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FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024

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Health officer resignation agreement released

Johnson to be paid through 2026

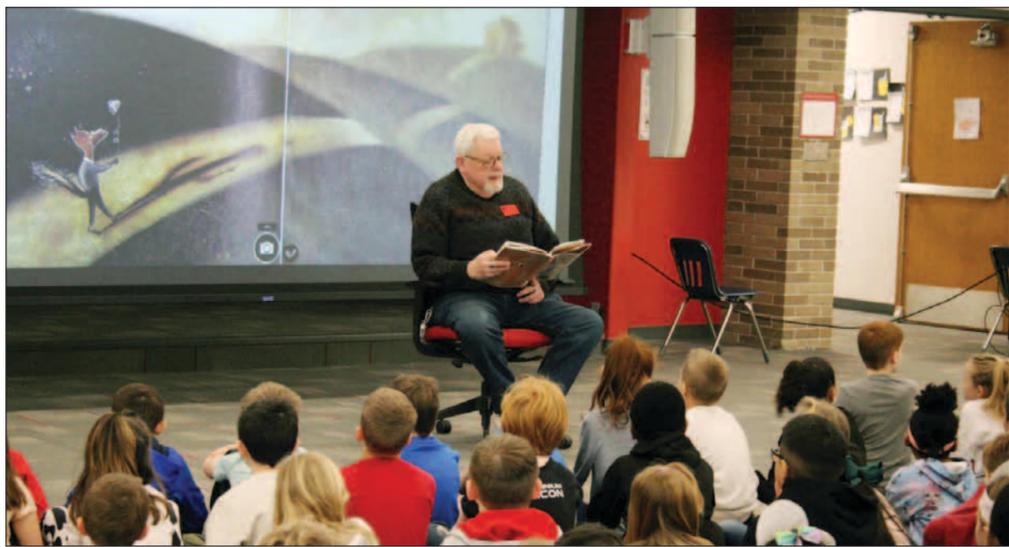
By HOLLY GASKILL
Nearly two weeks after the county's initial joint statement, more details have been made available regarding the agreement between the Wells County Board of Health, Wells County Health Department and the local health officer.

The joint statement announced that Health Officer Dr. Kay Johnson had voluntarily resigned, but would continue her duties until a new doctor was appointed and thereafter as a "consultant to the board." The Board of Health had initiated the removal of Johnson, who has served as health officer since 2010, on Dec. 6.

This consultant role will be utilized at "any reasonable time for consultation at the sole discretion and request of the President of the (Board of Health)", as outlined in the agreement. The role will be compensated at the same rate and duration that would have been due through Johnson's term as health officer, subject to her fulfillment of the agreement. According to the approved 2024 budget, the health officer is budgeted to receive

\$19,693 annually. Johnson was most recently appointed to a four-year term in 2022. Payment will continue through April 30, 2026. The board has agreed to take no further action against Johnson but retains the power to vote on her removal should the terms of the agreement be violated. Johnson has also agreed to not apply for any county vacancies in the future,

including the recently posted vacancy for a local health officer. Neither party has admitted wrongdoing through the agreement, but both parties desired a "mutually beneficial conclusion" and to avoid "further public hearing, appeals, and other potential litigation." On Dec. 19, the Wells County Superior Court granted Johnson
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Leap Day learners

Bluffton-Harrison Elementary School held a "Leap Into a Good Book" storytime for Leap Day on Thursday. Special guest Jerry Amstutz, affectionately called "Uncle Jerry" by the students, read "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs." Amstutz was also celebrating a special 17th Leap Day birthday, and, shown right, kindergarten students took a turn guessing how "old" Amstutz was turning. (Photos by Holly Gaskill)

Bluffton man is sentenced after selling fentanyl

By SYDNEY KENT

A 19-year-old from Bluffton received less than the advisory sentence after he sold enough fentanyl pills to kill 9,550 people. Malvern G. Bozarth was sentenced to 15 years in prison with 12 years executed during his hearing in the Wells Circuit Court last week. In December, Bozarth pled guilty to one count of dealing a narcotic drug in 10 or more grams, a Level 2 felony, and one count of possession of a firearm, a Level 4 felony. According to the probable cause affidavit, the charges stem from a drug deal between Bozarth and a confidential informant, or CI, in late April 2023. In less than four minutes, Bozarth sold 19.9 grams of fentanyl pills to the informant for \$1,000. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 to 100 times more potent than heroin or morphine — 2 milligrams is a lethal dose to an average adult. Over 500 pills were reportedly in Bozarth's possession at the time the deal was arranged, according to the informant, and more pills were seen in his apartment. A string of
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20 years of books

Wells County United Way celebrates anniversary with Imagination Library

By JONATHAN SNYDER

United Way of Wells County is celebrating its 20th anniversary partnering with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library with a fundraiser goal of \$15,000. Imagination Library donates books to every child in Wells County who signs up. They are mailed one age-appropriate book every month from the day they sign up until they are five years old. "I've never found a kid yet that didn't enjoy a book," said Pamela Beckford, who started the partnership with Imagination Library. "They want to look at the pictures, they want to turn the pages, (and) they want somebody to read to them. It's a great bonding experience between parents and children." From paperboard books to early childhood learning books, Imagination Library has a wide selection of titles given to children. While Wells County cannot control what books are mailed, Renkenberger stated that the Imagination Library keeps books on a rotation so that no kid gets the same book twice. "Their very first book is always the same, and the last book they get is the same," said Office Assistant Maribeth Harder. The first book is titled "The Little Engine That Could", and the last is "Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come." Imagination Library serves counties, towns and cities throughout the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland and
(Continued on Page 2)

Congress avoids shutdown with extension

By KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress passed another short-term spending measure Thursday that would keep one set of federal agencies operating through March 8 and another set through March 22, avoiding a shutdown for parts of the federal government that would otherwise kick in Saturday. The bill now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law. The short-term extension is the fourth in recent months, and many lawmakers expect it to be the last for the current fiscal year. House Speaker Mike Johnson said negotiators had

completed six of the annual spending bills that fund federal agencies and had "almost final agreement on the others." "We'll get the job done," Johnson said as he exited a closed-door meeting with Republican colleagues. The House acted first Thursday. The vote to approve the extension was 320-99. It easily cleared the two-thirds majority needed for passage. Democrats overwhelmingly voted to avert a partial shutdown. But the vote was much more divided with Republicans, 113 in support and 97 against. The Senate then took up the bill and approved it during an evening vote of 77-13.

"When we pass this bill, we will have, thank God, avoided a shutdown with all its harmful effects on the American people," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said moments before the vote. Next week, the House and Senate are expected to take up a package of six spending bills and get them to the president before March 8. Then, lawmakers would work to fund the rest of the government by the new March 22 deadline. At the end of the process, Congress is expected to have approved more than \$1.6 trillion in spending for the
(Continued on Page 2)

Career U.S. diplomat admits to spying for communist Cuba

By JOSHUA GOODMAN
and JIM MUSTIAN
Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A former career U.S. diplomat told a federal judge Thursday he will plead guilty to charges of working for decades as a secret agent for communist Cuba, an unexpectedly swift resolution to a case prosecutors called one of the most brazen betrayals in the history of the U.S.

foreign service. Manuel Rocha's stunning fall from grace could culminate in a lengthy prison term after the 73-year-old said he would admit to federal counts of conspiring to act as an agent of a foreign government. Prosecutors and Rocha's attorney indicated the plea deal includes an agreed-upon sentence but they did not disclose details

at a hearing Thursday. He is due back in court April 12, when he is scheduled to formalize his guilty plea and be sentenced. "I am in agreement," said Rocha, shackled at the hands and ankles, when asked by U.S. District Court Judge Beth Bloom if he wished to change his plea to guilty. Prosecutors, in exchange, agreed to drop 13 counts including wire fraud and making false statements.

The brief hearing shed new light on the question that has proved elusive since Rocha's arrest in December: What exactly did he do to help Cuba while working at the State Department for two decades? That included stints as ambassador to Bolivia and top posts in Argentina, Mexico, the White House and the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. "Ambassador Rocha," as he

preferred to be called, was well known among Miami's elite for his aristocratic, almost regal, bearing befitting his Ivy League background. His post-government career included time as a special adviser to the commander of the U.S. Southern Command and more recently as a tough-talking Donald Trump supporter and Cuba hardliner, a persona friends and
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Outside

Partly sunny today, cool and breezy tonight
Today Saturday Sunday
High 47 High 57 High 66
Low 38 Low 42 Low 52
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FRIDAY
March 1, 2024

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Health officer resignation

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an emergency temporary restraining order against the Board of Health and its members at the time, Chris Esterling, Steve Bales, Tom Longenberger, Dr. Mary Donley, Molly Hoag and Ann McNabb. Johnson had filed the request on Dec. 18, preceding the original date of the public hearing for her removal, 8 a.m. Dec. 20.

The filed complaint states Johnson was unable to attend the scheduled hearing due to a previously planned commitment to see and treat patients in Paoli, Indiana. Johnson's legal counsel sent a letter notifying of this conflict, and the county reportedly refused to reschedule. The emergency temporary

restraining order effectively postponed the hearing.

In the court's order, Judge Kenton Kiracofe, appointed in Judge Andrew Antrim's place, wrote, "The parties are ordered to meet and confer to determine a mutually available date and time for the rescheduling of said Due Process Hearing." The public hearing was later rescheduled for 5 p.m. Jan. 10.

County Attorney Ted Storer filed for the dismissal of the temporary restraining order on Jan. 18, citing that the reason for its placement was no longer relevant. Kiracofe granted this request on Feb. 1.

Johnson will no longer pursue the temporary restraining order nor sue

for any claim included in the agreement. Both parties have also agreed not to make any publicly disparaging comments regarding the others' roles.

Immediately following the release of the joint statement, Johnson called the agreement "fair and amicable" and that "everyone is happy with the outcome." Commissioner President Jeff Stringer expressed a similar statement.

Since the announcement of the agreement on Feb. 15, The News-Banner made several requests to relevant county parties, including Health Department Administrator Sahara Wall, Auditor Lisa McCormick, Public Information Officer LeAnne Wyss and Stringer, who

deferred to Storer. However, Storer repeatedly stated he was not the appropriate party to request the document from.

