

The Commercial Review

Portland, Indiana 47371

www.thecr.com

\$1



The Commercial Review/Bailey Cline

Table tennis with Tom

Tom Mills and Kathy Ayers play a match of table tennis this morning at Jay Community Center. Table tennis players have been meeting at the community center for more than a decade.

Unemployment rate clears 3%

Jay County ranks tied for 38th-lowest in Indiana

By RAY COONEY

The Commercial Review

For the first time since June 2021, local unemployment climbed above 3% last month.

Jay County had an unemployment rate of 3.1% in February according to estimates Indiana Department of Workforce Development released Tuesday.

The rate was up 0.8 percentage points from January and 0.7 percentage points from February 2022.

Local unemployment had been below 3% for 18 consecutive months since being at 3.3% in June 2021. It has not been above 4% since July 2020 when the state was coming down from the unemployment spike resulting from coronavirus pandemic shutdowns.

During a run of dramatically low unemployment, Jay County's rate in December 2021 was just 1.1%. That was the lowest rate in at least 30 years.

Jay County's rate last month was again close to the middle of the state rankings, tied for 38th-lowest along with Carroll, Huntington, Marion, Morgan, Ohio, Tipton and Union counties. (It was tied for 46th-lowest last month.)

The local rate was 0.3 percentage points lower than the Indiana average.

Hamilton, Gibson and Boone counties led the state with unemployment rates of 2.3%. Daviess County, which was lowest last month, came in at 2.4%.

Adams County was tied for fifth-lowest with Dubois and Hendricks counties at 2.5%.

LaGrange and Noble counties in northeast Indiana took over the highest rates in the state, coming in at 5.2%.

Steve Garbacz of The News Sun of Kendallville reported that while area economists took note of the big changes in those counties — LaGrange jumped up from 2.1% in December — there is no clear reason for the increases.

"The January labor market numbers show inconsistent performance across the northeast corner of the state, even across manufacturing-heavy locations," director of Purdue University Fort Wayne Community Research Institute Rachel Blakeman told the newspaper. "Employers have spent two-plus years learning how to operate with reduced worker availability, so it will be interesting to see if these workers who are now searching for work find suitable employment quickly, i.e. they are snapped up by other employers, or if they find companies less willing to hire as the economy, especially at a national level, shows signs of weakness in the new year."

Starke County was next at 5%, with Elkhart and Lake counties at 4.9%.

Area rates are as follows: Adams County: 2.5%, up 0.8 percentage points, tie-fifth lowest

Blackford County: 3.8%, up 1.4 percentage points, tie-21st highest

Delaware County: 3.7%, up 1.3 percentage points, tie-25th highest

Jay County: 3.1%, up 0.8 percentage points, tie-38th lowest

Randolph County: 3.5%, up 1.2 percentage points, tie-34th highest

Wells County: 2.8%, up 1 percentage point, tie-14th lowest

Zoning board approves findings on variance

By RAY COONEY

The Commercial Review

Portland Board of Zoning Appeals met briefly Tuesday and approved the findings of fact related to a variance it granted at its Feb. 14 meeting.

The board at its last meeting granted a variance to Wenzak, a firm planning to build a Wendy's at 514 N. Meridian St., to allow its

entrances on Race Street and the alley north of the property to be 42 feet from Meridian Street as opposed to the 70 feet required by city ordinance. Jae Schilling of Wenzak and Jay Kammeyer of Perry Building Contractors said the layout plan allows for the best scenario for moving traffic given the size and shape of the 0.605-acre lot.

In order to grant the variance, the board had to make various findings of fact, including that doing so would "not be injurious to the public health, safety, morals and general welfare of the community," the use and value of the adjacent property would not be effected in a "substantially adverse manner" and strict application of the ordinance would

result in "practical difficulties" in use of the property.

At Tuesday's meeting, Pati McLaughlin of Jay/Portland Building and Planning read the findings of fact, indicating that the board felt the variance request met the criteria. Board members Lee Newman, Larry Petro and Kyle Cook approved them unanimously. (Board

members Aaron Loy and Connie Roberts were absent from the meeting.)

The board's previous vote to grant the variance was 3-1, with Newman, Petro and Cook in favor, Loy dissenting and Roberts absent.

Mike Medler of Medler's Furniture, which is located north of the planned fast food restaurant, requested a copy of

the findings following Tuesday's meeting. Last month, Medler's attorney Jim Forcum indicated an intent to appeal the board of zoning appeals' decision to grant the variance.

Wenzak officials previously said they are hopeful to start the estimated \$2 million construction project this spring. It is expected to take 120 days to complete.

Russian jet and U.S. drone collide

By PETER MARTIN

Bloomberg News

Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON — A Russian fighter jet collided with a U.S. surveillance drone in international airspace above the Black Sea, causing the American aircraft to crash, the Pentagon said, an incident that ratcheted up tensions already running high over the invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's defense ministry denied the U.S. claim, saying its jets didn't come into contact with the drone, according to a statement posted on Telegram. The statement said the drone's transponders were off, and it flew out of control and crashed "as a result of sharp maneuvering" and that the Russian aircraft returned safely to their base.

U.S. officials had a different description of the event. The

Defense ministry denies that its plane was involved

U.S. European command said the Su-27 warplane, accompanied by a second Russian jet, struck the propeller of the MQ-9 Reaper drone in what was an "unsafe and unprofessional" intercept at around 7 a.m. local time. The two Russian fighter jets flew in front of and dumped fuel on the drone before the strike, it said.

See **Collide** page 5

Embracing Aimee

Aimee Pottkotter, recipient of Fort Recovery Chamber of Commerce's Citizen of the Year award, embraces friend Ashley Brown during the chamber's awards banquet Sunday. Brown introduced Pottkotter, who was nominated for her volunteer work with Wendelin Sportsman Club and Win on the Wabash (WOW) Super Raffle.



The Commercial Review/Bailey Cline

Weather

The temperature in Jay County hovered between 27 and 33 degrees Tuesday.

Tonight's low will be 33. Thursday's forecast calls for a high of 53

with winds gusting to 30 miles per hour and rain expected in the evening.

See page 2 for an extended outlook.

In review

Arts Place is hosting Galit Gertsenzon, George Wolf and David Rezits for a performance "Forbidden Music: Compositions by Imprisoned or Banned Composers during the Holocaust" at 7:30 p.m. tonight. Tickets will be available at the door or in advance at myartsplace.org or by calling (260) 726-4809.

Coming up

Thursday — Coverage of today's Portland Board of Aviation meeting.

Friday — Coverage of Thursday's Redkey Town Council meeting.



Controversial bill is likely dead for '23

By NIKI KELLY

Indiana Capital Chronicle
indianacapitalchronicle.com

Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray, R-Martinsville, has assigned a controversial bill involving transgender children and the Department of Child Services to the Senate Rules Committee, likely meaning it is dead for the session.

While the Senate sometimes uses the panel to vet legislation, that won't be the case for House Bill 1407.

"Sen. Bray has serious concerns about the legislation and, citing the pending court case on the matter, doesn't see a path forward for the bill," spokeswoman Molly Fishell

told the Indiana Capital Chronicle.

The Indiana House passed the bill 58-33. It would have banned courts from removing transgender children from their parents based only on parent refusal to seek gender-affirming care or otherwise support transitions.

The legislation centers on one Hoosier family — and its estranged transgender daughter — whose case is still in court.

