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## Wells County settles Gaiser Farm lawsuit for \$60K

By HOLLY GASKILL

The Wells County Commissioners have settled the April 2022 lawsuit filed against the county by Gaiser Farms, Inc. regarding the sale of the county farm. Wells County has paid \$60,000 in its settlement.

Judge Kenton Kiracofe issued a summary judgment in favor of Gaiser Farms on Feb. 13. The settlement was determined during a mediation session on March 14, and the commissioners approved the amount during their meeting Monday.

The lawsuit claimed the county had breached its farm lease agreement with Gaiser Farms of rural Bluffton. This alleged breach was regarding the county's timely notification of their intention to sell land rented by Gaiser Farms. Provisions in the lease stated the tenant would

receive written notice on or before Oct. 1 about the termination of the agreement for the following year. Written notice was not sent until Oct. 6.

The parcels owned by the county were then sold to Kurt and Lance Fiechter and Mounsey Family Farms as high bidders for the land at a sale on Dec. 6, 2021. They were also named in the suit.

The county argued that adequate notice had been given, referencing a public hearing about the potential sale on May 14, 2021. The matter had been published in The News-Banner, and Caleb Gaiser of Gaiser Farms had reportedly attended. The county also claimed that the tenant had violated the lease that same year due to a late payment.

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## Hoosiers prepare to host total solar eclipse

By LESLIE BONILLA MUÑIZ  
Indiana Capital Chronicle

The day after the August 2017 total solar eclipse spanned the country, Ginger Murphy got a phone call. The Chicago-area caller wanted to reserve 40 rooms at a Hoosier state park lodge for an eclipse due to darken skies above Indiana nearly seven years later.

"I went, 'Huh?'" said Murphy, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources' deputy director for state parks. "At that point, we weren't even thinking about it."

But that's changed. State and local entities alike have since joined forces to pull out all the stops for an eclipse — featuring a staggering 4 minutes of totality — that could bring up to 600,000 people to Indiana.

States in the path of previous eclipses told Indiana officials they should expect the April 8 eclipse to be the "single largest tourist event to ever happen in the state," said Amy Howell, the director of tourism, marketing and communications for the Indiana Destination Development Corporation.

Hoosiers are hosting hundreds of events around the state to mark the astronomical phenomenon, per Howell.

And state park spots, hotels and short-term rentals are filling up.

"My advice is: so many events, a once-in-a-lifetime event. Pack

your bags and come to Indiana!" Howell exclaimed.

But not all in Indiana will be outside to see the sky, as state agencies and local schools attempt to accommodate an event that fits less-than-neatly within academic year requirements and construction season.

A total solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and Earth, and completely blocks the face of the much larger sun. Hoosiers won't be in another total solar eclipse's path of totality until 2099.

Marketing Indiana

State agencies for security, law enforcement, roads, natural resources and tourism began planning for the eclipse about two years ago, according to Howell.

For its part, IDDC expects to spend about \$100,000 on digital advertising to out-of-state residents. The agency conducted pushes at a year out and six months out, and will sustain a third push from two months out through the day-of.

"We're primarily in like a Chicago — who's not gonna get any of the eclipse — a Louisville, a St. Louis. These are markets that are familiar with Indiana because we do our other seasonal campaigns (there)," Howell said.

She wants to capitalize on the

(Continued on Page 2)

## Schools get legislative OK to break up ILEARN testing throughout year

Some schools will adopt new testing through a pilot program this fall before the changes take effect statewide in 2025.

By CASEY SMITH  
Indiana Capital Chronicle

An option for schools to divvy up portions of Indiana's ILEARN exams was approved by state lawmakers at the end of the 2024 legislative session and will change how thousands of Hoosier students are tested.

The provision was included in House Enrolled Act 1243, an omnibus education bill filled with action items supported by the Indiana Department of Education.

The assessment plan includes what state education officials call "flexible checkpoints" for schools to administer ILEARN preparation tests in language arts and math before the typical end-of-year summative tests. A dozen other states already have similar models.

Based on a plan approved by the Indiana's State Board of Education last summer, the "check-

points" will consist of 20 to 25 questions and hone in on four to six state standards. The exams are designed to be administered to students about every three months, but local schools and districts can speed up testing if they wish.

"It's a good first step," said bill author Rep. Bob Behning, R-Indianapolis. "We are actually going to reduce the amount of time that we're going to be spending on the summative test at the end of the year."

Rather, schools will have "windows of time" to use the checkpoint assessments to monitor student success.

"It really, I think, moves us closer to having the ability to have a mastery-based system," Behning continued.

Schools pilot through-year assessments

Last summer, the state board of

education approved new "streamlined" K-12 education standards to make it easier for teachers to craft individualized lesson plans — setting the stage for updates to standardized testing.

Unlike the end-of-year ILEARN tests, checkpoint exams are not meant to be "high stakes," and results are not reported to the state, said Indiana Secretary of Education Katie Jenner.

Instead, the tests are designed to be diagnostic and help teachers and parents see where students are throughout the year. Jenner said this will help educators implement remediations and interventions — like additional tutoring for students who need it — ahead of the summative exam at the end of the academic year.

Because each checkpoint covers various Indiana academic stan-

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## Blinken: Israeli assault on Gaza's Rafah would be a 'mistake'

By MATTHEW LEE  
AP Diplomatic Writer

CAIRO (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday a major Israeli ground assault on the southern Gaza town of Rafah would be "a mistake" and "unnecessary" to defeating Hamas, underscoring the further souring of relations between the United States and Israel.

Blinken, on his sixth urgent Mideast mission since the war began in October, spoke after huddling with top Arab diplomats in Cairo for discussions over efforts

for a cease-fire and over ideas for Gaza's post-conflict future. He said an "immediate, sustained cease-fire" with the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas was urgently needed and that gaps were narrowing in indirect negotiations that U.S., Egypt and Qatar have spent weeks mediating. Those negotiations are to continue at a senior level in Qatar on Friday.

Blinken heads to Israel on Friday to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war cabinet. The growing disagreements

between Netanyahu and President Joe Biden over the prosecution of the war will likely overshadow those talks — particularly over Netanyahu's determination to launch a ground assault on Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians have sought refuge from devastating Israeli ground and air strikes further north.

Netanyahu has said that without an invasion of Rafah, Israel can't achieve its goal of destroying Hamas after its deadly Oct. 7 attack and taking of hostages that triggered Israel's bombardment

and offensive in Gaza.

"A major military operation in Rafah would be a mistake, something we don't support. And, it's also not necessary to deal with Hamas, which is necessary," Blinken told a news conference in Cairo with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. A major offensive would mean more civilian deaths and worsen Gaza's humanitarian crisis, Blinken said, adding that his talks on Rafah in Israel on Friday and discussions between senior U.S. and Israeli officials next week in Washington

will be to share ideas for alternative action.

The U.S. position on a Rafah operation has shifted significantly in recent days. Initially, U.S. officials said they could not support a major incursion into the city unless there was a clear and credible plan for getting civilians out of harm's way. Now, U.S. officials said they have concluded that there is no credible way to do that given the density of the population of more than a million people. They say now that other options, including

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**Outside**

Mostly cloudy today, showers likely tonight

Today	Saturday	Sunday
High 56	High 43	High 48
Low 29	Low 25	Low 37

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FRIDAY  
March 22, 2024

**PADDLEFISH**  
solar project

Susan Popper - Local Representative  
201 E. Market St., Suite No. 3  
Bluffton, IN 46714  
Office Hours: By appointment only

info@paddlefishsolar.com  
edf-re.com/project/  
paddlefish-solar-project/  
(260) 355-5951  
Paddlefish Solar Project  
facebook.com/PaddlefishSolar

**How to contact us:**

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or 1-800-579-7476  
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## County settles farm suit

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On April 2, 2022, commissioners Mike Vanover, Jeff Stringer and Blake Gerber published a Letter to the Editor in The News-Banner, affirming many of these claims. They wrote they were “committed to protecting the county and its citizens from aggressive demands for money and/or needless lawsuits ... The county will stand up for what is right and not take monetary demands or threats of litigation lightly. The county commissioners will continue

to inform the public as the matter progresses.”

In his summary judgment, Kiracofe stated that though Gaiser Farms “may have had knowledge of the defendant’s intention to sell the property did not automatically give rise to the (county’s) terminating of the Lease Agreement.” He additionally noted that the county did not vote to terminate the lease until Dec. 6, two months after notice had been given.

Regarding the claims of late payment, Kiracofe stated there was a precedent in the relationship

between parties. While a 2021 payment was late, there were also late payments in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. The county had neither addressed this violation nor charged interest.

Kiracofe referenced Indiana law in saying that when parties exhibit a history of a “very active, willing, and long-lived collaboration in the non-payment of rent”, the landlord is required to give notice before terminating a lease agreement.