A Freedom of Information Act request was filed with McCormick, and officials later stated a formal FOIA request was necessary due to a confidentiality statement in the agreement.

The Board of Health is responsible for appointing a new health officer, and the County Commissioners will certify the appointment. The current board members are Esterling, Bales, Donley, Hoag, McNabb, Tamara Troutt and Dr. Bart Hott.

Their next scheduled meeting is 6:30 a.m. April 18.

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Bluffton man sentenced

(Continued from Page 1)

social media messages also proved that Bozarth gave the CI money to purchase a firearm from a man in Fort Wayne on his behalf. This earned Bozarth the second count in this case.

"Cases involving informants have a number of variables not always within our control," Chief Deputy Prosecutor Jeffrey Stineburg said following the hearing. "We have to take that into account. Given Bozarth's limited criminal history and the variables that can occur at a trial involving an informant — we believe this to be an appropriate plea. We believe that the judge took this into consideration and sentenced Mr. Bozarth appropriately."

According to a plea agreement, 12 years was the maximum amount of time Bozarth could be ordered to serve in incarceration. There were no guidelines on the amount of time he could be sentenced.

"Both the detectives and departments involved did an excellent job in this case," Stineburg concluded. "(They) were all of the same mind that

this was a good outcome."

According to court documents, Bozarth's first introduction to the judicial system was at 12-years-old, and continued with several charges since. By 16, Bozarth testified that he had been shot with a firearm in the course of a drug deal during a four-month period where he was on the run.

In October 2021, when Bozarth was 17-years-old, he rear-ended the back of a vehicle driven by a Bluffton Police Department detective. The officer noted that Bozarth smelled of marijuana. Bozarth stated that he did not have any weapons, but the magazine well of a firearm was located in his front pocket. Officers also located 25 grams of marijuana and 81 pills identified as Alprazolam in the vehicle.

For this, Bozarth was charged with possession of a controlled substance, a Level 6 felony, carrying a handgun without a license and dangerous possession of a firearm by a child, both Class A misdemeanors, possession of marijuana, a Class B misdemeanor,

and driving without receiving a license, a Class C misdemeanor.

Bozarth could have faced several years in prison for the charges acquired from the accident if convicted, however, every charge was dismissed under a plea agreement from a case earlier that year.

In June 2021, Bozarth acquired charges for dealing a controlled substance over 10 grams, a Level 3 felony, dealing a controlled substance less than 1 gram, a Level 5 felony, dealing marijuana, a Level 6 felony, and dangerous possession of a firearm by a child, a Class A misdemeanor.

He was ultimately sentenced to two years in the Indiana Department of Correction with one year suspended and probation time. Bozarth has continued to violate probation on the case and has acquired new charges since.

Though he was ordered to serve 12 years of prison sentence, Bozarth could exit incarceration several years sooner contingent upon completing the Purposeful Incarceration, or PI, program.

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United Way

(Continued from Page 1)

Australia. The partnership with Wells County started in December 2003.

"The Imagination Library has to be made available to every child within your service area ... Not every book program does that," Beckford said. "So many of them are based on income."

Parents can sign their child up through a registration form at the Wells County Public Library or by following a link at United Way Wells' website. The link is located under the "What We Do" tab, which has a section for the Imagination Library.

The impact of Imagination Library is felt throughout the area, with an estimated 1,000 children receiving books every month, according to United Way Wells Director Ben Renkenberger. Jeremy Penrod, who signed up for Imagi-

nation Library when his three kids were young, still holds fond memories of sitting in a rocking chair and telling stories to his family.

"There were quite a few different books ... that we even talk about now, and my kids are teenagers," Penrod said. "So it's kind of cool that they still remember those."

"That's what these are for," Renkenberger said. "It's to spark that imagination system to move the needle for those kids that may not have had otherwise, especially in the early years."

Renkenberger and Harder expect they will hit over 200,000 total books given to Wells County through Imagination Library. The fundraiser is meant to cover the monthly cost of administering the books to kids. It costs over \$1,000 a month out of United Way's budget to continue this

program.

Since funding for the program is running low, the goal is to raise \$15,000 by March 15. The campaign has been underway for about a week and has seen about \$1,000 raised already.

Anyone who donates a minimum of \$30 will be entered into a drawing for a prize package from the Fort Wayne TinCaps baseball team. The TinCaps donated four tickets for any regular season baseball game, an opportunity to throw out the ceremonial first pitch, a TinCaps hat and bag, along with a United Way hat and sunglasses.

Donations are accepted via mail or in person. A link for a digital donation is available on the United Way of Wells County's Facebook page.

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Government shutdown avoided

(Continued from Page 1)

fiscal year that began Oct. 1. That amount is roughly in line with the previous fiscal year and is what former Speaker Kevin McCarthy negotiated with the White House last year before eight disgruntled Republican lawmakers joined with Democrats a few months later and voted to oust him from the position.

Some of the House's most conservative members wanted deeper cuts for non-defense programs than that agreement allowed through its spending caps. They also sought an array of policy changes that Democrats opposed. They were hoping the prospect of a shutdown could leverage more concessions.

"Last I checked, the Republicans actually have a majority in the House of Representatives, but you wouldn't know it if you looked at our checkbook because we are all too willing to continue the policy choices of Joe Biden and the spending levels of Nancy Pelosi," said Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla.

But Rep. Chuck Fleischmann, R-Tenn., countered before the vote that shutdowns are damaging and encouraged lawmakers to vote for the short-term extension.

"I want the American people to know, Mr. Speaker, that this negotiation has been difficult, but to close the government down at a

time like this would hurt people who should not be hurt," Fleischmann said.

The split within the GOP conference on spending and their tiny House majority bogged down the efforts to get the bills passed on a timely basis. With the Senate also struggling to complete work on all 12 appropriations bills, lawmakers have resorted to a series of short-term measures to keep the government funded.

Republican leadership said that the broader funding legislation being teed up for votes in March would lead to spending cuts for many nondefense agencies. By dividing the spending bill up into chunks, they are hoping to avoid an omnibus bill — a massive, all-encompassing bill that lawmakers generally had little time to digest or understand before voting on it. Republicans vowed there would be no omnibus this time.

"When you take away Defense and Veterans Affairs, the rest of the agencies are going to be seeing spending cuts in many cases," said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La. "There are also some policy changes that we pushed through the House that will be in the final product. Of course, some of those are still being negotiated."

The temporary extension funds the departments of Agriculture, Transportation, Interior and others through March 8. It funds the Pen-

tagon, Homeland Security, Health and Human Services and the State Department through March 22.

While congressional leaders have said they've reached final agreement on what will be in the first package of spending bills voted on next week, there's still room for an impasse on the second package to be voted on later in the month.

"We are working in a divided government. That means to get anything done, we have to work together, in good faith to reach reasonable outcomes," said Sen. Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The renewed focus on this year's spending bills doesn't include the separate, \$95.3 billion aid package that the Senate approved for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan earlier this month, with much of that money being spent in the U.S. to replenish America's military arsenal. The bill also contained about \$9 billion in humanitarian assistance for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank, Ukraine and other war zones.

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Weather

Friday, March 1, 2024

(24-hour observations at 9:13 p.m. Thursday)
High: 40; Low: 20; Precipitation: None
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 2.03 feet at 8:45 p.m. Thursday

Wells County forecast

Today: Partly sunny, with a high near 47. South wind 5 to 10 mph.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 38. South wind 5 to 10 mph.

Saturday: Partly sunny, with a high near 57. South wind 5 to 10 mph.

Saturday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 42. South wind 5 to 10 mph.

Sunday: Sunny, with a high near 66.

Sunday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 52.

Monday: A 20% chance of rain after 1 p.m. Mostly sunny, with a high near 71.

Monday Night: Rain likely. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 51. Chance of precipitation is 70%.

Tuesday: A chance of rain, with thunderstorms also possible after 1 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 59. Chance of precipitation is 50%.

Tuesday Night: A 30% chance of rain and thunderstorms. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 37.

U.S. diplomat

(Continued from Page 1)

prosecutors say Rocha adopted to hide his true allegiances.

Peter Lapp, who oversaw FBI counterintelligence against Cuba between 1998 and 2005, said the fast resolution of the case benefits not only the elderly Rocha but also the government, which stands to learn a lot about Cuba's penetration of U.S. foreign policy circles.

Typically in counterintelligence cases, the defendant is charged with espionage. But Rocha was accused of the lesser crimes of acting as a foreign agent, which carry maximum terms of between five and 10 years in prison, making it easier for prosecutors and Rocha to reach an agreement.

"It's a win-win for both sides," said Lapp, who led the investigation into Ana Montes, the highest-level U.S. official ever convicted of spying for Cuba. "He gets a significant payoff and the chance to see his family again, and the U.S. will be able to conduct a full damage assessment that it wouldn't be able to do without his cooperation."

"There are details that can really only come from the defendant," he added.

But the abrupt deal drew criticism in the Cuban exile community, with some legal observers worrying it amounted to a slap on the wrist.

"Any sentence that allows him to see the light of day again would not be justice," said Carlos Trujillo, a Miami attorney who served as U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States during the Trump administration. "He's a spy for a foreign adversary who put American lives at risk."

A Justice Department spokesman declined to comment.

Rocha was arrested by the FBI at his Miami home on allegations he had engaged in "clandestine activity" on Cuba's behalf since at least 1981 — the year he joined the U.S. foreign service — including by meeting with Cuban intelligence operatives and providing false information to U.S. government officials about his contacts.

Rocha made a series of recorded admissions to an undercover FBI agent who posed as a Cuban intelligence operative who reached out to Rocha on WhatsApp, calling himself "Miguel" and saying he had a message "from your friends in Havana."

Rocha praised the late Cuban leader Fidel Castro as "Comandante," branded the U.S. the "enemy" and bragged about his service for more than 40 years as a Cuban mole in the heart of U.S. foreign policy circles, prosecutors said in court records.

"What we have done ... it's enormous ... more than a Grand Slam," he was quoted as saying.

Federal authorities have said little about what Rocha actually did to aid Cuba, and FBI and State Department investigators have been conducting a confidential intelligence damage assessment that could take years.

But a recent Associated Press investigation found there were plenty of missed red flags over the years.

