



'Buffalo Miracle' is testament to resilience

Allen-produced film recounts fast-food manager's kindness during blizzard | **PAGE E1**

THE BUFFALO NEWS
SUNDAY



Oliver on a pressure campaign

After working through multiple injuries, Bills defensive lineman is making his presence felt. | *Page D1*

Biden commutation recipient now faces prison for shootout

Fentanyl trafficker shot at police who came to arrest him

DAN HERBECK
News Staff Reporter

On Dec. 12, 2024, then-President Joe Biden commuted the eight-year sentence of Keith Holmes, an admitted trafficker of fentanyl and owner of illegal firearms who had been prosecuted on federal charges in Maine.

Eighteen months later, Holmes was under arrest in a Buffalo hospital, facing charges that he repeatedly fired an illegal "ghost gun" at members of a U.S. Marshals Service fugitive task force who came to arrest him at an apartment on Glenwood Avenue.

No one from law enforcement was hurt. Police said several shots fired by Holmes struck a bulletproof shield that the marshals were carrying when they arrived at the apartment.

Holmes was critically injured by police gunfire, suffering more than a dozen wounds, according to a source closely familiar with the case.

Holmes now faces felony charges of assault on a federal officer, discharge of a firearm in furtherance of a crime of violence and being a felon in possession of ammunition. If convicted, he would face a mandatory minimum penalty of 25 years in prison and a maximum of life.

Holmes is involved in discussions with federal prosecutors that could lead to a plea agreement, according to a letter that his court-appointed attorney, Vincent T. Parlato, sent to federal court last month.

Parlato declined to comment when contacted Friday by a News reporter, except to say that his client is entitled to the presumption of innocence on all charges filed against him.

The defense attorney declined to say whether he agrees with the account of the shootout given by law enforcement.

Federal marshals and prosecutors also declined to discuss Holmes' crimes, his injuries, the shootout or the commutation of his sentence.

But authorities had plenty to say about the case after Holmes' arrest on June 8.

"This case highlights the dangers that are faced every day by law enforcement officers," said U.S. Attorney Michael DiGiacomo. "Any defendant who puts the life of a law enforcement officer at risk will face the consequences and be held fully accountable."

DiGiacomo said four marshals and nine members of the Marshals' Fugitive Task Force went to arrest Holmes that afternoon in an apartment in the 800 block of Glenwood.

Please see **SHOOTOUT,** Page A8

State gets 6-month reprieve before millions lose Medicaid

ROBERT GAVIN
Albany Bureau Chief

ALBANY – More than 200,000 Medicaid consumers in Western New York and the Finger Lakes regions who faced the loss of their health insurance on Jan. 1 have an additional six months to keep their coverage.

The estimated 114,000 consumers in five Western New York counties and 90,000 consumers in nine Finger Lakes counties were among approximately 2 million New Yorkers facing the loss of their Medicaid coverage because of new federal work requirements enacted in President Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill."

But Gov. Kathy Hochul has announced that New York opted into a "hold harmless period" that allows participating states until June 30, 2027, to meet the requirements passed under the 2025 law signed by Trump.

The law will require certain Medicaid applicants and beneficiaries between the ages of 19 to 64 to either: earn income of at least $580 a month or; complete 80 hours per month of a job, community service, a job training or work program or volunteering or enroll in an education program at least half-time; or have some income and complete some of the aforementioned activities, according to the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Please see **MEDICAID,** Page A8



JOSHUA BESSEX, BUFFALO NEWS

An aerial view of 400 acres of forest, recently acquired by the WNY Land Conservancy, around Camp Timbercrest near Keyser Lake in Randolph. The conservancy has protected almost 8,600 acres across dozens of properties.

Land Conservancy has big goal for anniversary

Organization wants to double the acreage it protects over 5 years

MACKENZIE SHUMAN
News Staff Reporter

Thirty-five years ago, John Whitney and four others gathered around a table in a basement office to discuss how to protect some of Western New York's open spaces from development.

Whitney, Ken Koehler, John Daleo, Henry Kreher and Emily "Lee" Oprea shared a vision: preserving the region's farmland, forests, grasslands, lakes and wetlands for future generations.

From those meetings came the Western New York Land Conservancy, a volunteer effort that has grown into an organization with 11 employees and nearly 8,600 acres protected across 96 properties.

Of that land, 4,342 acres are natural areas and 4,231 acres are farmland.

Now, the conservancy wants to more than double the acreage it protects over the next five years, with an interim goal of reaching 10,000 acres by the end of 2028.

"We are seeing both farmland and natural land disappear rapidly," said Marisa Riggi, the conservancy's executive director. "The pressure is on to make sure that we're finding those special places that are really important for connectivity, for wildlife, for plants and animals to be able to find homes, and that we're conserving them."

Riggi acknowledged that not every piece of undeveloped land can or should be preserved.

"We want people to live here; we want it to be a thriving place and community," she said. "But there are important places where we shouldn't be developing, where we shouldn't be building, and those places need to remain available for wildlife."

The stakes extend beyond Western New York. Biodiversity in the United States has declined by 33% since 1970, largely because of habitat destruction, according to the Land Trust Alliance.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms in an area. As development and climate change threaten habitats, some species struggle to survive. The loss of one species can have cascading effects on others that depend on it.

Please see **CONSERVANCY,** Page A6

Influx of Black Dems are ready to reshape legislative priorities

BIANCA FLOWERS, DISHA RAYCHAUDHURI AND TRAVIS HARTMAN
Reuters

WASHINGTON — The largest class of new Black Democratic lawmakers in more than 30 years will join Congress in January after November's midterm elections despite Republican-led redistricting efforts, according to a Reuters analysis.

The electoral outcome sets up a test of whether increased Black representation can translate into legislative power.

Congress will include 13 new Black Democratic members, the largest cohort since 1993, House historian data showed. Four are 34 years old or younger, and more than half of Black House members were first seated in 2021 or later.

The influx of Black lawmakers could reshape Congress' legislative priorities on voting rights, healthcare affordability and economic inequality, while giving a new generation of leaders a greater voice in shaping Democratic policy, political observers say. But the lawmakers' influence will depend on whether they can translate their growing numbers into powerful committee assignments and legislative victories at a time when longstanding civil rights protections face mounting challenges.

Please see **POLICY,** Page A5

■ **INSIDE:** *Democrats to take a a deeper look at Trump's Obamacare purge.* **Page A4**

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