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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2024

BLUFFTON, INDIANA • Wells County's Hometown Connection

\$1.00

Man gets maximum sentence for murder of his grandmother

By HOLLY GASKILL

A Markle man was sentenced to 85 years in prison exactly one year after police issued a warrant for his arrest for the murder of his grandmother.

Anthony Castleman, 38, was found guilty of the first-degree murder of Bernice "Dianna" Eubank, 72, on Oct. 31.

Eubank was found covered in debris outside of her rural Markle home, where Castleman also lived, on Nov. 12, 2023. Her body reportedly had 36 stab wounds. A warrant was

issued the following day and Castleman was located six weeks later in Rochelle, Georgia.

The Huntington County jury deliberated for under 30 minutes for the charge and nine minutes for an enhancement as a habitual offender. Castleman received the maximum sentence — 65 years for first-degree murder and 20 years as a habitual offender.

Prosecutor Jeremy Nix referred to Castleman as the "worst of the worst" in the hearing Wednesday afternoon. Nix outlined Castle-

man's 26-year criminal history, which began a pre-teen with child molestation and battery, included multiple instances of drug abuse and acts of physical violence against loved ones, and concluded with the murder of his grandmother.

"Harming not strangers, not friends — but family," added Prosecutor Chris Harvey. "People who unconditionally love him."

Special Judge Samuel Conrad from Adams County stated there were no mitigating factors to consider in the sentence, calling it



Anthony Castleman gestures toward the camera as he leaves the Huntington County Courthouse after his sentencing on Wednesday. (Photo by Holly Gaskill)

a "shocking and heinous crime." Conrad emphasized that not only was Castleman convicted of murder, but he

allegedly "slaughtered (his own grandmother)," slashing her face, repeatedly stabbing her, causing blunt force

trauma, raping her, attempting to hide her body, stealing her money and car to

(Continued on Page 2)

'Blue collar' dreams surround Bourbon MD

By JONATHAN SNYDER

A new place primarily for bourbon and cigars is scheduled to open early next year, with two Bluffton residents' love for both a driving force.

The new bar, Bourbon MD, will be located on Market Street, with a focus on atmosphere and a wide selection of bourbons and cigars available for purchase. Owners Joey Mossburg and Nathan Dirig both currently work on power lines and want to have the opportunity to



Nathan Dirig, left, and Joey Mossburg stand in front of their unfinished store front in downtown Bluffton. (Photo by Jonathan Snyder)

spend time closer to family.

Mossburg, a bourbon collector, and Dirig, a cigar lover, said that a combination of Bluffton's downtown growth and a desire to connect with the community brought the business to light.

"I moved down here from Fort

Wayne six years ago to get to the Norwell school district, and I just fell in love with the sense of community and the people that I met," Mossburg said. "I've noticed that it's such a cool town, because everybody loves to come together

(Continued on Page 2)

Police continue the search for armed robber

By SYDNEY KENT

Police are searching for a man wanted for an armed robbery committed Tuesday morning in Liberty Center.

According to a press release from the Wells County Sheriff's Department, police were called to the Liberty Center Gas and Deli around 6:24 a.m. on Tuesday for a reported armed robbery.

The caller reported a man attempted to buy beef jerky before putting it back due to the price. He then returned to the counter with a firearm.

"The suspect was described as a young black male wearing a black hooded sweatshirt," the release says. "He produced a firearm and demanded all the cash in the register. He then left in a black pick-up truck traveling Northbound on County Road 300 West."

Anyone with information about the suspect is advised to contact Detective Green with the WCSD at (260) 824-3426.

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State lawmakers get first glimpse of budget asks

Treasurer wants to double education savings accounts funding

By LESLIE

BONILLA MUÑIZ

Indiana Capital Chronicle
Indiana's State Budget Committee on Tuesday kicked off its first hearing for the upcoming 2026 and 2027 fiscal years. Lawmakers are set to file an initial vision for the \$40 billion-plus biennial budget in January.

Judicial agencies, three statewide elected officers and a higher education body made their cases before the committee, which is comprised of four lawmakers and the state's budget director.

Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Loretta Rush asked lawmakers for an additional \$3 million to develop a statewide jail management system, \$1.5 million to fund security

measures for local courts and \$1.5 million to implement "safe baby courts" protecting vulnerable young children.

"This is the most difficult project the court has ever encountered," Rush said of INJail, the statewide jail management system. She said that courts around the state currently use about 20 different systems, resulting in communication breakdowns, delayed releases and other problems.

Finishing INJail, Rush added, "really would put Indiana quite far along with regard to public safety and the data." Though it's expected to cost \$3 million annually to develop, Rush's staff said operating and maintenance expenses would eventually be lower, at an estimated \$1 million

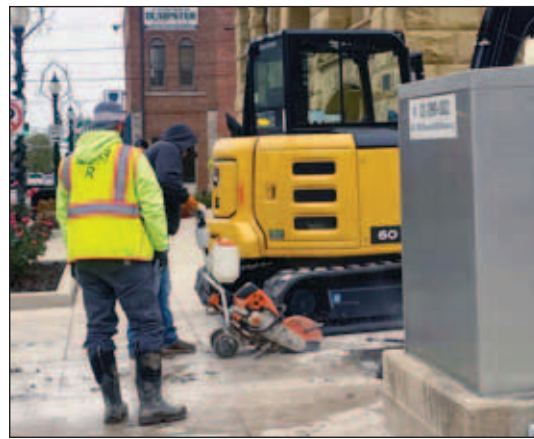
annually.

Appeals Court Judge Paul Felix asked lawmakers for money to expand the court's "Appeals on Wheels" traveling oral arguments program, increase salaries and keep up with information technology costs.

While the Commission on Court Appointed Attorneys and Indiana Public Defender Council requested to keep their funding flat, the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council came with larger asks.

Andre Miksha, deputy director of administrative and civil law, said the Legislature doesn't put enough money in the agency's general fund account to pay all of the employees that should get their salaries from there. The council has been pull-

(Continued on Page 2)



Repair closes courthouse

The Wells County Courthouse closed Wednesday afternoon due to a water break. There was no damage inside, custodian Bobbie Studebaker said, but the water needed turned off for repairs. Pictured, Highway Department employees cut into the concrete on the corner of Main and Market streets to access the pipe. Studebaker said the courthouse would re-open once the water was turned back on, likely by Thursday. (Photos by Holly Gaskill)

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Outside



And the rains came and will leave again tomorrow

Today	Friday	Saturday
High 55	High 54	High 56
Low 45	Low 42	Low 41

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Markle man sentenced

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purchase drugs, and fleeing the state.

"Humanity is something you're apparently not familiar with," Conrad said.

Castleman maintained his claim of innocence and alleged he was framed for the crime as he took the stand in his defense. When given the opportunity to make a statement Wednesday, he said, "I may be (found) guilty, but I sure as hell didn't kill my grandmother."

Castleman also shared his intent to appeal his conviction and was appointed a public defender from Brookville.

Six members of the family gave statements during the hearing. Most referred to Castleman as "AJ," a nickname he had gone by until he "cut ties with lies," he told the jury during his testimony.

"I don't know who you are anymore," said Linda Browning, Castleman's aunt. "You want to go by 'Anthony'? It still doesn't change who you are. You

were her grandson."

Both Browning and Patsy Fields wore "The Golden Girls" shirts in the courtroom. Fields explained that the four sisters, including Candy Daughtery, often compared themselves to the TV show characters. "One of 'The Golden Girls' have died," Fields said.

In her statement, Daughtery said she often prays for her sisters and adds Eubank's name before realizing she's gone. "My God loves you," she said to Castleman. "He talks to me about you ... I pray for you. I pray for your soul because your soul is in the hands of God — your judgment is in the hands of God."

"I pray that you find God and that he helps me forgive you," Fields added.

Fields said some family members had asked Eubank not to house Castleman and that she knew Eubank was scared of him. Even so, Eubank was the only one who would take him in and she "worried about you being cold (and) if you had something in your belly,"

Fields recalled.

Billy Fields, Eubank's nephew, said his aunt had helped him after he "made some bad choices" and he got back on his feet. Billy Fields said Castleman had taken someone truly kind from the family and community.

"I've spent this last year watching my mom and my aunts crumble," Fields said, adding, "I hope the next time he leaves prison, it's in a body bag."

Two of Eubank's children also spoke, including Castleman's mother, Tiffanee Cole.

After she was released as a witness, Cole sat behind her son in the courtroom gallery during the trial and Castleman often attempted to communicate with her. On Wednesday, Cole said that she knew people might not understand her choice, but she felt "Mamie," referring to Eubank, would've done the same thing.

"I miss the old AJ," she said. "The last time you came out of prison, you were a different person ... You or I will die before you

get out."

Eubank's son, John Chaney, had known his mother for only five years before her death. His mother and father, Richard, had Chaney when they were just teenagers. The couple tried to run away together, but Eubank was eventually placed in a home for unwed mothers and her baby was taken by the state days after his birth.

Chaney found his parents in 2018 — just weeks after Richard's death. "I had finally found the love I've been searching for," he said Wednesday. "My life was forever shattered on Nov. 12 of last year."

Chaney felt robbed of more time with his mom and mourned the loss for his children and grandchildren, including a three-year-old granddaughter he says looks just like Eubank's baby photos.

"This is something that's been senseless," he said. Referring to Castleman's previous charges, Chaney added, "He should have never been on the streets."

Bourbon MD

(Continued from Page 1)
and socialize. I'm one of the types of people that thrive off being with people all the time. I don't think you can have enough friends. And so, if you can create an environment or place where you can bring as many people as you can and have fun, why not?"

Despite Mossburg and Dirig's self-proclaimed "outsider" status, they both said that, in their short time in the city, Bluffton has quickly embraced them. Both desire to be involved in the community and give back to a city that has meant a lot to them, discussing potential golf outings and a Rivergreenway clean-up. Bluffton has responded to Mossburg and Dirig's plans, with people wishing them well both in person and on their Facebook page.

"It's great to open a building and make new friends and build customer clientele," Mossburg said. "My thought is, you can make all the money in the world, but if you're not giving it back (to the community) to me, that gives me the gratification that is meaningful."

"The community has just accepted us," Dirig said. "Me being an outsider, I haven't felt like an oddball out. It's been fantastic."

