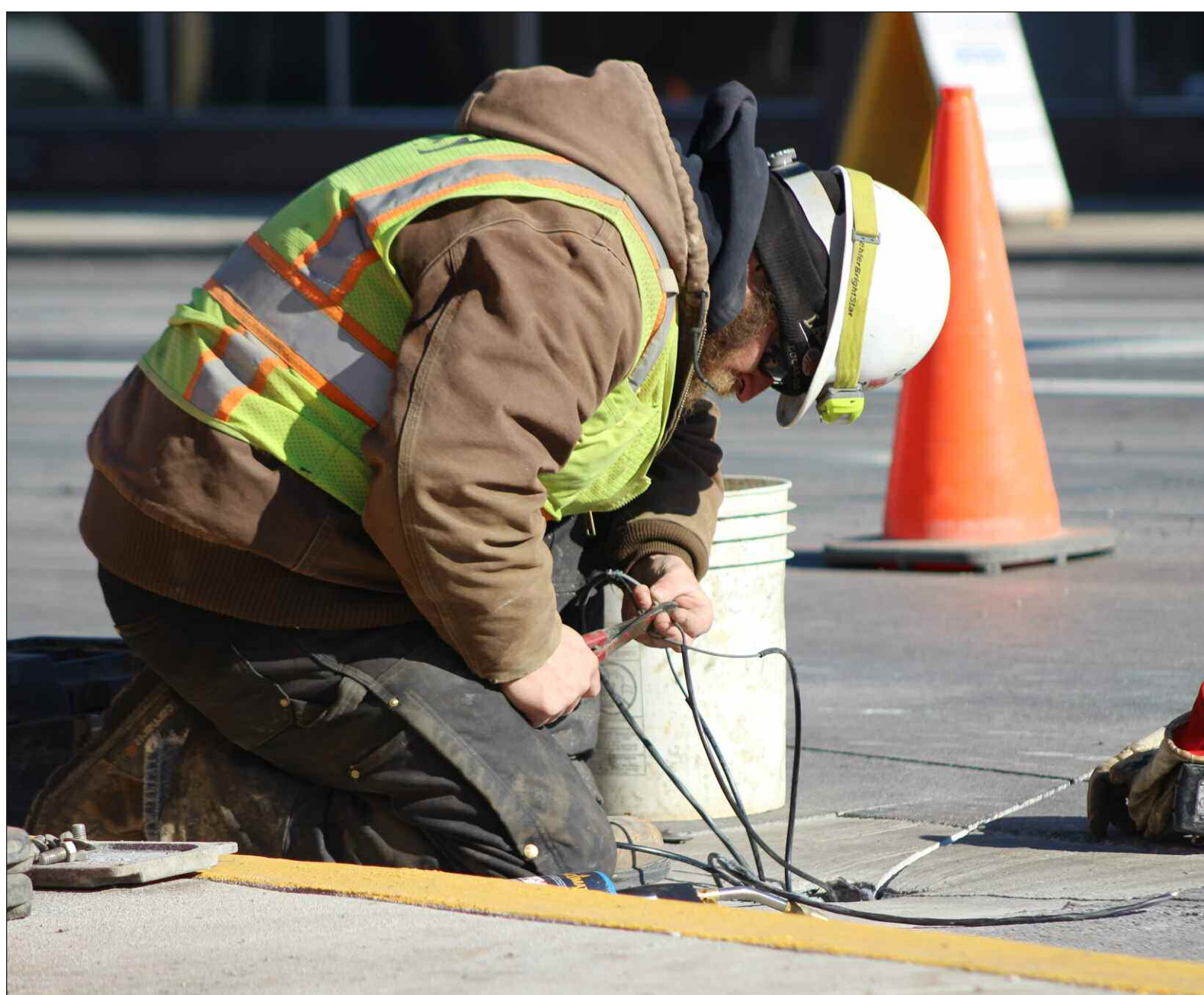


The Commercial Review

Portland, Indiana 47371

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\$1



The Commercial Review/Bailey Cline

Street circuit

A Shambaugh & Son construction engineering worker adjusts wiring Thursday on Meridian Street (U.S. 27) next to its intersection with Main Street in Portland. Workers installed and adjusted wiring in the street and filled corresponding cuts made in the street Thursday. Some equipment for stop lights and pedestrian signals have recently reappeared along the road, which has had ongoing construction since last year.

Firm will handle salary analysis

Council hires Waggoner, Irwin, Scheele and Associates to look at data

By BAILEY CLINE

The Commercial Review
It's time to look at some updated numbers.

Jay County Council agreed Wednesday to move forward with consulting firm Waggoner, Irwin, Scheele and Associates conducting a new salary analysis on county employees.

The process involves comparing employees' wages to similar jobs in other counties and providing the county with salary ranges to be used while considering raises during the budgeting process.

In recent years, Jay County employees have seen various raises across departments in an effort to make salaries comparable to neighboring counties. The county last conducted a salary analysis in 2023 to be used in 2024.

Answering a question from council vice president Cindy Bracy, Franks said the county typically conducts a salary analysis every three to four years. However, wages for county employees have already made it to the midpoint — the median salary suggestions made in the last analysis. Franks estimated the overall cost for the study will be around \$10,000.

Franks shared an initial proposition from Waggoner, Irwin, Scheele and Associates with council in November. She said Wednesday the company won't be able to begin the study until August.

Addressing a comment made by council member Harold Towell in support of the measure, Franks noted salary analyses done by outside companies also serve as protection in case of a lawsuit regarding salaries.

Council agreed to move forward with the process.

See Council page 2

GOP prioritizing property tax relief

By CASEY SMITH and WHITNEY DOWNARD
Indiana Capital Chronicle
indianacapitalchronicle.com

Indiana's Senate Republicans pegged property tax relief as its top priority during the 2025 legislative session — but leadership cautioned that a firm plan is still far from being codified.

The majority caucus, which unveiled its new agenda on Wednesday, is also promising to address rising Medicaid costs, water resource management and state contract accountability.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in the House also convened on the session's first day, and House Democrats shared their priorities.

Senate Majority Leader Rodric Bray emphasized that the 2025 session will, above all else, center around the next state budget. Given Indiana's cooling economy, he said crafting a new two-year

Medicaid and water management are also among focuses in Senate

pending plan will be "particularly challenging."

"Our revenue growth, while positive, is not at the record levels that we saw in recent years. We're also grounded with a Medicaid budget trying to explode, and inflation that is causing the cost of just about every function of government to increase," Bray continued. "Nevertheless, Senate Republicans are committed to passing another balanced budget this year."

Sen. Travis Holdman, R-Markle,

said Senate Bill 1 will be the primary property tax relief vehicle this session — a response to Governor Mike Braun's proposed tax reforms.

The senator said the measure, in its first draft, follows Braun's four-pillar plan that includes immediate property tax cuts for homeowners, as well as the introduction of a cap to limit future growth. Other portions of Braun's proposal include transparency on tax calculations and reforming the tax referendum process.

The bill's exact language has yet to be published, however. Senate GOP staff said priority measures aren't expected to go online until early next week.

"Property taxes are always a topic of conversation in this building, but they've been especially prominent in recent years. In Indiana, we're fortunate to have low property taxes, but many Hoosiers have been understandably frustrated by large, year-over-year increases in the bills," Holdman said, adding that property tax relief was a top campaign issue during the 2024 gubernatorial race.

With "a lot of ideas on the table" from other senators and the House, Holdman said a final property tax bill is likely to be piecemeal and incorporate elements from those other proposals.

See Tax page 2

Firefighters make gains

By TERRY CASTLEMAN
Los Angeles Times
Tribune News Service

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles firefighters have made big gains in battling the Sunset fire, which had triggered mandatory evacuation orders in Hollywood and the Hollywood Hills late Wednesday.