"All's I'm trying to do is, in this bill, is to protect parents from government's overreach [in] taking their children from them without having harmed them," bill author Rep. Dale DeVon, R-Granger, said on the floor.

House Bill 1407 includes a quasi-parents bill of rights, declaring that parents have "the fundamental right to direct" how they raise their children. That includes physical and mental health, education, and any other "inalienable rights" not specifically ceded legally. Government, it says, can't "infringe" without a good reason.

And the bill says that parents declining to consent to any form of affirmative care — names, pronouns, temporary puberty-blockers, hormone doses, surgical procedures, mental health services or other — doesn't mean children need the Department of Child Services to step in.

At the center of the legislation

is one Anderson family with a transgender daughter.

Mother Mary Cox claimed in committee this month that DCS removed her child from her home, placing her with an affirming foster home, because she and her husband didn't accept their daughter's gender identity.

Later testimony from Cox's attorney, who represented her in court proceedings against DCS, revealed that the 16-year-old had said she didn't want to return home to her parents — a factor that may be considered by courts in certain types of cases.

DCS told the Capital Chronicle that it does not open cases solely because parents don't support transitions.

In Cox's case, DCS removed the child after reports of the parents verbally abusing the child and refusing to treat the child's eating disorder. An October ruling from the Indiana Court of Appeals affirmed DCS' actions.

"The Parents have the right to exercise their religious beliefs, but they do not have the right to exercise them in a manner that causes physical or emotional harm to Child," the court ruled.

The case has been appealed to the Indiana Supreme Court.

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Indiana Capital Chronicle is an independent, nonprofit news organization. Its website is indianacapitalchronicle.com.

CR almanac

Thursday 3/16	Friday 3/17	Saturday 3/18	Sunday 3/19	Monday 3/20
53/42	49/21	30/20	36/22	45/27
There's a 30% chance of showers Thursday under mostly cloudy skies.	Friday's forecast shows nothing but rain and winds gusting up to 35 mph during the day.	Partly sunny, with highs near 30 degrees and a low around 20 at night.	Mostly sunny, with a low dipping to around 22 degrees in the night.	Sunny skies and warmer temperatures are in the forecast, with a high of 45.

Lotteries

Powerball Estimated jackpot: \$63 million	Quick Draw: 3-9-10-12-20-26-27-29-32-33-35-43-44-45-48-64-71-73-74-80 Cash 5: 3-16-22-27-30 Estimated jackpot: \$176,000
Mega Millions 1-7-23-38-55 Mega Ball: 2 Megaplier: 3 Estimated jackpot: \$254 million	Ohio Midday Pick 3: 8-2-8 Pick 4: 3-0-0-1 Pick 5: 4-6-3-8-8 Evening Pick 3: 5-3-0 Pick 4: 5-5-2-6 Pick 5: 5-3-6-8-5 Rolling Cash: 8-23-24-27-29 Estimated jackpot: \$100,000
Hoosier Midday Daily Three: 6-1-6 Daily Four: 8-1-9-0 Quick Draw: 1-5-10-14-15-17-18-29-30-36-37-38-38-40-54-55-65-69-73-76 Evening Daily Three: 8-4-5 Daily Four: 0-4-6-9	

Markets

Cooper Farms Fort Recovery Corn.....6.35 April corn.....6.36 Wheat.....6.37	Wheat.....6.39 July wheat.....6.84
POET Biorefining Portland Corn.....6.34 April corn.....6.40 May corn.....6.42	Central States Montpelier Corn.....6.20 Late March corn.....6.20 Beans.....14.80 Late March beans..14.80 July wheat.....6.83
The Andersons Richland Township Corn.....6.23 April corn.....6.23 Beans.....14.74 April beans.....14.74	Heartland St. Anthony Corn.....5.97 April corn.....5.97 Beans.....14.60 April beans.....14.60 Wheat.....6.42

Today in history

In 44 B.C., Julius Caesar was stabbed to death by Roman senators in Italy, resulting in civil war.

In 1917, Russia's last emperor, Tsar Nicholas II, abdicated after the February Revolution. Nicholas, his family and some of his servants were later executed.

In 1933, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was born in Brooklyn, New York. She served as a justice on the United States Supreme Court for 27 years.

In 1972, "The Godfather" premiered in theaters. Francic Ford Coppola's gangster movie, based on the novel by Mario Puzo, became one of the most popular films of its time.

In 1985, the first internet domain name was registered by Symbolics Computer Corporation in Massachusetts.

In 1990, Mikhail Gorbachev became president of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's reforms and free speech platform strengthened relations with other countries and led to the fall of the Berlin Wall, signaling the end of the Cold War.

In 2011, Syrian citizens held anti-government protests, launching the country's civil war. After a dozen years, conflict is still ongoing in the country.

In 2016, Portland Park Board hired Missy Bader as the manager of Portland Water Park. Bader managed the park for five years. Prior to her time as manager, she had worked at Portland Pool for two decades. — The CR

Citizen's calendar

Today 4 p.m. — Portland Board of Aviation, municipal airport, 661 W. 100 North.	Council, park cabin, 200 S. Mooney St.
Thursday 6 p.m. — Redkey Town St.	
Friday 10 a.m. — Dunkirk Police Pension Board, city building, 131 S. Main St.	



Pet of the week

Mittens, a friendly spayed female polydactyl (extra toes), is available for adoption from Midwest Pet Refuge. The fee is \$75. Adoption applications are available at midwestpetrefuge.com/adopt.

Photo provided

SERVICES

Friday
Adams-Armstrong, Carolyn: Hillcrest Cemetery, Redkey.

May 13
Warrick, Clarice: 11 a.m., West Richmond Friends Meeting, 609 W. Main St., Richmond.

Service listings provided by
PROGRESSIVE OFFICE PRODUCTS
120 N. Meridian St.
Portland, Indiana 47371
(260) 726-9201
progressiveofficeproducts.com

R-H joins with 2 for partnership

The Tribune-Star
Tribune News Service
Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology is partnering this year with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Stanford University on a semi-conductor initiative.

They are establishing the Intel-sponsored Higher Educational Initiative in Integrated Device Manufacturing.

The effort is intended to revitalize America's micro-electronics and semiconductor industry to meet future manufacturing workforce needs and make the industry more accessible to future employees.

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Help us choose our first TEACHER OF THE YEAR

The Commercial Review will honor its inaugural Teacher of the Year in a special section April 14.

Anyone can nominate a teacher. The award is open to anyone who:

- Teaches at a school in our coverage area
- Is a teacher who lives in our coverage area
- Is a teacher who previously lived in our coverage area



The deadline is March 31.

To nominate, send us a letter that includes your name, the name of the teacher being nominated, their school, the grade(s) and subject(s) they teach and your reasons for nominating them.

You can send it to news@thecr.com (preferred) or The Commercial Review, Teacher of the Year nomination, P.O. Box 1049, Portland, IN 47371

Local Teacher of the Year

Concert set in Dunkirk

A singer, songwriter and storyteller is performing a free concert in Dunkirk this weekend.

Daryl Mosley, a regular on “The Grand Ole Opry” and shows at the Bluebird Cafe, will perform at 10:30 a.m. Sunday at Calvary United Methodist Church, 301 N. Main St.

The southern gospel player is a three-time “Song of the Year” award winner, a two-time “Songwriter of the Year” award winner and has topped the charts with eight of his songs.

