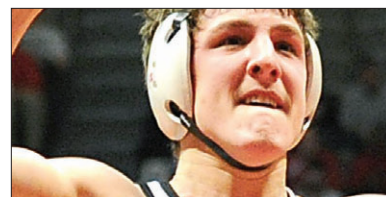




**Criminal justice bill
heads to governor**

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Ex-police chief explains questionable \$75,000 check

BY BRIAN MURPHY
CORRESPONDENT

Former Braidwood police chief Nick Ficarello came before the city council to address social media comments and Sound-offs in *The Braidwood Journal* about business dealings during his administration.

Ficarello spoke during the public comment portion of the Jan. 12 city council meeting at city hall.

"There appears to be some question regarding a \$75,000 check that was written out of the Federal Forfeiture Account. Also, a question pertaining to \$150,000 loan that was taken out for the remodeling of the police department," Ficarello said.

"On June 25, 2017, a loan for \$150,000 was taken out by the city through a resolution for remodeling of the police department," Ficarello

continued. "I believe the Mayor signed for the loan and with city approval and with a resolution. The mayor at that time was Jim Vehrs. I have a copy of the check that was written from the federal seizure account my last day of employment on April 23, 2019, for the sum of \$75,000.

"That was the last day I worked and the last day of Mayor Vehrs' administration. The check was written because in 2022 the next administration was going to have to pay a little over \$82,000 for lack of a better term, the balloon of the loan."

Following the meeting, Police Chief Todd Lyons responded to Ficarello's comments.

"Why would he write that check on his last day? I didn't even know that check was written to the city until we did our own audit and went

"I'M HERE TO QUELL ANY SPECULATION THAT THE PREVIOUS MAYOR MADE OUT WITH A LOAN OF \$150,000 FOR HIS OWN USE. HE DID NOT."

NICK FICARELLO
FORMER BPD CHIEF

through all the asset forfeiture stuff, and he said he did it as a favor. It was never applied to that loan because we didn't realize it was a balloon loan. He said it was earmarked but it wasn't in the books," Lyons said.

Ficarello blamed the lack of asset

forfeiture money and said he wanted to help offset some of the loan.

"Part of the issue was that the federal seizure account money wasn't coming in like it had been previously and my last day I thought I would take care of at least trying to offset the \$82,000-plus that was going to be owed by this administration at the end, trying to take some responsibility," Ficarello said.

"Social media has since, along with I also believe this board, has had some question what happened to the money and where the money went. After we left, I found out that there was \$75,000 put in the police department budget, I believe for the payment for that \$150,000 loan. The actual check was cashed on the 6th of May, 2019.

"I'm here to quell any speculation that the previous mayor made

out with a loan of \$150,000 for his own use. He did not. I'm also here to quell any social media or any questions this board had that the \$75,000 was never paid. It was earmarked 'building upgrades' and that's building upgrades for the police department," Ficarello said.

Lyons described several expenses he inherited and said the funds were not used appropriately according to federal requirements.

"If he was being responsible, why did he leave us with a \$200,000 bill to WESCOM? Why do we owe \$15,000 for portable radios? Why do we owe \$10,000 for tasers?" Lyons asked.

"When they did an audit on the asset forfeiture, there are rules on how you spend that money. If you use it for construction, you have to get

SEE MONEY, PAG E2



BAHCC creates long term garden vision

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The Braidwood Area Healthy Community Coalition (BAHCC) hosted its inaugural community garden in 2020.

Now, as the coalition preps for the garden to return in 2021, members are also eyeing some long term goals to keep it sustainable as well as make it a useable and enjoyable space for the community.

BAHCC project coordinator Pete Dell'Aquila gave an update on the garden's long term vision during the group's monthly meeting, which was held via Zoom on Jan. 11.

"We've been working behind the scenes for the past couple of months on the garden, planning our community garden," Dell'Aquila said. "We've been planning a vision of what we want the garden to look like, and then we've also developed a schedule of events and kind of a wish list for the things that we want for the garden."

Right now the garden has just two beds, which were used last year to plant and harvest more than 80 pounds

of produce. That haul was donated to the Community Care Center food pantry in Braidwood.

Dell'Aquila said that while the coalition will plant those beds again this year, the long term vision is to add up to 13 more beds, benches, a compost station, a tool shed, a potting table, and even a fountain and bird feeders.

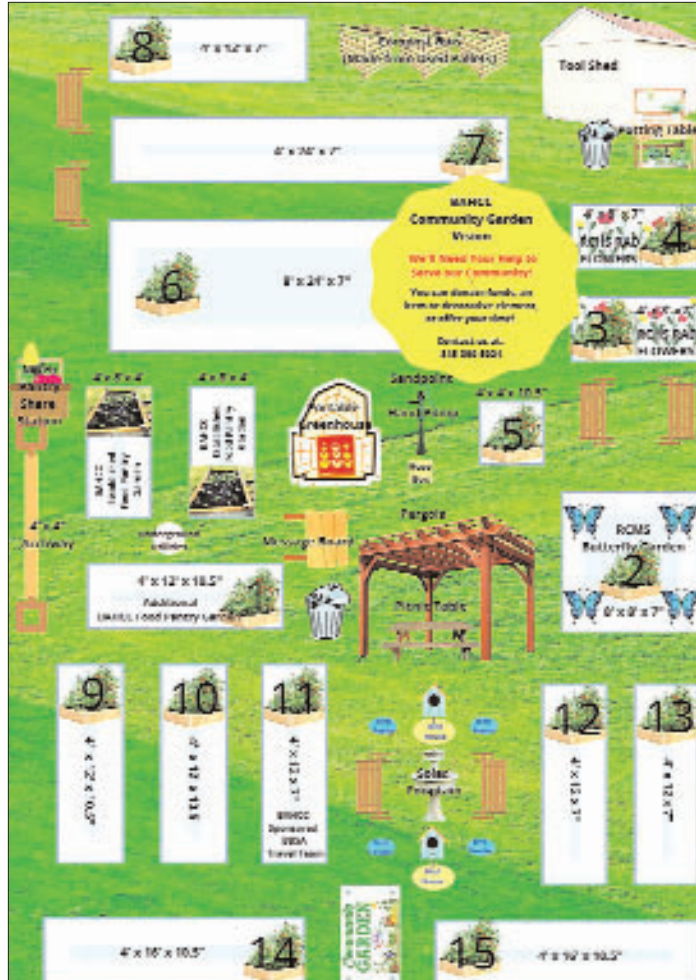
Dell'Aquila said the BBSA is already on board to sponsor one bed.

"We're adding another bed this year so we can donate even more to the pantry. We'd like to have a message board and some trash cans and a little gazebo that people can sit under," he said.

In addition to a hopeful future for vegetables and herbs, Dell'Aquila said there are plans for Reed-Custer Middle School students to sponsor a butterfly garden, and the Reed-Custer High School RAD group to eventually add flower gardens.

"We've come really far with the garden," Dell'Aquila said. "This first year that we rolled it out, we knew that we

SEE GARDEN, PAGE 2



Braidwood Park District provides services throughout pandemic

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

The novel coronavirus brought a lot of things to a halt in 2020. But, one thing that folks were encouraged to do throughout the year was to get outside.

To that end, the Braidwood Park District played an important role in the lives of folks in and around Braidwood in 2020, providing an outdoor venue even when other events had to be scrapped.

The district was able to check a few items off its project list in 2020.

In May, foam insulation was installed on the ceiling and walls underneath the Lions Pavilion, and the inner walls were finished, which marked the final phase of the district's original upgrade plan.

"The addition of insulation and inner walls helps in a couple of ways," explained Park Board Commissioner

Josh Bolatto. "Regulating temperature underneath the pavilion is probably the biggest. In the summer months, it helps to reduce the temperature as prior to the insulation it would get like an oven in there. In the winter, it helps makes it a little warmer in there."

"Also, when it rains, you can actually hear yourself think under there as the insulation helps to absorb some of the sound from the rain on the tin roof," he continued. "Our grounds crews painted it up really nice in there which helped to brighten it up as well. Our hope is that once people start being able to hold functions again like parties, celebrations, reunions, etc. it will be even more attractive for potential rentals."

Bolatto said the pavilion upgrade project began five years ago, broken out into five phases.

The first was an electrical

SEE PARK, PAGE 2

City expected to approve communication agreement

BY BRIAN MURPHY
CORRESPONDENT

The city of Braidwood is expected to approve a measure later this month that will help improve communications for local first responders.

Braidwood Emergency Services and Disaster Agency (ESDA) Coordinator Josh Bolatto addressed members of the City Council during their regular meeting on Jan. 12, asking them to approve the measure when it comes up for a vote on Jan. 26.

"At the next meeting, it will be on the agenda to approve an intergovernmental agreement with the County of Will for use and access of the countywide radio system," Bolatto explained. "This

agreement has been passed by numerous other municipalities and fire protection districts in order to utilize this system like Channahon, Elwood, Shorewood and Braidwood Fire Protection District also passed it."

Bolatto said being able to have access to the system is important for ESDA and the Braidwood police department.

"It allows that ability for communications which is important because if we go somewhere on the east side of the county, if we don't have

SEE COUNCIL, PAGE 2



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Park

upgrade, stopped the ongoing problem of blown out speakers.

Second was the concrete perimeter base for the walls along with the outer walls and the metal siding, with spaces left open for the roll up windows and doors.

One year later, the roll up doors and windows were added.

About six months after that, all of the lighting fixtures under the pavilion were upgraded to LED, which made a huge difference in brightness.

In addition to the pavilion project, new asphalt was laid in the parking lot off of Second Street in 2020, replacing all of the gravel located in that area.

"This had been on our wish list for quite a while but we finally got it done," Bolatto said. "Along with the new asphalt in the parking lot, we had several sections of the asphalt walking path repaved throughout the park and created a paved a parking area in front of the Goodrich Park on Maple Street."

Other completed projects in 2020 included:

- Semi loads of mulch were added to the three playground areas. Bolatto thanked the grounds crew and about a dozen student volunteers from the high school, who spread the mulch throughout the playgrounds in just a few days helping to give them a fresh look.

- Another phase of the security lighting project was completed.

"We had another light pole fall down on us at the beginning of the year during a storm but were able to get it replaced during this phase of the upgrades," Bolatto said. "Over the past few years, we've been replacing outdated lighting fixtures with LED style fixtures which are more energy efficient, brighter and less maintenance. We also added a new fixture which shines onto the sledding hills located on the north end of the park which helps light up the area after dark so families can enjoy some sledding time in the evenings after the sun goes down."

A few weeks into 2021, the district already has a list of items they hope to complete.

Included on that list is:

- Repairing some additional areas of asphalt along the walking paths and in front of the Old Smokey Community Building.
- Repairs to the power transformers and control boxes located between the baseball fields.

"We know this is going to be a big undertaking, just how big, we're not exactly certain, but we know that the units are starting to experience some issues with stress on the electrical lines so we've got to address that soon," Bolatto said. "As far as a cost, we'll probably have to put that project out to bid as I can imagine it'll probably be well over the \$20,000 bidding threshold. Those transform-



Photos by Marney Simon

DESPITE THE PANDEMIC, THE Braidwood Park District was able to finish up a handful of important projects in 2020. The district is looking ahead to 2021, with plans for maintenance and repair projects at all three of its parks, and to possibly issue General Obligation bonds for the park improvement account.



WINTER WONDERLAND! Families came out to enjoy the first major snowfall of the year at Old Smokey City Park in Braidwood on Saturday, Jan. 2. The Braidwood Park District added an LED light at the snowhill to allow for night time sledding. The district was able to accomodate folks who needed to get out and get some fresh air during the pandemic.

ers power the majority of the entire north end of the park so they're pretty important."

- Creation of a half-court basketball court at Goodrich Park. Bolatto said the asphalt pad for it has already been put in, and the hoop and stenciling should be installed in spring.

- Expanding the boarder of the play area in the Lions Kiddie Park. The district has purchased new boarder walls and hopes to get them installed in the spring and filled with additional mulch. The new border will help expand the area in preparation for new playground equipment.

- Repair or replacement to the small pavilion at the Kiddie Park.

- Reside the Old Smokey community building.

- Make repairs to the surface at the skate park.

- Possibly add some additional small playground equipment in the Goodrich

park play area.