"It's a miracle that no homes burned here," one firefighter told The Times. Hours earlier, the flames had approached the mansions that line North Curson Avenue. By 10:30 p.m., flames were barely visible on the distant hillside.

"These are really nice houses up here," one firemen said to another as they watched a helicopter fly by to drop water. Firefighters on scene said the fire had been 50 acres at its peak, and was now down to 42.3 — in retreat.

Sunset fire spanned as many as 50 acres

The blaze, for a short while, raised alarms throughout Hollywood. A mandatory evacuation order was issued around 5:30 p.m. for areas north of Hollywood Boulevard and south of Mulholland Drive, and east of Laurel Canyon Boulevard and west of the 101 freeway.

The was reported at 2350 N. Solar Drive in the Hollywood Hills.

The evacuation encompassed iconic locations such as the TCL Chinese Theatre, the Hollywood Pantages Theatre, the Dolby Theatre, and Ovation Hollywood, the shopping center in Hollywood.

Earlier Wednesday, David Potts, 66, stood on his front porch just a few hundred yards from the active fire, a fire truck parked directly opposite him.

Just up the hill, the crackle of flames punctuated the low hum of engines and flowing water. Every seven minutes or so, another helicopter came by and dropped water which sprinkled over the neighborhood.

See Gains page 2



Tribune News Service/Los Angeles Times/Jason Armond

A firefighter sprays water on the Sunset fire on Vista street on Wednesday in Los Angeles. Firefighters have made big gains in battling the fire, which had triggered mandatory evacuation orders in Hollywood and the Hollywood Hills late Wednesday.

Weather

Jay County had a high temperature of 27 degrees Wednesday. The low was 17.

Snow is expected tonight with light accumulation possible and winds gusting to 20 miles per hour. The low will be

18. Expect partly cloudy skies Saturday with a high in the mid 20s. A cold snap is expected next week, with lows dropping to below zero.

See page 2 for an extended outlook.

In review

Jay County Solid Waste Management District will have recycling trailers available today. Trailers will be open from 9 a.m. to noon in the shopping center at 220 Lincoln St., Portland, and Dunkirk City Park.

Coming up

Saturday — Results from the girls wrestling regional tournament.

Tuesday — Coverage of Monday's Jay County Council meeting.

Wednesday — Details from next week's Dunkirk City Council meeting.



Council ...

Continued from page 1
Also Wednesday, council (Bryan Alexander and Harold Towell opposing) made a \$3,391.88 additional appropriation for design firm Rundell Ernstberger and Associates' study and design work related to developing the county's 68 acres on the western edge of Portland.
Council originally looked at the full remaining amount budgeted for the contract (\$243,852.57) listed on the agenda for approval.
Council president Matt Minnich noted the county has already signed a contract not to exceed \$400,000 with the company and suggested approving the full amount. Other council members questioned that recommendation, noting the contract is paid in billable hours and saying they'd like to keep tabs on the company's progress.
Questions arose about the City of Portland's lack of involvement in the project, with council member Bryan Alexander saying the

topic hasn't been brought to Portland. Council member Mike Brewster said Portland representatives could have attended Jay County meetings related to the project. (In August, Rundell Ernstberger and Associates representative Cecil Penland and consultant Ed Curtin shared a presentation of the proposed project with the city council. No request for funds has been made to Portland City Council for the project.)
Council also agreed to meet at 5 p.m. Feb. 12 in joint session with Jay County Commissioners ahead of council's regularly scheduled meeting.
Franks pointed to new council members Mike Brewster and Bryan Alexander and new commissioners Doug Horn and Duane Monroe, who took office in January. She and county attorney Wes Schemenaur suggested undergoing a financial update with Jason Semler of consulting firm Baker Tilly in a joint session. (Franks shared a study com-

pleted by Semler in August 2023 related to financing options for the county.)
Schemenaur noted Semler has provided financial updates to the county for years. He referenced questions from officials regarding the county's different revenue sources. He also noted potential changes regarding property taxes that could be made during Indiana General Assembly's legislative session — a few council members expressed concern about hearing from Semler prior to the end of the legislative session — but still suggested Semler meet with county officials next month to share a general overview of the county's finances.
In other business, council members Towell, Alexander, Matt Minnich, Cindy Bracy, Randy May, Mike Brewster and Faron Parr:
•Made a \$1 million additional appropriation (Alexander opposing) for professional services related to the county's owner-

occupied rehabilitation program. The grant dollars, awarded by Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs for participating in its Hoosier Enduring Legacy Program, must be formally appropriated before the county makes payments using the funds, explained auditor Emily Franks.
•Made the following other additional appropriations: \$326,521 in ARPA dollars for purchasing and implementing Low Associates' Windows Payroll software for Jay County Auditor's Office and Jay County Treasurer's Office and one year of maintenance; \$264,626 in ARPA dollars for buying body and vehicle cameras for Jay County Sheriff's Office, with sheriff Ray Newton pointing out the equipment has been delivered and hopes are to begin installation and training on the cameras at the beginning of February; \$244,189.80 in ARPA dollars for replacing the bridge on county road 600 West north of Indiana 26 with a culvert; and \$7,000 for an

invoice from Ritter Strategic Services for its work in the study addressing emergency responder radio equipment.
•Re-appointed Minnich as president and Bracy as vice president.
•Made various council appointments to oversee county departments and act as representatives on county boards.
•Re-appointed Randy Geesaman and Kelly Herman to one-year terms on Property Tax Assessment Board of Appeals.
•OK'd a request from Jay County Clerk Missy Elliott to use an additional cash drawer in her office, with Elliott explaining she would like to be able to help with customers as needed. (Elliott has worked in the office for years and took over in January as clerk.)
•Approved \$72,716.62 in encumbrances from 2024 to 2025.
•Heard Bracy thank Newton for sharing extra food supplies recently from Jay County Jail's new food service with Jay County Country Living.

CR almanac				
Saturday 1/11	Sunday 1/12	Monday 1/13	Tuesday 1/14	Wednesday 1/15
26/19	30/25	28/9	16/6	14/8
Saturday's forecast shows mostly cloudy skies with wind gusts reaching up to 20 mph.	Mostly cloudy on Sunday, when the low will be in the mid 20s.	Monday's weather looks to be mostly cloudy with temperatures nearing single digits degrees late.	Mostly sunny on Tuesday, when the wind chill may dip to as low as zero degrees.	Wednesday should be mostly sunny with wind chills reaching as low as -10 degrees.

Lotteries	
Powerball 1-20-36-38-43 Power Ball: 24 Power Play: 2 Estimated jackpot: \$263 million	Daily Four: 1-6-7-2 Quick Draw: 3-6-12-19-20-27-31-33-37-40-46-49-51-53-55-61-62-65-72-78 Cash 5: 6-21-27-37-41 Estimated jackpot: \$311,000
Mega Millions Estimated jackpot: \$77 million	Ohio Wednesday Midday Pick 3: 5-8-0 Pick 4: 9-2-0-0 Pick 5: 6-8-8-8-6 Evening Pick 3: 0-4-6 Pick 4: 9-9-0-2 Pick 5: 3-1-2-8-9 Rolling Cash: 9-11-21-24-35 Estimated jackpot: \$100,000
Hoosier Wednesday Midday Daily Three: 7-3-9 Daily Four: 2-7-6-3 Quick Draw: 3-8-9-10-11-12-14-16-20-23-24-34-36-37-47-50-63-65-72-75 Evening Daily Three: 6-4-9	

Markets	
Cooper Farms Fort Recovery Corn.....4.60 Feb. corn4.62 March corn4.64	Feb. beans9.98 Wheat 4.82
POET Biorefining Portland Corn.....4.58 Feb. corn4.61 March corn4.63	ADM Montpelier Corn.....4.50 Feb. corn4.50 Beans.....9.89 Feb. beans9.92 Wheat4.91
The Andersons Richland Township Corn4.53 Feb. corn4.53 Beans.....9.91	Heartland St. Anthony Corn.....4.60 Feb. corn4.60 Beans.....9.65 March beans9.70 Wheat4.72

Today in history

In 1972, local farmers met in the fourth of a series of luncheons to discuss Jay County's crop crisis. John Jaqua Sr., who organized the meeting, said cash receipts from soybeans were expected to be 70% of normal and from corn 75% of normal.
In 2020, the Jay Coun-

ty High School girls swim team lost the Jay County Invitational by a single point to New Bremen. Juniors Ashlyn Dow and Eliza Bader picked up the wins for the Patriots, with the former taking the 100-yard breaststroke and the latter the 100 butterfly.

