Trace of snow  
**Wabash River Level** (at the Main Street bridge): 2.21 feet at 9:45 p.m. Thursday

## Wells County forecast

**Today:** Snow showers, mainly before 9 a.m. High near 22. Northwest wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph. Chance of precipitation is 80 percent. New snow accumulation of around an inch possible.

**Friday Night:** A 30 percent chance of snow showers, mainly before 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 6. Wind chill values as low as -10. West wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

**Saturday:** Partly sunny and cold, with a high near 17. Wind chill values as low as -10. West wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

**Saturday Night:** Mostly cloudy, with a low around 2. West wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

**Sunday:** Sunny and cold, with a high near 19.

**Sunday Night:** Mostly cloudy, with a low around 12.

**Monday:** A 20 percent chance of rain after 1 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 33.

**Monday Night:** Rain likely, mainly after 1 a.m. Cloudy, with a low around 30. Chance of precipitation is 60 percent.

**Tuesday:** Rain likely. Cloudy, with a high near 38. Chance of precipitation is 70 percent.

**Tuesday Night:** Rain likely. Cloudy, with a low around 34. Chance of precipitation is 70 percent.

**Wednesday:** A 50 percent chance of rain. Cloudy, with a high near 43.

# Congress votes

(Continued from Page 1)

"House Republicans must finally do their job and work across the aisle to pass full-year funding bills that deliver for the American people and address urgent domestic and national security priorities by passing the President's supplemental request," Jean-Pierre said.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has been under pressure from his right flank to scrap a \$1.66 trillion budget price tag he reached with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer earlier this month for the spending bills. Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said the continuing resolution passed Thursday will facilitate that agreement, and urged colleagues to vote against it.

"It's Groundhog Day in the House chamber all the time, every day, yet again spending money we don't have," Roy said.

Johnson has insisted he will stick with the deal, and centrists in the party have stood behind him. They say that changing course now would be going back on his word and would weaken the speaker in future negotia-

tions.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said Americans expect Congress to govern and work in a bipartisan fashion.

"Some of my colleagues would see that this government would shut down and don't care how hurtful that would be," DeLauro said.

House Republicans have fought bitterly over budget levels and policy since taking the majority at the start of 2023. Former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., was ousted by his caucus in October after striking an agreement with Democrats to extend current spending the first time. Johnson has also come under criticism as he has wrestled with how to appease his members and avoid a government shutdown in an election year.

"We just needed a little more time on the calendar to do it and now that's where we are," Johnson said Tuesday about the decision to extend federal funding yet again. "We're not going to get everything we want."



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Ossian Rotary is beginning its annual January-February shoe drive to collect shoes for those in need. (Photo provided)

## Ossian Rotary begins annual shoe collection

Ossian Rotary has begun its annual shoe collection, which continues until the end of February. The local service organization has collected over 4,000 pairs of used shoes to repurpose them to those in need over the past four years. As in past years, this year's collection is working in conjunction with the nonprofit organization Changing Footprints.

As its mission, Changing Footprints realizes the great need for shoes in our country and around the world as protection from diseases and a gateway to education. Shoes in any condition are collected for homeless, disaster-stricken, or underprivileged people locally, nationally and internationally regardless of race, religion, gender, or ethnicity. Even damaged and single shoes are converted to safe playground material upon which children run and play.

The organization collects and redistributes 60,000 pairs a year and on average 80 percent of the shoes collected locally are redistributed in Indiana — although shipments of shoes were also sent to Ukraine to help those in need there.

Shoe collection bins are located at Ossian and Lancaster Elementary Schools, Nor-

well Middle and High Schools, First Baptist Church of Ossian, Ossian Church of the Nazarene, Ossian Health Communities, Rod's Rustics on Main Street in Ossian and Caylor-Nickel Family Foundation YMCA in Bluffton.

Shoe pairs should be tied or bagged together to assist distribution efforts.

Ossian Rotary meetings are Thursday mornings at 7:30 at the First Baptist Church of Ossian, 1001 Dehner Drive on the north side of Ossian. Anyone is welcome to attend. For more information, please contact Jeremy Penrod, Ossian Rotary President, at jeremy.penrod@edwardjones.com.

Rotary International is the world's largest international service organization. Rotary brings together a global network of volunteer leaders dedicated to tackling the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges. Rotary connects 1.2 million members of more than 33,000 Rotary clubs in over 200 countries and geographical areas. Their work impacts lives at both the local and international levels, from helping families in need in their own communities to working toward a polio-free world.

# Police Notebook

## INCIDENTS

### City:

Tuesday, 4:19 p.m., 400 block of North Williams Street. Officer requested to stand by for check on dog. No issues.

Wednesday, 4:46 p.m., ells County YMCA. Report of a multiple vehicles in parking lot with broken windows, purses stolen from vehicles. YMCA to review video footage.

Wednesday, 6:12 p.m., Christian New Light Church. Report of a noise complaint from vehicle. Music off when officer arrived, owner advised of complaint.

Wednesday, 10:41 p.m., 600 block of Beth Avenue. Report of a domestic altercation.

Thursday, 5:01 a.m., 2300 North Spruce Drive. Officer transported woman and children to parking lot to pick up vehicle.

Thursday, 7:06 a.m., WEG. Attempt to locate subject with warrant; Ryan Graham detained and taken to Wells County Jail.

Thursday, 8:06 a.m., North Main and East Wabash streets. Report of juvenile walking with backpack not dressed for the

weather. Officer located student and drove them to school.

Thursday, 11:09 a.m., Walmart. Report of multiple theft charges.

### County:

Wednesday, 4:20 p.m., Markle Church of Christ. Driver cited for speeding 78 in a 55 mph zone.

Wednesday, 6:15 p.m., Ind. 116 and 150 North, Bluffton. Car versus deer.

Wednesday, 10:38 p.m., Family Ford. Report of a car with open door in lot.

Thursday, 7:03 a.m., River Road and South 450 East, Bluffton. Vehicle partially in roadway. Officer spoke with registered owner via text who advised to push it off the road. Vehicle was pushed with assistance from passerby who advised it was his father's car.

Thursday, 7:18 a.m., South Main and East South streets, Bluffton. Driver cited for running a red light.

Thursday, 8:13 a.m., South 300 West and Ind. 218, Bluffton. Driver cited for speeding.

Thursday, 8:46 a.m., South 450 West and Ind. 218, Poneto. Driver cited for speeding.

Thursday, 11:41 a.m., 8500 block of Southeast Jeff Road, Warren. Report of a damaged gate from property being broken into.

### Ossian:

Wednesday, 2:41 p.m., 100 East and 700 North, Ossian. Driver cited for speeding.

Thursday, 2:25 a.m., Ind. 1 and 1200 North, Ossian. Driver pulled over due to registration stating owners license is suspended. Driver was not the registered owner and advised she'll be complaining about this.

### ARRESTS

Ryan Lee Graham, 39, Bluffton, domestic battery, a Level 5 felony, and strangulation — aggravated, and confinement, both Level 6 felonies. No bond set.

Jodie Jean Inskip, 53, Uniondale, battery, a Class B misdemeanor. Booked and released.

Aaron Emmanuel Anaya, 35, Bluffton, operating a vehicle while intoxicated, a Class A misdemeanor. Bond set at \$1,500.

Grace Mona Sims, 21, Fort Wayne, possession of marijuana, a Class A misdemeanor. Bond set at \$1,500.

# Panel votes to ease youth employment restrictions

By CASEY SMITH

## Indiana Capital Chronicle

A House employment committee voted 8-3 Thursday to ease several child labor laws, including allowing youth as young as 14 to work during school hours with parental permission.

Supporters noted the bill mirrors existing federal law and a key amendment is largely aimed at Amish or Mennonite children who don't go to school past eighth grade. But opponents stressed the need for child labor laws and keeping children in school.

"As it turns out, state regulations are more stringent than federal regulations when it comes to employing our youth workforce," said Rep. Kendall Culp, R-Rensselaer.

House Bill 1093 repeals provisions restricting how long and when minors between 16 and 18 can work. It also specifies that a prohibition on kids aged 16 to 18 working in a hazardous occupation doesn't apply to youth performing farm labor.

An amendment was added with language from House Bill 1062 that a child who is at least 14 and has completed eighth grade can work during traditional work hours with parent approval.

