



Column: Living through 60 years as a fan of Illini basketball

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Privatizing space brings COMPLICATIONS



In 2025, during a public dispute over government contracts and regulatory matters, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk briefly threatened to decommission the Dragon spacecraft – the vehicle NASA relies on to transport astronauts to orbit, seen here on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station on Feb. 12.

JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Relying too heavily on one company can create risks

Svetla Ben-Itzhak
Johns Hopkins University
THE CONVERSATION

Private companies are no longer peripheral participants in U.S. space activities. They provide key services, including launching and deploying satellites, transporting cargo and astronauts to the International Space Station, and even sending landers to the moon.

Commercial integration is now embedded in U.S. space policy and shapes national space strategy. As someone who studies space and international security, I have watched the extraordinary rise of commercial space with awe – and with growing concerns about the structural vulnerabilities it creates.

Access to space, particularly for crewed missions, remains heavily concentrated in one company, SpaceX. While the United States has begun developing alternatives, in operational reality that concentration gives the company disproportionate leverage. If private power and public strategy were to diverge, would Washington have a credible Plan B?

Commercial integration is now official policy

On Feb. 4, the House Science Committee approved the NASA Reauthorization Act of 2026, directing the agency to partner with American commercial providers for operations in low-Earth orbit, lunar landings and the transition beyond the International Space Station. In critical areas such as lunar landers, the bill requires NASA to work with at least two commercial providers – a deliberate effort to avoid dependence on a single company.

President Donald Trump's December 2025 executive order expressed similar preference for prioritizing commercial solutions in federal space activities and set a goal of attracting at least \$50 billion in additional private investment in space by 2028. The U.S. Space Force's 2024 Commercial Space Strategy also emphasizes speed and innovation through private partnerships.

Congress, the White House and the military are aligned: The government sets objectives, then private industry

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STREATOR COLD CASE

FBI still seeking killer

Nearly 23 years later, case remains unsolved

Zach Roth
Peoria Journal Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

The FBI's office in Chicago said last week that they are still searching for the person who killed a 7-year-old boy from Streator in 2003, 23 years to the day that he was found bludgeoned to death.



Mesarchik Dalton Mesarchik was found dead in the Vermillion River on March 27, 2003, one day after he went missing from his home in Streator. The FBI said they and Illinois State Police are continuing to seek the public's help in finding the person that killed him. Anyone with further information is asked to contact the FBI at 1-800-CALL-FBI (1-800-225-5234) or provide a tip at tips.fbi.gov.

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Birthright citizenship under review

Maureen Gropp, Bart Jansen, Aysha Bagchi and N'dea Yancey-Bragg
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – The Supreme Court gave a tough – but not dismissive – review of President Donald Trump's effort to redefine who is an American, debating April 1 as Trump added to the historical significance of the case by becoming the first sitting president to attend high court oral arguments.

It is one of the court's biggest cases this term – perhaps in decades.

The executive order Trump signed on his first day back in office to sharply limit automatic citizenship for U.S.-born babies is central to his efforts to crack down on both legal and illegal

See CITIZENSHIP, Page 3A

Peoria County Coroner conducting autopsy on remains

JJ Bullock
Peoria Journal Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Peoria County Coroner's Office has completed a "thorough external examination" of the skeletal remains

found southwest of Peoria on Tuesday.

Peoria County Coroner Jamie Harwood said Wednesday morning said an autopsy will be conducted that will include full body X-rays and dental X-rays.

"Our goal is two part: one is to try to ascertain a cause of death, and the sec-

ond is identification," Harwood said on Facebook. "Surprisingly, the decedent does have a few discernible features that would be unique to the individual, and we may be able to make an identification from that information."

Harwood told the Journal Star on

Wednesday morning that at this point it cannot be discerned if the remains are male or female or adult or juvenile but that will be determined during the autopsy.

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