



# The Republican.

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 2026

MASS LIVE

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## WOMAN FATALLY SHOT BY ICE

An Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer shot and killed a Minneapolis driver yesterday during the Trump administration's latest immigration crackdown. Page A7

### TODAY'S MUST-READS

#### SPRINGFIELD

#### Bail hearing set for LaMar Cook

LaMar Cook, the former aide to Gov. Maura T. Healey who was charged with drug trafficking in October after 8 kilos of cocaine were delivered to him at the state building on Dwight Street, will be back in court Thursday morning.

Cook, 45, and attorney Kedar Ismail filed this week with Hampden Superior Court to argue against the existing \$75,000 bail for the drug charges and \$10,000 bail for firearms charges.

**Full story, Page A3**

#### SPRINGFIELD

#### WNEU names new president

Western New England University has appointed Joseph C. Hartman as the university's seventh president.

Hartman is currently provost and vice chancellor for academic and student affairs at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, where he has led academic affairs since 2019.

Hartman will take over June 1. **Full story, Page B4**

#### HOLYOKE

#### Public input sought on project upgrades

Holyoke's next round of preservation projects could redefine public spaces — and residents are invited to help decide, the Holyoke Community Preservation Act Committee said in a statement this week.

The committee will host virtual presentations Jan. 14 and Jan. 21, featuring proposals for historic restorations, park upgrades and infrastructure improvements.

**Full story, Page A3**

#### WEATHER

Sun and clouds.

**High: 44°; Low: 24°**

**EXPANDED WEATHER, A10**



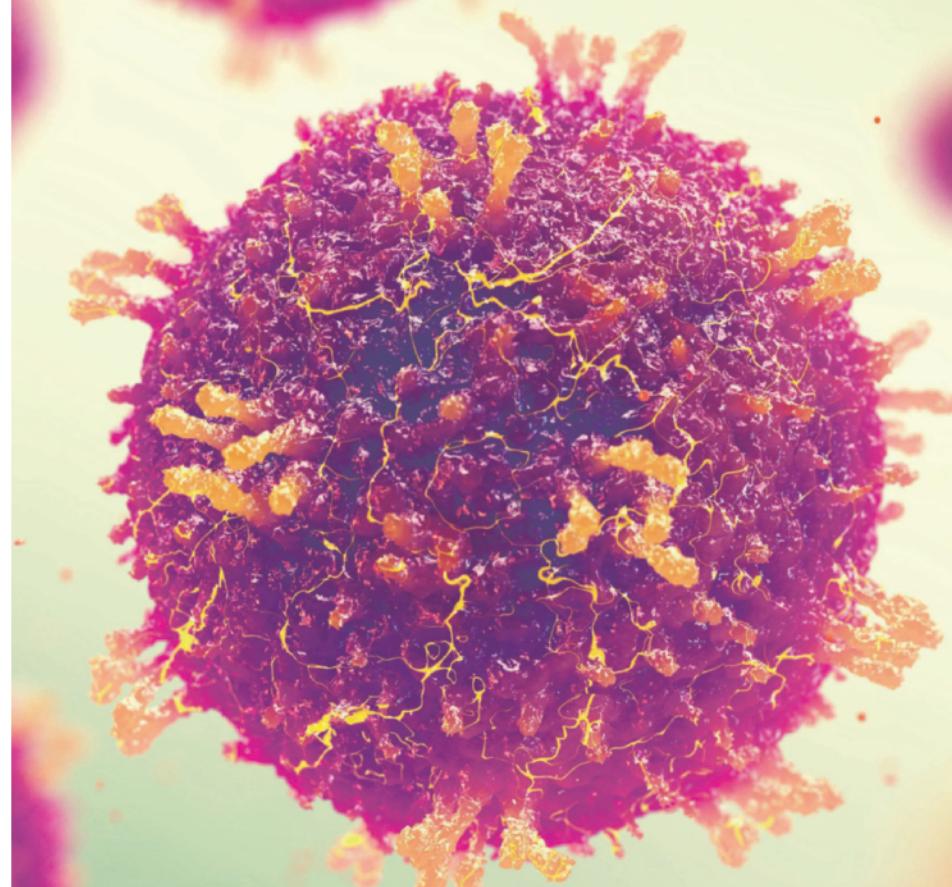
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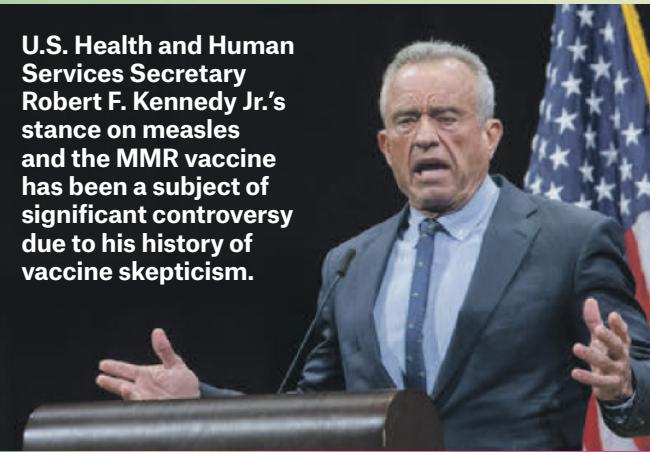
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## MEASLES RISK RISES