Stephen Jones testified that when a child or a student leaves the structure of a school, their learning doesn't end.

"This is an attempt to roll back child labor protections that have been fought for generations after generation," said Shawn Christ, secretary treasurer for the Indiana State AFL-

CIO.

"We teach our children to work in a responsible way so that they can become productive citizens in our society," he said.

In response to a question about hazardous jobs, he said, "I can answer that as a minister and a grandfather in our community... every Amish family, Mennonite family, does everything they can to protect the wellbeing of their child."

Christ, called the bill "an attempt to roll back child labor protections that have been fought for for generations after generation."

He noted that in the 19th Century, one in every six minors under 16 was employed. But years of advocacy and common sense have reduced that.

"We believe that chil-

dren should focus on improving their education and obtaining skills transferrable to the workplace," Christ said. "We believe that removal of the work hour restrictions for children who are 16 to 17 makes them vulnerable to potential abuse of being overworked by unscrupulous employers at the expense of their education."

Others who testified in support, including Indiana Beach Amusement Park, said it's a struggle to fill positions when students have to stop working at 7 p.m. on school days. And yet other students who participate in sports are out well past those times.

The committee voted 8-3, with all Democrats against the bill. It now moves to the full House.



## Elks honors Bluffton's football team

Wednesday night, the Bluffton Elks hosted an event to honor the Tigers' seniors on the football team and their success in winning back-to-back sectional titles. Included in the event was a certificate of achievement to the team and a donation to the Bluffton Athletic Department. The Elks said in an email, "Bluffton Elks Lodge 796 recognizes the importance of fostering a positive & competitive spirit in our local sports community. The Bluffton High School football program exemplifies those values. The Elks extend a heartfelt congratulations to the Bluffton High School football program for their achievements in winning consecutive football Sections during the 2022 & 2023 seasons. Bluffton Elks also commends the players and coaches for their hard work." (Photos provided)



## Thornton, Waldman win hoop shoot regional

Wells County was well represented at the regional Elks Hoop Shoot Saturday at Indian Springs Middle School in Columbia City. Avery Thornton (12-13 girls) and Cody Waldman (12-13 boys) won their age group and will advance to the state competition in New Castle. (Photo provided)

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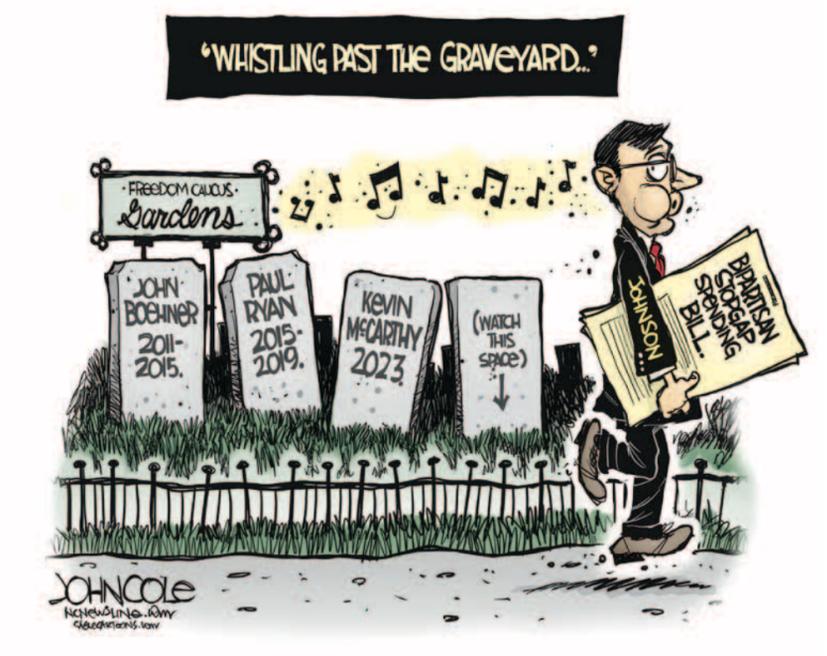
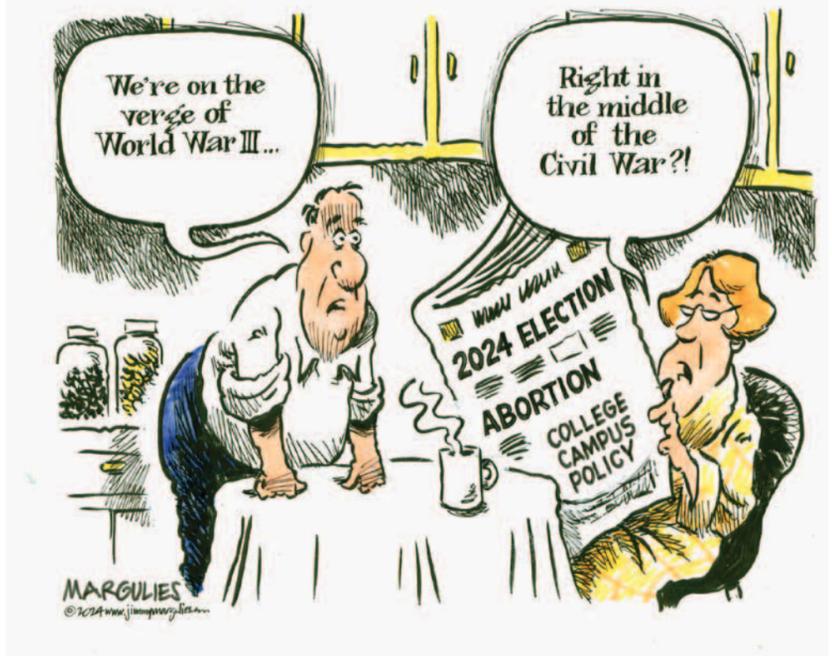
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The Week That Was - a look back through cartoonists' eyes...



Vacationing with Donald Trump

Larisa and I have been preparing for a much-needed vacation. I've been staring at a pretty hectic work schedule leading up to it, so I decided to pack early.



Doug Brown

Three weeks early. If we were leaving today (we aren't), all I need to do is throw some pre-selected shirts in my carry-on bag and head out the door.

We no longer check our luggage at the airport. One carry-on and backpack are all we need for seven days. We learned the hard way to pack light.

A few years ago we decided — on short notice — to tag along with another couple on their planned Dominican Republic vacation. We decided to go on Sunday and booked a flight on Thursday morning. Mistakes were made and it turned into a comedy of errors.

The weather was horrific, as it is prone to be in February. We drove to Chicago and sat on the plane at O'Hare for six hours while they repeatedly de-iced it. Our friends, meanwhile, left from the Fort Wayne International Airport without issue.

When we finally arrived at our destination, we were informed that Larisa's luggage was in Minnesota.

Hundreds of dollars later, she had the necessities to last a day or two. A swimsuit, cover-up and flip-flops. Everything is expensive at resorts.

That trip was our first experience with Canadians from Canada. We know quite a few Canadians, all of whom currently live in the U.S. There's a difference.

We became a curiosity to the Canadians from Canada. They only wanted to talk about one thing — Donald Trump.

Once they learned I was in the news industry, it was over for me. They were fascinated by "that orange clown." Their words, not mine.

I had no interest in talking about politics, I was there to unplug and get away from the world.

I have since learned the only way to turn the tables on a Canadian's Trump interrogation is to ask "How about Justin Trudeau? That guy is nuts!" It gives me just enough cover for a clean getaway.

I blame the Canadians from Canada but it seems like every English-speaking-non-American person grills us.

By us, I mean me. The newspaper guy. The leader of the free world is important to everyone, not just to the U.S. and our neighbors to the north.

At some point during that trip, our credit card was stolen. When we left for home we had just enough borrowed cash to pay for the transport to the airport. We landed at Midway in Chicago, around midnight on Sunday. We quickly realized that we had flown into the wrong airport. Our car was at O'Hare.

We somehow made it home around 4 a.m. Monday morning, slept minimally and got ready for work at 8 a.m.

So many things went wrong that weekend but we loved it so much. We learned a lot about traveling and have avoided repeating most of the mistakes.

The exception is Trump.