Mossburg and Dirig plan to create a lounge with leather couches and seating. They plan to offer allocated bourbons and cigars, which are rarer and will give Bourbon MD a broader selection than most bars. Traditional whiskeys and simple cocktails will be available, along with a selection of non-alcoholic beverages with similar tastes

to their alcoholic counterparts. Customers will be allowed to smoke cigars in the facility with air vents destroying approximately 85% of ambient smoke, according to Dirig.

"It'll be more of a lounge," Dirig said. "More of a social gathering place that people in Bluffton and the community can come to. We'll definitely have our varieties of bourbons and our varieties of cigars, so everybody can get a little taste of everything."

"We want everybody to feel welcome," Mossburg said. "We're blue collar right now, working on power lines, so we want everybody to feel like they are in an upscale environment and give them the best experience."

jonathan@news-banner.com

State lawmakers

(Continued from Page 1)
ing from federal child support dollars to "make ends meet" instead.

"By February each year, we are moving individuals from our general fund and starting to pay them out of our IV-D monies," Miksha said. "And there are some employees in our staff that, although they aren't necessarily IV-D employees, see their compensation come out of that fund."

The agency wants an additional \$626,000 in its general fund to fix that, as well as a combined \$932,000 in salary increases, benefit premium updates and other costs. It also asked for an additional \$1.5 million to add and retain High-Tech Crime Unit staff and pay for forensic analysis software.

Sen. Ryan Mishler, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee noted that the operations and High-Tech Crime Unit requests would be 50% increases or more.

"I mean, people are coming in here asking for two and three (percent increases)," Mishler, R-Mishawaka, said. "That's a pretty bold ask."

Statewide officers present

Three of Indiana's four statewide elected officials' agencies appeared before the committee Tuesday. Attorney General Todd Rokita's office wasn't on the schedule.

Comptroller Elise Nishalla asked to keep her agencies' budget flat.

Treasurer Daniel Elliott, however, asked lawmakers to consider doubling his office's allotment for education scholarship account (ESA) from \$10 million to \$20 million. Families can use the scholarships to pay for educational programs, therapies, services and more for their disabled children and non-disabled siblings.

"We now, for the first time, have a waiting list," Elliott said. "And part of the reason for that ask for that increase is because we literally have families with disabled children who would like to be on this program and are not able to be."



Treasurer Daniel Elliott presents during a State Budget Committee meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 12, 2024. (Photo by Leslie Bonilla Muñiz)

His staff said the \$10 million has been enough for about 800 students. There are more than 600 — worth \$8 million — on the waitlist.

Sen. Fady Qaddoura, D-Indianapolis, suggested Indiana could save money on high administrative costs by moving the program to the Department of Education or Commission for Higher Education. He questioned why the state's chief investment officer is administering education money.

"While, yes, we do investments, I'm extremely passionate, as you know, about school choice programs and I feel like we've done an excellent job," Elliott said, noting that his office has earned national recognition for how it runs the program.

Qaddoura was still skeptical in comments to the Capital Chronicle.

"I respect his passion. I just disagree with his position," Qaddoura said of Elliott. "I don't think the treasurer's office is responsible for educational outcomes in the state of Indiana. His recommendation to double the size of the ESA ... should have been a discussion with the Department of Education, with educational experts and policy experts, in consultation with our schools across the state ... This should be in a piece of legislation that is presented to the committee on education, and not just a finance number presented on the treasurer's budget for the next two years."

Rep. Ed DeLaney, D-Indianapolis, also went on the attack. He asked why the treasurer's office is the sole trustee for the State Police Pension Trust, and why that fund isn't under the \$50 billion Indiana Public Retirement System.

"We work with them directly and they have a voice," Elliott said, arguing that fund members can call him and his team. "They are having a hard time doing that with something as large as INPRS."

Elliott noted that his fund's returns are better than the system's returns, prompting DeLaney to ask, "Do you think you should run INPRS?" in the contentious exchange.

"No, sir. I did not make a criticism. What I did is I pointed out that we are doing very well with what we've been given," Elliott later said.

His office also asked for more money to cover higher salaries and inflation-related increases, and to

add staff.

The Secretary of State's Office, meanwhile, sought additional funding to add staff, sustain its investor education and financial literacy programs, maintain voter education and outreach programming, cover pay and benefit increases, pay for voter list maintenance, upgrade the statewide voter registration system's software and more.

Secretary of State Diego Morales did not appear. Instead, Deputy Secretary Jerry Bonnet said that statutorily required voter list maintenance is time-consuming for counties, so it's done in years without federal elections. And, he said, the voter registration system more than 15 years old — near the end of its life.

The Commission for Higher Education also presented, although the committee will hear change requests from public colleges and universities on Wednesday.

Weather

Thursday, November 14, 2024

(24-hour observations at 9:54 p.m. Wednesday)
High: 52; Low: 33; Precipitation: 0.13 inches of rain
Wabash River Level (at the Main Street bridge): 1.20 feet at 1:45 p.m. Wednesday

Wells County forecast

Today: Rain likely before 7 a.m., then showers likely, mainly between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m. Cloudy, with a high near 55. South wind 10 to 15 mph becoming southwest in the afternoon. Winds could gust as high as 25 mph. Chance of precipitation is 70%. New precipitation amounts between a tenth and quarter of an inch possible.

Tonight: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 45. Northwest wind 5 to 10 mph.

Friday: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 54. Northwest wind around 5 mph.

Friday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 42. Calm wind.

Saturday: Partly sunny, with a high near 56.

Saturday Night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 41.

Sunday: Mostly cloudy, with a high near 60.

Sunday Night: A 30% chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 45.

Monday: A 20% chance of showers after 1 p.m. Partly sunny, with a high near 61.

Monday Night: Showers likely. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 49. Chance of precipitation is 60%.

Tuesday: A 50% chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 63.

Tuesday Night: A chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 44.

Wednesday: A chance of showers. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 53.

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OBITUARIES

Jeffrey Lee Gephart, 62

Jeffrey Lee Gephart, 62, of Montpelier, passed away on Nov. 11, 2024, at the intersection of Monroe Street and Highway 18 in Montpelier when a utility truck and his motorcycle collided. Jeff was born to the late Jacob L. "Jake" Gephart and Frances Mae (Cook) Cason on Jan. 20, 1962.

Survivors include his stepmother, Joyce Gephart, of Gas City; son, Jarrod (Heather) Gephart, of Hartford City; three granddaughters; siblings, Rita Bennett, of Montpelier, Becky Pauley, of Hartford City, Dewight (Debbie) Allen, of Alexandria, Robin (Jerry) Allmond,

of Anderson; and several nieces and nephews.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brother-in-law, Billy J. Pauley, Jr.; and great niece, Harper Lyn Steed.

Family and friends may gather to share and remember at Walker & Glancy Funeral Home, located at 109 W. Windsor Street, Montpelier, on Saturday, Nov. 16, 2024, from 2-4 p.m. A service to celebrate Jeff's life will follow at 4 p.m. with Pastor Steve Rogers officiating.

Arrangements have been entrusted to Walker & Glancy Funeral Home in Montpelier, Indiana.



Pictured cutting the ribbon are John Beeks and Craig Cantwell, surrounded by family, friends, staff and Chamber Ambassadors. (Photo submitted)

Par & Below opens to the public, offering year-round golfing fun

The Wells County Chamber of Commerce and its Ambassadors recently celebrated the grand opening and Ribbon Cutting of Par & Below, a new indoor golf facility. Officially opening its doors in October 2023, Par & Below is located at 927 N Main Street in Bluffton. Owned by John Beeks and Craig Cantwell, the facility provides a unique, fun space where golfers of all ages and abilities can enjoy the game year-round, regardless of the weather.

Par & Below is staffed from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 7 days a week from October to April for all to enjoy. Members of Par and Below enjoy after-hours access 24/7, 365 days a year. Memberships are affordable and give not only after-hour access but discounted golfing on all hours played. This business model offers unmatched flexibility for golfers with unconventional schedules or those looking to practice outside of traditional business hours. This round-the-clock accessibility makes it perfect for spontaneous golfing, for golfers that work off shifts or a group wanting to sneak away from a holiday gathering to hit some balls. The facility's cutting-edge technology delivers instant feedback on golf swings, enabling golfers to refine their skills in real time and continue improving throughout the year.

Whether you're a seasoned golfer fine-tuning your swing or a beginner discovering the game, Par & Below creates an engaging, educational space for families and individuals alike. "Our goal was to build a place where younger generations could cultivate a passion for golf," said Beeks. "It's about fostering an environment where both begin-

ners and experienced golfers can come together to learn and have fun."

Cantwell added, "We aim to create an affordable, fun, and welcoming space where everyone can enjoy golf, no matter the weather outside. Whether you're practicing your swing, having fun with friends, or hosting an event, we're excited to provide a space for families, friends and businesses to gather, celebrate and enjoy the game. It's a place where the love of golf can grow and be shared by all."

The facility features state-of-the-art virtual golf simulators, offering a large variety of popular golf courses and fun golf games, including the popular "Candy Land" golf course, which has quickly become a favorite among younger visitors. In addition to golf, guests can enjoy other fun activities like simulated putt golf, skeet ball, and field goals, making Par & Below the perfect spot for both practice and entertainment.

Par & Below includes three public bays and two private bays, ideal for individual play, group events or parties. For special occasions such as corporate gatherings, birthdays or bachelor/bachelorette parties, the facility is open to these events at any time throughout the year. They also allow food catering/delivery/carry-in services for these special events and for longer sim rentals. Club rentals are available for guests who don't have their own, ensuring a convenient experience for all.

The facility also offers

memberships, private lessons, and the option to store golf clubs on-site, making it convenient for regular visitors. A full selection of snacks and beverages is available for those looking to relax and enjoy the experience.

"We wanted to bring something special to Bluffton, especially during the winter months when there isn't much to do," explained Beeks. "We wanted to create a space where people can still enjoy golf, even when they can't be outside. It's also a great way to introduce more people to the game, especially younger golfers or beginners who may not yet feel comfortable on a traditional golf course."

Par & Below is now accepting reservations via their website, although walk-ins are always welcome. To ensure the best experience, reservations are recommended during peak hours. For more information on memberships, pricing or to schedule a tee time, visit Par & Below at 927 N Main Street, Bluffton, or online at www.parandbelow.com. You can also connect with them on Facebook and Instagram.

VISITATION & SERVICES

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Obituary Policy

The News-Banner and Ossian Journal publishes "basic" obituaries free of charge for "local" deaths. "Basic" obituaries will include the deceased's name, age, community of record, date and place of death, basic genealogical information, the date, time and location of calling hours and services and the name of the funeral home handling arrangements.

