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The Herald Bulletin

TheHeraldBulletin.com

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026

\$2.50

Attorney general, Democrats clash amid Epstein files furor

ERIC TUCKER AND STEPHEN GROVES ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Pam Bondi launched into a passionate defense of President Donald Trump 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.

The hearing quickly devolved into a partisan brawl, with Bondi repeatedly lobbing insults at Democrats while insisting she was not "going to get in the gutter" with them. In one particularly fiery exchange, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland accused Bondi of refusing to answer his questions, prompting the attorney general to call the top Democrat on

See FILES on A2



Tom Brenner | Associated Press

Attorney General Pam Bondi arrives to testify before a House Judiciary Committee oversight hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on Wednesday.

SEEKING STABILITY

New tenants at Impact Center expected to start programming in 2026



Caleb Amick | The Herald Bulletin

Brian Blackmon, right, a strategic consultant for the United Alliance Corp., chats with Celeste Wilson, a THRIVE coach, at the Anderson Impact Center. Center officials said they're hopeful a new strategic plan will help attract new tenants to the building.

KEN DE LA BASTIDE THE HERALD BULLETIN

ANDERSON — The leadership team at the Anderson Impact Center is working to ensure the facility is financially sustainable in the future.

Plans are moving forward for the planned opening of the URBAN ACT Academy, a charter school through Ball State University, and a potential future construction trades program.

Director Sherry Peak said the URBAN ACT Academy is in the process of having its charter

approved. Peak said the charter school is already providing after-school tutoring for students.

"Right now, they have a lease at the Impact Center, with the plan to start classes in the fall," Peak said.

She said there will be regular school hours and a normal school year.

Peak said the Impact Center has been working with a company out of Anderson to open a construction trades program.

"The plan is to get the students certified after the training program," she said.

The program will include plumb-

ing, carpentry and electrical training for high school students aged 14 and 15.

"We find ourselves needing repairs and have problems getting contractors," Peak said. "Students will be able to use that hands-on training here in the building and help with maintenance and repairs."

There are also plans to open a STEM lab at the Impact Center.

"We're hoping to start the program this spring, along with the construction trade programs," Peak

See IMPACT on A2

MADISON COUNTY COUNCIL

Deputies' contract rejected

Funding for 21% pay hike approved for 2026

KEN DE LA BASTIDE THE HERALD BULLETIN

ANDERSON — The Madison County Council approved funding to provide merit deputies of the Sheriff's Department with a pay raise, but rejected a two-year contract Tuesday night.

Last year, the council approved a 21% pay increase for the deputies for 2026, but no increase in 2027.

The original contract approved by the Madison County commissioners called for a 21% pay hike in 2026 and 6% increases in 2027 and 2028.

The 21% pay increase was expected to cost the county \$1.7 million over two years.

As adopted by the council last year, the proposal included \$300,000 coming from the Sheriff's Department commissary fund and \$600,000 from interest earned by the county to help cover the costs.

The council voted Tuesday to appropriate \$376,148 for the 2026 pay increase.

Council members said funding for the 2027 pay rate has been approved by Sheriff John Beeman and the council, but the additional funding has not been provided by the commissioners.

Beeman said there have been no discussions on a new contract.

Madison County Council President Jodi Norrick said the council can't sign a two-year contract with the merit deputies because of uncertain finances.

"Last year was difficult," she said. "We were broadsided by many different things. I can't sign the contract."

"How can we fund that next year,

See COUNCIL on A2



Jodi Norrick

More on the Impact Center

History: Opened in 2012 in former Robinson Elementary School building

Founders: Rev. Earlie Dixon, Rev. James Streeter and Primus Mootry

New tenants: URBAN ACT Academy charter school; construction trades; STEM Lab

Postal delivery information:

WEATHER



Today: Partly sunny. Light north northwest wind. **Tonight:** Mostly clear. Calm wind. **Friday:** Sunny, with a high near 43.

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Full forecast on Page A8.

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