



# The News - Banner

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MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024

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### Shopping local

The Wells County Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Centre hosted a Small Town Formal Event Expo Saturday, featuring a variety of vendors for decor, catering and more. Above is Krysta Fornal of Son-Rise Bakery in Warren, and at right, Amy Sprunger of and Andrea Vanden Topp, both area photographers. (Photos by Holly Gaskill)



## Commissioners hope to recognize county efforts

By HOLLY GASKILL

The Wells County Commissioners have begun an initiative to recognize "exceptional citizenship" in Wells County.

Commissioner Mike Vanover explained that, as a board, the commissioners want to thank residents for serving the community, both in simple and large ways. Submissions are now being accepted through the county website at [wellscounty.org/wells-county-exceptional-citizenship-nomination/](http://wellscounty.org/wells-county-exceptional-citizenship-nomination/).

The submission form asks for the contact information of the person filing the form, the contact information of the nominated person, and the reason for nomination.

Contingent on submissions, the commissioners plan to recognize exceptional citizenship every month. Vanover hopes the venture fosters a culture of community involvement, as well as recognizes the community servants who are often too humble to draw attention to their work.

[holly@news-banner.com](mailto:holly@news-banner.com)

## Senate axes 13th check bid in favor of long-term plan

*Contentious election and cosmetology bills advance as penal facility concurrence stumbles.*

By LESLIE BONILLA MUÑOZ, CASEY SMITH and WHITNEY DOWNARD  
Indiana Capital Chronicle

A years-long disagreement between Statehouse Republicans over how best to fund pension benefit bonuses came to a head on Thursday when a Senate committee stripped a House bill providing 13th checks and instead inserted a Senate bill introducing a future hybrid approach.

Senators also approved legislation prioritizing "intellectual diversity" in higher education institutions — over academic freedom fears — alongside controversial election security and cosmetology bills. But they encountered a stumbling block on a prison proposal.

Indiana's lawmakers have traditionally offered public retirees a 13th check or a cost-of-living adjustment to supplement pension benefits that lag inflation. The ad hoc bonuses have become a sticking point between the House, which favors them, and the Senate, which has desired a long-term solution.

Last year, lawmakers approved no bonus, angering many public retirees.

"We have to fix this so we're not having these discussions every year," said Sen. Ryan Mishler, who chairs the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee.

This session, the House put forth legislation giving public retirees a 13th check this year. The Senate, meanwhile, proposed Senate Bill 275, establishing a long-term, hybrid approach in 2025 — but it never got a hearing in the House, killing it.

But when the Appropriations panel added House Bill 1004 to its agenda just before Senate deadlines, it wasn't for a compromise. Mishler offered an amendment emptying the bill and replacing it with his chamber's version.

Mishler said he doesn't believe the General Assembly can do both in tandem.

"We have to build the fund up," he said. "If you do a 13th check, you're going to prolong the permanent fix. That's the trade-off."

A fund already exists to pay for such additional benefits. But Mishler told reporters public employers would face higher surcharge rates to finance both the short-term and long-term approaches at the same time.

"They wouldn't be able to afford that," he said.

Several groups representing public retirees said they continued to support the long-term fix, but were disappointed in the lack of a short-term stopgap.

"What are we going to do in the meantime for retired educators?" asked Laura Penman, executive director of the Indiana Retired Teachers Association.

"The budget is not an issue," said Jessica Love, executive director of the Indiana Public Employees Association. "... Retirees are struggling, and you have the ability to rectify that in a small way — this year."

The Indiana Public Retirement System confirmed by email that lawmakers could do both "if all actuarial assumptions are met" but warned that it hasn't examined the risks

(Continued on Page 2)

## Head Start aims to fight poverty, but teachers struggle to make ends meet

By MORIAH BALINGIT  
AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — In some ways, Doris Milton is a Head Start success story. She was a student in one of Chicago's inaugural Head Start classes, when the antipoverty program, which aimed to help children succeed by providing them a first-rate preschool education, was in its infancy.

Milton loved her teacher so much that she decided to follow in her footsteps. She now works as a Head Start teacher in Chicago.

After four decades on the job, Milton, 63, earns \$22.18 an hour. Her pay puts her above the poverty line, but she is

far from financially secure. She needs a dental procedure she cannot afford, and she is paying down \$65,000 of student loan debt from National Louis University, where she came within two classes of getting her bachelor's degree. She dropped out in 2019 when she fell ill.

"I'm trying to meet their needs when nobody's meeting mine," Milton said of teaching preschoolers.

Head Start teachers — 70% of whom have bachelor's degrees — earn \$39,000 a year on average, far less than public school teachers with similar credentials. President Joe Biden wants to raise their pay, but Congress has no plans to expand the Head Start budget.