Bolatto also said the district will look into the possibility of issuing some new non-referendum General Obligation Park Bonds to help bring in some funds for the park improvement account.

"From preliminary review it looks like we would be in the range of \$100,000 to \$125,000," Bolatto said. "By doing a new bond issue, it looks like things would be paid off in 2031 or thereabout. By issuing new bonds, this will still allow us to refinance our existing bonds in the future while still living within our means."

Bolatto noted that issuing non-referendum bonds would require two meetings — one with a public hearing and one to approve a bond ordinance.

"We've done this several times in the past to help generate funds for our park improvement account," he said. "Since park improvements is not a line item that

we can include in our tax levy there are only three ways to get funds put into that account; 1 - By transfer of surplus funds within our budget towards the middle or at the end of a fiscal year; 2 - From cash donations made to the district; 3 - By the issuance of bonds, whether they be referendum or non-referendum based."

Bolatto said like everyone else, the district will also be anxiously awaiting when the COVID-19 pandemic finally eases up.

"Of course, if things with COVID restrictions ease up at some point throughout the year, hopefully we can start hosting the various organizations that hold their community activities on our grounds," he added.

Information on the Braidwood Park District, the board, and all of its services can be found online, at www.braidwoodparkdistrict.com.

Money

prior approval. You can use it on anything like drug related investigations, office equipment and it's pretty broad what you can use it for. But you have to get prior approval before doing a construction project. We got an email that money was used 'impermissibly,' and that money was not supposed to be used for that," Lyons said.

Lyons also questioned

the decision to rely on those funds because they are not guaranteed.

"He said he was over-budget because he did not get money from the asset forfeiture. I have not gotten money from the asset forfeiture because of COVID, I think it's slowing down our funds, but I'm still under budget. You can't plan for it, you don't know when that money is going to be released, so you can't count on it. So, when you run a police budget you can't count on getting that money," Lyons said.

Council

that ability to communicate back and forth it pretty much defeats that ability to help out our neighboring agencies and vice versa, if they come over here and they don't have our platform, it defeats the purpose," he said.

Bolatto said once local dispatching switches back to Wescom, the communication platform will stay inside the local radios for use.

"There is no fee for use or access to the system so that's a good thing. It's a pretty standard agreement but it will be on the agenda for next council meeting for approval," Bolatto said.

In other business before the council on Jan. 12:

- After his appointment at the Dec. 28 Special Meeting, City Clerk Adam Beaty said he was ready to face the challenges of his new position and announced licenses are available at City Hall for businesses that have not received them yet.

"I'm excited to start my role as the clerk. It's been a whirlwind for me thus far," Beaty said. "For the area businesses, business licenses and liquor licenses, if you haven't picked them up yet but you submitted for them, they are ready for pickup at the drive-up window," he added.

- Commissioner Wayne Saltzman asked City Attorney Bryan Wellner to provide clarity about the resolution regarding the approval of an IMRF agent that was on the agenda.

Wellner said the purpose of the resolution was to follow IMRF requirements.

"The Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund's website requires that there be an authorized agent that files the monthly reports and has access to certain things. For that authorized agent, they ask that a resolution or ordi-

nance be passed appointing that specific agent. What we're doing is trying to comply with the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund requirements. In the past, it has been the City Clerk so what is being suggested tonight is that Adam would be appointed as the authorized agent," Wellner said.

All commissioners voted to approve the Resolution to Appoint City Clerk Adam Beaty as the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund Authorized Agent.

- During public comment, former mayor James Vehrs offered his criticism of the current administration.

"When Mr. Gatto passed away, a police officer, the fire department lowered the flag. Firefighter Les Heberer just passed away, lifetime member of the community and his wife Kay sat on this board for a time. We did not lower our flag in front of City Hall, and I think that was a little disgrace to the family and I thought the city could be as a whole, which we are," Vehrs said. "Another thing that disturbed me was I opened up the paper and it looks really good for our town when it says, 'Braidwood Mayor not jailed yet,' I mean it is what it is, I guess."

City Administrator Tony Altieri said he was confused because the flag was lowered for Heberer.

- Altieri also noted that, following recent discussions, he is hopeful for some positive business-related news in the coming months.

"We had a couple good meetings this week on some prospective businesses. Hopefully in the next couple months we'll be bringing in front of the Council for approval," Altieri said.

- The council approved the payment of bills in the amount of \$166,034.

- The council approved payroll in the amount of \$91,841.

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Garden

just wanted to kind of test drive and see how it went, so we were able to get two beds up and had a bunch of materials donated to us to help start the beds. We raised over 80 pounds of produce from just those two small garden beds. So, imagine what we can do if we get 15 garden beds going."

Dell'Aquila said that as the garden grows, not all the produce raised and harvested will necessarily be donated. The idea is that families would eventually be able to sponsor a bed, and they would tend to

it and use it how they want.

"We loved what we did with the garden production wise, but as far as volunteer and aesthetic wise, right now it's just a sign and two lonely looking garden beds out there," Dell'Aquila said. "So, we think we can get a lot more traction if we can beautify the area. People drive by there every single day, kids are walking by every single day, so if we have a place where they can stop and rest and literally stop and smell the roses, we'd love to make that more of a traffic area. That's kind of the whole point of this vision is to hopefully get people excited and see what the potential area could look like."

The garden's message board would be utilized to inform the public on activities and programs sponsored by the BAHCC.

The vision for the garden would also include long term goals of growing gourds, selling flowers, and ultimately being able to even host fundraisers connected to the garden.

Dell'Aquila said the estimated cost of the garden, with all the items on the long term vision wish list included, would be around \$7,000. The hope would be for the coalition to match money raised up to \$3,500, which means the group would look to grant funding and donations for the

other \$3,500.

Dell'Aquila added that the coalition is actively seeking out grant funds, because they'd prefer external funding for cash, and volunteer time from the community.

"What we're really looking for is donations of money or time, but preferably time," he said.

Anyone interested in helping the community garden grow can contact the BAHCC at 815-390-5024.

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Bradley University dean's list

More than 2,000 students were named to Bradley University's fall 2020 dean's list. To be eligible for the dean's list, a student must achieve a minimum 3.5 grade point average for the semester on a 4.0 scale.

Local students on the list are Dustin Kelly, majoring in electrical engineering and Maja Mallory, majoring in psychology. Kelly and Mallory both hail from Wilmington.



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Eric D. Fisher, publisher
Ann Gill, editor

The birth of Braidwood, a rough delivery

Moving forward with life is sometimes not easy. Many people don't like change. But as we all know change is inevitable. In this case, the citizens of the unincorporated village called Braidwood did not want to change, but the forward thinkers pushed back. Set the way back machine to June 5, 1871 to witness the discussion.



TIME WAS....
Sandy Vasko

Let's look at the forward thinkers first. When Braidwood mushroomed into being, real estate investors realized that real estate in Braidwood would be increasing in value for both residences and businesses that supported the miners. They invested heavily. But during the first few turbulent years, selling that land to potential businesses was a problem. No one wanted to invest in a town where drunkenness ruled the streets, where it was impossible to bring a wagon into town due to the mud, where sidewalks did not even exist so that no one walked in town if they didn't have to.

What was needed was organization and infrastructure. To the

investors, that meant incorporation. To that end, a meeting was called among the investors and a town boundary was set. It seemed cut and dry.

It was not a done deal as the miners saw things differently. Braidwood was made up of mostly recent immigrants. They were not yet citizens, and therefore they could not vote. They were sure that incorporation meant

another layer of bosses to push them around, and they could not even vote them out of office. The matter came to a head on June 5, 1871

We read in a letter to the editor of the Wilmington Advocate, "The meeting was well attended. There could not have been less than 400 or 500 workingmen present, besides the lackeys and other dead-beats of the village. The meeting was called to order by John Ward. On motion of Mr. John McGrath, seconded by Mr. Daniel Lawlar, Mr. Patrick Creeley was proposed as president of the meeting. The motion for Mr. Patrick Creeley was put and carried unanimously with cheers."

Creeley opened the meeting with this, "Friends and fellow citizens; I

believe most of you are well aware of the object that has brought us here tonight; you all know that I do not profess to be an orator, therefore you need not expect an oration from me; we have met here tonight at the call of a few busy bodies who live among us, to give our vote for or against incorporation; hoping that good order and harmony will prevail. I declare the meeting now open."

"It was proposed that the limits should first be described so that all naturalized citizens and resident property holders would be able to give their votes for or against incorporation."

"After debate on the boundary lines, Bill Mooney, a pro-incorporation man stood up to speak. He said he would take the liberty of addressing those present and instruct them in the benefits and advantages that they would derive from incorporation; he then went on to heap abuse on our present town and county officers, he put them all down as a lot of land sharks who had no regard for their interests or the property of the people; he concluded his little oration by informing those present that unless they would vote for incorporation their children would become gamblers, drunkards and idle vagabonds, he said they would grow

up without respect for law or order, and instead of parents being able to chastise their children, the children will turn round and whip their parents. Mooney sat down amidst groans and hisses."

"Mr. James Kilpatrick said he wished to say a few words in his own behalf, he owned a house and lot within the proposed limits, and as a workingman he thought that he had more than enough to do with the money he earned from his labor in trying to raise his family and to live honestly, without aiding those who wished to burden the people with taxes; he considered that those who had nothing to do but walk about, and who appeared to be so very anxious to have good roads to walk up on, should get to work and make them, and not ask the workingman to do any more than the law called for. (Applause)"

Mr. Dunkin Rankin said he wished to make a few remarks, but it was impossible to do justice to the subject in the short time allowed; he said he had lived inside of incorporations and outside, and he knew the benefits and advantages that would flow from it, but he was as well aware of its evils. Mooney had said that we are governed by a lot of "land sharks" he did not believe all that Mooney

had said, nor did not think there were three in the meeting that did. He (Mr. Rankin) proposed to live under authority of the powers that we now live under rather than to be thrown into the hands of the few land sharks of Braidwood. (Loud cheers and all eyes turned to Mooney and Jack James.)

Mr. R. proceeded to explain that the working men were the largest property holders in the village, and he believed that there was not one man in every fifty that was long enough in the country to entitle them to a citizenship, and as a natural consequence, those men are against incorporation from the fact that their property would be subject to all the taxes levied by the said officers of the so called incorporation, while the would be denied a voice in its council; he thought it would produce a great deal of trouble at the present time; he also said he thought it was unreasonable for a few blood suckers to enforce incorporation when there was nine-tenths of the population against incorporation."

It was clear that both sides had their supporters. How did all come out? That is a story for next time.

Criminal justice reform bill heads to governor

Wilmington Chief says bill is bad news for local law enforcement

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

A criminal justice omnibus bill is headed to the desk of Gov. JB Pritzker, after it passed the Illinois Senate and House last week during the lame duck session.

But local law enforcement has taken issue with part of that bill, saying that the legislation, an initiative of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, will impose restrictions on police officers and municipalities.

"I don't know what legislator would even want this," Wilmington Police Chief Phil Arnold told members of the Police and ESDA committee on Jan. 12, prior to the passage of the bill.

Arnold took issue with the portion of the bill that addresses pretrial detention. Once signed into law, cash bail will be eliminated as of Jan. 1, 2023. All bail bonds and conditions of bail will be replaced by a system of pretrial release to be developed by the Illinois courts based on a detainee's alleged crime, their risk of not appearing for their court date, and the threat or danger they may pose to the community if released.

"It's going to open up crime to a new level I think, from everything we can see. Taking off cash bonds, basically whatever you arrest someone for, it doesn't matter, they don't have to post any bond, they're released with a promise to come to court," Arnold said.

The original version of the bill abolished cash bail effective immediately, but that was extended by two years to accommodate the transition and allow for uniform standards to be developed, state lawmakers said.

Another portion of the bill

that Arnold said carries local consequences is a provision that would have ended qualified immunity for officers, eliminating their protection from liability in civil suits if they violated rights guaranteed in the Illinois Constitution.

However, the legislation instead creates a yearlong Task Force on Constitutional Rights and Remedies, an 18-member body that will investigate and develop procedures to protect constitutional rights and remedies should those rights be violated. The task force will specifically look at qualified immunity as enjoyed by law enforcement.

A report with policy recommendations must be submitted to the governor's office and the General Assembly by May, with the task force being dissolved by the legislation at the start of the new year.