If additional information and/or a photo is desired to be included, or if the deceased does not meet the definitions of a "local" person, there is a charge.

Area funeral homes will provide details on the policy and will coordinate obituary publication.

Police Notebook

INCIDENTS

City:

Tuesday, 3:02 p.m., Main Street and Dustman Road. Citation issued for operating with expired plates.

Tuesday, 6:12 p.m., 400 block of Eastmoor Drive. Report of loud music. Resident advised of noise ordinance.

Wednesday, 8:09 a.m., Hunter Road and Dustman Road. Multiple calls about a sick deer running into traffic in area.

Wednesday, 1100 block of West South Street. Report of theft.

Wednesday, 12:56 p.m., Walmart. Seven tires stolen.

County:

Tuesday, 1:02 p.m., 600 Southeast S.R. 116, Bluffton. Report of harassment.

Tuesday, 2:48 p.m., 600 W and 625 S, Warren. Caller reported man walking in middle of road.

Tuesday, 5:53 p.m., U.S. 224 and 300 W, Uniondale.

Car versus deer.

Tuesday, 11:15 p.m., 5300 W 1100 S, Montpelier. Caller reported man tried to ask for help and ran away when caller offered to contact police. Unable to locate.

Tuesday, 11:47 p.m., 450 E and River Road, Bluffton. Caller reported striking sign on River Road.

Tuesday, 11:58 p.m., Wells County Jail. Warrant served to Daniel Boyer.

Wednesday, 3:53 a.m., Lancaster Chapel United Methodist. Officer checked on vehicle in parking lot, subject was too tired to drive on way home from hospital in Fort Wayne.

Wednesday, 6:38 a.m., 4700 S 100 E, Bluffton. Report of dog chasing cat.

ARRESTS

Dominique Denzel Kirby, 31, Bluffton; domestic battery in the presence of a child and deception — identity, both Level 6 felonies, and possession of marijuana,

a Class B misdemeanor. No bond set.

Mitchell Lee Buzzard, 40, Huntington; invasion of privacy, a Class A misdemeanor. No bond set.

Daniel Alton Boyer, 41, Ossian; operating with an ACE of .15 or more and operating while intoxicated, both Level 6 felonies. No bond set.

Terron Jamarr Wimes, 40, Fort Wayne; possession of narcotic drug, a Level 6 felony, and possession of paraphernalia, a Class C misdemeanor. Bond set at \$5,500.

Kristy Jane Thompson, 35, Bluffton; maintaining a common nuisance - controlled substances and possession of a narcotic drug, both Level 6 felonies, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a Class A misdemeanor, and possession of paraphernalia, a Class C misdemeanor. Bond set at \$12,000.

Holcomb announces two new projects to help northeast Indiana steel mill

By NIKI KELLY

Indiana Capital Chronicle

Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb and Indiana Department of Transportation Commissioner Mike Smith on Wednesday announced two new interchanges in the northeast region. One interchange will be located at the current intersection of U.S. 30 and County Road 700 East while the other will be at U.S. 30 and a County Road 600 East overpass.

The new projects near Columbia City are in coordination with Steel Dynamics, Inc. They were not previously on the state's five-year strategic plan, INDOT confirmed.

"Business is booming in northeast Indiana," Holcomb said. "Each year we're moving 724 million tons of freight through the Hoosier state, and that number is only going to grow. We're working to put the necessary infrastructure in place to continue that trend both safely and efficiently, providing a competitive advantage for manufacturing and distribution here in Indiana."

Both projects will soon enter the design phase and continue through the development process before moving to construction. Funding for the proposed interchange and overpass will be split between Steel Dynamics and INDOT.

"This is just one example of how INDOT is partnering with businesses and in this case, one of the largest steel producers in the United States, to deliver transportation infrastructure solutions," said Commissioner Smith. "Our economy relies on the efficient, reliable, safe, and secure movement of goods, materials, and services. We're looking at construction getting underway as soon as 2029."

INDOT Spokesman Natalie Garrett said the projects will be added to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program in an upcoming amendment.

"With construction currently planned for 2029, INDOT can incorporate these projects without delay to others. The cost share between the state and Steel Dynamics also assists our ability to add these projects to the STIP," she said.

"We are excited to collaborate with INDOT on the proposed future improvements to U.S. 30 near our Structural and Rail Division in Columbia City," said Barry T. Schneider, President and Chief Operating Officer of Steel Dynamics. "Safety is core to our values, and we welcome the opportunity to assist with the announced infrastructure plans to improve safety on U.S. 30 for our team members and community."

Supreme Court denies legal challenge of Indiana's ballot access law

By NIKI KELLY

Indiana Capital Chronicle

John Rust's legal challenge over Indiana's party affiliation statute is official-ly over.

In June, he appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States — seeking review of the Indiana Supreme Court's split decision that stymied his candidacy to run for U.S. Senate as a Republican this year.

But SCOTUS considered the 217-page petition last month and denied it without comment on Oct. 7.

He had argued that the justices should revisit Indiana's "harsh ballot access laws" that keep him "and over 81% of all Hoosiers off of primary ballots."

The basis for the state panel's decision was an Indiana party affiliation law that prohibits candidates from running whose last two primary votes don't match the party they wish to represent.

He said the court only accepts 1% of cases so the rejection was not surprising but disappointing.

"It is unfortunate that the U.S. Supreme Court is not going to take this opportunity to clarify ballot access law because issues still remain. The split Indiana Supreme Court opinion is far from clear and thus, ballot access issues will contin-

ue to recur in Indiana," Rust said in a statement.

While his federal maneuver failed, Rust said he will continue to fight for ballot access at the state level.

"This is not and has never been about one man's ballot access. It is about ALL Hoosier voters who are disenfranchised and about our state of Indiana having the lowest voter turnout in the nation. I will never stop fighting for Hoosiers to have choices on our ballots."

Ryan Shouse, who represented Jackson County Republican Party Chair Amanda Lowery on behalf of Lewis and Wilkins, LLP, said the results shows Indiana's reasonable requirements to appear on a primary ballot are constitutionally sound.

"We fought to protect the validity of these reasonable requirements from a repeated Democrat voter who tried to buy a seat at the table in a Republican primary instead of playing by the rules," he said.

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Nothing describes our civic health better than voting

There is no substitute for just showing up. Sometimes I wish there was one, but there just isn't.

The relentless polling that exhausted Americans during the last three months of the presidential campaigns never really swung all that much, no matter what the drama of the day was. By the time Labor Day arrived, the persuasion part of the national campaign was largely over.

I was skeptical of every undecided voter this year.

The presidential choices were so stark, remaining voter indecisiveness was really about whether they would vote at all, not whether they would choose Harris or Trump.

About nine million fewer Americans voted for president this year than in 2020, according to unofficial results as several states are still counting. Based on the estimated adult population in the country of 271 million, that means about 54% of eligible voters participated in the presidential election. That is down from 60% in 2020 but is an identical participation rate to 2016.

The old adage that Democrats perform better when turnout is better rings true again this year. I believe the adage is true on a macro level, and the swings over the last three elections confirm that. But 2020 was a year like no other, so that likely deserves an asterisk more than a medal.

It is difficult for a civic-minded person like me to accept that nearly half of Americans aren't participating in their inherited gift of self-governance. It is truly a gift. And when I say, "it is difficult" to accept these shameful participation rates, I am editing out the necessary profanity while speaking through grinding teeth. What is truly difficult to me, is forgiving those who don't show up for this most basic civic duty.

That's America. And that data is maddening in and of itself. But then there's Indiana.

Hoosier data

Early voting lines seemed to be a good harbinger but didn't last. Democrats have plenty of things keeping them from competing well here, but no aspect is more important than participation. I've written it many times before that the party needs a movement to reestablish its relevance. And movements require attendance.

So, where should the party look for the catalyst to achieve better participation? Always start at the top. In Indiana, the top is Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett. He is the highest ranking Democrat in the state, and he represents the largest number of Democrat voters. Right next to Hogsett sits Indianapolis Rep. Andre Carson, who was actually on the ballot this year. Neither are even trying to get voters to the polls. Their shared apathy matches the city's numbers.

Hayleigh Columbo reported for the Indianapolis Star last month, "There were more than 4.8 million registered voters in Indiana as of this year's Oct. 7 registration deadline, according to the Indiana Secretary of State's office ... Comparatively, 4.75 million Hoosiers were registered to vote ahead of the 2020 election." Indiana ranked 39th in the nation in 2020 and dropped to 40th this year.

That's specific to registrations though, which is a subset of participation.

Around 2.799 million Hoosiers voted for governor this year, down from 3,020,000 in 2020. But the population has also grown slightly. Therefore, the participation rate reduction is even larger than the "turnout" reduction here.

Turnout stats aren't yet finalized for Indiana — 24 counties had not yet reported — but the average so far is 55%. That is much lower than the 65% for 2020 and even the 58% in 2016.

Nowhere is the participation rate more embarrassing in Indiana than in Marion County.

According to World Population Review, there are 732,685 adults in Marion County. Approximately 350,000 people voted here. So, when the Indianapolis Star reports that the turnout rate in Indianapolis is 53.8%, the participation rate is worse, at 47.8%.

That's right, less than half of the adults living in the state's capital city vote. To me, this is baffling. I can't imagine that voting is easier anywhere in Indiana than in Indianapolis, yet the city is not in the same universe as, say, Hamilton County, directly to the north.

A little over 70% of registered voters showed up in Hamilton County this year, and that turnout percentage is also a slight decline from previous years. Oh, to be as bad as suburbia!

Indiana's voter turnout is worst in its most urban counties, and best in its suburban. That seems to track with national trends. Why? I don't have a definitive answer, but as you might guess, I certainly have advice.

Campaigns have two primary missions. First, to persuade voters that the candidate is the best one. Second, to inspire voters who agree to participate.

It's tiresome to listen to pundits say that Indiana Democrats need to move right if they want to win. Democrats aren't even showing up well enough to conclude such a thing.

And a funny thing happens when people do show up. They become aware of what is possible. Indiana ranks so poorly in so many ways, the story advocating for the status quo is a hard sell.