His songs have been performed by various artists, including Bobby Osborne, Lynn Anderson and The Booth Brothers.



Photo provided

Daryl Mosley, a singer and songwriter, will perform a free concert at 10:30 a.m. Sunday in Dunkirk.

Family adventure

Minnetrissa is celebrating Family Adventure Day next week.

The free community event offers crafts, games and other activities in Muncie. The event, a “choose-your-own-adventure opportunity,” will be separated into three sessions, from 10 a.m. to noon, 1 to 3 p.m. and 4 to 6 p.m. Wednesday. Pre-registration is required and can be completed by visiting minnetrista.net/events.

To learn more, visit the website or call (765) 282-4848.

Wow Scholars

The Win on the Wabash Super Raffle is offering scholarships to local high school seniors.

The organization will award 22 seniors with \$500 scholarships, according to a press release. Two seniors from each of the following high schools will be selected: Fort Recovery, Coldwater, St. Henry, Marion

Local, Versailles, Fort Loramie, Parkway, New Bremen, Minster, New Knoxville and Jay County.

To be eligible, applicants must be a United States citizen, enrolled at one of the above mentioned schools as a senior and active in the community.

Applications are available online by visiting wowaffle.com/scholarships/.

The deadline to apply is March 31, with scholarship winners notified by April 30.

Remember parents: your words matter

DEAR ABBY: While shopping at the mall, I have seen too many stressed-out parents ignore or yell at their children. It certainly isn't helpful. It isn't how I was raised or how I raised mine. Years ago, I saw a poem in your column that addressed the ramifications of bad parenting versus good parenting. From what I've been seeing, you should print it again. Many parents who should read it won't see themselves in it, but it could help the ones who do. Its message is so important. Thank you. — JANET F. IN MINNESOTA

Dear Abby



DEAR JANET: I know the poem you are referring to and I agree it sends an important message for parents. It's one of many profound poems and essays included in my “Keepers” booklet, which was compiled because so many readers requested reprints of their favorites. Read on:

- CHILDREN LEARN WHAT THEY LIVE**
by Dorothy Law Nolte
- If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn
 - If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight
 - If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy
 - If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty
 - If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient
 - If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence
 - If a child lives with praise, he

learns to appreciate

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith

If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.

This is just one of the poems, essays and letters that appear in the Keepers booklet. Some are witty, others are philosophical.

The topics include children, animals, aging, parenting, death and forgiveness. It can be ordered by sending your name and address plus a check or money order (U.S. funds) for \$8 to Dear Abby Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447.

Filled with down-to-earth nuggets of wisdom, it's a quick, easy read and an inexpensive gift for newlyweds, pet lovers, new parents or anyone recovering from an illness because it covers a wide variety of subjects.

Pen aficionados create club

By ZOE GREENBERG

The Philadelphia Inquirer
Tribune News Service

PHILADELPHIA — At the second meeting of the Philly Pen Circle, attendees signed their names in a ledger from the 1800s and compared custom fountain pen nibs. Over the course of the evening, their fingers became progressively more stained with ink.

The club, for those who like pens, paper, “and other actual objects,” is a bit of a splinter group. Michael McGettigan, a South Philly bike shop owner and analog aficionado, founded it in January after determining that the city's more-established pen collectors group gathered too rarely. (They meet quarterly.) The new group meets monthly at a rotating space; this month, about a dozen people assembled at Iron Hill Brewery in Center City to talk pen history, pen futures, and, of course, pen gossip.

“You hear buzz — oh there's this new paper you have to try,” said Lyn-gine Calizo, 52, a co-organizer who lives in Graduate Hospital.

Even as many of us work remotely and socialize on smartphones,

McGettigan believes we're living in an analog golden age. Vinyl sales are up, film cameras are cool again, and suddenly everyone wants to write in a bullet journal. (He may be a little biased: he has hosted a range of analog-passion meetups, from typewriter “type-ins” to letter-writing nights, over the years.) In a sign of just how much everything old is new again, he compares today's pen club to gatherings of early hackers. And he's already considering the group's legacy.

“A peculiar goal is that maybe 100 years from now, written evidence is found proving there was a Philly pen circle,” he wrote before the meeting.

Fountain pens, with their internal reservoirs of ink and metal nibs, are both status objects and nostalgic portals for those devoted to them.

“It forces you to think,” said Stan Minkovsky, 46, who works (“you'll be surprised”) as a computer programmer and lives in the Northeast. “With a computer, you can easily erase it. Once you put the pen on paper, it's permanent.”

For the most part, pen aficionados see the digital world and the analog one as complementary. They save

their harshest critiques for ballpoint pens, which Calizo described as “soulless.” (The group was universally appalled by the cheap swag ballpoint pen I was using to take notes)

“Has anyone brought up the term pen-abling yet?” asked Calizo. She first tried a fountain pen in grade school and loved it; years later she braved a blizzard to attend Philly's annual pen show.

Many fountain pens aren't expensive, but some are “grail pens,” extraordinary objects that can inspire a lifelong quest — and cost an enormous amount of money.

Mike Gealt, 74, estimates he spent about \$20,000 on pens last year. One of his favorites is an orange and blue Taccia Miyabi urushi-lacquered pen, which cost \$850. Its outer shell is made from the sap of the urushi tree, which behaves like poison ivy before it hardens.

Gealt, a Glenside resident, had learned about the Philly meeting from Washington's pen Facebook group; he attends their twice-weekly meetings online.

“I don't call myself a collector. I'm an accumulator,” he joked.

Community Calendar

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

Today

PORTLAND ROTARY

CLUB — Will meet at noon each Wednesday at Harmony Cafe, 121 N. Meridian St.

AL-ANON FAMILY GROUP — New Beginnings, a support group for friends and families of alcoholics, will meet at 6:30

p.m. each Wednesday in the Zion Lutheran Church, 218 E. High St., Portland. For more information, call (260) 726-8229.

A BETTER LIFE — BRANNA'S HOPE — A faith-based recovery group for all kinds of addictions, will meet from 6:30 to 8 p.m. each Wednesday at Redkey United Methodist Church, 122 W. Main St. Come early for a meal. For more information, call Pastor Randy Davis at (765) 369-2085.

Thursday

CELEBRATE RECOVERY — A 12-step Christian recovery program meets at 10 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. each

Thursday 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.

EN AVANT CLUB — Meets at 1 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month.

ORGAN TRANSPLANT SUPPORT GROUP — Will meet at 3 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month in the IU Health Blackford main conference room.

JAY COUNTY HUMANE SOCIETY — Will meet at 5:30 p.m. the third Thursday of each month at Jay County Public Library. The public is welcome.

Sudoku

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

Level: Intermediate

Tuesday's Solution

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

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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Swiss Village

NOW SEEKING: SUMMER MAINTENANCE WORKERS

Swiss Village is seeking individuals to work 40 hours/week from May to August in Maintenance. This position will be day shift hours and primarily be responsible for assisting with outdoor maintenance and lawn care, including mowing, mulching, trimming shrubs, and pulling weeds. As time permits or weather requires, this position will also be responsible for assisting with indoor maintenance duties.

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Swiss Village
1350 W. Main St., Berne, IN 46711
Or e-mail: careers@swissvillage.org

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Catching up was difficult to beat

Editor's note: This column is being reprinted from March 16, 2005. One of the things Jack was best at was keeping in touch with friends over distance and time.

