



At Winter Olympics, athletes share stage with nature



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Kindergarten readiness varies by income, data shows

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PET CARE

## TIME TO MOVE ON FOR MOBILE VET



CLAY JACKSON, THE PANTAGRAPH

Dr. Romanie Walter gives Patty Cate a treat on Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2026, at SmartVet in Normal. Patty Cate is owned by Natalie McKee.

### Romanie Walter of SmartVet retiring, values relationships

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NORMAL — After nearly 15 years of caring for pets in living rooms, backyards and during some of life's most tender moments, Dr. Romanie Walter is retiring from veterinary care in Central Illinois at the end of the month.

"I still have an amazing relationship and connections with a lot of people, both who are clients and also staff members," said Walter, founder of SmartVet Mobile Veterinary Service at 1537 Fort Jesse Road in Normal.

The community is invited to celebrate Walter's career and legacy during a retirement open house from 5 to 7 p.m. on Feb. 27 at SmartVet. The clinic will close early that day to allow for staff, clients and friends to gather in her honor.

Walter launched SmartVet in 2011, operating out of her garage and her little SmartCar and equipped to bring veterinary services directly to clients' homes. The idea came about after a study showed a decrease of veterinary visits from pet owners, and one of the reasons was how stressful the visits could be for the pets.

Walter said the idea is not dissimilar to how rural veterinarians used to operate, taking calls for larger farm animals and checking in on smaller companion pets all in the same visit. But eventually, office visits became more common for smaller companion pets.

However, many pets still have issues traveling in vehicles and some have not been

trained for carriers, which made the idea of home visits for small pets less of a novelty and more of a needed option. Walter said at the time, a mobile clinic option was not being widely offered in this area.

"I kind of meshed those back together a little bit ... and brought that back," Walter said.

This quickly became a trusted model of care for pet owners in Central Illinois to mitigate the stress of clinic visits for both the pets and the owners.

Walter said a few months after starting SmartVet out of her car, she rented a space before purchasing a small facility on Beech Street. Then in 2017, she moved SmartVet into its current facility on Fort Jesse Road to offer both in-office and mobile services.

"Some of our senior people just can't bring their large dogs, or we have a lot of clients with mobility (issues), so they really appreciate the fact that we just come to them," Walter said. "And then there's always the cat population. Cats are not fans of going into the carriers."

Walter said the mobile visits are used primarily cases that do not require large equipment like X-rays or procedures like surgery. The more extensive veterinary services are provided in the clinic.

Another aspect SmartVet's mobile services that clients have appreciated is pet euthanasia, where clients can have a final goodbye with their pet at home or in a park instead of in a clinic setting, Walter said.

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ICE CRACKDOWN

## Congress debates masked officers

Partisan divide stalls DHS funding as deadline nears

LISA MASCARO  
AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Beyond the car windows being smashed, people tackled on city streets — or even a little child with a floppy bunny ears snowcap detained — the images of masked federal officers has become a flashpoint in the Trump administration's immigration enforcement operations.

Not in recent U.S. memory has an American policing operation so consistently masked its thousands of officers from the public, a development that the Department of Homeland Security believes is important to safeguard employees from online harassment. But experts warn masking serves another purpose, inciting fear in communities, and risks shattering norms, accountability and trust between the police and its citizenry.

Whether to ban the masks — or allow the masking to continue — has emerged as a central question in the debate in Congress over funding Homeland Security ahead of Friday's midnight deadline, when it faces a partial agency shutdown.

"Humans read each others' faces — that's how we communicate," said Justin Smith, a former Colorado sheriff who is executive director and CEO of the National Sheriffs' Association.

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EPSTEIN FILES

## Bondi tells victims to speak up

ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, ERIC TUCKER AND  
STEPHEN GROVES  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Pam Bondi told victims of Jeffrey Epstein on Wednesday to come forward with information about their abuse as she sought to tamp down political turmoil over the Justice Department's handling of files related to the wealthy financier's sex trafficking investigation.

In her first appearance before Congress since the release of millions of additional Epstein files, Bondi addressed victims who were present in the hearing room, saying that she was "deeply sorry" for what they suffered. Bondi sought to fend off criticism from Democrats who accused her of ignoring victims.

"Any accusations of criminal wrongdoing will be taken seriously and investigated," the attorney general said.

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