During the Canadian COVID-19 travel bans, there was a reprieve from the endless questions. The resorts were empty and nobody talked to us about politics. There were also significantly fewer English-speaking people around.

I realize this is an election year and the worldwide Trump fascination has ramped up again, but I'm going to do my best to avoid it completely.

Sorry, Donald, I'm going on vacation with my wife. You're not invited.

doug@news-banner.com

Explaining Trump's big win

Even though it was the first time Republicans had voted in this presidential contest, there was a last-stand mentality here in Iowa among those who hoped to stop former President Donald Trump from reclaiming the Republican nomination. Their goal was to push the candidacy of Nikki Haley hard and hope that Haley, together with the fading Ron DeSantis, would not actually defeat Trump but keep him below 50% of the total vote. That way, they would argue that, in total, more GOP caucus voters had voted for someone other than Trump than voted for him.

It didn't work. Trump won with 51% of the vote and can now make the opposite argument: I won more votes than all the opposition combined. It's over. Why don't we just give me the nomination right now? An even shorter version of the night is: Trump won big, period.

He won 98 of Iowa's 99 counties. He won women voters. He won urban, suburban, and rural voters. He won every age group over 30, losing only the 18 to 29 group. He won evangelical Christians. He won college graduates. He won those without a college degree. In short, he won everybody.

Trump's across-the-board victory is sure to push the anti-Trump forces to wage an even more desperate battle against him in the New Hampshire primary, seven days away. Of course, Trump is leading in the polls there, too, although not nearly as decisively as he did in Iowa. But in New Hampshire, the anti-Trump forces' hope will be to convince enough Democrats and independent (known in New Hampshire as "undeclared") voters to take part in the Republican primary and defeat Trump.

They tried that in Iowa, where the rules allowed a Democrat or independent to come to the GOP primary, register as a Republican, and vote right away. According to media entrance polls, 16% of the electorate Monday night identified themselves as independent, while 2% were Democrats. At the caucus I covered, a precinct in the Des Moines suburb of Ankeny, there were a total of 180 voters. The party volunteers running the event told me that of that group, 25 people had registered as Republicans at the door. They didn't have any further information on that group, but it is safe to say they kept Haley in the game in a precinct in which Trump and DeSantis were fighting it out — the final result was DeSantis, 58 votes; Trump 57 votes; Haley 56; Vivek Ramaswamy 8, and Ryan Binkley 1.

Overall, in the entrance poll, Haley romped, just absolutely cleaned up, among voters who described themselves as "moderate" — she won 63% of them. The problem was, those "moderate" voters made up only 9% of the total caucus electorate, according to the entrance polls. Fifty-two percent of all voters described themselves as "very conservative," and Trump won 61% of them, while 37% described themselves as "somewhat conservative," and Trump won 47% of them. (One percent of voters described themselves as "liberal," but that wasn't enough to get any data on how they voted.)

The night was a blow to Haley, who was not only rising in the polls but, rich with GOP big-donor money, actually spent more money on advertising in Iowa than either Trump or DeSantis. After the results were known, Haley engaged in some bravado by claiming the caucuses

had made the Republican contest a two-candidate race, meaning herself and Trump. That is not what happened. Instead, the caucuses showed that the "moderate" camp inside the GOP just isn't big enough to put a candidate over the top. And at least on a really cold night in Iowa — leaving the caucus, it was six below zero where I was in Ankeny — not enough independents and moderates came out to push Haley to a win.



Byron York

Then there was DeSantis, who was relying on solidly conservative Republican voters who nevertheless want the party to move on from Trump. Among the 52% of the caucus electorate calling themselves "very conservative," DeSantis won 26% to Trump's 61% (and Haley's 5%). Among the tiny "moderate" group, where Haley won with 63%, DeSantis won just 7%, indicating that he really did attract conservative voters.



Monday night was do-or-die for DeSantis. The polls, especially the influential Des Moines Register poll, had showed him slipping to third place behind Haley in the final days of the campaign; in the RealClearPolitics average of polls, DeSantis had fallen to three points behind Haley. The consensus among insiders, or at least those who didn't work for the DeSantis campaign, was that DeSantis could not survive a third-place finish. In conversations in the last few days of the race, DeSantis' surrogates and staffers said they just didn't think the polls

were accurate. They believed that DeSantis' carefully built ground game would prevail over Haley when cold caucus night came.

They were right. Instead of losing by three points, DeSantis beat Haley by two points, 21.2% to 19.1%. DeSantis supporters were both relieved and eager to keep fighting. They were also really, really angry at media organizations that called the race for Trump so early that some caucus-goers hadn't even voted yet. They had a point — that really shouldn't happen again; it wouldn't be hard for media organizations to agree on a time, immediately after all votes have been cast, to release projections.

Now the race moves on to New Hampshire, where the more "moderate" Republican primary electorate, including Democrats and undeclareds, is better for Haley than DeSantis — but which Trump still leads by 14 points in the RealClearPolitics average. And then, were DeSantis to keep slogging, the race goes to South Carolina, where Trump is extremely popular — many insiders believe he will beat Haley in her home state. So if DeSantis goes on, there is a good chance he will lose to Trump in New Hampshire and then lose to Trump in South Carolina, on top of losing to Trump in Iowa. Where will that get him? Nowhere.

The fact is, the Iowa caucuses confirmed what the polls had said for months. The Republican race is Donald Trump far ahead, and a couple of other candidates far behind. If that dynamic continues, it will not come as a shock that the candidate who is far ahead will win.

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Byron York is chief political correspondent for The Washington Examiner

Lost and found etiquette

Dear Annie: I have a good friend who constantly wants to talk about politics. The problem is that we are on opposite ends of the spectrum. She thinks she's politically savvy. She is not educated or well informed, but she has an opinion on everything. How can I get her to stop talking about politics? — Political Mess

Dear Political Mess: This problem is incredibly common and, unfortunately, has caused the end of many friendships. So know that you are not alone.

It sounds like the odds of having a productive conversation with this friend are low, so try to stay away from political topics altogether. When she brings them up, you can redirect the conversation by, say, asking about her children or inquiring about a recent vacation that she took. You can also try your best to find some common ground — no matter how small or vague — and keep the conversation there. Good luck!

Dear Annie: What is the etiquette for items left behind after a party? Is it my responsibility as a host to find the owners of the items and deliver them? What is an acceptable time frame?

We host several family events during the year at our home, and there are always a few items that our guests leave behind. Sometimes I send out a photo to all guests of the lost and found pile or will follow up individually when I know who the item belongs to. Sometimes I have no idea who it belongs to, and it stays in our garage in a lost and found pile, seemingly never to be claimed.

When I reach out to let people

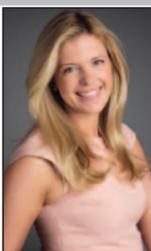
know what was left behind, some will apologize (no apology is needed); some will respond in a way that makes me feel that I should have told them sooner than a few days later; and some still don't initiate arrangements to come pick up the items. Is it on me as the host to deliver items left behind? Should I just assume the guest will contact me if it is important enough to them? — Lost and Found

Dear Lost and Found: Sending one text or email is a nice courtesy, but it certainly is not on you to deliver items that your guests have left behind. If nobody claims the missing item, you can send a message saying, "I will be donating everything that has been left behind at the end of the month, so please claim what's yours!" That way, your guests have a chance to retrieve their belongings and you aren't forced to serve as anyone's storage unit.

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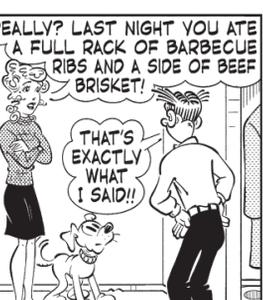
Dear Annie by Annie Lane



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My Answer by Dr. Billy Graham



'Poor in spirit' is to be aware of our spiritual poverty

Q: I heard a sermon that stated that just because we do good things doesn't make us fit for Heaven and that we are in "spiritual poverty," but what does that mean? — S.P.

A: The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most well-known sermons given by Jesus, but the reference to the poor is often misquoted. In this great sermon, Jesus blesses the poor "in spirit" (Matthew 5:3, NKJV). If Jesus had omitted the last two words, they would have all rejoiced, for they were all poor — but Jesus said "the poor in spirit."