Many have left the job — about one in five teachers turned over in 2022 — for higher-paying positions at restaurants or in retail. But if Head Start centers are required to raise teacher pay without additional money, operators say they would have to cut how many kids they serve.

The Biden administration says the program is already turning kids away because so many teachers have left, and not enough workers are lining up to take their places. And officials say it does not make sense for an anti-poverty program, where people of color make up 60% of the workforce, to underpay

(Continued on Page 2)

## Congressional leaders come out with 6 spending bills to avoid partial shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congressional leaders on Sunday came out with a package of six bills setting full-year spending levels for some federal agencies, a step forward in a long overdue funding process beset by sharp political divisions between the two parties as well as infighting among House Republicans.

The release of the text of legislation over the weekend was designed to meet the House's rule to give lawmakers at least 72 hours to study a bill

before voting. And it's a promising sign that lawmakers will avoid a partial shutdown that would kick in at 12:01 a.m. Saturday for those agencies covered under the bill, such as Veterans Affairs, Agriculture, Transportation, Justice and others.

Congressional leaders hope to complete votes on the package this week and continue negotiations on the remaining six annual spending bills to pass them before a March 22 deadline. The price tag for the package out Sunday comes to about \$460 billion, representing less than 30% of the dis-

cretionary spending Congress looks to approve for this year. The package still being negotiated includes defense spending.

House Speaker Mike Johnson highlighted some key policy and spending wins for conservatives, even as many of his GOP colleagues consider the changes inadequate. Some House Republicans had hoped the prospect of a shutdown could leverage more concessions from Democrats.

Overall, this year's spending bills would keep non-defense spending rel-

(Continued on Page 2)

**Inside**

Local/Area

Obituaries . . . . . 3  
Court Docket . . . . . 3

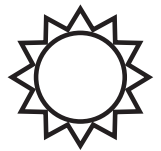
Opinion

Niki Kelly . . . . . 4

Also...

Sports . . . . . 6-7  
Classifieds . . . . . 9  
Diversions . . . . . 8

**Outside**



Sunny and warm today  
with rain tonight

Today	Tuesday	Wed.
High 74	High 63	High 50
Low 56	Low 42	Low 35

More Weather on Page 2

**Online**

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Vol. 95 No. 104

**MONDAY**  
March 4, 2024

Your MONEY

Your TAXES



It's that time of year! Review your  
finances and get your taxes done.

**Don't miss out!**  
**Today in New-Banner!**

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OBITUARIES

Phyllis "Mimi" Makowski, 92

Phyllis "Mimi" Makowski, 92, of Bluffton, passed away peacefully Saturday evening, March 2, 2024, at River Terrace Estates, surrounded by her loving family.



She was born July 3, 1931, in Wausau, Wis., to Arthur and Dorothy Beilke. Phyllis was an avid bridge player who enjoyed reading and was the best cook and baker. She enjoyed her time as a homemaker and was a loving mother, grandma, great-grandma and friend.

On June 16, 1951, Phyllis and Stanley "Stan" G. Makowski were married in Wausau, Wis. They shared 63 years of marriage before Stan preceded her in death Sept. 10, 2014.

Survivors include her three sons, Steven (Sherry) Makowski, Jeff Makowski and Joel (Patty) Makowski, all of Bluffton; grandchildren, Phyllis "Betsy" (Andy) Needler of Montpelier, Matthew (Isabel) Makowski of Galveston, Texas, Albrecht Makowski of Bluffton, Fiona Makowski of Indianapolis, Tadeus Makowski of Indianapolis, Oriana (Corbin) Patterson of Indianapolis, Nicholas (Natalie) Makowski of Fort Wayne and Rachel (Jon) Riley of Bluffton; and great-grandchildren, Zoe, Ashlie, Reagan, Stan and Kayci Needler all of Montpelier, Guy and Ren Makowski of Galveston, Texas and Jackson and Emelia Riley of Bluffton.

Phyllis is preceded in death by her husband, Stan, and a son, Mark A. Makowski in 2018.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 11 a.m. Tuesday, March 5, 2024, at St. Joseph Catholic Church, with Father David Violi celebrating mass.

Visitation will be held from 10 a.m. Tuesday until the time of mass on Tuesday at the church.

Burial will take place at a later date at Elm Grove Cemetery in Bluffton.

Memorials may be made to St. Joseph Catholic Church or to the National Leukemia Association.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the care of the Lemler family of Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton. Friends can send condolences to the Makowski family at www.thomarich.com.

Lynn A. Ealing, 71

Lynn A. Ealing, 71, of Bluffton, passed away Sunday afternoon, Mar. 3, 2024, at Ossian Health and Rehabilitation Center.

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

Virginia D. Marvin, 96

Virginia D. Marvin, 96 of Bluffton, died Sunday afternoon, March 3, 2024, at Envive Health Care in Huntington.

