



Tristan Pennington-led Northwest extends winning streak

SPORTS, 1B

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West Branch graduate oversees U.S. public housing programs for HUD

Benjamin Duer

Canton Repository

USA TODAY NETWORK

Ben Hobbs has been involved in public affairs for a long time, serving roles in the White House, U.S. Senate, nonprofits and the private sector.

The 38-year-old son of Fred and Re-

bekah Hobbs of Knox Township calls his new role with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development "an absolute dream job."

He was sworn in Jan. 14 as assistant secretary of Public and Indian Housing, overseeing HUD's programs for public housing and housing assistance for Native American tribes.

He wore a scarlet carnation during the ceremony, a nod to his Alliance area roots.

"The mission of public community housing is to provide decent and safe housing assistance for American families in need – and it's a mission I hold

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Freight rail industry dirtier than coal power plants



Railroad locomotive pollution causes an estimated \$48 billion in health care costs and 3,100 premature deaths annually in the United States, according to the EPA's Co-Benefits Risk Assessment tool. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Aging locomotives, pushback on regulation contribute to pollution problem

Tim McLaughlin

REUTERS

BNSF Railway, one of the crown jewels of Warren Buffett's sprawling Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate, calls itself an environmental leader in the U.S. rail industry with the cleanest locomotive fleet in North America.

"When you see our orange locomotives' and freight cars' steel wheels moving on steel rails, think green," BNSF says in its latest sustainability overview.

But the company is the largest player in an industry that has a pollution problem: U.S. freight railroads are a major source of pollution, huffing out more nitrogen oxide, the primary component of smog, than all the nation's coal-fired power plants combined, according to a Reuters calculation using government data.

U.S. railroads together produced about 485,000 tons of nitrogen oxide in 2024, compared to 452,000 tons emitted by U.S. coal-fired power plants, according to a Reuters calculation of reported annual fuel consumption multiplied by the EPA's 2023 weighted-average emission rates.

BNSF, the nation's largest freight rail-

"Americans don't realize how much harmful pollution comes from old diesel locomotives. EPA should require the railroad companies to modernize their fleets."

Bill Magavern

Policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air

road, accounts for about a third of that total, producing 161,500 tons of smog-causing nitrogen oxide in 2024, according to the data.

"We don't dispute your number. BNSF is the biggest Class I railroad by volume," BNSF said in an email.

BNSF's position as largest in the rail industry, as well as its profitability, will be challenged if regulators approve the planned \$85 billion merger of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern, which would create the first U.S. coast-to-coast freight rail operator, Morningstar railroad analyst Gregory Warren said.

Reuters shared its calculations with four industry experts and all agreed it was a fair methodology. About 80% of the industry's NOx tons are produced by Class I railroads, the industry term for the six major railroads with more than \$1 billion in annual revenue.

Details on the rail industry's recent NOx emissions performance, BNSF's share of those emissions, and the factors driving the ongoing high levels of pollution have not previously been reported.

Railroad locomotive pollution causes an estimated \$48 billion in health care costs and 3,100 premature deaths annually in the United States, according to the EPA's Co-Benefits Risk Assessment tool.

"Americans don't realize how much harmful pollution comes from old diesel locomotives," said Bill Magavern, policy director for the Coalition for Clean Air, a California group that advocates for public health. "EPA should require the railroad companies to modernize their fleets," he said.

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What's new for 2026 in Perry Township?

Steven M. Grazier

Massillon Independent

USA TODAY NETWORK

Editor's note: The Canton Repository and Massillon Independent are asking leaders in every Stark County township, village and city to share some highlights of what they have planned in 2026 for their communities. We will present these community highlights to readers throughout the next few months.

PERRY TWP. – Residents of Perry Township are in line for a series of upgrades to public buildings, a continuation of Fasnacht Farm Park improvements and a new website design this year.

Perry has temporarily revamped its website — www.perrytwp.com — by adding rotating photos of community involvement, color variations and an easier format for navigation. A more permanent design is coming down the road.

Here are some more things planned for 2026 in the township of roughly 28,000 residents:

Officials have eye on Lincoln Way corridor

Perry officials are working with the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative at Kent State University to formulate design ideas to improve aesthetics along the Lincoln Way corridor, a significant stretch of road that runs between Canton and Massillon.

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