

# The Minnesota Star Tribune

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H: 42° L: 28° | PARTLY SUNNY, MILDER

## Top health pick is a medical skeptic

Surgeon general nominee Dr. Casey Means faces sharp questions at Senate hearing.

By **DANI BLUM**  
The New York Times

Dr. Casey Means appeared before a Senate committee Wednesday to make her case to become the next surgeon general, outlining her vision to combat what she called a national epidemic of chronic disease. The job would make her the face of the mainstream medical sys-

tem — which Means, a wellness influencer and entrepreneur, has vehemently criticized.

Parts of Means' résumé make her seem like a natural fit. She graduated from the Stanford School of Medicine and has worked as a biomedical researcher. She championed healthy eating and exercise as essential for good health, long before "Make America Healthy

Again" became a political movement. And with hundreds of thousands of social media followers and a popular newsletter, Means is well-versed in communicating with the public about health.

But Means has also repeatedly railed against the conventional medical system. She dropped out of her medical residency and does not have an active license to treat patients. She is skeptical of some vaccines and has repeated the debunked claim that they

could be linked to autism. She has spoken out against bans on raw milk, which can contain dangerous bacteria. She has frequently told Americans not to trust the medical system, titling one chapter of her best-selling book: "Trust Yourself, Not Your Doctor."

"I believe that every American shares a core yearning to thrive and help their families thrive," she said during the hearing. "But we are asking people to make healthy choices in environments that

are squarely structured against them." Means did not respond to requests for comment.

The Senate is expected to confirm Means for the role. While the surgeon general cannot shape or enforce health policy directly, the position carries sizable influence over how Americans think and talk about health. Past surgeons general have pushed to slash smoking rates in America, beat back the stigma around AIDS and change the way the public talks about



ALEX KENT • The New York Times  
Wellness influencer Dr. Casey Means answers questions at her nomination hearing Wednesday.

## EDUCATING NATION ON SUBJECT OF ICE



Photos by LEILA NAVIDI and CARLOS GONZALEZ • The Minnesota Star Tribune

Flags representing students' countries of origin are displayed at Valley View Elementary School in Columbia Heights on Feb. 19.

Some of the sharpest push-back against the tactics in the recent immigration enforcement surge in Minnesota have come from two surprising voices: the leaders of small neighboring suburban school districts that rarely make headlines.

In the north metro, Fridley and Columbia Heights superintendents Brenda Lewis and Zena Stenvik lead districts that each span less than 6 square miles and serve fewer than 3,500 students. But their diverse schools have experienced an outsized impact during Operation Metro Surge, with the detention of several students and dozens of parents.

As a result, the two school leaders were among the first — and most outspoken — educators in Minnesota to oppose the immigration crackdown, which propelled the two women to

Fridley, Columbia Heights district leaders' response to surge heightens awareness of impact on school systems.

By **MARA KLECKER** • The Minnesota Star Tribune



Fridley Superintendent Brenda Lewis, left, and Columbia Heights Superintendent Zena Stenvik were among the first educators in Minnesota to oppose the immigration crackdown.



national attention. They've been flooded with media requests from across the world in the past two months, with Stenvik giving many interviews about 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos, whose detention drew widespread condemnation.

On Tuesday, Lewis flew to Washington, D.C., to attend a counter-rally to President Donald Trump's State of the Union speech as a guest of U.S. Sen. Tina Smith.

While other school leaders were more reluctant to speak publicly, the stories the two women shared helped transform scattered reports of detentions into a broader public understanding of how the federal surge affected children and classrooms, and inspired parents to action.

Now the superintendents

SEE SCHOOLS ON A9 »

## Lawmakers take aim at little-used transit

A bill likely would focus on suburban agencies.

By **TIM HARLOW** and **NATHANIEL MINOR**  
The Minnesota Star Tribune

State lawmakers will consider legislation this session aimed at eliminating little-used public transit lines and possibly consolidating transit agencies in the Twin Cities.

A bill has not yet been introduced. But the House Transportation Committee last week reviewed high-cost transit routes across the Twin Cities — many of which are operated by suburban providers and require large subsidies to operate — and several legislators said they wanted to rein in those costs.

"That definitely cannot continue," said committee co-Chair Rep. Jon Koznick, R-Lakeville. "It's an abuse of taxpayers."