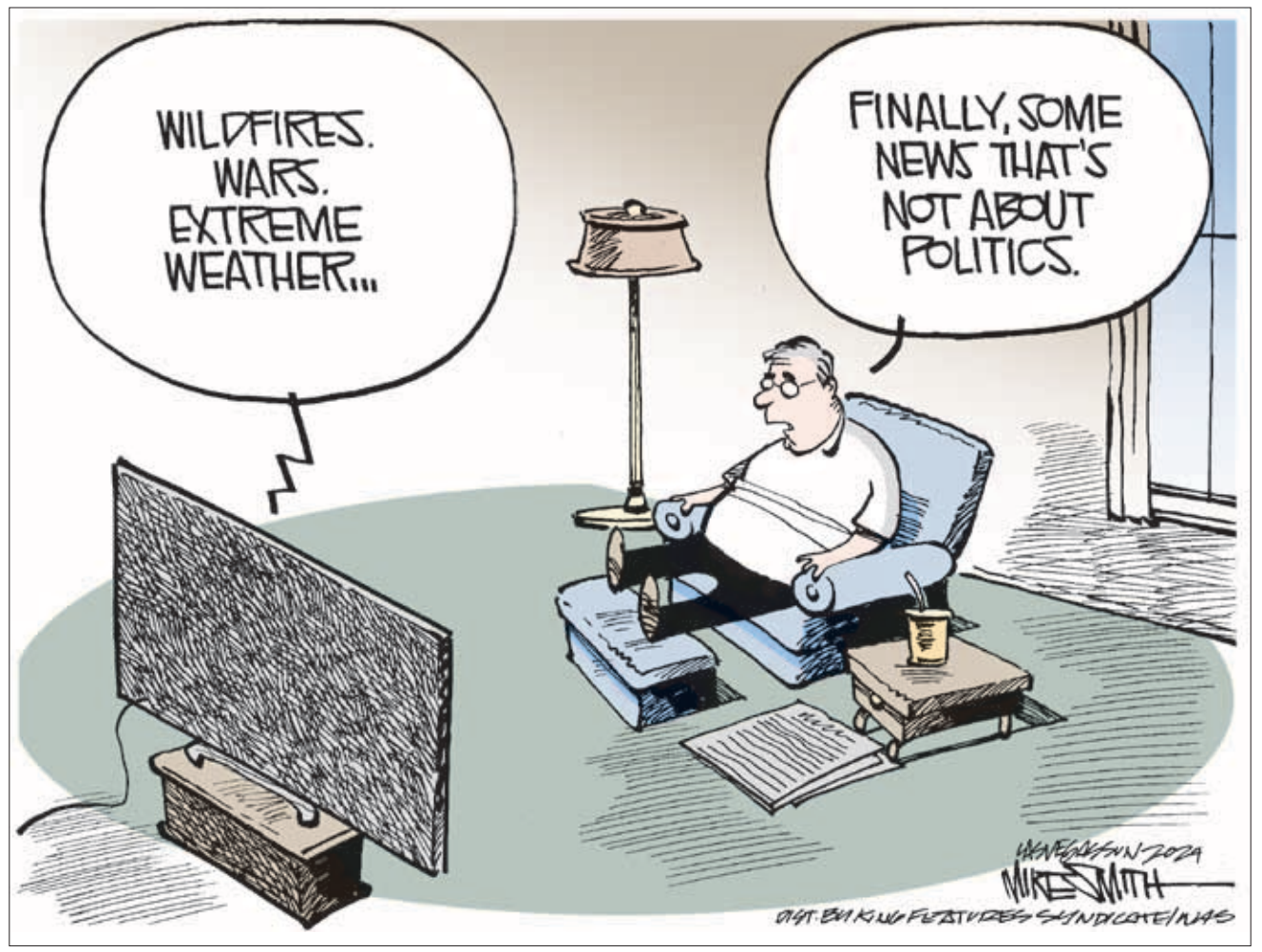
It does, however, sell well in a half empty room.

Michael Leppert is an author, educator and a communication consultant in Indianapolis. He writes about government, politics and culture at MichaelLeppert.com.



Michael Leppert

Hoosier Opinions



What happened? What's next?

Two weeks ago, I wrote, "There seems to be only one thing about which all Americans agree ... that something is very wrong in our nation."

My point then was that all the polling data has been pointing in one direction — Americans of all persuasions are not happy with what's happening in and the direction of our country.

Now we see, despite all the pessimism about the state of American democracy, that it works.

Why be surprised about the blowout of the incumbent party when, for most of Joe Biden's presidency, the percentage of Americans saying they are satisfied with the direction of the country hovered around 20%, and when, after the early months of his presidency, his approval ratings tanked and for the remaining time, the gap between his disapproval and approval hovered between 10 to 15 points.

As former Reagan speechwriter Ken Khachigian noted in The Wall Street Journal, Vice President Kamala Harris drove a stake into her candidacy when in an appearance on "The View" she said nothing came to mind that she would have "done differently than President Biden."

Gallup started asking about satisfaction with direction of the country in 1979. The highest it's ever been was 71% in February 1999.

In Trump's first term, satisfaction reached 41%, the highest it had been in 15 years. Then, to the misfortune of the then and future President Trump, Covid hit.

So, my answer to the tsunami of commentary about what happened in this election is that Americans are not happy and are sufficiently vibrant and healthy to step up and say "enough."

As I said in my column two weeks ago, the only thing most Americans seem to agree about is that things are not good.

Now that the status quo has been rejected, where do we go?

I will repeat what I have been saying for a long time. A country that is fiscally bankrupt, culturally bankrupt and morally bankrupt is not a country with a future.

The great news that I see is that those with the great stake in the country's future — our youth,

our working class and lower- and middle-income Americans, and our non-white Americans whose votes have always been disproportionately on the left, for Democrats, shifted in a meaningful way to Trump and Republicans.

Regarding the surge to the right by young men of all colors, my take is they are unhappy with a feminized culture of victimhood, wokeness and moral relativism.

I am not talking about manhood in a macho sense, but in the true sense of masculinity — to step up and take responsibility, to work, to build and to create. They are getting that the critical element of manliness is not taking control of others but of taking control of oneself.

The headline from the exit polls is decisive dissatisfaction with the economy, and all these votes went to Trump.

They will all agree with the tax cuts.

But how about spending cuts? We must shrink the long and heavy hand of government to recapture the economic growth of years gone by.

The voting shift among Americans of color is of crucial importance. The country is becoming less and less white.

Seventy-one percent of the 2024 vote was white voters. When Reagan was elected in 1980, 88% of voters were white.

Less than half the children in K-12 in America's public schools are white.

We need Americans of color to walk away from the culture of victimhood and embrace the culture of freedom and personal responsibility.

America needs these Americans of color, and these Americans of color need the values that built the country.

Regarding the Democratic Party, I would not liken it to a bankrupt company. A company in bankruptcy needs to reorganize and do its business more efficiently.

The Democratic Party is very efficient. Its problem is it's selling the wrong product.



Star Parker

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The charming cobra inchworm

Angelkeep has for many years found that some of the most interesting critters in nature came in the tiniest form. It was not an earth-shaking discovery.

For example look at a tall dried stalk of corn and compare it with the emerging first leaves of a germinating corn kernel. The new corn birth seems far more interesting than any ten-foot decaying stalk. Look at the bright red cardinals standing out colorfully against the neutral colors of the habitat in mid-November. Compare those against the newly hatching nestlings who break from an egg and immediately open their beaks wide begging for food even before the first hair turns into a feather. The small birds are adorable. Large, long icicles, which will only too soon begin to appear at Angelkeep, capture much attention through their shapes and glistening ice forms. They seem nothing compared to the astonishing beauty of a single tiny snowflake captured by macrophotography.

Autumn clematis, grown at Angelkeep for a quarter century, once grew a patch so large it appeared to be a snowdrift five feet tall by fifteen feet long. A single 4-petal bloom measures only about an inch. The plant's aroma demands a person's nose to be pressed into the blooms, much akin to the draw of a beautiful red rose. Autumn clematis fragrance equals an orange orchard in bloom.

During such a sniffing experience of late summer, a tiny movement caught the eye. Close investigation located a critter so small it measured less than the length of a single bloom's petal. It required a close look through a camera lens zoom to get

Angelkeep Journals



Alan Daugherty

any details. As was typically the case, Angelkeep's columnist hardly ever exited the house without that needed camera hanging around the neck.

The clematis vine held several inchworms. Close inspection heightened the intrigue. The head of this inchworm looked similar to the head of a cobra. A photo blown up to fill a two-foot computer screen revealed the amazing little critter's beauty.

The body had a line of over 100 minuscule tan dots running in the center of the back from head to tail. Several V-patterns of similar dots appeared along the line like veins on a leaf. Between the V-patterns came the gradual gradation of color from deepest brown to a beautiful red-ochre. Both sides of the inchworm again contained a line of tiny tan dots. The inchworm contained the variegated brown colors that would make any mink proud. Of course a mink stole has long ago gone out of fashion regardless of their beauty of softness and color.

The inchworm moved as all do. It could grasp the plant with one end and raise its body to move to a new location using the opposite end. That end could likewise grasp a hold, allowing the original grip's release. The critter inched its way from one petal to another. In the midst of the movement it often stopped and looked about, right and left, forward

and aft, looking very much like a cobra lifting its head from the basket as it emerged to the tunes of the snake charmer's flute.

This cobra inchworm certainly charmed Angelkeep.

Cobra inchworm was a common name given this animal. Cross-lined wave moth was the name commonly used for the animal that would eventually emerge from the cobra inchworm. This moth had not been spotted later at Angelkeep. Online photos indicated it would be mostly colored light tan covered with tiny darker brown specks. Wings were crossed by a pair of darker brown veins. Surprisingly the veins formed a V-pattern, its point at the top of the forewings.

Scientifically it had been named *Timandra amaturaria* in 1866. Angelkeep had no uniqueness to possessing this cobra inchworm. It grew commonly in all of the east half of the United States. Since Angelkeep's autumn clematis had been planted in 2000, cobra inchworm possibly appeared as a regular for all those years. It simply took a long time of sniffing the aroma of the clematis blooms before spotting the tiny inchworm that loved the clematis as much as Angelkeep's owners.

This moth can grow up to 7/8 inch. The cobra inchworm spotted measured less than a third of the moth. It pays to look closely at nature. This animal, with its big, mile-wide-beauty, actually measured only about a quarter of an inch.

Never underestimate the potential of the smallest of nature's flora and fauna.

Mr. Daugherty is a Wells County resident who, along with his wife Gwen, enjoy their backyard and have named it "Angelkeep."