“The terms of the Lease Agreement are unambigu-

ous and conclusive of the parties’ intention,” the summary reads. “There is no genuine issue of material fact and the Court finds that Wells County is in breach of the Lease Agreement by not providing notice.”

In the 2022 lawsuit filing, Gaiser Farms asked for damages, including lost profits and income.

Of the \$60,000 settlement, \$45,000 will be reimbursed by the county attorney at the time, Andrews and Crell Attorneys.

holly@news-banner.com

## Hoosiers prepare for eclipse

(Continued from Page 1)

event by getting newcomers into Indiana, and hopefully back for future visits.

IDDC has collected information on more than 600 events around the state, she said: partly to help state security and police monitoring and partly to offer visitors a complete menu of options.

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway, for example, was selected as a National Air and Space Administration broadcast location. Now it’s got a packed schedule featuring multiple astronauts, IndyCar drivers, NASA officials and Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb. The brickyard will also host technical and family-friendly educational programming.

In Bloomington, a solar eclipse committee with police, fire, business, university and other participants is overseeing a week of festivities: eclipse-themed trivia, glow-in-the-dark putt-putt, a showing of the space-related film Hidden Figures, and more.

“We want people to come into Bloomington, stay for a couple of days, enjoy their time and return,” said Jordan Smith, a leisure marketing manager at Visit Bloomington.

Discover Boone County says it’s inviting guests to “Get Mooned in Boone” with a treasure hunt, a free ‘80s concert and other activities.

### Seeing the eclipse

Indiana is highlighting its DNR properties as prime viewing real estate for Hoosiers and others that live outside the path of totality. The path includes a whopping 54 state parks, nature preserves, reservoirs and more, according to Murphy.

The properties are hosting dozens of events, from eclipse litter bag work-

shops and t-shirt how-tos to scary stories and “crepuscular creatures.”

Murphy’s agency created a table of locations — split by viewing, lodging and parking options and complete with estimated eclipse phase times — to help interested visitors plan.

It’s easier to see the eclipse in open spaces with fewer leafy trees, Murphy observed.

“There’s an effect that happens during ... totality where it looks like you have a sunset all the way around, in a 360-degree circle. So an open space is a great spot to potentially see that,” she said.

But many parks in the path are already booked out, with visitors from 44 states and even Canada, according to Murphy. She said the four inns in the zone are full and so are cabins. Campgrounds at 16 properties are sold out, but those at another five locations are between 70% and 90% of capacity.

That may or may not include her first caller, back in 2017. DNR begins booking at two years out, not seven.

Gates for day-of visitors open at 7 a.m. and close when parking fills up, even to those on bikes or on foot — so get in early.

“Get your spot set up and take a walk, or just enjoy the day, and be ready for the eclipse in the afternoon,” Murphy said.

But to safely view the eclipse, purchase glasses or solar filters compliant with the ISO 12312-2 international standard, such as those produced by manufacturers on a list by the American Astrological Society. Looking without protection will cause serious eye injuries.

### Business as usual for others?

Not everyone will be free to enjoy the festivities.

Indiana lawmakers were steps

away from authorizing an eclipse day waiver for schools, who must otherwise meet a 180-day academic year requirement. But they tweezed that language out on the eve of the session’s end.

Fort Wayne Community Schools’ board, for example, announced classes were cancelled for the eclipse — then reversed hours later when officials realized the waiver died, the Journal Gazette reported.

Schools with room in their calendars may extend their spring breaks, take the day off, or let students out early, according to an October Department of Education memo. Others can hold virtual classes or put on eclipse events during in-person instruction.

Construction workers, however, might be available for viewing after the Indiana Department of Transportation asked contractors and local laborers to halt work for the eclipse, according to KPC News.

That’s because INDOT and Indiana State Police expect congestion and delays from the influx of eclipse visitors. The request, from midnight on April 7 to sunrise on April 9, could delay projects.

DNR recommends that eclipse viewers fill up their gas tanks and pack plenty of snacks, water, first aid supplies and entertainment sources to ease long waits in parks or in traffic. That’s in addition to other tips listed on the agency’s website.

Despite the chaos, Hoosier officials want residents and tourists alike to enjoy themselves.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a lot of people,” Murphy said. “... We want people to have a great time and we’re looking forward to seeing them.”

## Weather

Friday, March 22, 2024

(24-hour observations at 10:13 p.m. Thursday)

High: 37; Low: 20; Precipitation: None

Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 1.93 feet at 8:45 p.m. Thursday

## Wells County forecast

**Today:** Mostly cloudy, with a high near 56. East wind around 10 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

**Tonight:** A 40% chance of showers before 2 a.m. Cloudy, with a low around 29. South wind 5 to 15 mph becoming north in the evening. Winds could gust as high as 20 mph.

**Saturday:** Mostly sunny, with a high near 43. North wind around 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

**Saturday Night:** Mostly clear, with a low around 25. East wind around 10 mph.

**Sunday:** Mostly sunny, with a high near 48.

**Sunday Night:** Mostly cloudy, with a low around 37.

**Monday:** Mostly cloudy, with a high near 63. Breezy.

**Monday Night:** Showers, mainly after 2 a.m. Low around 47. Chance of precipitation is 80%.

## ILEARN testing

(Continued from Page 1)

dards at different points in the school year, the end-of-year test will be reduced in length, according to guidance issued by IDOE.

IDOE will pilot the checkpoint model in the 2024-25 school year. More than 1,200 schools have opted-in to offer those assessments.

The checkpoint tests will be administered digitally without a time limit. IDOE’s plan is for schools in the pilot to give the first checkpoint exam between Sept. 16 and Nov. 15, the second between Nov. 18 and Feb. 7, and the third between Feb. 10 and April 11. Second-chance opportunities will be available for each checkpoint until the summative window begins on April 14, 2025.

“This is wildly popular amongst our educators, amongst our parents, because what this does is it gives not just end-of-year, one-point-in-time data, but it allows three checkpoints throughout the year on that student that are not punitive, that are totally about, ‘Has the child mastered it or not?’ Jenner said earlier this year.

The overall system will take effect during the 2025-26 school year.

Students who move into a new district mid-year will not be required to make up any missed checkpoint assessment. But schools will be allowed to use the “second chance” opportunity to see if students have mastered the previous content or if they need additional learning support, according to the state education department.

Under House Enrolled Act 1243, high school students will additionally be given the option to include their latest statewide assessment scores on their transcripts.

Although the bill passed with few naysayers, Sen. Jean Leising, R-Oldenburg, said she’s heard complaints from “lots of parents” in her district about kids already “having to undergo too much testing.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to vote for another change, because I think that we have tested the heck out of kids,” she said shortly before voting against the measure on the last day of the legislative session. “And we have not improved education — and that’s the sad part about it. I don’t know

why they’re separating it.”

“I don’t know how it’s all going to work, but I’m starting to feel sorry for the kids and teachers and the parents,” she continued. “Because all of this testing — we’ve reached a point of it just being over the top.”

### Slow student progress

The latest ILEARN data from 2023 showed an increasing number of Hoosier students in grades 3-8 passed state standardized tests — a sign of continued learning loss recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

But the scores still trailed behind 2019 results, and students who struggled before the pandemic were not making academic rebounds as fast as their peers.

Nearly 41% of Indiana students who were tested in Spring 2023 were at or above proficiency standards in English and language arts. Roughly the same percentage of students were at or above proficiency standards in math.

Only 30.6% of Hoosier students passed both the math and English sections of ILEARN, however. In 2019, pre-pandemic pass rates indicated that 37.1% of Hoosier kids in grades 3-8 were proficient in both the English and math portions of the exam.

IDOE officials said 99% of all Indiana students in grades 3-8 completed ILEARN exams last year. That’s equal to more than 491,000 students tested.

The exam was first implemented in 2019 to replace the ISTEP exam for students from third to eighth grade. The exam measures proficiency in various subjects starting in third grade, but the main focus is on English/language arts and mathematics.

With federal permission, the assessment was not given in 2020 due to pandemic-related school closures.

State lawmakers additionally approved a separate requirement for schools to administer the statewide IREAD test in second grade — a year earlier than current requirements — within Senate Enrolled Act 1. Local educators must direct new, targeted support to at-risk students and those struggling to pass the literacy exam.

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

## Israel’s assault on Rafah

(Continued from Page 1)

specifically targeted operations against known Hamas fighters and commanders, are the only way to avoid a civilian catastrophe.

But Netanyahu, on a roughly 45-minute call with GOP senators on Wednesday, pledged to ignore warnings about a Rafah operation. He also took aim at Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer’s condemnation last week of the civilian death toll in Gaza and his call for new elections in Israel in a speech that Biden later said was “good.”