At first, it sounds like a contradiction. We usually think of people who are poor as being unhap-

py. But Jesus teaches that happiness can be found in spite of poverty. What kind of poverty did Jesus have in mind? Did He mean those who had very little of this world's goods? No. Certainly they were included. But Jesus was speaking to people of every type — rich or poor, sick or well, educated or uneducated, young or old. God is concerned about every person on this planet, and Jesus' words were addressed to everyone in every circumstance and in every generation.

"Poor in spirit" is to be aware of our spiritual poverty. No one is more pathetic than he who is in great need and not aware of it. The body can be strengthened by food

and water, but the soul cannot not be nourished apart from the Spirit of the living God. The soul, created in the image of God, cannot be fully satisfied until it knows God in the proper way. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, NKJV). To belong to Christ is to know the "exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues: Across 1 Doze (off), 4 Crooned, 8 'The Da Vinci' —, 12 Actress Mendes, 13 Taxi alter-native, 14 Graph line, 15 Built to last, 17 Missing, 18 Goodies called, 19 Formerly called, 21 Golf peg collections, 26 Spud format, 29 Adobe file of U.S.A., 32 "Evita" role ranks, 34 Badge metal, 35 Chairman of China, 36 Encounters. Down 1 Salaman-der, 2 Done with Valley, 3 Historic South Carolina, 4 Humiliate, 5 New, 6 Award, 7 Future atty.'s exam, 8 Beloved, 9 Kitchen gadget, 10 Insult, creatures, 11 Ballpark fig., 16 In a while, 20 Seasonal helper, 23 Incite, 24 Baseball glove, 25 Back talk, 26 "Toodledo!" fort, 27 During, 28 Look after, 29 Saigon soup, 32 Waterfall, 33 Capital of South Korea, 35 Chess pieces, 36 Juveniles slangily, 38 Coffee bar offering, 39 Old gold coin with teeth, 43 Revise, 44 Contradict, 45 "Let's Get Loud" singer, to fans, 46 PC port — Paulo, Brazil, 49 100 yrs.

TV schedule grid showing channels (WJLA, MeTV, etc.), times (5 PM, 6 PM, etc.), and program titles (Last Flight Out, Inside Edition, etc.).

Additional crossword puzzle grid and clues for 'Yesterday's answer 1-19'.

# Panthers edge out Tigers in hard-fought battle

**By RYAN WALKER**  
Eastbrook's adjustments in the second half spoiled what could have been a big win for Bluffton against a team with a now 18-1 record.

The 66-52 score doesn't indicate the lead changes, multiple runs and clutch shots that both teams made Thursday night at The Tiger Den. But the Panthers were the ones who took the last run of 18-10 late and had the Tigers licking their paws in defeat.

"We're playing the No. 4 team in the state and they shoot the ball extremely well," Bluffton head coach Doug Curtis said after the game. "They took us out of our defense

— we didn't even attempt the defense I like to play. I was happy for three to three and a half quarters in there and we just didn't put the finishing touches on it."

The two high-scoring teams got right to work after the opening tipoff. Bluffton went full steam ahead into an 11-7 advantage in less than three minutes. Then, Eastbrook's head coach Jeff Liddick blew an early timeout that aided their own run. In less than two minutes after the timeout, Olivia Howell and Grace College commit Sophia Morrison stormed the Panthers ahead 16-11.

Eastbrook hit four threes in the quarter, three of them

by Kortney Goff and one from Morrison.

Tigers' forward Maryn Schreiber played her part well in dousing the 24-point fire out from the Panthers. She shredded through the man-to-man defense and made six buckets down in the paint.

Her 12 points in the first quarter kept the Tigers in the game and opened up the floor for the rest of the team. That's where Bluffton took its turn.

To begin the second, Eastbrook stretched its 5-point lead to nine. With 4:13 remaining in the half, Marly Drayer drained her first and only three-point attempt to get down by six. Then, she picked off a Panther pass to score an easy two.

Eastbrook's Mia Bustos hit her only shot of the night, and final one for the Panthers in the final 3:20. Madyson Sonnigsen started a final burst of points with a three in the corner, while Konley Ault cleaned a pair of baskets, and found the Tigers a lead before the break at 35-32.

Bluffton went 18-6 in the second and had hope with the No. 4 team in 2A, but unfortunately for the Tigers, that was when the Panthers took its turn.

Bluffton was just fine for half of the third quarter, as Schreiber found two more makes to add to her 16-point, six-rebound night. Isabella Stout's free throws in the final two minutes of the period held on to a 44-36 lead.

But Morrison hit two jumpers and edged to a 44-41 deficit that quickly dwindled down with Audri Prater's three and four points to Howell.

Howell's free throws would give the Panthers the lead 48-46 into the final quarter.

Sonnigsen, who hit a three in the same corner already, went back-to-back to spark life for the Tigers after the 12-2 run. But that could not stop Prater, How-



Bluffton's Konley Ault (left) and Isabella Stout (right) tag-team in an effort to take the ball away from Eastbrook's Sophia Morrison Thursday night at The Tiger Den. The Tigers fell to the Panthers in an all-out battle 66-52. (Photos by Ryan Walker)



Bluffton's Konley Ault (top) dishes a pass in the paint to Maryn Schreiber (bottom), a popular play for the Tigers against Eastbrook. Schreiber finished the game with a team-high 16 points on 8-9 shooting in the paint. Ault had four assists.

ell and Morrison.

The three combined for a final 16-0 run, creating turnovers and suffocating Schreiber in the post. The Tigers forward and leading scorer had no attempts in the fourth quarter, and the team went only 2-5 in the period due to the turnovers.

Meanwhile, Eastbrook hit two threes and made every free throw down the stretch and pulled out a victory.

Curtis explained the frustration, as the Panthers cooked up a defensive scheme against Schreiber and went after their weakness.

"Our gameplan was really good," Curtis said about the first half with Schreiber's six made shots. "We were driving lanes and were able to get the ball inside, but (Eastbrook) took her away as they continued to change defenses and they finally found that one where it all packed two-on-two on there and we didn't have the driving lanes. Then, it became more of a passing game, and that's been a struggle of ours all year. So,

I thought in the fourth quarter that was the key is once you found the pack two-one-two instead of the spread out stuff, it made a difference and we struggled."

Bluffton now falls to 15-6 on the season after going 12-1 to start the season. Its tough competition against Fairfield, Woodlan, Bellmont, Jay County and Eastbrook in the final games of the regular season have hurt them, now 3-4 since Dec. 21.

There are only two matches remaining for the Tigers, at Heritage and hosting Manchester for Senior Night. Those will be the final opportunities before the team heads to South Adams for the state tournament. The pairing show is taking place at 5:30 p.m. this Sunday on the IHSAA website.

"To get over that hump to win a sectional and win these last couple games with confidence, we have to be tougher with the basketball every possession," Curtis

said. "And, it can't be three-quarters of that, it has to be four-quarters of that. You've got to be tough."

Bluffton travels to play the Patriots at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 20.

Bluffton fell in the junior varsity contest 33-22. Isla Gibson had seven points and Addison Yates five.

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EASTBROOK 66, BLUFFTON 52	
At Bluffton	
<b>EASTBROOK (18-1):</b> Olivia Howell 12-18 2-3 26, Sophia Morrison 3-8 6-6 14, Kortney Goff 4-7 0-0 12, Audri Prater 1-5 2-2 5, Estah McKim 2-4 0-0 4, Mia Bustos 1-3 0-0 2. TOTALS: 24-45 10-11 66.	<b>BLUFFTON (15-6):</b> 8-9 0-0 16, Isabella Stout 4-8 1-2 9, Madyson Sonnigsen 3-4 0-0 9, Konley Ault 3-6 1-1 7, Haley Gibson 3-8 0-0 6, Marly Drayer 2-4 0-0 5, Tressa Renner 0-1 0-0 0, Sophie Eisenhut 0-0 0-0 0, Cayah King 0-0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 23-40 2-3 52.
<b>Eastbrook 24 8 16 18 — 66</b>	<b>Bluffton 19 16 11 10 — 52</b>
Three-point FG: Eastbrook 8-18	
(Goff 4-6, Morrison 2-6, Howell 0-1), Bluffton 4-10 (Sonnigsen 3-4, Drayer 1-1, Renner 0-1, Stout 0-1, Gibson 0-3). Rebounds: Eastbrook 16 (McKim 6, Howell 3, Prater 3, Bustos 2, Morrison 1, Goff 1), Bluffton 17 (Schreiber 6, Stout 4, Sonnigsen 3, Ault 2, Gibson 1, Drayer 1). Turnovers: Eastbrook 9, Bluffton 17. Fouls: Eastbrook 7, Bluffton 11. Fouled Out: None. Technicals: None.	
JV: 33-22 Eastbrook.	