Those included a tip that a longtime CIA operative received warning in 2006 that Rocha was working as a double agent. It was never pursued. And separate intelligence revealed that the CIA had been aware as early as 1987 that Castro had a "super mole" burrowed deep inside the U.S. government, and some officials suspected it could have been Rocha.

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FEATURE

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OBITUARIES

Bruce D. Klefeker, 71

Bruce D. Klefeker, 71, of Bluffton, died Tuesday evening, Feb. 13, 2024, at his residence.
 Bruce was born in Bluffton on Feb. 1, 1953, to Walter R. and A. Diane (Meadows) Klefeker-Enyart. Both parents preceded him in death.
 Survivors include two sons, Justin (Sam) Klefeker of Fairfield, Ohio, and Ryan Klefeker of Carmel; two brothers, Walter (Teri) Klefeker Jr. of Ossian, and Doug (Tammy) Klefeker of Keystone; a sister, Diana (Dave) Collins of Liberty Center; along with five grandchildren.
 In addition to his parents, Bruce was preceded in death by a son, Aaron Klefeker; and a brother, Steve Klefeker.
 A public graveside service will be held Saturday, Mar. 9, 2024, at 11:00 a.m., at Grove Cemetery, 5200 S. 100 E., Poneto, IN. Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel in Bluffton has been entrusted with the arrangements.
 Online condolences may be made at www.goodwin-caleharnish.com.

American Legion will host youth program

For the past 82 plus years, The American Legion and The American Legion Auxiliary have sponsored a week-long program enhancing youth's leadership skills and teaching them in a mythical setting about our government at the city, county and state levels. The program is designed to educate young men and women of Indiana on the duties, privileges, rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
 To be eligible, the student must be enrolled in an Indiana high school, having completed their junior year and be returning to the high school setting the following year, be in the upper half of their class academically, and be sponsored by a Post or Unit of The American Legion. Home school students are eligible if their home school is registered with the State of Indiana or the local school superintendent, or they are registered with a home school association.
 Qualifications for the program include that the delegate shall be interested in government, have leadership abilities, be honest and possess good character. In addition, they must give proper respect to the U.S. Flag and have a love for God and country. Many colleges and universities award financial aid based on completing an AL Boys/ALA Girls State session. For the past several years, the American Legion program has been recognized as one of the top leadership programs for young men and women.
 Both programs are held at Trine University in Angola, during separate weeks in June 2024. Delegates are expected to stay the entire week, following the guidelines and rules of the HBS/HGS Board and Trine University. Love for God and country will be broadened by inspirational flag ceremonies and non-denominational religious services held during the week. All participants are expected to attend these programs.
 Citizenship, not politics, is emphasized at Boys State/Girls State and completion for elective office is the means to an end, not the goal.
 For more information, please contact Robert Buehl at 260-824-3815 for Boys State, and Sandy Oswalt at 260-341-6013 or Cheryl Mann at 260-307-3360 for Girls State.

Rust files court petition to supersede state election commission

By CASEY SMITH, Indiana Capital Chronicle
 John Rust, who earlier this week was denied access to Indiana's GOP primary ballot, is appealing the decision in Marion County court, in hopes of continuing his run for U.S. Senate.
 Rust's petition for judicial review was filed in Marion County Superior Court on Wednesday, one day after the Indiana Election Division voted unanimously to block his Republican candidacy.
 The basis for the state panel's decision was an Indiana party affiliation law that prohibits candidates from running whose last two primary votes don't match the party they wish to represent.
 The Seymour egg farmer's two most recent primary votes were Republican in 2016 and Democrat in 2012 — meaning under the law he can't appear on the Republican ballot for the 2024 May primary election. The law allows an exception, should the county's party chair grant it. Jackson County Republican Party Chair Amanda Lowery elected not to do so in this case.
 But in his appeal, Rust points to a December ruling from Marion County Superior Court Judge Patrick J. Dietrick, who found the two-primary requirement to be unconstitutional. Rust maintains the contested law was on hold "during the entirety of the candidacy filing period" and therefore should not preclude him from running.
 And although the Indiana Supreme Court blocked the injunction earlier this month, Rust and his legal counsel argue that action came after the filing period, giving him "no opportunity to go back to Lowery and see if she would change her mind and certify him."
 "This process has shown me how far the establishment is willing to go to maintain control over our elections. At every turn, I've been challenged by party bosses who have already picked their insider candidate and are desperate to get him into the United States Senate. It's this kind of gamesmanship that has eroded trust in our political system," Rust said in a statement Thursday morning. "I'll fight this all the way up to the United States Supreme Court because Hoosiers deserve a choice and they deserve a change."
 Additionally included in the appeal is an affidavit from LaPorte County Republican chair Allen Stevens, who testified that — had Rust established residency in LaPorte County — he would have certified his candidacy.
 Indiana election commissioners said in their deliberations on Tuesday that Rust could have moved to a county with a "friendlier" party chair who would have signed off on his candidacy.

Police Notebook

INCIDENTS

City:
 Wednesday, 4:08 p.m., 400 block of West Washington Street. Caller reported subject took child to a house that had possible drug abuse.
 Wednesday, 4:27 p.m., Valley Park Apartments. Report of a woman yelling for help and that someone was throwing something at her. The male then left in a vehicle. Kyle Davis was arrested for domestic battery, intimidation and operating while intoxicated.
 Wednesday, 6:17 p.m., 500 block of Cottonwood Court. Report of a domestic issue.
 Wednesday, 7:20 p.m., 400 block of Cedar Road. Report of a noise complaint,

subject cited for noise ordinance violation.
 Wednesday, 11:31 p.m., 100 block of North Union Street. Report of theft.
 Thursday, 10:28 a.m., 300 block of East Horton Street. Report of subject going in and out of building, property manager was at wrong place.
 Thursday, 12:27 p.m., 400 block of West Townley Street. Welfare check requested for subject with mental health disorder involving hallucinations. Caller changed their mind when advised the Bluffton Police Department would be responding and took subject to ER on her own.
County:
 Wednesday, 2:45 p.m.,

Wells County Jail. Warrant served to Renee Fox.
 Wednesday, 4:29 p.m., River Terrace Estates. Report of fighting between dementia patients.
 Thursday, 5:03 a.m., Eagle View Lodge. Report of subject walking around with a flashlight. Subject was walking his dog.
 Thursday, 6:26 a.m., S.R. 1 and East 300 North. Car vs. deer.
 Thursday, 7:21 a.m., Wells County Jail. Warrant served at the jail.
ACCIDENTS
 Monday, 12:57 p.m., S.R. 1 and Commerce Drive. Margaret Muster, 24, was driving straight in her Pontiac G8 when the vehicle in front of her stopped sud-

denly due to traffic. Muster's vehicle collided with the rear end of a Buick Encore driven by James Wenger, 74. Damages did not exceed \$2,500.
ARRESTS
 Renee Ceresina Fox, 28, Gary; disorderly conduct, a Class B misdemeanor.
 Kyle Aaron Davis, 33, Bluffton; domestic battery with moderate bodily injury and intimidation, both Level 6 felonies, and operating a vehicle while intoxicated, a Class A misdemeanor. Bond set at \$31,500.
 Keith Lamont Hopkins, 33, Indianapolis; possession of marijuana, a Class B misdemeanor. Bond set at \$1,000.



Pulse's 'Radio Show'

Several members of the cast of the Pulse Opera House's production of "The Invisible Man: A Live Radio Show" have connections to Wells County's theatre productions. In the back row, left to right, are Dave Schultz, Michael Blaugher, Ken Zuk, David Parker, Ben Kizer, April Smith, John Cole and Shaun Berkey; in front are Priscilla Alter, Steve Rodenberger and J.J. Leak. They all will be on stage this evening at 8 p.m. and again on March 2, 8 and 9, as well as at 4 p.m. March 3 and 10. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$5 for those 12 and younger. (Photo provided)

State lawmakers send firm message that Indiana remains 'opposed' to assisted suicide

By CASEY SMITH, Indiana Capital Chronicle
 As more than a dozen states contemplate "death with dignity" laws, Indiana lawmakers are making clear they're staunchly opposed to any policy allowing physician-assisted suicide.
 A Senate resolution penned by Sen. Tyler Johnson, R-Leo, emphasizes that the legalization of assisted suicide "sends a message that suicide is a socially acceptable response to aging, terminal illnesses, disabilities, and depression" and subsequently imposes a "duty to die."
 Further, it states assisted suicide "is a direct threat to human dignity, patient rights, and the disabled when the medical goal must be to eliminate suffering rather than the person who suffers."
 Alternatively, the resolution preferences ongoing advancements in palliative care that can relieve pain and allow a person "to die naturally, comfortably, and in a dignified manner without a change in the law."
 The Senate health committee approved the resolution in a 9-2 vote, along party lines, on Wednesday.
 "You cannot compassionately kill a patient, and you cannot care for the patient that you are comfortable killing," said Johnson, who works as an emergency physician. "Physician-assisted suicide is contrary to everything I have as a physician and my duty to my patients, as a healer, and it clearly undermines the physician-patient relationship."
Strong opposition against assisted suicide
 The arguments in the resolution are similar to those held by other critics of physician-assisted death, including some religious groups, disability rights advocates, and the American Medical Association. They maintain the practice is at odds with physicians' responsibility to

care for patients and can open the door to more suicide.
 Last year, the AMA's legislative body voted against changing its stance on physician-assisted death, which its code of ethics describes as "fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as healer."
 Advocates, on the other hand, say giving terminal patients more control of end-of-life decisions brings more dignity to death.
 Assisted suicide is already banned in Indiana. Current statute states that a person who "participates" or "provides the physical means" for another person to attempt or commit suicide commits assisting suicide, a Level 5 felony. Those who have knowledge of an assisted suicide can also face the felony charge.
 Exempt from the law are medical professionals who provide care "to relieve a person's pain or discomfort, even if the medication or procedure may hasten or increase the risk of death, unless such medications or procedures are intended to cause death." Health care providers are additionally permitted to withhold or stop life-prolonging treatments.
 Johnson clarified that end-of-life and palliative care are not the focus of his resolution, however.
 "People call it medical assistance in dying, or paid physician assistance in dying, or physician-assisted suicide, or euthanasia. Really, at its core, we're discussing the act of a physician taking steps to end a patient's life," Johnson said, noting that he regularly works in his hospital's palliative care settings.
 "Frankly, medicine is really hard. It's not an easy thing. It gets tougher as we get more advanced. We don't always get it right," he continued. "But I can't fathom what it feels like to stop

