

VOTERS SEND MESSAGE TO TRUMP ON ECONOMY

NEWS | PAGE A6



BIG POTENTIAL FOR BEAR SEASON

WILDLIFE | PAGE B5

FIND THE LATEST NEWS

www.citizensvoice.com

Breaking News
Features
Sports

The Citizens' Voice

\$3.00 | SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2025 | CITIZENSVOICE.COM

FUNDING CRISIS

Budget impasse exacerbates charter-payment controversy



Bear Creek Community Charter School CEO Jim Smith stands with a black bear native to the land at Bear Creek Community Charter School in Wilkes-Barre on Wednesday. PHOTOS BY JASON ARDAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

By Christopher Doyle
CDOYLE@CITIZENSVOICE.COM

BEAR CREEK TWP. — The state-budget impasse had left a local charter school on the precipice of shutdown — and while that immediate crisis has now passed, the four-month stalemate did take underlying disputes on the future of how Pennsylvanian charter schools are funded and had them laid bare.

Bear Creek Community Charter School, located on a bucolic, 312-acre property in Bear Creek Twp. is a charter school with around 629 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. It has a focus on ecological education.

On Oct. 30, Bear Creek Community sent a letter to parents and guardians warning them that the charter school had nearly depleted its funds. It had received almost no funding since the end of the 2024-25 school year and was set to use the last of its reserves in December. The charter school said it would need to take out a \$1 million loan at 5.99% fixed interest to continue operating until Feb. 27. Whether the school would operate beyond that Feb. 27 date, Bear Creek Community warned, could not be guaranteed.



Second grade students learn math at Bear Creek Community Charter School in Wilkes-Barre on Wednesday.

At the core of that funding crisis, Bear Creek Community officials said, was how it and other charter schools in the commonwealth are often paid. Rather than pay tuition to Bear Creek Community directly, many school districts — including Wilkes-Barre Area, Wyoming Valley West, and Scranton — have required the charter school to submit their invoices to the state Department of Education. After its receipt of the charter school's invoice, the Education Department then satisfies a school district's obligations by taking part of the state funding the

commonwealth had originally allocated to school districts and redirecting it to Bear Creek Community. This has been a common way for many school districts to pay charter schools statewide for several years. Bear Creek Community officials said Wilkes-Barre Area, for example, first suspended its direct monthly payments to Bear Creek Community around February 2016, during the tail-end of the 2015-16 state-budget impasse; it has not paid Bear Creek Community directly in the decade since, requiring it to seek redirected state funds. Wilkes-Barre Area is

the chartering district for Bear Creek Community and children who live in Wilkes-Barre Area comprise the large majority of Bear Creek Community students.

"The whole money thing has created a lot of adversarial relationships between charter schools and traditional districts," Bear Creek Community CEO Jim Smith said Wednesday. "And that gets further compounded when the state starts cutting off funds from school districts."

This reliance on state-sourced funding for Bear Creek Community became a crisis during the state-budget impasse. With the General Assembly putting no state funding in place for any school districts in the commonwealth, the Department of Education had no state education funding to redirect to Bear Creek Community or other charter schools made to rely on state redirection. Any state funding Bear Creek Community would typically receive directly from Harrisburg was also on hold. And because charter schools are privately operated and so lack taxing authority, they were collecting almost no revenue for the duration of the budget stalemate.

See SCHOOL on Page A12

Fonda PAC spent \$40K on county

Political activist's committee donated to several local campaigns

By Michael P. Buffer
MBUFFER@CITIZENSVOICE.COM

A political action committee founded by iconic actress and political activist Jane Fonda donated \$70,017 to local campaigns in Pennsylvania, and \$40,000 went to Luzerne County campaigns, according to a report on campaign finances from June through Oct. 20.

The Jane Fonda Climate PAC donated \$20,000 to the United for Luzerne committee. The campaign committees for three Luzerne County Council candidates — Democrats Denise Williams, Dawn Simmons and Chris Belles — each received \$5,000 for the Fonda PAC.

The committee for Tim McGinley, a Democrat who unseated Republican Walter Griffith as county controller in the Nov. 4 election, also received \$5,000 from the Fonda PAC.

United for Luzerne spent \$17,000 on radio and digital ads supporting Belles, Simmons, McGinley and Mark Bufalino, a Democrat elected county judge on Nov. 4, committee Chairman Vito Malacari said.

Democrats flipped four of five seats on county council and regained the majority. Republicans

See FONDA on Page C6

Reports: Thanksgiving meal cost down slightly

By Robert Tomkavage
RTOMKAVAGE@SCRANTONTIMES.COM

Reports from a family-owned grocery store chain and Wells Fargo — an American multinational financial services company — show the cost to purchase items for the traditional Thanksgiving meal is down slightly this year.

Another survey conducted by Empower — another financial services company — found 47% of Americans might swap turkey for cheaper alternatives than the tryp-tophan-filled bird.

The cost for 15 Thanksgiving

See MEAL on Page A12

For More Great Savings, See Our Ad On Page A-4

2.99 ea. **SAVE up to 1.40** Limit 4 Per Variety

Bowl & Basket Coffee K-Cups
3.7 to 4.1-oz. box (Where Available, While Supplies Last) 12-ct., Any Variety

Coffee Mate Flavored Creamers
28 to 32-fl. oz. cont., Any Variety (Excluding Natural Bliss)

1.99 ea. **SAVE up to 1.50** Limit 4 Per Variety

Kraft Shredded Cheese
6 to 8-oz. pkg., Any Variety

Cracker Barrel Chunk Cheese
7 to 8-oz. pkg., Any Variety (Excluding Natural Slices, Cuts and 6 to 8-oz. Cheese Sticks)

Philadelphia Brick Cream Cheese
8-oz. pkg., Neufchâtel or Original

2\$9 FOR **Limit 4 Offers**

Coke Bottles 8-Pack or Cans 12-Pack
96-oz. tot. wt. btl. (Plus Dep or Fee Where Req.)
12-oz. Bottles, 8-Pack or 144-oz. tot. wt. cans, 12-oz. Cans, 12-Pack, Any Variety, Seagram's, Peace Tea, Sprite's, Barq's, Fanta or Coke

WHEN YOU BUY 2 Less or additional items will scan at \$8.00 each.

SALE ENDS THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20 WHILE SUPPLIES LAST.

We Reserve the Right to Limit Quantities.

thefreshgrocer.com

Look here every week for Mom's deals and promotions!

SUBSCRIPTION

Call 570-821-2010 for a subscription. To place a classified ad, call 570-821-2020. Copyright © 2024, Citizen's Voice citizensvoice.com

WEATHER FORECAST

TODAY H: 50 L: 32
MON. H: 43 L: 31
TUE. H: 43 L: 32
Full weather report C6

INDEX

Business A10
Classified C1-5
Community A2, A9
Crossword B6
Horoscopes B6
Lottery A2
Obituaries A11-12
Opinion A13
Sports B1-5

