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Celebrating 105 years

American Legion Post 111 celebrates 105th birthday with award ceremony

By JONATHAN SNYDER
The American Legion's Grover Sheets Post 111 celebrated its 105th birthday on Saturday, complete with awards for years of membership and personnel of the year.

Post Commander Bob Buehl opened the celebration by introducing the guest speaker and the leading candidate for Indiana Department Commander for 2024-25, Robert Burkhart.

Burkhart has been a member of the Legion for 32 years. He served in the U.S. Army of Active Duty, the Army Reserves and in the Indiana Army National Guard. He retired in 2013 at the rank of First Sergeant and was deployed in 2005 to Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Burkhart is a member of Post 87 in Alexandria and he's held post commander, adjutant and 1st vice commander positions in Post 87.

Burkhart spoke about the need to confront the escalating crisis of veterans' suicide in his speech. He discussed supporting the American Legion's "Be The One" program, which looks to tackle the root cause of the tragedies. According to the American Legion's website, suicide is the No. 1 issue in the veteran's community, with an estimated 17-22 veterans taking their lives daily.

Be The One seeks to create opportunities for those with mental health needs to speak out and get needed support. The program

seeks to provide resources in communities and give peer-to-peer help for those struggling.

Burkhart also discussed supporting the Veterans and Children's Foundation, which gives a cadre of leaders who are both competent in their roles and ethical in their practices. Burkhart urged Post 111 to support these programs with the same fervor as they have in the past.

At the celebration, Det. Cliff Thomas was awarded the Law Officer Of The Year by Police Chief Kyle Randall. Randall cited Thomas' care and compassion for young ones involved in crimes against children. Randall stated that it takes a special person to work cases where children are victims and that every single investigation he is on means something to the victim and their family.

Lt. Landon Eads was also awarded the Firefighter Of The Year by Lt. Jim Platt. Platt stated that Eads has a passionate heart and is fully dedicated to the fire territory. Eads joined the department in 2017 as a paid on-call firefighter and moved to a full-time role in 2022. Eads was recently accepted as a State of Indiana Fire Service Academy instructor. Eads responded to 187 off-duty calls during 2023.

"Thank you cannot be said enough times," Platt said.

Jeff Moss was awarded the

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Robert Burkhart speaks in the above photo. Detective Cliff Thomas, left, smiles as Robert Buehl (middle) and Kyle Randall (right) present him with the Law Officer Of The Year award. (Photos by Jonathan Snyder)

Markle partners with texting service

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Markle has rolled out a government texting service in an effort to further improve communication between the city and its people.

Citizens living in Markle can text "MARKLE" to 91896 and request opt-into the service. Alternatively, there is a sign on the town hall building with a QR code that can be scanned via their phone.

The alerts will include updates about upcoming events, road closures, council meetings and emergency alerts.

Utility Clerk Cheryl Hardin said 56 people have signed up for the service. Hardin also said that there promotional cards will be mailed sometime in June, which will describe the sign-up process.

TextMyGov contacted the town about the service, and Hardin said they made the partnership because of the capability to quickly inform citizens of emergencies in the area. Hardin emphasized that if something were to happen with

the water or other major utilities, it's beneficial to get information quickly to the public.

Citizens are also able to text the city through the service about any concerns. If residents see something that needs resolved, such as trash pickup, then they can send a message direct to the government office.

The service comes with a \$3,000 annual fee to the municipality, said Clerk-Treasurer Stephenie Hensley.

With the service being new, Hardin stated that alerts may be less frequent than expected. However, after some time with the service and the processes that go with it, Hardin believes the town will utilize it more.

"I think once we get to the point where we know what we're doing with it, it'll get utilized a lot more, once we get more people opted in. I just think it's going to be a really nice asset," Hardin said.

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Indiana lawmakers give final approval to absenteeism bill

Schools will have to intervene students at-risk of becoming habitually truant before reporting them to local prosecutors.

By CASEY SMITH
Indiana Capital Chronicle

New interventions to improve school attendance for Hoosiers in grades K-6 advanced to the Indiana governor on Friday after weeks of back-and-forth debate among lawmakers over how to address widespread absenteeism across the state.

Senate Bill 282, authored by Sen. Stacey Donato, R-Logansport, seeks to return students back to classrooms by compelling more parental involvement and responsibility.

More than a dozen versions of the legislation were floated throughout the session. The final draft approved by both chambers stipulates that if a student has five unexcused absence days within a 10-week period, then school representatives, teachers and parents of the truant student will have to meet to establish a plan to prevent future absences.

Public school districts will be required to report habitually truant students — already defined in

state law as those who have missed 10 or more days of school without an excuse or parental notification — to the local prosecuting attorney.

Despite concerns from the minority caucus that earlier iterations of the bill would have unfairly pushed children who miss school into the juvenile justice system, Friday's compromise drew unanimous support in the Senate and passed 92-6 from the House, where two Democrats and four Republicans voted in opposition.

"The bill is almost written backwards. ... It's designed to avoid (sending students to the prosecutor) at all costs," said bill sponsor Rep. Martin Carbaugh, R-Fort Wayne, referring to the mandatory parent meeting for students at-risk of becoming truant. "The whole focus is going to be, 'How do we avoid getting letters from the prosecutor?'" But at some point, if the parents still are not getting the children to school, there has to be a consequence, and already in law is educational neglect.

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An effort to get aid to Gaza by sea is moving ahead

By WAFAA SHURAFU and SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — A U.S. Army vessel carrying equipment to build a temporary pier in Gaza was heading to the Mediterranean on Sunday, after U.S. President Joe Biden announced plans to increase aid deliveries by sea to the besieged enclave where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are going

hungry.

The new push for aid came as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan was set to begin Monday in much of the world after officials in Saudi Arabia saw the crescent moon. Hopes for a new cease-fire by Ramadan faded days ago with negotiations apparently stalled.

The opening of the sea corridor, along with airdrops by the U.S., Jordan and others, reflected growing alarm over Gaza's dead-

ly humanitarian crisis and a new willingness to bypass Israeli control over land shipments. But aid officials say that air and sea deliveries can't make up for a shortage of land routes. Aid trucks entering Gaza daily are far below the 500 entering before the war.

A ship belonging to Spanish aid group Open Arms and carrying 200 tons of food aid was expected to make a pilot voyage to Gaza from nearby Cyprus "as soon as

possible," but not Sunday, said Linda Roth, a spokesperson for partner organization World Central Kitchen. There was no explanation after Cyprus' president had said it would leave then.

Israel says it welcomes the sea deliveries and would inspect Gaza-bound cargo before it leaves Cyprus. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant reviewed preparatory work off Gaza's coast on Sunday.

Biden has stepped up public

criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying he believes that Netanyahu is "hurting Israel more than helping Israel" in his approach to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, now in its sixth month.

Speaking on Saturday to MSNBC, the U.S. president expressed support for Israel's right to pursue Hamas after the militants' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. But

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Outside



Sunny and windy today, clear and breezy tonight

Today	Tuesday	Wed.
High 56	High 65	High 67
Low 40	Low 46	Low 49

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Celebrating 105 years

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 Legionnaire of the Year for his involvement since the mid-1960s, according to Buehl. Moss has always helped set up for monthly breakfast among other helpful thing he has done for the Legion.

“He’s always got too many irons and too many fires,” said Buehl. “He’s deserving of the Legionnaire Of The Year because of that dedication.”

The Legion gave out certificates for continuous years of membership in both the Sons of American Legion and in the American Legion proper. Randy Hoy and Linus Harrold have been members in the S.A.L. for 30 years, with Bruce Wolf, a member for 45 years. Mike Allread was also given a certificate of appreciation for his membership.

For continuous service in the American Legion Proper, Darrell Ball, Larry Hunter, Dewey Randall and Robert Zeis have been members for 50 years. Dennis Redding and Truman Andrews have been members for 60 years and Lloyd Sills has been a member for 70 years.

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In the above photo, Mike Allread, left, is presented with the S.A.L. Member Of The Year award by Rick Murphy. Lt. Landon Eads, left, is presented with the Firefighter Of The Year award by Bob Buehl (middle) and Lt. Jim Platt. (Photos by Jonathan Snyder)

Absenteeism bill

(Continued from Page 1)
 We’re just trying to intervene sooner. That’s what this bill does.”

Getting kids back in class
 State lawmakers were adamant to move bills in the 2024 session to help improve student literacy and bolster career readiness. That included the passage of Senate Bill 1, which will require schools to hold back third graders who do not pass the state-wide IREAD test as part of a push to improve reading.

Legislative leaders said, too, that ensuring Hoosier kids actually show up to class is part of their priority agenda.

The latest Indiana data shows that about 40% of students statewide missed 10 or more school days last year, and nearly one in five were “chronically absent” for at least 18 days.

Student absences have been on the rise since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indiana and across the nation. Although Indiana’s latest numbers show slight improvements, absentee rates during the 2022-23 school year were still 8% higher than before the pandemic.

Educators around the state say the reasons for absences vary, but family challenges some students face at home, along with hard-to-break tendencies to keep kids home when even mildly unwell — a habit borne out of the pandemic — are key factors. And schools are getting creative to try to combat the growing problem.

Education experts note that being absent as few as three days out of the school year affects test scores and overall academic performance. Getting to school every day also helps kids develop a routine and increases their influential engagement time with adults.

