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MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2024

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The eclipse will be cool. Here's what you need to know

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer

The sun is about to pull another disappearing act across North America, turning day into night during a total solar eclipse.

The peak spectacle on April 8 will last up to 4 minutes, 28 seconds in the path of total darkness — twice as long as the total solar eclipse that dimmed U.S. skies in 2017.

This eclipse will take a different and more populated route, entering over Mexico's Pacific coast, dashing up through Texas and Oklahoma, and crisscrossing the Midwest, mid-Atlantic and New England, before exiting over eastern Canada into the Atlantic.

An estimated 44 million people live inside the 115-mile-wide path of totality stretching from Mazatlán, Mexico to Newfoundland;

about 32 million of them are in the U.S., guaranteeing jammed roads for the must-see celestial sensation.

The eclipse will allow many to share in the "wonder of the universe without going very far," said NASA's eclipse program manager Kelly Korreck.

Here's what to know about April's extravaganza and how to prepare:

• **What happens during the total solar eclipse?**

The moon will line up perfectly between the Earth and the sun, blotting out the sunlight. It will slice a diagonal line from the southwest to the northeast across North America, briefly plunging communities along the track into darkness.

Fifteen U.S. states will get a piece of the action, albeit two of

them — Tennessee and Michigan — just barely.

Among the cities smack dab in the action: Dallas; Little Rock, Arkansas; Indianapolis, Cleveland; Buffalo, New York; and Montreal — making for the continent's biggest eclipse crowd.

Don't fret if you don't have front-row seats. Practically everyone on the continent can catch

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A high school and family reunion

Sunday afternoon's open house to honor 1964 Liberty Center High School grad Dick Harris, who will be inducted into the Indiana Basketball Hall of Fame later this week, brought together old teammates, former students, and plenty of the Harris family. At right, Harris visits with Jerry Arnold who was the student manager of the 1964 Liberty Center team that won their sectional and then lost to Swayzee in the record-setting 9-overtime regional semi-final. Below, Dick Harris is surrounded by a number of family members: from left, Bruce and (sister) Patty (Harris) Thornburg of Michigan; brother Don Harris, now living in Virginia; sister Cindy (Harris) Morphett of Fort Wayne; Don's wife Marilyn; double-cousin Mike Harris of rural Bluffton; and Dick's wife Donna. The induction ceremony is slated to be held Wednesday evening in Indianapolis. (Photos by Mark Miller)



First flight carries U.S. citizens out of Haiti

MIAMI (AP) — A charter flight carrying dozens of U.S. citizens fleeing spiraling gang violence in Haiti landed Sunday in Miami, U.S. State Department officials said.

More than 30 U.S. citizens were on the government-chartered flight, officials said in a statement. It arrived in the Miami International Airport after the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince earlier this month urged U.S. citizens to leave "as soon as possible" as chaos grips Haiti.

Passenger Avlot Quessa, who lives in Boston, traveled from the center of the country to board the charter flight after going to Haiti last month for what was supposed to be a weeklong trip to visit his mother.

"It's just terrible ... The suffering, you can only imagine," Quessa told the Miami Herald of the nearby Caribbean nation. "Haiti is my homeland and it's very stressful to see the homeland going through this act of violence, destruction ... and they are our neighbors."

Haiti's main airport in Port-au-Prince remains closed following gang attacks that have raged through Haiti in recent weeks, pushing many people to the brink of famine. Government and aid agencies this weekend reported looting of aid supplies as the situation worsened.

The State Department announced Saturday that it would offer limited charter flights for American citizens from the less chaotic northern city of Cap-Haïtien.

Officials said they could not provide ground transportation to Cap-Haïtien and that U.S. citizens should consider the charter flights "only if you think you can reach Cap-Haïtien airport safely."

"We encourage U.S. citizens still in Haiti who seek to depart to contact the Department of State using the crisis intake form on our website if they have not already done so," the agency said.

People taking the U.S. government-coordinated flights must sign a promissory bill agreeing to reimburse the government.

Another passenger on Sunday's flight, Marie Lucie St. Fleur, 69, of West Palm Beach, said she feels most at home in Haiti and it pains her to see what her homeland is enduring.

"I don't feel well at all. I would like to live in my country and I can't," she said while sitting in a wheelchair.

The State Department said government officials in Miami were helping the newly arrived evacuees to determine their next steps.

Netanyahu takes issue with growing U.S. criticism about his Gaza actions

By **TIA GOLDENBERG**
and **RAVI NESSMAN**
Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu railed Sunday against growing criticism from top ally the United States against his leadership amid the devastating war with Hamas, describing calls for a new election as "wholly inappropriate."

In recent days, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the highest-ranking Jewish official in the country and a strong Israel supporter, called on Israel to hold a new election, saying Netanyahu had "lost his way." President Joe Biden expressed support for Schumer's "good speech," and earlier accused Netanyahu of hurting Israel because of the huge civilian death toll in Gaza.

Netanyahu told Fox News that Israel never would have called for a new U.S. election after the Sept. 11 attacks in 2001, and denounced Schumer's comments as inappropriate.

"We're not a banana republic," he said. "The people of Israel will choose when they will have

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Easter Egg hunt

First Reformed Church held a community Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday. Parents and kids age 2-11 were invited to enjoy a hot dog lunch and an easter egg hunt, along with a story of the Resurrection of Jesus. Above, McKenna Moore picks out her prize while Elijah Morse (right) counts up the eggs he's found. (Photos by Jon Snyder)



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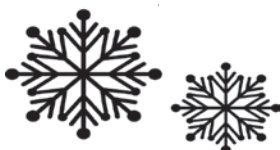
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Outside



Spring's on vacation:
A chilly week is ahead

| Today | Tuesday | Wed. |
|---------|---------|---------|
| High 36 | High 51 | High 43 |
| Low 26 | Low 31 | Low 22 |

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Eclipse

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at least a partial eclipse. The farther from the path of totality, the smaller the moon's bite will be out of the sun. In Seattle and Portland, Oregon, about as far away as you can get in the continental U.S., one-third of the sun will be swallowed.

• Why is totality longer?

By a cosmic stroke of luck, the moon will make the month's closest approach to Earth the day before the total solar eclipse. That puts the moon just 223,000 miles away on eclipse day.

The moon will appear slightly bigger in the sky thanks to that proximity, resulting in an especially long period of sun-blocked darkness.

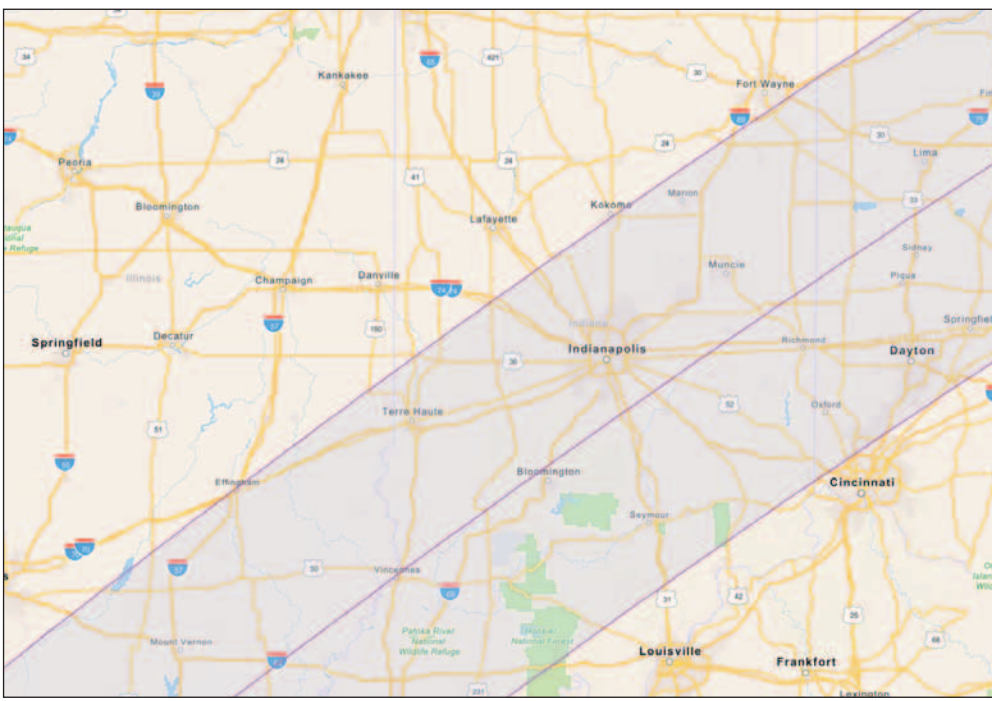
What's more, the Earth and moon will be 93 million miles (150 million kilometers) from the sun that day, the average distance.

When a closer moon pairs up with a more distant sun, totality can last as long as an astounding 7 1/2 minutes. The last time the world saw more than seven minutes of totality was in 1973 over Africa. That won't happen again until 2150 over the Pacific.

• How do I safely watch the eclipse?

Sunglasses won't cut it. Special eclipse glasses are crucial for safely observing the sun as the moon marches across the late morning and afternoon sky, covering more and more and then less and less of our star.

During totality when the sun is completely shrouded, it's fine to remove your glasses and look with your naked eyes. But before and after, certified eclipse glasses



This map, from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources website, shows the limits of the eclipse's path through Indiana on April 8. The center line of the event passes through Indianapolis.

es are essential to avoid eye damage. Just make sure they're not scratched or torn.

Cameras, binoculars and telescopes must be outfitted with special solar filters for safe viewing. Bottom line: Never look at an exposed sun without proper protection any day of the year.

• Where are some eclipse watch parties near me?

Towns up and down the path of totality are throwing star parties. Festivals, races, yoga retreats, drum circles and more will unfold at museums, fairgrounds, parks, stadiums, wineries, breweries and even one of Ohio's oldest drive-in movie theaters and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Besides looking up, you can attend a "space prom" in Texas Hill Country, get married at eclipse-themed ceremonies in Tiffin, Ohio, and Russellville, Arkansas,

or brush up on moonwalking history at the Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta, Ohio — Neil Armstrong's hometown.

As the eclipse unfolds, NASA will launch small rockets with science instruments into the upper atmosphere from Virginia and chase totality's shadow from high-altitude planes. Satellites and the International Space Station crew will attempt to capture the show from space.

There will be numerous livestreams for those stuck with clouds or outside the path.

• When is the next total solar eclipse?

Full solar eclipses occur every year or two or three, often in the middle of nowhere like the South Pacific or Antarctic. The next total solar eclipse, in 2026, will grace the northern fringes of Greenland, Iceland and Spain.

North America won't experience totality again until 2033, with Alaska getting sole dibs. Then that's it until 2044, when totality will be confined to Western Canada, Montana and North Dakota.

