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LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER



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Liggins in December: No 'reason for concern' over budget

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEARS
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In a December 2024 email, Fayette County Public Schools board member Amanda Ferguson asked Superintendent Demetrus Liggins why all departments had been told their budgets were being reduced by 10% and that some funds already had been slashed.

Why weren't school board members, Liggins' bosses, told first about the budget moves, she asked the superintendent. It was the first of a series of explosive emails between the superintendent and one of his bosses reviewed by the Herald-Leader.

They reveal, as Ferguson described, a district operating out of "fear and intimidation" instead of an "open and productive culture."

Liggins responded to Ferguson's original email that same day, Dec. 2, 2024. He said there were no cuts, the budget was healthy and there was no reason for concern, according to emails Ferguson provided.

Moreover, Liggins told Ferguson it wasn't practical for him to communicate all of his decisions to board members. He also chastised her for talking to his administrative staff.



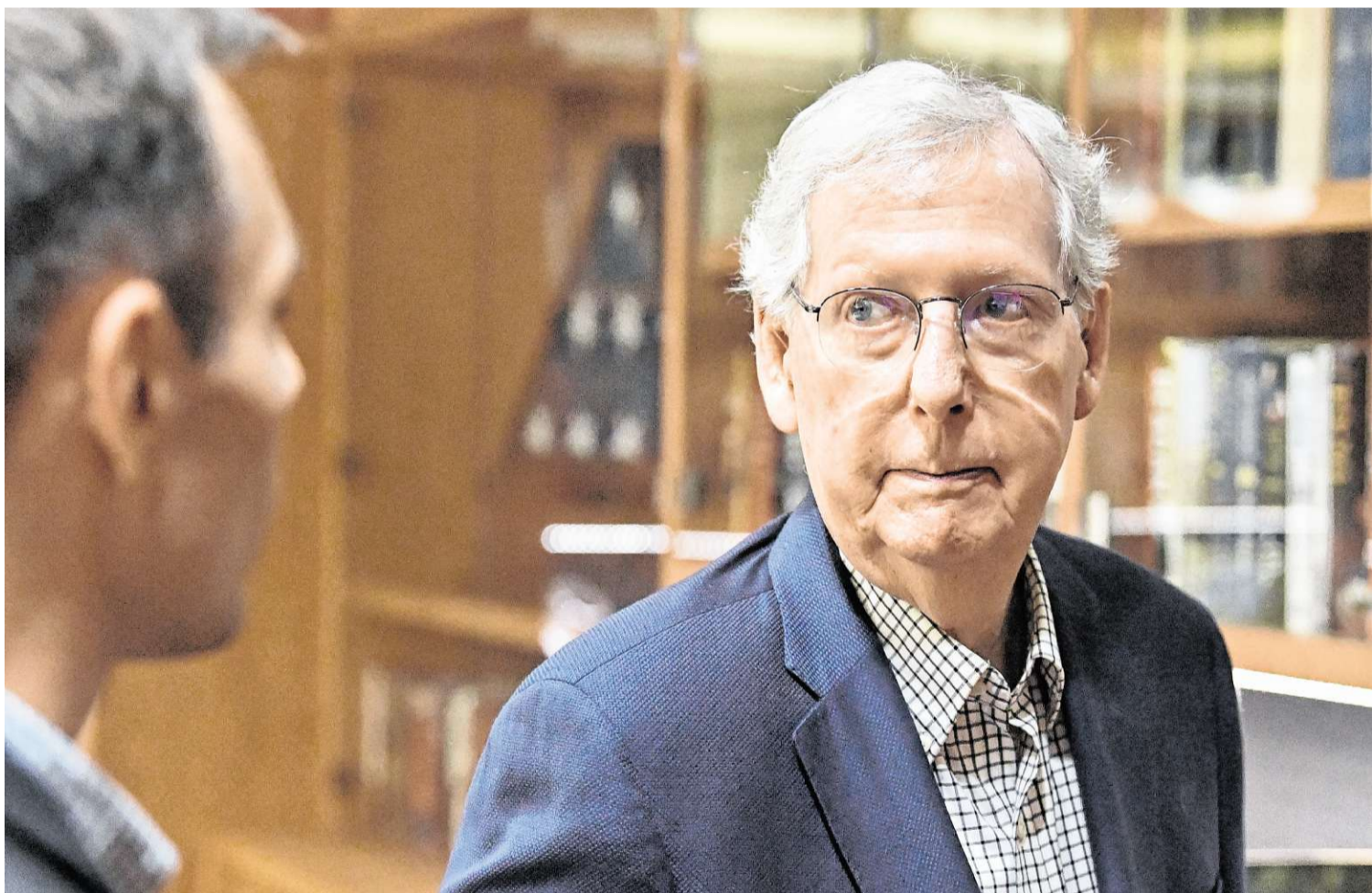
RYAN C. HERMENS rhermens@herald-leader.com