By JACK RONALD

The Commercial Review

Would I recognize him? I wasn't sure. Sitting in a big city bar, waiting to meet up with someone you haven't seen in almost 20 years can be a little intimidating.

Back in the Saddle



But would I recognize him? I wasn't sure.

Watching the entrance, I assessed everyone who came in.

When one guy with a partially-shaved head wandered by, I gave him a close look.

Maybe rebellious enough, but too young.

When another guy with a ratty ponytail came by, I thought back to my old friend's rock n roll days and decided he was a bad fit.

Finally, about the time I was beginning to think the reunion wouldn't happen, the most dapper guy in town walked in.

It was my old friend, although he looked a lot more like Frank Sinatra.

His suit was perfectly tailored. His tie was silk, with a designer label.

In other words, he looked a little different from the last time I saw him at our 20th class reunion and a heckuva lot different from our graduation back in 1966.

We made quite a pair as we went off to dinner.

If there's a word for the opposite of dapper, it would have applied to me.

Though I can be presentable when need be, my turtleneck and tweed sport jacket were not in the same league as my friend's tailoring.

In some ways, the differences in our wardrobes were symbolic of the different paths our lives had taken since high school.

I've been married almost 34

years; he's divorced, having been married to another of my best friends for a couple of decades.

He has no children; I have three charming daughters.

His parents — though in their late 80s — are living; mine have been gone for years, Dad died 22 years ago this week.

His career as an engineer has been built upon numbers; mine has been based upon words.

He's a self-described Libertarian. I'm, well, not a Libertarian.

Our lives have taken very different paths since high school graduation.

But it wasn't our differences which mattered over dinner.

It was our connections.

Seamlessly we moved from conversation to conversation, trading stories and anecdotes and opinions that dated back to

first grade at Judge Haynes Elementary School.

We reflected on how blind we were to other classmates' potential, how quickly we got caught up in all the adolescent nonsense which clouds human judgment, and — most of all — how glad we were that we'd been able to re-establish connection after all these years.

We told stories from elementary school. We told stories from junior high gym class.

We laughed over our teachers, our friends, and primarily at ourselves.

And when the evening ended, when we gave one another a hug at the entrance to his subway station at the base of my hotel, we both realized what a wonderful thing it can be when your friends at age 56 just happen to be some of the same folks who were your friends at age 6.

That's tough to beat.

Hostility has been bipartisan

Las Vegas Review-Journal Tribune News Service

Hostility to the First Amendment is a bipartisan endeavor.

Too many elected officials take an oath to uphold the Constitution without having bothered to read the document.

The Orlando Sentinel reported this week that a Florida lawmaker of Republican persuasion has offered a bill to require bloggers to register with the government or face fines.

The sponsor, state Sen. Jason Brodeur, who represents a district near Orlando, argues the bill is "an electioneering issue, not a free speech issue" and will provide voters with information about who is attempting to influence public policy.

That's weak tea. It may be news to Brodeur, but electioneering enjoys free speech protections.

"The idea that bloggers criticizing a politician should register with the government is insane," Newt Gingrich tweeted.

He's correct, of course.

Yet "good government" types, many on the left, have for years demanded that interest groups engaging in political activity register with the government or face legal consequences.

The archives are littered with examples of grassroots organizers — and even radio talk show hosts — becoming entangled in the byzantine campaign finance laws regulating expenditures and political activism.

In 1995, for instance, the U.S. Supreme Court was forced to step in when Ohio officials fined a woman for distributing anonymous leaflets advocating against a proposed school tax hike.

It's also worth noting that a good many Senate Democrats, including Nevada's two members of the upper chamber, have embraced a proposal to rewrite the First Amend-

Guest Editorial

The idea that bloggers criticizing a politician should register with the government is insane.

—Next Gingrich

ment to give federal bureaucrats more authority to regulate political speech, potentially even banning certain campaign discourse as an election neared.

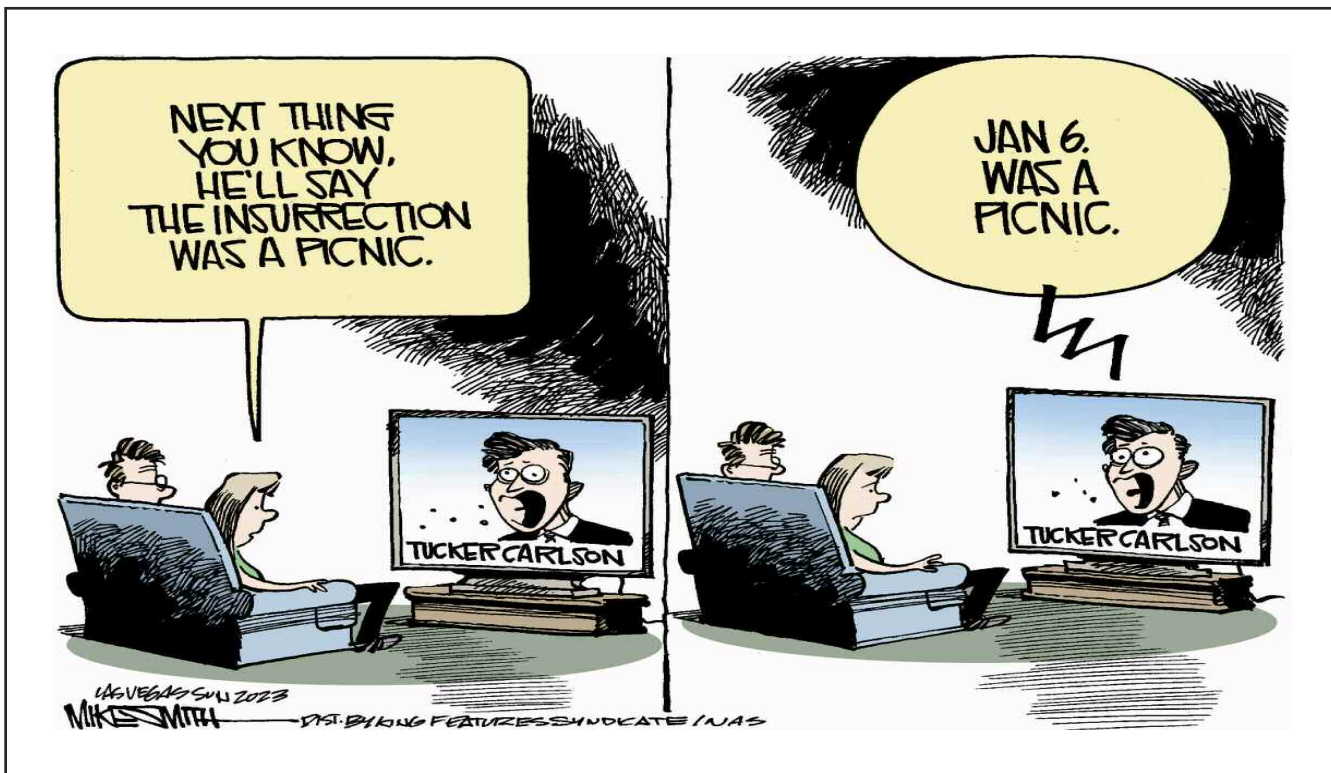
Brodeur's bill is equally offensive, a blatant effort to intimidate potential critics into silence.

"It is difficult to imagine a legislative proposal more fundamentally at odds with our nation's founding spirit than requiring citizens and journalists to register their publications with the government under pain of fines," a spokesperson for the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression told businessinsider.com.