Today in History

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, Nov. 14, the 319th day of 2024. There are 47 days left in the year.

Today's highlight in history: On Nov. 14, 1970, a chartered Southern Airways plane crashed while trying to land in West Virginia, killing all 75 people on board, including the Mar-

shall University football team and its coaching staff.

Also on this date:

In 1940, during World War II, German bombing raids destroyed much of the English city of Coventry.

In 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first Black child to desegregate William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

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Colts give Anthony Richardson the starting QB job

By **MICHAEL MAROT**
AP Sports Writer

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Anthony Richardson showed the Indianapolis Colts over the past two weeks off the field that he could be their starting quarterback.



Anthony Richardson

Again. Two ugly losses might have helped convince Indy's brain trust, too.

Either way, Richardson has won back the job.

Coach Shane Steichen announced Wednesday that he was making yet another quarterback change,

handing the reins back to the 22-year-old Richardson while benching 39-year-old Joe Flacco.

"He's going to be our starter again, he's going to start for the rest of the season and we're going to go from there," Steichen said. "I informed Joe of the decision yesterday. He's the ultimate pro. He respects the decision, he understands it."

Steichen made the first change because he said Flacco gave the Colts (4-6) the best chance of winning now.

Instead, Flacco committed six turnovers in two losses, the offense struggled to get in

the end zone or stay on the field and Indy's lost ground in the race for the AFC's seventh and final playoff spot.

So now the Colts are turning back to their franchise quarterback.

What changed? Apparently, Richardson commitment to working harder.

"It was, 'Hey, Anthony, these are the areas we need to work on and see growth and improvement and he's made great strides in those areas,'" Steichen said. "I didn't have a timetable on it, but I knew at some point, you know, we were not going to give up on Anthony."

For Richardson, it's yet another twist in what already has been a stop-and-go career.

After being drafted No. 4 overall in 2023, the former Florida star quickly won the starting job. Richardson's rookie tenure didn't last long.

He started Indy's first two games, missed Week 3 with a concussion, then started two more games before undergoing season-ending surgery on his throwing shoulder.

This season has been more of the same. Richardson started Indy's first four games then missed two more with a hip injury and



started two more before being benched.

Now, the youngest quarterback in the NFL will be back in the lineup for Sunday's matchup against the New York Jets and the league's oldest quarterback, Aaron Rodgers.

"I just showed I'm willing to be a pro, I'm willing to sacrifice anything I need to do for the team," Richardson said. "I feel that these

past two weeks have definitely opened my eyes and allowed me to do that and do a deeper dive and look into myself and see what I'm made of, so I'm thankful for these past two weeks and I'm real glad to have it (the job)."

Flacco, last season's AP NFL Comeback Player of the Year, won two of the five games he played in his first season with the Colts but was 1-3 as the starter.

Still, the decision was unexpected. On Monday, the day after Flacco threw three interceptions and lost a fumble in a 30-20 loss to Buffalo, Steichen left little doubt that Flacco would remain the starter for the rest of this season.

Less than 24 hours later, he notified Flacco of the move just four days before the

NFL's second-oldest quarterback met one of his former teams.

"Shane and I had a private conversation, and it was a good talk and that's all I'm going to say," Flacco said. "Every time you take the field you're being evaluated, and I'm definitely disappointed the way the last two weeks went. Any time you walk into the locker room like this, and you have the ability to play for the guys, you want to do a good job for them."

Now, though, Richardson must prove Indy made the right move.

In his first six games this season, Richardson threw seven interceptions and four touchdown passes with a league-low 44.4% completion rate. Richardson believes the extra time he's put in over the past two weeks have helped create more consistent habits that he hopes will help him on and off the field.

If it does, the Colts may finally figure out if Richardson can be the long-term solution to a quarterback carousel that has been spinning constantly since Andrew Luck's surprise retirement in August 2019.

"I feel like there's still for improvement all around but lately I've been working on consistency, just trying to get better at that," he said. "The past couple of weeks I've been trying to focus on like sacrificing more. Guys ask me to do certain things you've got to do it. They're sacrificing so why not do it?"

Perfect season has done the unthinkable — turned Indiana into the toast of college football

By **MICHAEL MAROT**
AP Sports Writer

Ed Miller has attended Indiana football and basketball games since the early 1970s, and he's never seen a fall quite like this.

As the leaves change colors and flutter to the ground, and the action ramps up for one of college basketball's true blueblood programs, everyone around Bloomington is focused on what's happening inside the football stadium.

Here, the 70-year-old Miller has been part of three straight home sellouts, seen the spinning towels and decibel levels attain new heights while the favored candy-striped basketball pants have been replaced by the increasingly fashionable candy-striped overalls. Yes, even the start of basketball season cannot tarnish this season's most unthinkable story in college football — the rise of the Hoosiers.

"It's hard this time of year usually to keep going to football games, but that has totally flipped," Miller said. "And now, honestly, I'm a little disappointed in basketball. I'm more excited about football than basketball, and I didn't think I'd ever say that."

For decades, Indiana football was mired in mediocrity or worse — irrelevance.

Indiana has the most losses (713) and the 10th-lowest winning percentage (.422) in FBS history. The Hoosiers three bowl wins are the fewest of any Power 4 team and the 33-year run between postseason victories still is the second-longest active drought among teams with multiple bowl bids.

How bad had things gotten? When ESPN broadcaster Joe Buck identified an Indiana alum during a Monday Night Football telecast a couple years back, Buck's broadcast partner, Troy Aikman, jokingly asked if the Hoosiers still played football.

Curt Cignetti took the Indiana job to



change that image and while fans liked his passion, they were skeptical of his bold, brash promise of immediate success.

"Hey, look I'm super fired up about this opportunity," he shouted at a December basketball game. "I've never taken a backseat to anybody and don't plan on starting now. Purdue sucks. But so does Michigan and Ohio State."

Nobody's questioning Cignetti now.

Nick Saban's first recruiting coordinator at Alabama is a frontrunner to be this year's national coach of the year, especially after Saturday's 20-15 victory over the defending national champion Wolverines.

Indiana earned just its second series win since 1988 while sealing the first 10-win season in school history, perhaps fittingly, against college football's winningest program.

No. 5 Indiana (10-0, 7-0 Big Ten, No. 5 CFP) now has one more win than its combined total over the previous three seasons and finds itself ditching the half-full stadiums that had become the norm in Octobers and Novembers of seasons past.

"We were excited to get a new coach. We knew there was going to be a lot of turnover with the football guys, but we never could have imagined 10-0," said 47-year-old Jennifer Worman, who lives in an Indianapolis suburb. "It is unreal for IU football."

There have been no shortage of milestone moments in 2024.

- Indiana's 77-3 victory over Western Illinois in Week 2 was the most lopsided in school history and its 56-7 win over Nebraska six weeks later matched the school record for margin of victory in league play.
- The Hoosiers 42-13 victory over UCLA was their first ever at the Rose Bowl.

(Continued on Page 7)

Guardians manager Vogt tweaks staff after winning AL Central title; Willis, Alomar Jr. both return

By **TOM WITHERS**
AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Guardians manager Stephen Vogt will have two invaluable coaches again by his side for his second season.

A finalist for AL Manager of the Year after leading Cleveland to 92 regular-season wins and an AL Central title, Vogt tweaked his staff on Wednesday with the biggest moves being Craig Albarnaz and Carl Willis staying put.

Albarnaz, who was the club's bench coach in 2024, was promoted to associate manager while Willis will return for his 15th season in Cleveland.

Vogt leaned heavily on Albarnaz last season during and after games while navigating his first season as a manager — at any level. Albarnaz became highly coveted this offseason, with the Miami Marlins and Chicago White Sox among the teams who inquired about him as a manager.

Instead, he'll stay with Vogt in Cleveland and have a new title.

"So excited he's coming back," Vogt said during a Zoom news conference. "Obviously for him to get the two opportunities and for him to choose to come back to us, it just speaks to who Alby is. His responsibilities won't change. It was just a recognition of, 'You're more than a bench coach, you mean more to us than a bench coach.'"

The same is true of Willis, who was instrumental in the Guardians working through some major pitching issues this year. Ace Shane Bieber was lost for the sea-

son after just two starts and the team had to plug major roles in the bullpen after Trevor Stephan and James Karinchak got hurt in spring training.

There had been speculation the 63-year-old Willis would retire or maybe join new Cincinnati manager Terry Francona's staff.

"I couldn't be more thankful that Carl's coming back, what he means to this organization, what he means to me, what he means to our pitchers and the rest of our staff," Vogt said. "We lean on him a lot. This is the most experience on our staff and for Carl to want to come back to want to be with us, we couldn't be more thrilled."

"I know I'm looking forward to sitting next to him for another season and him having to hear my words during the game and calm me down."

The team on Wednesday also promoted Grant Fink to hitting coach. He'll replace Chris Valaika, who joined Francona with the Reds. Fink was the club's minor league hitting coordinator the past three seasons.

"As we looked at the landscape of the hitting across the game," Vogt said, "we kept going back to Grant and what he brings from a leadership standpoint, from familiarity with a lot of our players and familiarity with the other three hitting coaches on our staff."

Also, first-base coach Sandy Alomar Jr. will be back in 2025 for his 16th season.

In addition, the Guardians promoted Kai Correa to major league field coordinator/director of defense, baserunning and game strategy.

High School Calendar

THURSDAY, NOV 14
No events scheduled.

FRIDAY, NOV 15

GIRLS BASKETBALL: Southern Wells at Lakeland Christian, 7:30 p.m.

SATURDAY, NOV 16

GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at East Noble, 7:30 p.m.; Norwell at Northridge, 2:30 p.m.; Southern Wells at Eastbrook, 7:30 p.m.

SWIMMING: (Girls only) Norwell Invitation, 9 a.m.

MONDAY, NOV 18

No events scheduled.

TUESDAY, NOV 19

GIRLS BASKETBALL: Bluffton at Mississinewa 7:30 p.m.; Norwell at Homestead, 7:30 p.m.

SWIMMING: (Girls only) Huntington North at Bluffton, 5:30 p.m.; Adams Central at Norwell, 5:30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, NOV 20
No events scheduled.

THURSDAY, NOV 21

BOYS BASKETBALL: Randolph Southern at Southern Wells, 6 p.m.