The student demographic groups with the largest gaps in state language arts and math testing since the pandemic are more likely to be chronically absent.

Carbaugh said focusing on the K-6 age group — rather than middle and high school — is a stepping stone for addressing absenteeism.

“When we look at what we’re trying to do this session with getting kids to read by third grade, and all those measures ... kids have to be there in order to learn,” he said. “In those younger

years, it’s so important. It’s important in later years — I’m certainly not against looking at older ages — but this is a good first step.”

Headed for the governor’s desk
 Even so, policymakers struggled to compromise on solutions for absenteeism.

The final draft of Senate Bill 282 is a far deviation from prior versions that would have sent the absenteeism topic to an interim study committee, without any other legislative action. Another provision deleted in the final hours of the session would have mandated habitually truant kids in grades K-6 be prohibited from participating in extracurricular activities.

Under “compulsory education” laws in Indiana, children must regularly attend school from the time they’re seven years old until they turn 18, with some exceptions.

But unless they’re excused, students who cut class too often could end up under a juvenile court’s supervision. Absence build-ups could also prompt prosecutors to file misdemeanors or charges against Hoosier parents, given that they are legally responsible for making sure their children go to school.

Generally, it’s up to local school districts to decide when students’ absences are excused, though existing state law requires schools to excuse absences for certain reasons, including illness, mental or physical incapacity, required court appearances, helping in elections, service as a page for the general assembly, participating in the state fair and up to 120 minutes per week of religious instruction.

It’s currently up to each Indiana county prosecutor to decide how to enforce absence and truancy laws.

Carbaugh said he expects the new absentee measures to apply differently, on a “case-by-case basis,” and that more often, it will be parents — not students — who face repercussions from the prosecutor.

“It depends on the situation. When you think about kindergarten through sixth grade, you’re talking about five- and six-year-olds. It’s not likely that a child is being brought to school — kindergarten, first, second grade — and running out the back door,” Carbaugh said. “That would be, maybe, more common as they get older. So in that

case, the focus would be on the student. But in the younger cases, it’s probably going to be on the parent. And ultimately, we give the prosecutor the ability to see who’s the one to focus on in that particular case.”

Rep. Matt Pierce, D-Bloomington, agreed that it’s unlikely the bill will force a child to face prosecution for truancy. He pointed to existing state law that already requires school attendance officers to report habitually truant students to the Department of Child Services or intake officers for the juvenile court.

“This bill is just basically saying you have to take that existing statute, that existing law, and you’ve got to plug it into your school attendance policy that you’re creating. This bill is not really creating any new requirements there,” he said. “I think that, even if a prosecutor does kind of go off the rails, you’ve got a judge in there somewhere who’s going to be looking at that, as well.”

Still, Pierce cautioned that lawmakers and prosecutors “shouldn’t overlook” various socioeconomic factors that cause some students to frequently miss school.

“We’re a little bit concerned that we might slide into, ‘Let’s get tough on truancy. Let’s really hammer these people who aren’t getting their kids to school, or kids who aren’t going to school.’ There’s a certain appeal to that,” Pierce said.

“But there are a lot of things, underlying causes,” he continued, giving examples of single parents who work at night and struggle to get their kids to class on time, as well as students who are responsible for getting themselves and their siblings to school without help.

Democratic colleague Rep. Tonya Pfaff, a longtime math teacher from Terre Haute, said she hopes lawmakers expand the absenteeism measure next year to include private schools and older students.

“If you ask any teacher right now, the top two things that are driving them crazy: absenteeism and cell phones. This is a good start,” Pfaff said. “Absenteeism is absenteeism. It doesn’t matter what school you go to. We need parents to help us as teachers. We need students in front of us. I can’t teach a kid that’s not there.”

Weather

Monday, March 11, 2024
 (24-hour observations at 10:17 p.m. Sunday)
 High: 40; Low: 32; Precipitation: Trace of snow
 Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 5.89 feet at 8:45 p.m. Sunday

Wells County forecast

Today: Sunny, with a high near 56. Southwest wind 5 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.
Tonight: Clear, with a low around 40. Southwest wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 30 mph.
Tuesday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 65. Southwest wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.
Tuesday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 46. Southwest wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.
Wednesday: A 20% chance of showers after 2 p.m. Mostly sunny, with a high near 67.
Wednesday Night: A 40% chance of showers and thunderstorms, mainly after 2 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 49.
Thursday: A 50% chance of showers and thunderstorms. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 67.
Thursday Night: Showers likely and possibly a thunderstorm. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 47. Chance of precipitation is 70%.
Friday: Showers likely, mainly before 2 p.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 56. Chance of precipitation is 60%.
Friday Night: A 30% chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 38.
Saturday: A 20% chance of showers. Mostly sunny, with a high near 53.

Gaza aid

(Continued from Page 1)
 Biden said that Netanyahu “must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost.” He added that “you cannot have 30,000 more Palestinians dead.”

The Health Ministry in Gaza said that at least 31,045 Palestinians have been killed since the war began. The ministry doesn’t differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says that women and children make up two-thirds of the dead. The ministry is part of the Hamas-run government, and its figures from previous wars have largely matched those of U.N. and independent experts.

Palestinian casualties continued to rise. The Civil Defense Department said 10 people were killed Sunday in an Israeli airstrike on a house of the Ashour family in the Tal al-Hawa area of Gaza City. Dust-covered bodies were placed onto blankets.

Elsewhere, the bodies of 15 people, including women and children, were taken to the main hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah, according to an Associated Press journalist. Relatives said they were killed by Israeli artillery fire toward a tent camp for displaced Palestinians in the coastal area near the southern city of Khan Younis.

Israel rarely comments on specific incidents during the war. It maintains that Hamas is responsible for civilian casualties, because the militant group operates from within civilian areas.

Meanwhile, U.S. efforts began to set up the temporary pier in Gaza for sea deliveries. U.S. Central Command said that a first U.S. Army vessel, the General Frank S. Besson, left a base in Virginia on Saturday and was on its way to the Eastern Mediterranean with equipment for construction. U.S. officials said that it would likely be weeks before the pier is operational. The sea corridor is backed by the European Union together with the United States, the United Arab Emirates and other countries. The European Commission has said that U.N. agencies and the Red Cross will play a role.



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Lawmakers from House, Senate find consensus on child care deregulation

By WHITNEY DOWNARD
 Indiana Capital Chronicle

Legislators voted to ease regulations on home-based child care providers Thursday over the concerns of Democrats, who feared the changes would endanger children.

House Bill 1102 would increase the maximum number of unrelated children allowed in an unlicensed home from five to seven. It moved on an 82-12 vote in the House, with all ‘no’ votes coming from Democrats.

It also increases the time between license renewals for other child care centers from two years to three years. Programs operating out of a private or public school would also be exempt from licensure, so long as they comply with health and safety regulations.

Rep. Dave Heine, R-Fort Wayne, detailed two changes made by the Senate to further define school property and limit home-based providers to caring for only three children under the age of one.

Previously, he pointed to the burdensome cost of child care and lack of availability in Indiana as the motives behind the bill, saying the “common-sense reductions” would

expand the number of seats available for families.

The final version, Heine said, “amends the definition of school property for the purposes of schools providing daycare to ... the school property must have been both owned by the school and used for childcare on or before January 1 of 2024.”

Sen. Greg Taylor, D-Indianapolis, applauded the deadline, which he said kept schools from getting into the child care business, but expressed concerns about the expanding number of children with home providers.

“We have worked hard to make sure that parents know that there (are) regulations in place to make sure that their children are safe ... and with this piece of legislation, you’re going to add the number of children that one person can watch,” he said. “We are trying to solve a problem by endangering children.”

Four Republicans voted with Democrats against the measure, which passed on a 34-13 vote in the Senate. It now heads to the governor’s desk.

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Nursing and ambulance payments bills cross the legislative finish line

Measure to eliminate tax on menstrual products won't become law

By WHITNEY DOWNARD
Indiana Capital Chronicle

A Richmond lawmaker pushed two distinct health care measures to the finish line on Friday, one addressing the nursing profession and another on ambulance payments.

Rep. Brad Barrett, a Republican, said he was “proud of what we created here” on the nursing bill, which had provisions from three separate bills amended into it on the final day of the 2024 legislative session.

House Bill 1259 originally included language to reduce hurdles for foreign-educated nurses working in Indiana, which the Senate stripped to avoid duplicating efforts in one of their bills. It also will eliminate the 18-month requirement for nurse preceptors, who fill a mentor role, in favor of letting employers decide.

On Friday, lawmakers added language from Senate Bill 139 to establish a therapeutic psilocybin research fund — a proposal that passed the Senate and a House committee but didn't make it to the House floor — along with House Bill 1327, which required health entities to report their ownership data. The Indiana Division of Health will then post that information on a public-facing dashboard.

Barrett said the psilocybin research, funded by federal dollars or donations, would “really help gain ground in a very frustrating mental health space.” Committee testimony emphasized the rigorous oversight and potential benefits of the drugs for treatment-resistant depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder and others.

Barrett's peers approved his bill on a 93-5 vote and it passed the Senate on a 45-1 vote.