On Tuesday, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis did the right thing.

"That's not anything I've ever supported, I don't support," he said in reference to the blogger plan, according to The Floridian. "I've been very clear on what we are doing."

Brodeur should apologize and then send his ridiculous bill through the shredder.



It's all about nastiness, loyalty

By MARK Z. BARABAK

Los Angeles Times Tribune News Service

Last weekend, the Texas Republican Party voted to punish one of its own.

Tony Gonzales, a two-term congressman from San Antonio, was censured for, among other things, backing a modest gun safety law after 19 children and two teachers were slaughtered at an elementary school in Uvalde.

The day after the party issued its condemnation, Texas Rep. Ronny Jackson appeared on Fox News (motto: "Lying to viewers for fun and profit") where he cracked wise about the removal of a cancerous growth from President Joe Biden's chest.

"Biden is the cancer," the Amarillo Republican said. "He's what needs to be removed, not the lesion they found."

There has been no clamor among Texas Republicans to sanction Jackson for his callous and tasteless remark, and none is expected.

Together, the events — though unrelated — say a good deal about the state of our politics and, especially, the nature of the Trumpified GOP.

Forget basic human decency. What counts is pugnacity, acting out and blind, unswerving allegiance to the party line.

For years, Texas' 23rd Congressional District — a behemoth sprawling hundreds of miles from El Paso to San Antonio — was among the most competitive in the nation.

Gonzales, a former Navy cryptologist who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, won a close race in 2020. He had an easier time of it when he sought reelection in 2022 after the lines were redrawn to give the district a somewhat more Republican tilt.

But it's still competitive by Texas standards, and Gonzales' performance suggests a lawmaker trying to navigate shaky ground.

His district includes Uvalde and his vote for the gun law following the May 2022 massacre was hardly a rad-

Mark Z. Barabak



ical response; all the legislation did was strengthen background checks, help states implement red-flag laws and boost funding for mental health and school safety.

If the measure came up again, Gonzales told reporters as the state GOP was weighing action against the congressman, he would double down in his support.

Another of Gonzales' heresies was voting in favor of legislation that codified same-sex marriage. It "wasn't a tough vote," he told the Texas Tribune, noting the diversity of his district. "If the Republican Party is gonna grow and thrive, we gotta be open to that."

Republicans used to call it "the Big Tent," and everyone was said to be welcome inside.

But for extremists who have taken over leadership of the GOP in Texas and other states, the emphasis is no longer party-building. It's purges and purity tests.

By Gonzales' count, he's taken nearly 1,400 votes in Congress "and the bulk of those have been with the Republican Party."

No matter.

After Saturday's overwhelming vote to censure, the state GOP issued a statement accusing the lawmaker of a "lack of fidelity" to Republican "principles and priorities" and all but begged a challenger from his party to step in and take on Gonzales in 2024.

Never mind that someone more rigid and ideological might prevail in a primary but then very likely lose the House seat in November.

If Donald Trump and his devotees

have shown one thing in the past few years, it's that they're not very good at winning competitive elections.

Ronny Jackson served as White House physician for five years under Presidents Obama and Trump, and it's scary — given what he's revealed since — that anyone let him remotely near the Democrat.

The crass quip about Biden's cancer is the least of it.

Elected to Congress in 2020, the former naval officer has helped promote Trump's stolen-election lie — Jackson voted against certifying Biden's victory — suggested the spread of COVID-19 was part of a Democratic election plot, and offered groundless theories questioning the president's mental and physical health.

None of which has hurt Jackson with voters in his overwhelmingly pro-Trump district; he won reelection in November with more than 75% support.

In Texas, "you don't get censured for being too far right," said Cal Jillson, an analyst and political science professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, or for taking a loud, confrontational stance in favor of guns and against gay rights.

How about making fun of the president having skin cancer?

"Our politics have descended to a level where that's not uncommon," Jillson noted, adding if that kind of boorish behavior drew more widespread condemnation "there would be lots of people being censured very frequently."

Here's a better idea. If you'd like to see more compromise and bipartisanship in Washington, vote for someone like Gonzales who shows a willingness to think independently, stand on principle and cross party lines to achieve a greater good.

And ship Jackson out to sea, where he belongs.

Barabak is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times, focusing on politics in California and the West.

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—Thomas Jefferson

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Tribune News Service/Getty Images/Arif Ali

Pakistan clash

Supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan clash with riot police (not pictured) near Khan's house to prevent officers from arresting him today in Lahore, Pakistan. Pakistan police appeared on March 15 to have given up an attempt to arrest former prime minister Imran Khan, ending a siege of his residence after violent clashes with hundreds of his supporters.

'Watershed' budget coming

By JOHN M. DONNELLY

CQ-Roll Call
Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON — The \$1 trillion American defense budget is in sight.

The U.S. government will spend that much on defense soon — maybe within just a couple of years, if recent trends continue.

The U.S. government is spending just 3 percent of America's gross domestic product on defense, Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord told reporters Monday — about half the share of U.S. wealth that the military got during the Reagan presidency and a far cry from the roughly one-third of GDP expended on defense during World War II.

Still, McCord acknowledged, it's a lot of money — and it's about to go up again. It's the product of more than two decades of largely unimpeded growth in Pentagon spending, including increases from year to year in seven of the last eight cycles, much of it driven by lawmakers adding appropriations for weapons that McCord called "lower priorities" — \$43 billion worth just last year, he said.

"Just do the math," McCord said of the looming \$1 trillion mark. "Maybe that's going to be a psychological, big watershed moment for many of us or some of us. But it is inevitable."

The Biden administration provided details Monday on its \$886.3 billion budget proposal for national defense in fiscal 2024, which includes \$842 billion for the Defense Department. Republicans have already blasted it for being only a 3.2% increase over the current level as inflation still roars at about double that rate, and the hawks are eyeing a big boost to Biden's proposed level of spending.

But the administration's

fiscal 2024 proposal would, even without a congressional addition, raise the defense budget by fully \$104.4 billion compared to that of fiscal 2022, which ended less than six months ago.

Moreover, none of these figures include the tens of billions in defense dollars that have gone to support Ukraine.

When Washington does increase the defense budget again in fiscal 2024 above the current level, it will be despite grumblings from the far left and far right — and it's quite likely to go up by more than 3.2%.

If it goes up again in fiscal 2024 by 10%, as it did from fiscal 2022 to fiscal 2023, the so-called topline will approach \$950 billion.

That will then become the baseline for the fiscal 2025 request. And so on. Hence the talk of a \$1 trillion milestone.

At some point, the Pentagon's budget will stop swelling at this rate, but it is not clear when — not with war raging in Europe and a bigger conflict possible in the future in Asia, and not with bipartisan majorities still supporting the increases, even with a newfound stinginess toward the Pentagon in the House GOP conference.

Still, while discussion of the topline gets massive attention in Washington, there are deeper questions that Congress is about to turn to.

For one, if America is not getting a bigger military for all this money — and officials made clear Monday it is not — is the country at least getting a more capable military? The fiscal 2024 plan has a stronger focus on building more munitions and missiles for possible use in Asia, deploying more attack-resistant satellite constellations and expanding use of artificial intelligence.

Teachers plan to strike

By HOWARD BLUME

Los Angeles Times
Tribune News Service

LOS ANGELES — Leaders of a union that represents financially struggling low-wage workers will announce on Wednesday the timing of a three-day strike that would involve teachers and force the shutdown of Los Angeles public schools, dealing another blow to the education of more than 420,000 students.