Arnold said if the abolishment of qualified immunity were to pass, it would hurt the ability of departments to recruit and keep officers.

"The removal of qualified immunity would open them up and their families up to frivolous lawsuits that they would have to fight on their own. It's going to be tough to keep people," he said.

The bill also requires the statewide establishment of use-of-force standards by 2022 while making changes to what are acceptable and unacceptable uses of force in Illinois statute.

The bill provides that use of force is permissible only when an officer has determined it is necessary to defend either themselves or others from bodily harm when making an arrest. When a suspect is attempting to escape, officers would not be permitted to use deadly force to stop them, unless that person cannot be apprehended at a later date and is likely to harm others.

The law prohibits certain uses of force. Chokeholds and restraints above the shoulders that can restrict breathing are banned, unless explicitly used as deadly force. It also pro-



Courtesy photo

ILLINOIS STATE LAWMAKERS celebrate the passage of the criminal justice reform bill during the lame duck session last week. Local law enforcement members said the bill, which is headed to the governor, could do more harm than good.

hibits using force as a punishment or in retaliation when it is not authorized; using non-lethal projectiles like tasers and rubber bullets on someone's head, groin area or back; firing rubber or any type of round into a crowd; and using tear gas and pepper spray without first allowing a crowd to disperse after being warned.

"If you're trying to arrest somebody, you can't touch them above their shoulders, so you can't touch their face, their head, their neck," Arnold said. "So, it's basically arms, torso and legs is all you can touch. So, it doesn't matter where they're hitting you, it doesn't matter, you can only touch them below the shoulders."

Before officers can use deadly force, they must make a reasonable effort to identify themselves as law enforcement and warn that they are about to use deadly force. Law enforcement can no longer use deadly force against someone for committing a property crime, unless that crime is tied to terrorism or to another crime or action where deadly force is permitted.

Officers are also restricted from using deadly force against a person who poses a danger to themselves but does not pose an imminent threat to the officer or another person.

Arnold also balked at the way the bill was introduced, arguing that it was pushed through without input from local law enforcement.

In a statement issued on Jan. 9, the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police broadly condemned the legislation, calling the a "defund the police" bill.

"Supporters of this bill must believe that the police are villains and adversaries of the 12.5 million Illinoisans they are sworn to protect and serve," ILACP Executive Director Ed Wojcicki posted to the organization's website. "The truth is, most of those millions of Illinoisans are largely supportive of their local police and sheriffs' departments. So it is disappointing to see that anyone would propose legislation that is so divisive in times when we all need to come together for the betterment of our communities and our state."

State Senator Sue Rezin, R-Morris, who voted against the bill, issued a statement following its passage, calling the bill an "extreme proposal" that will empower criminals while endangering law enforcement efforts.

"I stand with the men and women who take to the streets day-after-day to serve and protect," Rezin said. "I am utterly disappointed in both the outcome of this vote and the process that it came about. A bill of this magnitude should not be rammed through the General Assembly in the middle of the night of lame duck session. The citizens of Illinois should have been given a chance to provide their input... What we just witnessed is no way to conduct business."

One provision of the bill did earn the Wilmington chief's stamp of approval.

A police certification provision backed by the attorney general's office was also added to the bill. It gives the state more power over who can be a member of law enforcement and makes it easier to decertify and terminate the employ-

ment of problematic officers.

"Right now, police officers are certified by the state by the training board, but there's no real process to decertify them," Arnold said. "They're going to make it a more step by step process to decertify them, and the Illinois Chiefs are not opposed to that."

"Certainly there are bad police officers who are out there doing bad things in certain areas that should have been decertified," he continued. "Something that happens often is that if something happens and an officer is going to be fired from one department, they're able to make a deal that allows them to resign instead of being terminated, then they go to another police department that either doesn't do a background investigation properly or don't care because they're trying to fill open positions with somebody who has been through the police academy and save some money, so these bad apples are turning up over and over in different places."

"So, trying to weed that all out would not be a bad thing," Arnold concluded.

Before this legislation, the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board (ILETSB) could decertify an officer only if they were convicted of a felony or a limited set of misdemeanors such as offering a bribe, prostitution or criminal sex abuse.

The criminal justice omnibus bill grants ILETBSB greater discretion to decertify officers based on whether a Certification Review Board determines they violated conduct guidelines.

The legislation also requires all law enforcement agencies to utilize body cameras by 2025, and expands rights of people who are taken into custody by police. Suspects in custody must be able to make three phone calls within three hours of being taken into police custody.

Capitol News Illinois contributed to this report.

Will County remains under Tier 3 mitigations

STAFF REPORT

Nine of the state's 11 regions saw their resurgence mitigation requirements to battle the novel coronavirus rolled back at the beginning of this week.

But, Will County was not among those areas where

guidelines were relaxed.

Will County and Kankakee County make up Region 7, one of only two regions in the state that remain in Tier 3 mitigations. Region 4, the St. Louis metro east area, also remains in Tier 3.

Regions 1, 2, and 6 are now in Tier 1 mitigations. This

includes Grundy County which is part of Region 2.

In Tier 3 resurgence mitigations, bars and restaurants continue to be restricted from offering indoor service. Additional mitigations include capacity limits at grocery stores and pharmacies of 50%, funerals are limited to 10 guests, and all other meetings/gatherings, including weddings and private parties, are prohibited.

Additionally, health and fitness centers, personal care services, malls, and retail stores outside of grocery stores or pharmacies are limited to 25% capacity.

Masks and social distancing remain mandatory in all public spaces.

The changes mean that indoor service at bars and restaurants in Grundy County is permitted at 25% capacity, but is still not allowed in Will County.

Although indoor bar service is allowed under Tier 1, it remains suspended unless food is being served at the

establishment.

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), in order for Region 7 to move to Tier 2, it must experience less than 12% test positivity rate (seven-day rolling average) for three consecutive days, and greater than or equal to 20% percent available intensive care unit (ICU) and medical/surgical bed availability (seven-day rolling average) for three consecutive days, and a decline in the number of COVID-19 patients in the hospital (seven-day rolling average) in seven out of the last 10 days.

Region 7 has met two of those three metrics.

The region's test positivity rate is 7.5% as of Jan. 16. The region has remained under the 12% threshold for 31 consecutive days.

Hospital bed availability has been greater or equal to 20% for 19 consecutive days.

But the region has yet to meet the threshold for a decline in hospitalizations.

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0520-513HC_24775-11/30/2020

Hearing for selling of \$140,000 in Braidwood Park District bonds

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING CONCERNING THE INTENT OF THE BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS OF THE BRAIDWOOD PARK DISTRICT, WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

TO SELL \$140,000 PARK BONDS

PUBLIC NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Braidwood Park District, Will County, Illinois (the "District"), will hold a public hearing on the 2nd day of February, 2021, at 7:00 o'clock P.M. The hearing will be held in the Old Smokey Community Building, 245 West First Street, Braidwood, Illinois. The purpose of the hearing will be to receive public comments on the proposal to sell bonds in the amount of \$140,000 for the payment of land condemned or purchased for parks, for the building, maintaining, improving and protecting of the same and the existing land and facilities of the District and for the payment of the expenses incident thereto.

By order of the President of the Board of Park Commissioners of the Braidwood Park District, Will County, Illinois.
DATED the 13th day of January, 2021.

Josh Bolatto
Secretary, Board of Park Commissioners,
Braidwood Park District, Will County, Illinois

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Exposing America

WILMINGTON—If Biden does what he said he would do, such as take down the border wall, this will let more illegals in which will result in more drugs pouring into the country as well as terrorists and MS13 gangs causing more murder and crime resulting in more sanctuary cities and states. Caravans are now forming at the border. Also, he wants to give them free healthcare, drivers license, food stamps, and the right to vote in our elections giving them amnesty and citizenship. He wants to forgive college debt which many have paid or are paying now. All of this funded by the American taxpayer—YOU! Biden and company will defund the police, get rid of the border patrol and abolish ICE. Be careful what you wish for!

Antifa?

Neither side of the aisle condoned in any way the actions of the protesters, or should I say the small group of antagonists, planted within the protesters. Ninety-nine percent of the people who showed up at the Capital on Jan. 6 were there to protest an election process that they felt was rigid in favor of Democrats. They have every right to do that. But just as we have seen during the past four years, a small group of well organized left-wing radicals pushed the otherwise peaceful protest into a national disgrace. That group was once again Antifa. It has been substantiated that Antifa members were present at the protest and inside the Capital. They were taking advantage of the situation to embarrass not only President Trump but the Republican party and did a damn good job. So what is going to happen after Biden and Kamala (can't wait for Biden to resign) take office on Jan. 20? The liberals have not been able to bring themselves to formally label Antifa as a terrorist group because Antifa has been doing all the dirty work for the liberals allowing them to keep their hands clean and make everything look like president Trump's fault. But that will all change on Jan. 20. It will be interesting to see how the liberals deal with their dirty little secret. I wouldn't be surprised to see Antifa members appointed to positions within the Biden/Harris administration. Why not. They deserve it after all the work they have done for the Democratic party.

Stop the stupidity

WILMINGTON—I want the mayor and police department to do their job and enforce the mask mandate that has been put into place by the state of Illinois to protect the citizens of our town. I shouldn't have to tell people to "get away from me" or to "put a mask on" while out getting essentials. Almost 400,000 Americans are dead because of the stupidity of Donald Trump and his followers and Republican supporters in congress! This situation has been handled very poorly and it cost people their lives. It's overwhelmingly obvious this man is deeply out of touch with reality and incompetent to be the President of The United States. Also, I want anyone displaying a Confederate flag be made to take it down! It represents hate and racism. It belongs in a museum for history facts only, not displayed in a state that fought against it! The Confederate states lost the war for a reason. It's disgusting to see it hanging on a house as soon as you drive into the city of Wilmington. Take it DOWN!!! It's really sad to see so many people in this town look and act so unintelligently. I studied Micro Biology (germs/viruses) and I know this virus is very serious. You can die from it at any age or race. I am so angry! It's embarrassing! Think of all the revenue the city would of made issuing fines to all the idiots not following the mandate. The definition of mandate means mandatory. It was put into place to keep you safe from a deadly virus.

Country over Party

BRAIDWOOD—I just wanted to say thank you to Adam Kinzinger our representative. He chose country over party and we appreciate it. I just wish more people would, thank you.

New flavor

WILMINGTON—I heard Ben & Jerry are going to introduce a new flavor. It's a combination of peach ice cream and orange sherbet. They're gonna call it Impeachy.

Silencing Americans

SHADOW LAKES—The big tech companies are shutting down certain things on the internet because they seem to be afraid that Americans will see just how much corruption is really involved in the communication industry. They're going to try to do everything possible to silence any person who complains about how they want control over its citizens' thought process. We should remind any person who knows about history that these same type of things occurred in Europe which brought about the USA to enter a conflict that prevented freedom that had a cost of many lives to bring free choice back to many European nations. History does have a tendency to repeat itself. It seems to be being pushed into reality by the people that are trying to control independence and freedom.

Want complete control

WILMINGTON—Well, it looks like the corrupt, hateful, deranged, radical, Socialist Democratic party will occupy the White House and Congress. This Democratic party is worse than the "Nazis". They want complete power and control over this country and the people

and will do anything to get it and I mean anything. They will destroy this country and the American way of life. They have no respect for American values, or the patriotic American citizens who have fought for our freedom, the law, or the Constitution! You stupid pin-headed brain idiots who voted these deranged, maniacal, cockroaches into power will be responsible for the downfall of this country.

Believer of free speech

WILMINGTON—In April we will be holding our city elections in Wilmington and every year around this time I call in my same comment to Sound Off. I am a firm believer of free speech and I invite all the candidates that are running to feel free to leave a sign in my yard. The three candidates that are running for mayor, you are welcome to leave a sign in my yard. The people that are running for the school board, the library board and any other offices are more than welcome to put a sign in my yard because I do believe in free speech. I hope if the candidates do decide to put in my yard that other people will respect my decision to allow this and not be tearing up the candidates' yard signs, destroying them or throwing them away. Whether you support the sign in my yard or you don't support it, yard signs cost a lot of money, I know that first hand. So once again I invite any candidate for city offices to feel free to put a sign in my yard. Sherri Michaels

Neither did Manson

WILMINGTON—The Republicans are saying that Trump isn't responsible for the violence at the Capitol. Well Manson didn't kill anybody.