—The CR

Citizen's calendar

Monday 9 a.m. — Jay County Commissioners, auditorium, courthouse, 120 N. Court St., Portland. 6 p.m. — Dunkirk Board of Works, city building, 131 S. Main St. 6 p.m. — Fort Recovery School Board, community room, high school, 400 E. Butler St. 6 p.m. — Jay County Country Living Advisory Board, 1194 E. 200 North, Portland. 7 p.m. — Dunkirk City Council, city building, 131 S. Main St.	7 p.m. — Fort Recovery Park Board, village hall, 201 S. Main St. Tuesday 6 p.m. Redkey Town Council executive session, park cabin, 50 Mooney St. 6 p.m. — Ridgeville Town Council, Ridgeville Fire Department, 302 N. Walnut St. Wednesday 4 p.m. — Portland Board of Aviation, airport, 661 W. 100 North, Portland.
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Photo provided

Holdman honored

The Indiana County Commissioners Board presented State Sen. Travis Holdman (R-Markle), second from left, who represents Jay County, with its Commitment to Excellence Award last month. The award is for "performing at an exemplary level while making notable contributions to advance local government leadership."

Tax ...

Continued from page 1
"I fully expect this bill to change as it moves to the Senate, the House ... Together, we are committed to providing property needs to Hoosiers, but we've also got to balance the needs for schools and local units of governments like counties, cities, towns and townships," Holdman said. "Our goal is to find a sweet spot for this bill."
Another priority bill would introduce a cap to the state's Healthy Indiana Plan, an expansion of traditional Medicaid to cover moderate-income Hoosiers who can't afford other options.
Sen. Ryan Mishler's proposal would limit the number of enrollees to 500,000 — below the 692,028 beneficiaries currently on HIP — and limit Hoosiers to 36 months of coverage over their lifetime.
"Keep in mind that this is childless adults that are able-bodied, working individuals that are on this plan and will continue to be on this plan," said Mishler, R-Mishawa-

ka. "... there's a lot of work to be done with Medicaid, but I think this bill is a start to work with the administration and get that under control."
The fiscal impact of the legislation is uncertain, as 90% of HIP's costs are covered by the federal government and the remaining 10% is funded by a hospital provider tax and cigarette tax.
Additionally, the bill would also reintroduce work requirements — something that would have to be approved by the federal government — with limited exceptions. Mishler didn't rule out the possibility that the proposal would create another waitlist.
"If you want to take away waitlists, then you have to say, 'Do we want to cut education to not have waitlists? I mean, those are the decisions we'll face here,'" Mishler said.
House Democrats disagreed.
"Where there's a will, there's a way," said House Minority Leader Phil GiaQuinta.

Gains ...

Continued from page 1
He stopped to see if the water had extinguished a burning tree he could see from his perch.
His home of 11 years sits next to Runyon Canyon. Around 4:30 p.m., he saw a nearby fire on the news and stepped outside to a thick smell of smoke. He could see the flames just a few hundred yards up the hill, with one property between him and the blaze.
When the mandatory evacuation notice came shortly thereafter, his wife, daughter and son-in-law quickly packed and left.

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SERVICES

Today
Grile, Steven: 6 p.m., Baird-Freeman Funeral Home, 221 N. Meridian St., Portland.

Sunday
Hunt, Ruth Ann: 1:30 p.m., Covenant Presbyterian Church, 415 N. Main St., Springboro, Ohio.

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How to introduce new partner to ex

By JANN BLACKSTONE
Tribune News Service

Q. My ex and I split up six months ago and our children go back and forth between our new homes. We don't have a formal parenting plan — the split was amicable; we just share the kids every few days. They are 5 and 7. It seems to be working OK, but I have recently met someone new. I am afraid this will complicate things, and their mother will not return the kids when I want them. What's good ex-etiquette?

A. Unfortunately, human nature does kick in at times and triggers unpredictable responses in exes. You think, "Oh, they would never do this

Ex-Etiquette



or that..." but jealousy or hurt kicks in and there you are wondering, "What the heck?"

The introduction of a new love interest, especially after only 6 months of living apart and getting along well, means a new person will probably come as a surprise. So you are right about being a little concerned. Hopefully, if your ex is triggered, she will not use the children to

get back at you. The kids are probably confused as it is, since no one can project where they will sleep on a regular basis.

Having a formal parenting plan in place is a good idea for multiple reasons.

First, consistency. A parenting plan allows co-parents to plan their life, plus adds consistency to the children's transition from house to house. The kids will know where they will be, and so will their friends and teachers. Consistency and staying organized will help your children adjust to the fact that they now live in two homes. If you agree, you can always adjust the parenting plan without going back to court.

Second, it will ultimately prevent arguments. There will not have to be a discussion and the need to negotiate each time there is a transition. This leaves too many things subject to whim. Therefore, when something upsetting happens, the children's schedule still stays intact.

So, how do you break the news that you are now seeing someone else? Is it even necessary to tell your ex? Won't the kids just say something, and you won't have to deal with it?

The kids probably will — and that's the problem.

If mom has no idea that you are seeing someone, when the kids come home with the news, her reac-

tion could easily be over-the-top. Say she loses her temper, starts calling you or the new person names, and acts like it's all wrong. Now the kids think you are doing something wrong, when meeting someone new is completely predictable.

That's why it is best to tell your co-parent before the kids know, even if it is as insignificant as, "I'm dating other people now." Then they can reinforce the news (hopefully) by saying something like, "Yes, honey, your dad told me last week."

The kids now know you talk, can problem solve, and it's OK to like the new partner—even though the thought of them actually

liking someone new might make you a little queasy. It's best for the kids when they see their parents remain cordial.

Scream into a pillow, call your therapist or your friend if you feel you need to vent. And, if you feel like celebrating, it's best not to let the kids see that you're too happy that your ex has moved on (lol). That's good ex-etiquette.

Jann Blackstone is a child custody mediator and the author of "The Bonus Family Handbook: The Definitive Guide to Co-parenting and Creating Stronger Families. She can be reached at bonusfamilies.com or jann@bonusfamilies.com.

Widower continues to bother late wife's friend

DEAR ABBY: My friend of 30 years passed away two years ago. Her husband, with whom I had a cordial relationship, has been calling me and other friends of his wife nonstop. He usually calls with irrelevant nonsense.

One time, I decided not to answer any of his many calls per day. When I finally felt guilty and answered, he was furious. He demanded to know where I was so that I was not able to answer the phone. I fabricated a story that I was out of state visiting family. Sometimes, I lie and say dinner is ready, someone is at my door or I'm just about to leave the house.

My initial reaction to his calls was that I am lucky I'm not so needy and lonely. I manage to cut the conversation to three to five minutes, and I'm never rude. This man is 80, lives by himself and has an adult child near his home. It is my unprofessional opinion that because of his many health issues and inability

Dear Abby



to drive and really care for himself, perhaps he should be in assisted living.