The walkout of as many as 65,000 workers — expected to take place in the next two weeks — would represent the largest and longest full disruption of education in the nation's second-largest school system since the six-day teachers' strike of 2019. Not even the campus closures of the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted more than a year in Los Angeles, resulted in a complete halt to academic instruction.

The labor action comes as district

officials are discussing plans to offer two optional days of school over spring break — on April 3 and 4 — a project that has so far attracted a small fraction of students, about 6,000. Officials said they would be pleased to reach 340,000 or more but are determined to go forward with whoever signs up by the March 24 deadline.

This extra learning time — called acceleration days — has become caught up in the labor dispute, with leaders of the teachers union and its supporters calling these optional days a costly and poor use of resources.

The walkout would be led by Local 99 of Service Employees International Union. Local 99 represents about 30,000 workers including bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria and other food service workers, campus security aides, teaching assistants and aides for students with disabilities.

Local 99 would be joined in a solidarity strike by United Teachers Los Angeles, which represents 35,000 teachers, counselors, therapists, nurses and librarians.

L.A. schools Supt. Alberto Carvalho announced Monday night that campuses would close because he could not ensure students' safety without teachers and support staff.

To families, he said: "We encourage you to begin discussions with your employer, child care providers and others now."

To employees, he said: "We are making every effort to provide students with resources for learning, social emotional well-being and nourishment in the event of a strike."

For many union members, the walkout represents a painful but necessary step toward reaching a contract agreement, while also helping to recruit and retain high-quality workers who serve students.

Felony arrests

Domestic battery

A Portland woman was arrested Tuesday for domestic battery.

Trista L. Carreno, 34, 2367 W. Indiana 26, was preliminarily charged

with a Level 6 felony for domestic battery in the presence of a child younger than 16 years old.

She's being held on a \$3,000 bond in Jay County Jail.

Collide ...

Continued from page 1
"Our MQ-9 aircraft was conducting routine operations in international airspace when it was intercepted and hit by a Russian aircraft, resulting in a crash and complete loss of the MQ-9," Air Force General James Hecker said. "In fact, this unsafe and unprofessional act by the Russians nearly caused both aircraft to crash."

The U.S. planned to summon Russia's Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly Antonov, while U.S. Ambassador Lynn Tracy "conveyed a strong message to the Russian ministry of foreign affairs," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

Price said the collision was a "brazen violation of international law."

The incident over the Black Sea appeared certain to cause a new spike in strains between Moscow and Washington, whose relationship has almost completely broken down over Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine a year ago. It also fit what U.S. officials said was an increasingly aggressive pattern of behavior by Russian jets around the Black Sea, which is home to a Russian naval fleet, and surrounds the peninsula of Crimea, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

In February, the Pentagon scrambled fighter jets to counter four Russian aircraft that approached U.S. airspace off Alaska. The U.S. military was on heightened alert following the shooting down of an

alleged Chinese spy balloon and a series of other unidentified objects over U.S. airspace.

"Russian irritation about U.S. and NATO activities in/around the Black Sea is nothing new," Andrew Weiss, vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in a tweet. "Surely, people in the Kremlin are smart enough to know that U.S. won't back away from conducting surveillance missions like the drone flight that a Russian jet crashed into today."

U.S. officials echoed that argument, with White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby saying the U.S. would keep doing "what we need to do for our own national security interests in that part of the world."

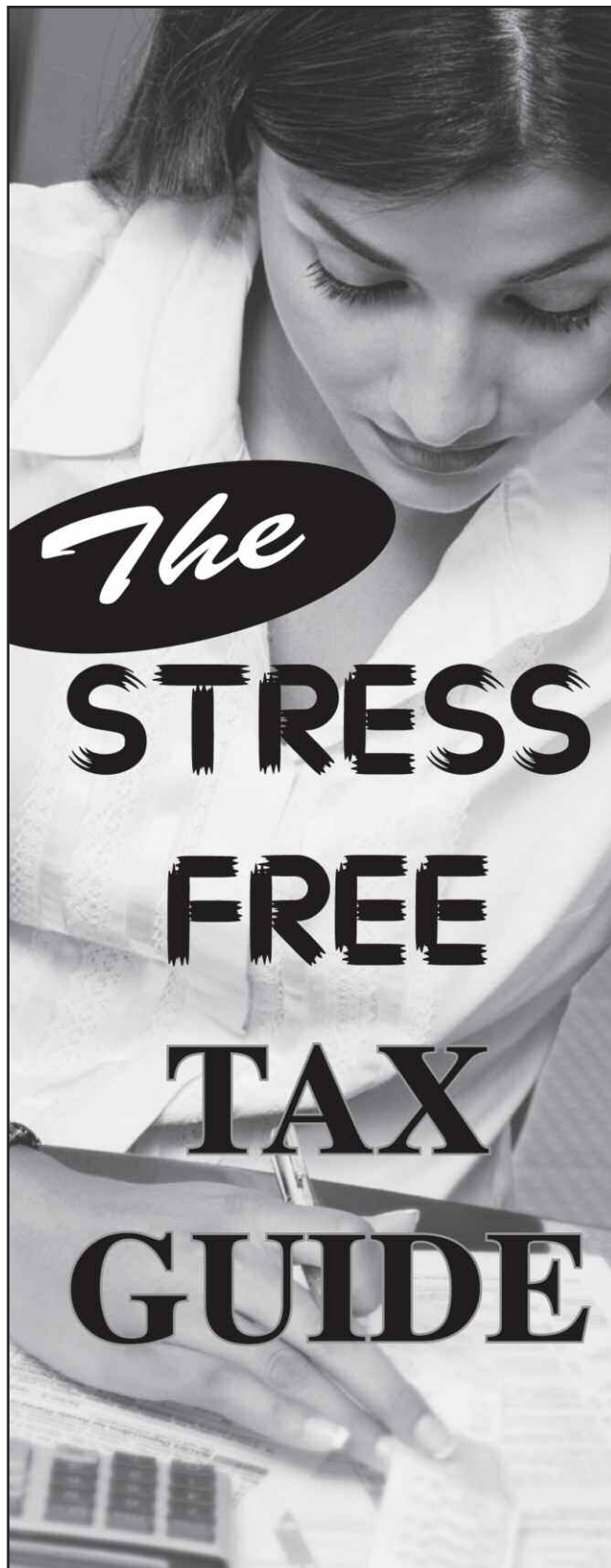
He said President Joe Biden had been briefed on the incident.

Kirby said intercepts by Russian aircraft over the Black Sea are "not uncommon."

The U.S. is working to declassify video of the incident, the Pentagon said.

An early U.S. assessment of the incident found that the two Russian jets flew close to the drone for 30 to 40 minutes before the collision. The MQ-9 has a 66-foot wingspan and is powered by a tail-mounted propeller.

"We have seen a little bit more aggressive attitude both in the Baltic Sea and also in the Black Sea," Norwegian Colonel Eirik Guldvog said last week.