Not surprising

WILMINGTON—Trump says he won't pay Rudy for legal services. Honestly, Rudy should've seen that coming.

The Swamp is back

SHADOW LAKES—Let us take a look at the news for this year so far. Nancy Pelosi is screaming to impeach our president. The crowds are yelling, "crucify him." People asked, "China Joe isn't it time to forget and forgive?" Didn't we see this act played out 2000 years ago? What was China Joe's response? "...that is up to the senate." He just stated, "it is time to unify the country." Vaccine, vaccine, where is the vaccine? The companies state they have shipped over one million doses. But where are they? They can't figure out how to distribute them. I know you heard by now in Washington state they are saying workers over 50 that work for Amazon should have the vaccine, because they are front line workers. Sounds fair to me. Maybe you saw the article on the tube about New York's governor and what he did with the vaccine. They can't dispense a vaccine in a timely manner, and these are the people who want to run, Medicare for all? My God helps us. Why is it the problems always seem to stem from states run by the Left? I hope you are all enjoying, what we will lose next, freedom of speech. How long will it take before your emails are censored? How long will it be before pro-trump articles in this paper will be censored? Do think it can not happen! Remember Big Brother is watching, you. No. 4, is one of my personal favorites. De-Fund the police. I don't have to explain what this is all about. You see just how well this is working in Portland. Now we have Illinois House Bill 163. Isn't that great? I am sure this is really going to help that one county, where most of the violence is. They can not control it now! Here is the other side of the coin, Washington D.C. We must arm the city to the teeth, to protect the politicians. I do not condone violence, in any form. Maybe instead of de-funding the police, maybe we should defund the politicians. After all, what do they really do for us? Not much! What has China Joe done for this county in 47 years? Sadly not much. As you can see, The Swamp is back...always Margot Lane

Wealthy politicians

ESSEX—Throughout the next two years the Democrat leadership will impose things upon the American citizens whether you are a Democrat or a Republican. They will have every American citizen suffer. The people that wanted the Democrat leadership and financed their election are very wealthy people that only want more money for their wallets. And in their opinion, the American citizens want too much money for their survival when they can go on welfare and stand in line at a food pantry if they want to eat and they can live in tents. Because the wealthy want cheap foreign labor that they will help take over the American citizens employment just to show that they can control the USA and not the laws of the USA.

Brainwash Americans

SHADOW LAKES—Congress is once again holding impeachment procedures against Donald Trump so he will never be able to hold a government office again because they do not want any more of their activities to be shown to the public. Even though the Democrat party has allowed crime to escalate in various cities and no one has been held accountable, they're also going to try to control every aspect of the our lives by pretending that they are looking out for us while they use the news and social media to decide which information is allowed to be shown to the public. They believe that the American citizens are a bunch of dunder heads not capable to understand anything and they do not care if the American citizen is a Democrat or a Republican. Since all they want to do is brainwash people into believing that whatever they say is gospel and no one better question their authority, even if they state "trees are not made of wood".

Gamemanship

WILMINGTON—I'm not being hyperbolic when I claim my vocabulary is better then the Sound Off editor.

Editor's note: Congratulations and pat yourself on the back. Didn't know there was a contest. But hey, if that



makes you feel good, we're flattered.

When cities burned

COAL CITY—Do as I say not as I do, is a phrase that has been used many times. Now our new congress is stating that the constitution and the rule of law must be honored. But where was this rule of law when the various cities being controlled by Democrat party were being burned during riots and our new vice president made sure all rioters were bailed out of jail to continue to riot. When there was evidence of illegal activity involved in the election process, with censorship and the altering of election laws without legislatures approval or having deceased individuals vote casting their ballots in the election. They have the nerve to state that they always obey the law.

USA or California?

On Jan. 20 you can say good-bye to the country formally known as the United States of America and welcome to the country now known as California. Let me introduce you to your new country. First of all, illegal immigrants are not only welcome but encouraged to wade across the Rio Grande illegally. Once here, they are granted more rights, privileges and social programs than legal citizens are given. Next, the highest taxes in history. Hey, socialism is expensive and you don't think wealthy people are going to flip the bill? If you consider yourself middle class right now, welcome to poverty. Don't worry, there will be plenty of social programs where you can stand in line and lose whatever dignity you might have. Socialists frown on people with dignity or people who are self-sufficient. You need to learn that the government will take care of all your needs from here on out. Just sit back and swallow whatever pride you have. You won't need it in Socialist America. You are not smart enough to make your own decisions. The bureaucrats will do it for you. Get ready for a whole bunch of homeless people. The state of California loves homeless people. They have taken over large areas of Los Angeles, San Francisco and other California municipalities. Do you like to walk down the sidewalk and tip-toe around human feces? Then you will feel right at home. Californians love to take a crap on public sidewalks. Forget about that 401k, the government needs that to support all the social programs that you don't qualify for because you still have a job. You have to keep working and hand over all your hard earned money to support people who think you're stupid for working. Let's see, what else can you expect: Skyrocketing property taxes, more regulations that will kill the economy, gas prices will go through the roof, political correctness will make a big comeback, freedom of speech will be regulated, get ready too turn your guns over, get used to elections being rigged in favor of liberal democrats, more planes full of cash sent to Iran to support their terrorist network and finally liberal politicians going to countries around the world apologizing for being an American and then giving them planes full of cash.

Over 42 million

BRAIDWOOD—A new report astonishingly shows that nearly 42% of all deaths worldwide last year were from abortion—more than 42 million. It was not only the leading cause of death but was almost more than all other causes combined. Think about that.

Bottom line

COAL CITY—Considering the vicious nature of events descending upon us lately, it might be a relief to ponder a recent humorous news report circulating the country regarding Princess Ivanka and how lucky we are to finally be rid of her. Apparently the first daughter can't bear to have Secret Service agents, who are poor people of the lower classes, invade her beautiful home which the agents are risking their lives to protect. Can't she spare one of her seven bathrooms for these brave men to relieve themselves? No, taxpayers must foot the bill for a \$3,000-a-month apartment costing a total of more than \$100,000 to date essentially for the use of a toilet. And it has nothing to do with COVID-19 because this has been going on since 2017. Of course, Ivanka denies these allegations, but the reality is that she does not let them in for bathroom privileges. Anyway, the bottom line is: Who would be so gullible as to believe a Trump? Kurt K.

Lipstick on a pig

CUSTER PARK—The election was rigged, say Trump supporters. It certainly was. It was harder for blacks to vote because Republican officials throughout the country did their best to stop them. Months before the election, Trump installed his stooge as postmaster general to thwart mail-in ballots. After the election, Trump filed 62 lawsuits although no fraud was found and even Supreme Court justices refused to hear Trump's case because it was a waste of their time. Then Trump pressured Georgia's secretary of state to fabricate votes in Trump's

favor and if that wasn't criminal enough, Trump incited his goons to storm Capitol Hill where the election was being finalized in Congress. Finally, the My Pillow guy was seen meeting Trump in the West Wing with notes urging him to declare martial law. With several days to go, who knows what Trump will come up with next. Yes, all these are tactics to steal the election as Trump tries to put lipstick on a pig. Gary W.

We will see

SHADOW LAKES—Let's see if the main stream media goes after Biden like it did Trump? If not, it's not the news that's taking sides and that is by definition is propaganda. Eddie

Senseless idea

SHADOW LAKES—Gendered Language: Has anybody seen the Orwellian push to change the words we use, for example, eliminating "gendered language." This may seem very trivial to you at this time. But will end up having a big impact on our society. Nancy P. is the pusher of this language to be used in the House of Representatives. You will not be able to say, mother, father, son, daughter, cousin, or etc. Here is how it works, you may say, "am the father of two sons." If Nancy has her way, here is how it will have to be spoken. "I am the parent of two siblings." This is to make language non-binary. Do you know any non-binary people? The answer is no because there are none. This is just more from the left, and you just keep voting them back in office over and over. Always, Margot Lane

The sore loser

WILMINGTON—What a sore loser, President Trump will never admit defeat. He has filed bankruptcy five times and refuses to pay his lawyers. I wonder why no one wants to defend him. Maybe DH can help pay his legal fees.

White Terror

WILMINGTON—These comments will be as popular as a cockroach's carcass but they need to be said. The siege of Capitol Hill is an example of unjustified white rage rationalized by white privilege incited by gluttonous desire for power. The palefaces of America need to get over themselves and their expectations of insatiable domination. From the nation's beginning, white colonists seized this land and all its riches from native Americans by cruel trickery transgressing New Testament Scripture. And now that same venomous serpent raises its head once more with a poisonous strike never before so vicious against justice in our beloved land. Are we a Christian nation or not? Doug L.

Four short years

WILMINGTON—Consider this. Dr. Fauci needs a security bodyguard as does his entire family since the Trump presidency. He has worked for five different presidents and has never felt endangered before. But that's the Trump effect and Dr. Fauci is not the only one suffering from it. Many congressional Republicans admit that they support Trump out of fear because otherwise their families' safety is at stake from local thugs. Congressional Democrats receive constant death threats directed at themselves and their children and the Michigan governor's kidnapping plot is proof of this. Furthermore, Trump's minions promise to carry out Trump's threats after Trump is gone from Washington. What do we do? The entire floor of the Capitol is covered by the National Guard but too bad it's a week late. Should we station soldiers throughout the land indefinitely like third-world countries? What does this say about President Trump? During the four short years of his presidency, America seems to have become a terrorist state. Irene D.

Thank goodness

GARDNER—Thank God we have grownups back in the White House. No more lies, bullying, or melodrama. No tweets. No more reality TV show - just the hard work of getting us out of the huge mess left for us. Sabotaging the new administration at every turn thinking it will make you look good. How stupid you are? No sane person will ever forget what you've done to this country and what traitors you are. The blood of almost 400,000 people and the ones killed on the Jan. 6 are on your hands. Anyone who enabled these creatures is responsible for everything they've done. A lot of you will be going to jail, including the traitor/grifter-in-chief. Have fun. Good bye and good riddance. And to good old Dan, your guy has been stealing from the soldiers, vets and the taxpayers this whole time. He's been a grifter all his life and will be one until the day he dies. His last grift is the election fraud. The only fraud is him and his lie. Once he knew you all would send him money, he kept it going. It's not going into any fund, it's going in his pocket.

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Commentary

Slight relief from our predatory government

BY RICHARD PORTER

Among all the bad policy coming out of Springfield, Ill., let's celebrate the occasional glimmer of good sense.

But first, some background: Illinois' legislature passed legislation on policing and related matters last week in the dead of night. The 764-page bill passed the state Senate at 4:49 a.m. after being introduced and distributed to the members at 3:04 a.m. Only a few legislative insiders could have possibly known what was in the bill before voting; the rest of the legislature, first seeing the measure upon its introduction, voted blind.

Only after the Democrat majority passed the bill are we learning what's in it — and there's little that's good.

The legislation has been assailed as radical and anti-police for good reason. Consider, for example, this nugget from page 50: Under current law, a complaint filed against a police officer is required to be supported by a sworn affidavit from the person filing the complaint and provides that anyone filing false information shall be referred for prosecution. The bill eliminates both the requirement for the sworn affidavit and the referral for prosecution for false complaints.

This and other provisions declare open season on law enforcement. Weakening law enforcement further in a state already riven by soaring crime rates unleashed by lax prosecution of basic criminal laws will make Illinois a more dangerous and less attractive place to live.

But, one provision in this bill reflects an idea that needs to be constantly reinforced: Government should help its citizens, not hurt them.

I have argued elsewhere that Illinois government has become predatory — that

it focuses on raising money to serve the people in government instead of focusing on serving the general public. A predatory government weighs heaviest on those who earn the least. Examples of predatory policies include the myriad fees, fines, rules and gotchas imposed — and the absurd penalties applied for minor infractions of this web of rules.

A young friend of mine, a high school graduate working his way into a skilled trade, would drive to visit his girlfriend. He earned about \$13 an hour. Sometimes, he didn't have money in his pocket for tolls and he didn't have credit to get the transponder that would cut his toll costs in half.

Let's pause for a moment: People with credit (i.e., those with more money) pay lower tolls on the highway than people with poor credit (i.e., those with less money). Why not charge folks who need to stop and pay cash the same amount as the folks who can drive through the toll with transponders?