Funeral arrangements are currently pending with the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton.

Sherry G. Salyers, 66

Sherry G. Salyers, 66, of Bluffton, died Sunday afternoon, March 3, 2024, at River Terrace Retirement Community.

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

Literacy bill – with third grade retention requirement – heads to Indiana governor

By CASEY SMITH, Indiana Capital Chronicle

Indiana senators gave final approval Thursday for a literacy overhaul bill that will require reading-deficient third graders to be held back a year in school.

Senate Bill 1, which seeks to remedy Indiana's literacy "crisis" by requiring schools to administer the statewide IREAD test in second grade — a year earlier than current requirements — and directing new, targeted support to at-risk students and those struggling to pass the exam.

But if, after three tries, a third grader can't meet the IREAD standard, legislators want school districts to retain them.

That number could reach into the thousands according to recent data.

While much of the rest of the bill has received bipartisan support, the retention language has been passionately debated in both chambers.

Numerous teachers, parents and education experts argued there are various, negative long-term effects for students who are forced to retake third grade. But Republican lawmakers remained firm that Indiana does a disservice to kids who are promoted to the fourth grade without foundational reading skills.

The Senate voted 29-16 on Thursday in favor of the bill. Seven Republicans joined Democrats in rejecting the measure, in part over the House chamber's deletion of dyslexia-specific supports for young learners.

Senate Bill 1 now heads to Gov. Eric Holcomb for his review and signature. The governor has not said where stands on the final version of the proposal but included third grade literacy — and mandatory retention — in his 2024 legislative agenda.

Wells Court Docket

Wells Superior Court Criminal Cases

Jeffrey D. Hall, 33, Bluffton; Sentenced to 180 days in the Wells County Jail with all but four days suspended. Hall pled guilty to one count of disorderly conduct, a Class B misdemeanor. One count of strangulation and one count of domestic battery in the presence of a child — both Level 6 felonies — were dismissed

as part of a plea agreement. Hall is required to serve six months on probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$529.00

Casey L. Hundley, 42, Bluffton; Sentenced to 547 days in the Indiana Department of Correction with all but 104 days suspended. Hundley received 104 days of jail credit towards his sentence. Hundley pled

guilty to unlawful possession of a syringe, a Level 6 felony. One count of possession of methamphetamine, a Level 6 felony, possession of marijuana a misdemeanor, were dismissed pursuant to a plea agreement. Hundley was also ordered to serve 365 days on probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$789.00

Levi Dean Bauer, 42, Bluffton; Sentenced to 547 days in the Indiana Department of Correction with all but two days suspended. The sentence was issued immediately after Bauer pled guilty to one count of residential entry, a Level 6 felony. Bauer is also required to spend 545 days on probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$949.00

Indiana county hires yet another election supervisor

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. (AP) — An Indiana county lost its top election official nearly every other month over the last year after a longtime supervisor resigned following a counting error in the November 2022 tally.

Voting advocates hope fears of a rocky election year will ease now that Monroe County has named a supervisor who is vowing to stay. The county clerk promoted a 24-year-old elections office assistant to the top job on Feb. 12, just 12 weeks before Indiana's May 7 primaries to choose candidates for U.S. Senate, governor and president.

"Given the national mood, public confidence in this election will likely be tested," the League of Women Voters of Bloomington-Monroe County said in a January letter urging county officials to quickly fill the role.

Voting advocates and local party chairs say enormous responsibilities and relatively low salaries have made it difficult to keep recent hires in Monroe. As home to Indiana University and the college town of Bloomington, the county is a Democratic island in overwhelmingly Republican Indiana.

Increased scrutiny around elections and threats to election workers have prompted waves of retirements and resignations from local election offices across the country since former President Donald Trump led efforts to challenge the 2020 vote counts. The resulting loss of institutional knowledge in the midst of many changes in voting laws is making 2024 a challenging election year.

"Not having somebody who's experienced in doing this and familiar with our county and how things have been done in the past makes the job heavier on the people who do have to do the work," said Debora Shaw, spokesperson for the Bloomington-Monroe League of Women Voters.

The turnover in Monroe began in early 2023 when Karen Wheeler, the supervisor since 2017, resigned following pressure that came mostly from her fellow Republicans over a mistake during the Nov. 2022 vote count. About 6,600 ballots were not added until the next morning, after unofficial results had already been sent to the Secretary of State.

Wheeler, 67, told The

Associated Press that the early voting results had been kept on a digital storage device and were added to the unofficial tally by 9 a.m. that Wednesday. She said she took the blame and resigned to avoid being fired by the Democratic county clerk, but stands by the performance of her staff.

"Some people are always suspicious of elections, but people who know who we are had a lot of confidence," Wheeler said.

