

THE Beacon-News

\$2.00

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026

AURORABEACONNEWS.COM

Students in Aurora stage walkout

Police say around 1,500 ultimately walked toward downtown area, City Hall

By Molly Morrow
Aurora Beacon-News

Around 1,500 students from area schools walked out of school toward downtown Aurora on Monday, according to the Aurora Police Department, joining a string of recent student protest actions in the Chicago area.

Three students were charged following the walkouts in Aurora, and the interactions between the police department and the

students involved have since drawn some criticism on social media and from local officials.

A number of student walkouts staged in protest of the Trump administration's continued mass deportation campaign have occurred in recent days — from Chicago to Naperville to Waukegan, according to reports. In the Aurora area, a number of high school students from East Aurora School District 131 held a walkout of their own in protest of ICE last

week too.

According to the Aurora Police Department, officers were deployed throughout the city at around 11:50 a.m. on Monday in response to the walkouts occurring at several local schools. Aurora police officials said officers worked with school administrators to encourage students to remain in class or return to campus, and, as students traveled together, provided verbal direction meant to keep the walkout participants out

of traffic and reduce the possibility of conflicts or unsafe conditions.

Around 1,500 students ultimately walked toward the downtown area and City Hall, a Facebook post from the police department said. According to the police department, portions of the crowd “began disregarding officers’ directions by entering traffic lanes, blocking vehicles and walking into oncoming traffic along Lake Street and surrounding corridors.” The police department also claims fights broke out, water bottles were thrown at police vehicles and reck-

less driving occurred near areas where students had gathered.

Amid the police response, the department said that it made contact with two individuals whose “actions were contributing to the unsafe conditions,” and both were taken into custody after police said they resisted officers’ attempts to detain and identify them. According to the police, a third student “intervened and punched an officer in the head, causing a laceration.”

Turn to Walkout, Page 3



The unveiling of the new Black Empowerment Coalition logo kicked off a recent launch party for the new organization in Aurora. More than 100 Black leaders gathered for this kick-off including, from left, former Aurora Mayor Richard Irvin, Quad County Urban League President and CEO Theodia Gillespie, Aurora African American Heritage Advisory Board Chair Curtis Wilson and Quad County African American Chamber of Commerce Chair Sherman Jenkins. **AURORA IN BLACK**

City Council planning water tower renovation

By R. Christian Smith
Aurora Beacon-News

The city of Aurora is planning a nearly \$1.9 million renovation of the water tower near the corner of Church Road and Bilter Road.

The project would mark the second rehabilitation this water tower has seen since it was first built in 1976. A contract with Era-Valdivia Contractors, Inc., for \$1.86 million was recommended for approval by a committee of the Aurora City Council on Monday, so now it heads to another committee before coming before the City Council for final approval.

“This is a major infrastructure maintenance project for the water production division,” Aurora Superintendent of Water Production Bob Leible told the City Council Infrastructure and Technology Committee on Monday.

An inspection of the tank in 2020 found that certain work would be needed at around this time, according to Leible. He said the previous renovation project on this water tank was in 2001, about 25 years after it was put into service — and so after another 25 years, the tank is “hitting that window again.”

Specifically, the 2020 inspection recommended a full recoating and ancillary repairs, according to a city staff report from last year about the engineering contract for this project. The report also notes that the tank, located at 2680 Church Road, is of a welded steel, fluted column tank design and can store up to 1.5 million gallons of water.

Design of this planned renovation project was done by Engineering Enterprises, Inc., of Sugar Grove, which estimated the cost of construction at about \$2.8 million, Leible said on Monday. So, the bid by Era-Valdivia Contractors is “significantly under budget,” he said.

Ald. Keith Larson, at-large, called it “good news.”

But Ald. Ted Mesiacos, 3rd Ward, had concerns about the cost estimate being nearly \$1 million higher than the lowest bid. Especially when the city is trying to budget, that kind of difference can skew things, he said.

Turn to Rehab, Page 3

New Black empowerment group calling for action over reaction

By Denise Crosby

No doubt over the years you’ve seen these names in this newspaper many times.