His constant calls are more than I can handle. Should I call his adult child or just not answer most of his calls? I think he may also be calling his children, and they may be aware of his behavior, but I don't want to upset them more than they probably are. My friends and I have done our best to talk to him, but it has reached the point that these calls are invasive. — OVERWHELMED IN NEW JERSEY

DEAR OVERWHELMED: You would be doing everyone a favor — yourself included —

if you made that call to inform this poor man's grown children what has been going on. Loneliness and isolation after the death of a spouse can eventually cause serious health problems, particularly in the elderly. Assisted living may be the solution he needs, not only for physical care but also for socialization. I'm glad you wrote.

DEAR ABBY: Being the least favorite is hurtful, yet my mom makes sure to convey how much she hates me every chance she gets. Mind you, she would never say that in front of my dad or my sisters. She says it standing behind me, rubbing it in. My sisters get text messages from her telling them how much she misses them. Me? I get comments like "I wish you were never born." I have tried hard to please her, but nothing has worked. Sadly, my youngest sister is rude and hates me, too. Please advise. —

UNLOVED IN TENNESSEE

DEAR UNLOVED: Unfortunately, we cannot pick our parents. Your mother's behavior is more than a little toxic, and now it has rubbed off on your little sister. This is why I am suggesting you see as little of your mother and younger sister as possible.

If you must see them, spend as little time alone with either of them as possible. Start developing relationships with people who are caring and supportive. Many people form "chosen families" when they come from families that are as dysfunctional as yours.

DEAR ABBY: I have worked successfully in the creative arts most of my professional life. My problem? My spouse never misses an opportunity to denigrate my work. If I show an unusual inspiration or spark of creativity which I am proud of, they instantly find fault and say it's

not a good or valid idea. It's crushing! This could destroy our long and happy marriage. It's painful because I love my spouse in every way. I am always respectful and supportive of their professional work. — NO VALIDATION IN CALIFORNIA

DEAR NO VALIDATION: Spouses are supposed to support each other. Is your spouse equally successful in their creative and work endeavors? If the answer is no, they may be jealous of, or threatened by, your success. They could also be insensitive about how their remarks affect you.

Have you asked your spouse WHY they are trashing your work? If you have and the response was unsatisfactory, a way to deal with this may be to tell your spouse you prefer that from now on, they keep their opinion to themselves, and quit looking to them for validation.

Community Calendar

Notices will appear in Community Calendar as space is available. To submit an item, email news@thecr.com.

Today

PAST RECOVERY SERVICES — Peer Addiction Support Team recovery support group meets at 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. each Friday at the Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition office at 100 N. Meridian St., Portland. For more information, call (260) 251-3259.

Saturday

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS — Will meet at 10 a.m. at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, 218 E. High St., Portland. For more information, call (260) 251-3336 or (260) 729-7000.

Sunday

A BETTER LIFE - BRI-

ANNA'S HOPE — A faith-based recovery group for all kinds of addictions, will meet from 5 to 6:30 p.m. each Sunday at Fellowship Baptist Church, 289 S. 200 West, Portland. Come early for a meal. For more information, call (260) 766-2006.

Monday

PORTLAND BREAKFAST OPTIMISTS — Will meet at 7 a.m. for breakfast at Richards Restaurant.

PING PONG — Will be played from 9 a.m. to noon each Monday at Jay Community Center.

EUCHRE — Will be played starting at 1 p.m. each Monday at West Jay Community Center, 125 Hoover St., Dunkirk.

PREGNANCY CARE CENTER — Free pregnancy testing with ongoing support during and after pregnancy. The center is

located at 216 S. Meridian St., Portland. Hours are 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call (260) 726-8636. Walk-ins accepted.

JAY COUNTY DRUG PREVENTION COALITION — Will meet at noon the second Monday of each month at Jay County Campus of Arts Place, 131 E. Walnut St., Portland. For more information, call (260) 251-3259.

DIABETES SUPPORT GROUP — Meets at 3 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at Mercer Health in Coldwater, Ohio.

TAKE OFF POUNDS SENSIBLY (TOPS) — Will meet for weigh-in at 4:30 p.m., with the meeting at 5 p.m., at Trinity United Methodist Church, 323 S. Meridian St., Portland. New members welcome. For more information, call (260) 726-5924.

BREAD OF LIFE COMMUNITY FAMILY MEAL — Will be served from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at Asbury United Methodist Church, 204 E. Arch St. in Portland. Everyone is welcome.

PORTLAND EVENING OPTIMIST CLUB — Will meet at 6 p.m. the second and fourth Monday of each month at Richards Restaurant.

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS — Will meet at 6:30 p.m. each Monday at A Second Chance At Life Ministries, 228 S. Meridian St. in Portland. For more information, call Brenda Eads at (260) 726-9625 or Dave Keen at (260) 251-8792.

REDISCOVERING JOY — The support group of widows and widowers meets at 6:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at R & R Fabrications, 601 E. Washington St., St. Henry, Ohio. For more information, email rediscoveringjoy@yahoo.com.

Tuesday

COMPASSIONATE CONNECTIONS RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUP — A group for anyone with a substance use disorder that helps individuals find connections as they develop long-term recovery meets at noon each Tuesday in the IU Health Jay Outpatient Behavioral Health Center, Entrance C, 510 W. Votaw St., Portland.

BRYANT COMMUNITY CENTER EUCHRE — Will be played at 1 p.m. each Tuesday.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS — Will meet at 7 p.m. at Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, 218 E. High St., Portland.

Sudoku

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

Level: Advanced

Thursday's Solution

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

The objective is to fill a nine-by-nine grid so that each column, each row, and each of the nine three-by-three boxes (also called blocks or regions) contains the digits from 1 to 9 only one time each.

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Space for color ads is limited and will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. Deadline for ads is Monday, Jan. 20

Our brides special section will be distributed in The Commercial Review (Portland), The News-Gazette (Winchester) and The News Times (Hartford City)

	full-page color — \$625
	full-page B&W — \$525
	1/2-page color — \$425
	1/2-page B&W — \$325
	1/4-page color — \$275
	1/4-page B&W — \$225
	Big business card (3x3.5) — \$105
	Business card (2x2) — \$52

Contact Lindsey at L.Cochran@thecr.com or (260) 726-8141

Merger block wasn't about security

Las Vegas Review-Journal
Tribune News Service

The president last week nixed a proposed \$14 billion merger between U.S. Steel and Japan's Nippon Steel.

He cited national security concerns for his decision. In reality, the move was a payoff to Big Labor that will hurt U.S. consumers and potentially hasten the demise of U.S. Steel.

The United Steelworkers union had opposed the merger, hoping "to create a steel-making cartel shielded from foreign competition by tariffs and Buy America rules." The Wall Journal

Guest Editorial

observed. Union boss David McCall can read the room: Industrial policy (read: government economic intervention) and trade barriers are all the rage in Washington, even with President-elect Donald Trump. The marriage would have undermined his union's influence.

President Joe Biden was only too happy to do the bidding of a politically connected special interest.

"This acquisition would place one of America's largest steel producers under foreign control and create risk for our national security and our critical supply chains," Biden explained.

That's a crock — and some members of Biden's team admit it.

"Bad decision," an official told CNN. "Doesn't actually protect union jobs and may kill the company."

National security? Japan is one of our closest allies, willing to work with the United States to challenge China's economic nationalism.

Jason Furman, a former economics adviser to President Barack Obama who now teaches at Harvard, summed up the cynical charade.