There won't be another U.S. eclipse, spanning coast to coast, until 2045. That one will stretch from Northern California all the way to Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Aside from Carbondale, Illinois, in the crosshairs of both the 2017 and 2024 eclipses, it usually takes 400 years to 1,000 years before totality returns to the same spot, according to NASA's Korreck.

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Weather

Monday, March 18, 2024

(24-hour observations at 9:35 p.m. Friday)
High: 45; **Low:** 34; **Precipitation:** Trace of snow
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 7.06 feet at 8:45 p.m. Friday

Wells County forecast

Today: A slight chance of snow showers before 8 a.m., then a slight chance of snow showers after 11 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 36. Northwest wind 10 to 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph. Chance of precipitation is 20 percent.

Tonight: Partly cloudy, with a low around 26. West wind around 10 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Tuesday: Partly sunny, with a high near 51. Southwest wind 15 to 20 mph, with gusts as high as 35 mph.

Tuesday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 31. West wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

Wednesday: Sunny, with a high near 43. Breezy.

Wednesday Night: Mostly clear, with a low around 22.

Thursday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 40.

Thursday Night: A 30 percent chance of snow showers, mainly after 2 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 30.

Friday: A chance of rain and snow showers before 2 p.m., then a slight chance of rain showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 44. Chance of precipitation is 30 percent.

Friday Night: A 20 percent chance of showers. Partly cloudy, with a low around 29.

Saturday: A 20 percent chance of showers. Mostly sunny, with a high near 49.

Saturday Night: A slight chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 32.

Sunday: A slight chance of showers. Partly sunny, with a high near 53.

Emergency declared in Ohio after severe storms that killed 3

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Ohio's governor has declared a state of emergency in 11 counties across central Ohio struck by severe weather last week.

Gov. Mike DeWine also activated the Ohio National Guard to help officials in one county, Logan County, where three deaths were confirmed, with the cleanup of storm debris on public property. DeWine announced the emergency declaration Sunday.

The declaration also covers Auglaize, Crawford, Darke, Delaware, Hancock, Licking, Mercer, Miami, Richland and Union counties. It orders all relevant state departments and agencies to lend their services, equipment, supplies, and personnel to aid in response and recovery efforts, the governor's office said.

Thursday night's storms claimed three lives in the Indian Lake area of Logan County, one of the hardest-hit regions.

The storms also left trails of destruction across parts of Kentucky, Indiana and Arkansas. About 40 people were injured and dozens of homes were damaged in one Indiana community. Tornadoes were also reported in Illinois and Missouri.

The National Weather Service confirmed nine tornadoes in Ohio, including an EF-3 tornado that began in southern Auglaize County near Fryburg and continued through the Lakeview area in northern Logan County. Forecasters say EF-3 tornadoes can pack winds up to 136 to 165 mph.

Suspect is arrested in fatal Indy bar shooting

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Police in Indianapolis arrested a suspect in connection with an early morning shooting at a bar that killed one person and injured five others Saturday, police said.

Nicholas Fulk, 25, was arrested on a preliminary charge of murder hours after the shooting at Landsharks on Broad Ripple Avenue around 1:30 a.m., police said.

"Detectives used technology, including public and private safety cameras, B-link cameras, automatic license plate readers and some good old-fashioned police work to track down the suspect," Indianapolis Metro Police Department Chief Christopher Bailey said in a statement posted on social media Saturday.

Police previously said five victims were transported by emergency responders to area hospitals and the sixth went to a hospital on their own after the shooting.

Bailey used the state-

ment announcing the arrest to stress the importance of businesses working with police to implement an existing safe plan for the area.

"However, the responsibility to provide a safe experience inside these businesses relies on the individual managers and operators," Bailey said. He noted the majority of establishments in the Broad Ripple area adhere to community standards, but "some do not and should be held accountable."

Corrections and clarifications

Monday's meeting of the Wells County Commissioners will be at 5 p.m. at the Wells County Community Center at the 4-H Park. An incorrect location was listed in the Local Roundup published in Saturday's edition of the News-Banner.

Natanyahu

(Continued from Page 1)

elections, and who they'll elect, and it's not something that will be foisted on us."

When asked by CNN whether he would commit to a new election after the war ends, Netanyahu said that "I think that's something for the Israeli public to decide."

The U.S., which has provided key military and diplomatic support to Israel, also has expressed concerns about a planned Israeli assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where about 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering. The spokesman for the National Security Council, John Kirby, told Fox the U.S. still hasn't seen an Israeli plan for Rafah.

The U.S. supports a new round of talks aimed at securing a cease-fire in exchange for the return of Israeli hostages taken in Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

The Israeli delegation to those talks was expected to leave for Qatar after Sunday evening meetings of the Security Cabinet and War Cabinet, which will give directions for negotiations.

Despite the talks, Netanyahu made it clear he would not back down from the fighting that has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. More than five months have passed since Hamas' attack on southern Israel killed 1,200 people and left another 250 hostage.

Earlier Sunday, Netanyahu said that calls for an election now — which polls show he would lose badly — would force Israel to stop fighting and paralyze the country for six months.

Netanyahu also reiterated his determination to attack Hamas in Rafah and said that his government approved military plans for such an operation.

"We will operate in Rafah. This will take several weeks, and it will happen," he said. The operation is supposed to include the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians, but it is not clear how Israel will do that.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi reiterated his warning that an Israeli ground offensive in Rafah would have "grave repercussions on the whole region." Egypt says pushing Palestinians into the Sinai Peninsula would jeopardize its peace treaty with Israel, a cornerstone of regional stability.

"We are also very concerned about the risks a full-scale offensive in Rafah would have on the vulnerable civilian population. This needs to be avoided at all costs," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said after meeting with el-Sissi.

And German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, after meeting with Netanyahu on Sunday, warned that "the more desperate the situation of people in Gaza becomes, the more this begs the question: No matter how important the goal, can it justify such terribly high costs, or are there other ways to achieve your goal?"

Germany is one of Israel's closest allies in Europe and, given memories of the Holocaust, often treads carefully when criticizing Israel.

Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, in Washington for St. Patrick's Day, said during a White House reception that the Irish people were "deeply troubled" by what's unfolding in Gaza. He said there was much to learn from Ireland's peace process and the critical U.S. involvement in it.

Varadkar said he's often asked why the Irish are so

empathetic to the Palestinians.

"We see our history in their eyes. A story of displacement, dispossession, and national identity questioned and denied forced emigration, discrimination and now hunger," he said.

Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli consul-general in New York and an outspoken critic of Netanyahu, said that the prime minister's comments fit with his efforts to find someone else to blame if Israel doesn't achieve its goal of destroying Hamas.

"He's looking on purpose for a conflict with the U.S. so that he can blame Biden," Pinkas said.

Both sides have something to gain politically from the dispute. The Biden administration is under increasing pressure from progressive Democrats and some Arab-American supporters to restrain Israel's war against Hamas. Netanyahu, meanwhile, wants to show his nationalist base that he can withstand global pressure, even from Israel's closest ally.

But pressure also comes from home, with thousands protesting again in Tel Aviv on Saturday night against Netanyahu's government and calling for a new election and a deal for the release of hostages. Large parts of the Israeli public want a deal, fearing that hostages are held in poor conditions and time is running out to bring them home alive.

Israel's offensive has driven most of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes. A quarter of Gaza's population is starving, according to the U.N.

Airdrops by the U.S. and other nations continue, while deliveries on a new sea route

have begun, but aid groups say more ground routes and fewer Israeli restrictions on them are needed to meet humanitarian needs in any significant way.

"Of course we should be bringing humanitarian aid by road. Of course by now we should be having at least two, three other entry points into Gaza," chef José Andrés with World Central Kitchen, which organized the tons of food delivered by sea, told NBC.

The Gaza Health Ministry said at least 31,645 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants in its count, but says women and children make up two-thirds of the dead.

Israel says Hamas is responsible for civilian deaths because it operates in dense residential areas.

The Health Ministry on Sunday said that the bodies of 92 people killed in Israel's bombardment had been brought to hospitals in Gaza in the past 24 hours. Hospitals also received 130 wounded, it said.

At least 11 people from the Thabet family, including five children and one woman, were killed in an airstrike in Deir al-Balah city in central Gaza, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and an Associated Press journalist. The body of an infant lay among the dead.

Nessman reported from Jerusalem. Associated Press writers Kareem Chehayeib in Beirut and Colleen Long in Washington contributed.

Find more of AP's coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

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OBITUARIES

Richard L. Johnson, 89

Richard L. Johnson, 89, of Bluffton, died Saturday afternoon, March 16, 2024, at the Markle Health and Rehab facility. Funeral arrangements are pending at the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton.

Darrell L. Jones, 80

Darrell L. Jones, 80, passed away Saturday afternoon, March 16, 2024, at the Christian Care Retirement Community in Bluffton. Funeral arrangements are pending with the Goodwin-Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel in Bluffton.

AES Indiana takes next step to stop using coal, convert to natural gas by 2026

By CASEY SMITH
Indiana Capital Chronicle

AES Indiana — one of the state's largest utilities — is moving forward with its plan to stop using coal by 2026 and triple its renewables portfolio by 2027.

The company announced Tuesday the next step in a plan to transition its two remaining coal-burning units to run on natural gas. Those are located on the White River near Petersburg in Pike County.

If approved by the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission, AES Indiana would be on its way to becoming the first Hoosier investor-owned electric utility to stop burning coal, according to Indiana Utility Report.

The utility, which provides electricity to the Indianapolis area, has already filed a request that is now pending with the IURC.

AES Indiana officials said the plan "to deliver cleaner, more efficient and cost-effective energy solutions" will save customers \$280 million over 20 years by avoiding coal-related costs. CO2 emissions could additionally see a reduction of 70 percent by 2030, compared to 2018 levels.

The project is expected to be completed in 2026. "Over the past decade, how we serve our customers has evolved due to factors like new technology, the aging of our current facilities, environmental regulations and economic conditions," AES Indiana President Brandi Davis-Handy said in a statement. "Empowering our Petersburg Generating Station aligns with our state's all-of-the-above energy policy while allowing us to continue our 50+ year commitment to Pike County."

The utility's most recent integrated resource plan submitted to the IURC in December 2022, included the coal-to-natural gas conversion of the Petersburg units.

Testimony filed by the company indicates the utility generates 31 percent of its energy from coal and 51 percent from natural gas. In its short-term project action plan, AES Indiana expects that natural gas will account for approximately 70 percent of its resource mix once the Petersburg conversion is complete.

In place of the coal units will be 25 to 30 gigawatts of solar, wind and energy storage. Across its portion of the grid, AES Indiana plans to add up to 1,300 megawatts of renewables by 2027.