The county clerk, Nicole Browne, did not return the AP's phone and email messages requesting comment.

Wheeler said an election training specialist hired before her resignation was prepared by the county to succeed her, but she quit just weeks after Wheeler left. Three others then briefly filled the job — one stayed only a month.

Wheeler said she both loved and hated the job. She administered eight elections and oversaw more than 80 workers during early voting and 300 each Election Day. Wheeler described the role as liaison between candidates, the media, vendors, the state and the public. The election supervisor also writes ballots specific to each precinct.

"It's an extremely difficult job," Wheeler said. "And with Monroe County the pay was pretty low" — around \$37,000 for the full-time, year-round work.

The starting pay was increased to \$55,674 for the latest hire, according to a county job posting.

Elections are becoming increasingly complex, the laws governing them change regularly, and the high turnover means officials stepping into these roles are less likely to be aware of resources that can help them, said Liz Howard, an election expert with the Brennan Center for Justice.

In Indiana, for example, a bill proposed this year would add a proof of residency requirement for first-time voters registering in-person.

"Many people are unaware of the complexity and all the work that it takes to make that process so easy for voters," Howard said.

None of the Monroe officials reported being threatened, but such inci-

dents are up sharply around the nation. Indiana lawmakers may join other states in increasing criminal penalties for threatening election workers, and the Justice Department formed a task force to address threats.

Monroe's party chairs, Democrat David Henry and Republican Taylor Bryant, praised Wheeler and lamented the office turnovers after her departure.

"That institutional memory is really hard to replace and replicate in a short period of time," Henry said.

While Shaw, who has worked with the newly promoted supervisor before, said she is glad Kylie Moreland is reliable and has some experience, there is always a chance that a presidential election won't go smoothly.

"It would be an awful job if you just got thrown in," Wheeler said.

Moreland developed a passion for election law and the process last fall, and wants to build a lifelong career at "election central." Despite lacking years of experience, she feels well prepared after working the November election and has support from the Indiana Elections Division, she said.

Indiana Secretary of State Diego Morales announced this year that more than 60 counties will split \$2 million in federal funding for election security and other projects. Monroe County is not among them. His office said additional funding opportunities are

being discussed. As for Wheeler, she works now for the county parks and recreation department and volunteers to teach voter registration training.

"I have a much easier job and I get paid the exact same," she said.

Financial Focus

Keep voting for solid investment moves

It's Election Season again. As an investor, how should you respond to the various promises made by the candidates?

To begin with, many campaign promises never become reality. And even those that do often don't affect the economy or the financial markets to the degree one might think.

The fact is that many events that do affect the markets are simply beyond the control of political leaders. For example, the Federal Reserve determines interest rates — and the Fed itself often acts in response to other events, such as the inflation that was caused, in part, by the supply chain backlogs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, instead of making investment decisions based on who is in office or what policies may result, stick with a long-term strategy that's appropriate for your goals, risk tolerance and time horizon. And follow tried-and-true techniques, such as diversifying your portfolio among different types of investments. While diversification can't protect against all losses, it can help reduce the impact of market volatility on your portfolio.

Elections can give political leaders a lot of influence — but when it comes to making the right investment choices, you've got the power.

This content was provided by Edward Jones for use by Jeremy Todd, your Edward Jones financial advisor at 260-824-0686.

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## Norwell Internship Spotlight award Olivia Hull

Senior Olivia Hull has been selected to receive the Norwell High School Internship Spotlight award. She has been doing her experience with Norwell Middle School librarian Tanya Milostan the entire school year. Olivia is the daughter of Terry and Dawn Hull of Murray. Olivia has been a huge help with checking books in and out for the students. She assists the students with selections they would like to read. Olivia also helps with daily maintenance which involves cleaning and organization. It's important to realize that the future of libraries is very promising as there is still something very authentic and genuine about curling up with a good book vs. the use of technology. Many libraries have diversified with reading programs, games and competitions, activities involving live animals, and story time to grab the interest of young readers. After graduation, Olivia plans to attend IVY Tech University in Fort Wayne for general studies. Her ultimate career goal is to focus on library sciences.



Olivia Hull

# Events at the Creative Arts Council of Wells County

428 S. Oak Street in Bluffton  
260-824-5222  
www.wellscocreativearts.com  
creativeartscouncil@gmail.com  
Facebook: www.facebook.com/wellsco-creativearts

**Instagram: @creativeartscouncil**  
Creative Arts office hours — Monday through Thursday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Friday (by appointment only).