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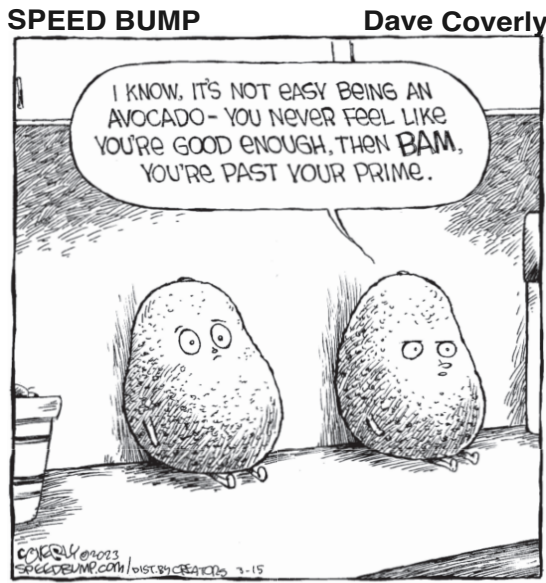
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♥ 8
♦ K 6
♣ K 10 9 6 5 3

WEST
♠ J 7 2
♥ Q J 7 4 3
♦ 4 3 2
♣ 7 2

EAST
♠ K 10 8 5 4
♥ 9 6 2
♦ 8 5
♣ A Q 8

SOUTH
♠ Q
♥ A K 10 5
♦ A Q J 10 9 7
♣ J 4

The bidding:
North East South West
1 ♠ 1 ♣ 2 ♣ Pass
3 ♣ Pass 3 ♥ Pass
4 ♣ Pass 4 NT Pass
5 ♣

Opening lead — two of diamonds.

East recognized that if he returned a second diamond, he could prevent declarer from ruffing any hearts in dummy, but he was concerned with an even more imminent threat — dummy's clubs. If declarer established that suit while the ace of spades remained as an entry to dummy, he could eventually discard his losing hearts on the good clubs.

East therefore set his sights on dislodging dummy's ace of spades before declarer could draw trump and establish the clubs. And to make sure that nothing went awry, East returned the spade king!

This proved to be just what the doctor ordered. No matter what declarer did from this point on, he could not avoid losing two more tricks, and he finished down one.

Note that if East had returned any card other than the king of spades at trick three, South would have had no trouble making the contract.

Peanuts



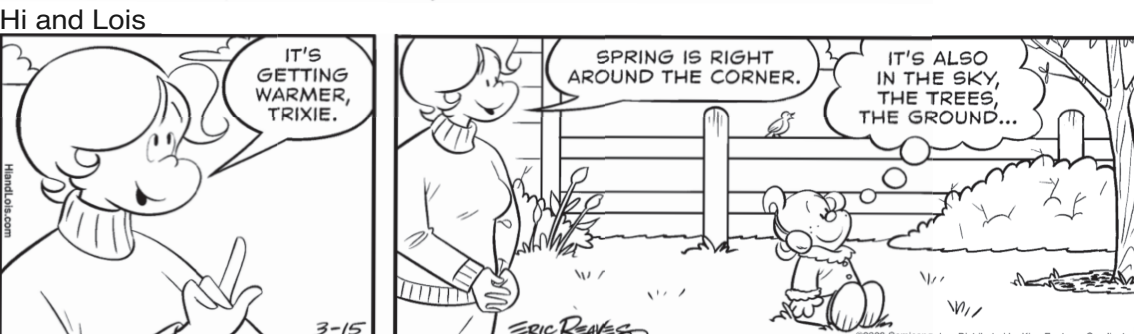
Rose is Rose



Agnes



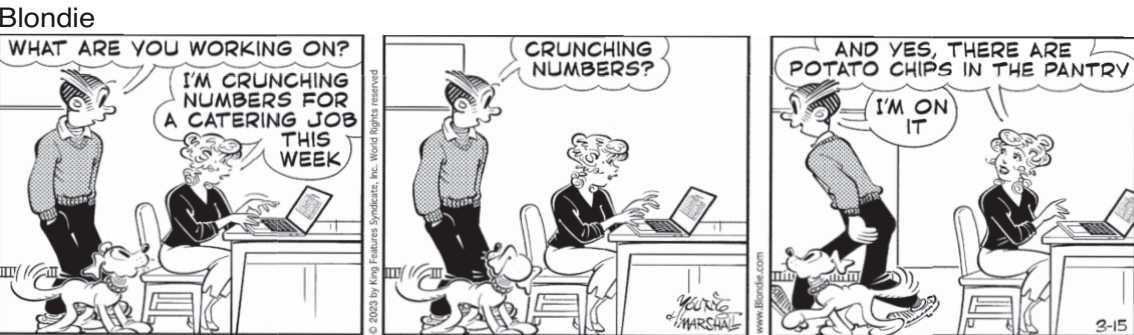
Hi and Lois



Between Friends



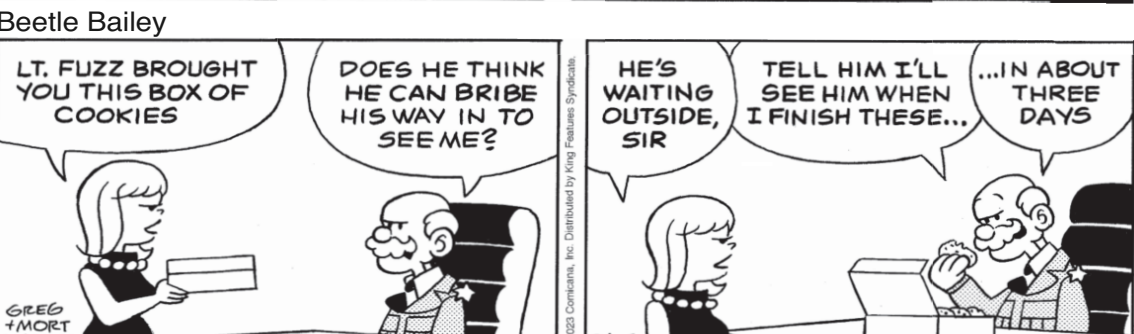
Blondie



Snuffy Smith



Beetle Bailey



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KG IBDQIOIFDHZD DQND H
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Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals M

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Hastens table
5 Spasm abbr.
8 Raced
12 Smell — (suspect)
13 Köln cry
14 Prado display
15 Diatribe
17 Reddish horse
18 Jellied entrees
19 Stable enclosures
21 "Empire" actress Long
22 Ex-Yankee Martinez
23 URL suffix
26 Devious
28 Beer type
31 Milne bruin
33 Long, skinny fish
35 Sleeve end
36 Sleep problem
38 Entanglement

DOWN

16 "JAG" spinoff
20 Up to relatives
23 IRS employee
24 "Alley"
25 Capulet rival
27 Evergreen tree
29 Newt
30 "Mayberry"
32 Warming devices
34 Migrating rodent
37 NPR's Shapiro
39 Release money
42 Enjoyed im- mensely
44 Trudges
45 Total failure
46 Perry's creator
48 Con- ceits
49 Litter's littlest
50 Beholds
53 Season opener?

Solution time: 23 mins.

