



Attorney General Pam Bondi, right, testifies at a House Judiciary Committee hearing Wednesday in Washington as Jeffrey Epstein survivors make their presence known. (Photos by TOM BRENNER | AP)

Bondi clashes with Dems over Epstein

Attorney general forcefully defends President Donald Trump and the Justice Department's handling of the files as victims look on.

BY ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER AND STEPHEN GROVES
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Pam Bondi launched into a passionate defense of President Donald Trump on Wednesday as she tried to turn the page from relentless criticism of the Justice Department's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein files, repeatedly shouting at Democrats during a combative hearing in which she postured herself as the Republican president's chief protector.

Besieged by questions over Epstein and accusations of a weaponized Justice Department, Bondi aggressively pivoted in an extraordinary speech in which she mocked her Democratic questioners, praised Trump over the performance of the stock market and openly aligned herself as in sync with a president whom she painted as a victim of past impeachments and investigations.

"You sit here and you attack the president and I'm not going to have it," Bondi told lawmakers on the House Judiciary Committee. "I am not going to put up with it."

With victims of Epstein seated behind her in the hearing room, Bondi forcefully defended the department's handling of the files related to the well-connected financier that have dogged her tenure. She accused Democrats of using the Epstein files to distract from Trump's successes, when it was Republicans who initiated the furor over the files and Bondi herself fanned the flames by distributing binders to conservative influencers at the White House last year. **See BONDY, 3A**



Bondi accused Democrats of using the Epstein files to distract from President Donald Trump's successes.

"You sit here and you attack the president and I'm not going to have it. I am not going to put up with it."

Attorney General Pam Bondi

"This is pathetic. I am not asking trick questions. The American people deserve to know."

Becca Balint, a Vermont Democrat

Fla. health agency also hurt AIDS drug program

The department has forced out some key workers and done little to reform the initiative.

BY ROMY ELLENBOGEN AND LAWRENCE MOWER
Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau

TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration is blaming rising health care costs and Congress for cutting off life-saving access to affordable AIDS drugs to thousands of Floridians next month.

But the administration's own actions will cripple the program.

Florida is planning to kick patients in the AIDS Drug Assistance Program off their state-paid health insurance, eliminating the initiative's main source of revenue.

And while the state has cited October's government shutdown as the impetus for its decision, the Times/Herald found that Department of Health leadership forced out key employees months earlier and did little to reform the drug program, despite their longstanding frustrations with it.

The decisions leave as many as 12,000 people — many of whom are members of the LGBTQ+ community, a population DeSantis' policies have targeted — scrambling to find **See DRUGS, 8A**

Measles case at a high school in St. Pete raises alarm

Some students at the Catholic private school stayed home after infection was confirmed.

BY CHRISTOPHER O'DONNELL
Times Staff Writer

A sophomore student at St. Petersburg Catholic High School tested positive for measles, the second case of the highly contagious disease reported in Tampa Bay this year.

The private school advised parents of the infection in a letter sent to parents last week. Unvaccinated and immunocompromised students were advised that they could stay home and to consult with their physicians.

But the school has stayed open based on its high vaccination rate. More than 99% of its roughly 500 students are vaccinated against measles, said Allison Munden, a spokesperson for the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

No other related cases have been reported so far. "We are closely following that because we're not out of the incubation period yet," Munden said.

The case comes as outbreaks of measles have been reported in a handful of Florida communities. About 50 cases of measles have been reported at Ave Maria University, a Catholic higher education campus near Fort Myers, reports show. State data also shows four cases in Jacksonville. **See MEASLES, 2A**

We tried new state fair foods; this was our favorite

The selections are zany, multicultural and, yes, still deep-fried. The fair runs through Monday.

BY EVAN RODRIGUEZ, MICHELLE STARK, GABRIELLE CALISE AND HELEN FREUND
Times Staff Writers

What do Mexican-style street corn, Italian sausage and frozen cheesecake have in common?

They're just some of the new foods at this year's Florida State Fair, which runs through Monday.

America is celebrating its 250th this year, and the fair is honoring the birthday with a red, white and blue theme and a bevy of multi-cultural options. Mexican-style street corn makes four appearances in the new food lineup, along with a cheesy arepa and chimichurri sauce over cheese curds.

With over 30 new food and drinks to sample this year, we've culled about a dozen that you might want to put on your radar, below.

On Friday, a group of us went to the fair to taste some of them ourselves. Our favorite bite of the day turned out to be a mozzarella stick coated in a cinnamon-sugar topping.

"I want to praise the CinnMozza Corn Dog, our dark horse of the day," said culture and nostalgia reporter Gabrielle Calise. "It was everything you'd want in a fair food, kind of ridiculous but also extremely snackable. **See FOOD, 6A**



The Florida State Fair has over 30 new food and drinks to sample this year. (MICHELLE STARK | Times)