**DRUM LESSONS**  
**beginner, intermediate & advanced**  
We are excited to expand our repertoire of musical instrument lessons by offering drum lessons! Lessons will be Monday evenings. Private lessons are \$25 per half hour session. There is a possibility for group lessons if we have enough interest for beginners. Limited Spots available

Lessons will be taught by Alex Cornett, a worship/rock drummer with 25 years of experience. He has toured with several worship bands across the country and overseas, and has played at dozens of churches, both as a fill in and an every week musician. With a degree in audio engineering and a history of studio work, Alex has a unique collection of musical knowledge and technical ability. He is offering beginner, intermediate, and advanced classes.

If you are interested in finding out more, please call the Creative Arts office at (260) 824- 5222.

**Creative Arts Summer Camps**  
**Summer Theater Intensive June 2024**  
Shrek the Musical JR (Ages 12-18); Auditions: Saturday, May 4th, 2024 (must be age 12 by March 1st); Rehearsals: June 3 - 14; Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Performances: June 14 at 7 p.m. and June 15th at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.; (Attendance is required at all 10 days of camp plus all 3 performances); Tuition: \$100

Disney The Jungle Book Kids (Ages 8-11); Auditions: Saturday, May 11, 2024 (must be age 8 by March 1st); Rehearsals: June 17-18; Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to Noon; Performances: June 28 at 7 p.m. and June 29 at 3 p.m.; (Attendance is required at all 10 days of camp plus both performances); Tuition: \$100

**Summer Dance Intensive**  
**Registration Opens - March 1, 2024;**  
**Dates: June 3-21, 2024**  
**Creative Movement** (Ages 3-5); For 3-5 year old students, the 45 minute Creative Movement class meets twice a week for three weeks.  
Choose 1 session; Tuesday and Thursday  
Session A from 10:00 to 10:45 a.m.  
Session B from 10:45 to 11:30 a.m.  
Tuition: \$50  
**Pre-Dance** (Ages 6-8); The Pre-Dance class is geared toward 6-8 year old students. Students will take two 45 minute classes (one in ballet and one dance elective) twice a week for three weeks. Tuesday and Thursday from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Tuition: \$90

**Continuing Dance** (Ages 9-12); For 9-12 year old students, Continuing Dance occurs twice a week for 3 weeks. Students will take two, one hour classes (one in ballet and one dance elective). Tuesday and Thursday from 4:45 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. Tuition: \$120

**Intermediate/Advanced Class**; For students that have reached an intermediate to advanced level of classical ballet. Students will take 1.5 to 2.5 hours of class three times a week for three weeks. Classes offered will include ballet, pointe, and contemporary dance styles.  
Monday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
Wednesday from 3:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
Friday from 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Tuition: \$190

**Ongoing Activities**  
Creative Crew: Tuesdays from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.: All forms of creativity welcome: painting, drawing, needlework and more. Spend the morning working on your craft and socialize with other artists. Enter Door 1 or Door 10 at Life Community Church, the creative crew meets in the cafe

Readers' Brown Bag Luncheon: Meeting the last Tuesday of the month at noon at Life Community Church, enter door 10. All readers are welcome. Feel free to call the office for more information...

**\*\*\*Important Scheduling Note: Changes can occur after the Creative Happenings column has been published. Please confirm dates and times before planning to participate in programs and activities\*\*\***

*Creative Arts Council activities are supported by memberships, sponsors and grants from funders including Arts United, a regional agency; the Indiana Arts Commission, a state agency; and the National Endowment for the Arts, a national agency.*

## Lunch & Learn at Ouabache begins March 14 with bluebird program

Ouabache State Park's Lunch & Learn 2024 programs will begin on Thursday, March 14, at noon at the Lodge by the Lake.

Program presenter will be Bob Mosshammer, IMN who will talk about "The Scoop on Bluebirds. Those attending should bring their own picnic lunch with dessert to be provided courtesy of Corner Depot. Sponsors of the programs are the Friends of Ouabache State Park. Gate fees apply and program donations are accepted.

**2024 Series**  
April 18: The Wonders of Loblolly Marsh, Curt Burnette, Naturalist at the Limerlost State Historic Site.  
May 9: Kayaking the Wabash and Beyond, LaNae Abbot, avid kayaking adventurer.  
June 13: All About Tur-

## Warren's Pulse Opera House wins a dozen BroadwayWorld Awards

Warren's Pulse Opera House was awarded 12 out of the 19 awards presented at the regional 2023 BroadwayWorld Awards event in the Fort Wayne area.