Netanyahu stressed that Israel would move ahead in Rafah, according to senators who participated in the meeting. Sen. John Kennedy, a Louisiana Republican, said Netanyahu “made it very clear that he and the people of Israel intend to prosecute the war to the full extent of their power and that he would not be dictated to by Senator Schumer or President Biden.”

Netanyahu has been accused by Israeli critics of undermining bipartisan American support by cultivating close ties with Republican leaders.

As Blinken and the Arab ministers met, Gaza’s Health Ministry raised the territory’s death toll to nearly 32,000 Palestinians since the war began on its soil. Also, U.N. officials stepped up warnings that famine is “imminent” in northern

Gaza.

The Cairo talks gathered Blinken with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as a top official from the Palestine Liberation Organization, the internationally recognized body representing the Palestinian people. They also discussed ways to increase urgent humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza by land, air and sea.

In an earlier meeting with Blinken, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi stressed the need for an immediate cease-fire and warned against the “dangerous repercussions” of any Israeli offensive in Rafah, according to a statement issued by el-Sissi’s spokesperson.

Both parties had renewed their rejection of the forced displacement of Gazans and agreed on the importance of taking all necessary measures to ensure the arrival of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, the statement said.

Blinken said “gaps are narrowing” in talks over a cease-fire but that more work was needed. “There are still real challenges,” he said. “We’ve closed some gaps but there are still gaps.”

Netanyahu’s office said Thursday that the head of the Mossad spy agency will return to Qatar on Friday to meet with CIA chief William Burns and other

key mediators in the talks. The office said Thursday that Qatar’s prime minister and Egypt’s intelligence chief would also join the talks.

Meanwhile, the United States said it would seek a swift vote on a newly revised and tougher U.N. resolution demanding “an immediate and sustained cease-fire” to protect civilians and enable humanitarian aid to be delivered. The U.S. deputy ambassador to the U.N., Robert Wood, said he hoped a vote could take place by the end of the week. The resolution is notable because it does not directly tie the release of the hostages to the need for a cease-fire.

Still, Blinken said the two must go hand-in-hand. “There is an urgent need for an immediate, sustained ceasefire with the release of hostages,” he said.

Netanyahu has also rejected the Biden administration’s repeated remonstrations that Israel’s long-term security cannot be assured without the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

A clear path and deadline for the formation of a Palestinian state are key requirements for Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations to normalize relations with Israel, something Netanyahu is keen to achieve. Blinken spent much of his time in Jeddah

with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman discussing the normalization process, which would also include U.S.-Saudi agreements.

With tensions running high after not speaking for a month, Biden and Netanyahu held a phone call on Monday during which Netanyahu agreed to send a team of experts to Washington to discuss the Rafah plans. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant will also visit Washington separately next week.

The war began after Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people in the surprise Oct. 7 attack out of Gaza that triggered the war, and abducted another 250 people. Hamas is still believed to be holding some 100 people hostage, as well as the remains of 30 others.

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OBITUARIES

**Karen Kay Roberts, 81**



Karen Kay Roberts, 81, passed away Wednesday morning, March 20, 2024, at River Terrace Retirement Community following an extended illness.

Karen was born in Wells County on April 20, 1942, to Merlin K. and Alice Elene (Martin) Bender; both parents preceded her in death. Karen married L. Kay Roberts at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Uniondale on July 23, 1960; he preceded her in death on March 28, 2013. She was a 1960 graduate of Rock Creek High School and a member of Murray Missionary Church and Red Hatters Club. Karen was a homemaker and retired after 25 years from Rock Creek and Northern Wells Schools.

She enjoyed golf trips and gardening. Karen became a World Traveler, traveling to Alaska, Africa, Bahamas, Haiti, Jamaica, Cozumel, Ireland, UK, Scotland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France. Karen enjoyed spending winters in Orange Beach with family and friends.

Survivors include three children, Kerry (Laura) Roberts of Bluffton, Kirk (Suzy) Roberts of Ossian, and Kelli (Brian) Reifel of Westfield, Ind.; nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

In addition to her parents and husband of 52 years, she was preceded in death by a brother, Gerry Bender and a sister, Regina Daugherty.

Visitation will be from 2-7 p.m. on Monday, March 25, 2024, at Goodwin - Cale & Harnish Memorial Chapel in Bluffton. Services will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at Murray Missionary Church, with visitation one hour prior to the service at the church. Pastor Mike Gilbert will officiate. Burial will follow at Markle Cemetery.

Memorials can be made in Karen's memory to Stillwater Hospice of Ft. Wayne, IN.

Online condolences can be made at [www.goodwincaleharnish.com](http://www.goodwincaleharnish.com).

**NMS announces Quarter 3 honor roll**

Norwell Middle School has released the names of its students on the high honor roll and honor roll for the third quarter of the 2023-24 school year.

**6th Grade Distinction (GPA of 3.7 or higher and no grade lower than A-)**

Canyon Aschliman, Oakley Bryant, Mackenzie Bunn, Violet Butcher, Julia Collins, Keegan Corey, Wesley Dafforn, Harbert Davis, Jackson Decker, Kaydence Denton, Cayden Doak, Jack Dunwiddie, Adleigh Ervin, Lydia Felton, Cooper Figert, Paxton Frisch, Blake Fuess, Camryn Fulton, Aria Geng, Gabriel Gerber, Annabelle Gill, Austin Harnish, Weston Harris, Allison Hart, Laken Heaston, Nolan Hitzfield, Cole Jackemeyer, Lyric Johnston, Alexis Keller, Grant Keller, Kennedy King, Harrison Koop, Macy McNabb, Hudson Meriwether, Mercy Meyer, Ellie Miller, Paxton Miller, Grayson Miser, Mason Morales, Layla Moyer, Brielle Noe, Madison Nordman, Elias Nussbaum, Brynleigh Ormsby, Paizley Price, Brooklyn Quintanilla, Triton Rankin, Jace Reinhard, Claire Ringger, Aubree Roberts, Meghan Roberts, David Runkel, Wesley Springer, Tyson Taylor, Graciela Torres, George Tucker, Mason Turnbough, Rylie Van't Hof, Rylan Watson, Shannon Weimer, Chloe Whitaker, Blake Whitmer and Samuel Worthman.

**6th Grade Honor (GPA of 2.7 or higher and no grade lower than B-)**

Sephora Alfreus, Braydon Arnold, Melody Bailey, Tanna Bauman, Maleah Baumgartner, Celia Behning, Madalyn Bookmiller, Alyssa Borkholder, Madyson Boyd, Vivian Branham, Kaiden Brooksher, Kayah Bryant, Joshua Buirley, Ada Campbell, Madelyn Chubb, Carter Culbreath, Addison Dalrymple, Allison Eltzroth, Clark Evans, Owen Glisson, Reece Goeglein, Bailee Grogg, Isaac Gruss, Veronica Haiflich, Austin Hartnett, Jaydon Heindel, Della Hensley, Rachel Hoag, Emma Holte, Annabelle Johnson, Leeum Johnson, Anistyn Jolloff, Kody Krinn, Piper Krumma, Braylon Leath, Aubrey Leighon, Brody Lengerich, Travis Lenwell, Camryn McCartney, Emma Moon, Alistair Newnum, Sydney Nordman, Taylor Nunn, Corbin Pearson, Nevaeh Pilkinton, Lola Pulfer, Marin Reinhard, Paige Ren-

fro, Hazel Richhart, Desirae Ruch, Landen Sallee, Claire Sands, Riley Schoenemann, Brynlee Sliker, Fisher Smith-Fisher, Landon Sonnigen, Mason Vendal, Ethan Walker, Easton Wilson, Jaxon Yager, Colin Young

**7th Grade Distinction (GPA of 3.7 or higher and no grade lower than A-)**

Isabel Affolder, Emma Bailey, Stella Ballard, Kynnlei Beste, Jordyn Brickley, Joao Calduro, Dalton Crow, Lily Dillion, Mason Diver, Crete Edwards, Kendall Fegley, Kenley Fisher, Baylee Ford, Kayla Freed, Vincent Fuhrmann, Camdyn Gerber, Chase Gerber, Krista Gerber, Parker Gerber, Ally Graft, Owen Grover, Jordyn Grzych, Rilynn Hoopingamer, Gracie Hulvey, Hadie Isch, Carter Jackemeyer, Titus Jacob, Claire Kelley, Wyatt Knell, Hunter Kurtz, Elijah Landis, Derek Lenwell, Haley Lewis, Addison Long, Elizabeth Mann, Angela Mayer, Anna McBride, Brenna Meyer, Hadley Meyer, Roman Meyer, Ian Mitchell, Quinn Oakleaf, Leah Randol, Haden Reece, Easton Reinhard, Jaydin Rhoads, Madeline Ringger, Joshua Roby, Elaina Scott, Charles Simerman, Bristol Smith, Adalyn Stine-McCave, Avery Thornton, Maddux Thornton, Stella Tumbleson, Cody Waldman, Case Wireman and Mason Zent.

