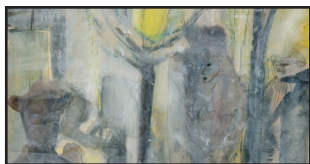


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In the news

■ **Steve Summers**, Dolly Parton’s longtime creative director, told her fans, “We were as surprised as anybody that she’s not here to see it,” at the Nashville, Tenn., opening of the Dolly’s Life of Many Colors Museum that includes her wedding dress a niece found wrapped in a paper bag and shoved into a trunk.

■ **Sheila E.**, a drummer and headliner at a Carson, Calif., jazz festival, excoriated organizers for not stopping the event when an attendee died, saying, “I would have never, never gotten onstage if I would have known that her body was still sitting there with her family surrounding her.”

■ **Terrell Owens** is being sued by three friends of the late Nolan Wells at the party where the Mississippi student was last seen alive after the NFL Hall of Famer posted a call for their immediate arrests along with a video theorizing they killed him.

■ **Gary Siders Sr.**, arrested after his 16 grandchildren were found locked in a single room in Hamden, Ohio, had all charges dismissed after a judge ruled him unfit for trial.

■ **Scott March** got 47 years in prison for a deadly Florida rear-end collision that happened when the 2026 Chevrolet Corvette he’d bought the day of the crash for \$170,000 struck another car at 147 mph and after a witness heard March say he’d have to buy another car the next day.

■ **John Sullwold**, a spokesman for Minneapolis’ Sea Life aquarium, said, “We just thought it’d be a really fun engaging thing,” as the venue hosted about two dozen orphaned kittens who stared into the blue and batted at the glass.

■ **Abdullah Keskin**, founder of Turkish publisher Avesta, is grateful for the International Freedom to Publish Award, saying it casts “a bright light that will illuminate our way forward” after its books have been burned over its championing of Kurdish culture.

■ **Thorsten Schumm** said it’s the achievement of a 50-year dream for physicists in announcing that his Vienna team is one of two to develop an ultra-accurate nuclear clock that calculates time by monitoring how a high-powered laser beam interacts with an atomic nucleus.

■ **Oscar James Meredith** said, “It shows there’s still some good people around,” after an operator at a Florence, Ala., wastewater plant reunited him with his 1965 class ring lost down a drain by his late wife when they were still dating.

Honoring the dead



Benny and Maggy Solomon, parents of Hila Solomon, who was killed in the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on Israel, attend a memorial marking the third anniversary of the attack at the Nova music festival site near Kibbutz Reim, southern Israel, on Wednesday. (AP/Ohad Zwigenberg)

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Senator says water deal’s lobbyist advised Sanders

MICHAEL R. WICKLINE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A senior campaign adviser to Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders is lobbying her administration to back a project to pipe surplus water from Texarkana to Texas.

Last year, a former Arkansas agency’s separate plan to sell water rights to Texas

was scuttled after Sanders signaled concerns about the deal. Her office said Wednesday that it would be premature for her to take a position on the Texarkana project, but state Sen. Jimmy Hickey, R-Texarkana, said he learned Sanders might be amenable to the proposal.

That raised eyebrows,

Hickey said, especially after he discovered that lobbyists Chris Caldwell and Robert Moery were representing the private group touting the Texarkana pipeline. Caldwell is Sanders’ senior campaign adviser and was her campaign manager during her 2022 gubernatorial run.

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Judge says firm OK to request legal fees

BRETT BARROUQUERE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A law firm and an attorney who represented the Arkansas Board of Corrections were properly hired and can submit a claim for legal fees, a judge ruled Wednesday, while reiterating that a settlement agreement calling the firm’s hiring improper is invalid.

Pulaski County Circuit Judge Patricia James, in a three-page order, said the firm Hall Booth Smith and attorney [Abtin Mehdizadegan](#) may submit a claim for fees accrued while suing Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

“Once received, the court will determine whether the request(ed) attorneys’ fees are ‘reasonable compensation’ without further hearing unless requested by any of the parties,” James wrote.