The awards included:  
Favorite Local Theater  
Best Director of a Musical—Cynthia Smyth Wartzok for Into the Woods  
Best Musical Director—Danielle Webb for Into the Woods  
Best Costume Design—

Cynthia for Into the Woods  
Best Lighting Design—Ron Wartzok for Into the Woods  
Best Sound Design—Ron for Into the Woods  
Best Performer in a Musical—Carson Cunningham for Into the Woods  
Best Supporting Performer in a Musical—Jana Henly for Into the Woods  
Best Play—Sherlock Holmes: Baker Street Irregulars

Best Ensemble—Sherlock Homes: Baker Street Irregulars  
Best Director of a Play—Cynthia for Sherlock Holmes  
Best Supporting Performer in a Play—Hanson Hensley in Sherlock Holmes

BroadwayWorld is a theatre news website based in New York City covering Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional and international theatre productions.

key, Dian Jorday, National Wild Turkey Federation.  
July 11: E.B. Williamson: Bluffton's Native Son, Alan Daugherty, author and local historian.  
Aug. 8: Owls and Other Friends, Upper Wabash Interpretive Services.  
Sept. 12: Pond Life: Jeff Ormiston, retired naturalist from Fox Island.  
Oct. 10: Seed Collecting, Jody Heaston, DNR, IMN Coordinator.

# Special Feature

# Your MONEY \$ Your TAXES

## Tax breaks aging taxpayers may be eligible for

Growing older comes with many perks for those who are open to exploring the benefits. In addition to senior discounts on movies, meals and more, moving into one's golden years could offer some breaks when it comes to taxes and finances.

It is always best to go over tax- and finance-related plans with an accountant or certified financial planner to figure out what is in your best interest. However, generally speaking, here are some potential age-related tax perks.

**Increase retirement savings**  
Older individuals can contribute more to employer-sponsored retirement accounts and Roth or traditional individual retirement accounts (IRAs), according to AARP. For 2023, the contribution limit for employees who participate in 401(k) and 403(b) programs, most 457 retirement savings plans and Thrift Savings Plan through the U.S. Federal

Government can increase their contributions to \$22,500 — a jump of \$2,000 from last year. Those over age 50 can maximize contributions even more, up to a total of \$30,000.

**Larger standard deduction**  
The Balance Money says for tax year 2022, people age 65 or older can add an extra \$1,750 to the standard deduction they're eligible for if they are unmarried and not a surviving spouse. Those who are married and file joint returns can add \$1,400. For tax year 2023, those amounts go up to \$1,850 and \$1,500. In addition, the standard eligible deductions increased. Most older taxpayers feel the bigger standard deduction plus the extra standard deduction is more than any itemized deductions they can claim and choose this option when filing their returns.

Reduce taxable income  
The ability to contribute more to tax-def-

ered retirement accounts enables older adults to reduce their taxable incomes. This, in turn, reduces the amount that needs to be spent on income taxes.


**Changes in filing threshold**  
According to The Arbor Company, which oversees senior living communities, the filing threshold is the income that must be made before being required to file a tax return. Typical tax-

payers who are either employees or retired and drawing pensions or Social Security find the threshold increases over age 65. Single filers over age 65 do not need to file returns if their incomes are \$14,050 or under. Married filers over age 65 have a threshold of \$27,400. If primary or sole income comes from Social Security or a pension, those over age 65 may not have to file returns at all.

**Elderly or disabled tax credit**  
Differing from deductions, a credit for taxpayers is available to people age 65 or older or retired persons on permanent and total disability who receive taxable disability income for the tax year, according to the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, this credit is for those who have an adjusted gross income or the total of nontaxable Social Security, pensions, annu-

ties, or disability income under specific limits. The eligibility levels change from year to year. Credits range from \$3,750 to \$7,500.

These are some of the tax breaks American seniors can expect when filing their income tax returns. Speak with an accountant and financial planner about other perks that come with aging. Individuals also can visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for further information.




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# Kamala Harris leads Bloody Sunday memorial marchers

By KIM CHANDLER  
Associated Press

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris told thousands gathered for the 59th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday attacks on civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, that fundamental freedoms, including the right to vote, are under attack in America even today.

Harris joined those gathered at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where voting rights activists were beaten back by law enforcement officers in 1965. The vice president praised the marchers' bravery for engaging in a defining moment of the civil rights struggle.

"Today, we know our fight for freedom is not over, because in this moment we are witnessing a full on attack on hard-fought, hard-won freedoms, starting with the freedom that unlocks all others, the freedom to vote," Harris said.

She criticized attempts to restrict voting, including limits on absentee voting and early voting, and said the nation is again at a crossroad.

"What kind of country do we want to live in? Do we want to live in a country of freedom, liberty and justice? Or a country of injus-

ice, hate and fear?" Harris asked, encouraging people to answer with their vote.

She paid tribute to the civil rights marchers who walked across the bridge in 1965 knowing they would face certain violence in seeking "a future that was more equal, more just and more free."

Decisions by the Supreme Court and lower courts since 2006 have weakened the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was passed in the wake of the police attacks in Selma. The demonstrators were beaten by officers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965, as they tried to march across Alabama to support voting rights.