trying. We strive every day to take great care of people — even in the toughest of situations, even when it's hard, even when it's hard for the patient to keep going."
Legal in other states
 On the opposite side of the issue, House Bill 1011, introduced earlier in the legislative session by Rep. Matt Pierce, D-Bloomington, sought to allow terminally ill patients to voluntarily end their lives. The bill was never heard in committee however.
 Pierce has filed similar proposals in years past without success.
 Still, support for such legislation is growing.
 Assisted suicide has so far been legalized in 10 states — Maine, Vermont, Oregon, New Mexico, Hawaii, Colorado, California, Montana, Washington and New Jersey, as well as the District of Columbia — either through legislation or court decisions, according to Death with Dignity, an organization promoting end-of-life options.
 Pierce's proposal mirrored Oregon's Death With Dignity Act, which took effect in 1998 and has since been used as a model in several other states.
 Under Pierce's bill, a patient's doctor would supervise the process and be required to refer the patient to another physician for a second opinion. Both must agree that the patient is terminally ill.
 The patient would even-

tually be prescribed medication, which they must self-administer, that renders them unconscious before death ensues.
 According to a 2020 study from the Journal of American Geriatrics Society, 5,329 patients died by "medical aid in dying" and 8,451 received a prescription between 1998 and 2020 in states that had such laws and publicly available records. Roughly 74% of those deaths had a diagnosis of cancer, per the study.
 Sen. Shelli Yoder, D-Bloomington, who voted against the resolution, pointed to national polling that shows broad support for assisted suicide legalization.
 She called the resolution "problematic at best," and said the General Assembly should have instead held public hearings on a bill like Pierce's "so we could at least have a discussion, a grown-up conversation, to bring in experts, to listen to Hoosiers — all while honoring the sacredness of life."

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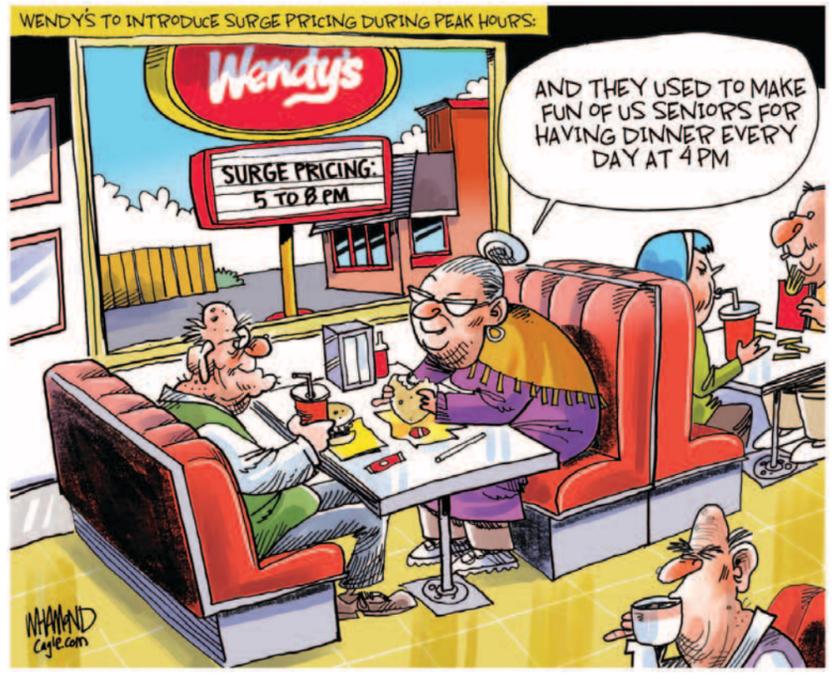
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The Week That Was - a look back through cartoonists' eyes...



Other Opinions

Biden's student loan forgiveness boast

American Presidents may not like Supreme Court decisions, but most since Andrew Jackson haven't bragged about defying its rulings. Not even Donald Trump. Then there's President Biden, who, while canceling more student debt this week, boasted about ignoring the Supreme Court's landmark 2023 ruling that his previous loan forgiveness plan was illegal.

Speaking in Culver City, Calif., on Wednesday, Mr. Biden said his original plan to "provide millions of working families with debt relief for their college student debt" was derailed by "MAGA Republicans" and "special interests" who challenged the plan in court. "The Supreme Court blocked it," Mr. Biden added, "but that didn't stop me." He apparently thinks defying the law is a virtue.

On Wednesday Mr. Biden wrote off another \$1.2 billion in student-loan debt, bringing the total amount he has canceled to some \$138 billion. That's not as much as the \$400 billion debt cancellation a 6-3 Supreme Court majority struck down last summer, but it's still a handout to 3.9 million borrowers.

He's not really cancelling anything because he's transferring the debt from the borrowers it benefited to the taxpayers who will finance it with higher taxes or interest payments on the rising national debt.

Under his Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan, President Unstoppable is offering loan forgiveness through income-driven repayment plans. Borrowers used to be expected to pay 10% of the portion of their discretionary income that exceeds 150% of the federal poverty level (\$22,590 for individuals) for 20 years after which their loans are forgiven. The Biden plan reduces the payments to 5% of their discretionary income above 225% of the poverty level.

The Education Department says borrowers will also be eligible for loan forgiveness if they are enrolled in the SAVE plan, have been making payments for 10 years, and had total original debt of less than \$12,000. Those with larger loan amounts will also be eligible for forgiveness on a sliding scale.

Missouri had standing to challenge the first Biden loan forgiveness plan because its loan servicer would be adversely affected if borrowers stopped paying their loans. In overturning that Biden diktat, the Court said Mr. Biden had acted without proper Congressional authority and thus violated the Constitution's separation of powers.

Mr. Biden's method of loan forgiveness has changed, but the same legal principles apply. We hope states and other plaintiffs harmed by Mr. Biden's debt transfer to taxpayers are already looking to sue.

Mr. Biden is boasting about his debt forgiveness because he is desperate to get young voters to support him again in November. His 2020 coalition is splintering, and younger voters aren't thrilled with his leadership or the results of his economic policies. His debt forgiveness scheme is as flagrant a vote-buying ploy as we can remember.

But the costs are high, and they aren't merely to the federal fisc. The forgiveness skews to upper-income borrowers who have attended college at the expense of those who don't. It is grossly unfair.

It also punishes parents and students who have saved to pay for college without loans, or who sacrificed consumption after college to repay them. Mr. Biden's scheme does nothing to reform student lending, so it increases the incentive for students to borrow more and colleges to raise tuition knowing all or nearly all will be forgiven eventually.

But worst of all is Mr. Biden's blatant rejection of the law, even after the Supreme Court called him out. Is it any wonder that GOP voters don't take Democratic alarms about losing democracy seriously? Mr. Biden doesn't take his own warnings seriously.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
Distributed by The Associated Press

Roosevelt fixed his serious VP mistake. Will Biden?

Today's subject is potentially the most consequential mistake of Joe Biden's irresponsibly prolonged public life. She, the mistake, will not, however, be mentioned again:

In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt replaced his vice president, Texan John Nance Garner, with his agriculture secretary, Iowan Henry Wallace. If FDR, who died April 12, 1945, had died a year earlier, the postwar era would have been even more dangerous than it was and we might live in an even worse world.

Roosevelt in 1940 was in his 59th year, a paraplegic with signs of physical decline and ominous prospects regarding longevity. Yet he put Wallace on the precipice of the presidency, for which Wallace was grotesquely unsuited. This story is told in historian Benn Steil's new biography "The World That Wasn't: Henry Wallace and the Fate of the American Century," which should be read *right now*.

Wallace was a jumble of weird attributes that made him difficult to decipher, and he disguised his long infatuation with political evil. He was a scientist, an agronomist smitten by an abstraction, humanity, but more fond of plants than of actual people. Wallace, who called himself "a practical mystic," became enthralled by a charlatan guru to whom Wallace wrote embarrassingly effusive letters in which he called himself Galahad and spoke of "Karmic duty" and the "Holy Chalice."

Wallace's manderings about "changing the human heart" and ending "selfishness" made him seem like a harmless naif rather than what he was: an apologist for, and advocate of accommodating, the blood-soaked tyranny Joseph Stalin imposed on the Soviet Union and later exported to Eastern Europe.

On a four-week 1944 tour organized by Andrei Vyshinsky (prosecutor in the 1936-1938 show trials of Stalin's Great Purge), Wallace and his Soviet handlers traveled through Siberia's vast prison/forced-labor complex. The ideologically blinkered Wallace saw this as (in Steil's words) a "testament to Soviet economic, social, and artistic accomplishment." Wallace celebrated Siberian high wages and salubrious working conditions (supposedly an eight-hour workday and pay equivalent to that of a high-ranking Red Army officer) "that had brought the miners" — prisoners all — "into the Far East."

Rapturous, Wallace said, "They know how to laugh and play and sing." Were they singing, those people plodding, under armed guards, to 14 hours of forced labor, while Wallace's car waited for the column to pass? "No Potemkin landmass the size of the one Wallace traversed," writes Steil, "can fool one unwilling to be fooled." Wallace's "perception

merely projected predisposition."

Steil, who has studied Soviet-era archives, says members of what Wallace complacently called the "extreme liberal group" in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration included Alger Hiss, Lee Pressman, John Abt and Nathan Witt. All of whom, Steil writes, "would go on to cultivate long-standing secret ties to the Communist Party or Soviet intelligence."

FDR replaced Wallace with Harry S. Truman as his 1944 running mate. Shortly before dying the following year, Roosevelt made Wallace commerce secretary. Steil writes that Wallace's "manipulation by Soviet assets within the Commerce Department" was followed by "his back-channel collusion with Stalin to undermine official U.S. foreign policy."

President Truman belatedly fired Wallace in 1946 for his pro-Soviet pronouncements; then Wallace ran against Truman in 1948 as the candidate of the thoroughly communist-infiltrated Progressive Party. In the 1950s, when Wallace no longer mattered, he had second thoughts about Stalinism.