Back to my story: My friend did not pay about \$30 in tolls. Shame on him — but note that the tolls that are small for many were more than he could afford on a daily basis. His minor infraction, which he ignored because he didn't have the money anyway, turned into \$2,500 in fines, as well as a suspended license — which led to the loss of his job — before I got involved.

While the Illinois Tollway authority has since then significantly reduced some of its penalties, government for people with low to moderate incomes is often Kafkaesque: a small mistake in dealing with government or error in judgment leads to cascading consequences that bear no proportion to the original mistake.

While not unique to Illinois, this is

particularly true there because of the state's financial crisis. Making government work for ordinary citizens is a secondary concern for leaders obsessed with finding money to fund the over-promised, under-funded public pensions.

The folks running our government, who campaign on imposing a \$15 minimum wage on small businesses, have legislated a system of taxes, tolls, fees and fines that lower income residents can't afford. And, as in the case of my friend and others, our government routinely forces people into debt and out of jobs in its search for revenue.

Is "safety" a reason or just a rationale for red light camera tickets? Are high highway tolls and gas taxes fair to those who make less? These and other petty revenue collection devices that then require enforcement hammer the less well-off. A bankrupt state that forces its own citizens into bankruptcy is a predatory state.

The good news in this bad bill is that motorists would no longer lose their licenses as a consequence of unpaid red light and speed camera tickets. That's a small but important win for the people of Illinois, but what of the tickets themselves and the exorbitant penalties and fees that accompany this policy? Why not abolish these as well?

We need a thorough rethinking of all aspects of our government. We need leaders looking for ways to help people rise instead of holding them down or shaking them down.

PS: The young friend of mine I mentioned above recently moved to Texas. Why? He aspires to start his own business some day and he believes it's easier to do that in Texas than in Illinois.

Richard Porter is a lawyer in Chicago and Illinois's national committeeman to the Republican National Committee.

Sound-off, continued from page 4

ets for all the lawsuits coming his way. He has never been as rich as he said he was and is always conning his way through deals. The big deal maker hasn't made a deal in four years. He owes other countries millions of dollars, too, so your money will go for that. The bank he was laundering money through for Putin for years won't work with him anymore, so I don't know how Putin will feel about that. I'm sure they'll work out something, though. Not only is Trump the leading cause of death in this country, but he's also the biggest national security threat. He'll give away our secrets for a happy meal. He just can't help being a crook. That's all he knows. So if you're OK with that and every other disgusting thing he's done to this country, shame on you. You've believed all his lies no matter how unbelievable or just plain stupid they were. You're OK with it because you all hate the same people. You are no patriot, sir. Trump said he wondered how Jim Jones got his people to drink the Kool Aid, but said he finally figured it out. Divide and keep spewing lies to vulnerable people until they believe it. It's worked since the days of Hitler. We will never be a dictatorship. If you want one, go live in Russia or China, or any of the other countries that are run that way for awhile and see how you like it. Watch what you wish for, though. Also, see how many of you will be able to have your guns there. This is a democracy and we will fight to keep it that way. The Republican party is now the party of white nationalists, militias, racists, proud boys, boogaloo boys, and any other murderous creatures that have crawled out from under the rocks these past four years. You must be so proud. There used to be some good ones. I miss John McCain. Of course, Captain Bone Spurs said he's not a hero. Such garbage spewed from white trash. The stench he came with will never leave him or his enablers. God bless this country and God bless our troops.

850 smiles

GARDNER—I just wanted to thank the Coal City second grade class for helping us out with our Christmas Card Project at Sacred Heart Church in Kinsman. Between them, the parishioners, the Sacred Heart CCD class, the kids at MVK, and my granddaughter we had over 850 cards. We were able to deliver them to the LaSalle, Quincy, and Manteno Veterans' Homes, Park Pointe Assisted Living, The Memory Gardens and The Regency in Morris, and both homes in Dwight. It was awesome. Such a great project. Couldn't have done it without everybody's help. Can't wait to do it again and hoping we can have the kids deliver them in person next time. Donna Gabehart

A big zero

GARDNER—How many of Trump's (common man) supporters do you think he would let into his private golf resorts or at Mar-A-Lago? Probably about the same number he would shake hands with at his super spreader

rallies. I think the number is a big zero. He said the virus was a good thing because he didn't have to shake those disgusting people's hands anymore. Ah, the man for the little guy. You terrorists from the Jan. 6 incident want pardons? He's selling them for about \$2 million a pop. Good luck.

Highway speeding

WILMINGTON—When is something going to get done to slow down the vehicles coming in from the west? You have semis coming in at over 50 mph, not to mention people in the morning who are running late for work and run the red light at First Street. What's it going to take? Someone getting killed before something gets done?

Weren't from Harvard

COAL CITY—During the recent riot at the Capitol you may have noticed a new symbol of the Republican party. Gone is the stodgy old elephant that has symbolized our country's faithful conservatives for more than a century. The new face of the party is a bare-chested misfit with tattoos and a painted face who is wearing coyote skins and a bison horn on his head. This 32-year-old goon was kicked out of the Navy and lives with his mother in Arizona. He and the rest of the mob are the culmination of years of lies spread by Fox News and other propaganda outlets. They are the result of those who enable the Trump Circus and didn't have the guts to stand up to his craziness. Trump demonized those who opposed him, encouraged violence, promoted racism and glorified stupidity with his dumb comments on climate change and the deadly virus. If you look closely at the Trump Storm Troopers who attacked the capital you saw that most of them did not look like graduate students from Harvard. Rather, they were a scruffy gang who looked like they spent the last week in a cave. These brain washed terrorists now control the Republican Party and are out to destroy our country. If you think I'm wrong I hope you heard the remarks of the Illinois Republican Congresswoman who told the crowd about the things Hitler got right. Our tax dollars should not be spent repairing or guarding the capitol. Send the bill to the Trump campaign.

Going against God

SHADOW LAKES—The Bible states that homosexuality is not to be tolerated, but yet Democrats wish to tolerate it. They are not Christians in my book. Anyone who tolerates homosexuals goes against God. God does not tolerate homosexuals. It is written in the Bible. Dan Hill

Correction

This is another sound-off correction. I said Trump lost the popular vote twice but due to an arcane holdover of slavery called the electoral college he still won the 2016 election, the point being he never had the support of the majority of Americans. Penny Lane

Local students earn honors at Mizzou

The University of Missouri has recognized the academic achievement of five area students by naming them to the fall 2020 dean's list.

Local students earning a grade point average of 3.25 or higher during the fall semester were included.

Earning the academic honor were Joshua J. Michalak, a freshman arts and science major, from Diamond.

Wilmington residents Rhianna Ellen Kay Brown, a freshman journalism major, and Lillian Solt, a junior majoring in health professions.

Maggie Christina Meyr, of Essex, who is majoring in health professions and Madyson Nicole Schuck, a sophomore journalism major, from Braceville.

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Deanna McDowell

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Lame duck session was a failure by Pritzker administration

"The legislature is going to be a check on the executive branch," newly-elected House Speaker Chris Welch flatly declared to me during an interview the other day.

Welch was responding to a question I posed to him about his Jan. 13th inaugural address, when he asked not-so-rhetorically, "Why is it difficult to ensure that families' unemployment checks continue unabated and arrive on time so struggling families can feed their children? Why is that hard to grasp?"

Welch's predecessor, Speaker Michael Madigan, stayed completely mum about Gov. JB Pritzker's handling of the COVID-19 crisis and resulting mass unemployment, even though Pritzker occasionally took verbal shots at Madigan and called on him to resign if he refused to answer questions about the ComEd investigation.

Not a single House committee hearing has been held about the backlog at the Illinois Department of Employment Security, or, for that matter, all the other migraine headaches that legislators have been dealing with as desperate constituents have turned to them for assistance when they couldn't get through to a state agency. That could very well change.

Rep. Fred Crespo (D-Hoffman Estates) warned the governor via the Center Square publication last week that the

House could "hold up some of these funds, even federal dollars," to IDES if members don't start getting answers to their questions. Crespo was instrumental in corraling votes for Welch and has been the chair of the House General Services Appropriations Committee. "It's not a threat, I think it's more, I think it's an education," Crespo told the outlet. "They're new and make sure they understand the process."

"I'm going to have an open and ongoing relationship with the governor to express what I'm hearing from our members," Welch told me. He didn't come right out and say it, but what he's hearing from his members about the governor ain't all that great these days, as Rep. Crespo could attest.

The Pritzker administration appears to have gotten a taste of what may come later this year during the just-concluded lame duck session when both of the governor's top priorities failed to pass.

A bill to decouple the state from federal business tax breaks (depending whom you talk to) worth between \$400 million to \$1 billion to state coffers received just 50 votes in the wee hours of last



Rich Miller

Wednesday morning. Nine Black Caucus members did not vote for the bill.

Most either voted "Present" or took a walk, but Rep. Debbie Meyers-Martin (D-Olympia Fields) voted "No." Black Caucus members are usually reliable votes for revenue increases. Not that day.

Welch himself didn't vote on the decoupling bill, either. He explained early Wednesday morning that he was "distracted" (even though the roll call was held open for quite a long while) and would vote for it again when the time came, but that time never came.

The Senate played games with the governor's must-have cannabis cleanup bill, waiting until almost 2 o'clock Wednesday morning to pass it pretty much as the governor wanted. But, by then, it was too late for the House to act.

The Senate seemed to many to be deliberately slow-walking important bills for the governor and for others during the last couple days of session. "I'm pretty sure this bill that we're debating right now was sent to us about six hours ago from the House," grumbled one Senator at 5:37 Wednesday morning.

The House Democrats

were heavily distracted by their election of a new Speaker and some white northern suburban Democrats were prepared to go "on strike" if the cannabis bill was passed without allowing their dispensaries to move to better locations, which was a deal-killer for the Black Caucus.

In the end, . Yes, there were tons of extenuating circumstances. But they knew ever since veto session was canceled in November that a lame duck session was a distinct probability. They had two months to prepare and now have precious little to show for it except for the Black Caucus agenda that they weren't in charge of.

Pritzker's huge legislative success in 2019 was an aberration. It was a legislative expression of joy and relief at having a governor who wanted to work with them to get big things done after 12 years of gubernatorial ineptitude and outright hostility toward the General Assembly. But if they don't address whatever issues there are with Harmon, woo the new Speaker and start tending to member egos, they're in for a very rough spring.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax, a daily political newsletter, and CapitolFax.com.

Welter starts third term in Illinois House

SPRINGFIELD—State Rep. David Allen Welter, R-Morris, was sworn in to his third full term on Jan. 13 with a focus on emerging from the pandemic and economic opportunity for families and students.

Welter joined all 118 members of the Illinois House of Representatives for the inauguration of the 102nd General Assembly held at the Bank of Springfield Center. Welter has represented Illinois' 75th District since July 2016.

"Democrats and Republicans need to work together to position Illinois to effectively distribute COVID-19 vaccines and assist our economy to bounce back from the ravaging effects of the pandemic," Welter said. "We need to make policy changes that will create jobs, strengthen schools and enact meaningful and lasting property tax relief. Illinois presently ranks second in the nation for people leaving for lower taxes and better opportunities elsewhere. Our priority in 2021, in tandem with overcoming the pandemic, must be to reverse this trend



Courtesy photo

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DAVID Welter, R-Morris, was sworn in for his third full term serving the 75th District in the Illinois House

by making Illinois more competitive for job creators and more affordable for families and seniors.

"Too many of our best and

brightest students leave Illinois after graduation. We need to work together to give recent graduates more reasons and opportunities to stay here.

Cairns named to dean's list

The University of Utah has named Luke Cairns, of Coal City to its fall 2020 dean's list. He was among 9,700 students who achieved a grade point average of 3.5 or higher in at least 12 graded credit hours in the term.

Cairns, the son of Shannon and Ben Baer of Coal City and John Cairns of Wilmington, is majoring in pre-computer science with an emphasis on game design. He is a 2020 Coal City High School graduate enrolled in the university's honors program.

Opposition to potential Illinois income tax hike mounting

BY KEVIN BESSLER
THE CENTER SQUARE

With Illinois facing a nearly \$4 billion budget shortfall this year, some are fearful of a possible state income tax increase in the near future, possibly while lawmakers conduct business in Springfield this week.

