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River waters still high

The recent rain has kept the water level of certain rivers in Wells County high, leading to some flooding issues. Above and at right are photos of the Wabash River near the White Bridge on South County Road 450 East. Below, the Wabash river is running high near the Southwest Church Road Bridge near Vera Cruz. (Photos by Jonathan Snyder)



Special session needed to approve county's insurance

By HOLLY GASKILL

Wells County Commissioners again delayed approval of an insurance policy. They will hold a special session before the county's current policy expires.

Representatives from Walker-Hughes returned with quotes during the commissioners' meeting on Monday. However, the commissioners again stated the quotes undervalued county property, specifically the Wells County Jail and Carnegie Annex.

The same item had been discussed earlier this month, where the commissioners had asked for new quotes raising the value of the jail from \$15 million to \$25-30 million and new consideration for the annex, courthouse and highway garage. At both meetings, Commissioner Jeff Stringer said the county would be underinsured in the event of a total loss.

Representative Danica Dunning assured she would have new quotes by the end of the week, but the policy would need

approval by May. The commissioners' next meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m. on May 6.

As the conversation concluded, Stringer stated this has not been the first time they've had to hold a special session for a quote issue.

Also during the meeting, the commissioners were introduced to Ashleigh King, the recently hired director of Imagine Early. Imagine Early is a coalition between Adams and Wells counties to serve childcare needs.

King said she is working with Reusser on branding design and a website. She also plans to spend the first six months meeting with parents, providers and businesses to create an understanding of the current childcare needs in our community, noting that data often doesn't capture the greater story at hand.

The commissioners have committed to support the organization with \$25,000 annually for three years.

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Markle council vies for 'seat at the table' with economic development

By JONATHAN SNYDER

Markle's Town Council members have expressed its frustration with not being included in conversations about Wells County economic development.

During Wednesday's meeting, Council President Matthew Doss stressed that Markle's Town Council has not been contacted for input on the hiring process of a new economic development director, despite previous statements of desiring a unified plan for the county.

Council Vice-President Nicolas Lund noted that Markle is in a unique situation with the town split between Huntington and Wells counties. Because of the split, Markle has traditionally supported an economic development commission for both counties. Lund stated that Chad Kline, the former Wells director, had represented the town well.

Doss also stated he feels that

Markle must be a part of Wells County's initiative in hiring a new economic development director and wants Markle to be a part of the interview process for the role. The council decided that Doss would be proactive in ensuring Markle's seat at the table.

"It sounds like I'm madder than I actually am," Doss said. "But there are a lot of extra questions that we are not being keyed in on."

The council also stated that regardless of what happens with the EDC situation, they should look into all possible opportunities. One avenue mentioned was contracting an independent third party for the Wells County portion of Markle.

Markle also renewed its insurance contract with Walker-Hughes. While the contract was approved as presented, the council will be able to look at a revised policy to increase the collision deductible

(Continued on Page 2)

Boeing put under Senate scrutiny during hearings on safety

By DAVID KOENIG
AP Airlines Writer

An engineer at Boeing said Wednesday that the aircraft company, in rushing to produce as many planes as possible, is taking manufacturing shortcuts that could lead to jetliners breaking apart.

"They are putting out defective airplanes," the engineer, Sam Salehpour, told members of a Senate subcommittee.

Salehpour was testifying about Boeing's 787 Dreamliner, hundreds of which are in use by airlines, mostly on international routes. He spoke while another Senate committee held a separate hearing on the safety culture at

Boeing.

The dual hearings were a sign of the intense pressure on Boeing since a door-plug panel blew off a 737 Max jetliner during an Alaska Airlines flight in January. The company is under multiple investigations, and the FBI has told passengers from the flight that they might be victims of a crime. Regulators limited Boeing's rate of aircraft production, and even minor incidents involving its planes attract news coverage.

Salehpour alleged that workers at a Boeing factory used excessive force to jam together sections of fuselage on the Dreamliner. The extra force could compromise the

carbon-composite material used for the plane's frame, he said.