As part of that ongoing effort, the company acquired the Hoosier Wind project earlier this month — a 106 megawatt wind farm in Benton County. AES Indiana has received IURC approval for a proposed 200 megawatt, four-hour standalone battery energy storage system, as well.

In Petersburg, the utility intends to stagger the unit outages to continue serving customers during conversion, according to testimony submitted as part of AES Indiana's petition.

The company said Petersburg's first unit will be converted first, with the outage beginning in February 2026 and commercial operation starting in June 2026. Once that's complete, the second unit will begin conversion with a commercial operation slated for December 2026.

Through a competitive bid process, Akron-based Babcock & Wilcox Company was selected to complete the conversion project. Midwestern Gas Transmission Company, headquartered in Tulsa, will construct a one-mile natural gas lateral pipeline to provide service to the converted units, according to the petition.

AES Indiana officials said employees who currently work at its coal units in Petersburg will be retained. The company also reported that the upcoming projects could create 400 construction jobs and deliver about \$125,000 annually in local economic impact.

The move makes AES Indiana among the first utilities to seek approval of a coal-to-natural gas conversion under the state's updated clean energy project statute, according to the Indiana Utility Report.

In 2023, state lawmakers amended the code to include such projects. House Enrolled Act 1421 additionally established a 240-day timeframe for an IURC decision on a petition like that filed by AES Indiana.

According to its latest filings, the company has proposed a late-July evidentiary hearing before the IURC and requested an order from the commission by Oct. 30.

Holcomb approves 3 more bills

By CASEY SMITH
Indiana Capital Chronicle

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb signed into law three more bills Friday, including a debated measure that will effectively kill a pending lawsuit by the city of Gary against gun manufacturers and sellers.

Just two pieces of legislation remain unsigned — one defining and banning antisemitism within the Hoosier public education system, and another constraining the state's public access chief.

House Enrolled Act 1235 ends a long-running Gary lawsuit against firearm manufacturers and prevents Hoosier communities from filing similar court challenges.

"While HEA 1235 does not impede families or businesses from legally challenging gun manufacturers, retail stores or trade associations, it does bring closure to a long standing statewide legislative debate," Holcomb said in a statement. "This bill brings certainty that only the state, not political subdivisions, can bring forward such a lawsuit in the future."

Talking to reporters on Thursday, Holcomb said he had read "every word" that Gary Mayor Eddie Melton has sent, but that it is "appropriate" for lawmakers to intervene in the active litigation. The Republican governor maintained his decision would be one that he's "willing to defend."

Under the new law, only the state attorney general could bring suit against gun manufacturers and sellers. The measure is retroactive to Aug. 27, 1999, three days before Gary filed its lawsuit.

As such, Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita applauded the move. His office previously testified in support of the proposal, saying the attorney general — rather than a "slew of municipalities filing various lawsuits on what they perceive, based on their own ideological or political preference" — should have the sole power to sue.

"Hoosiers value their Second Amendment rights, and they support local businesses, including gun and ammunition dealers and

One ends the city of Gary's attempt to sue gunmakers

sellers," Rokita said in a Friday statement. "Glad to see the General Assembly defended the people of Indiana through the newest gun-related bill, which prohibits a political subdivision from independently suing these companies."

There are two narrow exceptions — one to allow local governments to sue over a breach of contract or a warranty issue, and the other to allow political subdivisions to enforce their own zoning ordinances.

But representatives with the Brady Center, a gun violence prevention group that is representing the city of Gary in its lawsuit, said Friday that House Enrolled Act 1235 is "killing off the most consequential legal case against the gun industry in this country."

"This new law in Indiana is a tragedy for Americans everywhere," said Kris Brown, president of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit. "Indiana legislators just gave America's top gun manufacturers a free pass. Every other industry faces accountability in the courts. It should send chills down the spine of every American that the corporate gun industry succeeded in changing the law to stop discovery and being held responsible in court."

"Every American should question what the gun industry is hiding and what truly abhorrent practices they want to be kept in the dark," Brown continued. "This is a grim day for the gun violence prevention movement and our nation's future."

Also signed Friday was House Enrolled Act 1199, altering an Indianapolis-based taxing district, as well as House Enrolled Act 1183, which limits "foreign adversary" land buys.

Will Holcomb sign the last two bills?

Holcomb has just four days to decide whether he'll sign or veto two other hot-topic bills.

House Enrolled Act 1002, concerning antisemitism, was strongly questioned by Holcomb on Thursday.

In the final hours of the legislative session, state lawmakers struck a compromise to include in the core International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism within the bill. Excluded was the IHRA working definition's 11 contentious "contemporary examples" of antisemitism, which include references to Israel.

Holcomb indicated the compromise is crumbling, however, saying "things have changed" since the bill was approved by the General Assembly last week.

"I want to make sure whatever we do we get it right. And we don't just do it to do it," Holcomb said.

He noted that people "far and wide" — including from outside the state — have contacted him with concerns.

Members of the Hoosier Jewish community said the examples need to be codified, but critics maintained they're overly broad and limit free speech.

Separately, House Enrolled Act 1338 would curtail the office of the Public Access Counselor (PAC), a little-known office tasked with interpreting the state's public records and meetings laws.

Commenting on the bill on Thursday, Holcomb said he would have preferred "more robust discussion" on the late-stage changes, but wasn't worried about "politicization" of the position. He said he hadn't made a final decision.

Restrictions in the legislation would allow a governor to dismiss the state's PAC at any time, rather than a "for cause" dismissal currently allowed during a

four-year term. It would also limit the PAC to considering only the "plain text" of the state's public access laws and "valid" court opinions when putting together non-binding advisory opinions.

Senate Republicans have pointed to some of PAC Luke Britt's advisories on school board meetings as the impetus for the language. Democrats, however, have argued the changes limit the PAC's independence.

Financial Focus

Time for financial spring cleaning?

It's time for spring cleaning. And just as you may decide to tidy up your physical surroundings, you might want to spruce up your financial environment, too.

For starters, think about how you clean windows to help you see the world more clearly. You can also bring more focus to your financial vision, such as reviewing your overall investment strategy to determine whether it's still appropriate.

And just as you de-clutter your home by getting rid of duplicate objects, you can improve your portfolio by selling redundant investments, such as nearly identical mutual funds, and using the proceeds to help diversify your portfolio.

Also, similar to how gardeners plant flowers and vegetables in the spring, you can plant seeds of opportunity by owning investments that could provide sufficient growth potential for your goals.

Finally, just as spring cleaning may include getting rid of dangers such as toxic chemicals, you'll want to protect yourself against threats to your income that could derail your financial future.

Spring is a great time for brightening your physical space — and your financial one, too.

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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Coroner: 3 children slain by their mother

MADISON, Ind. (AP) — A southern Indiana woman fatally shot her three children before turning the gun on herself last December, a prosecutor said Friday.

The bodies of Naomi Briner, 35; Adelia Briner, 12; Leland Briner, 8; and Iyla Briner, 6, were found dead inside their burning home in the Ohio River city of Madison on Dec. 12, Jefferson County Prosecutor David Sutter said.

Based on the results of the autopsies and the evidence in the case, the Jefferson County Coroner's Officer ruled the manner of death of the three children to be homicide and that Naomi

Briner died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, Sutter said.

"This was a tragic case that has been heartbreaking for the community and all who have been involved in this investigation. My heart goes out to the involved families for the tragedy that they have endured," Sutter said in a news release.

The prosecutor said investigators need not pursue any other leads in this case.

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FSSA excels on one front; swings and misses on another

On one hand, Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) has performed well in the sensitive process of dis-enrolling people who are no longer eligible for Medicaid. But it has similarly faltered in proposing large cuts to a program helping parents care for disabled children.



Niki Kelly

I'll start with the positive.

New data show Indiana is moving through Medicaid unwinding in a conscientious, efficient way.

During COVID-19, the federal government barred states from purging their Medicaid rolls during the economic tumult and enhanced the federal match, paying for nearly three-quarters of the cost of coverage rather than the traditional two-thirds. Indiana's rolls grew from just over 1.5 million enrollees in February of 2020 to over 2.3 million in March of 2023, the last month of protections.

KFF reported that 10 months into the unwinding of the Medicaid continuous enrollment provision, states have conducted renewals for roughly half of all enrollees in the program. Previously, the health care organization ranked Indiana highly for its policy choices to protect Hoosiers during the unwinding process.

Indiana is at 43.6%. The highest state is Oregon at 87% and lowest is Wyoming at 18%.

Overall, Medicaid enrollment has declined by nearly 10% across states since the start of unwinding — a decline of almost 10 million people. However, the national decline in Medicaid enrollment masks significant variation across states.

The enrollment decline in Indiana is around 10% — again, right in the middle. The highest is 31% in Idaho and the lowest is less than 1% in Hawaii.

FSSA has used an awareness campaign to educate Hoosiers on the process. And while initial rejections were high, they have leveled out.

And yet the same agency has floundered on handling proposed Medicaid cuts needed after revealing a \$1 billion forecasting error in the program last year.

First off, the agency has repeatedly refused to answer basic questions — from reporters, from lawmakers, from parents and from stakeholders.

We know the agency has proposed a collective \$300 million in cuts. But it's declined to share how much of that will come at the expense of an attendant care program for parents of medically complex children.

"The estimated savings from the cost containment strategies that have been outlined are all interdependent and can not accurately be broken down any further," agency spokeswoman Michele Holtkamp said.

Attendant care is a catch-all term to encompass skilled and unskilled care provided by another individual — whether a nurse, parent, spouse or another family member. Legally responsible individuals are a class of individuals, usually those parents and spouses, that the state paid to provide attendant care for medically complex Hoosiers.

To break that category down even further, I'm focusing on the roughly 1,600 children whose parents provided state-paid unskilled care like bathing, dressing or feeding.

Just two years ago, only 456 children utilized attendant care at a cost of \$9.3 million, according to FSSA. But with over 1,600 children, the costs soared to \$172 million — a number that includes a Medicaid increase implemented over the summer.

As costs surged, the agency decided to transition those families to Structured Family Caregiving and make up some of \$1 billion deficit. Families decried the move, which would transition them from an hourly rate to a lower per diem. They also note that none of the state's current Structured Family Caregiving providers offered pediatric care.

It's clear the state let this program get out of hand and is abandoning it instead of adding guardrails.

National perspective

According to the New York Times, some states moved to keep but control the program. For instance, Ohio made its caregiving program permanent, but eligible parents or spouses must prove they cannot hire an aide, and paid hours are capped at 40 a week.

State Senator Ryan Mishler, a Republican who is the chairman of the Senate appropriations committee, told the New York Times that in a few cases providers had billed the state more than \$200,000 for the care of a single individual, weakening an argument that home care was more cost effective than institutional care.

