



County wrestlers eyeing PIAA berths

SPORTS, 1B

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Trump touts 'roaring economy' in speech



President Donald Trump enters the House Chamber to deliver the State of the Union address Feb. 24. His speech turned out to be the longest State of the Union in history. KENNY HOLSTON/POOL VIA GETTY IMAGES

State releases plan for higher ed

Goal is to make it affordable, attainable

Bethany Rodgers

USA TODAY NETWORK - PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania officials have unveiled a multi-part plan for strengthening the commonwealth's higher education system by making credentials more affordable and growing a workforce that matches the needs of a shifting economy.

With the Feb. 19 release of its plan to "transform" postsecondary schooling, the Pennsylvania State Board of Higher Education vowed to get to work on its goals immediately and report progress annually.

"It will not sit on a shelf and collect dust," Cindy Shapira, who heads the state board, said of the plan. "We are ready to roll up our sleeves."

How does the plan make schooling more accessible?

The report notes that in higher education rankings, Pennsylvania often places "at or near the bottom in terms

State of the Union address full of criticism for Democrats

Zac Anderson and Sarah D. Wire
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON - President Donald Trump declared the country is booming, his opponents are "crazy" and his administration is engaged in unprecedented levels of "winning" in a marathon State of the Union address that comes as polls showed deep skepticism of his leadership heading into a crucial midterm election.

The president delivered a partisan defense of his policies amid a low point in his second term as he grapples with a major setback on tariffs, strong opposi-

tion to his immigration enforcement tactics, low approval ratings and other challenges at home and abroad, including a partial government shutdown and a potential military conflict with Iran.

"We have achieved a transformation like no one has ever seen before, and a turnaround for the ages," Trump said during the nearly 1-hour and 50-minute speech, the longest State of the Union in history, while lashing out at Democrats he accused of "destroying our country."

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-New York, called the speech a "state of delusion" as his party tries to gain control of Congress and put

a check on a president Democrats accuse of being out of touch on the economy and increasingly authoritarian.

Trump sought to counter Americans' dim views about his economic stewardship, which is expected to be the central issue in the midterms.

The speech had dramatic moments and notable guests. Members of the gold medal-winning men's U.S. Olympic hockey team were in attendance. Many Democrats were not, skipping the speech to protest the administration's policies.

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Erie County and health care officials mark the beginning of construction of a new health care training unit at the Erie County Community College in August 2025. A.J. RAO/ERIE TIMES-NEWS

UPMC Somerset unveils new unit, details \$15M+ investment

Madolin Edwards
The Daily American
USA TODAY NETWORK

UPMC Somerset highlighted major accomplishments and future priorities during its 2026 Annual Meeting Feb. 19, emphasizing continued investment in patient care, technology, workforce de-

velopment and community impact across Somerset County and the surrounding region.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was also held to celebrate the completion of renovations to the 4A Medical Surgical Unit, which will provide patients with a more private, healing environment and numerous technological upgrades. The

hospital anticipates the new unit will be open in the middle of March.

"Feb. 1 marked the seventh anniversary of our affiliation with UPMC," said Andy Rush, president of UPMC Somerset, UPMC East and UPMC McKeesport. "The transformation of our community hospital demonstrates UPMC's commitment and investment in the health

care of our region. Over the past seven years, we have expanded access to primary and specialty care, recruited many new specialists, advanced our technology, improved our infrastructure, and enhanced our employee benefits. This would not have been possible

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