**7th Grade Honor (GPA of 2.7 or higher and no grade lower than B-)**

AJosephina Alig, Emily Bennett, Cruz Bolinger, Reid Boly, Henry Brinson, Callie Burton, Benjamin Captain, Landon Clark, Caedon Confer, Miles Daugherty, Jillien Dallow, Kora DeLaGarza, Alex Dillion, Leah Ewing, Alivia Fenstermaker, Isaac Figueroa, Myah Frauhofer, Kyndal Fuller, Kayla Jeffrey, Preslie Jones, Cohen Karns, Jason Lenwell, Madelynn Lewis, Elizabeth Long, Benjamin Lukins, Novalynn Malone, Noah Nash, Allyson Peterson, Kenley Reed, Eli Rodgers, Connley Rupp, Stormie Selking, Abigail Swineford, Isaiah Thompson and Katelyn Trout.

**8th Grade Distinction (GPA of 3.7 or higher and no grade lower than A-)**

Kenan Abdulrahim, Ellie Bales, Tiffany Bays, Jillian Bischoff, Brooke Bowling, Fielder Brege, Emma Burnau, Edward Bushee, Connor Careins, Greyson Cha-

vis, Dylan Chism, Kaitlyn Collins, Erika Crosswhite, Stellen Davis, Addison Dohrman, Kamdyn Ealing, Elias Fagin, Adalynn Fausz, Cash Fegley, Lillie Felton, Zeke Ford, Layla Frisch, Brennen Fryback, Kinley Heindel, Ethan Hill, Ivy Hill, Abigail Hippenstele, Kahlilan Hollenbach, Lillian Holmes, Carter Kelley, Mia Kurtz, Emma Lenwell, Jacob Macy, Ava Mason, Joshua McBride, Rebecca McConnell, Lance Meriwether, Emma Miller, Eric Morgan, Khloe Morgan, Tenlee Morris, Macy Oatess, Addison Parsons, Amelia Penrod, Benjamin Peterson, Hudson Petrie, Vivian Reidenbach, Connor Rose, Kahra Rupp, Illiyana Sailors, Abigail Schlemmer, Gabrielle Schlemmer, Hailey Singleton, Jillian Smith, Daisy Swineford, Ty Tofflemoyer, Julian Torres, Ashley Tucker, KayLee Tucker, Grady Vachon, Adrienne Wagner, Reese Wathen, Kiera Whitaker, Levi White, Phoenix Whitsitt, Reagan Wilson, Amelia Zavacki and Anthony Zavacki.

**8th Grade Honor (GPA of 2.7 or higher and no grade lower than B-)**

Roman Aschliman, Lauryl Baird, Corbin Behning, Kaylee Bennett, Scheumann Bixler-Scheumann, Keyani Brinneman, Taven Brock, Makenzie Bronnenberg, Cooper Bunn, Robert Cahoon, Reid Cavanaugh, Madelyn Clark, Aidyn Clayton, Chloe Comer, Camden Connert, Carter Costello, Emma Crippen, Gracie David, Avery Elmore, Keigan Fortriede, Dessie Fritts, Amore Gilbert, Isaiah Goeglein, Wyatt Goulet, Eva Grisafo, Larinda Harms, Jordyn Hart, Payton Hupfer, Baylee Johnston, Carson Jolloff, Shelby Kaehr, Koda Keller, Marvin Keller, Miles Kelly, Owen Lichtsinn, Ethan Mast, Collin McAtee, Anna McLaughlin, Layken Mialkowski, Westin Miller, Jordan Mills, Christenson Misch, Tripp Mitchell, Cooper Nagel, Magnolia Neuschwander, Mya Oatess, Carmen Ortiz, Penelopy Pavlin, MacKenzie Price, Addison Privett, Mali Schwartz, Greyson Shoemaker, Kaulen Sinclair, Garcia Smith-Garcia, Elijah Sonnigen, Khloe Stockman, Evan Swallow, Gavin Tackett, Channing Thompson, Evan Uptgraft, Brady Watkins, Rachel Werling, Karter West, Malory Young and Tyler Zent.

**County Briefs**

**Sheriff requests share of ARPA funds**

Planning to buy four police vehicles this year, Sheriff Scott Holliday requested a portion of the remaining American Rescue Plan Act funds to help cover the cost. Holliday said there was roughly \$131,000 in ARPA funds remaining.

Each police vehicle costs approximately \$45,000, which is in the jail's budget but would "take a good portion of it away," Holliday said.

The Highway and Health departments have also made requests for the remaining funds. The commissioners said they would consider the request.

Holliday advised that Work on repairing pipes in the administrative portion of the jail began Monday. The process requires the removal of a bathroom wall to access the leaking sewer lines.

As of Monday, there were 74 inmates housed in the jail, 42 of which were pre-trial holds for the Wells County Circuit Court, 22 pre-trial Superior Court, eight from the Department of Correction and two Level 6 felons.

Holliday also recognized custodian Bob Monce, who is retiring next week. His replacement has trained alongside him for several weeks.

**County considers adjustment to right-of-way requirement**

As the county tries to close on several near-complete road conversion petitions, Highway Supervisor Shawn Bonar said he may be able to negotiate a smaller right-of-way with landowners.

When paving graving roads, the county has required the donation of 30 ft. of right-of-way, meaning the land for the road and ditch line. Nate Rumschlag, former Wells County engineer, had set this standard to align with Indiana Department of Transportation recommendations.

The right-of-way ensures a safe, gradual decrease along the roadway and no obvious obstacles. When converting a gravel road to a paved one, it is assumed there will be higher driving speeds and a need for a larger right-of-way.

The matter has been contentious in some areas as a majority of landowners have donated their right-of-way for paving, while one "hold-out" has not. In speaking with some of these landowners, Bonar believes he could get the landowners to sign on for a 25 ft. right-of-way.

"There are several roads out there that are so flat and have hard any ditch lines that we may not need to require the entire 30 ft.," Bonar said.

Meanwhile, Bonar advised that the department is still moving dirt, asphalt and lumber from the previous building. The staff continues to organize the new garage building, and crews are working through the final 20 punch list items.

**County partners with landowners on Jefferson Township tile replacement**

The drainage board unanimously approved \$7,500 toward the replacement of the Ferguson Prong 4 Drain in Jefferson Township during their meeting Monday.

Surveyor Jarrod Hahn said the landowners on the tile will split the remaining cost. The work is expected to be done this summer.

**Police Notebook**

INCIDENTS

City:

Tuesday, 2:51 p.m., 900 block of North Main Street. Caller requested welfare check for child after woman took the crying toddler to car before going back inside to sit at computer.

Tuesday, 5:54 p.m., 100 block of East Arnold Street. Caller requested assistance with property retrieval.

Wednesday, 2:32 p.m., 500 block of West Wiley Avenue. Caller reported tree fell on front porch at this address.

Wednesday, 4:29 p.m., 900 block of South Mulberry Street. Report of an issue with custody exchange.

Wednesday, 4:31 p.m., Animal Shelter. Officer requested to pick up paperwork.

Thursday, 12:26 a.m., 300 block of East Central Avenue. Officer requested in reference to domestic issue.

Thursday, 1:14 p.m., Dollar General. Report of

domestic issue.

County:

Wednesday, 12:14 p.m., Wells County Jail. Officer detained driver for driving while suspended. Upon arrival at the jail, it was discovered the driver gave the officer the fake identity of his brother, who is currently in prison. Additional charges requested for Jason Boyd Cook.

Wednesday, 2:14 p.m., Wells County Jail. Subject reported domestic violence in her home from her husband and his mother.

Wednesday, 3:48 p.m., Wells County Jail. Ryan Graham served with no contact order.

Thursday, 7:27 a.m., East 300 North and S.R. 116, Bluffton. Vehicle was driving when another subject, identified as a deer, failed to yield.

Thursday, 8:25 a.m., 3600 West 200 South, Liberty Center. Report of an injured

deer.

Thursday, 8:31 a.m., Wells County Jail. Warrant served to Terez Leonard Jr.

Thursday, 9:48 a.m., 7700 East 300 South, Bluffton. Caller reported someone is throwing trash in her yard.

ACCIDENTS

City: Tuesday, 10:50 a.m., S.R. 1 and North Lamar Street. Linda Elzroth, 69, Zanesville, reported she attempted to merge her Chevrolet Equinox into the right lane and failed to observe a Honda Accord driven by Isaiah Delong, 22, Bluffton. No injuries reported. Damages did not exceed \$5,000.