Wallace was neither the first nor the last running mate selected for short-term political advantages — in his case, the farm states — without responsible considerations of presidential suitability. (Abraham Lincoln's second vice president, Andrew Johnson, was drunk at the 1865 inauguration and, drunk or sober, was an especially virulent white supremacist.) In 1940, with the world ablaze, Wallace's disreputable sympathies and strange ideas should have been disqualifying. But even a 1940 running mate whose shortcomings were merely banal — say, having no pertinent talent — would have been shockingly reckless.

FDR's 1944 replacement for his 1940 mistake was a Missouri senator who, as president, launched the Berlin airlift, implemented the Marshall Plan, oversaw the creation of NATO, and resisted communist aggression in Greece, Turkey and Korea. Wallace denounced all such anti-Soviet measures.

A lesson of Steil's timely, riveting biography is: Playing roulette with presidential successions is risky, even if, as Otto von Bismarck supposedly said, a special providence looks after fools, drunks and the United States. Perhaps a special providence prolonged FDR's life during the four years Wallace was a heartbeat — or a cerebral hemorrhage — away from the presidency. Today, however, auxiliary precautions are advisable, in case providence is negligent sometime before 2029.

georgewill@washpost.com.



George Will

Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Friday, March 1, the 61st day of 2024. There are 305 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On March 1, 1974, seven people, including former Nixon White House aides H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, former Attorney General John Mitchell and former assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian, were indicted on charges of conspiring to obstruct justice in connection with the Watergate break-in. (These four defendants were convicted in January 1975, though Mardian's conviction was later reversed.)

On this date:

In 1867, Nebraska became the 37th state as President Andrew Johnson signed a proclamation.

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Mother-in-law longs for order

Dear Annie: I need advice on how to approach my son about the disorder in his house. He was raised in a very neat home. When he lived alone for several years, his house was immaculate. He's now been married for four years. They have a 2-year-old and one on the way.

Their house is in total disarray — laundry basket full of dirty clothes, counters and every surface full of junk. He does all the cooking and works full time. I don't want to insult them, but I can afford to get them organized. I don't want to overstep as the mother-in-law, though. Any advice? — Neat Freak

Dear Neat Freak: It sounds like your son and his wife have their hands full with a 2-year-old and another on the way. I'm sure your son would appreciate a little extra help around the house, but it is possible his wife might not. She might have grown up in a messy household and that's what makes her comfortable.

Have a conversation with them without criticizing them. Acknowledge how busy they are and that you want to offer your services around the house in any way that might be helpful. Let's hope that cleaning and organizing top their list, but even if they employ your services with other chores, it will free up more time for them.

Remember "The Odd Couple," where Felix was a neat freak and Oscar was a slob? If that's what you are dealing with, you might need to back off if you want to avoid being a meddling mother-in-law.

Dear Annie: I try my best not to be a jealous person. My boyfriend of three years has been sick and just got out of the hospital from a cancer-related health issue. He lives at my home with me. He said that there is nothing wrong with letting all his exes come by our home to visit him after getting out of the hospital. I have a problem with that.

I don't care how he throws a fit that they are just friends and there is nothing going on between him or any of them. He just started telling them that they

could come on by, and he never even asked me if it was OK with me or if I had bad feelings about it. He just decided it doesn't matter how I feel about it and that he can have them visit him at our home anytime they want.

Annie, am I wrong or selfish for getting offended or upset about this decision that he made, no matter if I like it or not, because these are his friends? Please tell me because he thinks that I'm wrong for getting upset and mad about it. What should I have done in this ordeal? — Upset Girlfriend

Dear Upset Girlfriend: Exes popping up can be uncomfortable under any circumstance, but the fact that your boyfriend invited them around without a discussion or your consent makes it even worse. For him to then get so bent out of shape and angry at you is unacceptable.

In instances like these, open communication with your partner is crucial. Share your concerns with him and figure out how to set boundaries together. It sounds like the real issue here is that he doesn't take you into consideration when he makes decisions, which is a big red flag and one that must be addressed for your relationship to thrive.

"How Can I Forgive My Cheating Partner?" is out now! Annie Lane's second anthology — featuring favorite columns on marriage, infidelity, communication and reconciliation — is available as a paperback and e-book. Visit http://www.creatorspublishing.com for more information. Send your questions for Annie Lane to dearianne@creators.com.

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My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



No substitute for goodness

Question: Why does the Bible say that no one is good, "no not one"? — N.G.

Answer: The word good in the language of Scripture literally means "to be like God," because He alone is the One who is perfectly good. It is one thing to have high ethical standards but quite another for the Holy Spirit to produce the goodness that has its depths in God Himself. The meaning is more than just "doing good." Goodness goes far deeper. Goodness is love in action. It carries with it not only the idea of righteousness but righteousness demonstrated in everyday living. It is

doing good out of a good heart, to please God, without expecting medals and rewards. Christ wants this kind of goodness to be the way of life for every Christian. People can find no substitute for goodness, and no spiritual touch-up artist can imitate it.

We can do good deeds, and by practicing principles of goodness, we can witness to those around us that we have something "different" in our lives — perhaps something they themselves would like to possess. We may even be able to show others how to practice the principles of goodness in their own lives. But the Bible says, "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it [goes] away"

(Hosea 6:4, KJV). True goodness is a "fruit of the Spirit," and our efforts to achieve it in our own strength alone can never succeed.

We must be constantly aware that Satan can take any human effort and twist it to serve his own purposes, but he cannot touch the spirit that is covered by the blood of Christ and rooted deep in the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit can produce the goodness that can stand up under any test.

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

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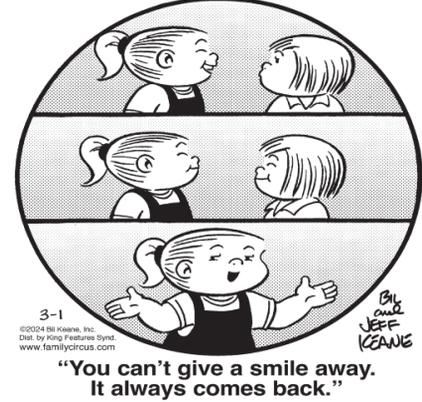


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THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By Bil Keane



The LOCKHORNS



TV schedule table with columns for time slots (5 PM to 12:30) and rows for various channels (WJLA, CBS, etc.) listing programs and their descriptions.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words, and a solution key for the previous day's puzzle.

Fuelling makes Supreme 15, Fuess & Rosswurm on All-state

Three Norwell Knights were honored by the Indiana Basketball Coaches Association Thursday morning for the 2023-24 basketball season.

Girls' basketball players across the state were selected for the IBCA's Supreme 15 and All-State members separated by large school and small school All-State teams.

Senior guard Kennedy Fuelling received the highest award, earning a spot on the Supreme 15 All-State list. This group is the top 15 senior players in the state.

Fuelling, who will join Marian University next fall for basketball, averaged 21.6 points per game and a red-hot 43 three-point percentage this season. She also picked off nearly four steals per game.

Others selected on the Supreme 15 include Jordyn Poole from Fort Wayne Snider and Purdue University commit,

and Camryn Runner from Hamilton Heights, a University of Evansville commit.

Senior guard Makenzie Fuess received large school All-State honors. The future Saint Francis Cougar was the second piece in the Knights' one-two punch of scorers. Fuess averaged 16.1 points per game and shot 36% from long range and 78% at the free-throw line.

Other notable names on the list include Chloe Graham, Gibson Southern; Ciara Sims, Fort Wayne Snider; Lexi Castator, Fort Wayne Northrop and Morgan Cross, Northridge.

Sophomore forward Vanessa Rosswurm earned large school honorable mention honors for underclassman. This award includes any grade below seniors.

Rosswurm burst on the scene in her second year on varsity with 11.6 points per game, 34% from deep and led the Knights in rebounding.

Knights beat Eagles in MS swim

The Norwell Middle School swim and dive team won over Indian Springs Wednesday night.

The boys won 13-34 and the girls 113-69.

First-place finishers were:

Boys

• Ben Peterson in the diving events and in the 100-yard IM.

• Evan Swallow in the 200-yard freestyle and in the 400-yard freestyle.

• Wyatt Goulet in the 50-yard freestyle.

• Eli Rodgers in the 50-yard butterfly.

• Tyler Zent in the 100-yard backstroke.

• Easton Reinhard in the 100-yard breaststroke.

• Oakleaf, Reinhard, Rodgers and Rupp in the 200-yard medley relay.

• Goulet, Zent, Swallow and Peterson in the 200-yard freestyle relay.

• Zent, Peterson, Swallow and Goulet in the 300-yard freestyle relay.

Girls

• Katelyn Troutt in the diving events.

• Mia Kurtz in the 200-yard freestyle.

• Abby Swineford in the 100-yard freestyle.

• Grant, Kurtz, Easley and Miakowski in the 300-yard freestyle relay.

High School Calendar

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

TRACK & FIELD (CO-ED): Bluffton at Hoosier State Relays (IWU Troyer Field-house), 5:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

No events scheduled.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

No events scheduled.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

No events scheduled.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

No events scheduled.

MLB average salary rose 7% to a record \$4.5M last year

By RONALD BLUM AP Baseball Writer

Significant free agents still on the mNEW YORK (AP) — Major League Baseball's average salary rose 7.1% last year to a record \$4,525,719, according to the annual report the players' association issued Thursday, but several teams appear to be cutting payroll for 2024.

After declining in 2021 following the pandemic-shortened season, the average rose 23% over two seasons. The 2022 average marked a 14.8% increase from 2021.

Union figures are based on the 2023 salaries, earned bonuses and prorated shares of signing bonuses for 1,038 players on Aug. 31 active rosters and injured lists, before active rosters expanded for the remainder of the season.

Luxury tax payrolls, based on 40-man rosters and average annual values, increased 12.2% in 2023, according to MLB's calculations.

The Los Angeles Dodg-

ers have topped offseason spending, giving two-way star Shohei Ohtani a record \$700 million, 10-year contract and pitcher Yoshinobu Yamamoto a \$325 million, 12-year deal.

With some significant free agents still on the market, the New York Mets, San Diego, Los Angeles Angels, San Francisco, Boston, Colorado, Minnesota and the Chicago White Sox are among the teams on track to cut payroll from last year.

"In the face of record revenues of our game that will continue to spiral upward, we have major market teams, many of which would otherwise be competitive teams, simply cutting payroll and not investing in competitiveness," said agent Scott Boras, who has yet to reach deals for free agents Blake Snell, Jordan Montgomery, Matt Chapman and J.D. Martinez.