If true, that could easily be nipped with appropriate limitations. And capping what percentage of payment the third-party provider who trains the parents gets to keep also could reduce costs. Parents reported receiving \$15 per hour, less than half of the \$36 FSSA said it paid providers.

Holtkamp said "the agency explored many considerations, and determined that structured family caregiving was the best path to allow all (aged and disabled) waiver recipients who wished to have paid caregiving delivered by a legally responsible individual to do so in a fiscally sustainable manner."

"If a parent wants their child to continue to receive attendant care services they can do so, but it must be provided by a caregiver who is not a legally responsible individual after July 1," she added.

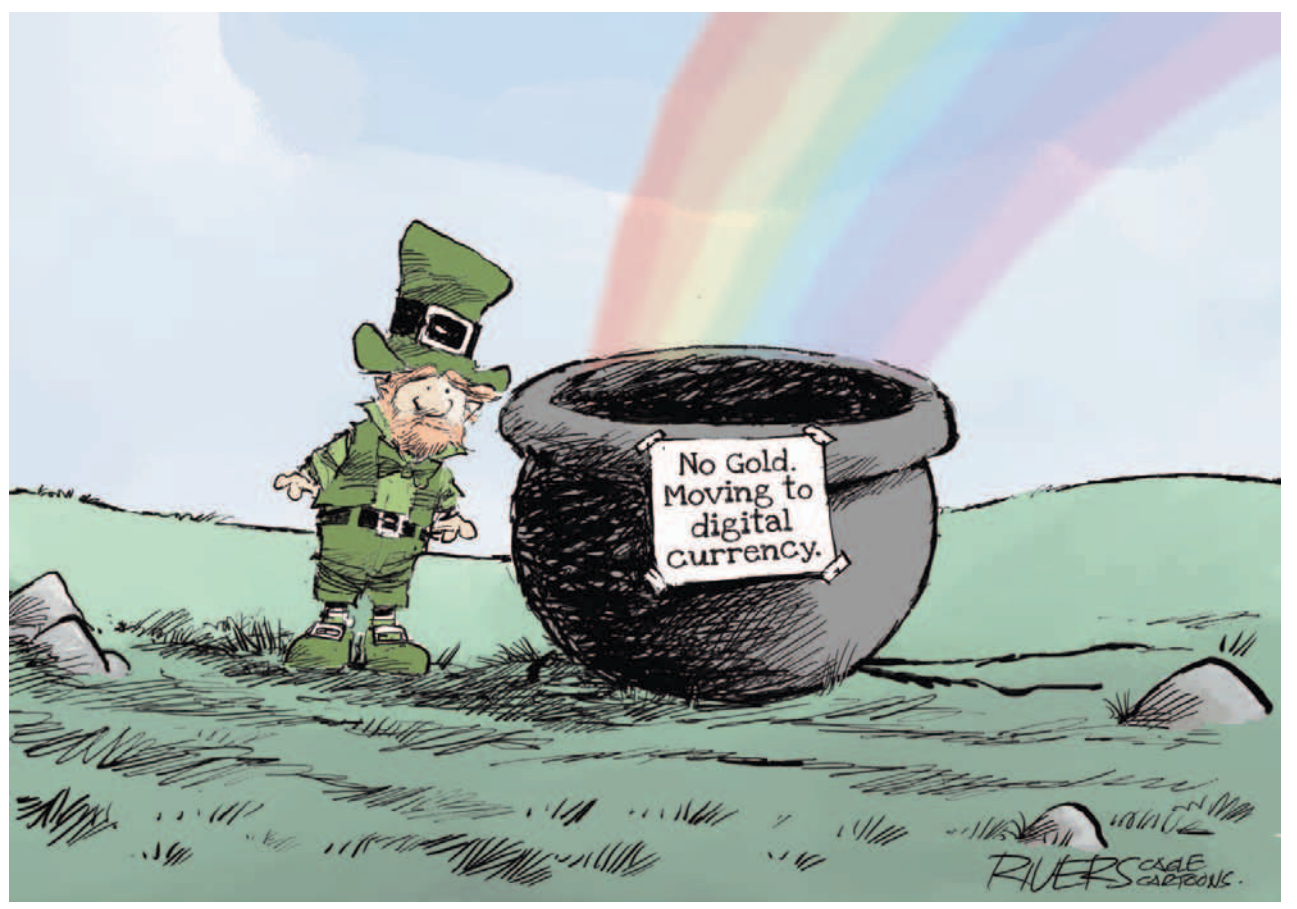
Families say somebody needs to provide care but, with a nationwide nursing shortage, there's no one available. Some parents worry that leaves them doing so at a rate just above poverty. And they note it is too time-consuming to work a full-time job.

Lawmakers implemented a few, weakened transparency provisions during session but seemed to want to stay out of the policymaking. Private discussions focus on whether it's appropriate for the state to pay a parent to care for their child, which is already their duty as moms and dads, versus the overwhelming amount of care needed in some families.

Lawmakers were happy to wipe their hands clean and leave town but that leaves FSSA holding the bag — and it's clear no one is particularly happy with the final outcome.

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

Hoosier Opinions



GOP candidates weigh referendums in Indiana

Indiana is not a referendum state. Hoosier voters cannot gather signatures to qualify an issue to appear for an up or down vote on the ballot.

That wasn't the case in conservative Kentucky, Kansas and Ohio when it came to abortion referendums following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling to end Roe v. Wade era abortion rights in June 2022.

Last November, Ohio voters by a 56.6% to 43.4% verdict chose to amend the state's constitution to give individuals the "right to make and carry out one's own reproductive decisions," including on abortion. Kansas voters passed by 59% guaranteeing abortion rights in 2022, just weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court negated Roe v. Wade. In other red states such as Kentucky and Montana, 52% of voters backed similar measures.

The 2022 Hoosier Survey by Ball State University's Bowen Center found that a majority of Hoosiers surveyed (56.7%) believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases. This survey occurred after the Republican supermajorities passed the nation's most far-reaching abortion restrictions that previous August.

The Indiana Constitution provides for a legislative process to amend the constitution. A simple majority vote is required during two successive General Assembly sessions to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot. Amendments do not require the governor's signature to be referred to the ballot.

The disconnect here is that in 2011 and again in 2021, the Republican-controlled General Assembly drew their own maps. The window for creating an independent redistricting commission had closed the year before both reapportionments commenced. So, essentially, legislators created their own districts. They chose their own voters.

Since 2014, Republicans have had super majorities in both the Indiana House and Senate, which is unprecedented in the state's two century-plus history. The congressional maps, too, have been skewed. Previous reapportionment maps had created enough competitive districts that in an average decade, five to seven House seats flipped between the Republicans and Democrats. Since 2012, not a single Hoosier incumbent has lost to the other party.

At last Monday's Republican gubernatorial debate hosted by the Carmel Current, the six candidates were asked about whether they support a voter-driven referendum process.

Here's how they answered:

Former attorney general Curtis Hill: "The ballot issue works in other states; I don't think it works here in Indiana. We have representative government and there's a reason for that. We want to make sure our issues are fleshed out, debated out in the open. My concern about ballot issues is that sometimes it's driven by emotions. Fortunately here in Indiana we don't have that. We have our opportunity to pick our leadership."

Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch: "We are not a referendum state. Our state reps and state senators are the ones who make the decisions. There is a process where that can end up on the ballot. But I do believe

that people should have voices in government. While I would not lead an initiative to change referendums on the ballot, if a bill was passed by the General Assembly ... and it would come to my desk ... I would support it and sign it."

U.S. Sen. Mike Braun: "When you do have representation of democracy, when you see what happened in Ohio and Kansas, in the case of each of them it probably didn't exactly mirror where they might have been. I agree with the lieutenant governor, if it did pass the state legislature and it was vetted well, I would give it serious thought to signing it into law."

Former Commerce Secretary Brad Chambers: "We are a representative form of government. It is in the constitution of our state that referendums are not allowed. I don't think it will pass through this legislature. If it did I would seriously consider. If you look at California, they are clogged up with referendums. We don't want to be California."

Fort Wayne businessman Eric Doden: "We have a representative form of government and I prefer a representative form of government. We also have a citizen legislature and I would prefer they be part-time. If there was something that passed the General Assembly that would be referendum based, I would certainly consider that."

Businesswoman Jamie Reitenour: "This is just not easy because with our government running the way that it should. Yes there are people representing us. In the U.S. there has been an enormous amount of government overreach. The government is the safest in the hands of the people."

Then there are the Democrats. "Citizen-led ballot referendums are how voters across our country have been able to protect their rights and expand freedoms at the ballot box," Indiana Democratic Party Chair Mike Schmuhl said. "Hoosiers deserve that right too, but Mike Braun, Brad Chambers, Suzanne Crouch, and the Republican supermajority at the Statehouse want to keep regular people out of the process to protect special interests and their gerrymandered districts."

"A Jennifer McCormick administration will fight to give you a direct voice on the issues that matter most, from reproductive freedom to workers' rights," Schmuhl said.

So here's a true story. After opposing a constitutional amendment on a state lottery, a hardworking Democrat named Marc Carmichael (now running for the U.S. Senate) upset Republican Speaker J. Roberts Dailey in 1986, who had blocked that process. Two years later, Hoosier voters passed the lottery amendment with more than 60% of the vote.

Want the referendum process in Indiana? Find a head or two to roll. That will fetch the attention of the powers that be at the Statehouse.

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



Brian Howey

Politicking

Red lines or victory?



Cal Thomas

A recent headline in the Wall Street Journal expressed Hamas' last chance in its terrorist war against Israel: "Hamas Pins Survival Hopes on Ramadan." The sub headline reveals its strategy: "Group's leader in Gaza counts on holy month to pressure Israel to end the war."

In a softball interview on MSNBC by Washington Post reporter Jonathan Capehart, President Biden claimed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu disregards "innocent lives" in Gaza, adding that should Israel invade Hamas' last holdout territory in Rafah, it would be a "red line."

Where have we heard that before? President Obama said if Syria used chemical weapons against its people that would be a "red line." Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used them. Obama did nothing.

Perhaps more than any other nation Israel goes out of its way to protect innocent lives, oftentimes at the cost of Israeli lives. Biden has acknowledged that. He has also acknowledged that Hamas hides out among civilians and uses them as human shields. That familiar strategy is designed to persuade nations and the media to pressure Israel to cease military operations without reciprocity or an agreement to release the

remaining 100-plus hostages.

There is only one reason to fight a war and that is to win. If the goal is anything less than victory, the war is not worth fighting.

This business about "red lines" seems to be limited in its application to Israel and its supposed "ally," the United States. Each time Israel is attacked the U.S. initially supports the Jewish state, but if the conflict is prolonged, that support weakens as the media and other nations pressure Israel to stop short of victory, thus ensuring the inevitability of more wars. This is not a secret. Hamas and other anti-Israel groups openly state their goal is to eliminate Jews and their nation. Why do so many not believe them?