ARRESTS

Lorinda Lynn Satterfield, 59, Markle; theft, a Level 6 felony. Bond at \$10,000.

Terez Alastair Leonard Jr., 19, South Bend; interfering with law enforcement using a vehicle, a

Level 6 felony. No bond set.

VISITATION & SERVICES

**Lillyian Danielle (Smith) Ellenberger**  
 Calling: 2 - 8 p.m. Friday, March 22 and one hour prior to the service.  
 Service: 10:30 a.m. Saturday, March 23 at the funeral home.

**Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home**  
 308 W. Washington St.  
 824-3850  
[www.thomarich.com](http://www.thomarich.com)

VISITATION & SERVICES

**Keaton William Osmun**  
 Calling: 2 - 8 p.m. Friday, March 22 and one hour prior to the service.  
 Service: 2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 23 at the funeral home.

**Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home**  
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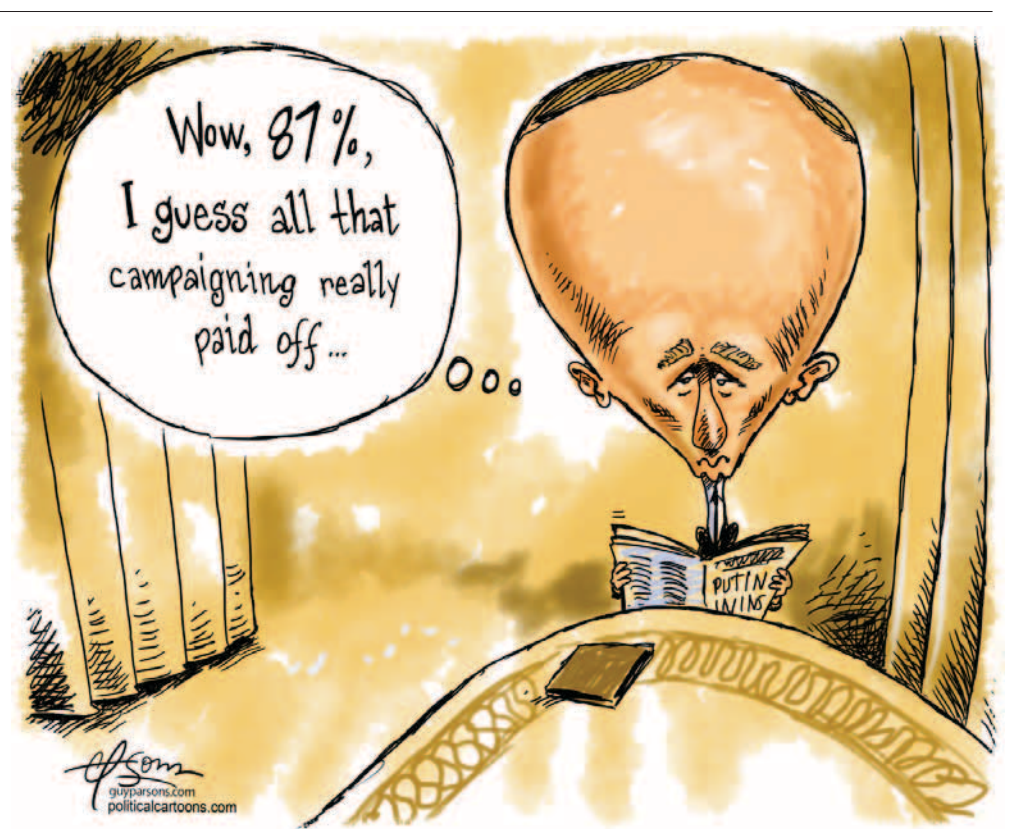
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The Russian Election - a look back through cartoonists' eyes...



Other Opinions

Biden's incoherent Iran sanctions

Two days after reissuing a \$10 billion Iran sanctions waiver, the Biden Administration on Friday threatened coordinated Group of Seven sanctions against Iran if it delivers ballistic missiles to Russia. The policy signal these two moves send is incoherence.

G-7 leaders are talking tough. "Were Iran to proceed with providing ballistic missiles or related technology to Russia," they write, "we are prepared to respond swiftly and in a coordinated manner including with new and significant measures against Iran." Russia has benefited greatly from Iranian drones in its invasion of Ukraine, and its interest in Tehran's missiles has been clear for months.

All of this was foreseeable when the U.S., U.K., France and Germany let the international embargo on Iran's missile program lapse in October. Instead of triggering snapback sanctions, the Biden Administration preferred to avoid an escalation that might disrupt diplomacy with Iran. Weeks after the Oct. 7 massacre, while Iran's proxies were firing on U.S. troops in the region, appeasement was in the air.

It was the same story in November, when the Administration last renewed the sanctions waiver giving Iran access to more than \$10 billion. It opens up to Iran the frozen revenue from its electricity shipments to Iraq, which seems to have a perpetual excuse to buy sanctioned goods from Iran.

As usual, the State Department spin is that the money can be used only for "humanitarian purposes," and that the Trump Administration issued waivers too. Neither point survives scrutiny.

The old waivers let Iraq import electricity from Iran but sent the money into escrow in Iraq, where Iran couldn't touch it. President Biden changed the rules, allowing the money to leave escrow, be converted to euros and end up as an Iranian fund in Omani banks. It can be put toward Iran's debt payments and import subsidies, according to Richard Goldberg of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Adults know that money is fungible. These funds free up others for use in spreading terrorism abroad and advancing a nuclear-weapons program at home. Why does the Biden Administration pretend otherwise?

Maybe it's for the same reason the Administration keeps hidden how much of the \$10 billion Iran has accessed since the waiver was last extended: The American people might not like what they find out.

The G-7's newfound assertiveness on Iranian missile transfers to Russia is welcome, but its deterrent value is undermined by President Biden's waiver 48 hours earlier. His Iran policy has remained stuck in the world of Oct. 6, desperate to buy peace and quiet from a regime with no interest in either.

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Mark Miller, Opinion Page Editor

Opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily represent the views of this newspaper.

Biden's 'lawfare' joke is not funny

Why do so many Democrats and their allies in the media desperately want former President Donald Trump to stand trial before Election Day? The answer is simple: Because they think it will help President Joe Biden defeat Trump and win reelection.

So far, the "lawfare" directed at Trump — two federal indictments from a special counsel appointed by the Biden Justice Department, plus two local indictments from elected Democratic prosecutors, plus a financial lawsuit from another elected Democratic prosecutor and a sex-and-defamation lawsuit financed by a Democratic megadonor — has backfired at the polls. It helped boost Trump to a runaway victory in the Republican primaries, and so far, it hasn't hurt him in general election matchup polls against Biden.

Democrats hope a guilty verdict in a criminal trial — any trial will do — will peel away voters who say they support Trump now but would not support him if he were a convicted felon. We'll see.

But the lawfare campaign is already having another effect on Trump. It has put the former president under severe financial stress. In two ways. The first is the tens of millions of dollars in legal fees Trump has already spent defending himself against the onslaught of criminal charges and lawsuits. The other is the crippling financial penalty — \$454 million — in the lawsuit brought by the elected Democratic attorney general of New York, Letitia James.

It was an unprecedented lawsuit in which James created what former federal prosecutor Andrew McCarthy called "a fraud case in which there are no fraud victims." Trump did not have the right to a jury trial, and a hostile judge came up with a devastating financial judgment.

Trump is now scrambling to find an insurer that will post a bond for the money so that Trump can proceed with an appeal of the verdict. If he can't find an insurer to do that, New York law requires that Trump will either have to come up with the cash himself or sell some of his real estate holdings, just to be able to mount an appeal. And all that is on top of an \$83 million award in a separate sex-and-defamation suit, the one financed by the Democratic donor.

No criminal trial has begun, but the swarm of Democratic legal actions has already cost Trump dearly. Of course, that was the idea, or at least part

of the idea. And it's something that Biden himself indirectly acknowledged in a recent speech.

It happened in Washington at the Grid-iron Dinner, a fancy white-tie gathering of major media figures and the top politicians they cover. Biden delivered a speech that was part comedy routine and part inspirational talk to his media base.

And this is a joke Biden told, according to news accounts: "Our big plan to cancel student debt doesn't apply to everyone. Just yesterday, a defeated-looking man came up to me and said, 'I'm being crushed by debt. I'm completely wiped out.' And I said, 'Sorry, Donald, I can't help you.'"

Ha ha ha. The media audience, of course, laughed. With one joke, Biden acknowledged the work his party's lawfare warriors have done in the Trump matter. And how could Biden not be grateful? He's trailing Trump in the polls, facing an electorate that largely believes he is too old for a second term, and is underwater in approval ratings for his handling of most issues.