The Mets and Padres paid the highest luxury tax last year for exceeding payroll thresholds and both failed to make the playoffs.

San Diego along with the Angels and Twins are among the 14 teams who entered the offseason uncertain of their local broadcast revenue because of the Diamond Sports' Bally regional sports networks.

"When you look at the mass of the decline just in eight teams, you might see well over \$300 million that was spent a year ago and that is not being spent today," Boras said.

Union deputy executive director Bruce Meyer said he will wait until after opening day rosters are set before analyzing 2024 spending.

With some large multi-year deals for players with little or no major league experience, the gap decreased last year for players with two-to-three years service who are eligible for arbitration and those who were not.

Super-2s averaged \$1.96 million last year, down from \$2.1 million, and the rest of the of the two-year class averaged \$1.1 million, up from \$867,000.

NCAA reveals its top 16 seeds in women's tournament reveal

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

South Carolina, Ohio State, Stanford and UCLA would be the No. 1 seeds in the NCAA Tournament if it began now.

The NCAA women's basketball selection committee on Thursday did its second reveal of the teams in line for the top 16 seeds. A lot has changed in the two weeks since the initial unveiling, outside of South Carolina and Ohio State's dominance. Of the original top 16 seeds, 11 lost at least one game.

"That's a testament to where college basketball is right now, it's difficult night in and night out," NCAA women's basketball selection committee chair Lisa Peterson told The Associated Press in a phone interview Thursday. "That hasn't always been the case."

Peterson said that South Carolina and Ohio State have had really strong seasons and that there was a lot of discussion of the final two No. 1 seeds.

"Stanford was a little more secure than the others because of their body of work," she said. "They lost to Arizona, but Cameron Brink was out. The last No. 1 had a lot of conversations considering that Virginia Tech has been playing so great right now. UCLA had such a tough schedule and they have (Lauren) Betts back."

Just outside the top four teams was Caitlin Clark and Iowa, which is ranked No. 6 in the AP poll. It will be Clark's last NCAA Tournament as she announced on Thursday she is foregoing her final season to enter the WNBA

Draft.

The Hawkeyes, last year's national runners-up, were once again projected as a No. 2 seed. They play at home against Ohio State on Sunday.

The top 16 seeds will host first- and second-round games, with the regional rounds being played at two neutral sites for the second straight year. Portland, Oregon, will host half of the Sweet 16, and Albany, New York, will host the other eight teams.

South Carolina and Ohio State were projected as the top seeds in the Albany Regional, with Stanford and UCLA in Portland. The unbeaten Gamecocks were the overall No. 1 seed.

Joining the Gamecocks in their bracket were No. 2 Iowa, No. 3 Oregon State and No. 4 Oklahoma.

Peterson said Iowa was switched with USC to ensure that the bracketing principle of keeping the top four teams in a conference in different regions was protected.

The Pac-12 had five of the top 16 seeds. The Buckeyes would have No. 2 seed Southern Cal, No. 3 LSU and No. 4 Colorado. The Buffaloes were a No. 1 seed in the initial review.

The other top teams in Stanford's region were No. 2 Texas, No. 3 N.C. State and No. 4 Indiana. UCLA would be joined by Virginia Tech, UConn and Gonzaga.

Teams just outside the top 16 included Kansas State, Notre Dame, Syracuse and Utah.

Iowa star Caitlin Clark declares for WNBA draft, will skip final season of college eligibility

By HANK KURZ Jr. AP Sports Writer

Iowa star Caitlin Clark, who is on the verge of becoming the all-time NCAA scoring leader in college basketball, announced Thursday she will leave the Hawkeyes after this season and enter the WNBA draft.

"While this season is far from over and we have a lot more goals to achieve, it will be my last one at Iowa," Clark wrote on social media.

Clark has become the focal point of women's basketball, with her flashy play and 3-point shot, often from the on-court logo. Many players would be benched for shooting from so far out, but Clark has the green light from her coach and has delivered while also finding her teammates and hitting the boards.

The guard, with one more year of eligibility, became the all-time leading women's scorer in major college basketball by scoring 33 points to pass Lynette Woodard and post her 17th career triple-double in a 108-60 victory over Minnesota on Wednesday night.

In her announcement, she thanked her teammates, coaches and the thousands of fans who have packed arenas across the country to watch her and the sixth-ranked Hawkeyes.

Those fans were chanting "One more year! One more year!" while Clark was being interviewed on the court Wednesday night, when she also broke the NCAA single-season record by sinking eight 3-pointers for a total of 156.

She has 3,650 career points. Woodard had 3,649 points for Kansas from 1977-81, before the NCAA sanctioned the sport. Earlier this month, Clark broke Kelsey Plum's



Caitlin Clark

NCAA scoring record (3,527 points).

Next up is the overall NCAA scoring record of Pete Maravich, who is just 17 points ahead of her.

Clark is expected to be the top pick in the draft on April 15.

The Indiana Fever, who have the first pick, indicated on social media shortly after Clark's announcement that they intend to select her.

"We're just simply reminding you that there are only 46 days until the 2024 WNBA Draft," the team posted after dropping a link to its game tickets and a conspicuous "No. 1."

The Fever had the first pick in last year's draft as well. They selected Aliyah Boston out of South Carolina. The forward is averaging 14.5 points and 8.4 rebounds per game.

The two former Associated Press players of the year sat down for an interview with NBC Sports in October.

"Well, the Indiana Fever could have the first pick, so people may, may or not, may not, maybe will, have the duo. I don't know?" Clark said to a laughing Boston. "It remains to be seen. But me and Aliyah may be teammates at some point, you never know."

Clark went on to say in the interview that "your time in college is so special and it's different from being a pro."

"I want to experience every single moment and really soak it in," she said.

Clark's final regular-season home game at Iowa is likely to bring one of the priciest tickets in women's college basketball history.

The cheapest ticket listed Thursday on TickPick.com for the Sunday game against No. 2 Ohio State was \$481.

Bon Jovi to lead the field to green in IndyCar season-opener

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) — Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Jon Bon Jovi will be featured at the first two IndyCar races of the season and take a ride in the "Fastest Seat in Sports" with four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves.

Meyer Shank Racing said Wednesday that SiriusXM's Bon Jovi Radio channel will be featured on Felix Rosenqvist's car at both next weekend's season-opening race in St. Petersburg, Florida, and the \$1 million challenge at California's Thermal Auto Club

in late March.

Bon Jovi will be in IndyCar's star-studded two-seater at St. Pete when Castroneves leads the field to green on the downtown city streets for the March 10 season opener. Both will be wearing custom Bon Jovi Radio fire suits.

Castroneves now has an ownership shake in Meyer Shank Racing, which is co-owned by Jim Meyer, the former CEO of SiriusXM. Rosenqvist will be making his MSR debut.



Red Bull's Horner denies misconduct

By JAMES ELLINGWORTH AP Sports Writer

SAKHIR, Bahrain (AP) — Red Bull principal Christian Horner dismissed "anonymous speculation" after alleged evidence in his misconduct investigation was widely distributed on Thursday, two days before his team opens its bid for a fourth consecutive Formula 1 drivers' championship.

His statement was forced by a stunning off-track development: As the second practice was going on for the Bahrain Grand Prix, a file alleged to contain evidence presented against Horner was emailed to nearly 200 people in the F1 paddock, including Liberty Media, F1, the FIA, the other nine team principals and multiple media outlets.

The authenticity of the files has not been verified by The Associated Press; the file came from a generic email account.

The files were sent one day after the team's parent company dismissed a complaint that alleged misconduct by Horner toward a team employee. He was at the practice when the files were sent.

"I won't comment on anonymous speculation, but to reiterate, I have always denied the allegations," Horner said in a statement read to journalists by a team spokesman; the statement was from Horner, not on behalf of Red Bull.

"I respected the integrity of the independent investigation and fully cooperated with it every step of the way," Horner said. "It was a thorough and fair investigation conducted by an independent specialist barrister and it has concluded, dismissing the complaint made. I remain fully focused on the start of the season."

Details of the allegations involving Horner have not been made public. The Red Bull company said Wednesday the complainant has a right to appeal the decision.

The 50-year-old Horner has been the team principal since Red Bull entered F1 as a full constructor in 2005. He has guided the team to six constructors' championships and seven drivers' championships. Red Bull won all but one of the 22 races last season, with 19 wins for Max Verstappen, the three-time champion. Its redesigned car is widely considered the fastest on the grid for 2024 going into Saturday's season opener.

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News-Banner Scoreboard

BASKETBALL

High School

Monday Boys' Scores
No Games.

College

Men's Basketball Scores

Thursday, Feb. 29

EAST

Albany (NY) 91, New Hampshire 67
Binghamton 76, Maine 74, OT
CCSU 78, LIU 64
Delaware 73, Northeastern 67
Drexel 90, Stony Brook 86
Le Moyne 70, Wagner 56
Mass.-Lowell 89, Bryant 67
Merrimack 74, Fairleigh Dickinson

MIDWEST

Rutgers 82, Michigan 52
Sacred Heart 79, Stonehill 51
UMBC 79, NJIT 60

SOUTH

Coll. of Charleston 96, Campbell 73
Elon 76, William & Mary 71
Gardner-Webb 72, Longwood 69
Hampton 64, Monmouth (NJ) 56
Hofstra 69, UNC-Wilmington 58
Liberty 83, New Mexico St. 58
Memphis 82, East Carolina 58
Morehead St. 72, SE Missouri 50
Towson 84, NC A&T 58
UT Martin 80, Tennessee Tech 69
UTEP 72, Jacksonville St. 65

MIDWEST

Lindenwood (Mo.) 67, S. Indiana 63
Ohio St. 78, Nebraska 69
S. Dakota St. 77, North Dakota 62
South Dakota 88, N. Dakota St. 68
St. Thomas (MN) 88, Omaha 61
W. Illinois 70, E. Illinois 66

FAR WEST

Abilene Christian 77, S. Utah 68
Grand Canyon 72, Texas Rio
Grande Valley 43
Montana St. 62, Idaho 48
Utah 90, Stanford 68