The engineer said he studied Boeing's own data and concluded "that the company is taking manufacturing shortcuts on the 787 program that could significantly reduce the airplane's safety and the life cycle."

Salehpour said that when he raised concern about the matter, his boss asked whether he was "in or out" — part of the team, or not. "Are you going to just shut up?" ... that's how I interpreted it," he said.

Boeing said retaliation is strictly prohibited. A spokesperson said the company encourages employ-

ees to speak up, and that since January it has seen more than a 500% increase in employee reports on a company portal.

The hearing of the investigations subcommittee marked the first time Salehpour has described his concern about the 787 and another plane, the Boeing 777, in public. Senators said they were shocked and appalled by the information. Democrats and Republicans alike expressed their dismay with the iconic American aircraft manufacturer.

The company says claims about the Dreamliner's structural integrity are false. Two Boeing engineering executives said this week that

in both design testing and inspections of planes — some of them 12 years old — there were no findings of fatigue or cracking in the composite panels. They suggested that the material, formed from carbon fibers and resin, is nearly impervious to fatigue, which is a constant worry with conventional aluminum fuselages.

The Boeing officials also dismissed another of Salehpour's allegations: that he saw factory workers jumping on sections of fuselage on another one of Boeing's largest passenger planes, the 777, to make them align.

Separately on Wednesday, the

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Outside



A beautiful spring day and a stormy spring night

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Communications breakdown left residents without alerts amid Maui fire

HONOLULU (AP) — As unpredictable wildfires roared across Maui last August, the head of the emergency management agency dragged his heels about returning to the island amid the unfolding crisis, while a broad communications breakdown left authorities in the dark and residents without emergency alerts, according to a report released Wednesday.

Communications problems were also encountered by the Hawaiian Electric Company, with officials unable to confirm that power lines were de-energized until well after flames had caused widespread damage, the report from the Hawaii Attorney General's office said.

It was the second of two major assessments out this week about the deadliest U.S. wildfire in a century. A report released Tuesday by the Western Fire Chiefs Association detailed the challenges facing the Maui Fire Department during the unprecedented series of blazes, including one that killed 101 people in the his-

toric town of Lahaina.

Attorney General Anne Lopez presented the latest report along with Steve Kerber, vice president of the Fire Safety Research Institute.

"When Attorney General Lopez contacted us, clearly we were paying a lot of attention to what was going on in Lahaina and really had the same question that she had. How is it possible that something like this could happen?" Kerber said.

Officials did not answer questions about cause or liability, saying it is only an initial reckoning and two more reports will follow. Investigators are still trying to get some documents from Maui County, officials said.

"We're going to continue this investigation, and we will follow it wherever it leads," Lopez said.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is also investigating, and its report, expected to pinpoint cause, will come out before the one-year anniversary.

The report released Wednesday says that five days before the flames

broke out, meteorologists warned that strengthening winds resulting from a hurricane south of Hawaii could lead to extreme wildfire risk Aug. 8. "Confidence in the development of critical fire weather conditions this many days away is quite rare, and we believe that this warrants a heads up to you," a National Weather Service forecaster said in an email to fire contacts Aug. 3.

Kerber described complex and "incredibly fast" fires with flames traveling at a rate of about a mile in 90 minutes.

The Maui Emergency Management Agency had posted to Facebook on Aug. 6 about a "serious fire and damaging wind threat" due to dry conditions as Hurricane Dora passed.

The agency's administrator, Herman Andaya, was off island at a conference on Oahu on Aug. 8 as the fires intensified. His call and text records show that he was getting updates from Gaye Gabuat, an administrative assistant. After a series of evacuations in Lahaina, Gabuat told Andaya that

"multiple people look overwhelmed," according to the report. Andaya asked if he should come home, to which Gabuat responded, "it may look okay."

After the fire had been burning for more than five hours, Gabuat told Andaya that flames had reached Front Street. Lahaina's commercial heart. Only then did Andaya respond that he had "better come home tomorrow."