Ambulances payments

House Bill 1385 would require health plans to pay out-of-network ambulance providers for transports at rates set by local units. In the absence of a local rate, insurers would pay either the provider's billed charges or

at 400% of the Medicare base rate — whichever is less.

Senators amended the House proposal to strike the state health plan to avoid a fiscal, or cost, which could sink the bill in a non-budget session and to refine language around hospital ambulances.

An effort to eliminate the sales tax on menstrual products, including tampons and pads, didn't survive this session. Rep. Peggy Mayfield introduced the language in committee on Senate Bill 256 but senators ruled that the proposal wasn't germane to the underlying bill and it didn't appear elsewhere by session's end.

“There's two mechanisms for hospitals to negotiate with insurance. One is as a global negotiation and we're leaving that space alone,” said Barrett in a rules committee. “The other option is for hospitals to do this just as private ambulances would do (this) and have separate negotiations. That is left in the bill.”

On Friday, lawmakers from both chambers negotiated to add Senate Bill 10 to the final version, a measure that would establish a Community Cares grant program to help localities establish health programs and reduce public safety expenses. Barrett noted Senate Bill 10 passed the Senate and his Public Health Committee unanimously but didn't get through Ways and Means.

“Only with the (Ways and Means) chairman's release was it included in this,” Barrett said. “It was a grant that has been established ... overseen by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction through (the Family and Social Services Administration) and unfunded. But a mechanism for funding exists in the event that there are federal dollars available.”

Barrett noted the state could choose to fund it in the future or the grant could accept donations.

The bill passed the Senate on a 45-2 vote. In the House it had unanimous support.

Both bills are headed to the governor.

Wells Court Docket

Wells Superior Court Criminal Cases

Steven Carl Thomas, 61, Colgate, Ohio, was sentenced to one year in the Wells County Jail with all time suspended. Thomas was sentenced immediately after he pled guilty to one count of battery resulting in bodily injury, a Class A misdemeanor. One count of residential entry, a Level 6 felony, was dismissed as part of the plea agreement. Thomas is also required to serve one year on probation and pay court costs and

filing fees in the amount of \$314.

Jaden Tyler Cornett, 24, Markle, was sentenced to 180 days in the Wells County Jail with all but four days suspended. Cornett pled guilty to one count of disorderly conduct, a Class B misdemeanor. Cornett is also required to serve 361 days on probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$189.

Joshua Isaac Lutz, 19, Fort Wayne, appeared in

the Wells Superior Court for a hearing to revoke his sentence after he violated probation. Lutz was ordered to serve 60 days of his 213 day suspended sentence in jail.

In late September, Lutz was sentenced to one year in the Wells County Jail with 213 days suspended and 152 days of jail credit. Lutz pled guilty to one count of domestic battery, a Class A misdemeanor. Lutz is also required to pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$339.

Indiana lawmakers compromise on Republican priority bill to define and ban antisemitism

By CASEY SMITH
Indiana Capital Chronicle

After multiple iterations and weeks of debate, a bill to define and ban antisemitism at Indiana's public education institutions cleared the General Assembly on Friday and now awaits a signature from the governor.

“This is a very strong statement that the state of Indiana finds it abhorrent that anybody would ever engage in any type of antisemitic behavior,” said bill sponsor Sen. Aaron Freeman, R-Indianapolis, adding that the definition “will hopefully be a guide to live by in the future for our state.”

In contention has been a definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, part of which references 11 “contemporary examples” of antisemitism that members of the Hoosier Jewish community said are necessary to codify in state law. Critics maintained those examples are overly broad and limit free speech, however.

In the final hours of the legislative session, a compromise on the final version of House Bill 1002 found a middle ground: include the IHRA's core definition of antisemitism, but not specifically reference the accompanying examples.

The House priority bill, authored by Rep. Chris Jeter, R-Fishers, ultimately passed unanimously from the House, and with just one opposing vote in the Senate from Fort Wayne Republican Liz Brown.

“House Bill 1002 ... has been on quite a journey,” Jeter said. “One of the big discussion points really revolved around how to reference the definition. ... There were some real, more technical negotiations back and forth about whether we should reference an outside group, or whether we should put the definition right into the code, and so that it's really clear that it doesn't change unless we change it. We sort of came to an agreement on that by doing both — we tightened the language down, referenced IHRA, and then put the actual words, the definition, and pegged it to a certain date. I think that got everybody good with that.”

Jeter said the exam-

ples created “issues” for lawmakers, though: “We removed a reference to those because some were problematic.”

The Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council — which previously reversed its support when senators removed all reference to IHRA in an earlier draft — said it approved of the final bill and was “grateful” to the General Assembly for “standing with us in the fight against antisemitism.”

The group additionally applauded the bill for “formally recognizing that antisemitism, whether expressed by an individual or through an institutional policy, is a prohibited form of discrimination in educational institutions in this state.”

Policy makers define antisemitism

The final bill language approved by legislators is part — but not all — of IHRA's overall definition of antisemitism.

The intergovernmental organization, comprised of dozens of countries including the United States and Israel, adopted the “working definition” of antisemitism in 2016. Since then, the definition has been widely accepted by Jewish groups and is used by the U.S. State Department, the European Union and the United Nations.

That “working definition” includes contemporary examples of antisemitism, like “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor,” and “holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel.”

The original legislation specifically included IHRA's “contemporary examples of antisemitism” included in the May 26, 2016, working definition of antisemitism.

But Friday's bill instead

defines antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.” It continues, saying “rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Although included in earlier versions of the bill, lawmakers removed another provision that said “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country” is not antisemitism.

Indiana law already bans discrimination on the basis of race and “creed,” which means religion. The legislation specifies that antisemitism — bias against Jewish people — is religious discrimination and is not allowed within the public education system.

Jeter filed an identical bill in 2023. It passed out of the House in a 97-0 vote but never received a committee hearing in the Senate, effectively killing the proposal.

Caryl Auslander, speaking on behalf of the JCRC on Friday, said antisemitism “is not just criticism against the State of Israel.”

“Our feeling is that there's a fine line between hate speech and free speech,” Auslander said. “But there are limitations on free speech, as we know. It's not universal, and so we feel very strongly that this will make a very strong statement against hate in the State of Indiana against Jews.”

Critics of the IHRA definition have argued that it's overly broad and limits free speech. They worried, too, that criticism of a foreign government would still count as anti-Jewish rhetoric.

Many of those issues appeared to be resolved after the IHRA reference was struck out earlier in the session.

Bill limiting land buys by 'foreign adversaries' goes to governor

By LESLIE BONILLA MUÑIZ
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Legislation banning citizens and companies from six “foreign adversary” countries from owning or leasing certain plots of land in Indiana heads to Gov. Eric Holcomb's desk, after lawmakers approved a final draft of the bill Friday.

There is some concern it would compromise economic development deals in the works, but it passed easily through both chambers: unanimously, 47-0, in the Senate, and 91-1 in the House. Rep. Mark Genda, R-Frankfort, was the lone “no” vote.

Author Rep. Kendell Culp, R-Rensselaer, told the House Friday that his bill “protects Indiana's farmland and our food security.”

House Bill 1183 bars entities affiliated with China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela from acquiring or renting agricultural land — and mineral, riparian and water rights. Those nations are on a list kept by the U.S. Department of Commerce.

It also prohibits purchases and leases of land in a 10-mile radius of a military installation. That provision applies to entities from China, Iran, North Korea, Russia and any other countries designated “threats to critical infrastructure.”

There are exceptions for dual citizens and lawful permanent residents. It also lets citizens of the “adversary” countries rent resi-

dential properties, meant to accommodate university students, professors and others.

The Indiana Attorney General would be empowered to act on suspected violations. Illegally purchased land would be subject to divestiture, and the proceeds would go to first to lien-holders and then to the state of Indiana's coffers.

The legislation has gotten some pushback. Eleven Chinese companies are currently seeking projects within Indiana, according to bill sponsor Sen. Jean Leising, R-Oldenburg.

Accordingly, bipartisan lawmakers whose districts wanted to host those projects unsuccessfully pushed for changes allowing local units of government to circumvent the restrictions.

But there's still one major carveout: renewals for leases made before July 1, 2024 are exempt from the ban, as long as the land leased doesn't change. That's to accommodate Syngenta, a Switzerland-based agricultural company acquired by ChemChina in 2017.

The legislation builds on a previous measure passed in the 2022 session, which limited foreign entities from buying more than 320 acres in Indiana for crop farming or timber production, among other restrictions. That measure included farmland-related exceptions for research, confined feeding operations and egg-producing operations.

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Public access counselor bill fails on process and policy

Indiana's public records law opens like this:

"A fundamental philosophy of the American constitutional form of representative government is that government is the servant of the people and not their master. Accordingly, it is the public policy of the state that all persons are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and employees."



Niki Kelly

And it's clear that the GOP-led General Assembly doesn't believe that. If lawmakers did, they would want to empower Indiana's public access counselor — not defang it.

Hoosier Opinions

Indiana's already weak public records and access laws took a body blow this week as lawmakers pulled a fast one to reduce what little power the state's public access counselor has. Changing the role's four-year term to at-will employment strips protections from politics and places the elected above the everyman.

The irony behind gutting the position is that it came with no transparency and on the eve of a national recognition of the importance of transparency in a functioning democracy. Happy Sunshine Week to journalists and citizens alike who dare to want to know what their government is up to!