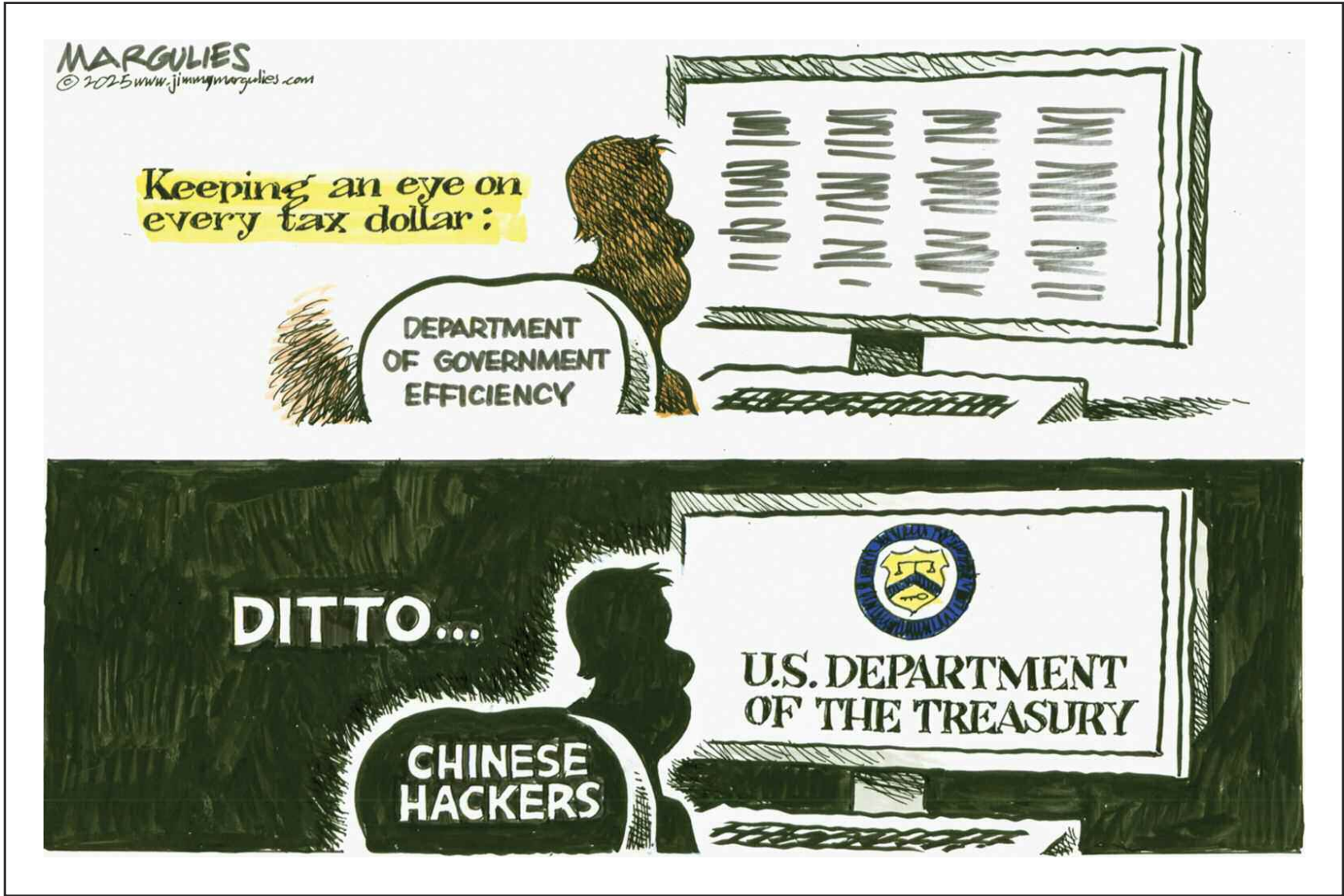
"President Biden claiming Japan's investment in an American steel company is a threat to national security is a pathetic and craven cave to special interests that will make America less prosperous and safe," he wrote in an X post. "I'm sorry

to see him betraying our allies while abusing the law."

Sorry, but hardly surprised. U.S. Steel now faces an uncertain future. Domestic suitors are few and far between. The company's infrastructure is in desperate need of improvement and investment.

"If U.S. Steel can't turn around unprofitable plants, it may have no choice but to close them," one analyst told NBC News. How that will help communities or union members is unclear.

Biden's political play sets a bad precedent and sends the wrong signal to a trusted ally.



Responses to attacks are sadly revealing

By ERIC FOSTER
cleveland.com
Tribune News Service

ATLANTA — 2025 is not off to a good start. Last week, we woke up on New Year's Day to terrible news out of New Orleans. In the first hours of the new year, a man named Shamsud-Din Jabbar drove an electric Ford pickup truck that he'd rented into a crowd of revelers celebrating the holiday on Bourbon Street in New Orleans' French Quarter. Jabbar then got out of the vehicle and opened fire on officers in the area. He was shot dead in the shootout with officers. The death toll from Jabbar's attack currently sits at 15 people, including his own death.

That same day, mere hours after Jabbar's attack, another attack occurred. This one was in Las Vegas. At around 8:40 am, Matthew Alan Livelsberger drove a Tesla Cybertruck that he'd rented in front of the entryway of the city's Trump International Hotel. After roughly 15 to 20 seconds, the vehicle — which was loaded with fuel canisters and fireworks mortars — exploded. Livelsberger was the lone fatality; he'd shot himself in the head before the blast, police said. However, seven other people were injured.

When attacks such as these occur, we all ask the same question: "Why?" It is a human response. We need to know the answer. We need to rationalize seemingly irrational behavior.

In a way, it's a defense mechanism. The world is a dangerous place. Understanding the why of dangerous events brings us back to a feeling of control in an uncontrollable world. It allows us to feel like we can take preventative action to protect ourselves and those we love from being vic-

Eric Foster



timized. It is a fanciful delusion. But an understandable one.

The answer to why always begins with the perpetrators. Jabbar was 42 years old. He was a U.S. Army veteran, having served his country on active duty for nearly a decade. He served in Afghanistan. He served an additional five years in the Army Reserve. He lived in Houston, Texas, where he worked for the accounting firm Deloitte making roughly \$120,000 per year. He was college-educated, with a degree in computer information systems. He was thrice married, with three children. His upstairs neighbor, an elderly woman, said that he was always helpful, doing things such as offering to help her carry her groceries.

We know somewhat less about Livelsberger's background. He was 37 years old. He was an active-duty Army soldier, on leave from his post in Germany at the time. He was a Green Beret with extensive combat decorations. He also served in Afghanistan. He lived in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with his wife and child. A military colleague described him as "big-hearted."

Two men. Both middle-aged. Both seeming to be living the American Dream. Both having answered the call to serve their country. Just two weeks ago, many Americans would have thanked these men for their service upon meeting them. Of all

people, why would these men perpetrate these attacks?

It appears that Jabbar was radicalized by the Islamic State terrorist group. In videos posted to Facebook before his attack, he pledged allegiance to ISIS. An Islamic State flag was found in his truck. Notably, his radicalization was recent. In the past year, members of his family noted erratic behavior; seemingly influenced by increasingly conservative religious views. He began growing a beard to look more like a "traditional" Muslim. He began posting recordings about his views on websites. An ex-wife filed a restraining order to limit his contact with his children because of his unpredictable behavior.

It appears that Livelsberger was radicalized by right-wing political sources. He left letters explaining his actions. Per law enforcement, they are rife with themes of political grievance. Interestingly, though he conducted the attack at a Trump hotel, he was a supporter of President-elect Donald Trump. He did not view his conduct as a terrorist attack. Instead, he described it as a "wake-up call." He wrote that the country was "terminally ill and headed towards collapse." He called for the removal of Democrats from both the federal government and the military. A separate email he reportedly sent to an Army intelligence officer contained allegations of U.S. government surveillance and a U.S. military cover-up of a 2019 airstrike in Afghanistan in which hundreds of civilians were killed in a day.

It's interesting, though entirely expected, to note the different framing of these men's similar actions. Jabbar's actions have been unanimously labeled as a

terrorist attack. Livelsberger's actions have been described as the product of mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Both are clearly terrorist attacks. The FBI defines international terrorism as violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations. It defines domestic terrorism as violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial or environmental nature.