The support for raising the state income tax comes after voters rejected the graduated income tax amendment in November's election. Gov. J.B. Pritzker said the change in tax code would have raised an estimated \$3 billion a year in revenue, so now what?

Last September, Illinois Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton warned of a 20 percent across-the-board income tax hike if voters didn't approve the progressive tax amendment in November.

"To adequately address the budget crisis under our current tax system, lawmakers

will be forced to consider raising income taxes for all Illinois residents by at least 20 percent," Stratton said.

Brian Costin, state director of Americans for Prosperity, said now is a terrible time to raise taxes.

"Tax hikes are not working. It is not turning around the economy of Illinois, it is making it worse," Costin said. "People are making huge sacrifices during the COVID-19 pandemic. They shouldn't be asking for more money from the taxpayers during this very difficult time."

The last tax hike was just over 3 years ago. On July 6, 2017, the Illinois General Assembly voted to override then-Gov. Bruce Rauner's veto of a record-setting income tax hike. Personal income tax rates rose 32% to 4.95%, while corporate income taxes rose 33% to 7%.

Democratic Rep. Lashawn Ford would support an

income tax hike only if Republicans were on board.

"It has to be bipartisan because we have to make sure that we are fair about the taxes and have input from Republicans as well as Democrats as it relates to spending of the revenue," Ford said.

Pritzker's office has asked state agencies to prepare for the possibility of budget cuts reaching up to 10 percent by fiscal year 2022. He has already announced over \$711 million in cuts for this fiscal year, but details of those cuts remain unclear.

Costin is keeping an eye on the proceedings in Springfield during the General Assembly session.

"It is quite clear that the legislature is not willing to reform government spending, so we are very fearful that they will try to raise taxes," he said.

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Take yourself back to the beach with a Diamond Head

The calendar has turned to a new year, and more than likely plenty of friends, co-workers, and marketing emails have already wished you a happy New Year! If nobody has wished you a happy Wave Season yet, let me be the first to do so.

What, and when is Wave Season? Wave Season starts right about now and runs through early March, think of it as a "Black Friday" for the cruise industry. In a "normal" year, this is the time of year when the best deals on cruise packages to top destinations can be found online.

You see, the cruise industry knows that you are over shoveling snow and adding layers of clothing to stay warm once the Holidays are over. They take advantage of cabin fever by showing you pics and videos of tropical destinations until you finally book your dream vacation. This year, during a global pandemic, I have no idea what cruising, or vacationing in general looks like. I did not take a vacation last year, here's hoping that I can take one late this year.

Many would be travelers use Wave Season as an opportunity to pour their first tropical drink of the year. For this year's Wave Season, I chose the Diamond Head cocktail for two reasons. First, it is named after a popular tropical tourist destination. Second, the drink was created by Hawaiian bartending legend Harry Yee who at the time of printing is 102 years young.

That's right, Harry has been a fixture on Waikiki's bar

scene since before Hawaii became our 50th state. Following 30 years as head bartender at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, he taught bartending in and around Honolulu. Harry was born in 1918, which means that he is one of the few people on planet earth that has lived during both the Spanish Flu pandemic and COVID-19.

Harry is an innovator, with several iconic drinks to his credit. He could literally come up with new drinks on the spot, in part because he had to. Think about the early years of statehood for Hawaii. The islands hosted maybe 100,000 visitors annually in the 1950s, growing into the nearly 7,000,000 annual visitors of recent years. Tourists would come to Hawaii, sit down at Harry's bar, and order a "Hawaiian" drink. There was a problem: there were no Hawaiian drinks. They simply didn't exist.

Harry had to invent the drinks, and think of names for them, often on the fly. A few iconic drinks credited to Harry Yee are the Blue Hawaii, Hawaiian Eye, Tropical Itch, The Chimp in Orbit, and the Banana Daiquiri. He is also attributed with being the first bartender to use those little umbrellas in tropical drinks.

On to the cocktail, in this case, Diamond Head. This is another case of Harry coming



THE SUNDAY COCKTAIL
Brian Rung

up with something "Hawaiian" and naming it after a local landmark. The Diamond Head cocktail is gin-based, with the pleasant fruit notes of apricot brandy. Harry created the occasional rum drink, but was not a fan of rum. Harry preferred cognac, perhaps he still does.

The gin behind Harry's bar around the time that the Diamond Head cocktail was created would have been a standard London dry gin, something like the current Beefeater or Gordon's offerings. Gin serves as an excellent base for tropical drinks as the right gin is light and refreshing with complex floral notes and botanicals.

Once upon a time apricot brandy was a mainstay of mixology, especially in the time between the end of prohibition and the late 1970s. Apricot brandy remains a popular ingredient behind tiki and tropical bars, but has become less common behind other commercial bars.

Your local spirits retailer may have only one or two apricot brandy options, reach for Bol's if that is one of the options.

Since most of us are imbibing at home these days, seems like the perfect opportunity to go the extra mile for fresh fruit juice. Yes, juicing a pineapple is labor intensive. Your efforts will be rewarded as

the addition of fresh pineapple juice to the Diamond Head, or any other pineapple cocktail will take the drink to another level.

If you prefer to go the canned pineapple route, reach for Dole unsweetened pineapple juice. Keep the 6 oz. cans in your home bar and you will always have pineapple juice.

Preparation of the Diamond Head cocktail is simple, fast, and straightforward. It had to be. Harry and his staff had to build them five or ten at a time and serve them quickly. Fill a glass with crushed ice, add ingredients listed below, stir and serve. Don't let this one sit too long as the crushed ice will melt and cause the drink to dilute quickly.

The thought of a beach vacation seems like a dream under the current circumstances, but with any luck we'll turn a corner soon. I imagine that the travel and hospitality industries miss you as much as you miss them, make it a point to support them when you are safely able to do so.

The Diamond Head cocktail is built and served in a small vase-like glass, filled with crushed ice.

Fill glass with crushed ice, then add:

1 oz. gin
1/2 oz. apricot brandy
2 oz. pineapple juice
Stir, garnish with fresh pineapple

Until next week, enjoy responsibly.

Gas prices go up as demand shows renewed signs of recovery

Gasoline prices in Illinois have risen 3.8 cents per gallon in the past week, averaging \$2.46/g Monday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 4,378 stations in Illinois. This compares with the national average that has increased 4.2 cents per gallon versus last week to \$2.38/g, according to GasBuddy.

Average gasoline prices on January 18 in Illinois have ranged widely over the last five years: \$2.51/g in 2020, \$2.10/g in 2019, \$2.55/g in 2018, \$2.40/g in 2017 and \$1.85/g in 2016.

Including the change locally during the past week, prices yesterday were 5.3 cents per gallon lower than a year ago and are 20.8 cents per gallon higher than a month ago.

The national average has increased 15.6 cents per gallon during the last month and stands 17.4 cents per gallon

lower than a year ago.

"Gas prices have jumped to yet another multi-month high as crude oil price rise amidst perceived improvement in the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to pump prices up as demand shows renewed signs of recovery," said Patrick DeHaan, head of petroleum analysis for GasBuddy.

"In addition, with rumors swirling that President-elect Biden plans to cancel approval of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would cut off reliable Canadian oil to the U.S., oil prices may see additional pressure in the coming days. For now, the upward trend in gas prices may slow from the sharp rise in the last week, but motorists shouldn't expect much of a break from rising gas prices, which now stand less than twenty cents from their year-ago levels."

SIU-Carbondale dean's list

Southern Illinois University's Carbondale campus recently announced its dean's list for the fall 2020 semester, and more than one dozen area students have achieved academic honors.

Recognized by the university were Hannah Schwieler, a senior from Coal City and fellow seniors Joseph R. Horn, Stephen Lapinsky and Troy W. Mumma, of Wilmington.

Zachary Ridgley, a senior from Custer Park; Hallie J. Jeffries, a sophomore from Braidwood; Koby T. Smith, a senior from Braceville, and Gardner residents Marlana J. Ferrari, a senior, and sophomore Jack P. James.

Mumma achieved straight A's for the semester, as did Morris residents Hannah M. Brath, a freshman; Caitlin E. Mikula, a junior, and seniors Eli J. Gile, Matthew Jurak, Megan Jurak and Nicholas A. Wright.

How seniors can make their bathrooms safer

Dear Savvy Senior,

What tips can you recommend for making a bathroom senior-friendly? My 78-year-old mother has mobility problems and fell getting out of the bathtub last month. I'd like to modify her bathroom with some safety features that can help keep her safe.

Concerned Daughter

Dear Concerned,

Great question! Because more accidents and injuries happen in the bathroom than any other room in the house, this is a very important room to modify, especially for seniors with mobility or balance problems.

Depending on your mom's needs and budget, here are some simple tips and product recommendations that can make her bathroom safer and easier to use.

Floor: To avoid slipping, a simple fix is to get non-skid bath rugs for the floors. Or if you want to put in a new floor get slip-resistant tiles, rubber or vinyl flooring, or install wall-to-wall carpeting.

Lights: Good lighting is also very important, so install the highest wattage bulbs allowed for your mom's bathroom fixtures and get a plug-in nightlight that automatically turns on when the room gets dark.

Bathtub/shower: To make

bathing safer, purchase a rubber suction-grip mat, or put down adhesive nonskid tape on the tub/shower floor. And have a carpenter install grab bars in and around the tub/shower for support.

If your mom uses a shower curtain, install a screw or bolt-mounted curtain rod, versus a tension-mounted rod, so that if she loses her balance and grabs the shower curtain the rod won't spring loose.

For easier access and safer bathing, consider getting your mom a shower or bathtub chair so she can bathe from a seated position. In addition, you should also have a handheld, adjustable-height showerhead installed that makes chair bathing easier.

If your mom has the budget for it, another good option is to install a curb-less shower or a walk-in-bathtub. Curb-less showers have no threshold to step over, and come with a built-in seat, grab bars, slip resistant floors and an adjustable handheld showerhead. While walk-in tubs have a door in front that provides a much lower threshold to step over than a standard tub. They



SAVVY SENIOR
Jim Miller

also have a built-in seat, handrails and a slip resistant bottom, and some have therapeutic features like whirlpool water jets and/or bubble massage air jets.

Curb-less showers and walk-in-tubs run anywhere between \$2,500 and \$10,000

installed.

Toilet: Most standard toilets are around 15 inches high and can be an issue for taller seniors with arthritis, back, hip or knee problems. If your mom has trouble getting on or off the toilet, a simple solution is to purchase a raised toilet seat that clamps to the toilet bowl, and/or purchase toilet safety rails that sit on each side of the seat for support. Or, you can install a new ADA compliant "comfort height" toilet that is 16-to-19 inches high.

Faucets: If your mom has twist handles on the sink, bathtub or shower faucets, consider replacing them with lever handle faucets, or with a touch, motion or digital smart faucet. They're easier to operate, especially if she has hand arthritis or gripping problems. Also note that it only takes 130-degree water to scald some-

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OBITUARIES

Edward Wilkins

ESSEX—Edward Eugene Wilkins, 67, of Essex, passed away Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021 at Edwards Hospital in Naperville, IL.

Born July 31, 1953 in Richland Center, WI, he was a son of Edward Earl and Jean Marie (nee Himes) Wilkins. Edward graduated from Joliet West High School with the class of 1971. He retired from the Braidwood Nuclear Generating Station after 30 years of employment. Edward was a former elder at the Shepherd of Peace Lutheran Church in Braidwood and a current member of the River of Life Lutheran Church- Missouri-Synod in Channahon, IL.

He was an avid fisherman, duck hunter, and overall was a great outdoors man. After retirement he enjoyed working at the South Wilmington Sportsman Club and volunteering at the youth hunts and many other activities they offered.

Surviving are his beloved wife of 48 years, Barbara Leah (nee Rudd) Wilkins, of Essex, who he married July 15, 1972 at the St. Peters Lutheran Church in Joliet; three sons: Edward



M. (Jeanine) Wilkins, of Frankfort, IL; Patrick R. (Nicole) Wilkins, of Wheaton, IL and Clint (Elizabeth) Wilkins, of Braidwood; eight grandchildren: Eddie, Dakota, Skylar, Amber, Joshua, Elijah, Magdalyn and Nolan; three siblings: Robert (Gwen) Wilkins, of Zellwood, FL; Debra (Paul) Merzlock, of Joliet and Kirk (Sheila) Wilkins, of Braidwood and numerous nieces, nephews, and their families.

