



Quaker Valley standout Thiero signs with Maryland

SPORTS, 1B

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Health providers in Connellsville, PA brace for Medicaid cuts



Fayette County, which includes Connellsville, above, trails only Philadelphia in its Medicaid enrollment rates. Almost a third of the county’s residents and more than half its children depend on the program. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY SALLY MAXSON

‘Not providing health care is also expensive’

Bethany Rodgers USA TODAY NETWORK

Courtney Blocker, a 33-year-old from a southwestern Pennsylvania coal community, found out she’d lost her insurance coverage at a pharmacy counter while trying to replenish her supply of insulin. • Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes as a child, Blocker relies on a pump to deliver a regular drip of the medication, risking life-threatening acid buildup in her bloodstream if she doesn’t have it. But with the each vial priced at up to \$300, she can only afford the treatment through Medicaid, a government health insurance program for low-income Americans. • That day, about two years ago, the pharmacist told her the program had kicked her out. • “You have to have (insulin) to live,” she said. “They’re just like, ‘Oh, no, now you can’t get it.’” • The only way Blocker pulled through while she scrambled to re-enroll, she says, was by borrowing an insulin vial from a friend who also had diabetes.

Her issue was something of a fluke, related to a paperwork error at the county benefits office, she recalls. But health experts say millions across the U.S. could soon face a similar loss of coverage because of new hurdles created by the One Big Beautiful Bill, the massive tax package passed this year by congressional Republicans. And they predict the fallout of President Donald Trump’s marquee bill will land particularly heavily on some of the very rural communities that put these GOP politicians in office. Fayette County, where Blocker lives, is one of these places. In Pennsylvania, the once-prosperous coal mining hub trails only Philadelphia in its Medicaid

enrollment rates, with almost a third of the county’s residents and more than half its children and youth depending on the program. About a tenth of Fayette County’s Medicaid users, or 4,080 people, will lose their coverage because of forthcoming work requirements and other aspects of the “big beautiful” bill, state officials have estimated. This rise in uninsured and projected drop of \$50 billion in federal Medicaid funding in Pennsylvania over the coming decade could squeeze fragile health systems that have managed to survive in rural areas, advocates say. See HEALTH CARE, Page 2A



“Health care is expensive,” said Dave Rider, head of Fayette County’s behavioral health administration. “And not providing health care is also expensive.”

Who wins, loses in PA’s \$50.1B budget?

Matthew Rink and Bethany Rodgers USA TODAY NETWORK – PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania lawmakers reached a deal on a state budget on Wednesday, Nov. 12, to end a four-month stalemate that held up critical funding to school districts, local governments and other agencies. After reaching a deal with Gov. Josh Shapiro, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives voted 156-47 on the \$50.1 billion spending plan. The GOP-controlled Pennsylvania Senate followed suit, approving the budget bill 40-9. Neither Democrats nor Republicans came out as clear victors in the nearly 20-week budget battle, which extended well past the June 30 state-mandated deadline. Democrats secured

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Gov. Josh Shapiro signs the fiscal year 2025-26 budget surrounded by General Assembly members on Nov. 12 at the Capitol in Harrisburg. The state budget had been due June 30, and Pennsylvania the final state in the country to approve a funding deal. PROVIDED BY PACAST

Epstein survivors are seeking justice

Erin Mansfield USA TODAY

Lisa Phillips felt sick to her stomach. She stood on the east side of the U.S. Capitol on a clear fall day as one woman after another described how Jeffrey Epstein sexually abused them.

They were groomed as teenagers and young women under the guise that they would just be providing massages to an older man. They said they were scared of saying anything for years. Phillips looked down at her phone, then across the way at her friends, then back to her phone. She took deep

breaths. She adjusted her shirt, moved her shoulders back, and stood up tall. Finally, she stepped to the podium. “I stand here today for every woman who has been silenced, exploited and dismissed,” Phillips said. “We are not See SEEKING JUSTICE, Page 5A