No doubt Biden's joke about bankrupting Trump reflects his satisfaction that the lawfare effort is starting to work. But Biden wants more. In February, Politico reported that Biden has "grumbled to aides and advisers that had [Attorney General Merrick] Garland moved sooner in his investigation into former President Donald Trump's election interference, a trial may already be underway or even have concluded."

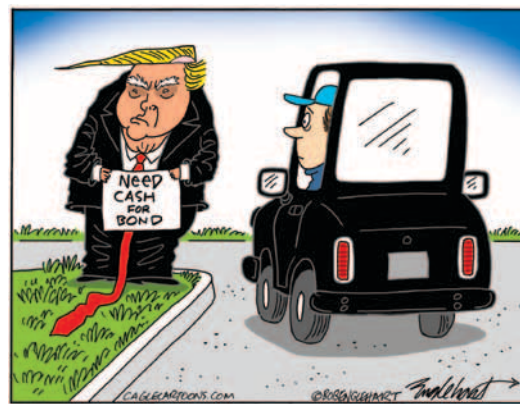
In April 2022, the New York Times reported that Biden "confided to his inner circle" his belief that Trump "should be prosecuted." The paper added that while Biden "has never communicated his frustrations directly to Mr. Garland, he has said privately that he wanted Mr. Garland to act less like a ponderous judge and more like a prosecutor."

Garland knows the president wants him to get Trump sooner rather than later. Garland's pick for special counsel, Jack Smith, who first wanted to put Trump on trial in January, is now racing to start a trial by summer. Anything to get the job done by Election Day. Maybe Smith will succeed, and maybe he won't. But the lawfare campaign is a heavy burden on Trump every day.

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Byron York



Today in History

The Associated Press

Today is Friday, March 22, the 82nd day of 2024. There are 284 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On March 22, 2019, former President Jimmy Carter became the longest-living chief executive in American history; at 94 years and 172 days, he exceeded the lifespan of the late former President George H.W. Bush.

On this date:  
In 1765, the British Parliament passed the Stamp Act to raise money from the American colonies, which fiercely resisted the tax. (The Stamp Act was repealed a year later.)  
In 1882, President Chester A.

Arthur signed a measure outlawing polygamy.

In 1894, hockey's first Stanley Cup championship game was played; home team Montreal Hockey Club defeated Ottawa Hockey Club, 3-1.

In 1941, the Grand Coulee hydroelectric dam in Washington state officially went into operation.

In 1963, The Beatles' debut album, "Please Please Me," was released in the United Kingdom by Parlophone.

In 1978, Karl Wallenda, the 73-year-old patriarch of "The Flying Wallendas" high-wire act, fell to his death while attempting to walk a cable strung between two hotel towers in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

In 1988, both houses of Congress overrode President Ronald Reagan's veto of the Civil Rights Restoration Act.

In 1993, Intel Corp. unveiled the original Pentium computer chip.

In 1997, Tara Lipinski, at age 14 years and 10 months, became the youngest ladies' world figure skating champion in Lausanne, Switzerland.

In 2010, Google Inc. stopped censoring the internet for China by shifting its search engine off the mainland to Hong Kong.

In 2012, coroner's officials ruled singer Whitney Houston died by drowning, but that heart disease and cocaine use were contributing factors.



Tardy thank-you notes

Dear Annie: My daughter received some lovely gifts for her quinceanera (an important milestone in Mexican and Latin American cultures that celebrates a girl's 15th birthday). Unfortunately, there were a few without cards or tags. I am not sure if the card became accidentally separated from the gift, or if there was no card or tag in the first place.

My daughter is writing thank you cards to everyone who helped put this event together or gave her a gift. I hate to think about just a few people going unthanked — but we don't know who gave the gifts. Any ideas other than asking those in attendance who we didn't get a gift from (for sure) if they gave it? — Unsure Parent

Dear Unsure: Congratulations on your daughter's quinceanera, and kudos for making sure every gift-giver gets a thank you! One option is to reach out casually to close friends and family members and ask if anyone has insight as to who bought your daughter what gift. (Make sure you only ask those whose gifts are already accounted for.) You could also make a social media post or a group message with a photo of the gift(s) and a heartfelt message like: "My daughter received this beautiful gift for her quinceanera, but it's missing a tag! If this gift is from you, please reach out so that she can properly thank you." If anything, going to such great lengths to thank the gift-giver will make the "thank you" even more special.

Dear Annie: My high school sweetheart and husband of 30-plus years passed away suddenly from COVID at the beginning of the pandemic. He was 57 years old, athletic and died within two weeks of testing positive. It was a huge shock to our three teenage/young adult children. Hundreds of friends and family attended his

wake and funeral, and a memorial scholarship fund raised over \$50,000.

I purchased personalized thank you cards but haven't sent them out. His passing will be two years this spring. Is it too late to send out the cards? Should I write anything additional to explain the delay? — Still Heartbroken

Dear Still Heartbroken: I'm so sorry for your loss. Losing a partner is always difficult, but especially so suddenly and during the pandemic must have been even more devastating. It is beautiful to read just how many people and lives your husband touched — he was clearly a very special person.

In the wake of such a significant loss, it's completely valid to feel overwhelmed, but it's never too late to convey your appreciation and gratitude to your loved ones for their support. Perhaps include a small acknowledgment of the delay or a thank you for their patience in your note. I am sure they will be more than understanding about why it took so long.

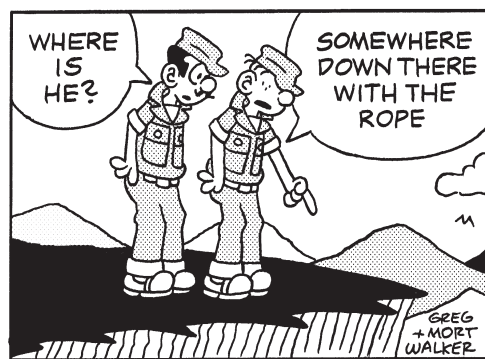
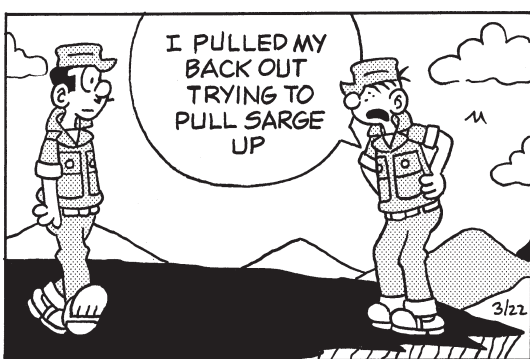
"How Can I Forgive My Cheating Partner?" is out now! Annie Lane's second anthology — featuring favorite columns on marriage, infidelity, communication and reconciliation — is available as a paperback and e-book. Visit http://www.creatorspublishing.com for more information. Send your questions for Annie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

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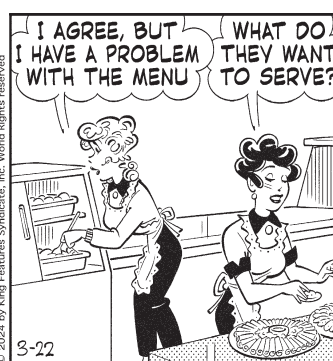
Dear Annie by Annie Lane



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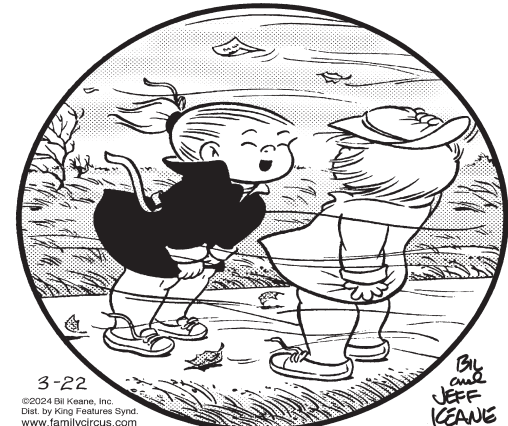


CRANKSHAFT

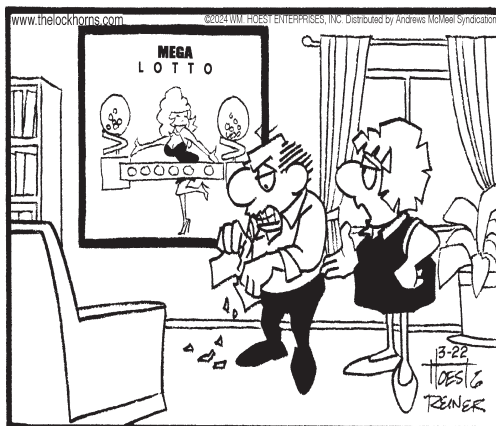


THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By Bil Keane



The LOCKHORNS



My Answer

By Dr. Billy Graham



The Bible is very clear that the Holy Spirit is God Himself

Question: I understand who God is, and who Jesus the Son of God is, but I have a hard time comprehending the Holy Spirit. — T.T.