Wagner scores 29, Magic beat Pacers to stay unbeaten at home

By **DICK SCANLON**
Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Franz Wagner scored 29 points, Jalen Suggs hit two free throws with 9.8 seconds left and the Orlando Magic beat the Indiana Pacers 94-90 on Wednesday night to remain unbeaten at home.

Orlando is 6-0 at home this season and has won 13 in a row overall at home.

Pascal Siakam led Indiana with 29 points. Benedict Mathurin added 23 points — scoring 12 straight Pacers points late

in the fourth quarter — and 12 rebounds. Tyrese Haliburton had with nine points and 11 assists.

Goga Bitadze added 12 points and 12 rebounds for the Magic. Anthony Black came off the bench for six points, six assists, four steals and two big blocks.

Takeaways

Pacers: The Pacers survived a scoreless half by Haliburton to lead 45-41, but the NBA's third-best 3-point shooting team could not survive 10-for-30 shooting from behind the arc.



NHRA Drag Racing

In-N-Out Burger NHRA Finals

Site: Pomona, California.

Track: In-N-Out Burger Pomona Dragstrip.

Last event: Brittany Force earned her first Top Fuel victory in 39 races, beating defending champion Doug Kalitta in Las Vegas. Teammate Austin Prock defeated Paul Lee in Funny Car to move to the brink of his first championship.

Fast Facts: Prock leads teammate Jack Beckman by 188 points and will clinch the Funny Car title with his first qualifying run. Beckman is driving for John Force as the 16-time champion continues to recuperate from a horrific accident in June. Force witnessed both wins in his return to the track.

Next event: March 6-9, 2025, Gainesville, Florida.

Formula 1

Last race: Max Verstappen overcame penalties that left him starting 17th and then the rain to win the Brazilian Grand Prix in Sao Paulo and take a huge step toward securing his fourth consecutive title.

Next race: Nov. 23, Las Vegas.

NASCAR Cup Series

Last race: Joey Logano led 107 laps to dominate the winner-take-all finale at Phoenix Raceway, earning his third championship and completing a remarkable turnaround after initially missing the second-round cut before earning a reprieve with another driver's disqualification.

Fast facts: All of Logano's titles have come in even-numbered years: 2018, 2022 and this season. He and Kyle Busch are the series' only active three-time champions. ... Playoff drivers William Byron (Chevy) and Tyler Reddick (Toyota) finished third and sixth respectively in the 312-lap race in the desert. ... 2017 champion Martin Truex Jr. finished 17th after starting on the pole in his final full-time Cup start.

Next race: Feb. 16, 2025, Daytona Beach, Florida.

NASCAR Xfinity Series

Last race: Justin Allgaier recovered from being a lap down midway through the race to pass Austin Hill and Cole Custer in overtime after a restart, finish second behind Riley Herbst and claim his first series title.

Next race: Feb. 15, 2025, Daytona Beach, Florida.

NASCAR Truck Series

Last race: Ty Majeski dominated from the pole in a Ford to earn his first championship, holding off playoff drivers Corey Heim and Christian Eckes in the 150-mile finale at Phoenix Raceway.

Next race: Feb. 14, 2025, Daytona Beach, Florida.

World of Outlaws Sprint Cars

Last event: David Gravel won in Concord, North Carolina, last Thursday and clinched the series crown a day later while Carson Macedo won Friday's event for his 12th victory of the season.

Next race: Feb. 5-8, 2025, Barberville, Florida.

IndyCar

Last race: Alex Palou claimed his second consecutive IndyCar championship and third in four years at Nashville Superspeedway, where Colton Herta won the Music City Grand Prix for Andretti Global.

Next race: March 2, 2025, St. Petersburg, Florida.

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News-Banner Scoreboard

Indiana football

(Continued from Page 6)

- Indiana became the first bowl eligible in the team with a 41-24 victory at Northwestern.
- They've scored at least 40 points, seven times, won nine times by 14 or more points and have trailed only twice briefly all season.
- And if the Hoosiers win at No. 2 Ohio State, something they haven't done since 1987, a win over rival Purdue (1-8, 0-6) could send them to their first Big Ten title game.

It's a season on the brink only this locker room thought possible.

"We have playmakers all across the board," sixth-year quarterback Kurtis Rourke said earlier this season. "It makes my job a lot easier. The O-line is playing great so we can run and pass. We're just clicking right now."

Naturally, all these wins have put players such as Rourke, the 2022 Mid-American Conference MVP, in the postseason award debate. Some think Rourke even belongs in the Heisman Trophy race.

He's hardly alone. Defensive end Mikail Kamara, a transfer from James Madison, leads the conference in sacks (9 1/2) and earned two national defensive player of the week awards following a 2 1/2-sack, 4 1/2-tackle for loss performance as Indiana reclaimed the Old Brass Spittoon at Michigan State.

Elijah Sarratt also played previously for Cignetti at James Madison and now ranks fifth in the Big Ten in catches (38), yards (685) and yards per catch (18.0). He's tied for sixth with six TD receptions.

And while some contend a soft schedule has helped the Hoosiers, it didn't in other years.

Indiana may in fact be the most balanced team in the nation. It's ranked second in scoring offense (43.9 points), seventh in scoring defense (13.8) and among the top 25 nationally in passing offense (23rd, 276.5 yards), run defense (first, 72.7), pass defense (22nd, 183.3), turnover margin (tied for 12th, 1.0 per game) and takeaways (20th, 17).

It's enough to convince Indiana fans the Hoosiers should make the expanded 12-team playoff field — win or lose at Ohio State. And it's rekindled memories of Bob Knight's three national championship runs and has done what nobody thought possible — temporarily overshadowed basketball at Indiana while the victory flag at Memorial Stadium flies for a 12th consecutive week.

FOOTBALL

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	8	2	0	800	290 193
Miami	3	6	0	333	147 202
N.Y. Jets	3	7	0	300	177 214
New England	3	7	0	300	160 220

South

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	6	4	0	600	224 226
Indianapolis	4	6	0	400	208 223
Tennessee	2	7	0	222	157 240
Jacksonville	2	8	0	200	152 264

North

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	7	2	0	778	215 146
Baltimore	7	3	0	700	318 253
Cincinnati	4	6	0	400	270 262
Cleveland	2	7	0	222	148 213

West

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	9	0	0	1,000	219 161
L.A. Chargers	6	3	0	667	186 118
Denver	5	5	0	500	197 177
Las Vegas	2	7	0	222	168 251

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	7	2	0	778	233 161
Washington	7	3	0	700	290 217
Dallas	3	6	0	333	177 259
N.Y. Giants	2	8	0	200	152 222

South

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Atlanta	6	4	0	600	238 236
Tampa Bay	4	6	0	400	279 266
Carolina	3	7	0	300	167 310
New Orleans	3	7	0	300	227 246

North

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	8	1	0	889	284 171
Minnesota	7	2	0	778	221 157
Green Bay	6	3	0	667	230 194
Chicago	4	5	0	444	175 167

West

W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Arizona	6	4	0	600	238 220
San Francisco	5	4	0	556	233 202
L.A. Rams	4	5	0	444	185 217
Seattle	4	5	0	444	210 221

Thursday's Games
Baltimore 35, Cincinnati 34

Sunday's Games
Carolina 20, N.Y. Giants 17, OT, Munich, DEU
Buffalo 30, Indianapolis 20
Kansas City 16, Denver 14
Minnesota 12, Jacksonville 7
New England 19, Chicago 3

New Orleans 20, Atlanta 17
Pittsburgh 28, Washington 27
San Francisco 23, Tampa Bay 20
L.A. Chargers 27, Tennessee 17
Arizona 31, N.Y. Jets 6
Philadelphia 34, Dallas 6
Detroit 26, Houston 23
Open: Cleveland, Las Vegas, Green Bay, Seattle

Monday's Games
Miami 23, L.A. Rams 15

Thursday, Nov. 14
Thursday Night Football: Washington at Philadelphia, 8:15 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 17
Baltimore at Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.
Cleveland at New Orleans, 1 p.m.
Green Bay at Chicago, 1 p.m.
Jacksonville at Detroit, 1 p.m.
L.A. Rams at New England, 1 p.m.
Las Vegas at Miami, 1 p.m.
Minnesota at Tennessee, 1 p.m.
Sunday Night Football: Indianapolis at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
Atlanta at Denver, 4:05 p.m.
Seattle at San Francisco, 4:05 p.m.
Kansas City at Buffalo, 4:25 p.m.
Cincinnati at L.A. Chargers, 8:20 p.m.
Open: Arizona, Carolina, N.Y. Giants, Tampa Bay

Monday, Nov. 18
Monday Night Football: Houston at Dallas, 8:15 p.m.

Monday's Games
Miami 23, L.A. Rams 15

Thursday, Nov. 14
Thursday Night Football: Washington at Philadelphia, 8:15 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 17
Baltimore at Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.
Cleveland at New Orleans, 1 p.m.
Green Bay at Chicago, 1 p.m.
Jacksonville at Detroit, 1 p.m.
L.A. Rams at New England, 1 p.m.
Las Vegas at Miami, 1 p.m.
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Sunday Night Football: Indianapolis at N.Y. Jets, 1 p.m.
Atlanta at Denver, 4:05 p.m.
Seattle at San Francisco, 4:05 p.m.
Kansas City at Buffalo, 4:25 p.m.
Cincinnati at L.A. Chargers, 8:20 p.m.
Open: Arizona, Carolina, N.Y. Giants, Tampa Bay

Monday, Nov. 18
Monday Night Football: Houston at Dallas, 8:15 p.m.