Theodia Gillespie, Curtis Wilson, Sherman Jenkins, Clayton Muhammad, Richard Irvin, Cynthia Latimer, Cynthia Miller, Peggy Hicks and Pastors Julian Spencer and John Thompson are just some of Aurora’s Black leaders who are concerned about what they see as the steady erosion of their community’s influence in Aurora.

In response, more than 100 of these African American advocates gathered at Kathryn’s Place restaurant in Aurora on Thursday for the launch of the Black Empowerment Coalition, which has been described not only as a “new organization” but as a “long overdue” one.

“We can no longer afford to just sit around” while “our culture is being pushed aside and not recognized as being relevant”

“It’s time to get our hands dirty and be that advocate to not only create unity but develop new leaders.”

— Theodia Gillespie, president and CEO of Quad County Urban League

said Theodia Gillespie, president and CEO of Quad County Urban League, noting how many positions of Black leadership have been lost in the past year alone in Aurora, including mayor, police chief and East Aurora School District 131 superintendent.

“It’s time to get our hands dirty and be that advocate to not only create unity but develop new leaders,” continued Gillespie.

Interestingly, this already-planned gathering during National Black History Month took place amid renewed national outrage about racism after President Donald Trump shared a social media post portraying former President Barack Obama and wife Michelle as primates in

a jungle — an incident that underscored for many in the room why unity felt increasingly urgent.

A press release by the Black Empowerment Coalition also noted the exclusion of Maryland’s Wes Moore, the country’s only Black governor, from a White House dinner tied to the National Governors Association, where he serves as vice president.

“It’s hard when you see micro-aggressions coming at you day to day,” noted Aurora African American Heritage Advisory Board Chair Curtis Wilson, who is the Black Empowerment Coalition co-chair with Gillespie. “We need to look at how we can protect one another, not in an insular way, not as a separate society but use

our common power when things go off the rails.”

While the timing of this Black coalition seems less coincidental than consequential, the seeds were planted last year when the city of Aurora, under newly-elected Mayor John Laesch, decided not to hold a city-sponsored Juneteenth flag-raising celebration this year, with a flag-raising eventually held the evening before the holiday.

The frustration and anger within the Black community only grew when past interview remarks made by an East Aurora School Board member that went public seemed to place the needs of Hispanic students above their Black peers. These African American leaders, also upset over other ways they felt their students and staff were being treated by the district, confronted school officials about the many grievances.

At that time this group did not

Turn to Action, Page 3

Pritzker endorses state Rep. Croke for comptroller

With just over a month until the March 17 primary the Governor puts support behind a Democratic nomination for Illinois comptroller, bolstering the Chicago lawmaker’s bid against three challengers. **News, Page 2**

Marshall-ing the Royals

Who will be able to pick up the slack? That was Hinkleley-Big Rock’s biggest question heading into this season with the graduation of the program’s all-time leading scorer and rebounder. **Sports, Page 14**

Governor sees progress on keeping Bears in Illinois



Gov. JB Pritzker answers questions from reporters on Jan. 20. Pritzker’s January calendar shows he had two scheduled conversations with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell while Goodell was in Chicago for the Bears-Packers playoff game. **ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

By Jeremy Gorner and Dan Petrella
Chicago Tribune

While Indiana officials play up their efforts to lure the Chicago Bears across the border for a new stadium, Gov. JB Pritzker said Monday that he and his staff have made “progress” to incentivize the football team to stay in Illinois.

The governor’s comments come as Pritzker’s January calendar shows he had two scheduled conversations with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell while Goodell was in Chicago for the Bears-Packers playoff game on Jan. 10.

During his time here for the game, Goodell joined Bears Pres-

ident and CEO Kevin Warren and Chair George McCaskey on a tour of the Arlington Heights site the team owns, and sites in northwest Indiana, including one near Wolf Lake in Hammond.

The first conversation between the governor and Goodell was a scheduled half-hour phone call on Jan. 9, while the second was a half-hour discussion between the two on Jan. 12, according to the governor’s calendar entries. The governor’s office on Monday declined to comment on how the conversations went or what was said.

But the scheduled talks underscore that efforts surrounding the Bears stadium have not gone

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TODAY’S WEATHER



High 40 Low 27

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