

Dining diary: Eating good at immigrant-owned restaurants. **C1**



Super Bowl: Former Vikings remind us of what got away. **B1**



Obituary: Gordie Bailey, Newport nursery owner, 90. **A3**



Morning Report

Start your day with the best and most important stories handpicked by editors each weekday.

To sign up, go to:

TwinCities.com/newsletters



PIONEER PRESS

Serving our community for 176 years

| THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2026 | TWINCITIES.COM |

Feds in Minnesota

Border czar signals drawdown



Federal immigration agents use cellphones to record protesters Wednesday at the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building at Fort Snelling.
JOHN AUTEY — PIONEER PRESS

Homan pulling out 700 agents, says local cooperation improved

By Madeleine Ngo
NEW YORK TIMES

Tom Homan, the White House border czar, said Wednesday that the federal government would immediately withdraw 700 law enforcement officers from the Twin Cities, scaling down the Trump administration's immigration crackdown in the area.

The change came after the Trump administration sent thousands of federal officers and agents to Minnesota, a deployment that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials said was the agency's "largest operation to date." About 2,000 officers and agents would be left

in the state, Homan said.

Speaking in Minneapolis, Homan said that federal officials in Minnesota had made significant progress working with state and local officials, despite some differences. An "unprecedented number of counties" were cooperating with federal officials and allowing ICE to take custody of unauthorized immigrants before they are released from jails, he added, though it was unclear what policy changes might have been agreed to by the counties.

The cooperation, Homan said, had provided a "safer environment" for immigration officers to conduct arrests, allowing for fewer officers in the region.

"This is smart law enforcement, not less law enforcement," he added.

See ICE on Page A10



Tom Homan, White House "border czar," speaks at a press conference Wednesday at the Whipple Federal Building.
JOHN MOORE — GETTY IMAGES

Government lawyer yanked from immigration detail

By Michael Kunzelman and Alanna Durkin Richer
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A government lawyer who told a judge that her job "sucks" during a court hearing stemming from the Trump administration's immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota has been removed from her Justice Department post, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Julie Le had been working for the Justice Department on a detail, but the U.S. attorney in Minnesota ended her assignment after her comments in court on Tuesday, the person said. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a personnel matter. She had been working for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement before the temporary assignment.

At a hearing Tuesday in St. Paul for several immigration cases, Le told U.S. District Judge Jerry Blackwell that she wishes he could hold her in contempt of court "so that I can have a full 24 hours of sleep."

"What do you want me to do? The system sucks. This job sucks. And I am trying every breath that I have so that I can get you what you need," Le said, according to a transcript.

Le's extraordinary remarks reflect the intense strain that has been placed on the federal court system since President Donald Trump returned to the White House a year ago with a promise to carry out mass deportations. ICE officials have said the surge in Minnesota has become its largest-ever immigration operation since ramping up in early January.

See ATTORNEY on Page A10

ELECTION 2026

Demuth tops GOP field for governor

House speaker gets around 32% in Minn. caucuses; Democrats support Klobuchar

By Alex Derosier
ADEROSIER@PIONEERPRESS.COM

Minnesota House Speaker Lisa Demuth came out on top in a crowded field of Republican candidates for governor in straw polls held across the state Tuesday night at GOP precinct caucuses. Of the 12 candidates listed on the ballot, Demuth had around 32% of roughly 17,600 votes cast by Republican voters at local party gatherings across the state. Results were incomplete, but more than 96% of precincts had reported as of early Wednesday afternoon.

The straw poll offers an early look into the 2026 contest for the GOP endorsement, and could inform candidates on whether they should remain in the race. The party describes participants as representing "the most politically active Republicans in Minnesota" and calls the poll the "first major test of grassroots support."

Precinct caucuses are often described as the starting line for Minnesota elections.

See ELECTIONS on Page A6

ST. PAUL

City ordinance would bar ICE face coverings

By Mara H. Gottfried
MGOTTFRIED
PIONEERPRESS.COM

With many federal officers wearing face coverings during the current immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota, the St. Paul City Council on Wednesday introduced an ordinance requiring law enforcement to be unmasked.

The city council has said they're taking a phased approach to introducing a series of ordinances in response to the enforcement, and Wednesday's was the third brought forward in as many weeks.

The city council discussion began after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement operation on Nov. 25 on Rose Avenue near Payne Avenue. St. Paul police said they were called to assist as protesters gathered. They used chemical irritants and less-lethal munitions, which drew criticism from all city council members and community members.

Since then, "federal immigration enforcement tactics have changed rapidly," the city council said in a statement on Jan. 21. "As a result, residents and the City cannot wait for a single comprehensive update

to the City's existing separation ordinance.... The Council's phased approach allows swifter action while providing stronger legal protection for ordinance changes."

The city council unanimously approved on Wednesday an ordinance introduced on Jan. 21 to prohibit law enforcement from staging on city-owned property for federal immigration enforcement and to limit access to non-public spaces. It will take effect 30 days after publication.

FACE MASKING, IDENTIFICATION

An ordinance introduced by the council last week would require law enforcement officers to have the name of their law enforcement agency on the outermost layer of their uniform. It would also require either a name or badge number, or both, on the uniform.

Another ordinance brought forward Wednesday by the city council says a law enforcement officer "shall not wear a face covering... that conceals or obscures their facial identity in the performance of law enforcement duties." There will be a public hearing on the matter

See ST. PAUL on Page A10

TWIN CITIES

Discount food pop-up closes up shop

Fare For All to keep outstate operations; competition cited

By Molly Guthrey
MGUTHREY
PIONEERPRESS.COM

Fare For All, an affordable pop-up grocery store, is ending service to the Twin Cities metro after its February stops.

The program, which includes monthly stops in St. Paul, Eagan, White Bear Lake and six other locations in the Twin Cities, will continue serving nine sites in Greater Minnesota. The Food Group announced to shoppers on Monday.

The nonprofit's traveling grocery store is open to everyone, selling packs of fresh produce and frozen meat at up to 40% off retail prices — seen as especially helpful in recent times with rising grocery prices.

Another affiliated program, Twin Cities Mobile Market — a grocery store bus that visits neighborhoods mostly in St. Paul and Minneapolis — will continue service, the Food Group said.

See FOOD on Page A10