Post-Tribune

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Indiana DWD rules in favor of BP



A child sits among the crowd during a rally in support of locked-out members of the United Steelworkers Local 7-1 on Nov. 14. **KYLE TELECHAN/ FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE**

Locked out workers are notified that they aren't entitled to unemployment benefits

By Michelle L. Quinn
FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE

BP's locked out workers who haven't yet filed for unemployment benefits won't be allowed to, and those who already have may be on the hook to pay back the money they've received.

The Indiana Department of Workforce Development on Friday issued a ruling in BP's favor after the Whiting plant filed an appeal with it to deny unemployment claims that have been already filed, according to a release from United Steel Workers Local 7-1. The hearing for that appeal was held October 16.

The State of Indiana initially approved nearly 700 unemployment filings from the locked-out workers before the company appealed it, according to the release. Currently, Indiana provides a maximum of $390 per week for six months before tax.

If the state requires them to pay back monies they received, they'll owe $8,970, according to the DWD's website.

USW Local 7-1 officials notified the workers via email of the ruling after workers "discovered changes to their claims on the state's unemployment website," the email said. Neither the Local nor its attorneys had received official word, it said.

"Our members deserve better than to learn about a decision of this magnitude in this manner," the email said. "We understand the frustration and concern this news will cause. We share those feelings and remain committed to fighting for our members through every appropriate avenue available

See **WORKERS** on Page A2

PORTAGE

North side could be hospitality hot spot

Developers propose turning 380 acres into entertainment mecca

By Doug Ross
FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE

While Portage's dream of attracting World's Finest Chocolate melted, one aspect of the company's abandoned bid to locate in the city sparked Portage officials' imagination.

What if the 380 acres owned by the Redevelopment Commission turned into an entertainment and hospitality mecca?

The Chicago-based chocolatier had discussed a demonstration project with robotics and other bells and whistles for a chocolate-themed attraction. That, along with other World's Finest Chocolate's dreams, vanished when the option to buy the site expired a few months ago.

But others are interested in that same property.

If that site sounds familiar, it's the same one where the failed Sport Resort development would have been built years ago.

It's where the city hastily put together its Halas Harbor pitch for a Chicago Bears stadium that might, or might not, be moving to Hammond.

Real estate consultant Bill Rathjen gave Redevelopment Commission members a proposal from Omaha-based Holland Bashan Architects to turn that site into an entertainment mecca even without the Bears stadium.

Holland Bashan contacted the city about studying that site. Rathjen gave the company the go-ahead a week ago to put together a realistic plan after putting them off until the city was ready.

Abonmarche has been compiling parcels at the site to make it more development-friendly.

The south side of Burns Waterway is already platted, and wetlands to protect have been identified. A bridge to be built next

See **SITE** on Page A2



Jim Schmidt, stepfather of Gabby Petito, speaks about intimate partner violence at the MAAC Foundation in Valparaiso on Thursday. **MICHAEL GARD/FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE**

'A ripple effect'



In this image taken from police body camera video provided by The Moab Police Department, Gabrielle "Gabby" Petito talks to a police officer after police pulled over the van she was traveling in with her boyfriend, Brian Laundrie, near the entrance to Arches National Park on Aug. 12, 2021. **MOAB POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Gabby Petito's stepfather, experts offer advice on escaping domestic violence

By Doug Ross
FOR THE POST-TRIBUNE

Gabby Petito's stepfather, Jim Schmidt, joined local experts Thursday in offering how to help people escape abusive intimate partners.

"Chances are, everybody in this room knows somebody who experienced it or is experiencing it," Schmidt said.

He knows of at least two domestic violence fatalities in Indiana that occurred just this week. Petito's August 2021 killing by her fiancé, Brian Laundrie, drew international attention. Looking back, Schmidt now sees red flags he missed before it was too late.

Schmidt and others spoke Thursday at the MAAC campus in Valparaiso.

Fair Haven Rape Crisis Center sponsored the event. "Violence does not happen in isolation, and neither can prevention," Executive Director Kelly Vates said.

"The warning signs of abuse are not always obvious, but the consequences of missing them can be deadly," Vates said.

See **RIPPLE** on Page A3

Gary man gets 17.5-year split term in July 2025 shooting death

By Meredith Colias-Pete
POST-TRIBUNE

Deputy Prosecutor Maureen Koonce admitted Friday in court that her office wasn't entirely sure how Lamont Wilkerson knew Edward Kindred or why he ended up killing him in a shootout.

They "struggled to find a motive," she said. "We couldn't even find a connection, let alone a motive."

They weren't sure "who shot first," she added, or if either shot back in self-defense. Afterwards, two people were caught on camera getting rid of the vehicle. At least one was "never identified," Koonce said.

Those factors led them to cut a plea deal, she said.

Wilkerson, Jr., 23, of Gary, admitted in September to voluntary manslaughter under sudden heat, a Level 2 felony, in the July 13, 2025, death of Kindred, then 23, of Gary. He faced up to 17.5 years.

Judge Gina Jones sentenced Wilkerson to 15 years in prison and 2.5 years in Lake County Community Corrections — with 1.5 years on work release and a year on home detention if he finishes prison with good behavior.

Koonce said Kindred's mother, who did not speak in court, was left "heartbroken."

Defense lawyer Mark Gruenhagen, with co-counsel Amanda Hires, said he agreed with Koonce's assessment. He argued the shooting was complicated since Kindred was also armed. Wilkerson "feels terrible," the lawyer said.

Wilkerson apologized, telling Kindred's mother her forgiveness was "a lot to ask for." He asked Jones for "mercy."

Noting behavioral issues in jail, Jones warned him to cooperate with prison staff, or he would spend the whole time behind bars.

"You asked for a carrot," she said. "That is what I'm giving."

Police responded to Waverly Drive and Taft Street in Gary. Kindred died from a gunshot wound to his legs, according to the Lake County Coroner's Office. Police found 15 bullet shells at the scene.

Video showed Kindred leaving Taft Foods when a silver car pulled up, a man in all white got out, followed Kindred briefly, then opened fire before fleeing. A second man also got out, but police weren't sure if he fired a gun.

Moments later, as Kindred was "limping away" and holding a weapon, he appeared to draw as he was attacked. Police appeared to identify the suspect as Wilkerson after he was seen on video pumping gas a day earlier — matching his picture to a police database. The car appears to be the same one later seen fleeing the murder. He was wearing the same clothes.

The car was registered to Wilkerson's relative. Investigators found it torched July 17, 2025, on the 1100 block of Wright Street.

mcolias@post-trib.com

WEATHER FORECAST

TODAY	SUN.	MON.
H:67 L: 54	H:56 L: 34	H:45 L: 27

Complete Chicagoland forecast on back page

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Vol. 117 No. 293