Jabbar's attack in New Orleans plainly fits the definition of international terrorism. He pledged his allegiance to a foreign terrorist organization just before murdering people. It's similarly clear to me that Livelsberger's attack in Las Vegas plainly fits the definition of domestic terrorism. He rigged a vehicle as a bomb, drove it to a prominent location, and detonated it — injuring seven people — to "wake people up" to his political views of grievance, the Democratic threat, and U.S. government misconduct.

I have a theory on why these events are viewed so differently. Of course, it is related to how these men look. We see it time and time again. Black people protesting George Floyd's murder are criminals. White people storming the U.S. Capitol are Americans exercising their First Amendment Rights.

Race matters, people. But I want to discuss why it matters in this context. It matters for one simple reason: Fear.

It's one thing to live in fear of

the man who looks nothing like you. Because he looks nothing like you, you can easily identify him. He stands out. This makes it easy to avoid him. You can take it a step further and avoid anyone who looks like him. This makes the fear manageable.

It's quite another thing to live in fear of the man who looks like you. He can be anyone. He can be your neighbor. Your postman. Your child's teacher. Your Uber driver. He can even be your relative. There is much less, if anything, you can do to avoid this man. This makes the fear nearly unmanageable.

Shamsud-Din Jabbar is easy to identify. He stands out. Matthew Livelsberger, however, does not. You can stop everyone at the airport who looks like Jabbar or has a similar-sounding name. You can question their citizenship during traffic stops. You can raid their neighborhoods. You can't do that to people who look like Livelsberger. Those people have rights. They are the real Americans.

Here's how this will play out: Muslims across America will be unfairly associated with Jabbar. They will experience unwarranted vilification, harassment, and ostracization. On the other hand, nothing will change for people who look like Livelsberger. Of course it wouldn't. They didn't do anything wrong.

No, 2025 is not off to a good start. Not just because of these heinous terrorist attacks, but because of how we are responding to them. New Year. Same America.

.....
Foster, a community member of the editorial board, is a columnist for The Plain Dealer and cleveland.com. He is a lawyer in private practice.

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VOLUME 151—NUMBER 183
FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2025

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The Commercial Review is published daily except Sundays, Mondays and four holidays (New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas — holidays are observed on Tuesday when they fall on a Monday) by The Graphic Printing Co. Inc., 309 W. Main St., Portland, Indiana 47371. Periodical postage paid (USPS 125820) at Portland, Indiana. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Commercial Review, 309 W. Main St., P.O. Box 1049, Portland, Indiana 47371 or call (260) 726-8141.

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—Thomas Jefferson

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Biosecurity requirement added

By **BROOKS JOHNSON**

The Minnesota Star Tribune
Tribune News Service

Federal officials are cracking down on poultry operations looking for taxpayer relief from bird flu losses and will now require a biosecurity audit before insuring birds against future avian influenza outbreaks.

The new requirement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is an effort to stamp out the nearly three-year-old outbreak that has claimed 128 million birds nationwide. Infections continue in Minnesota and elsewhere, driving up the cost of eggs and meat.

As the outbreak spreads, the public costs continue to rise. The biosecurity requirement is an attempt to rein in the cost of compensating growers, who are required to euthanize their entire flock when bird flu is detected. Producers are reimbursed for the market value of the birds they had to euthanize.

Of the 1,200 producers who have received federal indemnity payments, 67 have had at least two infections, the USDA said Monday.

Those multiple-outbreak operations have been quite large, accounting for \$365 million of \$1.1 billion of indemnity payments to date, according to the USDA.

That's also true in Minnesota, where much of the \$170 million in federal reimbursements have gone to the largest poultry companies in the state, including Hormel-owned Jennie-O Turkey Store and egg producer Forsman Farms, which has received eight indemnity payments for \$73 million.

There have been 18 facilities with three or more outbreaks nationally.

"Biosecurity is proven to be our best weapon in fighting this virus, and this update will ensure that poultry producers who received indemnity for HPAI are taking measures to stop future introductions of the disease and avoiding actions that contribute to its spread," USDA Chief Veterinary Officer



The Minnesota Star Tribune

A farm in Melrose quarantines after a bird flu outbreak in 2010. Federal authorities are now requiring stepped-up biosecurity measures before reimbursing growers for bird flu losses. The requirement is an effort to stamp out the nearly three-year-old outbreak that has claimed 128 million birds nationwide. Infections continue in Minnesota and elsewhere, driving up the cost of eggs and meat.

Dr. Rosemary Sifford said in a news release.

Poultry operations that don't comply with beefed-up biosecurity requirements "will not be eligible for indemnity payments if the premises experiences future infections within the same outbreak," the USDA said.

As more chickens are put

down, the price of eggs has shot up again this fall after backing off record highs set in early 2023, according to federal data. After decades of trending under \$2, a dozen eggs rang up for \$3.65 on average in November, up 8.3% over October.

In Minnesota, nearly 100,000 turkeys were culled this month

amid outbreaks in Fillmore, Chippewa and Stearns counties, according to the state. The state, which leads the nation in turkey production, has lost nearly 9 million birds.

In Iowa, several flocks, including one with 4 million birds, were infected in December, according to USDA figures.

The virus known as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) or H5N1 also has jumped to cattle but does not yet pose a widespread risk to people, health officials say. Experts are urging further measures to stop the spread before it mutates into a virus that poses a pandemic threat.

December decline

Sentiment dip driven by weaker perspective

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Farmer sentiment drifted lower in December as the Purdue University/CME Group Ag Economy Barometer dropped 9 points to a reading of 136.

The decline was driven by producers' weaker perspective on current conditions in U.S. agriculture and their farms, with the Index of Current Conditions falling 13 points to 100.

Although the Current Conditions Index declined this month, it remains 24 points above its low in September and 5 points higher than in October. The Index of Future Expectations also fell 8 points to 153, remaining 59 points above its September low and 29 points higher than the October reading. This month's survey was conducted from Dec. 2-6, 2024.

"While sentiment dipped this month, it's clear that much of the postelection optimism about future conditions is still holding strong," said James Mintert, the barometer's principal investigator and director of Purdue University's Center for Commercial Agriculture. "Producers' optimism about the future seems to stem largely from their expectations for a more favorable policy environment over the next five years."

Farmers' views on the current and long-term outlooks for agriculture showed some noticeable differences in December. While sentiment regarding the current situation and the one-year outlook was more cautious than in November, expectations for the agricultural sector over the next five years were notably more positive. The percentage of producers anticipating widespread good times in U.S. agriculture over the next five years increased to 57%, from 52% in November and 34% in October. This optimism extended

across both the crop and livestock sectors, with 4-point and 5-point increases, respectively, in the percentage of respondents expecting good times. In contrast, views on the near-term outlook were less favorable. When asked about financial conditions on their farms compared to a year ago, 57% of producers reported worse conditions in December, up from 51% in November. Similarly, 51% of farmers expressed concern about the U.S. agricultural economy over the next 12 months, an increase from 40% in November.

Following a 13-point increase in November's survey, the Farm Capital Investment Index fell 7 points to a reading of 48. The weakening in investment sentiment was reflected in a lower percentage of farmers who believe it is a good time to invest, dropping to 17% from 22% in November. At the same time, the proportion of producers who viewed it as a bad time to invest increased slightly to 69%, up from 67%. This dip in investment sentiment mirrored the decline in the Farm Financial Performance Index, which fell 8 points in December to 98.

Continuing the trend from November, the Short-Term Farmland Value Expectations Index dropped 5 points to a reading of 110, following a similar 5-point decrease the previous month. Despite these two consecutive decreases, the short-term index remains well above its low of 95 in September. The Long-Term Farmland Value Expectations Index, which reflects producers' outlooks for farmland values over the next five years, decreased by just 1 point to 155.