Answer: Reverence for the Trinity is at the heart of the Christian faith. "For there are three that bear witness in heaven; the Father, the Word [Jesus], and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:7, NKJV). The Holy Spirit is not a thing and Scripture severely warns against mocking (blaspheming) the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 12:31).

There's a story of a young boy who asked his father, "How can I

believe in the Holy Spirit when I have never seen Him?" His father, an electrician, took the boy to a power plant and showed him the generators. "This is where the power comes from to heat our stove and to give us light. We can't see the power, but it's in that machine and in the power lines." Then he asked his son, "Do you believe in electricity?"

As the boy thought about it, his father explained that everyone believes in electricity because they see what it can do. Likewise, though we cannot see the Holy Spirit, believers in Christ know the results of His power in their lives. Sur-

rendering our lives to the Lord Jesus opens up the power source.

The Bible is very clear that the Holy Spirit is God Himself. When we yearn for God and desire His truth, we're experiencing the evidence of the Holy Spirit. A life touched by God's Spirit will run after sin no longer. It is never a question of how much we have the Spirit, but how much He has of us.

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

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TV schedule grid with columns for time slots (5 PM to 12:30 AM) and rows for various channels (WIMN, CBS, Antenna, ABC, NBC, etc.).

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 25 mins and a 'Yesterday's answer' section.



# Raiders' softball team looks to bounce back in 2024

By RYAN WALKER

Southern Wells had a tough season on the diamond last year, finishing with a 5-20 record and 0-6 in the ACAC.

This year, head coach Jason Riley said he's feeling positive for the season with some of the team's youth, experience and attitude in the early season practices.

"I think the biggest strength we have is how (the team) holds each other accountable and push each other to get better," Riley said. "Our goal is always to improve each and everyday. There is no I in team but their is a I in win. So I have them ask themselves this. We play as a team but how do I help us win? I want them to find the I to help us win games."



Sophomore pitcher Kyah Thomas fires a pitch during her freshman season. She will help lead a young, but more experienced Southern Wells softball team this year. (News-Banner file photo)

Four impact players on the Raiders' squad last year have graduated, leaving this year's team with no seniors on the roster.

Of those graduates, the team will need to replace its only member on the all-ACAC team from a year ago, Jady Yencer. The speedy outfielder hit .371 with a team-high 22 stolen bases and 22 runs. She also had a perfect fielding percentage.

Hailey Duncan, Raigen Tarr and Kayleigh Jones will be other bats in the lineup needed to fill up with, along with junior Brittany Costello, who will not be returning to the team this year after hitting a team-high .382 average.

"Last year, our seniors were true servant leaders and will be missed on and off the field," Riley said.

Every team goes through its hardships in the cycling out of players, but Riley is optimistic about his Raiders.

It starts with a freshmen duo that did more than enough to prove their worth in their first high school seasons last year.

Kyah Thomas and Emma Parks, now sophomores, were crucial at the dish and on the bump last season. The two were the top innings eaters, hurling 40-plus innings and 15 starts between them.

Parks showed out with a stellar 3.32 ERA and Thomas a 5.86 but threw 31 strikeouts.

Riley says that freshmen Kaylea Cofel and sophomore Maddy Sutton will also get the majority of the innings this season behind Thomas, while Gracie Reeves and Remi Holmes are candidates to help out too.

Parks and Thomas will help carry the offense as well, bringing back two of the top hitters from last year's lineup.

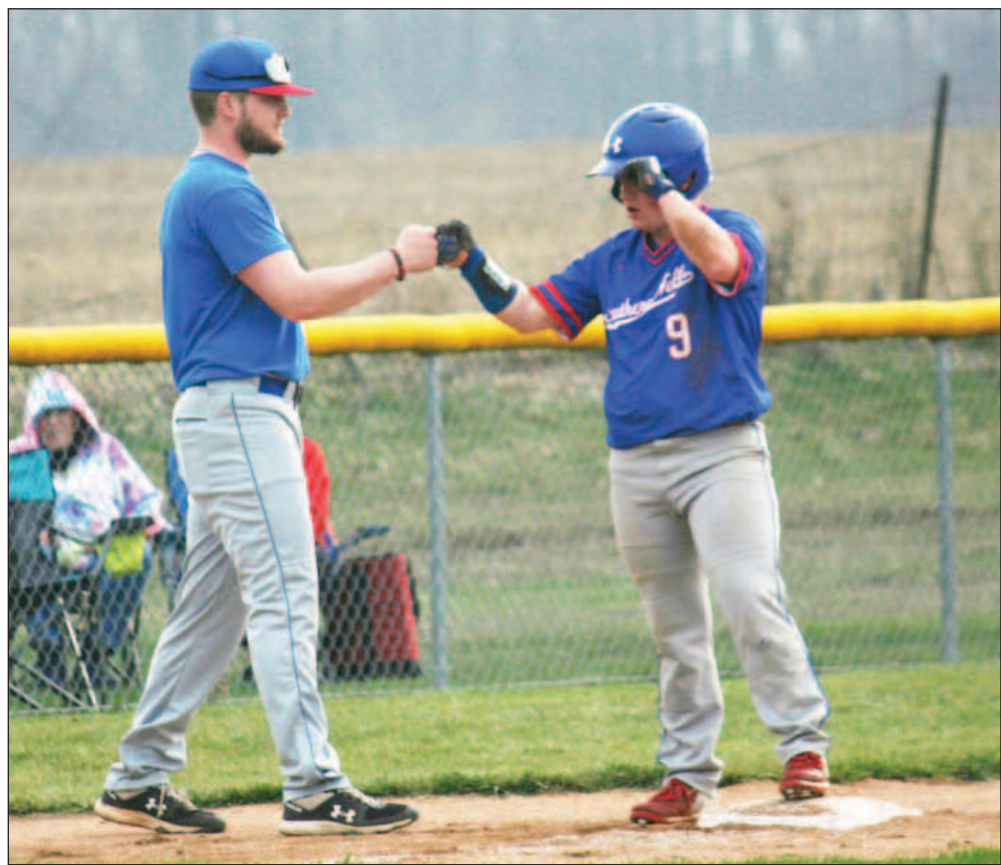
Parks was second on the team with 23 hits (.324 average) and drove in a team best 23 runs with 10 extra-base hits. Thomas hit .292 with nine RBI.

Collena Reeves will also be a top piece in the middle of the lineup slashing a .348 average and six extra-base knocks. Riley also shouted out Morgan Jones, Kenzie Paxson and Gracie Reeves with varsity experience and had solid seasons a year ago.

When asked about the team's outlook this year, Riley talked about his two juniors Collena Reeves and Paxson, as having over 50 games of varsity experience, and many other underclassmen who have had varsity games under their belt that makes a strong, depth rotation of athletes on the team.

Southern Wells will take all the wisdom it can get in a tough ACAC. Four teams finished with a 4-2 record or better in the conference: Woodlan (5-1) followed by 4-2 records by Heritage, South Adams and Jay County. South Adams was also solid despite a 3-3 conference record, finishing 19-10.

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



Southern Wells head baseball coach Evan Huffman (left) gives a fist bump to Case Boxell at third base. (News-Banner file photo)

## Coach Huffman to reload his roster in his second year with the Raiders

By RYAN WALKER

Southern Wells had a rough go-around on the baseball diamond last year, and will lose significant pieces to the team this year.

The Raiders finished 5-18 on the season, falling to a top-ranked Wes-Del squad in the opening round of the sectional tournament.

This will be year No. 2 for head coach Evan Huffman, leading his alma mater, and will have some adjustments to make on the field with recent graduates.

The first were his top two pitchers, Cody Perdue and Kedrik Sonnigsen. Perdue more than doubled Sonnigsen in innings pitched for the top spot, tossing 55.2 innings of work, while Sonnigsen finished second with 23 innings.

Sonnigsen will be missed most with his bat, hitting .339 with six extra base hits. He tied with fellow graduate Jenson Nusbaum as the team's batting champion.

The graduating class wasn't large, but more significant for what the players offered. The team will be also losing junior Bryar Gearheart, who would have been a leading

candidate in the dugout with his hitting ability.

For returners, the Raiders will bring back eight players with 20 or more at-bats. The top returners are Carson Smith and Wyatt Yoder.

Smith, who leads all returners with a .238 batting average, scored the second most runs for the Raiders and drove in six. Smith can play the outfield and third base, and will get time on the mound.

Yoder is the only other player to hit over .200 for Southern Wells that returns this year. He drove in five runs and hit .225 and will play in the outfield and pitch.