Norwell's Trevon Stoppenhagen (middle) moments after signing with IU Kokomo Thursday morning at Norwell High School. The senior plans on doing sprints and studying criminal justice at the school. (Photo by Ryan Walker)

## Norwell's Stoppenhagen signs with IU Kokomo to run track

**By RYAN WALKER**  
Norwell's Trevon Stoppenhagen signed his letter of intent with IU Kokomo on his birthday at the high school Thursday morning.

The sprinter just finished his junior season making it to the state meet at Indiana University and said he can finally take a deep breath now with the recruiting process.

"It's a good question because there were a lot of options," Stoppenhagen said after signing the papers. "There were probably five or six schools that all offer good benefits and

good things for me. But, when I visited IU Kokomo, I already had friends down there and got better connected with the coach. It already felt like home to me."

Of one of his friends at Kokomo already is Trevon Hess, and will see a few familiar faces as Southern Wells runners Nick and Nathan Lozoya are also on the team.

The Cougars compete in the NAIA and will be participating at Indiana Tech's indoor track meet Friday in an all-day Invitational.

Their first outdoor meet of the season will be at Myr-

tle Beach, South Carolina at the Alan Connie Shamrock Invitational in March.

For IU Kokomo, Stoppenhagen hopes to continue running sprints but says he is versatile and willing to try new things. He also plans to study criminal justice.

Before he steps foot on campus, he wants to finish out his senior season with a bang.

"One of my goals is going back to state I didn't place or anything last year, but that's the No. 1 goal this year," Stoppenhagen said.

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## RACING NEWS

### Mercedes F1 tech director Allison signs a long-term contract

BRACKLEY, England (AP) — Mercedes technical director James Allison has signed a long-term contract extension with a view to helping the team back to the top of Formula One.

Mercedes announced the deal on Thursday, without saying how long the new contract is for. Earlier this week, team principal Toto Wolff — who is also friends with Allison — signed a new three-year deal.

The 55-year-old Allison joined Mercedes in 2017 during a period of prolonged success for the Silver Arrows team. Allison's technical expertise helped star driver Lewis Hamilton win consecutive F1 titles from 2017-2020, taking his record-equaling tally to seven.

"It is a great privilege to continue this adventure, working alongside brilliant colleagues and fighting together for championship success," Allison said.

Mercedes also won the constructors' championship from 2017-2021 before Red Bull took over as F1's leading team, with Max Verstappen completely dominating the past two seasons.

Mercedes failed to win a race last year and won only one in 2022 through George Russell, while the last of Hamilton's record 103 wins came in Saudi Arabia at the penultimate race of the 2021 campaign.

Mercedes admitted getting its car design completely wrong in 2022 — when it suffered more than most other cars from the effect of bouncing, known as porpoising — while 2023 proved to be equally frustrating for Hamilton and Russell.

But Wolff is confident that Allison can help the team compete for victories again.

"Put simply, he is the most impressive technical leader in our sport. His gladiator spirit, along with his knowledge, experience, and determination, make him second-to-none," Wolff said. "His influence and impact, however, goes so much further than that. Since joining in 2017, he has been a key ally and sparring partner for me personally. We can challenge each other openly and honestly."

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# Sports Roundup

## Tigersharks sweep Generals in swim

Bluffton swept visiting Wayne in its home swim meet Thursday night.

The Tigershark boy won by a score of 135-47, while the girls won 81-55 On Senior Night.

### Individual winners:

- Boys**
- Elija Robles in the diving events and in the breaststroke.
  - Noah Brooks, Graham Linderwell, Isaac Wheeler and Wes Frettinger in the 200-meter medley relay.
  - Wheeler in the 200-meter IM and in the 400-meter freestyle.
  - Aithan King in the 50-meter freestyle.
  - Dalton Rodgers in the 100-meter freestyle and in the 10-meter backstroke.
  - Wheeler, Griffin Linderwell, Brooks and Frettinger in the 200-meter freestyle relay.
  - Brooks, Robles, Ashton

Arnett and Rodgers in the 400-meter freestyle relay.

### Girls

- Lucia Corkwell in the 200-meter IM.
  - Anna Zurcher in the 50-meter freestyle and in the 100-meter backstroke.
  - Ellie Coyne in the 100-meter freestyle and in the 100-meter breaststroke.
  - Corkwell, Zurcher, Coyne and Kierstynn Reed in the 200-meter freestyle relay.
  - Zoey Schmidt, Emma Pink, Emily Hansen and Zurcher in the 400-meter freestyle relay.
- Bluffton will be at the ACAC swim meet at Jay County at 5:30 p.m. Friday, Jan. 19.

## Knights top Starfires by 1 in wrestling

Norwell took down South Adams on the wrestling mat by a single point Wednesday night. The Knights won 34-33 in the

final tally.

### Individual results:

- Titus Loshe (SA) wins by fall over Eli Thomas at 106.
- Daniel Rupp (SA) wins by forfeit at 113.
- Hunter Douglas (N) wins by major decision over Dakota Sprunger 13-2.
- Jason Prough (N) wins by decision over Will Patterson 6-2 at 16.
- Conner Fojtik (N) wins by decision over Braxton Kirchner 6-1 at 132.
- Wyatt Mann (SA) wins by fall over Chase Behning in overtime at 138.
- Colton Bollenbacher (SA) wins by fall over Jake Gruss at 144.
- Luke Driband (N) wins by fall over Mark McKinley at 150.
- Isaiah Meyer (SA) wins by fall over Aden McJury at 157.
- Cody Cox (N) wins by major decision over Wes Summersett 12-3 at 165.
- Luke Behning (N) wins by

major decision over Luke Bauman 11-0 at 175.

• Zach Wilson (N) wins by major decision over AJ Thompson 17-6 at 190.

• Ethan Michael (N) wins by fall over Bryan Roll at 215.

Norwell will be at the Northeast 8 Conference meet hosted by Huntington North at 9 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 20.

## Knights split swim meet with Eagles

Norwell split the swimming doubleheader at home against Oak Hill Thursday night.

The girls' team won on their team night 131-55, while the boys' lost 106-73.

### Individual winners:

- Boys**
- Rylan Heyerly in the 200-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard freestyle.
  - Colten Strunk in the 100-yard butterfly.

• Ethan Williamson in the 500-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard backstroke.

• Sturmk, Heyerly, Gage Reinhard and Kale Meredith in the 200-yard freestyle relay.

### Girls

- Jillian Melcher, Ella Krug, Haleigh Reinhard and Renee Frazee in the 200-yard medley relay.
  - Cassie Coyne in the 200-yard freestyle and in the 500-yard freestyle
  - Melcher in the 50-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard backstroke.
  - Krug in the 100-yard butterfly and in the 100-yard breaststroke.
  - Emerson Meredith in the 100-yard freestyle.
  - Sawyer Peterson, Frazee, Krug and Meredith in the 200-yard freestyle relay.
  - Coyne, Meredith, Marlee Meredith and Melcher in the 400-yard freestyle relay.
- Norwell will host the Northeast 8 Conference swim meet at 10 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 20.

# The Classifieds

## SUDOKU

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

### King Classic Sudoku

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

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Difficulty: ★★★★★

1/19

## FOR SALE

### Miscellaneous

**EVEREST VX3 ICE & WATER VENDING MACHINE** This Everest VX3 water/ice vending machine is the perfect addition to any business looking to boost their profits. With the ability to dispense both water and ice, this unit is sure to be a hit with customers. The machine is in great working condition and has been slightly used, making it a cost-effective option for those looking to invest in a vending machine. This unit is made in the United States and comes with a unit quantity of 1. Included is an all season insulation package, ice shield ozone disinfection, and cold fusion energy recovery. It is perfect for placement in other beverage and snack vending locations, as well as in restaurant and food service settings. Don't miss out on the opportunity to make extra money with this Everest VX3 vending machine. \$45,000.00 260-273-7020 glacierpure@outlook.com

### Pets

**HELOISE HINT:** Be aware of possible pet food recalls. Check the food you have been giving to your pets. Make sure the food is not making them sick. If the products you have are tainted, you should be able to get a refund. Email HELOISE@Heloise.com.