Harris drew parallels between those who worked to stifle the Civil Rights Movement and "extremists" she said are trying to enact restrictions on voting, education and reproductive care.

She said other fundamental freedoms under attack include "the freedom of a woman to make decisions about her own body," a reference to state abortion bans. She also stressed the Biden administration's support for a six-week ceasefire in Gaza to "get the hostages out and a significant amount of aid in."

Under a blazing blue sky, Harris then led the crowd across the

Edmund Pettus Bridge in the march that concludes the annual commemoration. Thousands followed, sometimes singing hymns and anthems of the Civil Rights Movement including, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round."

Earlier Sunday, Attorney General Merrick Garland spoke at a Selma church service marking the anniversary of the attack by Alabama law officers on civil rights demonstrators. He said recent court decisions and certain state legislation have endangered voting rights in much of the nation.

"Since those (court) decisions, there has been a dramatic increase in legislative measures that make it harder for millions of eligible voters to vote and to elect representatives of their choice," Garland told worshippers at Selma's Tabernacle Baptist Church, the site of one of the first mass meetings of the voting rights movement.

"Those measures include practices and procedures that make voting more difficult; redistricting maps that disadvantage minorities; and changes in voting administration that diminish the authority of locally elected or nonpartisan election administrators," he said. "Such measures threaten the foundation of our system of govern-

ment."

The march and Garland's speech were among dozens of events during the Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee, which began Thursday and culminated Sunday.

The commemoration is a frequent stop for Democratic politicians paying homage to the voting rights movement. Some in the crowd gathered to see Harris speak about the upcoming November election and what appears to be a looming rematch between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump.

Khadijah Stone, 27, part of a crowd gathered at the bridge Sunday in light rain before the march, said she sees the work of today's activists as an extension of those who were attacked in Selma in 1965. Stone works for the voter engagement group Alabama Forward, and was a plaintiff in the Voting Rights case against the state that led to creating a second Alabama congressional district with a substantial number of Black voters. Voters will cast their first ballots in that district on Tuesday.

"We have to continue to fight, because they (voting rights) are under attack," Stone said.

Nita Hill wore a hat saying "Good Trouble," a phrase associated with the late Rep. John Lewis,

who was beaten on the bridge during Bloody Sunday. Hill, 70, said it is important for Biden supporters to vote in November.

"I believe Trump is trying to take us back," said Hill, a retired university payroll specialist.

Decades ago, images of the violence that at the bridge stunned Americans, which helped galvanize support for passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The law struck down barriers prohibiting Black people from voting.

U.S. Rep. James Clyburn, a Democrat of South Carolina who is leading a pilgrimage to Selma, said he is seeking to "remind people that we are celebrating an event that started this country on a better road toward a more perfect union," but the right to vote is still not guaranteed.

Clyburn sees Selma as the nexus of the 1960s movement for voting rights, at a time when there currently are efforts to scale back those rights.

"The Voting Rights Act of 1965 became a reality in August of 1965 because of what happened on March 7th of 1965," Clyburn said.

"We are at an inflection point in this country," he added. "And hopefully this year's march will allow people to take stock of where we are."

# Super Tuesday highlights how presidential selection process can exclude many U.S. voters

By GARY FIELDS  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As an independent, Christian Miller can't vote in Pennsylvania's closed presidential primary in April. He said it wouldn't matter even if he could.

"You're not really voting for anything," said Miller, who left the Democratic Party in 2022. "Every election I've ever seen, the candidates have been decided by the time they get to Pennsylvania."

Pennsylvania is a crucial presidential swing state and the fifth most populous in the country. And yet holding a primary so much later than other states means its voters often have little say in choosing the presidential contenders. It's the same for voters in much of the rest of the country.

That dynamic is even more pronounced this year with the front-runners for both major parties in overwhelming position to become the presumptive nominees on or not long after Super Tuesday, traditionally the biggest day on the election calendar when 16 states hold contests.

Academics and democracy analysts said the presidential primary system, in which a small percentage of the nation's voters often determines the candidates, is one of several quirks that make the United States stand out. To some, it raises questions about whether the world's oldest and most prominent democracy might also be among the least representative.

Voter attitudes might be different if the U.S. were more like many countries in the European Union that give all voters a slate of candidates from different par-

ties and then hold a run-off with the top vote-getters, said Danielle Piatkiewicz, deputy chief operating officer at the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, a Denmark-based think tank.

"You don't have the frustrations of where it's an either or system," she said. "Usually you can find a political party that meets your needs."

Attention to America's primary system is especially notable this year, a historic one for elections around the world and as polls have consistently shown a deep lack of enthusiasm for a rematch between Democratic President Joe Biden and his predecessor, Republican Donald Trump.

As Tuesday's contests near, Biden and Trump appear on their way to securing their parties' nominations even though just eight states will have awarded delegates through presidential primaries or party caucuses by then.