Farmers' outlook for the future of their farms and the agricultural sector remains noticeably more positive than at the end of

summer. This shift appears to be driven by expectations of policy changes following the 2024 election, particularly in areas such as environmental, estate and income tax policies. Leading up to the election, over 40% of producers anticipated more restrictive environmental regulations over the next five years.

However, following the election, fewer than 10% expressed concerns about tighter regulations. Similarly, 40% of farmers expected estate taxes to rise before the election, but less than 10% foresee an increase in estate taxes within the next five years. Regarding income taxes, nearly 38% of producers anticipated rises before the election, with that percentage also dropping below 10% postelection. Lastly, more than half (55%) of survey respondents expect the election outcome to lead to a stronger farm income safety net than was in place prior to the election.

One ongoing concern for U.S. farmers is the future of international trade in agricultural products. In December, 4 out of 10 (43%) farmers chose "trade policy" as the most important policy for their farm in the upcoming five years. Both the November and December barometer surveys asked producers about the likelihood of a "trade war" that could negatively affect U.S. agricultural exports. The results indicate that many producers remain worried about this scenario. In December, 48% of farmers said they believe a trade war that harms agricultural exports is either likely (32%) or very likely (16%), an increase from 42% in November. Conversely, only 21% of respondents in December viewed a trade war as either unlikely (17%) or very unlikely (4%), down from 26% in November.



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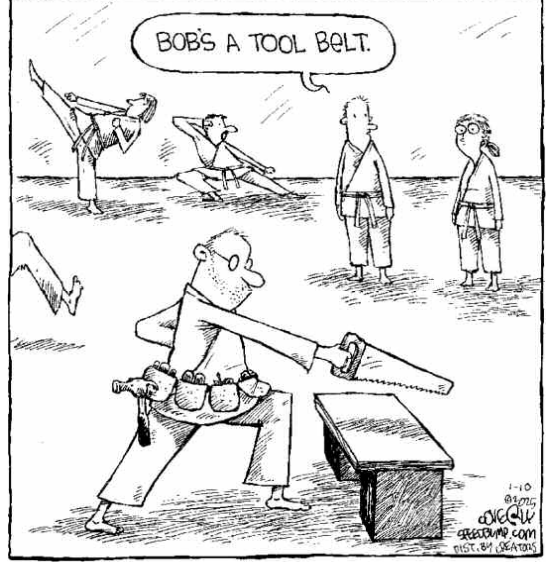
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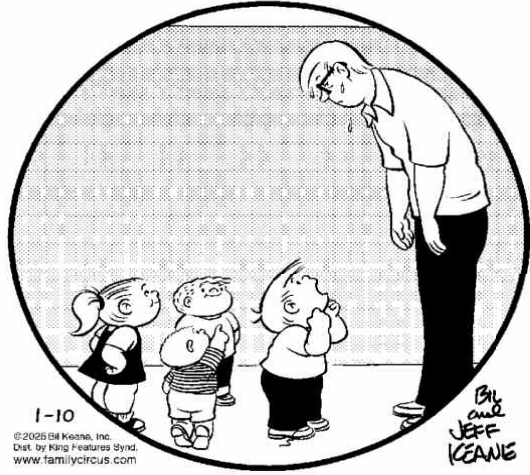
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THE FAMILY CIRCUS By Bil Keane



"Lift me up to the ceiling again, Daddy? You did them THREE times and me only TWICE"

Contract Bridge By Steve Becker

Bidding quiz

You are South in each of the following sequences, and the question in every case is whether your partner's second bid indicates a minimum opening bid...

- 1. ♠ North 2♥ South
2. ♠ North 2♥ South
3. ♠ North 2♥ South
4. ♠ North 2♥ South
5. ♠ North 2♥ South
6. ♠ North 1NT South

1. Minimum. Since your two-heart response promises 10 or more points, partner cannot have 16 or more points...

Tomorrow: Look before you leap. ©2025 King Features Syndicate Inc.

1-10 CRYPTOQUIP

ZW RGJO F QBTPBGHFIB RW
VXFH ORK'TB EFOZGI ZE
PXBBNO, XRV FTB ORK EQBFNZGI?

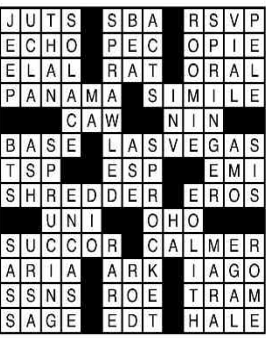
QFTHJO QBTHJO.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT MOUNTAINS WILL ALWAYS MAKE ME CRACK UP LAUGHING. THEY ARE HILL-AREAS. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: O equals Y

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Purse part, 6 Tatter, 9 Fr. holy woman, 12 Borders on, 13 In the past, 14 Allow, 15 Trattoria offering, 16 Wild hurry, as on Black Friday, 18 Divides in two, 20 Greek mountain, 21 Rule in India, 23 Goat's plaint, 24 City on the Yangtze River, 25 Broadway failure, 27 Zaps in a microwave, 29 Argue, 31 Portugal's place, 35 Fix a lawn, 37 Bath bubbles, 38 Long-legged shorebird, 41 Hwys., 43 Scale note, 44 Spanish "but", 45 Rob Roy spirit, 47 Pressed for time, 49 Garlicky mayo, 52 Dijon denial, 53 Blackbird, 54 "What's in — me?", 55 — Lanka, 56 "Acid" actress, 57 Crusoe's creator, 2 TV schedule abbr., 3 Work that's done ASAP, 4 "— boy!", 5 Sacred song, 6 French Baroque composer, 7 Turkish officials, 8 Deity, 9 Melting snow, 10 "Selma" actress, 11 Patriot Allen, 17 Awakens, 19 Wind indicators, 21 "Mayberry —", 22 Hearty brew, 24 Spider's home, 26 Sitting room, 28 Youngster, 30 Hanoi holiday, 32 Exit in haste, 33 Altar promise, 34 Visual communication syst., 36 Corsage flower, 38 Whirls, 39 Choir member, 40 Resident of Tabriz, 42 Composed, 45 Taxpayer IDs, 46 Refer to, 48 "Friendly skies" co., 50 Brit's restroom, 51 Fury

Solution time: 25 mins.



Yesterday's answer 1-10

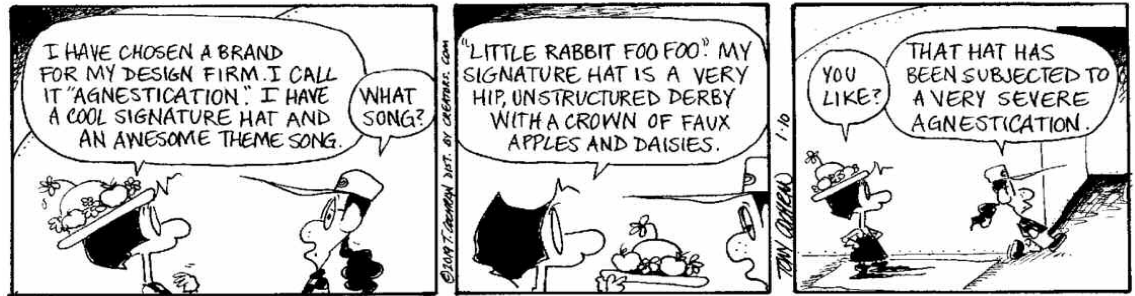
Peanuts



Rose is Rose



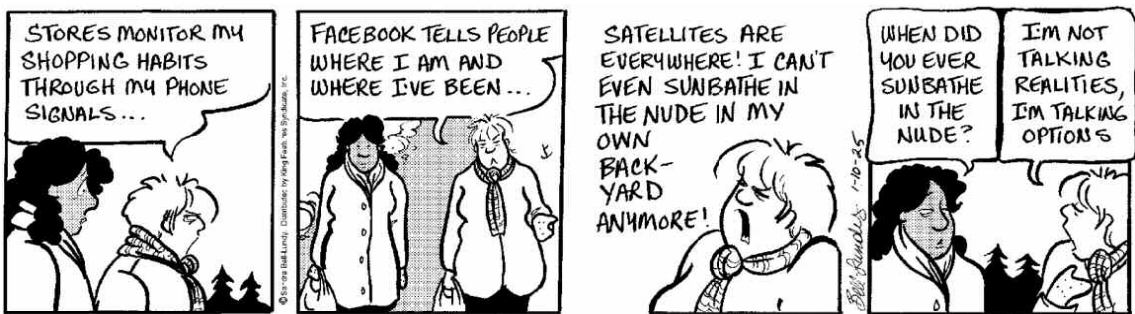
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Hi and Lois