BASKETBALL

High School

Wednesday's Girls' Scores
Boone Grove 40, Hebron 18
Boonville 46, Pike Central 23
Carroll (Flora) 73, Taylor 41
Danville 52, University 51
Edinburgh 45, Indpls Lutheran 17
Fishers 64, Anderson 20
Hamilton Southeastern 69, Franklin 13
Homestead 62, Northridge 60
Indpls Scenic 47, Hagerstown 20
Indpls Shortridge 45, Indpls Ritter 29
Jennings Co. 68, Scottsburg 53
Lawrence Central 63, Westfield 26
Madison-Grant 54, Wes-Del 16
New Palestine 59, Greenwood 36
Randolph Southern 65, Union City 22
Rochester 42, N. Miami 41

College
Men's Scores
Wednesday, Nov. 13

EAST
Hofstra 49, Seton Hall 48
St. John's 66, Wagner 45
UConn 90, Le Moyne 49

SOUTH
Auburn 79, Kent St. 56
Cent. Michigan 70, George Mason 69
Middle Tennessee 80, Evansville 63
NC State 82, Coastal Carolina 70
St. Bonaventure 74, Florida Gulf Coast 65
Tennessee 92, Montana 57
Vanderbilt 85, California 69
Wake Forest 85, SC-Upstate 80

MIDWEST
Creighton 78, Houston Christian 43
Dayton 77, Ball St. 69
Illinois 66, Oakland 54
Nebraska 86, Fairleigh Dickinson 60
North Texas 54, Minnesota 51
S. Indiana 71, Bellarmine 69
Toledo 86, Wright St. 77

SOUTHWEST
Arkansas 65, Troy 49
Houston 91, Louisiana-Lafayette 45
Texas Tech 96, Wyoming 49

FAR WEST
BYU 99, Queens (NC) 55
Utah St. 117, Westminster (Utah) 53

Women's Scores
Wednesday, Nov. 13

EAST
Buffalo 56, Md.-Eastern Shore 46
Maryland 84, Syracuse 73
Princeton 70, Villanova 61
St. John's 69, Loyola (Md.) 61

SOUTH
Alabama 68, Norfolk St. 58
FAU 50, North Florida 41
Mississippi St. 83, Alabama St. 29
Virginia 83, Radford 41
Virginia Tech 85, UNC-Asheville 62

MIDWEST
Ball St. 95, Memphis 66
Butler 56, Indiana 46
Cincinnati 68, Davidson 50
Green Bay 74, Ill. Chicago 71
Iowa 94, Toledo 57
Notre Dame 92, James Madison 46
Robert Morris 59, Akron 53
S. Dakota St. 79, Wisconsin 57

SOUTHWEST
Arkansas St. 114, MVSU 54
Oklahoma 122, W. Carolina 56
TCU 90, Texas St. 31
Texas 95, Lamar 58

FAR WEST
BYU 69, Colorado St. 55
Fresno St. 67, S. Utah 59

Tuesday's Games
Orlando 114, Charlotte 89
Atlanta 117, Boston 116
Detroit 123, Miami 121, OT
New York 111, Philadelphia 99
Milwaukee 99, Toronto 85
Phoenix 120, Utah 112
Portland 122, Minnesota 108
Golden State 120, Dallas 117

Wednesday's Games
Orlando 94, Indiana 90
Cleveland 114, Philadelphia 106
Boston 139, Brooklyn 114
Oklahoma City 106, New Orleans 88

Chicago 124, New York 123
Houston 111, L.A. Clippers 103
San Antonio 139, Washington 130
Milwaukee 127, Detroit 120, OT
Memphis at L.A. Lakers, late
Minnesota at Portland, late
Phoenix at Sacramento, late

Thursday's Games
Dallas at Utah, 9 p.m.

Friday's Games
Detroit at Toronto, 7 p.m.
Miami at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at Orlando, 7 p.m.
Brooklyn at New York, 7:30 p.m.
Chicago at Cleveland, 7:30 p.m.
L.A. Lakers at San Antonio, 7:30 p.m.

Washington at Atlanta, 7:30 p.m.
Denver at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Houston, 8 p.m.
Phoenix at Oklahoma City, 8 p.m.
Memphis at Golden State, 10 p.m.
Minnesota at Sacramento, 10 p.m.

NBA

HOCKEY

NHL

Tuesday's Games
Winnipeg 6, N.Y. Rangers 3
Ottawa 3, Toronto 0
New Jersey 4, Florida 1
Boston 3, St. Louis 2
Edmonton 4, N.Y. Islanders 3, OT
Seattle 5, Columbus 2
Vancouver 3, Calgary 1

Wednesday's Games
Detroit 3, Pittsburgh 2, OT
Toronto 4, Washington 3, OT
Carolina at Utah, late
Los Angeles at Colorado, late
Vegas at Anaheim, late

Thursday's Games
New Jersey at Florida, 7 p.m.
San Jose at N.Y. Rangers, 7 p.m.
St. Louis at Buffalo, 7:30 p.m.
Nashville at Edmonton, 9 p.m.
Chicago at Seattle, 10 p.m.

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

Difficulty: ★★★ 11/14

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Services

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Lottery Numbers

Wednesday's Drawings
HOOSIER LOTTERY
Cash 5 — 05-10-11-19-25
Lotto Plus — 08-10-15-41-45-46
Cash4Life — 12-16-22-32-48, Cash Ball: 04
Quick Draw Midday — 03-04-12-19-21-24-26-39-40-44-48-49-61-65-69-71-74-76-79-80, BE: 26
Daily Three-Midday — 03-01-01, SB: 04
Daily Three-Evening — 03-01-02, SB: 03
Daily Four-Midday — 03-00-07-04, SB: 04
Daily Four-Evening — 06-02-00-09, SB: 03
Quick Draw Evening — 01-03-07-19-23-32-45-48-50-51-53-57-59-60-65-69-73-74-77-79, BE: 32
Hoosier Lotto — 09-15-28-33-36-44
MEGA MILLIONS
Estimated jackpot (for Friday): \$387 million
POWERBALL
09-20-26-43-58 Powerball: 09; Power Play: 2X

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Public Notices

Notice of Special Meeting
Town Council of the Town of Ossian, Indiana
Monday, November 18, 2024 beginning not earlier than 7:10 p.m.
Collier's 215 North Jefferson Street Ossian, Indiana 46777
The Town Council of the Town of Ossian, Indiana will hold a special meeting on the date and at the time and place referenced above to receive information, consider, and perhaps act on matters.
oj, nb 11/14 hspaxlp

SUDOKU ANSWER

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

Public Sale Calendar

NOVEMBER 14 - 6 p.m. - Becher Family Farms LLC, sellers. Auction location: Adams Co. 4H Expo Hall, 160 W. Washington St., Monroe, IN. Four tracts, Washington Township, Adams County. Tract 1: 82.88 acres, County Rd. 200 West, Sec 18. Tract 2: 80.2 acres, County Rd. 450 North, Sec 8. Tract 3: 35.05 acres, County Rd. 450 North, Sec 9. Tract 4: 39.97 acres, County Rd. 400 North, Sec 9. *Heartland Auction & Realty, Inc.*, heartlandauctionrealty.com, 260-724-3499.

BIDDING ENDS NOVEMBER 17 - (Online only firearm) - McNamara, owners. Rifles, shotguns, handguns, ammunition, archery. Auction preview & online bidding assistance Nov. 16, 9 a.m.-11 a.m., 215 E. Market St., Bluffton, IN. Sale manager Isaac Stoller, 260-413-3515. Please review all registration information before bidding. *The Steffen Group*, www.steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.

SOFT CLOSE STARTS NOVEMBER 17 - 6 p.m. - Herman Family farm & Elite Tooling, owner. Online real estate auction. 47+/- acres, log home, machine shop, dog kennel, 2 ponds, CNC lathes, mill, machinist tools, Ferris mower, mowers, skid loader, 1960 Harley Davidson toppler. *Green Auction*, SoldonGreen.com, 260-589-8474.

NOVEMBER 17-NOVEMBER 24 - (Online Only) - Various consignors, seller. Large quantity of Christmas decorations, vintage toys, antiques, Early Featherweight sewing machine, rare primitive mud sled, modern and antique furniture, sporting goods, much more. Open houses Nov. 19 and Nov. 21 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., 102 S. Jefferson St., Ossian. *The Steffen Group Inc.*, www.steffengrp.com, 260-824-3006.

NOVEMBER 24-DECEMBER 1 - (Online Only Auction) - The Estate of Eldrid Tinkel. Major personal property auction. 1995 Ford XLT 1/2 ton pickup truck, Komatsu PC 10-6 backhoe mini excavator, antique tractors, horse equipment and horse drawn buggies, horse drawn covered wagon, horse drawn sled, farm implements, tremendous amount of tools, antiques, farm related items. Open house Nov. 24 from 2-4 p.m. and Nov. 29 from 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 1910 N Meridian St., Marion, IN. Brandon Steffen, sale manager, 260-710-5684, *The Steffen Group Inc.*, www.steffengrp.com.

NOVEMBER 25 - 6 p.m. - Christopher & Kellie Pierce, owner. Held at Krueckeberg Auction Complex, 815 Adams Street, Decatur. Real estate & land auction! Tract 1: 2 bed, 1 bath, 948 sq. foot home, full basement, 40'x90' bank barn, 30'x20' barn, grain bin, wooded, tillable, 6.5+/- acres. Tract 2: 4+/- acres tillable frontage on Hoagland Rd. Tract 3: 4+/- acres tillable frontage on SR 101 & Hoagland Rd. Tract 4: 42.5+/- acres tillable frontage on SR 101 & Hoagland Rd. To be sold in individual tracts or any combinations. *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.

NOVEMBER 26 - 6 p.m. - (Live Auction) - The Estate of Jimmy L. Thompson, seller. Auction location: 1245 4-H Park Rd., Bluffton, IN. 96.89+/- acres, Liberty Township, Section 18, southern Wells County farmland. Highly productive farmland with approximately 76+/- acres tillable land, road frontage along 500 W. and 200 S., approximately 15.5+/- acres in woods/classified forest. Nick Huffman, 260-827-8255, sale manager, *The Steffen Group Inc.*, 260-824-3006, www.steffengrp.com.

BIDDING NOW OPEN AND STARTS CLOSING DECEMBER 1 STARTING AT 4 p.m. EST - Various consignors, owners. Online only Elm Street consignment auction! Name brand woodworking tools, camping supplies, like new 24" Craftsman lawn vac, lawn & garden tools, weight lifting equipment, household furniture, Craftsman snow blower, antiques, collectibles, kitchen items, and much more! Preview Nov. 27, 3-5 p.m., 812 Elm Street, Decatur, IN. Pick up Dec. 2, 2-6 p.m., Dec. 3, 9 am.-noon. *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.

DECEMBER 3 - Starts at 6 p.m. - Blackford Golf Club (Lort Services, Inc.), owner. Held at Blackford County Fairgrounds, Hartford City, IN. Online bidding available. 105+/- acres offered in 7 tracts or any combination. Currently a golf course, potential farmland, recreational land, development potential, personal property available, Blackford Co. Inspections Nov. 16, 10 a.m.-noon, Nov. 19, 3 p.m.-5 p.m., 1605 W. Water St., Hartford City. Auction mgr. Al Pfister, 260-760-8922, *Schrader Real Estate and Auction Company, Inc.*, schraderauction.com, 800-451-2709.