Israel's enemies have no red lines. They kill civilians at will, especially Jewish civilians (remember October 7?). There was no red line or concern for German civilians during the early 1945 carpet bombing of Dresden and other cities of the Third Reich. Same with Japan when President Truman ordered atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending World War II. The exact number of civilian deaths remains in dispute, but most historians agree it was in the hundreds of thousands.

When a surgeon does not com-

pletely remove a cancerous tumor it almost always grows back. It is the same with Hamas. Unless its leadership is eliminated, along with as many of its terrorist fighters as possible, Hamas will live to kill another day. Perhaps the civilians who voted for Hamas to take leadership in Gaza will think twice before doing so again. That would be a bonus for peace.

Why should Israel be pressured into pausing its road to victory against Hamas because of Ramadan? Do Israel's enemies pause their attacks in recognition of Jewish holidays? Have we forgotten the coalition of Arab nations that attacked Israel during Yom Kippur in 1973? Or do double standards not matter when it comes to Israel?

In an op-ed column for The Wall Street Journal, Letters editor Elliot Kaufman writes: "There is an idea that it is wrong to fight an Islamic country during the holy month of Ramadan. ... It's nonsense: Look at Egypt and Syria's 1973 Ramadan War against Israel or Iran's 1982 Operation Ramadan against Iraq."

The late World War II General Douglas MacArthur said: "There is no substitute for victory." That applied to Germany and Japan 80 years ago. It also applies now in Israel's war for survival against Hamas and others that wish to destroy the Jewish state.

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Norwell Internship Spotlight award Grace Oden

Senior Grace Oden has been selected to receive the Norwell Internship Spotlight award. She is doing her experience with Home Joy Renovations out of Warren with mentor and owner Erin Harlan. Grace is the daughter of Nick and Jenny Oden of Markle.

Home Joy is a remodeling company that specializes in commercial and home renovations of kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms, and bedrooms. Grace helps with painting, tiling, wall papering, and dry-walling. She has learned to operate various tools such as saws, drills, ladders, and scaffolding.

After graduation, Grace plans to study entrepreneurial business at Indiana Tech in Fort Wayne.



Grace Oden

Events at the Creative Arts Council of Wells County

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

Creative Arts Spring Showcase

Friday, April 26 at 7:00 p.m. and Saturday, April 27 at 3:00 p.m. Admission: \$5

Creative Arts is very proud of our dance academy and are excited to present our Spring Showcase in April! Our Ballet, Modern, and Tap dancers will be presenting in this year's showcase. Our Ballet program will be presenting excerpts from "Sleeping Beauty". Our Modern dance program features the beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes as they take a sojourn into ancient Egypt. Tap will be performing rhythm and Broadway tap styles. We will proudly present two performances, both in the auditorium at 428 S. Oak St in Bluffton.

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 Jungle Book Kids

Registration is full, call to be put on the waiting list.

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 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 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 to 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday from 3:00 to 5:30 p.m.
Friday from 3:00 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. 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.

Ouabache's Lunch & Learn was all about bluebirds



Bluebird birdhouse door prize
Rick Murphy, at left, was the winner of the Bluebird birdhouse, created by Bob Mosshammer, at right, who was the program presenter for the Ouabache State Park's Lunch & Learn event Thursday, March 14, at the park. (Photo by Barbara Barbieri)

By **BARBARA BARBIERI**

Friends of Ouabache State Park hosted the first Lunch & Learn event of the season on Thursday as Bob Mosshammer presented a program about Bluebirds.

A slide presentation part of the program was cut short by a power outage in the area with Mosshammer continuing to offer information in the dark. He also explained how to construct a bluebird house and how to keep it ready for bird occupancy.

He presented each program attendee a fact sheet that had basic information about the birds as well as information on how to learn more about them. Suggested sites for more information included:

Lesley the Bird Nerd—A bird once almost gone forever the Eastern Bluebird (Youtube)

Bluebird Man—Al Larsen Bluebird Recovery Documentary (Youtube)

And <https://www.bird.cornell.edu>

Those attending provided their own picnic lunch and Corner Depot Catering provided cookies featuring a bluebird decoration. Mosshammer provided a bluebird house as a door prize won by Mick Murphy.

The next Lunch & Learn event will be held at noon on Thursday, April 18th with Curt Burnette, Naturalist with the Limerlost State Historic site will talk about the "Wonders of the Loblolly Marsh." The event is free, however gate fees apply.

Special Feature

Your MONEY \$ Your TAXES

What to know about applying for an extension on your tax return

The Internal Revenue Service reports that the deadline to file a 2023 tax return is Monday, April 15, 2024. The vast majority of taxpayers will have no issue filing by the deadline, but some may not be able to file on time. In such instances, taxpayers can apply for an extension of time to file.

An extension is not necessarily as straightforward as the term suggests. In fact, the IRS urges taxpayers to be aware that applying for an extension does not grant taxpayers an extension of time to pay their taxes. Failure to pay by the April 15 deadline could incur penalties, even for people who have applied for an extension. The IRS urges taxpayers to estimate any owed taxes by the deadline and submit payments for those estimates by April 15.

Extension requests must be submitted by the regular return due date.

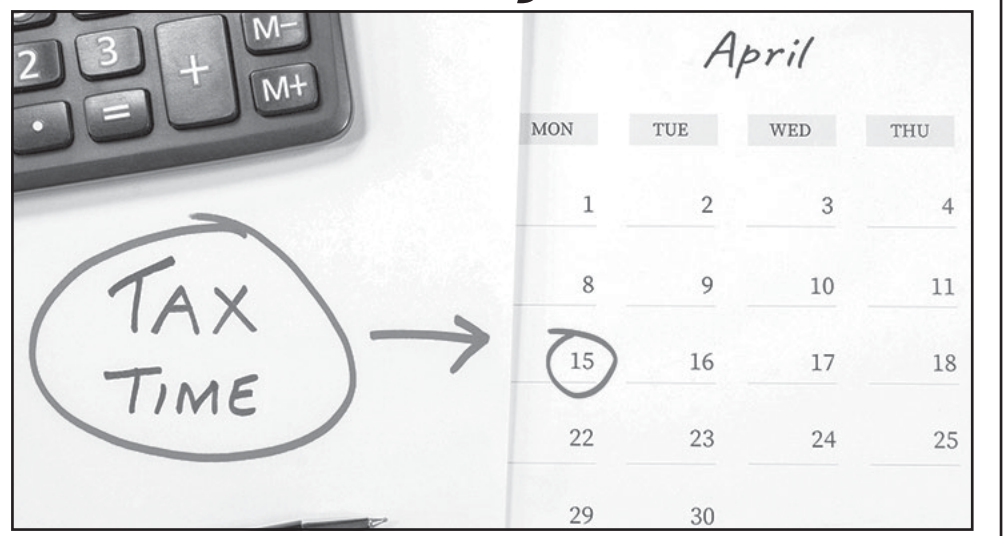
Some taxpayers may not have to submit an extension return. The IRS notes that taxpayers

in certain disaster areas do not need to submit an extension electronically or on paper. For example, the IRS had already determined by February 2024 that Maine taxpayers impacted by severe storms and flooding qualified for tax relief. Various deadlines, including the April 15 filing deadline for individuals and businesses, were extended to June 17, 2024. Maine taxpayers are urged to contact a tax preparation professional to determine if they are eligible for the later deadline. A list of additional extensions affecting the 2024 filing deadline can be found at <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/tax-relief-in-disaster-situations>.

Individual taxpayers, regardless of income, can use the IRS Free File (<https://www.irs.gov/filing/free-file-do-your-federal-taxes-for-free>) to request an automatic tax-filing extension. Filing that form gives taxpayers until October 15 to file a return. If October 15 falls

on a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday, the due date is extended until the next business day. It's important that taxpayers filing for the October 15 extension deadline recognize that they must still estimate their tax liability on the Free File form and pay any estimated taxes owed.

The deadline to file a 2023 tax return is Monday, April 15, 2024. Individuals who need more information about applying for an extension are urged to visit [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov).



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Purdue gets top seed in Midwest region of NCAA Tournament

By EDDIE PELLIS
AP National Writer

Even before the brackets came out Sunday, March Madness was a muddled mess.

About the closest thing to a sure thing: UConn.

The defending champion Huskies earned the top seed in the NCAA Tournament, joined by Houston, Purdue and North Carolina as No. 1 seeds in a bracket that started going haywire even before the pairings were announced Sunday evening.

Of those top teams, only UConn heads into the tournament coming off a win. The others lost in their conference tournaments, yet those were hardly the only surprises over the final weekend of hoops before the sport's main event hits center stage.

Unexpected titles placed teams like Oregon, North Carolina State and even Duquesne, none of whom were projected to make the tournament, into the field of 68 via the automatic bid that goes to conference champions. The teams they beat gobbled up a handful of the 34 at-large bids, thus shrinking the number of spots available to teams on the so-called bubble.

"It was one of the most difficult that I've been involved in," Charles McClelland, the chairman of the selection committee, said of

the process that had everyone up until 2:30 a.m. the night before. "And I talked to some of the staff that's been in that room for the last 20 years, and they said this is probably the most difficult selection process that they've been a part of."

It showed in a bracket that had its share of head-scratchers:

- Two of the last four teams in
- Boise State and Colorado State
- weren't even considered on the bubble by most bracketologists.

"A little surprised to be honest," Boise State coach Leon Rice said of his team's No. 10 seed.

— Some of the teams left out

- St. John's and Oklahoma
- were thought to be safely in as late as Saturday. St. John's decided not to even play in the NIT.

"How is St. John's so far off the cutline?" said UConn coach Dan Hurley, who was surprised only three Big East teams made it.

— Florida Atlantic and Texas A&M were considered bubble teams but ended up with 8 and 9 seeds, respectively.

All of this could be fodder for the growing conversation about expanding the bracket to 76, maybe 80 teams. Under that scenario, bubble teams like Pittsburgh, Seton Hall and even Indiana State would almost certainly be in.



The tournament starts Tuesday with two First Four games, including a matchup between Virginia and Colorado State. The 32 first-round games take place Thursday and Friday. The Final Four is set for April 6-8 in Glendale, Arizona.

UConn the favorite

UConn, which opens Friday against Stetson, is the favorite according to FanDuel Sportsbook and is trying to become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006-07. The Huskies (31-3) are on a seven-game win streak and are tied with James Madison for most wins in the nation.

For all its excellence this season, UConn ended up in an East region with two of last year's Final Four teams (San Diego State and Florida Atlantic) along with Iowa State, which is coming off a 69-41 win over Houston and was thought, for a minute, to be top-seed material.