Paula Stevens, 73, is one of those voters unhappy with the candidate options and frustrated that the contests are likely to be decided by the time she is able to vote on March 19, the date of Ohio's primary.

Grocery shopping north of Columbus, Stevens said she will pass on this year's presidential contest. She registered Republican in 2016 specifically to vote against Trump, but can't support Biden this year.

"There's no choice," she said.

Nick Troiano, founding executive director of the group Unite America, said the system also fails to engage independent voters, who are prohibited from voting in presidential primaries in 22 states. That's

24 million voters who end up "stuck with the party nominees" without selecting them, he said.

He said gerrymandering of congressional and state legislative districts highlights another consequence of independents being excluded from many party primaries.

"The primaries are really the only elections that matter because the districts are so uncompetitive these days," he said.

More than 80% of congressional districts are decided in the primary because the districts lean so heavily in favor of one party or the other. But a much smaller percentage of voters cast ballots in those races: "So we have a rule of the minority, not the majority," he said.

It's yet another aspect of elections in the U.S. that sets the country apart. In most states, a partisan legislature draws the legislative and congressional districts and can do so in a way that ensures it will hold onto, and perhaps expand, its power.

The U.S. is "pretty close to the only democracy in the world" that has the participants of the government controlling the redistricting process and making the rules, said Michael Miller, a political scientist who specializes in democratization at George Washington University. "For a huge swath of our country, it's still parties picking what's best for the current party in control."

What several experts said they find most striking about the U.S. compared to some other democracies is that the right to vote is not enshrined in the Constitution.

The amendments make

it illegal to deny specific groups the right to vote, "but there is no provision in the Constitution that gives you the right to vote generally, other than the anti-discrimination provisions," said Paul Smith, vice president of the Campaign Legal Center.

What is there is "not the same as saying every citizen has the right to vote and to participate in a free and fair electoral process. If I could wave a wand, I would start there," said Nathan Stock, associate director of the Carter Center's Conflict Resolution Program. "That lack of a codified right allows for a lot of other mechanisms, voter suppression, all kinds of issues that at this point are fairly unique to American democracy."

Other concerns include

the hyper partisanship prevalent in the country's politics and the stagnant nature of the government. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, which ranks 167 countries and territories on measures such as political culture and political participation, lists the U.S. as a flawed democracy in its 2023 report.

The report warned that if Biden faces Trump again in the general election "a country that was once a beacon of democracy is likely to slide deeper into division and disenchantment."

There is one notable bright spot. Despite hurdles to voting and a selection process for presidential candidates that can exclude much of the country, Miller, of George Washington University, said the actual

administration of elections is "exceptional in the United States."

That is despite years of attacks from Trump, who falsely blames his loss in 2020 on widespread voter fraud and whose drumbeat of election lies has persuaded a majority of Republicans to believe Biden was not elected legitimately.

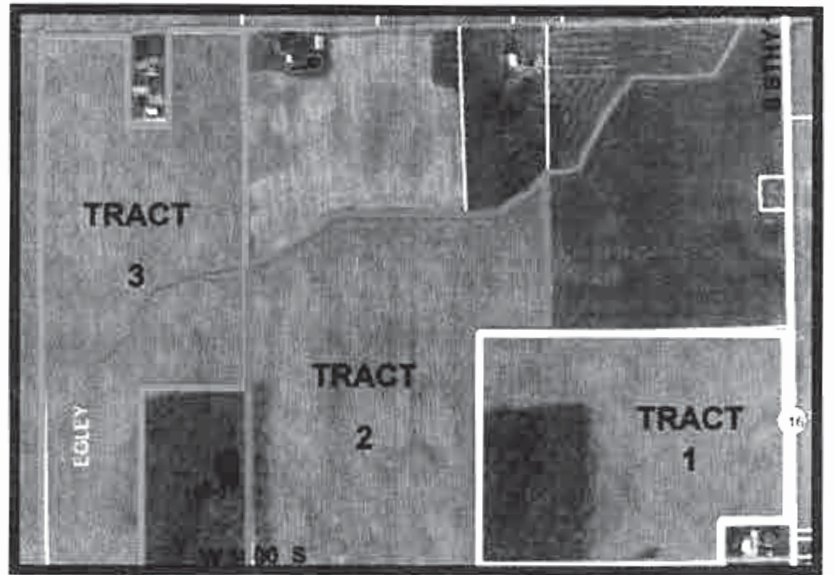
"Despite the growing distrust of the system because of extreme partisanship, there's really no evidence of any real fraud occurring," he said, noting the dedicated professionals running the systems.

"Even well-established democracies have much higher degrees of errors or even some degrees of violence," he said. "We don't really have that — so far, anyway."

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