Demetrus Liggins, Fayette County Public Schools superintendent, speaks during the district's Budget Solutions Work Group first meeting at the Hill in Lexington, Ky., on Wednesday, June 25, 2025.

The emails expose the first cracks in the beleaguered district's financial state. By May, a crisis was looming related to

FCPS' estimated \$848 million budget.

SEE LIGGINS, 4A



TIMOTHY D. EASLEY

Sen. Mitch McConnell speaks with a Herald-Leader reporter during an interview at the McConnell Center located at the University of Louisville Ekstrom Library in Louisville, Ky., Friday, Aug. 29, 2025.

Q&A

McConnell on his legacy, Beshear, Israel and more

BY AUSTIN HORN
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Sen. Mitch McConnell has a message he'd like to get across. At the outset of a recent in-

terview with the Herald-Leader, McConnell made a point to ask: What greater measure of popularity is there than elections? "These suggestions about who's popular and who isn't irritate the hell out of me, be-

cause when you get into the leadership position, you get beat up," McConnell said. "So, how do you judge popularity? Seven victories in Kentucky, nine victories in the (Senate Republican) conference."

Since stunning the political world with his 1984 win over incumbent Democrat Walter "Dee" Huddleston to gain office, McConnell has indeed won all of his elections in Kentucky by comfortable margins, and his colleagues in the Senate granted him a record-breaking 18 years as party leader.

So, why does popularity matter for an already legendary 83-year-old Senator entering his final act, not seeking reelection in 2026?

It's become a central mes-

SEE MCCONNELL, 2A

Fight heats up over electric transmission line project

BY TAYLOR SIX
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A nearly two-year battle over a transmission line in Berea is escalating, as a power company has declared eminent domain

on properties in Madison and Jackson counties to try to proceed with the project.

Known as the Big Hill Line, the project was proposed in 2023 by the East Kentucky Power Cooperative to construct a high-voltage electric trans-

mission line and substation spanning 8.5 miles across the two counties.

In June, the power company sued, claiming eminent domain over eight properties — three in Jackson County, five in Madison County — to proceed with

their already delayed timeline.

Perhaps most notably, the project would run through the Berea College Forest, prompting a legal response from college officials who have opposed the project on environmental and economic grounds.

In addition to environmental concerns, Berea College said the proposed project could undermine local economic and conservation goals, including ecotourism, sustainable forestry

SEE PROJECT, 4A

Pope Leo XIV accepts LGBTQ inclusion in Catholic Church

BY MIKE HEUER
UPI.com

Pope Leo XIV confirmed his intent to include LGBTQ parishioners within the Catholic Church ahead of their planned Holy Year pilgrimage to Vatican City.

The pope met editor and author the Rev. James Martin of New York for 30 minutes and said he intends to continue Pope Francis' policy of inclusion for all, the National Catholic Reporter reported Monday.

Pope Francis refused to judge and expel a gay priest in 2013 and afterward allowed priests to bless same-sex couples.

Francis did not change the Catholic Church's policy of teaching parishioners that homosexual acts are "disordered," though.

Martin co-founded Outreach, which is a Catholic ministry that promotes LGBTQ inclusion, and will participate in the Holy Year pilgrimage to Vatican City on Friday and Saturday.

An estimated 1,200 people are expected to participate in the pilgrimage, which is not sponsored by the Vatican.

Leo and Martin met in the library of the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City, where the Pope clarified his position of inclusion for LGBTQ church members.

The pontiff's position was in doubt after he criticized what he called the "homosexual lifestyle" in 2012 while serving the church and was still known as the Rev. Robert Prevost.

After being elevated to a cardinal in 2023, Prevost told Catholic News Service he did not oppose Pope Francis' inclusion of members due to the choices that they make in their personal lives.

He confirmed the Catholic Church's policy regarding homosexuality had not changed.

Leo also said church leaders were "looking to be more welcoming and more open and to say all people are welcome in the church," the Catholic News Service reported.



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