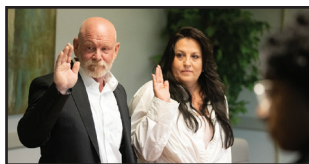


Bryant bar on defense

Burks Brothers Brewery says taking steps to avoid future slipups. — Arkansas, 1B



One of a kind

Collins left impression at UA with talent, charm; set to join ASHOF. — Sports, 1C

Arkansas Democrat Gazette

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In the news

■ **Rob Mark**, who adopted a stray terrier he spotted on the side of an Anne Arundel County, Md., highway, said “the idea that we could be part of her story and give her a loving home, really, it made sense.”

■ **Cody Roberts**, 44, was sentenced to 18 months of probation for hitting a wolf with a snowmobile before taping the wounded animal’s mouth shut, bringing the creature into a bar, then killing it in Daniel, Wyo.

■ **Doug Diny**, mayor of Wausau, Wis., will not face criminal charges for removing an absentee ballot box before any votes were received in 2024, as special prosecutor Eric Toney said he would not be able to prove any charges beyond a reasonable doubt.

■ **Erik Duran**, a former New York City police sergeant, was sentenced to three to nine years in prison for picking up and tossing a bystander’s drink cooler at a suspect fleeing on a motor scooter, causing the man’s death.

■ **James Strahler II**, 37, of Columbus, Ohio, became the first person convicted under the Take It Down Act, a 2025 federal law that criminalizes the nonconsensual sharing of sexually explicit images of others and requires companies to remove them, prosecutors said in a news release.

■ **Muhammad Khan**, a 21-year-old Pakistani also known as Shahzeb Jadoon, faces up to life in federal prison after pleading guilty to trying to commit acts of terrorism transcending national boundaries, admitting that he planned to cross the border from Canada to the United States in September 2024 with “the intention of killing Jewish people in Brooklyn.”

■ **Nelson Kuma**, 37; Richard Hounnou, 45; and Norma Munoz-Bent, 68, all former employees of the Psychiatric Institute of Washington, have been charged with criminal negligence in the 2020 death of a patient.

■ **Daniel Ramos**, 42, of Guatemala, acknowledged in a federal court his involvement in a failed migrant-smuggling scheme, in which at least 53 migrants were killed.

■ **Hugh Clements Jr.**, interim police chief of Brown University, was chosen to oversee safety and emergency management on a permanent basis at the Providence, R.I., campus, with administrators noting in an email that he “brings an extraordinary combination of Rhode Island law enforcement leadership, national policy experience and a deep commitment to community-centered policing.”



The carry team removes the casket of Tech. Sgt. Ashley B. Pruitt from an aircraft during a dignified arrival ceremony at Samuels Field Airport in Bardstown, Ky., on Thursday. (AP/Jon Cherry)

Israeli premier permits talks with Lebanon

Goal to disarm Hezbollah, establish normal relations

JON GAMBRELL, ELENA BECATOROS AND MIKE CORDER THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — In a potential boost to Middle East ceasefire efforts, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that he authorized direct negotiations with Lebanon “as soon as possible” aimed at disarming Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants and establishing relations between the neighbors.

Israel and Lebanon have technically been at war since Israel was established

in 1948, and Netanyahu later stressed that there was no ceasefire between them. In a video statement, he said Israel will keep striking Hezbollah until security is restored in northern Israel.

There was no immediate response from Lebanon. But Israel-Lebanon negotiations were expected to begin next week at the State Department in Washington, according to a U.S. official and a person familiar with the plans, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the delicacy of the matter.

The prospect of talks See IRAN, Page 5A

Account program rule changes OK'd

Vote brings proposal closer to reality

JOSH SNYDER ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A slate of proposed changes to the Educational Freedom Account program are one step closer to becoming reality after Arkansas education officials voted to approve them Thursday.