Procedure often bugs me more than the policy, but this is one of those rare cases that is a two-fer.

There were no bills filed on the topic. There were no specific hearings vetting whether Public Access Counselor Luke Britt is or isn't doing his job. So, there was no real chance for the public to attend a hearing and have their say. After all, the underlying bill was about meeting decorum and trespass issues — not transparency.

The language was inserted with 11 days left in a two-month session.

A few people were there to testify on the underlying bill and when asked about the new provisions didn't have an opinion because they had just seen it. The Hoosier State Press Association wasn't there to weigh in. This simply isn't how laws should be made.

Independence is important

So, let's talk about the actual changes to the statute.

To begin with, Indiana's public access counselor is who citizens go to when they are denied a record or access to their government. The office issues advisory opinions as to whether, for instance, a document is a public record or whether a local government inappropriately made a decision in private instead of in public.

For instance, the Sullivan County Sheriff's Office recently tried to hide a nonemergency call from disclosure. It used an investigatory records exemption but the counselor ruled there was no crime being investigated so that exemption was not allowed. The counselor also found the Marion County Prosecutor's Office had to provide a copy of a deleted social media post.

The counselor can't issue fines. The opinions are advisory. If you win and the entity still doesn't follow the law, you have to sue.

Looking through some of the opinions, the counselor denies most of the complaints. I have certainly lost more than I have won.

For instance, Hoosiers regularly lose requests that don't follow "reasonable particularity" — i.e., a request can't be a vague fishing expedition. And the counselor recently found that a working group inside the East Noble School Corporation that is vetting library books doesn't qualify as a public body.

But the counselor is an independent arbiter of the law who isn't bound to either side. The role is an invaluable resource.

Right now, he or she serves a fixed four-year term and can only be fired "for cause." House Bill 1338 says the counselor serves at the pleasure of the governor and can be removed the first time he or she issues a ruling someone powerful doesn't like.

The next change is that the counselor now can only use the public access law itself and court rulings to issue opinions. Not even a dictionary!

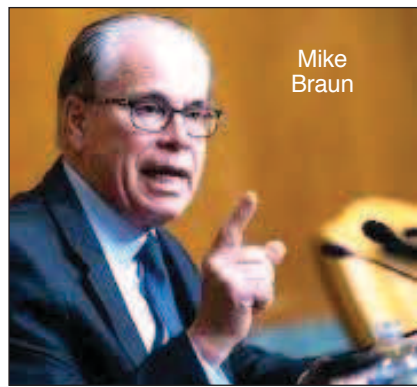
Sen. Aaron Freeman, R-Indianapolis, added the language because of several rulings that he thinks have been too liberal.

The use of the word liberal is interesting since the public access law itself says in black and white it must be "liberally construed." So, the counselor role is getting neutered because Britt was following the law.

The House concurred on the Senate bill Wednesday in a 58-36 vote. My last hope is that Gov. Eric Holcomb has the courage to stand up and veto the bill.

He has a procedural argument, that the language was unvetted and the public left out of the process. And he would be in the right to always err on the side of the public's right to know — just like the law says.

Niki Kelly is the editor of the Indiana Capital Chronicle, a non-profit newsroom. nkelly@indianacapitalchronicle.com



Mike Braun



Brad Chambers



Suzanne Crouch



Eric Doden



Curtis Hill



Jamie Reitenouer

Brace yourselves for a rollicking GOP governor primary

In two months, Hoosier voters will be selecting nominees for their next governor. Former Republican school superintendent Jennifer McCormick will be the Democrat nominee, and Libertarians have nominated Donald Rainwater again. For Republicans, there are an unprecedented six candidates seeking to replace term-limited Gov. Eric Holcomb.

I say "unprecedented" because in the television age of Hoosier politics, the GOP primary race usually comes down to two or three candidates, like in 2004 when Mitch Daniels faced Eric Miller after the field winnowed. That six candidates are in the field in a race that will almost certainly exceed \$20 million means that no one has consolidated a grip on the nomination ... yet.

U.S. Sen. Mike Braun is the perceived frontrunner. A poll this week by The Hill and Emerson College had him leading the field with 33%, followed by Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch at 7.2%, Fort Wayne businessman Eric Doden at 6.6% and former Commerce Secretary Brad Chambers at 5.2%. Also in the race are former attorney general Curtis Hill and businesswoman Jamie Reitenouer.

That leaves a whopping 43% undecided. Brian Gramache, spokesman for the Doden campaign, observes that "despite spending more than \$3 million, Mike Braun has slipped from 47% to 34% in the most recent public survey. That's a 13-point drop in the polls without a dollar of advertising spent against him." He cited internal Braun polls showing the senator with 40% in late December and 47% in late November.

So this race is in a state of flux, as to be expected. Coming next will be a spate of attack (or contrasting) TV ads. By this weekend, whether you are watching Fox59, CNN or Peacock, this race will switch into hyper-mode, and the gloves will finally slip off the brass knuckles.

"We will be the beneficiary of a seven-figure broadcast, mail, digital and streaming independent buy attacking Braun by this weekend," Marty Obst, senior adviser for the Brad Chambers campaign, told Howey Politics/State Affairs Pro.

But Obst contends that internal polling for Chambers about two weeks ago shows Braun's support is shallow. "Braun's numbers are weak and soft," Obst said. "He will be vulnerable to attacks from Doden — and Chambers — affiliated PACs. The perception is that Braun is up with about 40%, but it is soft. Doden, Crouch and Chambers are crowded around second place."

The Chambers campaign has spent \$8 million thus far ginning up his name ID and positive message. Obst insisted Chambers wouldn't have entered this race had there not been a "path" to victory.

Gamache added, "To date, the Doden campaign has spent less than \$5 million on media and advertising, and thanks to our strong fundraising, we're well-positioned to continue advertising competitively with the other campaigns."

The Crouch campaign, which unveiled its first TV

ad last week, declined to specify how much it will spend. "It's significant," campaign spokesman Robert Vane said. "We will be on the air until May 7."

Braun campaign spokesman Jahan Wilcox declined to specify how much the campaign has spent to date. (Obst says it's about \$3 million, but Howey Politics/State Affairs has not independently verified any of the ad expenditures.) "The rest of the questions pertain to strategy, and we don't discuss that," Wilcox said.



Brian Howey

Politicking

Wilcox confirmed Braun will not participate in Monday's first debate hosted by the Carmel Current at the Palladium. The sold-out event is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. ET and will be livestreamed at YouAreCurrent.com. The campaign did not say why Braun will skip this debate but indicated he will participate in the other scheduled debates in March and April.

Perhaps the biggest advertising change comes with the expansion from broadcast, cable, mail and digital modes and into streaming services as more consumers cut their cable cords.

According to Maya Hoff of Marketplace, "Streaming services ... are a relatively new territory for political advertising regulation. Since the FCC has no oversight over how political ads are streamed, the services are left to write their own rules and policies on the ads they choose and how they run them."

Key questions heading into the final two months of the campaign:

1. Will former president Donald Trump come back to Indiana to campaign for his endorsed candidate, Sen. Braun? In 2018, Trump had multiple rallies for Braun, helping him upset Democrat Sen. Joe Donnelly.

2. Will candidates with the ability to self-fund — Braun, Doden and Chambers — write more big personal checks? Chambers just gave his campaign another \$2 million on top of the \$5 million he seeded last August.

3. Lt. Gov. Crouch will be freed from her State-house duties after the General Assembly's conclusion. She has been endorsed by more than 100 locally elected officials, including 27 in law enforcement and won recent straw polls in the 6th Congressional District and Tippecanoe County. Will that local support give Indiana Republicans their first female nominee?

4. Doden has raised close to \$700,000 in large donations this past month (compared to \$265,000 for Braun, \$360,000 for Chambers and \$210,000 for Crouch), suggesting he has some momentum.

5. After a generation of GOP campaigns without negative TV ads (by Govs. Daniels, Mike Pence and Holcomb) will the coming din turn off voters? Stay tuned, folks.

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

The ongoing denigration of Black conservatives

President Joe Biden stirred up controversy during the last presidential campaign, when, in an interview with a Black radio host, he said, "If you have a problem figuring out if you're for me or Trump, you ain't Black."

Biden got pushback on this, but he captured a pretty common view among liberals. That is, that liberalism is genetically emblazoned in Black DNA. They see Blacks who are not liberal as not normal, not really Black.

As a Black woman and a conservative for many years, I can testify to the prevalence of this view. Now the liberal media is getting into a new version of this. Same story, but slightly different version.

The big scoop is that Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas has hired as one of his clerks a young woman who has been accused of racism.

Crystal Clanton, a magna cum laude graduate of Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University, most recently a clerk for highly respected conservative Judge William Pryor on the 11th circuit federal court of appeals, was just hired by Thomas. Clanton, according to liberal accusers, posted remarks, back in 2015, while working at Turning Point USA, saying "I hate Black people" with some profanity accompanying the statement.

Far left journalists, such as Ruth



Star Parker

Marcus of The Washington Post, and Jane Mayer of The New Yorker, have been on the story for years — Mayer first reporting about it in 2017. This despite no definitive evidence that the racist post was the work of Clanton.

Now that Thomas has hired Clanton, liberals have shifted into high gear. With all the supposed concerns of the left about racism, none seem troubled or confused by the allegation that a Black judge — no less the most prominent Black jurist in the nation — would hire a racist. How does that compute?