DECEMBER 4 - 3 p.m. - Online - Dusty Roach, Bankruptcy Trustee, sellers. 6,142 sq. ft. modern commercial building. Key features: 5 rental units w/4 office suites, 1 currently leased, 600 sq. ft. heated garage w/16'x12' overhead door, independently controlled heating and cooling for units, expansion potential w/additional land available for future. Open houses Nov. 20, 2-3 p.m., Nov. 27, 2-3 p.m., 2379 N. Main St., Bluffton, IN. Kurt Ness, auction mgr., 260-417-1545, *Ness Bros. Realtors & Auctioneers*, www.NessBros.com, 260-459-3911.

DECEMBER 5 & 6 - 9 a.m. - Secured creditors & various consignors, owners. 815 Adams St., Decatur. Day 1: Online bidding only. Over 300+ lots including skid loader attachments, tool boxes, workbenches, iron gates, chains & binders, 1 trip 40' high side shipping container w/side doors, dome shelter containers, much more! Day 2 truck & equipment auction! Onsite and online bidding offering 600+ lots! Cars, SUV, 1/2 ton & 3/4 ton pickup trucks, cargo & passenger vans, dump trucks, large group of box trucks, day cabs, sleepers, utility trucks, bucket trucks, utility & semi trailers, SUV's pickup trucks, various skid steer attachments, much more! Accepting consignments! *Krueckeberg Auction & Realty LLC*, 260-724-7402, Kjauction.com.

DECEMBER 8-15 - 2 p.m. - (Online only personal property) - Thomas B. & Mary Lou Woodward, seller. 2016 JD 1025R diesel utility tractor, Frontier RT1149 tiller, 2016 Grasshopper zero turn mower, 2020 Club Car Carryall 1700, mowers, lawn & garden, patio furniture, antique & modern furniture, vintage framed art work, lithograph prints, vintage pickle castors, glassware, collectibles, more. Preview Dec. 1, 8, 2-5 p.m., Dec. 12, 3-6 p.m., 301 N. Highland Ave., Ossian. Patrick Carter, sale manager, 260-824-3006, *The Steffen Group Inc.</*

Speaker Mike Johnson wins GOP nomination to remain in job

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and KEVIN FREKING
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker Mike Johnson won the House Republican nomination Wednesday to stay on the job, on track to keep the gavel after a morning endorsement from President-elect Donald Trump ahead of a full House vote in the new year.

While Johnson has no serious challenger, he faces dissent within his ranks, particularly from hard-right conservatives and the Freedom Caucus withholding their votes as leverage to extract promises ahead.

Trump told House Republicans, during the president-elect's first trip back to Washington since the party swept the 2024 election, that he's with the speaker all the way, according to a person familiar with the remarks but unauthorized to discuss the private meeting near the Capitol.

Johnson heaped praise on Trump, calling him the "comeback king."

It's been a remarkable political journey for Johnson, the accidental speaker who rose as a last, best choice to replace ousted former speaker Kevin McCarthy more than a year ago and quickly set a course by positioning himself alongside Trump and leading Republicans during this year's elections.

Johnson said Trump tipped him off early Wednesday that he would be tapping another House Republican for his administration — Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, as attorney general — reducing Johnson's slim numbers in the new year. Gaetz submitted his resignation from Congress, effective immediately, launching an eight-week clock to fill his seat, Johnson said,

possibly in time for the start of the new Congress on Jan. 3, 2025.

Gaetz is the third House GOP lawmaker tapped for the Trump administration, and Johnson said Gaetz wanted to help prevent the narrow numbers. The quick departure also ends a long-running House ethics probe into the Florida congressman.

As Johnson tells it, Trump is the "coach" and he is the "quarterback" as they prepare for a unified Republican government in the new year.

Johnson has embraced Trump's priorities on mass deportations, tax cuts, cutting the federal workforce and a more muscular U.S. image abroad. Together they have been working on what the speaker calls an ambitious 100-days agenda hoping to avoid what he called the mistakes of Trump's first term when Congress was unprepared and wasted "precious time."

Wednesday's internal GOP vote was by voice rather than roll call or ballots, with no objections to Johnson, according to the same person in the room. The rest of the top GOP leaders were also elected.

But the outcome belies a more difficult road ahead for the speaker.

While Johnson expects to lead the House in unified government, with Trump in the White House and Republicans having seized the Senate majority, the House is expected to remain narrowly split, even as House control remains undecided with final races particularly in California still too early to call.

The problems that come with a slim House majority and plagued Johnson's first year as speaker when his own ranks routinely revolted over his plans are likely to spill into the new year, with a potential fresh round of chaotic

governing.

Johnson needs just a simple majority in Wednesday's closed-door voting to win the GOP nomination to become speaker. But he will need majority support of the full House, 218 votes, to actually take hold of the gavel on Jan. 3, when the new Congress convenes and conducts the election for its speaker. It took McCarthy some 15 rounds of voting in a weeklong election to win the gavel in 2023.

Trump has made Johnson's problems more complicated by tapping House Republicans for his administration, reducing the numbers further. Just before voting, Trump announced Gaetz as his nominee for attorney general, sending shockwaves through the room over the far-right pick.

"Everybody was saying, Oh my God," said Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

Still, with Trump in the White House, the speaker may enjoy a period of goodwill from his own ranks as Republicans are eager to disrupt the norms of governing and institutionalize Trump's second-term agenda.

"His challenge is what it's always been," Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., a member of the Freedom Caucus, said of Johnson.

But he said, "With Trump in charge, it'll be easier for him to deliver."

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., who launched a failed effort last year to oust Johnson from the speaker's office said: "You know who he's going to have to answer to? Donald Trump."

And Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, who wore his "Make America Great Again" tie with matching Trump gold sneakers, told reporters the party must put aside the chaos of the last few years and unify behind the president-elect.

Trump picks Matt Gaetz for attorney general, Marco Rubio for secretary of state

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President-elect Donald Trump chose Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida to serve as his attorney general on Wednesday, bypassing more experienced options in favor of a loyalist who has built a national reputation as a disruptor and whom Trump has tasked with dramatically overhauling the Justice Department.

Trump also announced that he had tapped Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida as his nominee for secretary of state. And he selected Tulsa Gabbard, a former Democratic member of Congress and presidential candidate, to serve as his director of national intelligence.

The choices continued a pattern of Trump stocking his Cabinet with those he believes he can trust to execute his agenda rather than longtime officials with experience in their fields. Gaetz's selection, in particular, was seen as a shock. The Florida lawmaker was not among the more established attorneys who had been mentioned as contenders for the job, and even his colleagues in Congress appeared stunned by the news.

"Everybody was saying, 'Oh my God,'" said Republican Rep. Mike Simpson of Idaho.

Gaetz resigned from his House seat Wednesday evening.

Trump announced the decision in a post in his Truth Social network, saying Gaetz would

"root out the systemic corruption at DOJ, and return the Department to its true mission of fighting Crime, and upholding our Democracy and Constitution."

If confirmed by the Republican-led Senate, Gaetz would instantly become one of the most closely watched members of Trump's Cabinet given his avowed loyalty to a president-elect who has threatened to pursue retribution against perceived adversaries.

Gaetz represents much of the Florida Panhandle and became a conservative star when he joined Congress, appearing as a frequent staunch defender of Trump on cable news.

House Republicans first got wind of the nomination during a private meeting and initially thought the news was a joke before realizing Trump had indeed named Gaetz to serve as the nation's chief law officer.

GOP Rep. Max Miller told reporters the shock in the room was more a reflection of members' happiness that the Florida Republican will no longer be a member of the chamber after years of instigating intraparty battles.

Even Trump's allies in the Senate were keeping their distance.

"We'll see," said Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin when asked whether he would vote to confirm the congressman.

U.S. overdose deaths are down, giving experts hope for decline

By MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The decline in U.S. drug overdose deaths appears to have continued this year, giving experts hope the nation is seeing sustained improvement in the persistent epidemic.

There were about 97,000 overdose deaths in the 12-month period that ended June 30, according to provisional Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data released Wednesday. That's down 14% from the estimated 113,000 for the previous 12-month period.

"This is a pretty stunning and rapid reversal of drug overdose mortality numbers," said Brandon Marshall, a Brown University researcher who studies overdose trends.

Overdose death rates began steadily climbing in the 1990s because of opioid painkillers, followed by waves of deaths led by other opioids like heroin and — more recently — illicit fentanyl. Provisional data had indicated a slight decline for 2023, and the tally released Wednesday showed that the downward trend has kept going.

Of course, there have been moments in the last several years when U.S. overdose deaths seemed to have plateaued or even started to go down, only to rise again, Marshall noted.

"This seems to be substantial and sustained," Marshall said. "I think there's real reason for hope here."

Experts aren't certain about the reasons for the decline, but they cite a combination of possible factors.

One is COVID-19. In the worst days of the pandemic, addiction treatment was hard to get and people were socially isolated — with no one around to help if they overdosed.

"During the pandemic we saw such a meteoric rise in drug overdose deaths that it's only natural we would see a decrease," said Farida Ahmad of the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

Still, overdose deaths are well above

what they were at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The recent numbers could represent the fruition of years of efforts to increase the availability of the overdose-reversing drug naloxone, and addiction treatments such as buprenorphine, said Erin Winstanley, a University of Pittsburgh professor who researches drug overdose trends.

Marshall said such efforts likely are being aided by money from settlements of opioid-related lawsuits, brought by state, local and Native American governments against drugmakers, wholesalers and pharmacies. Settlement funds have been rolling out to small towns and big cities across the U.S., and some have started spending the money on naloxone and other measures.

Some experts have wondered about changes in the drug supply. Xylazine, a sedative, has been increasingly detected in illegally manufactured fentanyl, and experts are sorting out exactly how it's affecting overdoses.

In the latest CDC data, overdose death reports are down in 45 states. Increases occurred in Alaska, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

The most dramatic decreases were seen in North Carolina and Ohio, but CDC officials voiced a note of caution. Some jurisdictions have had lags in getting death records to federal statisticians — particularly North Carolina, where death investigations have slowed because of understaffing at the state medical examiner's office. The CDC made estimates to try to account for incomplete death records, but the decline in some places may ultimately turn out not to be as dramatic as initial numbers suggest.

Another limitation of the provisional data is that it doesn't detail what's happening in different groups of people. Recent research noted the overdose deaths in Black and Native Americans have been growing disproportionately larger.

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