Hall Booth Smith and Mehdizadegan say they are owed in excess of \$300,000 for handling the board’s lawsuit against Sanders, which [resulted in a ruling](#) by James in September that kept the power to hire and fire the top officials in the Department of Corrections in the hands of the board.

James also repeated her prior ruling that a proposed settlement between the board and Attorney General Tim Griffin’s office to reinstate two laws that would have given those powers to the governor is null and void. James also restated that the two laws at

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Protests in France



Police officers spray students with pepper spray near Sciences Po university as they protest against under-resourced schools in Paris on Wednesday. (AP/Thibault Camus)

Board OKs Sherwood detachment vote

ANNE LI
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

The Arkansas State Board of Education has advanced an effort by Sherwood-area school advocates to detach the community’s schools from the Pulaski County Special School District.

The board voted unanimously Wednesday to order a March 2, 2027, election on the measure. Citizens in the proposed Sherwood school district will be eligible to vote on the detachment plan.

The [proposed district](#) would include Cato, Clinton, Harris, Oakbrooke, Sherwood and Sylvan Hills elementary schools; Sylvan Hills Middle School; Sylvan Hills Junior High; and Sylvan Hills High School.

The Sherwood Public Education Foundation, the group of Sherwood school advocates behind the pro-

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Audit: Action on child abuse claims lacking

99% cases accepted by state failed to meet US standards

BRETT BARROUQUERE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

A federal audit says Arkansas failed to properly handle claims of child rape and of children being watched on camera while undressing, and didn’t conduct proper follow-up on those reports.

About 99% of all reports — 20,964 of 21,268 — accepted by the state Department of Children and Family Services and the Crimes Against Children Division of Arkansas State Police failed to meet federal standards for screening, assessment and investigation, according to the audit by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Inspector General.

The audit, dated Sept. 29, takes the state’s department to task for failing to notify law enforcement of determinations of severe maltreatment of children, including sexual abuse or life-threatening harm. The agencies also failed to show that interviews with the custodial and noncustodial parents were completed where abuse was reported, the audit says.

Auditors recommended that the state immediately review the inappropriately screened-out sample reports, update its guidance, strengthen its procedures, implement system enhancements and reinforce existing requirements.

In a six-page response, Tiffany Wright, director of

Arkansas’ Division of Children and Family Services, said the agency has adopted the recommendations and is using them to improve how the system works.

Gavin Lesnick, a spokesman for the Arkansas Department of Human Services, said the department has increased staffing and training, and initiated a continuous quality improvement process since 2023 and 2024, the years covered by the audit.

Lesnick also said the department is working with Arkansas State Police, which runs the Child Abuse Hotline, to make improvements there.

“We are appreciative of our correspondence with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and look forward to working closely with them as we continue efforts to serve children and families in the best way possible,” Lesnick said.

HHS conducted the audit as part of a series examining compliance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act’s requirements for the intake, screening, risk and safety assessment, and investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect.

Auditors reviewed 27,690 screened-out reports and 21,268 in-home reports accepted for investigation re-

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State farmers to see up to \$1B in funds

Programs set for record yearly payout

CRISTINA LARUE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Arkansas farmers are set to see as much as \$1 billion in Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage program payments starting this month.

The programs will pay out approximately \$13.8 billion to the nation’s eligible farmers for the 2025 crop year, the United States Department of Agriculture said in a news release. It will be the largest annual payout since the programs were

established in the 2014 farm bill, the department said.

The estimated amount for Arkansas was included in a news release from Sen. John Boozman’s office.

The Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs are farm safety net programs, and payments are made annually based on market conditions.

The One Big Beautiful Bill, signed into law in July 2025, increased reference prices for covered commodi-

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WEATHER

LITTLE ROCK

TODAY	TONIGHT
HIGH 91	LOW 62

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