Funeral services were held at the R.W. Patterson Funeral Home and Crematory, Braidwood on Sunday, Jan. 17, 2021. Cremation rites were accorded following services.

Memorial donations in his name to the River of Life Lutheran Church or the American Cancer Society would be appreciated.

For more information and to visit his online guestbook, log on to www.rwpatterson-funeralhomes.com.

R.W. Patterson Funeral Home & Crematory, 401 E. Main St., Braidwood was in charge of arrangements.

Dora Wilson

BRAIDWOOD—Dora (Heck) Wilson, 80, of Braidwood, and formerly of Wilmington, passed away Friday, Jan. 8, 2021 at her home.

Born Jan. 19, 1940 in Wilmington, Dora Ellen was a daughter of Arthur J. and Alpha (Sitter) Heck. She was raised and educated in Wilmington and attended the Wilmington schools. Dora worked for many years as a school bus driver for the Gardner South Wilmington School District. She was a member of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Braidwood and enjoyed quilting and crocheting. In her free time, Dora took pleasure in tending to her vegetable garden, canning and fishing.

Survivors include her husband, Daniel Wilson, of Braidwood; four children: Tina Hendrex, of Coal City; Terry (the late Gerald) Champion, of Paducah, KY; Duane Hendrex, of Braidwood and Bryan (Lori) Hendrex, of Morris; seven grandchildren: Lee Heafner, Stacy Burt, Michael Esparza, Jeremy Esparza, Nathan Esparza, Renae Champion Mariner and Brandon Hendrex; numerous great-grandchildren, two brothers, Arthur (Carol) Heck, of Lafayette, IN and Larry Heck, of Wilmington; three sisters: Mary Ruth (the late Charles "Bud") Bullock and Betty Marlene (the late Herbert) Akins, both of Wilmington and Joanna (Glen) Schwartz, of Hiawatha, IA and sister-in-law, Sandy Heck, of Joliet, as well as numerous nieces and nephews.



Dora was preceded in death by her parents, son, Orman Heafner; sister, Anna Heck and brother, John Heck.

Cremation rites have been accorded and Dora will be laid to rest at Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Wilmington with her parents.

Family and friends are encouraged to sign the guest book, upload photographs and share Dora's memorial page online through social media by logging onto: www.BaskervilleFuneral.com/obituary/Dora-Wilson

Green flameless cremation services and memorial arrangements have been made under the direction and care of Baskerville Funeral Home in Wilmington.

COVID-19's positive impact on the flu

Low flu numbers due to safety precautions

As COVID-19 exploded last year, the seasonal flu did an about face, dropping off significantly compared to past years.

The numbers are telling. For example, in the third week of December 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) network of clinical labs reported 16.2% of almost 30,000 samples tested positive for influenza A. During the same period in 2020, only .3% tested positive.

In another example, during the last week of December 2019, the Winnebago County Health Department in Rockford, IL, reported 198 cases in Winnebago County. During that same time period in 2020, there was one case of influenza.

One of the major reasons is the number of flu vaccines being distributed. According to the CDC, 192.3 million doses of flu vaccine have been distributed as of Dec. 25. That's the highest number of flu doses distributed in the U.S. during a single influenza season.

"Flu cases have been significantly down this year. We anticipated that, but we prepared for the worst," said Dr. Syed Zaidi, of OSF HealthCare. "The important message of getting your vaccination for the flu was high priority in communities. The numbers that have been down have been largely due to the number of vaccinations through community healthcare systems and community pharma-

cies."

That's not all. While more people are vigilant about getting the flu vaccine this season, people are also washing their hands, social distancing, wearing masks and traveling less due to COVID-19 – all important factors in the drop in flu cases. Another contributing factor is children learning from home rather than the classroom. Flu typically starts with children.

"Typically immunization rates increase around November to December and that's been the case this year as well," said Zaidi. "However we see flu cases rise post-holiday season. Right when people are getting back from the holiday, family gatherings – January, February is when we're usually harder hit."

Flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and possibly death. The best way to prevent flu is by getting a flu vaccine.

"Typically, fevers, cough, colds, runny nose, are on our radar all the time now," said Zaidi. "I think the number of

testing might increase almost proportionate to COVID testing, but the number of positive cases come back for flu are unprecedentedly low. Have I seen flu cases in my office, yes? Would I say weekly, no? Perhaps on average once a month at least in one small office like mine."

Moving forward, Dr. Zaidi hopes the steps people are taking this flu season is a sign of things to come.

"When we start to value our health day to day and we start to worry about our vulnerable whether it's our children or our parents, we tend to make more sound, knowledgeable decisions and part of that decision is making sure your preventative care is met and that includes vaccinations."

Dr. Zaidi adds that this is no time to let our guard down.

"Flu season continues and we will see pattern of peak after the holiday season. It's the utmost importance that we continue to vaccinate and get your flu shot, typically the vulnerable – the younger and the elderly – and we all hope and pray that we will continue to be safe from whatever ails us as a society."

209-U lunch menu

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Tues., Jan. 26: hot dog on bun, nacho & cheese, baby carrots, mandarin oranges in jell-o and choice of milk

Wed., Jan. 27: 2 tacos, refried beans, salsa, pears and

choice of milk

Thurs., Jan. 28: cheese tortellini, green beans, garlic toast, applesauce and choice of milk

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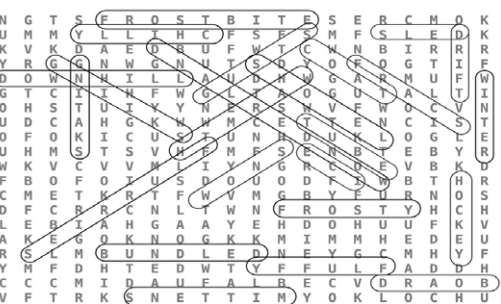
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The Wilmington Fire Protection District is seeking qualified applicants to establish an eligibility list for the position of Firefighter/Paramedic with the District.

Starting Salary: \$50,500.00

QUALIFICATIONS

- Applicant must be at least 21 years of age and under 35 years of age at the time of submission of an application unless otherwise provided by state or federal law
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- Possess a valid class B non CDL driver's license in the State of Illinois
- Be certified as a Basic Operations Firefighter or Firefighter II through the Office of the State Fire Marshall in the State of Illinois
- Be certified as a Paramedic in the State of Illinois (IDPH EMT-P)

Applications will be available to qualified candidates January 20th – February 22nd between the hours of 8:30am-4:30pm, Monday-Friday at Station #1, 501 N. Main Street, Wilmington, IL. \$30 non-refundable processing fee (Cash/check only) is due upon receipt of application.

A valid driver's license must be presented in order to obtain an application. Only one application per candidate will be given.

Completed application shall be returned to the above address no later than 4:30 pm on February 22, 2021. Failure to complete the application in its entirety shall be grounds for rejection from the process.

Applicants must attend the following:

- Orientation/Written Exam: February 24, 2021 at 6 pm Sharp (No one will be allowed in the room after 6 pm)
- Oral Interviews: March 8th and March 10th.
- Physical Ability: Must have a CPAT card with ladder climb issued no more than 365 days prior to conditional offer.

The Rules and Regulations of the Board of Fire Commissioners, Wilmington Fire Protection District, will govern all facets of the hiring process, a copy of which is available for viewing at the District's Station#1. If you have any questions please call (815)-476-6675.



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Coalers start practices Monday but Wildcats, Comets will have to wait

BY SHAWN LONG
SPORTS WRITER

The good news for Coal City High School is that their cheerleading, boys and girls basketball teams can start practicing on Monday.

The bad news is Wilmington and Reed-Custer still have to wait.

On Monday, Region 2 which includes Grundy County, dropped to Tier 1 mitigations while Reed-Custer and Wilmington, in Region 7, remain under tier 3 restrictions.

According to CCHS Athletic Director Dan Hutchings and Principal Chris Spencer, they'll be moving forward on Monday.

"Competitive cheer and competitive dance are allowed to start practicing immediately," said Hutchings. "Same thing for boys and girls basketball which is a higher risk sport. With parental consent they actually can go to close guarding and intrasquad scrimmaging but no competition as of yet. The dance and cheer teams can compete but the issue is Region 5 in southern Illinois is the only other region in Tier 1 so no competitions locally. Still, we're allowed to practice so we'll get our kids involved that way."

Starting Monday contact

days for spring and summer sports can also begin.

"What that means for us is basketball and cheer teams will get to have priority."

The spring sports now includes football, volleyball and boys soccer. The seasons will run from February 15 to May 1.

The summer sports consisting of baseball, softball, track & field, girls soccer and boys tennis (CC only) will be held from April 19 to June 26.

"The main thing for us is we get to open up our weight room again with the capacity of 25 after school and before school. So we'll get our kids back in there to give them the acclimation of getting back into shape for their sports."

Since Reed-Custer and Wilmington remain at Tier 3, nothing will begin.

Wilmington cheer coach Jeannine Bejlovec says her girls have been doing what they've been allowed to do and that hasn't been much.

"Since Nov. 20th, we have had a few virtual workouts prior to winter break," said Bejlovec. "And it's been one day per week with athletes coming in to tumble for 10 minutes each."

Bejlovec says that is a big change as the girls would normally be in practicing almost every day.

"We usually practice 5-6 days a week under normal circumstances so this has been tough," added Bejlovec. "Prior to that week, we had been practicing a couple days per week since summer and enjoying some fun games, activities and contests to keep up the team spirit and unity."

Bejlovec says the girls have been working hard and just want a chance to showcase their skills.

"The girls attended tumbling classes in the fall as well," commented Bejlovec. "They learned a ton of game material to be ready whenever those seasons take place."

As for Reed-Custer cheerleading coach Lexi Stewart, it's the same story, different tune.

"We have been able to meet with an individual athlete for about 20-30 minutes at a time," said Stewart. "We've done some conditioning, stretching, jumps and tumbling. It's hard to do anything cheer related since we aren't able to practice as a team."

The frustration is setting in and she just wants Reed-Custer to get back to some type of normalcy. All this change is killing spirit.

"This season has been just so up and down with the rules and regulations," commented Stewart. "It has been so hard to keep up and some times to

even stay motivated. I really feel for my athletes and all other athletes that just want to be able to compete and play the sports they love."

Both coaches will be tuned in on Wednesday, Jan. 27th for the board meeting when the Illinois High School Association will hopefully devise a schedule for the rest of the school year.

That will hopefully also clear a path for Wilmington and Reed-Custer basketball teams, who are itching to get back on the court.

Right now, basketball teams within Tier 3 mitigations are not allowed to compete or practice.

Once the Wildcats and Comets move to Tier 2, they will be able to practice team training drills with no contact. Then, once they reach Tier 1 where Coal City is, they'll be allowed to practice and scrimmages. There will still be no contests or scrimmages against other schools.

Time is ticking for sports in Illinois. If the IHSA doesn't make a decision for a schedule next Wednesday, the chance for basketball might be unlikely.

"We realize there is a desire for finality on a sports schedule for 2020-21, however, we did not believe it would be prudent to lock ourselves into

a schedule at a time when IHSA schools are unable to conduct any sports," commented executive director Craig Anderson. "...February seems like a realistic timeline to have sports resume statewide. We expect that the events of the next two weeks will go a long way toward informing our opinion on which scheduling option we decide to proceed with. We recognize that if no sports have resumed by February, season lengths could be impacted in certain sports, and that we may need to take a longer look at the likelihood of true seasons being conducted in high-risk sports this year."

"Our overall goal remains unchanged, as we hope to conduct all IHSA sports during the remainder of the school year calendar. Please know that we see and read many of the comments and messages from student-athletes, coaches, and parents, and that we are doing everything we can to try and bring IHSA sports back within the current parameters we are working in."

A hashtag campaign on Twitter, '#HearOurVoiceIllinois' allows student-athletes the chance to make their voices heard by sending videos to the governor and other state officials, telling them what school their from,

what sports they play and why sports are important to them.

A Reed-Custer High School mom Stacy Clement, who has three student-athletes, was encouraging all high school athletes to make videos. Reed-Custer sophomore Halie LaGrange and senior Maddie McPherson among other athletes, have been spreading the word in tweets on Twitter.