## EMPLOYMENT

### Help Wanted



**LEGAL ASSISTANT FOR ADVANCED ELDER LAW MEDICAID PLANNING**  
Sprunger Elder Law is growing and is seeking a Legal Assistant. Responsibilities include documentation gathering, scheduling, prep for e-signing, lead tracking, communicating with clients, and handling logistics. Experience is preferred, but not required. The ideal candidate is someone who is dedicated and driven person who excels in a team environment. They will be a focused and organized professional with strong attention to detail and a desire to deliver impeccable service for clients. sprungerandsprunger.com

## Help Wanted

**THE WELLS COUNTY** Prosecutor's Office is looking to hire a person for an Investigator position. The position is a part-time county-paid position making \$21/hour. The investigator would be responsible for conducting criminal investigations and assisting the Prosecutor in preparing cases for trial. The investigator must be an effective communicator, be proficient with a computer, be able to work independently, and have the ability to be on 24-hour call for assistance at crime scenes. Interested persons should go to [wellscounty.org/prosecutor/](http://wellscounty.org/prosecutor/) for a more detailed description of this position. Send any resumes to the Wells County Prosecutor's Office, 102 West Market Street, Suite 405, Bluffton, IN 46714 or submit them by email to [prosecutor@wellscounty.org](mailto:prosecutor@wellscounty.org).

**HELOISE HINT:** If you feel yourself getting stressed out at work. Do not ever lose your cool at the workplace. Instead, stay calm and composed. Never show anger. Once the workday is over, find a healthy way to alleviate your stress. Fax Heloise @ 210-HELOISE (435-6473).

## Lottery Numbers

- Thursday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY**  
Cash 5 — 04-06-08-30-32
- Cash4Life** — 02-03-04-25-57, Cash Ball: 03
- Quick Draw Midday** — 04-05-08-11-17-18-24-26-27-30-36-44-45-55-56-57-61-67-70-76, BE: 30
- Daily Three-Midday** — 06-01-09, SB: 08
- Daily Three-Evening** — 01-03-02, SB: 00
- Daily Four-Midday** — 00-05-09-09, SB: 08
- Daily Four-Evening** — 06-04-08-07, SB: 00
- Quick Draw Evening** — 01-04-05-07-11-13-15-16-24-31-35-36-39-43-46-50-59-60-63-76, BE: 43
- Hoosier Lotto** — Estimated jackpot (for Saturday): \$3.2 million
- MEGA MILLIONS**  
Estimated jackpot (for Friday): \$236 million
- POWERBALL**  
Estimated jackpot (for Saturday): \$120 million

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## Help Wanted

**WELLS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE** is currently seeking applicants for the position of Maintenance/Custodian. Applicants must have general knowledge of heating/cooling, plumbing, electrical with the ability to make minor repairs and/or adjustments. Additional responsibilities include building maintenance and ground keeping. 20-year matrix salary range for the position is \$43,682 - \$52,774. Years of service and experience will be honored for a starting salary up to five years in the pay matrix. Apply at [www.wellscountysheriff.com](http://www.wellscountysheriff.com) under "Job Opportunities". Deadline for Pre-application submission is no later than February 5, 2024. A full job description is also listed on the website for review.

## Help Wanted



**JOURNAL GAZETTE NEWSPAPER CARRIER**  
Deliver newspapers Mon-Sat in Bluffton city limits. Delivery hours approx. 2-6 am Mon-Fri and 2-7 am Sat. Independent contractor - Estimated monthly pay \$1,400. Call 260-750-0524 today!

## Public Sale Calendar

**BIDDING ENDS JANUARY 21 - (Online only auction) - Various consignors, sellers.** 1999 Ford F350 truck with lift bucket, antiques, display cases, advertising memorabilia, jewelry and pocket watches, Fenton and Indiana glass, mid-century modern, industrial quality fans and tools. *The Steffen Group Inc.*, [www.steffengroup.com](http://www.steffengroup.com), 260-824-3006.

**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*, 800-424-2324, [halderman.com](http://halderman.com), Rick Johnloz, 260-827-8181.

**JANUARY 30 - 10 a.m. EDT - Stetzel Farm LLC.** Farm machinery retirement auction. Tractors, planters, harvest equipment, tillage, miscellaneous and farm related, trucks and trailers. Timed online. No reserve. Inspection Jan. 20 and Jan. 29 from noon to 4 p.m., 7204 S 200 E, Warren. Contact Mike Stetzel, 260-450-2370, with equipment questions or to set up an inspection appointment. *Merit Auctions*, [www.meritauctions.com](http://www.meritauctions.com), 833-273-9300, auction manager: Zach Hiner, 260-437-2771.

**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://halderman.com). *Halderman Real Estate & Farm Management*, 800-424-2324, Rick Johnloz: 260-827-8181, Neal Wolhert: 260-336-2219.

**FEBRUARY 2 - 10 a.m. - Secured creditors & various consignors, owners.** 815 Adams St., Decatur. Online only truck & equipment auction. 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 & much more! Accepting consignments! *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, [Kjauction.com](http://Kjauction.com).

**FEBRUARY 12 - 6 p.m. - Daniel E. Schloss, Elizabeth L. Burchfield (f/k/a Elizabeth L. Schloss), Estate of Meshell L. Schloss.** Wells County 4-H Community Center, Bluffton. Online bidding available.

164+-/-A offered in 8 Tracts or combination. Productive tillable land, professionally designed and stocked pond, recreational woods, newer tree plantings w/ conservation grasses, potential country building sites, Huntington County, Salamonie Township. Inspection Feb. 5, 3-5p.m., call for private showing. Auction managers: Jerry Ehle, 260-410-1996, Steven C. Coil, 260-446-2037, *Schrader Real Estate and Auction Company, Inc.*, [schraderauction.com](http://schraderauction.com), 800-451-2709.

**FEBRUARY 13 - 6 p.m. - Keith L. Gilbert estate.** Markle Volunteer Fire Department, 150 W. Sparks St., Markle. Property: From Town of Markle, travel northeast on Marzane Road 4 miles. 67.5+-/-A offered in 4 tracts or any combination, Wells County, Union Township. Tract 1: 18+-/-A w/16.44+-/-A tillable. Tract 2: 9.5+-/-A w/7.26+-/-A tillable. Tract 3: 20+-/-A, mostly tillable. Tract 4: 20+-/-A, mostly tillable. All tracts have road access! Online bidding available. Inspection: Feb. 3, 10 a.m.-noon. Auction manager Al Pfister, 260-760-8922, *Schrader Real Estate and Auction Company, Inc.*, 800-451-2709, [schraderauction.com](http://schraderauction.com).