"If we're able to get to our identity ... and then we play harder than you, we keep ourselves from

being vulnerable that way," Hurley said.

Conference bragging rights

Both the SEC and Big 12 placed eight teams in the field, while the Big Ten and Mountain West each had six.

Speaking of pride: Michigan State extended its nation-leading streak to 26 straight years in the tournament. The ninth-seeded Spartans will play Mississippi State on Thursday, the same day No. 5 seed Gonzaga plays No. 12 McNeese. In February, the Zags were considered a bubble team, but a stretch of nine wins in 10 games changed that, and coach Mark Few's team made the field for the 25th consecutive year.

Injury worries

Injury-riddled Kansas comes in as a 4 seed, set to play Samford, after two of its best players, Hunter Dickinson and Kevin McCullar Jr., sat out the Jayhawks' 20-point loss in their Big 12 Tournament opener.

Florida is a 7 seed, and will play the winner of the Boise State-Colorado play-in game, but the Gators suffered a big blow when big man Micah Handlogten broke his leg early in the SEC title game.

Small fry

The Ivy League is sending Yale, a 13 seed that needed a furious late comeback and a buzzer-beating

basket against Brown to win the title and set up a game Friday against No. 4 Auburn. And Saint Peter's back in the tournament, two years after making an unlikely run to the Elite Eight as a No. 15. This year, the Peacocks are 15 seeds again, opening against Tennessee in the Midwest.

Should Tennessee advance, coach Rick Barnes could face his old school, No. 7 Texas, which opens against the Virginia-Colorado State winner.

Meanwhile, Duquesne, the surprise winner of the Atlantic-10, is back in the tournament for the first time since 1977. A game against No. 6 BYU awaits.

Job security

Back in 1999, head coach Dan Monson and assistant Mark Few led Gonzaga on a surprise run all the way to the Elite Eight. Monson now coaches Long Beach State and, just last week, was relieved of his duties pending the end of the season. Funny enough, Monson's team went on a run and won the Big West to get a ticket to the tournament. The 15th-seeded Beach open Thursday against No. 2 Arizona.

"As Mark Few said in a text, why don't we have a run in the first year and one in the last," Monson said after his job-extending win.

Shannon scores 34 points as No. 13 Illinois takes Big Ten title with win over Wisconsin

By DAVE CAMPBELL
AP Sports Writer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Terrence Shannon Jr. scored 34 points on 15-for-17 shooting from the free-throw line, helping 13th-ranked Illinois outlast Wisconsin 93-87 in Big Ten tournament championship game on Sunday.

Marcus Domask added 26 points, eight assists and seven rebounds and Dain Dainja had nine points and seven rebounds for the Illini (26-8), who won their second conference tournament title in four years after shooting 16 of 26 in the second half. They faced a double-digit deficit in all three games.

"It was a little bit different every night," coach Brad Underwood said. "I love that."

A.J. Storr had 24 points and Chucky Hepburn added 20 points for the Badgers (22-13), who went 7 for 20 from 3-point range after going 33 for 79 over their first three games.

Shannon finished with 102 points in three games, one short of the Big Ten Tournament record, and was voted the Most Outstanding Player. Keegan Murray had 103 points for Iowa in 2022, but the Hawkeyes played four games that year on the way to the title.

After celebrating in a shower of orange-and-blue confetti and cutting down the nets at Target Center, the Illini hustled to a side room for the NCAA Tournament selection show to learn they're the No. 3 seed in the East Region, with a first-round game on Friday against Morehead State.

Wisconsin got the No. 5 seed in the South Region and a first-round matchup against James Madison.

"My hat's off to Wisconsin. Boy, are they good. They'll make a lot of noise," Underwood said.

Shannon, who broke the Big Ten Tournament single-game record with 40 points in the semifinal win over Nebraska, still faces a rape charge in Kansas for an alleged incident last year. His school-issued suspension was overruled by a federal judge after six games.

The Wisconsin fans taunted him often, but he's not easily rattled. He coolly pulled up for a 3-pointer off the break to give Illinois a

41-40 lead with 31 seconds left before half-time, blowing a kiss at the crowd of 13,991 that was heavy with red-clad Badgers fans.

Hepburn's three-point play gave Wisconsin a game-high 61-51 lead, but Illinois went on a 21-5 run over the next 6 minutes to ensure a tight finish.

Max Klesmit made a 3-pointer for an 82-81 lead with 3:53 to go and another for the tie with 1:57 left, but Shannon answered that one from deep on the other end to make it 88-85 with 88 seconds left. Then he stole an careless dribble from Storr on the other end, drove the other way to draw a foul and sank both free throws for a five-point lead.

"Sometimes in my career there's been moments where those 3s would have just destroyed everything," said Coleman Hawkins, who had seven points, six rebounds and two blocks. "We made some mistakes, but we were able to keep playing."

Hepburn was a hero of Wisconsin's overtime victory over top-seeded Purdue in the semifinals on Saturday, hitting the tying layup at the buzzer in regulation and drawing a key charging foul to set up Klesmit's winner.

The junior guard passed the 1,000-point mark for his career in this game and contributed in all kinds of ways, after sitting out the quarterfinal win over Northwestern because of a knee injury.

"I feel like he's one of the best players in our league," Hawkins said. "When he's aggressive, I feel like they're a really good team."

Illinois won the only regular-season matchup between these teams two weeks ago, a 91-83 victory fueled by Domask's 31 points in the Waupun native's first game in Wisconsin since high school. The transfer from Southern Illinois, a first team All-Big Ten pick with Shannon, shot 8 for 11 in this game.

Both the Badgers and the Illini made their eighth appearance in the conference title game, which was staged for the 26th time, a total bested only by Ohio State's nine. Michigan State has the most Big Ten Tournament championships with seven.

High School Calendar

MONDAY, MARCH 18

No events scheduled.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

No events scheduled.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

No events scheduled.

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

No events scheduled.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

No events scheduled.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

No events scheduled.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

No events scheduled.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

No events scheduled.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

No events scheduled.

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

No events scheduled.

FRIDAY, MARCH 29

BASEBALL: Norwell vs. Evansville Central at Edgewood High School, 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

BASEBALL: Norwell vs. Edgewood, 10 a.m.; Norwell vs. Brownstown Central at Edgewood high School, 5:30 p.m.

Bears send QB Fields to Steelers, clear way to take a QB such as Caleb Williams with No. 1 pick

By ANDREW SELIGMAN
AP Sports Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — The Chicago Bears traded Justin Fields to the Pittsburgh Steelers on Saturday night, clearing the way for them to draft a quarterback with the No. 1 overall pick — perhaps USC's Caleb Williams.

The Bears received a 2025 sixth-round draft pick that could potentially become a fourth-rounder in return.

"We have engaged in multiple trade conversations in recent weeks and believe trading Justin at this time to Pittsburgh is what is best for both Justin and the Bears," general manager Ryan Poles said in a statement. "Today we spoke to Justin to inform him of the trade and the rationale behind it for us as a club."

"We want to thank him for his tireless dedication, leadership and all he poured into our franchise and community the last three years and wish him the best towards a long and successful NFL career."

Fields thanked Chicago

and the organization, as well as his teammates in a post on X.

"Can't say thank you enough to the city of Chicago for taking me in and embracing me," he tweeted. "Thank you to the entire Bears organization and ownership for allowing me the opportunity to be part of such a historic franchise. But most of all thank you to my all my brothers that I played with. You all were the reason I attacked each day the way I did. I can't thank you all enough for what y'all have meant to me over the last 3 years through the ups and downs. I wish each one of you nothing but success."

"Ready for this next chapter!"

Fields figures to back up nine-time Pro Bowler Russell Wilson, who signed a one-year deal with the Steelers on Friday. Pittsburgh also traded Kenny Pickett to the Philadelphia Eagles once it added Wilson.

Wilson tweeted a picture of him and Fields shaking hands with the message:

"Let's get it @justnfields! QB room bout to be (fire)."

Fields, drafted 11th overall in 2021 by the Bears and former general manager Ryan Pace, struggled as a rookie under former coach Matt Nagy. Though he produced big plays with his legs and arms, he did not develop as a passer the way the team hoped the past two years under Poles and coach Matt Eberflus.

Fields completed 578 of 958 passes for 6,674 yards with 40 touchdowns and 30 interceptions in three seasons. He has just one 300-yard passing game in his career.

Chicago could have gotten a big haul by trading the No. 1 pick. But it's not often the historically quarterback-challenged Bears have a chance to draft a prospect such as Williams. The 2022 Heisman Trophy winner is largely expected to be picked first overall after he threw 72 touchdown passes with only 10 interceptions the past two seasons at USC after a year at Oklahoma.