Women's Basketball Scores

Thursday, Feb. 29

EAST

Albany (NY) 45, New Hampshire 40
Boston College 78, North Carolina

MIDWEST

Bryant 60, Mass.-Lowell 51
CCSU 65, LIU Brooklyn 56
Delaware St. 57, Morgan St. 53
Fairfield 64, Quinnipiac 46
Fairleigh Dickinson 71, Merrimack

SOUTH

Iona 71, Canisius 58
Le Moyne 55, Wagner 46
Maine 57, Binghamton 51
Maryland 79, Wisconsin 63
Mount St. Mary's 58, Manhattan 43
NJIT 77, UMBC 76, OT
Niagara 75, Rider 56
Sacred Heart 78, Stonehill 49
Siena 73, Marist 62

FAR WEST

Alabama 76, Florida 73
Auburn 77, Mississippi St. 60
Austin Peay 63, E. Kentucky 55
Chattanooga 60, Furman 53
Clemson 68, Wake Forest 64
Duke 73, Virginia 54
Florida Gulf Coast 75, North Florida

SOUTH

Louisville 70, Florida St. 55

McNeese St. 72, Houston Christian 64

Miami 62, Pittsburgh 44
Mississippi 75, Kentucky 45
NC State 75, Syracuse 71, OT
Northwestern St. 55, Nicholls 47
SE Missouri 70, Morehead St. 63
Stetson 55, Jacksonville 51
Tennessee 75, Texas A&M 66
UT Martin 67, Tennessee Tech 37
Wofford 75, ETSU 64

MIDWEST

Bellarmine 80, Lipscomb 74
Denver 74, UMKC 60
Detroit 64, IUPUI 59
Drake 84, Ill. Chicago 63
Grand Canyon 66, Texas Rio
Grande Valley 40

SOUTH

Illinois St. 75, S. Illinois 66, OT
Michigan St. 87, Illinois 70
Missouri St. 70, Bradley 44
N. Dakota St. 63, South Dakota 54
N. Iowa 78, Valparaiso 59
Notre Dame 71, Virginia Tech 58
Oakland 84, Wright St. 82, 2OT
Omaha 79, St. Thomas (MN) 62
S. Dakota St. 103, North Dakota 47
S. Indiana 75, Lindenwood (Mo.) 38
Vanderbilt 68, Missouri 61
W. Illinois 64, E. Illinois 54

SOUTHWEST

Abilene Christian 75, S. Utah 42
Cal Baptist 100, Stephen F. Austin 96, OT

MIDWEST

Incarnate Word 53, SE Louisiana 51
Lamar 74, Texas A&M Commerce

SOUTH

Seattle 81, Texas-Arlington 77
South Carolina 98, Arkansas 61
Tarleton St. 76, Utah Tech 60
Texas A&M-CC 81, New Orleans 54
UALR 68, Tennessee St. 46
UTEP 70, Jacksonville St. 48

FAR WEST

E. Washington 56, Montana 55
Idaho 58, Montana St. 53
Liberty 60, New Mexico St. 56
N. Arizona 89, Idaho St. 74
N. Colorado 72, Weber St. 64
Pacific 82, San Diego 62
Santa Clara 86, Loyola Marymount

SOUTH

Southern Cal 95, Arizona 93, 2OT
UC Irvine 64, CS Northridge 54
UCLA 70, Arizona St. 41
Utah 82, Washington St. 67

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Boston	46	12	.793	—
New York	35	25	.583	12
Philadelphia	33	25	.569	13
Brooklyn	23	36	.390	23½
Toronto	22	37	.373	24½

Southeast Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Miami	33	25	.569	—
Orlando	34	26	.567	—
Atlanta	26	33	.441	7½
Charlotte	15	44	.254	18½
Washington	9	49	.155	24

Central Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Cleveland	38	20	.655	—
Milwaukee	39	21	.650	—
Indiana	34	26	.567	5
Chicago	28	31	.475	10½

Detroit 9 49 .155 29

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
New Orleans	35	25	.583	—
Dallas	34	25	.576	¼
Houston	25	33	.431	14½
Memphis	20	39	.339	19
San Antonio	12	48	.200	23

Northwest Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
Minnesota	42	17	.712	—
Oklahoma City	41	18	.695	1
Denver	40	19	.678	2
Utah	27	33	.450	15½
Portland	15	42	.263	26

Pacific Division

W	L	Pct	GB	
L.A. Clippers	37	20	.649	—
Phoenix	34	24	.586	3½
Sacramento	33	25	.569	4½
N. Dakota St.	31	27	.534	6½
L.A. Lakers	32	28	.533	6½

Wednesday's Games

Dallas 136, Toronto 125
Indiana 123, New Orleans 114
Minnesota 110, Memphis 101
Chicago 132, Cleveland 123, 2OT
Denver 117, Sacramento 96
L.A. Lakers 116, L.A. Clippers 112

Thursday's Games

Milwaukee 111, Charlotte 99
Orlando 115, Utah 107
Brooklyn 124, Atlanta 97
Golden State 110, New York 99
San Antonio 132, Oklahoma City 118

Friday's Games

Charlotte at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Cleveland at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Boston, 7:30 p.m.
Golden State at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.
Indiana at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
Portland at Memphis, 8 p.m.
Sacramento at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Milwaukee at Chicago, 10 p.m.
Washington at L.A. Clippers, 10:30 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Atlanta at Brooklyn, 3 p.m.
Utah at Miami, 5 p.m.
Portland at Memphis, 8 p.m.
Denver at L.A. Lakers, 8:30 p.m.
Houston at Phoenix, 9 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Philadelphia at Dallas, 1 p.m.
Golden State at Boston, 3:30 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota, 3:30 p.m.

Monday's Games

Charlotte at Toronto, 6 p.m.
Detroit at Orlando, 6 p.m.
Indiana at San Antonio, 7 p.m.
New York at Cleveland, 7 p.m.
Oklahoma City at Phoenix, 9:30 p.m.

Tuesday's Games

Philadelphia at Washington, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at Anaheim, 8 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Edmonton, 9 p.m.

Toronto 59 34 17 8 76220 187
Detroit 60 33 21 6 72216 191
Tampa Bay 62 32 24 6 70210 210
Buffalo 60 28 28 4 60174 180
Montreal 60 23 28 9 55170 215
Ottawa 57 25 29 3 53190 203

Metropolitan Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
N.Y. Rangers	60	40	17	3	83201	164
Carolina	60	36	18	6	78198	167
Philadelphia	60	31	22	7	69183	177
New Jersey	59	30	25	4	64198	205
N.Y. Islanders	59	25	20	14	64175	200
Washington	58	27	22	9	63153	186
Pittsburgh	56	27	21	8	62170	154
Columbus	59	19	30	10	48173	218

Western Conference

Central Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Dallas	62	36	17	9	81222	188
Winnipeg	58	37	16	5	79177	139
Colorado	60	36	19	5	77221	189
Nashville	61	34	25	2	70194	189
St. Louis	59	30	26	3	63171	185
Minnesota	60	28	26	6	62189	202
Arizona	59	23	31	5	51170	196
Chicago	59	15	39	5	35123	208

Pacific Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vancouver	61	38	16	7	83221	170
Vegas	60	33	20	7	73196	172
Edmonton	57	35	20	2	72204	170
Los Angeles	58	29	20	10	68178	160
Calgary	59	29	25	5	63185	184
Seattle	58	25	22	11	61163	169
Anaheim	58	20	35	3	63151	207
San Jose	57	15	37	5	35120	222

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Wednesday's Games

N.Y. Rangers 4, Columbus 1
Edmonton 3, St. Louis 2, OT

Thursday's Games

Carolina 4, Columbus 2
N.Y. Islanders 5, Detroit 3
Toronto 4, Arizona 2
Buffalo 3, Tampa Bay 2, OT
Boston 5, Vegas 4
Florida 4, Montreal 3, SO
Dallas 4, Winnipeg 1
Nashville 6, Minnesota 1
Colorado at Chicago, 9 p.m.
Los Angeles at Vancouver, 10 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Seattle, 10 p.m.
Anaheim at San Jose, 10:30 p.m.

Friday's Games

Arizona at Ottawa, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at Washington, 7 p.m.
New Jersey at Anaheim, 10 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Winnipeg at Carolina, 12:30 p.m.
Florida at Detroit, 3 p.m.
Edmonton at Seattle, 4 p.m.
Colorado at Nashville, 6 p.m.
Minnesota at St. Louis, 6 p.m.
Montreal at Tampa Bay, 7 p.m.
N.Y. Rangers at Toronto, 7 p.m.
Ottawa at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Vegas at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
Boston at N.Y. Islanders, 7:30 p.m.
Columbus at Chicago, 8 p.m.
San Jose at Dallas, 8 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Calgary, 10 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Arizona at Washington, 1 p.m.
New Jersey at Los Angeles, 3:30 p.m.

San Jose at Minnesota, 7 p.m.
Winnipeg at Buffalo, 7 p.m.
Vancouver at Anaheim, 8 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Edmonton, 9 p.m.