Other starters in the field will include Case Boxell, Caleb Johnson, Rugar Holmes, Trey Slusher, Peyton Miner and Sebastian Couch.

Smith and Yoder are also the top returners on the mound in terms of innings pitched. Smith finished the season with 15 innings of work, and Smith 7.1.

Another name to watch out for was Holmes, who threw 5.1 innings and compiled a 2.62 ERA.

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



Bluffton senior Eli Garrett (front row, third from left) signs his letter of intent with Indiana Tech at Bluffton High School Thursday morning. His family in the front row along with Bluffton coaches and staff members pose with Garrett. (Photo provided)

## Bluffton's Garrett signs with Indiana Tech for baseball

Bluffton's Eli Garrett signed his national letter of intent to play baseball at the college level for Indiana Tech Thursday morning.

The Tigers' senior middle infielder and pitcher will be joining a Warriors squad in the NAIA and WHAC Conference that just wrapped up a 33-17 2023 campaign.

Garrett has spent his entire high school baseball career on varsity and has hit over .300 in all three seasons. His career batting average is now up to .326, scoring 54 runs and driving in 28, according to MaxPreps.

He's also made an impact elsewhere, swiping 30 bags in his three seasons, and has nearly 52 innings under his belt on the mound.

Last season, Garrett missed six games

due to a lower-body injury, but still managed a .327 average with nine RBI and still managed a career-high 12 stolen bases.

He helped the Tigers finish 18-7, the best in his three years, and is looking to help improve that this season.

Indiana Tech has been a known program throughout the NAIA as a winning program and a threat to win the WHAC. The Warriors have had 17 straight winning seasons, 16 of them under head coach Kip McWilliams.

McWilliams has led the team to five WHAC championships and 12 NAIA Opening Round playoff appearances and an NAIA World Series berth in 2019.

Bluffton's scheduled to open its baseball season on April 4 at Blackford.

## High School Calendar

**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.

## RACING NEWS

### Reigning NASCAR champ Ryan Blaney wins pole Bristol race

By MARK LONG  
AP Sports Writer

Ryan Blaney has won the pole for Sunday's NASCAR race at Bristol Motor Speedway.

The reigning Cup Series champion covered the 0.533-mile concrete track in Bristol, Tennessee, in 15.356 seconds on Saturday. He edged Josh Berry for the No. 1 spot and will lead the field to the green flag in the Food City 500.

It was Blaney's 10th career pole in 11 seasons and his first since the spring race at Richmond Raceway in 2022.

"I think the track kind of caught everybody by surprise, honestly," Blaney said. "The (lap) time fall off, the grip loss behind the wheel was incredible, huge. It was who cannot mess up a lap and still put a decent time down."

"It was fun. It was fun working through it. I wish I could even do it over again to try to make our car even better because I think there was still some more out there."

NASCAR returned Bristol to normal for the first time in four years for the spring race. The famed short track added red clay each of the last three years. Reviews were mixed, and as the novelty wore off,

sub-par racing inside the bullring overshadowed any excitement that came with the series running on dirt for the first time since 1970.

In an effort to improve the racing and make sure the track has several equal lanes, workers put down a resin-based traction compound through the turns near the inside portion of the oval. It seemed far from perfect.

"I think someone peeped in the Goodyear rubber mixture, I'm not really sure," driver Denny Hamlin said. "It's definitely really different. It's kind of enjoyable 'cause everyone's so out in left field right now."

"It's certainly different to be the same tire (from 2023). I'm not really sure (about) the mixture of the resin and the tire. It's throwing all of us for a loop in the short term."

Blaney made the best of it in his No. 12 Ford for Team Penske. Berry was second in qualifying in another Ford for Stewart Haas Racing.

Hamlin was third in a Toyota, followed by Joey Logano and Chase Elliott. Chase Briscoe, Michael McDowell, William Byron, Bubba Wallace and Kyle Larson rounded out the top 10 in the final qualifying session.

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# Appeals court orders judge to probe claims of juror bias in Boston Marathon bomber's case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER  
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — A federal appeals court on Thursday ordered the judge who oversaw Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's trial to investigate the defense's claims of juror bias and determine whether his death sentence should stand.

A three-judge panel of the Boston-based 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals did not throw out Tsarnaev's death sentence. Defense lawyers had pushed for that while claiming bias by two people who sat on the jury that convicted him for his role in the bombing that killed three people and injured hundreds near the marathon's finish line in 2013.

But the appeals court found that the trial judge did not adequately probe Tsarnaev's allegations, and sent the case back to the judge for a new investigation. If the judge finds that either juror should have been disqualified, he should vacate Tsarnaev's sentence and hold a new penalty-phase trial to determine whether Tsarnaev should be sentenced to death, the appeals court said.

"And even then, we once again emphasize that the only question in any such proceeding will be whether Tsarnaev will face execution; regardless of the outcome, he will spend the rest of his life in prison," it said.

The U.S. attorney's office in Massachusetts declined to comment Thursday. The Justice Department can either ask the full 1st Circuit to hear the matter or go to the U.S. Supreme Court. Lawyers for Tsarnaev didn't immediately respond to emails seeking comment on the decision.

It's the latest twist in the long-running case, which has already been argued in front of the U.S. Supreme Court once. The high court in 2022 reinstated the death sentence imposed on 30-year-old Tsarnaev after the 1st Circuit threw out the sentence in 2020. The circuit court found then that the trial judge did not sufficiently question jurors about their exposure to extensive news coverage of the bombing. The Supreme Court justices voted 6-3 in 2022 when they ruled that the 1st Circuit's decision was wrong.

The 1st Circuit took another look at the case after Tsarnaev's lawyers urged it to examine issues the Supreme Court didn't consider. Among them was whether the trial judge wrongly forced the trial to be held in Boston and wrongly denied defense challenges to seating two jurors they say lied during questioning.

Despite a moratorium on federal executions imposed by Attorney General Merrick Garland, the Justice Department has continued to push to uphold the death sentence in Tsarnaev's case. The moratorium came after former President Donald Trump's administration put to death 13 inmates in its final six months.

Oral arguments before the three-judge 1st Circuit panel more than a year ago focused

on two jurors Tsarnaev's lawyers say were dishonest during the lengthy jury selection process.

One of them said she had not commented about the case online, but she had retweeted a post calling Tsarnaev a "piece of garbage." Another juror said none of his Facebook friends had commented on the trial, even though one had urged him to "play the part" so he could get on the jury and send Tsarnaev to "jail where he will be taken care of," defense attorneys say. Tsarnaev's lawyers raised those concerns during jury selection, but say the judge chose not to look into them further.

William Glaser, a Justice Department lawyer, acknowledged during oral arguments before the 1st Circuit appeals court that the jurors made inaccurate statements, but said other disclosures suggested they misremembered rather than lied. He argued that the trial judge did nothing wrong.

The appeals court said there are potentially "innocuous" explanations for the jurors' conduct, like they forgot about their social media posts or misunderstood the judge's questions. But the trial judge's "error was in failing to conduct an inquiry sufficient to rule out the more pernicious explanations," the appeals court said.

The appeals court panel voted 2-1 in favor of sending the case back down for more investigation into the jurors. Those who supported the idea were Judges William Kayatta Jr. and O. Rogerie Thompson, who were both nominated to the court by President Barack Obama.

Judge Jeffrey Howard, who was nominated by George W. Bush, dissented, writing that there was "ample basis for the district court to arrive at the judgment that the two jurors in question were not improperly biased."

Tsarnaev's guilt in the deaths of Lingzi Lu, a 23-year-old Boston University graduate student from China; Krystle Campbell, a 29-year-old restaurant manager from Medford, Massachusetts; and 8-year-old Martin Richard, of Boston, was not at issue in the appeal, only whether he should be put to death or imprisoned for life.

Defense lawyers argued that Tsarnaev had fallen under the influence of his older brother, Tamerlan, who died in a gun battle with police a few days after the April 15, 2013, bombing.

Tsarnaev was convicted of all 30 charges against him, including conspiracy and use of a weapon of mass destruction and the killing of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Police Officer Sean Collier during the Tsarnaev brothers' getaway attempt.

Prosecutors told jurors that the men carried out the attack to punish the United States for its wars in Muslim countries. In the boat where Tsarnaev was found hiding, he had scrawled a confession that referred to the wars and wrote, among other things, "Stop killing our innocent people and we will stop."



## Hoosier history

Fourth graders at Bluffton-Harrison Elementary School hosted a "Hoosier Hall of Fame" Tuesday. Students researched historical figures, including many famous Hoosiers, and impersonated them for students to interact with and ask questions. Dressed as Abraham Lincoln above is Wesley Sills and Amelia Earhart at right is Giovanna Martinez (Photos provided)

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