News-Banner Scoreboard

BASKETBALL

High School

Boys' Basketball

IHSAA Semi-State

Semifinal Class 4A

Elkhart

Fishers 48, Crown Point 37

Ft. Wayne Wayne 62, Mishawaka

47

New Castle

Indpls Ben Davis 75, Center Grove 49

Jeffersonville 62, Lawrence North

60

Class 3A

Logansport

Delta 54, Fairfield 45

S. Bend St. Joseph's 88, Peru 80

Seymour

Guerin Catholic 57, Danville 52

Scottsburg 58, Evansville Bosse

45

Class 2A

Lafayette Jefferson

Ft. Wayne Blackhawk 55, Wabash

51

Wapahani 48, N. Judson 28

Southport

Brownstown 50, Indpls Park

Tudor 49

Parke Heritage 64, Forest Park

54

Class 1A

Michigan City

Ft. Wayne Canterbury 60, Elkhart

Christian 51, OT

Liberty Christian 50, Michigan

City Marquette 47

Washington

Barr-Reeve 54, Evansville Christian 44

Bethesda Christian 53, Greenwood Christian 35

College

Men's Basketball Scores

Saturday, Mar. 16

TOURNAMENT

America East

Championship

Vermont 66, Mass.-Lowell 61

American Athletic

Semifinal

UAB 93, South Florida 83

Temple 74, FAU 73

Atlantic 10

Semifinal

VCU 66, Saint Joseph's 60

Duquesne 70, St. Bonaventure 60

Atlantic Coast

Championship

NC State 84, North Carolina 76

Big 12

Championship

Iowa St. 69, Houston 41

Big East

Championship

UConn 73, Marquette 57

Big Ten

Semifinal

Wisconsin 76, Purdue 75, OT

Illinois 98, Nebraska 87

Big West

Championship

Long Beach St. 74, UC Davis 70

Conference USA

Championship

W. Kentucky 78, UTEP 71

Ivy League

Semifinal

Brown 90, Princeton 81

Yale 69, Cornell 57

Metro Atlantic Athletic

Championship

St. Peter's 68, Fairfield 63

Mid-American

Championship

Akron 62, Kent St. 61

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference

Championship

Howard 70, Delaware St. 67

Mountain-West Conference

Semifinal

New Mexico 74, Colorado St. 61

Championship

New Mexico 68, San Diego St. 61

Pacific-12 Conference

Championship

Oregon 75, Colorado 68

Southeastern

Semifinal

Auburn 73, Mississippi St. 66

Florida 95, Texas A&M 90

Southwestern Athletic

Championship

Grambling St. 75, Texas Southern 66

Western Athletic

Championship

Grand Canyon 89, Texas-Arlington 74

Women's Basketball Scores

Sunday, Mar. 17

Tournament

Northeast

Championship

Sacred Heart 69, Le Moyne 48

Patriot League

Championship

Holy Cross 61, Boston U. 55

NBA

Saturday's Games

Houston 117, Cleveland 103

New Orleans 126, Portland 107

Indiana 121, Brooklyn 100

Philadelphia 109, Charlotte 98

Chicago 127, Washington 98

Oklahoma City 118, Memphis 112

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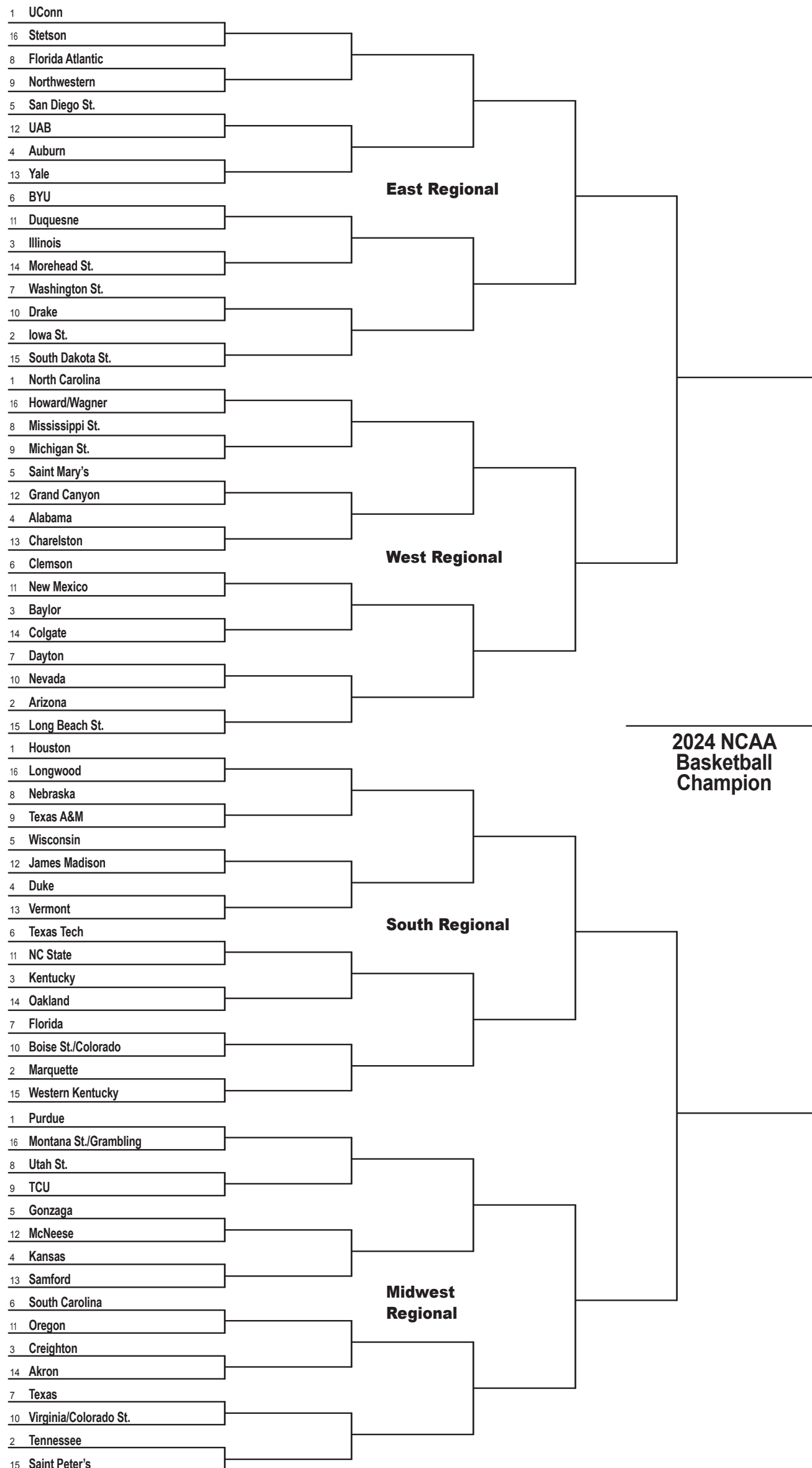
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Lottery Numbers

Due to a transmission error late Sunday evening, the lottery numbers were not available to publication in today's edition of the News-Banner. The lottery drawings from Saturday, Sunday, and Monday will all appear in Tuesday's edition of the News-Banner.

It's no surprise: Putin will remain leader of Russia

President Vladimir Putin basked in a victory early Monday that was never in doubt, as partial election results underlined the Russian leader's total control of the country's political system.

After facing only token challengers and harshly suppressing opposition voices, Putin was set to extend his nearly quarter-century rule for six more years. Even with little margin for protest, Russians crowded outside polling stations at noon on Sunday, the last day of the election, apparently heeding an opposition call to express their displeasure with the president.

Putin hailed the overwhelming early results as an indication of "trust" and "hope" in him — while critics saw them as another reflection of the preordained nature of the election.

"Of course, we have lots of tasks ahead. But I want to make it clear for everyone: When we were consolidated, no one has ever managed to frighten us, to suppress our will and our self-conscience. They failed in the past and they will fail in the future," Putin said at a meeting with volunteers after polls closed.

Any public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine has been stifled. Independent media have been crippled.

Public Notice

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) SS:
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IN THE WELLS)
CIRCUIT COURT)
2024 TERM)
CAUSE NO.)
90C01-2401-ES-00001

IN THE MATTER OF THE SUPERVISED ESTATE OF BEN C. MACIAS, deceased

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATION
Notice is hereby given that Marie E. Blacksten and Annette McComas, were on February 27, 2024, appointed Co-Personal Representatives of the Estate of Ben C. Macias, deceased, who died on November 27, 2023.

All persons who have claims against this estate, whether or not now due, must file the claim in the office of the Clerk of this Court within three (3) months from the date of the first publication of this notice, or within nine (9) months after the decedent's death, whichever is earlier, or the claims will be forever barred.

Dated at Bluffton, Indiana, this February 27, 2024.

Beth Davis
Clerk, Wells Circuit Court
Colin Z. Andrews #26767-49
Andrews & Crell, P.C.
116 South Main Street
Bluffton, Indiana 46714
(260) 824-4049
Attorney for the Estate

nb 3/11, 3/18
hspaxlp

SUDOKU ANSWER

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Notices

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EMPLOYMENT

Help Wanted

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



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

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| | 8 | 2 | 6 | | | | | |
| | | 4 | | | | 8 | | |

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Inheritance issues and husband's inappropriate ogling

Dear Annie: My parents have had property for many, many years. This property was to be divided among us kids upon their death.

My father passed away, which puts my mother in charge of everything.

Recently, we found out that she gave ALL this property to one of our siblings.

We were always a close-knit family, but this has caused a huge rift among us. I know it's "her money/property and she is entitled to do what she wants," but it really hurt us that she chose one child over her other children. We always suspected he was her chosen one, but now we really know he is the chosen one.

We ALL have been there for her, and this brother has only been there for her since our dad passed. How do we move past this? — Hurting Kids in Ohio

Dear Hurting Kids: I am sorry for your loss — both of your father and now your inheritance. It is no surprise that you feel hurt so much. I'm not sure how close your siblings are to each other, but maybe the brother who inherited everything will try to make things more equitable. I would suggest having a family get-together, mother included, and discuss the situation as calmly as possible. Remind everyone that family is more important than possessions.

Dear Annie: My husband and I are in our mid-60s and have been married for almost 50 years. We married and started our family very early in life. My problem, I'm sure, is shared by many women my age. My husband can't stop ogling other women

in public. He is always secretly looking up the sexually dressed women and videos.

I have told him many times how that hurts me. He says he's sorry, but then later his behavior rears its ugly head again.

He also is very friendly with females in public. He says he's just being nice. I've gotten so that I don't want to go to public places with him. I love him, but I don't like how he disrespects me as his wife and especially as a woman. I can't compete with what's out there, nor do I want to. — Disrespected Wife

Dear Disrespected Wife: Your husband is acting like a louse. You should keep talking to him about how disrespected you feel he is being to you and to the women who he is ogling in public. If he continues to ignore your requests, it is time to seek the help of a professional marriage counselor.

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

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Dear Annie

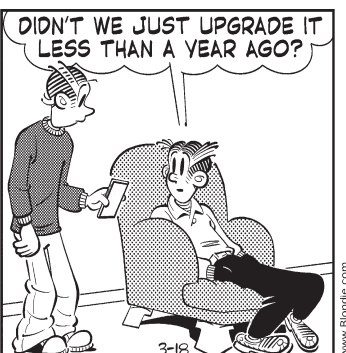
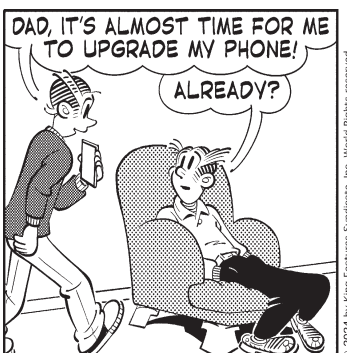
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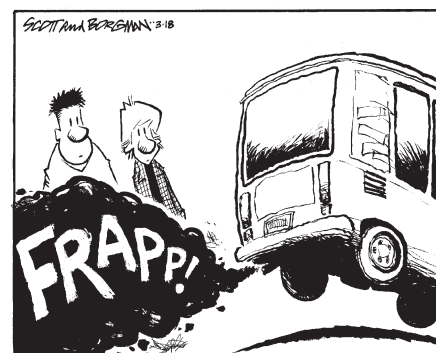
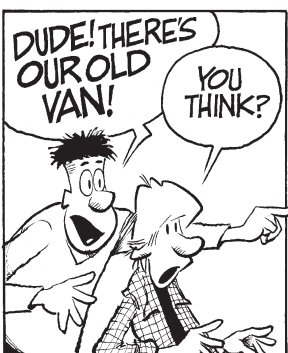
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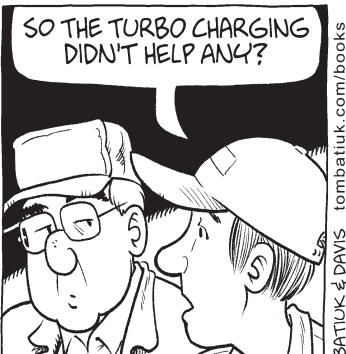
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My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham

God should be center of every home

Question: I've heard that "home" is an institution. It sounds kind of stuffy. — I.H.