Koznick said draft legislation is in the works that would try to

eliminate high-subsidy lines and look for "overhead and administration" savings as well. "We may entertain generally one provider. ... How that actually looks specifically we've still yet to determine," he told the Minnesota Star Tribune.

Such a bill would likely target four suburban transit agencies based in the western and southern suburbs — the Plymouth Metrolink, Maple Grove Transit, SouthWest Transit and the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority. Those date to the 1980s and have for decades operated independently of the Metropolitan Council, which operates the vast majority of the metro area's public transit service.

Some of those suburban transit agencies say their services are popular with riders and that they've already eliminated many high-cost, low ridership routes. They are also pushing legislators to send them more

SEE TRANSIT ON A3 »



TIERNEY L. CROSS • The New York Times

"You've killed Americans!" Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., shouts at President Donald Trump during his State of the Union address. Her guest, Aliya Rahman of Minneapolis, was arrested and removed. **A3**

### ANALYSIS

## Trump puts on a show starring 'dirty rotten lie'

At State of the Union, he acted as an emcee and baited Democrats.

By **KATIE ROGERS**  
The New York Times

WASHINGTON — It was spectacle as survival strategy.

In his State of the Union address, President Donald Trump didn't bother to introduce a raft of new policies — unusual in a midterm election year with control of Congress on the line. He did not seem concerned with making the case that he gets it when it comes to the issue Americans are most worried about. "Affordability," he said, was part of a "dirty, rotten lie" perpetuated by the Democrats.

Instead, with the slashing

style of a natural campaigner and the instincts of a onetime reality television producer, he spent the better part of two hours baiting the ranks of incensed Democrats in the chamber and endeavoring to define them to the electorate as "sick," unpatriotic and utterly out of step with the values of most Americans.

"These people are crazy, I'm telling ya, they're crazy," Trump said at one point. "Boy oh boy, we're lucky we have a country with people like this — Democrats are destroying our country, but we've stopped it just in the nick of time."

Going into the speech, Trump knew that he needed to use it to maneuver out of a politically treacherous moment for himself and his party. His approval

SEE SPEECH ON A5 »

## Detainee flight tally signals smaller federal presence

By **LOUIS KRAUSS**  
The Minnesota Star Tribune

Since mid-February, the planes Nick Benson watches on the frosty tarmac of the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport are mostly empty, with federal agents on average loading less than a dozen immigration detainees on board. It's a far cry from last month, where he looked on, stunned, as they boarded as many as 127 detainees — the largest group he saw

flown out on a single plane since Operation Metro Surge began.

Benson, a flight watcher who volunteers for the group MN50501, said it represents a significant decrease in the number of detainees flown from Minnesota to El Paso, Texas, or other detention center locations across the country.

When border czar Tom Homan announced Feb. 12 that the operation was ending, it was met with skepticism

from activists and immigrant rights groups. Yet the observations from the airport add to a steady stream of indicators — from official statements, court filings and activist encounters — showing that federal immigration officials have dramatically downsized their footprint in Minnesota.

"Even as I consider myself deeply skeptical of anything the federal government is telling us right now, the trend and the data right now is what I would

expect to see if things were drawing down," said Benson, who watches from the upper floors of an airport parking garage and counts every immigrant detainee put on a plane.

There are no longer the huge numbers of detainees flown out in January, when Border Patrol Cmdr. Greg Bovino was leading the operation in Minnesota.

Back then, observers often saw 70 or more detainees put on each plane, and there were

SEE FLIGHTS ON A9 »

### TOP NEWS

Iran pushes back on Trump's pressure tactics ahead of talks over nuclear program. **A4**

### NATION & WORLD

Rubio tells Caribbean leaders that Venezuela is better off without Nicolás Maduro. **A4**

### STATE & REGION

Prosecutors say Mpls. gang members were behind open-air drug market on Lake Street. **A8**

### SPORTS

Could the Gophers find a way to duplicate Indiana's football success? It's complicated. **C1**

### BUSINESS

Tennant's software system rollout causes major disruptions, leads to a quarterly loss. **D1**

### TASTE

Asal Bee Cafe is open in Burnsville, focusing on all the ways honey makes life sweeter. **T1**

### HAVE YOU HEARD?

And the winner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's 2026 Name a Snowplow contest is ... (Find out on page **A8**.)

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