P	R	A	M	C	P	A	S	O	P	H
I	A	G	O	I	L	C	R	A	M	
S	C	R	A	M	B	L	E	R	E	N
A	K	A	A	R	E	L	I	M	E	S
	S	R	A	T	A	P				
B	O	C	C	E	P	I	S	T	O	N
I	B	A	R	A	B	S	U	H	J	
D	I	L	U	T	E	S	W	R	O	T
	F	A	R	L	I	E				
A	L	O	F	T	A	U	S	A	P	O
S	I	M	I	S	C	R	E	E	N	E
A	N	N	E	A	M	T	Y	O	R	E
P	A	I	R	X	E	D	E	N	T	S

Yesterday's answer 3-15

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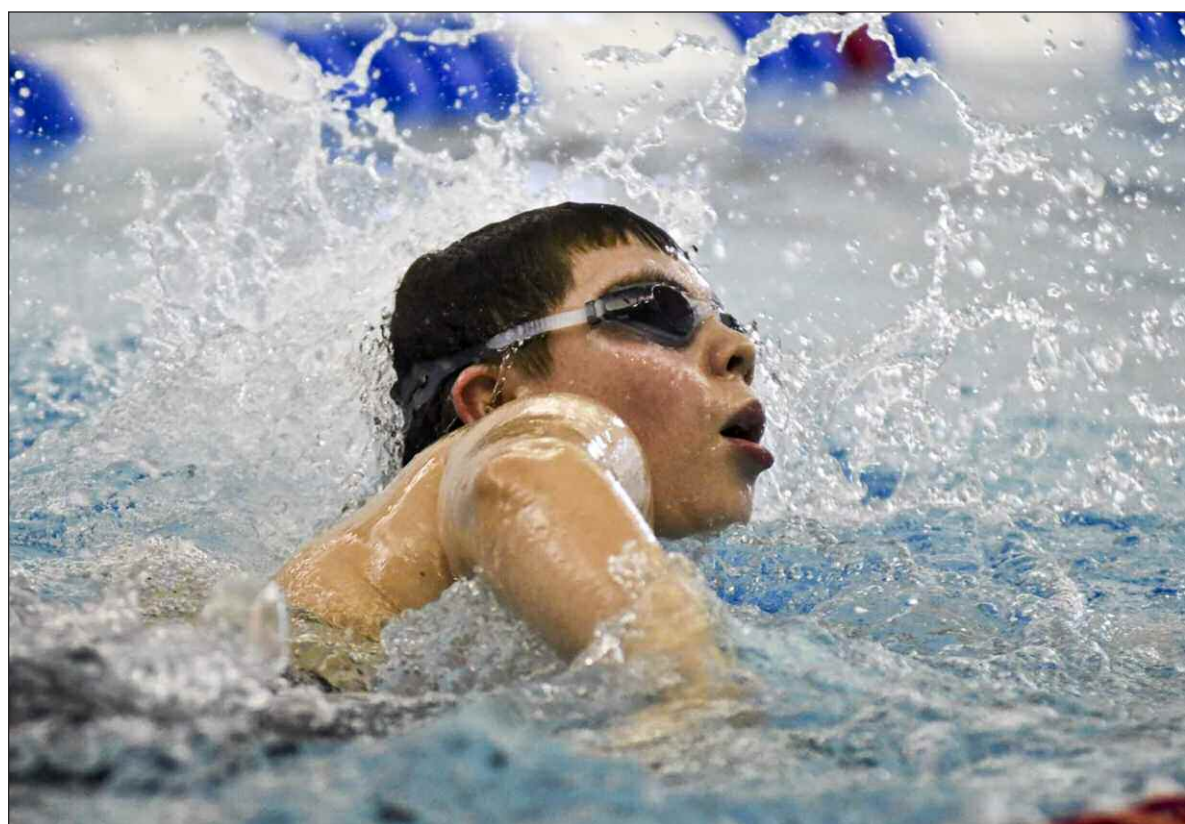
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Sports



The Commercial Review/Andrew Balko

Final freestyle

Arman Solis of the Jay County Junior High School boys swim team swims the freestyle during the Patriots' final meet of the regular season Monday night against Blackford.

Ryan is out, Gilmore traded

By **GEORGE BREMER**
The Herald Bulletin (Anderson)
Tribune News Service

INDIANAPOLIS — The Indianapolis Colts will have a new Week 1 starting quarterback for the seventh straight season.

And there's work to do at a suddenly extremely thin cornerback position.

Atlanta television reporter Zach Klein reported Tuesday the Colts will release veteran quarterback Matt Ryan — confirming a long-expected move — and ESPN's Adam Schefter reported Indianapolis has agreed to trade veteran cornerback Stephon Gilmore. See Traded page 7

Panthers win in First Four

By **JERRY DIPAOLA**
The Tribune-Review (Greensburg)
Tribune News Service

DAYTON, Ohio — In the aftermath of Pitt's rousing 60-59 victory Tuesday night in the First Four of the NCAA Tournament, Jamarius Burton, Blake Hinson and the Diaz Graham twins — Guillermo and Jorge — handled themselves from three totally different corners of the emotional spectrum.

Guillermo, who blocked Mississippi State's Tolu Smith's potential game-winning shot with two seconds left in his first career start, couldn't hold back the tears when his brother hugged him on the UD Arena hardwood. Moments earlier, he let out a scream in front of a section of Pitt fans as Smith's shot bounced out of bounds.

Burton, who played only 19 minutes because of foul trouble, hit the

game-winning shot with 9.8 seconds to play. Later, he explained what happened like he does it every day.

"When I got the ball, I just told myself I'm built for it," he said. "I've been in this position before with the ball in my hands. I gave myself the confidence and got to a spot and let it go."

Hinson? He calmly munched on Swedish fish from a paper cup in the Pitt locker room while explaining how he hit the 3-pointer that gave Pitt its biggest lead, 58-52, with 3 minutes, 8 seconds to play.

It was his second 3-pointer of the game and the most important of his 93 this season.

The roar from the crowd as the basketball settled into the cords reflected the importance of the game. Yet Hinson all but shrugged his shoulders when asked about his ability to hit long-range shots.

"When you're big and unathletic growing up," he said, "you have to find another way to compete."

Compete is what Pitt and Mississippi State did while trying to advance to the 64-team field. The Panthers (23-11) recorded their first NCAA Tournament victory since 2014 and will meet Iowa State in a Midwest Regional first-round game at 3 p.m. Friday in Greensboro, N.C.

The biggest lead for either team was six points, and one-point advantages changed hands on seven consecutive baskets at the outset of the second half.

"We were never rattled," Greg Elliott said. "Our team just stayed connected the whole time."

Finally, Elliott stepped up and made two free throws and a basket in front of Hinson's 3-pointer to give Pitt six points of breathing room.

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GENUINE PARTS

This week's featured vehicles

 <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold;">PT0058</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2007 Jeep Wrangler</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Unlimited X, 6 speed, manual, 3.8 V-6</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">16/21 City/Hwy</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Only \$13,995</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold;">PC0038</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2020 Toyota Camry SE</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Leather, 2.5L P/S, P/B, T/W C/C Back up Camera</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">28/39 City/Hwy</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Only \$23,995</p>
 <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold;">PC0050</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2014 Dodge Challenger</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Ralley Red Line, leather, alloy wheels, 50k miles</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">only \$24,495</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold;">PC0057</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2020 Mustang GT</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Lots of extras, custom wheels, paint, stereo, Corsa exhaust</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Only \$38,495</p>
 <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold;">PT0144</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2018 Dodge Durango Citadel</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">AWD, loaded, MUST SEE, very nice SUV</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">21/28 City/Hwy</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Only \$31,995</p>	 <p style="text-align: right; font-weight: bold;">PT0110</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">2019 Ford Ranger Lariat</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">4x4, crew cab, 2.3L, leather, loaded</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">21/28 City/Hwy</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: blue;">Only \$36,995</p>

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