"I genuinely hope our governor realizes how much he has taken away from the students of Illinois," said McPherson in tweet. "The seniors have waited all these years to enjoy our last year of high school but we have to be more focused on keeping our masks above our nose rather than planning a bright future."

A Facebook group 'Illinois High School Sports Central' that was started by Kevin Dennis, will be holding a peaceful Let Us Play march in Springfield, IL on Saturday, Jan. 30 at 1:30 p.m.

Stacy tweeted about the rally this past Saturday inviting others: "Students, athletes, parents, fans & coaches, join us Jan. 30, 8 a.m. in Top Fuel parking lot at 275 S. Hickory St. to drive down to the rally in Springfield. Everyone is welcome #HearOurVoiceIllinois."

Comets would put up a good fight during dream team wrestling matches

BY SHAWN LONG
SPORTS WRITER

If a wrestling match of dream team opponents was held between Coal City, Reed-Custer and Wilmington, it would need to be held in a bigger venue than the RCHS gym. Simply, there'd be a overwhelming number of fans who would show up from all three schools.

But in this case the stage for a dream team wrestling match is hypothetical as this week we're pairing many of the best wrestlers from all three schools on paper.

Reed-Custer Middle School wrestling coach Yale Davis helped with drafting a wrestling lineup. The rest is based on actual achievements because there's no way someone could subjectively call a winner unless the two had faced each other in the past. With some of these matchups, wrestlers weren't even born when others became champions.

Reed-Custer started with a first of two dual team matchups against Coal City. The Comet vs. Coaler dream team match heavily favored Coal City but Reed-Custer would have a chance in a couple weight classes.

Starting at 106, it would be Coal City Middle School wrestling coach Branden Petersen against former Coal City two-time state champion Todd Combes. And based on their accomplishments alone, Combes would win. The two battled each other in 1997 during the 113-pound state championship. Combes won it with an 11-2 major decision so that's a small sample size but based on that statistic, Combes would win.

Next up is Reed-Custer's 2011 state champion Trent Lyons (38-4) at 113 against Coal City's 2016 state champi-

on Joey Rivera (43-4). Lyons was a state champion at Reed-Custer and a runner-up for Wilmington in 2012. Rivera was a state champion as well so the match would come down to the wire with Lyons the victor.

At 120, Comet Steve Rosenberg (35-7), who placed third at state, would fall to two-time state champion Cody Minnick (48-1).

Jake Sinkular, who qualified for state in 1999, is next to take the mat for the Comets at 126. Opposing him is three-time state placer and state champion Corey Jurzak from Coal City. Jurzak would win this match being a state champion.

At 132, Ron Housman (34-7), who placed fourth in 1997 at 119 pounds, wrestled up to face the four-time state place winner and 2019 state champion Alex Friddle (53-0) in a best on best match. Friddle has the edge being a state champion and a four-time state placer.

With two wins in the first four, the Comets turn to 1996 runner-up at 135, Don Hall (37-6), squaring off against two-time state champion Mike Friddle (33-2-1) at 138. Numbers suggest Friddle would win over Hall in a close loss.

At 145, Reed-Custer sent out the three-time state qualifier and 1993 state runner-up Donovan Marschner (37-3) against Coal City's two-time state champ John Odeen (35-0). With the two state titles under his belt, numbers suggest John Odeen would win.

At 152, Coal City has Chase Odeen (39-1), a state champion, step out onto the mat to face 2000 runner-up Joey Spiker (37-4). Chase would win but Spiker would make it close.

Reed-Custer's first-ever state champion Jay Conley would oppose super tough

Drew Vickers (35-11) from Coal City, who placed fourth in 2004. Based on accomplishments, Conley (37-3) would win.

The next matchup is two-time state champion Billy Chancey, who went 151-17 at Reed-Custer, against 1981 third place medalist Rob Murphy Sr. (coach at Wilmington High School). Numbers thought Chancey would win pretty handily, winning two titles in high school. Murphy Sr. (is good but only managed third in high school.

At 182, the Comets sent out two-time state qualifier Noah Curl against two-time state champion Daniel Jezik from Coal City. Based on accomplishments, Jezik (57-1) would win handily.

When asked, Curl was very excited about the hypothetical match and thinks it would be a little bit closer than the numbers show.

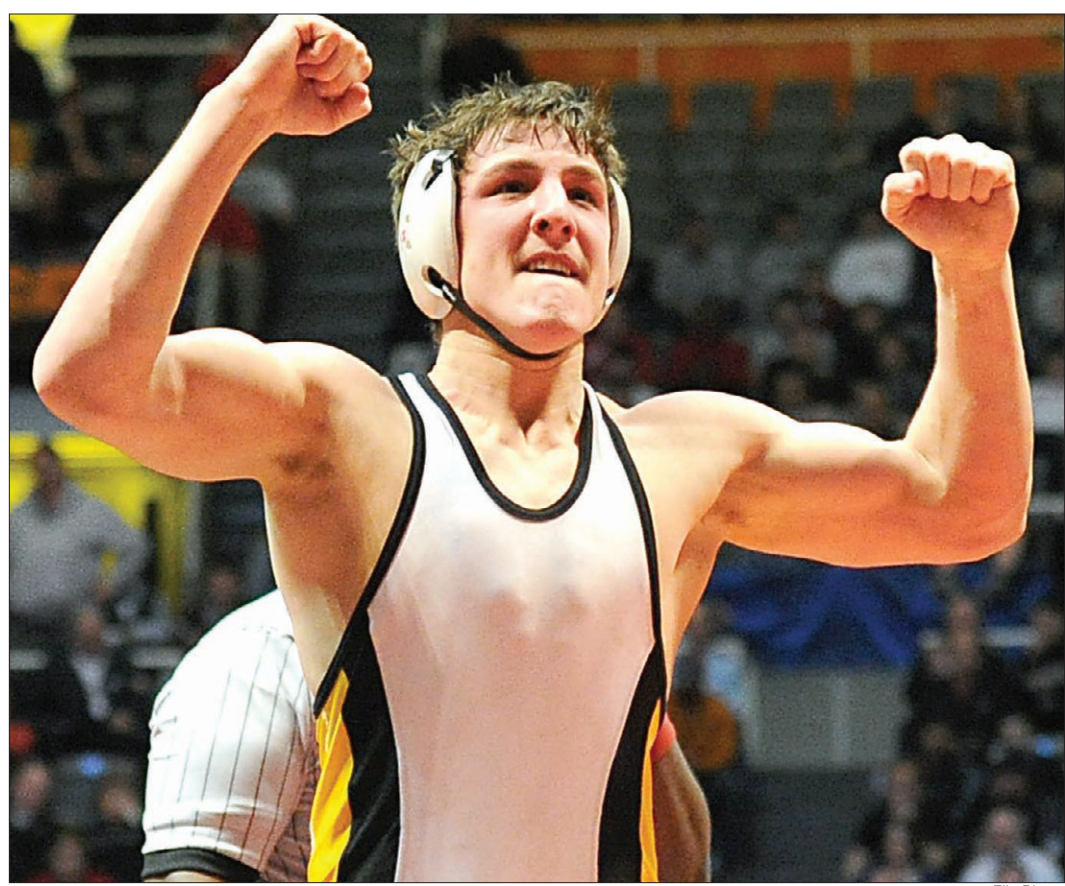
"I think it'd be a good match for sure," said Curl. "Daniel is a really strong guy but I think if we took it the whole match, I'd be close for sure. He'd probably go for a quick double or a sweep but I'm confident I'd be able to get out in the event I got on bottom. I feel like my cardio throughout the match would be my advantage for sure."

He was actually entertaining the fact of making it happen. With Jezik in Oklahoma at Oklahoma State University and Curl in Texas finishing up his basic training for the Air Force, it's possible they could have a match.

"I'd love it," commented Curl. "...let's make it happen."

Jezik agrees he'd like to see it happen but thinks it might go differently now. It might have been a closer match in high school.

"Well, if it were to happen right now, I'd like to think I'd win by a decent margin con-



File Photo

REED-CUSTER'S Billy Chancey would go 2-0 in two wrestling dream team matches against Wilmington and Coal City's 170-pound wrestlers.

sidering I'm still wrestling," said Jezik. "But I know him personally and he's quite the hard worker and if it did happen, he'd definitely do everything he could to even out the slate. But back in our prime years of high school, I think it would probably be a little more interesting because I wasn't in very good shape and I know he was."

Next up for the Comets was 2011 fourth place medalist Zach Boyer at 195 pounds. He bumped up two classes to match up with state champion Riley Kauzlaric. State champion Kauzlaric would have the edge here.

At 220, Comet Billy Waliczek, who didn't make it to state because he had a tough class of wrestlers, won the regional at 215 in 1994. He was set to oppose 2019 fourth place medalist Gage Leake. Leake (41-8) would be declared the winner based on his accomplishments. They are both good wrestlers but Waliczek never made it to state.

At 275, Matt Mathena, who placed third at the heavyweight division in 1999, would face a familiar foe in Jack Leffler. Mathena (34-4) was good but Leffler (38-0) was better. Numbers suggest Leffler would wear down Mathena. He was just too good being a three-time state placer and 1998 state champion.

Coal City's dream team was tough and Wilmington's doesn't get any easier even though Reed-Custer could win a couple different weight classes.

In the first match, Wildcat Steve Marshall, the 1978 state champion at 105, would face Reed-Custer's Petersen. Marshall (38-3) would win but that doesn't mean it wouldn't be close.

After that, two-time runner-up Alex Jones (34-5) from Wilmington would meet former teammate 2010 state

champion Trent Lyons at 113. There's no way to call this one as they were both talented wrestlers. The only way would be Lyons has a state championship and Jones doesn't.

At 120, Steve Rosenberg, who was a third place medalist in 2011, was the chosen wrestler. Murph countered Rosenberg with three-time state placer Jack Narine. According to accomplishments, Rosenberg has the edge in this match. Narine is still a very tough wrestler who won't go down without a fight.

Next up at 126, Reed-Custer has state qualifier Sinkular to face-off against two-time state champion and four-time state placer Johnny Van Duyn. Van Duyn would win big based on his overall record and state success. Van Duyn was 170-10 in high school.

At 132, Reed-Custer would send out 1997 fourth place finisher Ron Housman against 1990 130-pound state champion Stormy Tidmore. In the end, Tidmore wins.

Next onto the mat at 138 pounds was Reed-Custer's 1996 runner-up Don Hall against Wilmington's 2007 state champion Vince Vercelli. Numbers suggest Vercelli would handily beat Hall based on his state championship trophy to Hall's runner-up but like a lot of these matches, it wouldn't be a blowout.

The next match was going to be Reed-Custer's 1998 state runner-up Donovan Marschner against Wilmington's 2008 state champion Jake Murphy at 145 pounds. Even though Marschner was a very talented wrestler in his own right, Murphy was a state champion who captured the title winning knocking off a two-time state champ that year.

At 152 pounds, Reed-Custer would have 2002 runner-up Joey Spiker to oppose

2007 state champion Josh Peters. Based on their records, Wilmington has this one with Peters state championship but Spiker was no pushover. It'd be a strength on strength battle with Peters edging him out.

The next match is going to be Reed-Custer's first-ever state champion, Conley against Rob Murphy Jr., who won the state title in 2005. This match was 50/50 but in the end, Murphy Jr. was the only Wildcat to capture nine state medals while Conley had his state title so Murphy (38-1) would win in a brawl.

The next matchup is two-time state champion Chancey against Wilmington's first ever state champion Chris Nugent (34-5) at 170. It'd be a win for Chancey, who won it twice and placed second his sophomore year.

Reed-Custer would send out Matt Kuchar who made it to state at 171 pounds. Wilmington's Steve Liaromatis would be his opponent and have the edge based on their records.

At 220, Waliczek against 2005 undefeated state champion Tony Vercelli, who would have Waliczek's number from the get-go.

Based on both their accomplishments, 1999 third place medalist Matt Mathena and 2013 third place medalist for Wilmington Derrick Romano, would have a match down to the wire. Unfortunately, that match is too close to call.

While it's fun to make decisions based on hypothetical matches, it'd be even more fun to see the real thing. As of now, high school wrestling has been moved to the summer season which starts April 19 for practices. What's unknown is if it will be considered a high risk sport and be delay or canceled due to the pandemic mitigation.

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