Answer: God is the Creator of the universe. He set the boundaries for the oceans. He made the great sun and set it in the center of the solar system to hold it together. If it were not for the sun, our solar system would fly to pieces.

Likewise, God instituted marriage between a man and a woman. He instituted the family and the home. God is the center of all of this. The home is like a solar system and unless the Son of God is at the center of the home, it too may fly

to pieces. Home life is being assaulted. Many couples are fearful lest their marriages break someday. Family tensions threaten relationships. What can we do?

The Bible tells us that the institution of home and family predates government and even the church. Almighty God created the home that flows from His love for mankind. He placed a man and a woman as husband and wife in the midst of a home fashioned by His own heart. Read His Word. Believe His truth. Obey His instruction. Apply yourself to the wisdom that He gives to guide and direct.

There is only one

insurance policy that can guarantee the unity of our homes and that is making Jesus Christ the Head and centering it on His precious Word. The Bible instructs parents to teach their children His truth "when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7, NKJV). In other words, at all times keep the Lord the focus of personal and family life.

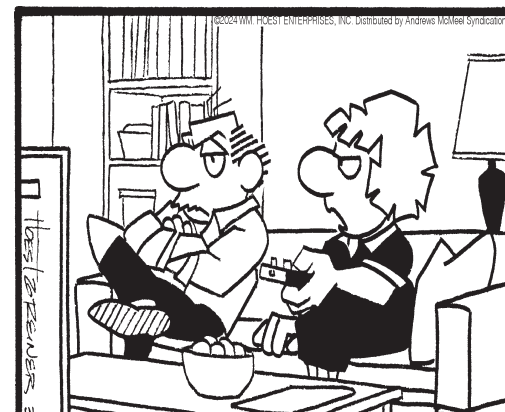
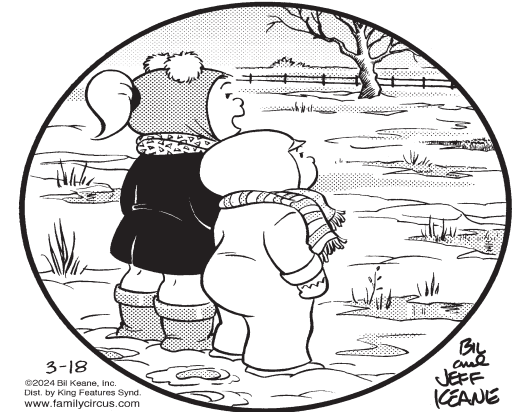
(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By Bil Keane

The LOCKHORNS



"Winter is almost over. The ground's pokin' up through the snow."

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues and Saturday's answer 3-18 button

Table with columns for date, channel, and program details including times and descriptions.

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Easter Walk

Southern Wells Community Church held its annual Easter Walk Sunday evening, portraying scenes from Holy Week. At left, Gary McFadden, as the Apostle John, promises to comfort the mother of Jesus, played by Rhonda McFarren, after the death of Christ on the cross. Below, Deena McClure, playing a resident of Jerusalem, talks about Peter's denial. (Photos by Chet Baumgartner)



Purple Ohio? Vote this year could decide it

By **JULIE CARR SMYTH and CHRISTINE FERNANDO**
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — It's been nearly four decades since liberal-leaning justices held a majority on Ohio's supreme court.

Democrats hope this is the year that changes, in a campaign that will begin to take shape with Tuesday's primary. They'll be choosing a candidate to compete for an open seat on a court that will be at the center of fights over redistricting, public education, health care, environmental issues and criminal justice.

But it's abortion that Democrats hope will be a game-changer in a state that has swung from centrist to reliably Republican over the past decade. The Ohio Supreme Court is expected to shape how a voter-approved constitutional amendment that enshrined reproductive rights in the state constitution will be implemented.

"I don't think it's an overstatement to say reproductive freedom and abortion access is at stake in this state supreme court race," said Kellie Copeland, executive director of Pro-Choice Ohio.

It will be a consequential year for state supreme court seats around the country, with 80 of them on the ballot in 33 states. Ohio is among only a few states where it's possible for vot-

ers to flip partisan control of their supreme court, and already activists and the major parties are bracing for an intense and expensive campaign.

Democrats will be defending two seats on the Ohio court this year, while a third is open. Only the open seat, where two Democrats are campaigning for the right to face a Republican judge in November, has a competitive primary.

They would have to win all three races in the fall to flip the court's 4-3 majority. That's a tall task in a state where Republicans hold every statewide office, supermajorities in the Legislature and twice voted convincingly for Donald Trump for president.

But Ohio Democrats see a possible path to cracking the Republican Party's longstanding lock on all three branches of state government. In November, the amendment enshrining an individual's right to make reproductive health-care decisions — including on abortion, miscarriage care, contraception and IVF — won with 57% support.

"Voters may not realize that even if they pass this amendment for abortion rights, these fights over existing abortion laws are all still ongoing in the court system, and the Ohio Supreme Court holds power in interpreting the amendment how they see fit," said Jessie Hill, a law professor

at Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland who consulted for advocates of the amendment, known as Issue 1. "That is a huge amount of power."

Aaron Baer, president of the Center for Christian Virtue in Ohio, said the partisan makeup of the court will largely determine how the amendment gets implemented.

"We just passed an amendment that says we're not going to be able to have abortion restrictions prior to viability," said Baer, who served on the board for Protect Women Ohio, the Issue 1 opposition campaign. "But are you going to see judges take this amendment and try to jam a California agenda onto Ohioans?"

State supreme court races across the country have become increasingly costly in recent years. During a Wisconsin Supreme Court race last year, spending topped \$42 million, nearly triple the previous record for any state supreme court contest. A Democratic-backed Milwaukee judge won that race, giving liberals control of the court with the fate of the state's abortion ban on the line.

Former Ohio Democratic Party Chair David Pepper

said the party's success in Wisconsin is bolstering its hopes in court races across the nation — particularly in Ohio, where party control is in play.

"I used to have to beg people nationally to understand why these supreme court races mattered," he said. "After Wisconsin, these are no longer some hidden, low-interest campaigns."

He said the races began to gain greater attention after the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision that ended the constitutional right to abortion, turning the issue back to the states.

In Michigan, where Democrats hold a 4-3 court majority, one Democrat and one Republican incumbent are up for election this year, though without party labels. The minimum wage and clean energy goals are among the central issues there.

In Ohio, Republicans have controlled a majority on the state Supreme Court since 1986. The court has served as final arbiter on disputed laws passed by GOP supermajorities in the Legislature and signed by Republican governors, as well as on decisions of the Republican-controlled redistricting commission.

Wells Court Docket

Rafael Jose, 24, Bluffton; Sentenced to 365 days at the Wells County Jail with all but six days suspended. Jose pled guilty to one count of theft, a Class A misdemeanor. Jose is also ordered to serve 359 days of probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount \$549.

Lee Mack Breedlove, 33, Bluffton; Sentenced to 365 days at the Wells County Jail with all but 180 days suspended. Breedlove plead guilty to one count domestic battery in violation of a protection order, a Level 6 felony. One count of invasion of privacy - violates protective order, was dismissed as part of a plea agreement. Breedlove is also ordered to serve one year of probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$239.

Breedlove was also scheduled for a sentencing hearing in an additional case. In May, Breedlove was charged with domestic battery committed in the presence of a child less than 16 years old, domestic battery on a person less than 14 years old, and strangulation, all Level 6 felonies. An order of dismissal was filed last week on Monday.

Joshua Michael Saraceno, 36, Bluffton; Sentenced to 545 days in the Indiana Department of Corrections with all but 180 days suspended with 164 days of jail credit. Saraceno pled guilty to one count of possession of a narcotic, a Level 6 felony. He is also required to serve 330 days of probation and pay court costs and filing fees in the amount of \$939.

State report: Maine could have taken guns from shooter who killed 18 people

By **PATRICK WHITTLE, STEVE LeBLANC and NICK PERRY**
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Law enforcement should have seized a man's guns and put him in protective custody weeks before he committed Maine's deadliest mass shooting, a report found Friday.

An independent commission has been reviewing the events that led up to Army reservist Robert Card killing 18 people at a bowling alley and a bar in Lewiston on Oct. 25, as well as the subsequent response.

The commission criticized Sgt. Aaron Skolfield, who responded to a report five weeks before the shooting that Card was suffering from some sort of mental health crisis after he'd previously assaulted a friend and threatened to shoot up the Saco Armory.

The commission found Skolfield, of the Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Office, should have realized he had probable cause to start a so-called "yellow flag" process, which allows a judge to temporarily remove somebody's guns during a psychiatric health crisis.

Leroy Walker, whose son Joseph was killed in the shootings, said the commission's finding that the yellow flag law could have been implemented but wasn't reflected what victims' families have known all along.

"The commission said it straight out — that they could have done it, should have done it," said Walker, an Auburn City Council member. "What something like this really does is it brings up everything ... It just breaks the heart all over again."

Maine State Police and the sheriff's office did not immediately respond to calls seeking comment.

Commission Chair Daniel Wathen said their work wasn't finished and that the interim report was intended to provide policymakers and law enforcement with key information they had learned.

"Nothing we do can ever change what happened on that terrible day, but knowing the facts can help provide the answers that the victims, their families, and the people of Maine need

and deserve," Wathen said in a statement.

Ben Gideon, an attorney representing the victims, said he felt the report focused heavily on the actions of the sheriff's office while ignoring the broader issue of access to guns by potentially dangerous people in the state. Elizabeth Seal, whose husband Joshua was killed in the shootings, said she felt the focus of the report was "narrow."

"I'm in agreement with the committee's findings as far as they go, and I do think it's a legitimate point that the Sagadahoc Sheriff's Office could have done more to intervene," Gideon said. "I was a little disappointed that the committee didn't take a wider view of the issues that start as far back as May."

He also said he hoped the report would make the shooter's health records available to victims and the public, which it did not.

Led by a former chief justice of Maine's highest court, the commission also included a former U.S. attorney and the former chief forensic psychologist for the state. It was assembled by Democratic Gov. Janet Mills and Attorney General Aaron Frey.

It has held seven sessions starting in November, hearing from law enforcement, survivors and victims' family members and members of the U.S. Army Reserve as it explored whether anything could have been done.

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