### NOTICE

The City of Bluffton is accepting sealed bids for the purchase of street materials for 2024. Bidding specifications may be obtained from the Clerk Treasurer's Office, 128 E Market St, Bluffton, IN, 46714, Mon-Fri, 8 am to 4:30 pm. Bids must be returned to the Clerk Treasurer's Office by 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 30th, 2024, to be opened and read aloud at the Board of Public Works and Safety on Tuesday, January 30th, 2024, at 4:30 p.m.

nb 1/12, 1/19  
hspaxlp

### NOTICE

The City of Bluffton will receive sealed bids for the construction of sidewalks/curbs and concrete repair. Specifications and Notice to Bidders may be obtained from the Clerk Treasurer's Office, 128 E Market St, Bluffton, IN, 46714, from 8 am to 4:30 pm Mon-Fri. Sealed bids must be returned to the Clerk Treasurer's Office by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 30, 2024 to be opened at the Board of Works and Public Safety at 4:30 p.m. on January 30, 2024.

nb 1/12, 1/19  
hspaxlp

## SUDOKU ANSWER

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

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## Public Notices

STATE OF INDIANA  
COUNTY OF WELLS  
IN THE WELLS  
SUPERIOR COURT  
CAUSE NUMBER:  
90D01-2312-MF-000033  
SPECIALIZED LOAN SERVICING LLC,  
Plaintiff,  
vs.  
UNKNOWN HEIRS, LEGATEES, DEVISEES, EXECUTORS, ADMINISTRATORS AND ASSIGNS, IF ANY, OF ANITA F ROGERS  
CATHY MORSE  
Defendants.  
**NOTICE OF SUIT**  
SUMMONS - SERVICE BY PUBLICATION

The State of Indiana to the defendants above named, and any other person who may be concerned. You are notified that you have been sued in the Court above named. The nature of the suit against you is a foreclosure of the real estate mortgage, legally described as:

THE FOLLOWING DESCRIBED REAL ESTATE LOCATED IN WELLS COUNTY, INDIANA:

PART OF THE SOUTHWEST QUARTER OF SECTION FOUR (4), TOWNSHIP TWENTY SIX (26) NORTH, RANGE TWELVE (12) EAST, BOUNDED AND DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS, TO-WIT:

COMMENCING AT A POINT WHERE THE EAST LINE OF OAK STREET INTERSECTS WITH THE NORTH LINE OF ARNOLD STREET, IN THE CITY OF BLUFFTON, THENCE NORTH ALONG THE EAST LINE OF OAK STREET 50 FEET, THENCE EAST PARALLEL WITH THE NORTH LINE OF ARNOLD STREET 140 FEET, THENCE SOUTH TO THE NORTH LINE OF ARNOLD STREET, THENCE WEST ALONG THE NORTH LINE OF ARNOLD STREET 140 FEET TO THE PLACE OF BEGINNING, CONTAINING 16/100 OF AN ACRE.

This property is commonly known as 527 W Arnold, Bluffton, IN 46714

This summons by publication is specifically directed to the following Defendants whose addresses are known:

Cathy Morse  
527 W Arnold  
Bluffton, IN 46714  
And to the following defendant whose addresses are unknown: Unknown Heirs, Legatees, Devisees, Executors, Administrators and Assigns, if any, of Anita F Rogers, Address Unknown

In addition to the above named Defendants, being served by this summons there may be other Defendants who have an interest in this lawsuit. If you have a claim for relief against the Plaintiff arising from the same transaction or occurrence, you must assert it in your written answer. You must answer the Complaint in writing, by your attorney, on or before the 3rd day of March 3, 2024, (the same being within thirty (30) days after the Third Notice of Suit), and if you fail to do so a judgment will be entered against you for what the Plaintiff has demanded.

Matthew C. Gladwell (30493-49)

Christopher J. Arlinghaus (31680-15)  
Aaron Rodgers (28418-84)  
Attorney's for Plaintiff  
Reisenfeld & Associates LLC  
3962 Red Bank Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45227  
Voice: (513) 322-7000  
Facsimile: (513) 322-7099  
ATTEST:  
Clerk of the Wells County Circuit/Superior Court  
nb 1/19, 1/26, 2/2  
hspaxlp

# Norwell HS releases honor rolls for second semester

Norwell High School has announced its honor roll and distinction for the first semester of the 2023-24 school year.

## SENIORS Distinction

Morgan Batdorff, Eli Baumgardner, Timothy Bonjour, Collin Burns, Sophia Campbell, Riley Dettmer, Anna Dodane, Peyton Dunwiddie, Emily Edmiston, Ashton Federspiel, Renee Frazee, Makenzie Fuess, Taylor Grant, Haley Green, Emilyn Heaston, Addyson Heyerly, Ciera Hiester, Jake Hoover, Olivia Hull, Elijah Ingle, Annabelle Johnson, Addison Keller, Jacob Kelley, Ella Krug, Samantha Lemler, Alyssa Lenwell, Nevada Lenwell, Connor Lewis, Lane Lewis, Madeline McCabe, Jillian Melcher, Grant Mishler, Ashtin Mounsey, Coral Neuenschwander, Lillian Norris, Grace Oden, Jaden Payne, Milanna Pepper, Kaby Peterson, Haleigh Reinhard, Ali Riley, Emma Roembke, Hudson Roller, Cade Shelton, Spencer Smith, Drew Thomas, Marlee Wenger, Isabella Winget, Jordyn Xayachack and Cayden Young.

## High Honor

Joshua Adam, Alex Baker, Faith Bales, Hayden Bennett, Logan Bennett, Ayden Billiard, Ava Cavanaugh, Calvin Cozad, Abigail Crail, Aiden Curry, Aaron Dennison, Emma Dodane, Lucas Dunwiddie, Kailey Eccles, Macy Felger, Harlan Ford, Logan Freiburger, Valarie Gambrel, Grace Gerber, Alexis Hartup, Coby Hartzler,

Chase Hulvey, Dannya Jackson, Luke Johnson, Sophie Marks, Jeremiah McLaughlin, Lauren Merritt, Braxten Millard, Emily Mills, Trace Moser, Haleigh Newnum, Brooklyn Riley, Michaela Rinehart, Gracie Rinkenberger, Kaden Rittmeyer, Evan Rolston, Delainey Sessions, Cooper Sloan, Sophia Smith, Ryan Straub, Bree Ulfig, Hannah Ungerer, Mason Watters, Taylor Werling, Zachary Willson, Willem Wooster and Bodie Zimmer.

## Honors

Larson Brock, Quentauris Jones and Kennedy Williams.

## JUNIORS Distinction

Maxwell Babcock, Johnathon Baxter, Mekynzi Beck, Elise Boomershine, Shae Brooks, Jessica Bynum, Logan Cotton, Cody Cox, Cassandra Coyne, Ryan Ewing, Grace Fausz, Madison Fisher, William Gerber, Ryland Graft, Isabel Isch, Jasper Kreigh, Teagan Lesley, Hattie Lewis, Dominick Lyon, Madison Mashuda, Jacquelyn Mayer, Adam McBride, Parker McCartney, Emerson Meredith, Kale Meredith, Kyler Morris, Evan Nuttle, Jason Prough, Kaedyn Quintanilla, McKenna Rigby, Garry Riley, Hannah Rusu, Rebecca Settle, Ridley Sheets, Jordyn Shroyer, Derek Smith, Ryne Thornton, Gavin Threewits, Noah Turk, Ethan Williamson and Colby Winkler.

## High Honor

Sophia Baird, Faythe Bowyer,

Katherine Bradford, Jalisa Bristow, Alana Cady, Wes Carmean, Kaydance Clark, Astrid Clausson, Abigail Dale, Brady Dettmer, Landon Diver, Luke Dreiband, Kendall Dunwiddie, Jacob Francioni, Philip Gaier, Hudson Gerbers, Drew Graft, Emmerson Hammond, Lily Hank, Zack Herrell, Maximus Klotz, Conner Lothamer, Joseph Macy, Nicole Maldeney, Nolan Martin, Hadley McSorley, Karrigan Melcher, Kylee Nevius, David Nunn, Riley Oglesbee, Jenna Osborn, Olivia Pula, Eli Randol, Austin Renninger, Gavin Reynolds, Katherine Rickerd, Aktan Satybaldiev, Trenton Singleton, Cavin Smithley, James Springer, Isaak Stefanski, Ian Todd and Braysen Wilson.

## Honors

Austin Haiflich.

## SOPHOMORES Distinction

Eva Aschliman, Franklin Bales, Hunter Bauman, Kedric Borne, William Case, Emily Davis, Madeline Dean, Emmerson Delaney, Kaylee Eicher, Rilynn Ervin, Samantha Evans, Kale Fuess, Cohen Garrett, Tristen Gase, Ellie Gattton, Brayson Gehring, Mark Golden, Jaycie Grzych, Leland Hammond, Gabrielle Hoepfner, Delaney Hoover, Elijah Jacob, Emmaline Johnson, Asher Knell, Kaydence Krumma, Grace Mann, Ella McIntosh, Aubrey Meyer, Brooklyn Meyer, Emma Miller, Dana Minnich, Hope Mitchell, Elizabeth Norris, Addilynn Page, Caiden Petrie, Kaitlee Reinhard,

Addison Roembke, Vanessa Ross-wurm, Ava Schlemmer, Alison Simerman, Campbell Sloan, Brady Smith, Hallie Smith, Larkin Smith, Lora Smith, Nolan Smith, Cristin Springer, Colten Strunk, Greyson Taylor, Lucile Thompson, Emma Vachon, Abigail Wagner, Ashley Waldman, Delaney Wathen, Christian Werling, Mason Wills, Kinsley Young and Makayla Young.