U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s stance on measles and the MMR vaccine has been a subject of significant controversy due to his history of vaccine skepticism.



Portions of WMass lack herd immunity, data says

BY DANIEL JACKSON

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Vaccination rates for kindergartners in three Western Massachusetts counties have dropped below what is necessary to secure herd immunity against measles, according to data released last week by the Washington Post.

About 93.8% of kindergartners in Hampden County have received the two doses of the vaccine to guard against measles, mumps and rubella. Meanwhile, 91.5% are vaccinated in Franklin County, and 91.8% are vaccinated in Berkshire County, according to data.

For measles, a vaccination rate of at least 95% protects the community overall through herd immunity, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Broad swaths of Massachusetts, Rhode Island and all of Connecticut have vaccination rates above 95%. In the Bay State, however, vaccination rates have also dipped in Suffolk County and on Nantucket, according to the Post.

Public health officials said the vaccination rates in Western Massachusetts means they will continue to work to address vaccine confidence in the region. They also noted that with a smaller population of kindergartners in some parts of the region, the decisions by a small number of families can cause swings in the vaccination rates.

SEE MEASLES, PAGE A2

**"Our biggest battle now is there's a lot of misinformation and confusion."**

Jessica Collins, executive director of Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts.



#### SOUTH HADLEY

## Notes from private PVPA meeting accidentally released

School still grappling with lawsuit threat

BY GRETA JOCHEM

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It was supposed to be a private portion of a meeting Board of Trustees of the Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School.

But an AI-powered note-taking tool was being used at the mid-November meeting, and when the group went into an executive session, a closed-door session, the tool recorded the conversation, according to the AI-created transcript that a member of the public shared with The Republican. For the record, AI note-taking applications are not perfect transcribers.

The notes were inadvertently shared with the public through the AI-powered note-taking app and show the trustees were discussing potential litigation related to a problem that students and parents have been questioning: staff conduct with students.



The Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School in South Hadley, seen here Wednesday, accidentally released some notes from a closed-door meeting that showed the school still under threat of lawsuit. (DOUGLAS HOOK / THE REPUBLICAN)

At the Nov. 21 special meeting, the board scheduled an executive session to talk about minutes from a closed-door meeting in March.

The school was reviewing a legal threat from former students regarding former employees,

SEE PVPA, PAGE A2

#### HOLYOKE

## Stop & Shop accused of age bias in lawsuit

BY NAMU SAMPATH

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An older man who was fired after working at a popular Northeastern grocery store for over two decades is now suing his former employer for age discrimination.

Gerald Sousa, 83, of Holyoke, had been working at Stop & Shop as a night crew stocker since 2003. According to the suit filed in Hampden Superior Court on Dec. 30, for months leading up to Sousa's termination, he claims to have endured repeated prodding about his age.

"All three of (our) ages added up do not equal yours," one of Sousa's co-workers told him, according to the suit. This is the only specific example of allegedly discriminatory comments made by co-workers in the complaint.

Sousa is represented by Shawn P. Allyn, a Holyoke attorney. Allyn did not respond to

SEE LAWSUIT, PAGE A2



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