BASEBALL

Spring Training

AMERICAN LEAGUE

W	L	Pct	
Baltimore	6	1	.857
Texas	5	1	.833
Kansas City	5	3	.625
Detroit	3	3	.500
Boston	4	2	.667
New York	3	2	.600
Los Angeles	3	3	.500
Oakland	3	3	.500
Chicago	3	5	.375
Cleveland	2	4	.333
Houston	3	4	.429
Minnesota	1	4	.200
Tampa Bay	2	3	.400
Toronto	2	4	.333
Seattle	1	4	.200

NATIONAL LEAGUE

W	L	Pct	
Cincinnati	4	1	.800
Philadelphia	3	1	.750
Los Angeles	5	2	.714
New York	4	2	.667
Washington	4	2	.667
Colorado	5	3	.625
Arizona	4	3	.571
Atlanta	3	3	.500
San Diego	4	4	.500
Chicago	3	3	.500
St. Louis	2	3	.400
Miami	1	3	.250
Milwaukee	1	5	.167
Pittsburgh	1	5	.167
San Francisco	0	4	.000

Wednesday's Games

Detroit 5, Pittsburgh 3
Washington 4, Boston 3
Baltimore 12, Minnesota 3
Atlanta 7, Philadelphia 7
Toronto 3, Tampa Bay 2
Houston 6, Miami 1
N.Y. Mets 3, St. Louis 0
San Diego 3, Chicago White Sox 1
Oakland 7, San Francisco 4
Texas 6, L.A. Dodgers 4
Arizona 8, Cleveland 6
Colorado 3, L.A. Angels 1
Kansas City 9, Seattle 7
Chicago Cubs 6, Milwaukee 1

Thursday's Games

Boston 5, Detroit 2
Atlanta (ss) 5, Minnesota 0
Baltimore 9, Pittsburgh 8
Atlanta (ss) 12, Tampa Bay 9
Washington 3, St. Louis 1
Philadelphia 5, Toronto 0
San Diego 5, Oakland 3
Chicago White Sox (ss) 6, Kansas City 1

Texas 7, Milwaukee 5
Colorado 10, Chicago Cubs 9
L.A. Angels 4, Cleveland 1
Chicago White Sox (ss) 6, Seattle 5

Friday's Games

Atlanta vs Baltimore at North Port,

Fla., 1:05 p.m.
Detroit vs Philadelphia (ss) at Lakeland, Fla., 1:05 p.m.
Minnesota vs Boston at Fort Myers, Fla., 1:05 p.m.
Pittsburgh vs Tampa Bay at Bradenton, Fla., 1:05 p.m.
Washington vs Houston at West Palm Beach, Fla., 1:05 p.m.
Philadelphia (ss) vs Miami at Clearwater, Fla., 1:05 p.m.
St. Louis vs N.Y. Mets at Jupiter, Fla., 1:05 p.m.
Chicago Cubs vs Chicago White Sox at Mesa, Ariz., 3:05 p.m.
Kansas City vs Oakland at Surprise, Ariz., 3:05 p.m.
San Francisco vs Texas at Scottsdale, Ariz., 3:05 p.m.
Colorado vs Seattle at Scottsdale, Ariz., 3:10 p.m.
San Diego (ss) vs L.A. Angels at Peoria, Ariz., 3:10 p.m.
Milwaukee vs San Diego (ss) at Phoenix, 3:10 p.m.
N.Y. Yankees vs Toronto at Tampa, Fla., 6:35 p.m.
L.A. Dodgers vs Cleveland at Phoenix, 8:05 p.m.
Cincinnati vs Arizona at Goodyear, Ariz., 8:05 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Baltimore vs N.Y. Yankees at Sarasota,

Black soldiers are honored, name by name, at Civil War battlefield

By **EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS**
Associated Press

VICKSBURG, Miss. (AP) — Thelma Sims Dukes grew up during the 1940s and '50s in a segregated Mississippi town steeped in Civil War history.

As a small Black girl, she would walk to school through Vicksburg National Military Park — the hilly battlefield where Union and Confederate soldiers fought and died over whether the U.S. would continue allowing slavery in the South.

Union forces won a pivotal campaign to capture the town of Vicksburg and gain control of the Mississippi River in 1863, hastening the war's end. But during Dukes' childhood, Vicksburg venerated the Confederacy and ignored the history of Black soldiers who fought for the Union, including her great-great grandfather, William "Bill" Sims.

"The superintendents and the museum curators — they said we didn't fight in the Civil War," Dukes said recently.

The Black soldiers' valor and service to the country is no longer ignored, thanks to the efforts of historians, park employees and citizens like Dukes. On crisp morning in mid-February, Dukes and her niece, Sara Sims, and four park employees — two of them Black men wearing reproductions of U.S. Army uniforms from the Civil War — placed American flags on 13 graves where a group of recently identified Black soldiers are buried in Vicksburg National Cemetery, which is part of the military park.

A historian working for the military park, Beth Kruse, identified the soldiers through research of military records, newspapers and other sources. Their remains lie

beneath white marble headstones carved with numbers rather than names, as are most veterans buried in the cemetery.

In recent years, the National Park Service has broadened how it presents history in parks nationwide. In the Vicksburg military park, which is dotted with more than 1,400 monuments, markers and tablets and is one of the largest tourist attractions in Mississippi, drawing visitors from around the globe, the visitor center now includes information about Black history, and a monument to Black soldiers was dedicated 20 years ago.

Sunlight dappled the graves under a towering magnolia tree during the flag-planting ceremony on Feb. 14. Dukes said the men and other Black Union soldiers were "freedom fighters," not only for themselves but for all Americans.

"They are not unknowns anymore," she said. "This is a start. This is good. Let's put history right."

The newly identified soldiers had enlisted in the Vicksburg-based 1st Mississippi Infantry (African Descent) as the town was under federal occupation. In early 1864, 18 soldiers and two white officers traveled by boat some 95 miles north along the Mississippi River to Chicot County, Arkansas, to forage for crops to feed people and horses.

On Feb. 14, 1864, at Ross Landing near the town of Lake Village, irregular Confederate troops from Missouri shot the Union soldiers and officers, killing most and leaving some for dead. They used the Union soldiers' own bayonets to impale the dead and wounded, pinning them to the ground, according to research by Kruse.

Brendan Wilson, chief of interpretation, education and partnerships for Vicksburg National Military Park, said on the 160th anniversary of the gruesome day in Ross Landing that it's still not known which of the 13 Black soldiers from that massacre is in which specific grave. Records show where the group is buried.

"And now we have their names and can bring those names back to life," Wilson said.

Kruse is working in Vicksburg through the National Park Service's Mellon Humanities Postdoctoral Fellows program. She said at least 11 soldiers of the 1st Mississippi Infantry (African Descent) were previously enslaved on southern plantations.

"For these soldiers, it was not abstract ideology," she said. "They knew what it was to be unfree."

Vicksburg National Cemetery was established in 1866 and now holds more than 18,000 graves — veterans from six wars and a few former park employees. More than 17,000 of them fought for the Union in the Civil War, including more than 5,500 Black soldiers, designated by the U.S. War Department in 1863 as United States Colored Troops.

Vicksburg is the largest cemetery for Union soldiers and sailors, its dead brought from Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and other states. Nearly 13,000 are buried as unknown.

About 5,000 Confederate soldiers are buried in a city cemetery in Vicksburg, outside the military park.

Some 80 years after the Civil War ended, Dukes' father worked in maintenance at the national military park. She said she has always thought the landscape of the former battlefield is beautiful,

but when she was young she never saw any of the history there as relevant to the Black community.

"All I know is that the South lost. OK, I did know that," Dukes said. "But none of the battles like we are learning now. I didn't feel like it was any connection to Blacks."

In 2004, Vicksburg National Military Park dedicated a monument honoring the Black soldiers who fought in the Vicksburg Campaign. The troops were pivotal in a Union victory at Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, along the Mississippi River north of Vicksburg, in June 1863. Robert Major Walker, a historian elected as Vicksburg's first Black mayor in 1988, proposed the monument in 1999 after spending years doing research and securing money for it.

"Something had to be done to show the involvement of Black folk in the Civil War," Walker said recently. "So much positive had been left out of the books of history. Everybody needed to know the truth."

Dukes, whose great-great grandfather fought at Milliken's Bend and survived the war, criticizes efforts by some Republican governors, including Florida's Ron DeSantis and Mississippi's Tate Reeves, to limit the teaching about slavery and other difficult aspects of U.S. history.

"And I don't see why the majority of people in America don't say, 'No, you can't do that. Let's tell it all,'" Dukes said.

Three days after placing American flags in the cemetery, Dukes joined others inside the military park's visitor center for a libation ceremony, a traditional African religious ritual, to pay tribute to the 20 men killed or wounded at Ross Landing.

Albert Dorsey Jr., a history professor from Jackson State University, read the name of each man — Black and white — as he poured water into a pot of soil and grass, a small chunk of Earth brought indoors for the chilly day:

Pvt. Henry Berry, Pvt. Calvin Cathron, 1st Lt. Thaddeus Cock, Pvt. Howard Dixon, Corp. Fleming Epps, Pvt. Ruffian Epps, Corp. Peter Everman, Pvt. Charles Farrar, Pvt. Henry Ford, Pvt. John Geneva, Pvt. Anthony Givens, Pvt. Richard James, Sgt. Tony McGee, Sgt. Noah Powell, Pvt. Thomas Ransom, 1st Sgt. James Spencer, Pvt. Isaac Stanton, Pvt. Isom Taylor, Corp. Nelson Walker, Pvt. James H. Boldin.

After each name, the audience of about 50 people responded: "Asé," pronounced ah-SHAY, a word from the Yoruba language spoken in parts of western Africa. It is similar to "Amen," an affirmation of a life force.

The 13 Black men killed in the massacre were initially buried at Ross Landing, and later interred in the cemetery as unknowns. Three more were wounded and died during or shortly after the Civil War, and also were buried as unknowns. Two others survived until 1918. The two white officers' bodies had been identified and sent home to Ohio and Indiana for burial during the war.

Kruse told the audience that the Black men who joined the Union Army were "not groveling for inclusion" but actively chose to fight.

"As President Lincoln remarked of the Gettysburg dead," Kruse said, "we, too, can recognize the men who lay in the hallowed grounds of the Vicksburg National Cemetery, and never forget what they did for freedom."

Lawmakers fault Defense Secretary Austin for failure of leadership over hospital stay

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin faced pointed bipartisan criticism at a congressional hearing Thursday for his failure to promptly notify President Joe Biden and other U.S. leaders about his hospital stay last month. Republicans demanded to know why no one has been disciplined.

Members of the House Armed Services Committee condemned the lapse as an embarrassment and a failure of his leadership. They said the fact that Biden was kept in the dark about Austin not being in command for days could have meant confusion or delays in military action, even though decision-making authorities had been transferred to the deputy defense secretary.

Austin insisted there were no gaps in control of the department or the nation's security because "at all times, either I or the deputy secretary was in a position to conduct the duties of my office." He said

changes have been made to the notification process.

Many Democrats also expressed concerns about Austin's lack of transparency about his hospitalization for complications from prostate cancer surgery. But some also used the hearing to criticize House Republicans, who hold a slim majority, for not passing a budget or addressing critical national security needs.

Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., denounced the "outrage and drama" from committee members as she said Austin has admitted making an error, apologized and taken action to prevent a repeat. She implored her colleagues to "focus in on the things that are actually important to national security" such as threats from Russia and China.

Nonetheless, there was general agreement that Austin and his staff bungled notifications about his hospital stay in early January.

Check out these websites of local & area companies and businesses.

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