The answer is that in liberal eyes, Black conservatives "ain't Black."

Certainly, a Black conservative as sophisticated as Thomas could in no way be Black. And therefore, he could even be a racist and sympathetic to racists.

Absurd? Of course. Is it demeaning and insulting to Thomas? Of course.

Liberals are not only very tolerant of sloppy thinking. They are also tolerant of sloppy journalism. Mayer's latest coverage, which she first reported in the New Yorker in 2017, appears under the headline "The Scandal of Clarence Thomas's New Clerk."

What is the scandal? Thomas has hired Clanton "who became notorious in 2015 for apparently sending texts that said, 'I hate Black people ...

"" Apparently" is enough for Mayer and her liberal compatriots to convict.

When Pryor hired Clanton, who had a previous clerkship with Judge Corey Maze in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama, seven congressional Democrats called for an investigation. An investigation was conducted by Chief Judge Debra Ann Livingston of the Second Circuit. The end of Livingston's investigation of the incident was a green light for Clanton.

Livingston pointed out that both Maze and Pryor knew of the allegations when they hired her, rejected their validity and found her to be highly competent.

As part of the Second Circuit investigation, Thomas sent a letter saying, "I know Crystal Clanton and I know bigotry. ... Bigotry is antithetical to her nature." Thomas and his wife, Ginni, have known Clanton for years and Clanton actually lived with them for almost a year. If she was a racist, how could Thomas not know it?

Yet despite this, liberal journalists continue on about him hiring a racist as his clerk.

When will we realize that the real racism belongs to liberals who see every Black American as a liberal mannequin, denying their uniqueness, integrity and individuality? When will we realize the disservice to Black Americans and all Americans in denying the humanity of Black Americans who are conservative?

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Mark Miller, Opinion Page Editor

What's happening at the Wells County Public Library

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

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

Brown Bag Book Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Monday, March 11 at 1:30 p.m.

Adults. Pick up a copy of the book-of-the-month at the library before the discussion each month. This month's book for discussion is "The Disappearing Spoon" by Sam Kean. Registration appreciated.

Crafty Kids At Ossian

At the Ossian Branch Library: Monday, March 11 at 3:30 to 5:30 p.m.

School-age kids. Drop-in for a different craft each month. No registration needed.

Computer and iPad Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Tuesday, March 12 from 1 to 3 p.m.

Adults. Start with Computer Club and then go or stay for iPad Club. Each month has a different tech focus and there is plenty of time for questions. All skill levels are welcome. Registration appreciated your first visit.

Cook, Talk, Taste

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Tuesday, March 12 from 6 to 7 p.m.

Adults. Enjoy the tastiest club at the library. This month the group will be talking about differences in types of dough, along with samples to taste. Registration appreciated.

Children's Book Clubs

At the Main Library (Bluffton)
Grades 3-4 Book Club: Tuesday, March

12 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Grades 5-6 Book Club: Thursday, March 14 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

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

Teen Fun with Food At Ossian

At the Ossian Branch Library: Thursday, March 14 from 3 to 4 p.m.

Grades 6-12. Get hands-on experience with treats dipped in chocolate. Registration appreciated.

Teen Book Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, March 14 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Grades 6-12. Join us as we discuss "The Inheritance Games" by Jennifer Lynn Barnes and enjoy an Inheritance Treasure Hunt. Pick up the book-of-the-month when you register at the library.

Book Discussion: "Blessings"

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, March 14 at 6:30 p.m.

Adults. Pick up a copy of the book-of-the-month at the library before the discussion each month. This month's book for discussion is "Blessings" by Anna Quindlen. Registration appreciated.

Saturday Movies

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Saturday, March 16 at 11 a.m.

All ages. Drop-in for a family-friendly movie under the stars in the Story Hour Room.

Secrets & Truths

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Monday, March 18 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Grades 6-12. How's your poker face? Do you know your friends? Are you good at reading strangers? Test your social deduction skills and get to know your peers and friends better with games that test your abilities at

intrigue and instinct. Registration required.

Craft Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Tuesday, March 19 from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.

Adults. Bring a current travel-sized project and your materials with you to work on your craft projects while chatting with others and learning from each other. Open to those that knit, crochet, embroider, quilt, paper craft, and more. See what materials the library has to assist you as well. Registration appreciated, but not required.

Intro to the Computer and Internet

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Tuesday, March 19 and Tuesday, March 26 from 6 to 8 p.m.

Adults. This two-part, beginning level computer class will cover everything from how to turn on the computer, using the mouse and keyboard, working with Windows, and basic computer terminology. No computer experience necessary. Registration required for this computer class series.

Kids' Club

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Tuesday, March 19 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

A club for kids in K-3rd grade who enjoy fun stories, activities, and crafts! The meeting will be held in the Story Hour room every third Tuesday of the month. The program lasts about an hour. Registration appreciated.

Theater Thursday

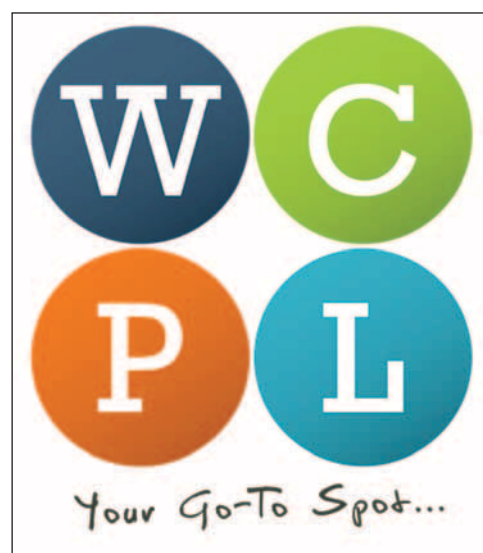
At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, March 21 at 10 am

Adults. Join us for a movie, popcorn, and snacks. Sponsored by the Bluffton Parks & Recreation and the Friends of the Library. No registration needed.

Board Game Night

At the Ossian Branch Library: Thursday, March 21 from 6 to 8 p.m.

Adults (18+). Join us for a night of table-



top games at the Ossian Branch. Registration appreciated.

Fine Dining Extravaganza: Club 456

At the Main Library (Bluffton): Thursday, March 21 from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Grades 4-6. Connect with friends over a multi-course meal! Fancy attire recommended but not required. Registration requested.

Trivia Night At The Parlor City

Brewing Company
Sunday, March 24 from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m.

Adults (21+). Grab a team of up to four people and test your knowledge on a variety of subjects, from pop culture, sports, local history, and other trivia categories. Prizes awarded; space is limited. Sign up at the library or online at wellscollibrary.org.

Library Hours

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

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

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

Norwell Internship Spotlight award Maddie Brown



Maddie Brown

Senior Maddie Brown has been selected to receive the Norwell Internship Spotlight award. She has been doing her experience at Christian Care Retirement Community the entire school year. Her mentor is scheduling coordinator Cierrah Walden. Maddie is the daughter of Jeremy Baer of Willshire, Ohio and Kimberly Brown of Bluffton.

As a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant), Mad-

die assists her residents with ADL's (Activities of Daily Living). This includes toileting, walking, and hygiene. When Maddie starts her shift, she reads reports on each of her residents. She then begins charting such information as behaviors, toileting, and food intake for her residents.

Upon graduation, Maddie plans to attend Indiana Tech. in Fort Wayne to study health sciences and attain her

BSN (Bachelors of Sciences in Nursing).

Workday at the Wells County Historical Museum

Volunteers will be gathering at the Wells County Historical Museum on Tuesday morning, March 12, to move display cases and artifacts in preparation for 2024 Opening Day on Sunday, April 14th.

Items have been added to the Military display in the Annex, a 1913 and 2003 Flood Display has been created and a new display featuring the work of local artist Harry Lindstrand is being created. (The museum is looking for items to add to the Lindstrand display.)

The Sports Room is being relocated to the second floor and the museum is looking for items to add

to this collection. Some larger items also will be added to the Carriage Barn area for display.



Gloria's favorite time of the year

Editor's Note: Gloria is taking the week off to get caught up on some spring cleaning and answering mail. So this week we step back into the time machine to the spring of 2019 and read about this favorite time of year in the Yoder household. Gloria will return next week- Kevin Williams, Editor

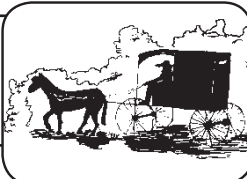
Ah, this Spring weather gets me going. I can't wait to start planting the garden. Daniel plowed our garden plot a couple days ago in hopes to have it dry out faster. Digging deeper by plowing also helps some of those buried nutrients to get closer to the surface where the plants will take be taking root. The way it sounds we have more rain coming the next couple of days so we'll try to stay patient. There's just nothing like fresh goodies from the garden. Equally fulfilling is watching the children's eyes widen with delight as they help harvest veggies straight from plants they heed start from seed, pulled weeds, and helped keep watered.

A couple girls from our church own a greenhouse that they have been experimenting with growing greens all winter long. Now that is quite impressive if you ask me. Fresh, nutritious salad greens in December surely is an amazing experience. Even children will eat salads better if it's made up of tender young greens fresh from the patch. We have found too, that having a good dressing to go over the salad does go a long way, whether you're feeding youngsters or even Daddy! Daniel is just like my dad has been as long as I can remember; to them, it's not worth even eating a salad if you don't have some good old fashioned homemade dressing to go with it.