## High Honor

Alaina Barnhart, Kara Brown, Payton Brown, Maxwell Carpenter, Cayden Cassel, Michael Chubb, Gavin Crail, Allison Crow, Olivia Daniel, Evelyn Davis, Gabriel Dettmer, Vincent Freiburger, Harman Goraya, Easton Heckber, Nathan Heinkel, Cory Hudson, Braxton Hull, Autumn Lee, Addison Lyons, Madison Mason, Sawyer Peterson, Cameron Reed, Kyra Rhoads, Macie Saalfrank, Noah Schamerloh, Layne Seslar, Grant Shelton, Savanna Simerman, Sydney Soares, Madelyn Tanner, Joshua VanDyk, Tyler Weaver, Nolan Weedman, Bridget Wilson and Dalton Young.

## Honors

Dane Dalrymple, Addison Meyer, Addison Norris, Macy Richmond, Elizabeth Rickerd, Justyn Voltz, Luke Ward, Jordan Whitsitt and Brock Zent.

## FRESHMEN Distinction

Grant Adam, Maddox Affolder, Avery Baird, Michael Baker, Ashlyn Bertsch, Stella Butcher, Addison Case, Allie Dillion, Jax-

son Dohrman, Jersey Donaldson, Kaylynn Fairchild, Addison Gaier, Ryden Gerber, Gabriella Gill, Alivia Green, Elizabeth Haggard, Audrey Hand, Kylee Hanne, Rylan Heyerly, Maysie Johnson, Aubryn Keller, Hazel Lewis, Adam Mahnensmith, Nicholas McBride, Marlee Meredith, Lucas Millard, Isla Moses, Elias Musselman, Aiden Privett, Josiah Ray, Bria Reinhard, Gage Reinhard, Jack Richardson, Zachary Roberts, Ella Smith, Eden Stoppenhagen, Charlotte Swindell, Isabella Swineford, Cade Thornton, Braylon Troutt, Haley Williamson and Carley Wolf.

## High Honor

Dani-Lyn Allen, Lily Bailey, Samuel Balkema, James Baxter, Chace Behning, Keaton Blinn, DeLaruelle Bridges, Dallas Brinson, Kowen Burton, Emma Fey, Camden Fisher, Sophie Gerber, Lucy Gerbers, Anne Haiflich, Afton Hanni, Brooke Harder, Luke Harkless, Avery Heban-Keeran, Kyle Hipsher, Braden Hoag, James Hughes, Brady Jacobs, Jaeli Johnson, Jacob Kettinger, Bridget Lantz, Mikah McCartney, Chase McKinney-Baatz, Shyanna Morrow, Eden Nash, Reid Payton, Rylee Plunkett, Trendon Privett, Dylan Randol, Carlee Strunk, Molly Threewits, Jade-Lin Volz, Max Ward and Jakobi West.

## Honors

Wyatt Clifton, Lyanna Kelley, Palmer Krug, Owen Reynolds, Olivia Tieman and Aiden York.

## Wells County Briefs

### Highway Department nears building move-in

Highway Supervisor Shawn Bonar told the county commissioners Tuesday the department is working toward moving into its new building. Construction remains on track to be turned over to the county in February, and stakeholders planned to review any concerns this week.

Later, the commissioners approved an interlocal agreement with Adams County for their current and Wells' former engineer, Nate Rumschlag, to return once weekly to carry over ongoing grant applications. The agreement outlines a weekly \$1,500 fee for services.

Wells County Council permitted the funding last week. County Attorney Ted Storer advised Adams County has also approved the agreement, which will take effect immediately.

Also during the meeting, the commissioners:

- Approved amendments to ordinances regarding zoning, subdivision control and flood damage control, all recommended by the Area Plan Commission.
- Appointed county building manager Bobbie Studebaker as the Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator, taking over the role from former engineer Nate Rumschlag.
- Approved a new control for a portable alcohol unit vendor for Community Corrections.

### Wells given favorable insurance, investment updates

While many factors of the economy appear uncertain, Treasurer Kathy Peeper reported a healthy interest earned on the county's bank accounts during the annual Board of Finance meeting Tuesday.

Wells County earned interest of \$671,242.79 in 2023, \$517,405.76 more than in 2022, Peeper reported. Bank and CD interest earned \$810,822.28. "We had a pretty great year last year," Peeper summarized.

Dan Lipp and Danica Dunwiddie, now with WalkerHughes Insurance, also gave kudos to the county's department leadership during their annual workman's compensation renewal meeting.

Claims have lowered, and so have the county's rates. "I'm absolutely thrilled with this ... What that means is that you've got a lot of department heads that are probably focusing on safety (and) doing things the right way," Lipp noted. The commissioners approved a renewal with IPEP of Kokomo.

With updates to the jail and a new highway building, Commissioner Jeff Stringer noted it might be time to re-evaluate building insurance quotes. However, Lipp

advised it's been increasingly difficult to garner interest for counties from insurance companies. He added, "We've had over 25 occurrences this last year in the United States where they were over a billion dollars in claims — over 25 separate occurrences, and a billion is just where they're starting."

### Recycling Center makes garage door upgrade

The Solid Waste District board, which guides the Recycling Center, approved the purchase of a \$1,700 garage door opener and safety equipment during their monthly meeting Tuesday.

The recycling center had an insurance claim at the end of last year due to the garage door partially shutting on a vehicle. Superintendent Kevin Poling had advised the opener button was a slight distance from the entrance, and a vehicle had pulled up in the gap of time after an employee had cleared the area.

No decision was reached, however, about permits for companies recycling cardboard. The recycling center pays \$35 per ton of cardboard, and Auditor Lisa McCormick said 175 tons of cardboard were recorded in 2023.

The board also tentatively scheduled their shred event for May 4 and hazardous material collection for June 15.

In its annual reorganization, the board voted 4-0 to retain its current leadership, Blake Gerber as president and Scott Mentzer as vice president. Gerber, Mentzer, Vicki Andrews and Stephanie Tucker voted in favor; Commissioner Mike Vanover and Mayor John Whicker were absent. The board also agreed to reinvest \$100,000 in a 6-month CD with Flagstar in Bluffton.

### Wells will not join joint drainage board

The Wells County Drainage Board waived its right Tuesday for a joint board discussion with Allen County regarding the Casteel Tile Drain in Jefferson Township. Surveyor Jarrod Hahn said the area was selected for an ARPA-funded project but advised it was not pertinent to sit on the board given that less than 10 percent is in Wells.

The board also granted an easement on the Werling Prong Tile Train in Jefferson Township. Hahn said the property had been granted an easement for a hog barn, but the new property owner had torn it down and was in the permit process for a new building.

Additionally, Hahn advised there were several items of legislation he was keeping an eye on and would update the board at their Feb. 6 meeting.

— Compiled by Holly Gaskill

## Largest deep-sea reef to date mapped by scientists off the U.S. Atlantic coast

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have mapped the largest coral reef deep in the ocean, stretching hundreds of miles off the U.S. Atlantic coast.

While researchers have known since the 1960s that some coral were present off the Atlantic, the reef's size remained a mystery until new underwater mapping technology made it possible to construct 3D images of the ocean floor.

The largest yet known deep coral reef "has been right under our noses, waiting to be discovered," said Derek Sowers, an oceanographer at the nonprofit Ocean Exploration Trust.

Sowers and other scientists, including several at the National Oceanic and Atmo-

spheric Administration, recently published maps of the reef in the journal *Geomatics*.

The reef extends for about 310 miles from Florida to South Carolina and at some points reaches 68 miles wide. The total area is nearly three times the size of Yellowstone National Park.

The reef was found at depths ranging from 655 feet to 3,280 feet, where sunlight doesn't penetrate. Unlike tropical coral reefs, where photosynthesis is important for growth, coral this far down must filter food particles out of the water for energy.

Deep coral reefs provide habitat for sharks, swordfish, sea stars, octopus, shrimp and many other kinds of fish, the scientists said.

January

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