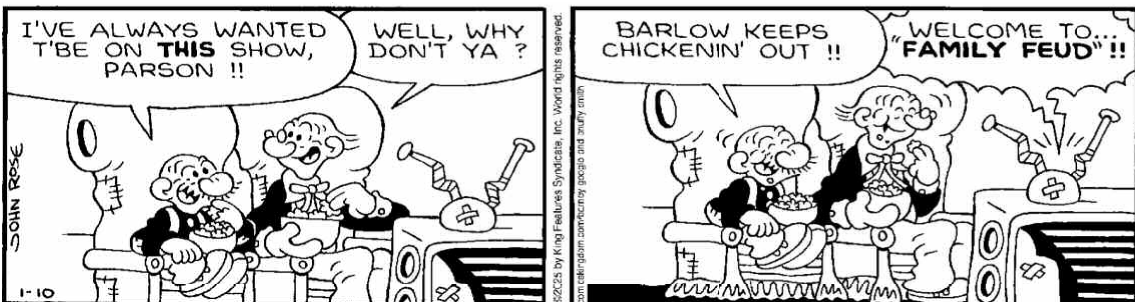
Between Friends



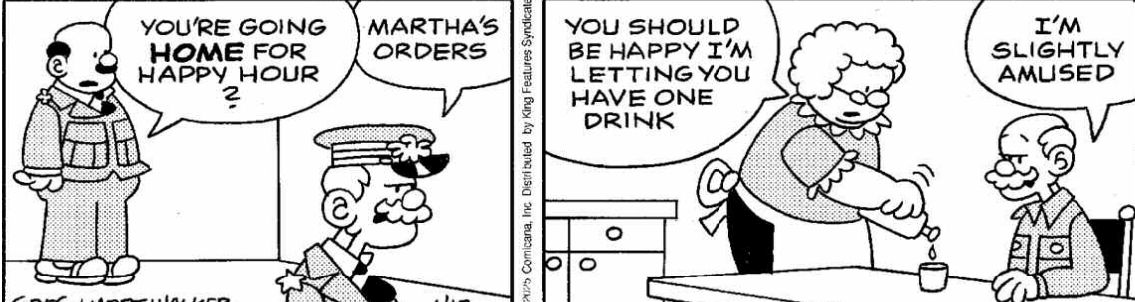
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Application open

Fort Recovery begins process to find next football coach

By **ANDREW BALKO**
The Commercial Review

The search for a new football coach has officially begun.

Fort Recovery Local Schools posted the application form for the Fort Recovery High School head football coaching position on Wednesday to begin the search for its first new coach in 21 years.

"So applications opened (Wednesday) and the process will close on January 24," said FRHS Athletics Director Amiee Pottkotter. "Then we're hoping to do interviews the next two or three weeks after that. If possible, we'd want to have someone for the February board meeting or the March board meeting, probably at the latest."

Pottkotter added that the timeline could change if the applicant they chose is also looking to be hired on within the school as a teacher or in another role as well.

Fort Recovery is looking to fill the position left open following Brent Niekamp's decision to step down after 21 seasons. During his time as head coach, the Indians to eight playoff appearances and a state title in 2015. He finished with an 81-131 (38.2%) while climbing up as high as third in the Midwest Athletic Conference standings in 2015.

"Brent was around for 21 years and led us to a state championship," said Pottkotter. "So it's hard to follow up on that and that great dedication, but that's what we're looking for."

During his final season as the Tribe's coach, Fort Recovery went 2-9 and lost in the opening



Former Fort Recovery High School football coach Brent Niekamp calls out a play from the sidelines during the Indians' 36-24 victory over the Parkway Panthers on Oct. 11. Niekamp stepped down from coaching FRHS following the season.

round of the playoffs to Marion Local. Niekamp also served as the FRHS athletics director from 2018-21.

For now, the Indians will have to wait for the hiring process to take place and hope they receive an applicant that can match the success that

Niekamp brought to the program.

"That's something that we're looking for, someone who wants to be a part of Fort Recovery and wants to help our athletes be a part of something bigger than themselves," Pottkotter said. "Our three main pillars of

our Fort Recovery athletics culture guide our commitment, integrity and relationships. So we are looking for someone who would be able to instill all three of those in our student athletes and grow them into a great person after high school athletics."

Dylan Hernández



UCLA coach Mick Cronin rips his players

By **DYLAN HERNANDEZ**
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — UCLA coach Mick Cronin sounded exasperated as he cataloged his team's crimes against his brand of basketball, pointing out his players didn't play defense and allowed their opponents to push them aside to collect rebounds. The details he recalled during his 10-minute postgame news conference were intended to support an overarching thesis.

"We're soft," he said. The blunt appraisal after No. 22 UCLA's 94-75 crushing defeat to No. 24 Michigan at Pauley Pavilion on Tuesday night was part of an annual tradition during which Cronin questions the character of his players and declares they lack the ability to win without exerting maximum effort.

Not everyone is enamored with the approach, a segment of UCLA's fan base insisting he should temper his sideline behavior and take greater responsibility for his team's failures.

But here's the thing: His approach works.

While it's fair to be suspicious of his acumen as an offensive coach or wonder whether his old-school style will prevent him from landing or retaining the caliber of player required to win a national championship, what's irrefutable is that he knows what he's doing.

See Rips page 7

NFL plans for Rams to host Vikings

By **CHUCK SCHILKEN and THUC NHI NGUYEN**
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Five days before the Rams host the Minnesota Vikings in an NFC wild-card playoff game, the NFL said it was keeping an eye on the wildfires that have ravaged parts of Los Angeles County since Tuesday.

The league said it currently plans for the Rams to host the Vikings during their playoff game Monday night at SoFi Stadium in

Game could be moved to Arizona due to fires

Inglewood south of where fires burned on Wednesday, but it has a contingency plan if the fires adversely impact the ability to host the game.

"As with all games, there are contingency plans in

the event a change in location is needed," the NFL said in a statement. "In this instance, the game would be played on Monday night at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz."

Wind gusts reaching

nearly 100 mph have fueled the Palisades, Eaton, Hurst and Woodley fires, which started Tuesday and were responsible for at least five deaths and have burned more than 1,100 buildings as of Wednesday afternoon.

The NFC West champion and No. 4-seeded Rams are scheduled to play the No. 5 Vikings at 5 p.m. PST on Monday at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood. With a scheduled day off from practice Wednesday, it remains to be seen whether the Rams

will explore practicing somewhere other than their Woodland Hills facility later this week.

The Rams posted on X that their "hearts are with those affected by" the fires and "the first responders protecting our community."

"Be safe," the team wrote.

Star receivers Cooper Kupp and Puka Nacua were among the Rams players who posted similar sentiments.

See Plans page 7

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The Commercial Review – **\$160**
The News-Gazette – **\$145**
The News Times – **\$120**

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