Another alternative, I've found when it comes to salads in the dead of winter or when you run out of patience while waiting in the Springtime is sprouting

The Amish Cook

by Gloria Yoder



your own seeds. It doesn't take nearly as long as planting and waiting till your lettuce is ready to harvest and not only that, you can keep growing it on your counter-top through every inch of rain that falls relentlessly on the outdoors.

Talking about rain, yesterday when Julia stepped inside after her walk home from school she said, "Mom, I know what we could do to help the garden dry off faster. We could use buckets and dip the water out of those furrows." Bless her heart. Obviously, she heard Daniel and I discussing the matter the day before and noticed all the water that still needed to dry out as she walked past the garden.

I went with her to investigate, yes she was correct, gardening does look like it could be a little way off yet, but then this really can be an opportunity to be an example to the children of being thankful for the weather God sends us and not spend time pining over it.

Flowers are another thing I enjoy, but I need or want to keep things basic this year. Never again will I have this Summer with two one-year-old boys and a two-year-old girl. As my aunt would say, "Your flowers run around." Yes, I wouldn't trade my darling for the world's most stunning flowers. Neither do I want my little ones to grow up with the memory that Mom was constantly saying, "No, no, don't pick Mommy's flowers!" So one lofty goal that I do have is having a few nice long rows

of flowers in the garden, solely for the children to be able to go out and pick bouquets, I'm not sure what kind it'll be yet, perhaps some gladiolus and freesias that cousin Owen gave. Since Owen is staying at our house, we also get to have his blueberry plants which he planted in large totes a year ago. A brainy idea, now he could just move it with him. I can just see the little boys' hands reach up and pick fresh berries, that is if we can keep their hands off long enough to allow the berries to ripen.

GLORIA'S SPRING SALAD

- 2 cups chopped lettuce
- 1 cup sprouted alfalfa seeds
- 1 hard boiled egg, diced
- ¼ cup each of the following:
 - Ham or chicken, diced
 - Bacon
 - Carrots
 - Radishes
 - Onions
 - Cheese, shredded
 - Raisins or dried cranberries
- ½ cup pecans or nuts of your choice

Cut veggies, ham and bacon into chunks. Toss everything together. We prefer using chopped pecans and browning them lightly in a tablespoon of melted butter and sprinkling them with salt. This adds an outstanding flavor to the entire salad. Last but not least, remember to toss in only what strikes your fancy and don't be limited to these options.

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U11 & U15: Two 1-hour practices each week, chosen by coach
* Practices will begin Monday, April 29th

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ALL games are 1-hour time slots with start times varying between 8am - 2pm.

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Knights open up the track season at Bulldog Invitational at Indiana Tech

The Norwell track and field teams had their first event of the 2024 season on Saturday.

The Knights' co-ed squads traveled to Indiana Tech indoors for the Bulldog Invitational. The boys finished tied for ninth with a team score of 25 points, while the girls placed 11th with 11.33 points.

Carroll was the overall champion in both boys and girls. Full team results are below.

Top performers were:

- Boys**
- Trevon Stoppenhagen fifth in the 60-meter dash with a time of 7.36.
 - Gavin Threewits 10th in the 3200-meter run with a time of 10:49.63 and Lukas Mashuda 19th with a time of 11:17.23.
 - Cohen Garrett 14th in the 60-meter hurdles 10.60.
 - Jace Harmon second in the long jump with a jump of 20-4.25.
 - Jasper Kreigh fourth in the pole vault with a height of 12-6, Easton Scherrer seventh (10-6) and Zach Roberts 10th (10-0).
 - Alex Fojtik 10th in the shot put with a throw 38-4.5, Luke Harkless 11th (38-1) and Will Gerber 18th (36-11).



- Girls**
- Eden Nash 14th in the 60-meter hurdles with a time of 10.86.
 - Jaycie Grzych eighth in the high jump with a jump of 4-6.
 - Haley Williamson 15th in the long jump with a jump of 14-3.
 - Emerson Meredith third in the pole vault with a height of 9-6, Ryleigh Huffman sixth (7-6) and Kendall Dunwiddie (7-0) seventh.
 - Sawyer Peterson 19th in the shot put with a throw of 27-7.
- Team results:**

- Boys**
1. Carroll (95 points), 2. Northrop (86), 3. Churubusco (64), 4. Manchester (55.50), 5. Westview (47), 6. Leo (43), 7. Bremen (42.50), 8. Goshen (30), T9. Norwell (25) & DeKalb (25), 11. South Adams (16), 12. North Side (13), 13. Plymouth (11), 14. Wayne (10), T15. South Side (8) & Central Noble (8).
- Girls**
1. Carroll (156), 2. Warsaw (111), 3. Northrop (71), 3. Northrop (71), 4. Leo (38), 5. Leo (28), 6. Central Noble (27), 7. Goshen (26), 8. Plymouth (23), 9. DeKalb (22.33), 10. West Noble (14), 11. Norwell (11.33), 12. Churubusco (11), T13. Wayne (10) South Side (10), 15. Westview (9), 16. North Side (8), 17. Manchester (6.33), 18. (3).



Habegger finished 3rd in state

Bluffton bowler Miken Habegger participated in the Indiana high school state bowling tournament on Saturday. The event took place in Kokomo, where Habegger bowled a 601 to place second in the qualifying round. In the finals, he finished in third. In addition to this, Habegger competed in the Indiana youth open on Saturday and Sunday in Fort Wayne. He bowled another perfect game on Saturday to aid his 800 series with individual scores of 257, 300 and 258. (Photo provided)

Christopher Bell pulls out an emotional victory for Joe Gibbs Racing at Phoenix

By JOHN MARSHALL
AP Sports Writer

AVONDALE, Ariz. (AP) — Christopher Bell and the rest of Joe Gibbs Racing have been through more than their share of heartbreak in the desert.

Owner Joe Gibbs' son, the team's vice chairman, died unexpectedly in Phoenix two years ago. Last fall, a broken brake rotor spoiled Bell's NASCAR Cup Series championship hopes in the Valley of the Sun.

Winning at Phoenix Raceway will never erase the anguish, but it's certainly another step in the healing process.

Bell surged into the lead when Martin Truex Jr. was forced to pit and then pulled away for an emotional NASCAR Cup Series win at Phoenix Raceway on Sunday.

"This one feels really good," Bell said. "You don't get cars like that very often, as you know. Just super, super proud to be on this 20 car."

JGR has been through a whirlwind of emotions in Phoenix.

In 2022, hours after Ty Gibbs won an Xfinity season championship for his grandfather's team, vice chairman Coy Gibbs was found dead in his hotel room. Ty's father was 49.

Bell and JGR returned to Phoenix Raceway in November as part of the championship four vying for the Cup Series title. Instead of mending emotions, the team left dejected after Bell's car broke early in the race.

Given another shot, Bell held his emotions in check and the crew gave him the fastest car on a perfect afternoon in the desert that ended with a massive celebration on victory lane.

"It is a little bit cathartic," Bell's crew chief Adam Stevens said.

Bell's win in the No. 20 Toyota also ended Chevrolet's perfect start to the season after winning the first three races. He is the eighth different winner in eight races at Phoenix Raceway's mile tri-oval.

Chris Buescher finished second after being wrecking 27 laps into last week's race in Las Vegas and Ty Gibbs was third for his career-best finish. Brad Keselowski and Ryan Blaney rounded out the top five.

"We had a rough go last week," Buescher said. "This was good to get everybody back to prove that we're in this together and we're going to win one of these things as a team."

The Phoenix race marked the debut of NASCAR's new aerodynamics package for short tracks in hopes of producing more passing on tracks of a mile or less and road courses. Good-year also produced tires with thicker treads designed to retain heat and increase lap-time falloff.

Starting 13th, Bell took advantage of the changes, overcoming a slow pit stop to charge back to the front. Bell moved into the lead with 40 laps to go when leader Truex had to pit for fuel and tires.

Bell led the final 49 laps for his seventh career Cup Series victory — first since Homestead in October.

"I drove a rocket ship today," Bell said. "It just took off."

Truex and his crew made calculated gamble on lap 217, opting to stay out when most of the leaders went into the pits.

The JGR driver stayed in the lead,

hoping he would have enough fuel and his tires would hold out long enough to reach the checkered flag. Neither happened and Truex was forced to the pits. He finished seventh.

HAMLIN SPINS

Pole sitter Denny Hamlin took advantage of having the first stall to twice take the lead out of the pits, but ran into trouble with about 100 laps left.

Trying to pass Reddick, Hamlin's No. 11 car got loose and he spun out, causing a caution that sent most of the cars to the pits. Hamlin dropped to 23rd after a pit stop and finished 11th.

"Just got in too deep and tried not to wreck him," Hamlin said. "Just ended up wrecking ourselves."

CINDRIC'S BAD LUCK

Austin Cindric had an early end to his day, a week after a spinout knocked him well back in the pack at Las Vegas.

Cindric completed six laps at Phoenix Raceway before being involved in a wreck with Austin Dillon and Derek Kraus. Dillon and Kraus were able to return to the track, but Cindric's car was damaged too much.