The proposed rule changes would make fees for certain community or homeschool athletics leagues reimbursable while restricting other sports expenditures. They would also cut by more



This coverage was made possible by donations to the ADG Community Journalism Project.

than half the amount of money that an Educational Freedom Account participant can roll over from year to year, and more explicitly describe what the state Department of Education must do to limit abuse of the hundreds of mil-

See PROGRAM, Page 3A



Jeff Wood (from right), seated beside fellow State Board of Education members Leigh S. Keener and Randy Henderson, voices his support for proposed revisions to the Educational Freedom Account program Thursday at Lee County Senior High School in Marianna. (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette/Josh Snyder)

Officials explain county funding

Pulaski’s balance problem atypical

AMIR MAHMOUD AND DANIEL McFADIN ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

As Pulaski County’s general fund balance spiraled into the red, Treasurer Debra Buckner scrambled to pay the bills.

She had “to rob Peter to pay Paul” with the expectation that “Paul is going to have to pay back Peter down the road,” Buckner said. “It’s very typical (for counties).”

The problem Pulaski County confronts is atypical: The balance in the county’s general fund has plunged from \$48.8 million from the beginning of 2023 to minus \$9.3 million at the end of last month.

See FUNDING, Page 3A

Growth potential seen for \$1B data center

SYDNEY SASSER ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Google’s proposed Port of Little Rock data center, initially announced as a \$1 billion investment, has the potential to grow much larger, according to a recently filed public notice.

Nearly a year ago, city of Little Rock officials signed a

memorandum of understanding with Willowbend Capital LLC — a front company being used by Google as it develops the project — that said the project will include the “construction of an approximately 300,000 square foot data center facility.”

It also said Willowbend “anticipates an investment

in the construction and equipping of the project will be approximately \$1 billion.” The document mentions the potential for the developer to build one or more additional data center buildings at the 380 acre site.

A public notice document published in March by the U.S. Army Corps of En-

gineers Little Rock District said the project is designed to include “a state-of-the-art, five building light industrial complex in Arkansas.”

The five buildings will each be approximately 285,300 square feet, totaling 1.43 million square feet. The site will also consist of two

See CENTER, Page 6A

Governor: Income tax cuts to be session focus

MICHAEL R. WICKLINE ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders on Thursday left the door open to adding corporate income tax cuts to the call for a planned special session.

That special session, during which time lawmakers will consider individual income tax cuts, will be called after ongoing fiscal session.

The Republican governor told lawmakers on Wednesday that she would call a special session to consider cutting the state’s income tax by two-tenths of a percentage point if the Republican-dominated Legislature holds the line on the expansion of government and “as soon as we pass our budget” in this year’s fiscal session.

The governor has proposed an increase of \$194.5 million, or about 3%, in the state’s general revenue budget to \$6.68 billion in fiscal 2027 with most of the increased general revenue targeted for Arkansas Educational Freedom Account program. The fiscal year begins July 1 of this year and ends June 30, 2027.

The governor’s proposed budget would increase the general revenue allocation for the state’s Educational Freedom Account program by \$122 million to \$309.4 million in fiscal 2027, which

See TAX, Page 3A

Protests in Venezuela



Bolivarian National Police stop protesters who are demanding higher salaries, pensions and benefits from continuing their march to the Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas, Venezuela, on Thursday. (AP/Pedro Matthey)

Judge denies Norris’ suit challenging results of county election

NEAL EARLEY ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Secretary of state candidate Bryan Norris is asking election results in Saline County be declared “null and void,” but a judge dismissed his lawsuit the same day it was filed.

In his lawsuit, Norris is

claiming Saline County election officials failed to properly secure boxes of ballots and that they obstructed his attorney from viewing the recount he requested.

But just hours after Norris filed his lawsuit Thursday, Pulaski County Circuit Judge Timothy Fox issued an

order dismissing it, writing Arkansas law requires the complaint to be filed in Saline County.

As of Thursday, Norris came up 918 votes shy to state Sen. Kim Hammer, R-Benton, in the March 31 Republican runoff for secretary of state, according to unofficial re-

sults.

“This filing is not about bitterness, and it is not about attacking the local election workers who may have been doing the best they could with the training and direction they were given,” Norris said in a statement on his Facebook page. “It is about

whether the election and recount process in Saline County complied with Arkansas law, and whether the ballots reviewed can be reliably verified as the same ballots cast by the voters.”

In his motion to dismiss, Fox cited Arkansas law that See SUIT, Page 6A

WEATHER

LITTLE ROCK

TODAY TONIGHT



HIGH 83 LOW 57

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