By that time multiple areas had been evacuated, according to a situation report by Andaya's agency. Front Street had been closed along with the Lahaina bypass road, another key thoroughfare. In Lahaina alone, 29 utility poles were reported downed.

There was no immediate response to attempts Wednesday to reach Andaya, who resigned Aug. 18, via phone, email and social media.

Investigators said they requested incident activity logs and other records from the agency's emergency operations center, or EOC, on multiple occasions. Derek Alkonis, a manager with the

fire research institute, said they had received some information but not everything they had requested. "You'll find in the report that there is a difficulty with gaining information from the EOC," Alkonis said. "In terms of the reason for that challenge, it's going to be analyzed in subsequent reports."

The report also describes a breakdown in communication between police, firefighters and emergency officials after cell networks went down. Police and firefighters had to communicate using their handheld or car radios on closed channels that public officials and others could not listen to.

Meanwhile a stretched and limited dispatch center had single operators monitoring five or six channels at a time to keep up.

"With no cellular communication, residents and tourists were not able to receive emergency alerts, communicate with loved ones and/or to receive incoming or outgoing calls/texts," the report's authors wrote.

They detailed how one

police officer told other responders his daughter had been babysitting in a neighborhood that was hit by the fire. Without cell communications he had no way to check if she escaped, and it took two days before he confirmed she was OK.

Fire crews also became trapped, according to staffing logs included in the report. Around 4:30 p.m., one engine was destroyed and another broke down. A firefighter from one of the engines rescued the crews using a police department SUV, according to the logs.

Hawaiian Electric has acknowledged that a downed power line sparked a fire in Lahaina early on the morning of Aug. 8. Firefighters were still mopping up that fire at noon and waiting for a utility worker to arrive and confirm that the power lines had been de-energized. But he got there, he was unable to confirm the power had been cut off — information that would likely have helped fire crews assess the risk of re-ignition as well as the risk posed by other downed lines.

Senate rejects impeachment articles against Mayorkas, ending trial

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate dismissed all impeachment charges against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas on Wednesday, ending the House Republican push to remove the Cabinet secretary from office over his handling of the the U.S.-Mexico border and shutting down his trial before arguments even began.

Senators voted to dismiss both articles of impeachment and end the proceedings, with Democrats arguing that the articles were unconstitutional. The first article charged Mayorkas with "willful and systemic refusal to comply" with immigration law and second article charged him with a "breach of trust" for saying the border was secure. The votes were 51-48 and 51-49, both along party lines.

Senate Majority Leader

Chuck Schumer said the House Republicans' charges failed to meet "the high standard of high crimes and misdemeanors" and could set a dangerous precedent.

"For the sake of the Senate's integrity and to protect impeachment for those rare cases we truly need it, senators should dismiss today's charges," said Schumer, D-N.Y., as he opened Wednesday's session.

Senate Republicans had argued for a full impeachment trial after the House narrowly voted in February to impeach Mayorkas for his handling of the border, stating in the two articles that he "willfully and systematically" refused to enforce immigration laws.

An outright dismissal of House Republicans' prosecution of Mayorkas, with no chance to argue the case, is an embarrassing defeat

for House Republicans and embattled House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., who made the impeachment a priority. And it is likely to resonate politically for both Republicans and Democrats in a presidential election year when border security has been a top issue.

Republicans argue that President Joe Biden has been weak on the border as arrests for illegal crossings skyrocketed to more than 2 million people during the last two years of his term, though they have fallen from a record high of 250,000 in December amid heightened enforcement in Mexico. Democrats say that instead of impeaching Mayorkas, Republicans should have accepted a bipartisan Senate compromise aimed at reducing the number of migrants who come into the U.S. illegally.


House impeachment

managers delivered the charges to the Senate on Tuesday, standing in the

well of the Senate and reading them aloud to a captive audience. But they did not

get a chance to present the case before the Senate dismissed it.

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