Cindric finished 29th at Las Vegas and was in contention at the Daytona 500 before getting caught up in a late wreck.

"I felt like I got hit twice," Cindric said. "I knew the 3 (Dillon) was on the inside, but I thought he would fall back but he came back up. It's just a product of not qualifying well."

UP NEXT

The Cup Series heads to Bristol Motor Speedway in Tennessee next weekend.

Purdue retires Zach Edey's jersey after he leads No. 3 Boilermakers past Wisconsin

By MICHAEL MAROT
AP Sports Writer

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. (AP) — Zach Edey had a banner day.

The 7-foot-4 Purdue senior withstood a physical onslaught from Wisconsin in his home finale, persevered and received a surprise reward: seeing his jersey number, 15, added to the Mackey Arena rafters.

Edey played through an injured left leg, finished with 25 points and 14 rebounds, became the first Big Ten player with 2,200 points and 1,200 rebounds and led No. 3 Purdue past Wisconsin 78-70 on Sunday. And then the Boilermakers surprised him by retiring his jersey.

"It's real cool. I had all my friends here from Toronto for like the first time," Edey said before addressing the emotions of the day. "It's my last game in Mackey."

And there was plenty to celebrate for Edey and Purdue (28-3, 17-3), winners of five straight.

Afterward, Edey stood arm in arm with his mother before addressing the crowd.

Before the game, coach Matt Painter presented point guard Braden Smith with a ceremonial ball for breaking Purdue's single-season assists record, which stood for nearly 50 years. Moments later, Purdue's pep band played "O Canada" as a Senior Day tribute to Edey, who's from Toronto.

"I've been trying to get them to do that for four years," Edey joked.

Edey needed less than five minutes to grab the three rebounds needed to reach 1,200. It took a little longer for the Boilermakers' six-player senior class to match Indiana's record for conference wins, 59, over a four-year period. Indiana did it from 1972-76.

Fletcher Loyer added 15 points and Smith added 10 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds for the Boilermakers, who won a second consecutive Big Ten title by at

least three games. John Blackwell scored 18 points for the Badgers (19-12, 11-9). Tyler Wahl had 17 points and 10 rebounds, and AJ Storr also scored 17.

"I thought we did a lot of good things offensively," Badgers coach Greg Gard said. "That's a tough team. I would say you can't get a consistent diet of things in the paint just because of his presence."

Purdue certainly tried to fight off Edey near the basket, fouling him 11 times. And it looked like Edey's presence might be short-lived when he limped gingerly to the bench with an apparent left leg injury and Purdue leading 17-9. He finished the half on the bench because of foul trouble.

And after Loyer's four-point play helped stake Purdue to a 40-26 lead, Smith appeared to hurt his right ankle on a non-contact play.

He went to the locker room but returned 75 seconds later as the Boilermakers made it 44-33 at the half.

Edey and Loyer remained on the floor without apparent difficulty in the second half as the Badgers twice cut the deficit to four. But the Boilermakers answered with 3-pointers each time, first by Smith and then by Caleb Furst.

"You can tell he loves the game, you can tell he respects the game," forward Mason Gillis said when asked about Edey. "The people around know what he does. He looks out for everybody. He's a good guy in the gym. I don't think we could ask for a better national player of the year."

UP NEXT

Purdue: Heads to Minneapolis with the Big Ten's No. 1 seed, a double bye and a Friday quarterfinal game.

Knights defeat Tigers in swimming & diving

Norwell's swim and dive teams defeated Bluffton on Thursday in the second to last week of the season.

The boys won 139-46, while the girls 120-66.

Individual winners were:

- Boys**
- Ben Peterson in the diving events and in the 50-yard butterfly.
 - Evan Swallow in the 200-yard freestyle and in the 400-yard freestyle.
 - Easton Reinhard in the 100-yard IM and in the 100-yard breaststroke.
 - Wyatt Goulet in the 100-yard freestyle.
 - Tyler Zent in the 200-yard backstroke.
 - Oakleaf, Reinhard, Rodgers and Hank in the 200-yard medley relay.

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

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

- Girls**
- Katelyn Troutt in the diving events.
 - Emma Easley in the 200-yard freestyle.
 - Faith Grant in the 50-yard freestyle and in the 100-yard backstroke.
 - Mia Kurts in the 100-yard freestyle.
 - Reagan Wilson 100-yard breaststroke.
 - Hoopingamer, Mialkowski, Easley and Kurtz in the 200-yard freestyle relay.
 - Grant, Easley, Kurtz and Mialkowski in the 300-yard freestyle relay.

Ware scores 28 in the Hoosiers win over MSU

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. (AP) — Kel'el Ware had 28 points, 12 rebounds and the go-ahead free throw to lead Indiana to a 65-64 victory over Michigan State on Sunday as the Hoosiers wrapped up the Big Ten regular season with their fourth consecutive win.

The score was tied three times in the final three minutes. The last tie was at 64 on a driving layup by MSU's Tyson Walker with 1:28 remaining. After a series of misses, Ware made one of two free throws and the Hoosiers led 65-64 with 17 seconds left. Walker missed a jumper with 4 seconds left and Indiana rebounded to run out the clock.

Ware scored 19 points in the second half, making 9 of 13 shots. For the game, he missed his first five foul shots before connecting on the sixth. Malik Reneau added 16 points and Mackenzie Mgbako had 13. Only five players scored for the Hoosiers (18-13, 10-10 Big Ten).

Walker scored 30 points for Michigan State (18-13, 10-10). Jaden Akins and A.J. Hoggard added 10 points each.

The Hoosiers got 10 points each from Reneau and Mgbako in the first half and led 34-29 at halftime. Indiana had an early 20-5 lead and maintained a double-digit advantage until the Spartans' Walker and Malik Hall combined to score the last eight points of the half.

The Spartans scored the first 11 points of the second half, stretching their scoring run to 19 in a row and taking a 43-36 lead. Indiana chipped away at the lead and eventually went ahead 56-55 on Xavier Johnson's 3-pointer near the eight-minute mark. Ninety seconds later, a dunk by Ware gave the Hoosiers a 58-57 advantage and Michigan State never regained the lead.

High School Calendar

- MONDAY, MARCH 11**
No events scheduled.
- TUESDAY, MARCH 12**
No events scheduled.
- WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13**
No events scheduled.
- THURSDAY, MARCH 14**
No events scheduled.
- FRIDAY, MARCH 15**
TRACK & FIELD (CO-ED): Bluffton, Norwell at Taylor University Qualifier, 5:30 p.m.

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Help Wanted

THE CITY OF Bluffton Street Department is accepting applications for a Laborer/Truck Driver. The minimum educational requirement is a high school diploma or equivalent. Applicants must possess and maintain a CDL License or obtain one within the time limit. The City utilizes E-Verify and follows EEOC guidelines. Applications may be obtained from the Clerk Treasurer's office, 128 East Market St, Bluffton, IN between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm Monday-Friday or at www.blufftonindiana.net.

WELLS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE is currently seeking applicants for the position of Full Time Deputy Sheriff. Applicants must be a US Citizen, at least 21 years of age upon graduation from police academy, possess a high school diploma or equivalent as well as a valid Indiana Operators License. Applicant can't have any felony convictions. Applicants must pass all aspects of the hiring process including physical agility testing, written examination, background investigation, oral interview, polygraph and physiological evaluation. Selected applicant must be able to graduate from the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy. ILEA certified applicants do not have to attend the physical agility and written examination portion of the process. 20-year matrix salary range for a Deputy Sheriff (no rank) is \$56,600 - \$68,400. Years of service and experience will be honored for a starting salary up to five years in the pay matrix. Pre-Application can be found on our website at www.wellscountysheriff.com. Once pre-application is completed, details on the paper application will be emailed to the applicant. Return completed paper application to 1615 W Western Ave, Bluffton, Indiana 46714 Attn: Chief Deputy Randy Steele no later than 12:00 pm on March 15, 2024.

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

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Notices

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Pers

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Lottery Numbers

Saturday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY
Cash 5 — 06-08-14-37-41
Cash4Life — 01-06-23-37-56, Cash Ball: 03
Lotto Plus — 11-13-20-22-32-38
Quick Draw Midday — 15-19-20-27-29-31-33-34-35-40-45-52-55-67-68-70-74-75-77-79, BE: 67
Daily Three-Midday — 03-04-05, SB: 07
Daily Three-Evening — 07-06-06, SB: 01
Daily Four-Midday — 04-07-02-01, SB: 07
Daily Four-Evening — 00-05-04-09, SB: 01
Quick Draw Evening — 06-08-12-13-14-19-28-34-35-37-44-49-51-54-56-59-60-70-72-73, BE: 56
Hoosier Lotto — 06-18-28-31-43-46

POWERBALL
30-36-49-52-63; Powerball: 16; Power Play: 5X

Sunday's Drawings HOOSIER LOTTERY
Cash 5 — 02-19-31-33-44
Cash4Life — 05-13-17-42-43, Cash Ball: 04
Quick Draw Midday — 01-05-06-17-18-25-26-31-35-37-40-43-48-52-55-57-62-68-77-78, BE: 25
Daily Three-Midday — 00-09-02, SB: 05
Daily Three-Evening — 04-07-09, SB: 02
Daily Four-Midday — 08-07-08-05, SB: 05
Daily Four-Evening — 04-06-07-04, SB: 02
Quick Draw Evening — 02-03-05-06-07-10-14-17-24-27-29-30-42-44-52-56-59-72-76-79, BE: 52
Hoosier Lotto — Estimated jackpot (for Wednesday): \$6.3 million

MEGA MILLIONS
Estimated jackpot (for Tuesday): \$735 million

POWERBALL
Estimated jackpot (for Wednesday): \$532 million

SUDOKU ANSWER

9	4	1	9	8	7	6	8	2
9	8	6	1	7	8	7	9	2
8	7	1	6	7	9	1	9	8
8	1	9	8	9	7	6	7	1
7	8	7	6	9	8	1	9	9
7	6	9	8	7	1	8	7	9
6	9	7	9	1	8	7	7	8
7	9	8	7	8	6	9	7	1
1	7	8	7	9	7	9	8	6

Female representation remains low in U.S. statehouses

By LEAH WILLINGHAM and KIMBERLEE KRUESI
Associated Press
CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Democrat Kayla Young and Republican Patricia Rucker frequently clash on abortion rights and just about everything else in West Virginia's Legislature, but they agree on one thing: Too few of their colleagues are women, and it's hurting the state.

