

Analog islands

"The past gives comfort": Finding refuge amid deepening digital seas. **Life+Travel**

'Missing middle'

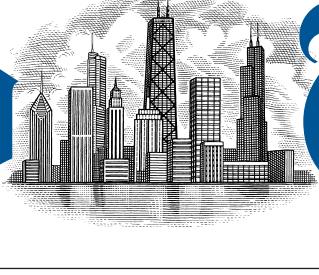
Cities are working to address the lack of affordable housing options. **Real Estate**



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SUNDAY, JANUARY 11, 2026

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



FINISH LINE IN SIGHT

After dedicating much of the past 20 years to speedskating, Oak Park's Emery Lehman enters his fourth — and last — Olympics



Above: Emery Lehman skates on his way to winning the men's 1,500-meter competition on Jan. 4 during the U.S. Olympic Team Trials Long Track at the Pettit National Ice Center in Milwaukee. **Top:** Lehman, right, celebrates with his parents, David and Marcia, after winning the race and qualifying for the Milan Olympics.

BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS

By Andrew Carter
Chicago Tribune

MILWAUKEE — As usual, Marcia Lehman could not watch.

It had been that way for a long time, this habit of not watching her son's races. Though it had become part superstition by now, it had always been more about coping. The truth is that she could not handle it. The anxiety. The nerves. The helplessness of being a spectator.

And so in the moments before Emery Lehman approached the starting line last weekend at the Pettit National Ice Center, Marcia made a familiar exit and walked outside. She began her go-to calming routine, pacing and smoking a cigarette or three. Anything to take her mind off the pressure and stakes, both of which felt much heavier than usual.

Emery Lehman, the Oak Park native and one of the fastest speedskaters in the world, was in that moment attempting to qualify for his fourth consecutive Olympics. Never mind that his place on Team USA was likely already secure, given his role on a formidable Team Pursuit squad that didn't necessarily require he qualify individually.

To make the Olympics that way, though, by the appointment of a committee, felt like a consolation

Turn to Lehman, Page 8

State lawmakers return to Capitol facing budget gap

Look to plug \$2 billion hole while pushing affordability message

By Jeremy Gorner and Olivia Olander

Chicago Tribune

SPRINGFIELD — In an election-year General Assembly session where what won't pass will likely be as telling as what might, Illinois lawmakers return to the Capitol facing a familiar but narrowing path: avoid politically radioactive fights, plug a more than \$2 billion budget hole and sell voters on a single unifying theme Democrats are leaning on from Washington to Springfield — affordability.

With control of both chambers and the governor's office, Demo-

crats are anticipated to steer clear of sweeping, high-risk policy overhauls as they campaign for every House seat, a slate of Senate races, and Gov. JB Pritzker's bid for a third term. Instead, legislative leaders are signaling major proposals — from health care and insurance regulation to energy policy and even how the state will entertain Chicago Bears stadium talks — will be filtered through a cost-of-living lens.

Hovering over it all is the fact that Illinois enters its new budget cycle on July 1 with a forecasted \$2.2 billion shortfall and shrinking federal support from the Republican Trump administration. While Democrats say they are committed to balancing the budget without dramatic disrup-

Turn to Lawmakers, Page 4



ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Bears win in a thriller

Bears cornerback Nahshon Wright takes down Packers wide receiver Christian Watson, who fumbles the ball just short of the end zone during the second quarter of Saturday's NFC wild-card matchup at Soldier Field. The Bears rallied from 18 points down to stun the Packers 31-27. **Coverage at chicagotribune.com**

INSIDE

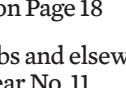
Venezuelans in area face a difficult choice

After the U.S. captured Nicolás Maduro last weekend, "people are afraid to stay and people are afraid to return." **Chicagoland, Page 3**

TODAY'S WEATHER

High 34

Low 28



Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 18

\$5.75 city, suburbs and elsewhere
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