

TO GIVE THE NEWS IMPARTIALLY, WITHOUT FEAR OR FAVOR

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STAFF PHOTO BY MATT HAMILTON

Citizens line up to speak Monday during the meeting of the Bradley County Commission in Cleveland, Tenn. The commission approved a zoning ordinance it says will effectively ban data centers.

## State expands private school subsidies

BY RUBY RAYNER  
STAFF WRITER

Last week, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a \$58 billion state budget, including nearly \$300 million to almost double the state-funded private school subsidy program, a program championed by Gov. Bill Lee.

As chair of the Finance, Ways and Means committee, state Sen. Bo Watson, R-North Chattanooga, works closely on passing the appropriations, the state's final budget.

"The entire session is really focused on the budget at the end of the day," Watson said by phone.

The biggest discretionary expenditure in the budget was for the expansion of the Tennessee Education Freedom Scholarship Program, from 20,000 to 35,000 state-funded credits of \$7,295 each to Tennessee families to enroll their children in private schools.

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"We all did vote against the governor's budget this year, which is actually unusual, if you look at most budgets that are adopted in Tennessee are adopted on a bipartisan basis," Sen. Jeff Yarbro, D-Nashville, said at a Senate Democrats press conference. "I think most of us have voted for most of the Tennessee budgets. But the reality is, this budget is full of wish-casting and willful denial

See BUDGET › A4

## 'Almost impossible'

### Bradley County Commission approves strict data center rules

BY DANIEL DASSOW  
STAFF WRITER

CLEVELAND, Tenn. — The Bradley County Commission received a standing ovation from residents as it unanimously approved zoning regulations Monday that leave few, if any, properties where data centers could be built.

The commission room at the Bradley County Courthouse in Cleveland was overflowing with residents, who spilled into the hallway and down into the lobby. Several residents asked the commission to outright ban data centers, which use large amounts of electricity and water to store and process data for artificial intelligence companies.

Commissioners came to the meeting with a resolution that would allow data centers to be built in properties zoned for general industrial use, but they ended up approving a substitute resolution that restricts the projects only to properties zoned for special impact industrial use. The special impact zone is meant for heavy industrial development with a negative environmental impact. The only county site currently in the zone is a landfill.

The final resolution, introduced by Commissioner Louie Alford, also restricts data centers from being built within 3,000 feet of properties in the forestry, agricultural and residential zoning. The agricultural zone covers

nearly all of Bradley County outside the city of Cleveland, Commissioner Milan Blake said.

"This basically, in a way, makes it 99.9% — you can round it up — almost impossible," Blake said of data center development.

The resolution adopted 14-0 by the commission also restricts data centers from two other residential zones or from being built within 3,000 feet of an existing residence, school or church. The substitute resolution added to the original resolution's limitation on sound emitted from data centers to 60 decibels or below.

See RULES › A5

## Path ahead for US, Iran in ending war is unclear

BY AAMER MADHANI,  
MUNIR AHMED AND  
RUSS BYNUM  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump offered mixed messages Monday about the path ahead for the U.S. war against Iran, declaring that he was in no rush to end the conflict while also expressing confidence that further negotiations with Tehran will soon take place in Pakistan.

With the 14-day ceasefire to expire Wednesday, Trump whipsawed in telephone interviews and social media posts between measured optimism that a deal could soon be reached and warning that "lots of bombs" will "start going off" if there's no agreement before the ceasefire deadline.

Trump indicated that he still expects to dispatch his negotiating team, led by Vice President JD Vance, to Pakistan's capital of Islamabad for a second round of talks, even as Iran insisted it would not take part until Trump

dialled back his demands.

Iran's chief negotiator and parliament speaker, Mohammed Bagher Qalibaf, accused the United States of wanting Iran to surrender and added that on the contrary, Iran has been preparing "to reveal new cards on the battlefield."

"We do not accept negotiations under the shadow of threats," Qalibaf wrote in a post on X early Tuesday.

Trump insisted he feels no pressure to end the war until Iran agrees to his terms.

"I am under no pressure whatsoever," Trump said on his Truth Social platform, "although, it will all happen, relatively quickly!"

Pakistani officials moved ahead with preparations for a new round of talks between the U.S. and Iran as the tenuous ceasefire was further strained over the weekend by renewed conflict around the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump told Bloomberg News he was "highly unlikely" to renew the ceasefire.

See IRAN › A5



BRAD J. VEST/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Chaz Molder, the mayor of Columbia, Tenn., and a Democratic House candidate, rides on a wagon during the town's annual Mule Day parade April 11 in Columbia.

## Dems eye broader field to capture Congress

BY EMILY COCHRANE  
AND REID J. EPSTEIN  
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

COLUMBIA — As the mule-drawn floats and carts lined up for the annual Mule Day parade in Columbia, Tennessee, Mayor Chaz Molder, a Democratic donkey in conservative country, was bantering with Republican officials when one official called out, "With as much money as you raised, you should

have two more donkeys."

Molder, 42, waved off the remark, but onlookers in mule T-shirts and floppy mule ears weighed in on the mayor's unlikely challenge to Rep. Andy Ogles, with either a hardy "go get 'em, Chaz" or a quieter call of support for the incumbent, a hard-core conservative who in any other year would be hard to beat.

That Ogles' seat is even in the conversation is an indi-

cation of the political shape Republicans find themselves in as they approach the mid-term elections. Anger over President Donald Trump's war in Iran, spiking gas prices and persistent affordability concerns have led to shifts of up to 20 percentage points in recent elections compared with the 2024 election that returned Trump to the White House.

See DEMS › A5

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**TODAY**

HIGH 81  
LOW 53  
Mostly sunny

**WEDNESDAY**

HIGH 82  
LOW 55  
Sunny

**THURSDAY**

HIGH 84  
LOW 58  
Sunny

See B8 for full weather reports