"There are exceptions to every single rule, but I think in general, men do kind of see this as their field," said Rucker, part of the GOP's Senate supermajority that passed one of the nation's strictest abortion bans while Young — the lone Democratic woman elected to the House — opposed it.

Nearly 130 years since the first three women were elected to state legislative offices in the U.S., women remain massively under-represented in state legislatures.

In 10 states, women make up less than 25% of their state legislatures, according to Rutgers' Center for American Women in Politics. West Virginia is at the very bottom of that list, having just 16 women in its 134-member Legislature, or just under 12%. That's compared with Nevada, where women occupy just over 60% of state legislative seats. Similar low numbers can be found in the nearby southern states of Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Louisiana.

"It's absolutely wild to know that more than 50 percent of the population of West Virginia are women, and sometimes I'm the

only woman that's on a committee, period," said Young, currently the only woman on the House Artificial Intelligence Committee and was one of just two on the House Judiciary Committee when it greenlighted the state's near total abortion ban.

The numbers of women filling legislative seats across the U.S. have remained low despite women registering and voting at higher rates than men in every presidential election since 1980 — and across virtually every demographic, including race, education level and socioeconomic status.

For the last three decades, voters have demonstrated a willingness to cast ballots for women. But they didn't have the opportunity to do so because women weren't running, said Jennifer Lawless, chair of the politics department at the University of Virginia.

"The gender gap in political ambition is just as large now as it was then," said Lawless, adding that women are much less likely to get recruited to run for office or think they're qualified to run in what they perceive as a hostile political environment.

And those running in southern, conservative states — still mostly Democratic women, data show — aren't winning as those states continue to overwhelmingly elect Republicans.

In 2022, 39 women ran as their party's nominee for state legislative seats in West Virginia, and 26 were Democrats. Only two of the Democratic candidates won, compared to 11 out of 13 of the Repub-

licans. Debbie Walsh, director of Rutgers' Center for American Women in Politics, said there's more money, infrastructure and support for recruiting and running Democratic female candidates. The Republican Party often shies away from talking about what is labeled or dismissed as "identity politics," she said.

"It's a belief in a kind of meritocracy and, 'the best candidate will rise. And if it's a woman, great.' They don't say, 'We don't want women, but if it's a man, that's fine, too,'" she said. "There's no sort of value in and of itself seen in the diversity."

Larissa Martinez, founder and president of Women's Public Leadership Network, one of only a few right-leaning U.S. organizations solely supporting female candidates, said identity politics within the GOP is a big hurdle to her work. Part of her organization's slogan is, "we are pro-women without being anti-man."

In 2020, small-town public school teacher Amy Grady pulled off a huge political upset when she defeated then-Senate President Mitch Carmichael in West Virginia's Republican primary, following back-to-back years of strikes in which school employees packed into the state Capitol.

Carmichael took in more than \$127,000 in contributions compared to Grady's self-funded war chest of just over \$2,000. Still, Grady won by fewer than 1,000 votes.

"It's just you're told constantly,

"You can't, you can't, you can't do it," said Grady, who has now risen through the ranks to become chair of the Senate Education Committee. "And it's just like, why give it a shot?"

Tennessee state Sen. Charlene Oliver says she didn't have many resources when she first raised her hand to run for political office. She had to rely on grassroots activism and organizing to win her 2022 election.

Yet securing the seat was just part of the battle. Oliver, a 41-year-old Black Democratic woman, is frequently tasked with providing the only outside perspective inside for the Republican supermajority Legislature.

"They don't have any incentive to listen to me, but I view my seat as disruption and give you a perspective that you may not have heard before," she said.

Many male-dominant statehouses have enacted strict abortion bans in GOP-controlled states since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022. For many female lawmakers, this trend has meant sharing deeply personal stories surrounding abortion and childbirth.

In South Carolina, the abortion debate resulted in an unlikely coalition of five women senators banding together to filibuster a near-total abortion ban. The group took turns describing pregnancy complications, the dangers surrounding limited access to contraceptives and the reproductive system. The chamber has since gained a sixth female senator, rais-

ing the total to three Republicans, two Democrats and one independent. Together they are known as the "sister senators."

The actions of the original five were met with praise from national leaders, but at home, the consequences have been swift. The Republican women received censures and promises of primary challenges in this year's elections.

Women also have championed gun policy, education, health care, and housing proposals.

Recently, some states have allowed candidates to make childcare an allowable expense for campaign finance purposes. Young was the sponsor of her state's law — one of her priorities her first session in the Capitol in the minority party.

During Young's first term in office, she relied on a family member who would care for her two young children while she was at the state Capitol. But she was left without a solution last year when that caregiver passed away unexpectedly days before the session. Her husband, who works in television production, had to stay home and didn't work for two months, meaning the family lost out on his income.

Young's bill won the vote of Rucker, the first Hispanic woman elected to the West Virginia Senate. She too has had to juggle the challenges of being a working mom. She left her job as a teacher to homeschool her five children, and the family relied on her husband's salary as a pediatric nurse to make ends meet.

Gunmen kidnap nearly 300 students in northwest Nigeria

By CHINEDU ASADU
Associated Press
KURIGA, Nigeria (AP) — Rashidat Hamza is in despair. All but one of her six children are among the nearly 300 students abducted from their school in Nigeria's northwest, riddled with Islamic extremists and armed gangs.

It has been more than two days after her children — ages 7 to 18 — went to school in the remote town of Kuriga in Kaduna state only to be kidnapped by gunmen. She was still in shock Saturday.

Authorities said at least 100 children aged 12 or younger were among the abductees in the state known for violent killings lawlessness and dangerous roads where people get regularly snatched.

"We don't know what to do, but we believe in God,"

Hamza told The Associated Press during a visit to the town.

The mass kidnapping in Kuriga was the third in northern Nigeria since last week; a group of gunmen abducted 15 children from a school in another northwestern state, Sokoto, before dawn Saturday, and a few days earlier 200 people, mostly women and children displaced by conflict, were kidnapped in northeastern Borno State.

The kidnappings are a stark reminder of the security crisis plaguing Africa's most populous country.

No group claimed responsibility for any of the recent abductions. But Islamic extremists waging an insurgency in the northeast are suspected of carrying out the kidnapping in Borno. Locals blame the school abductions on herd-

ers who are in conflict with the settled communities.

It's not the first time for a student kidnapping in Nigeria to shock the world. In 2014, Islamic extremists abducted more than 200 schoolgirls from Borno's Chibok, sparking the global #BringBackOurGirls social media campaign. A decade later, at least 1,400 Nigerian students have so far been abducted from their schools in similar circumstances. Some are still held captive, including nearly 100 of the Chibok girls.

Recalling Thursday's kidnapping, Nura Ahmad, a teacher, told the AP that students were just settling into their classrooms at the government primary and secondary school when gunmen "came in dozens, riding on bikes and shooting sporadically."

The LEA Primary and Secondary School, one of

the few educational facilities in this area, sits by the road just at the entrance of the town, tucked in the middle of forests and savannah. Even with its decaying roof and wrecked walls, it gave parents hope for a better future for their children.

"They surrounded the school and blocked all passages ... and roads" to prevent help from coming before kidnapping the children in less than five minutes, Ahmad said.

Fourteen-year-old Abdullahi Usman braved gunshots to escape the captors.

"Those who refused to move fast were either forced on the motorcycles or threatened by gunshots fired into the air," Abdullahi said. "The bandits were shouting: Go! Go! Go!" he said.

Nigerian police and soldiers headed into the forests Friday to search for the missing children, but combing the wooded expanses of northwestern Nigeria could take weeks, observers said.

"Since this happened, my brain has been muddled," said Shehu Lawal, the father of a 13-year-old boy who is among those abducted.

"My child didn't even eat breakfast before leaving. His mother fainted (upon hearing the news)," he said.

Some villagers like Lawan Yaro, whose five grandchildren are among the abducted, say their hopes are already fading.

People are used to the region's insecurity, "but it has never been in this manner," he said.

"We are crying, looking for help from the government and God, but it is the gunmen that will decide to bring the children back," Yaro said. "God will help us."

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