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SPORTS, 1B

The Jackson Sun

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2026 | JACKSONSUN.COM | JACKSON, TENN.

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Children play with food items inside Katrina Clark's Preschool 3 classroom at Anderson Early Childhood in Brownsville on Sept. 29. PHOTOS BY JAMAR COACH/THE JACKSON SUN

Brownsville preschool expands with Ford funds

Sarah Best

Jackson Sun | USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Anderson Early Learning Center in Brownsville is celebrating its newly expanded preschool program, which is helping to address a critical early learning need.

Courtesy of a \$250,000 investment from Ford Community Relations, Anderson was able to clear its waiting list of about 30 young children to enroll in preschool.

School staff, Ford team members, and members of the media toured Anderson's new classrooms on Sept. 29.

The school had offered its preschool program to students four years of age, but Ford's investment has helped grow early education to three-year-olds, which began this school year and operates on the same schedule as K-12.

Previously, there were four preschool classrooms available for three-year-olds, each with one teacher and one teacher's assistant.

The school has opened up two more classrooms and hired two teachers and two teacher assistants to run the three-year-old preschool classrooms as part of the investment.

Anderson now has six classrooms for three-year-old preschoolers and six classrooms for four-year-old preschoolers.



Educational Assistant Ronda Thompson plays with preschoolers inside Katrina Clark's Preschool 3 classroom at Anderson Early Childhood.

Free preschool helps parents avoid costly daycare alternatives, emphasizes play-based learning

Director of Pre-K and Early Literacy, Grace Fergie, stressed that early learning is the foundation for education and said the investment is about "setting the framework for success."

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Christa Pike's lawyers faced communication hurdles as execution failed

Evan Mealins

Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Minutes after 8 p.m. Sept. 30, sitting in a dark room with the curtain shut, Christa Pike's only lawyer inside the prison could hear her breathing despite receiving the state's final round of lethal drugs.

The lawyer, Randy Spivey, demanded to call the rest of Pike's defense team. To do so, he would have to leave the one place he could tell if she was dead or alive.

Spivey was led through a locked door. Then another. Then four more locked doors, he said. At about 8:22, after seven minutes away from the execution chamber, during which Pike was also separated from her spiritual adviser, Spivey reached the phone, he said.

Spivey was led back to the witness room after the call, and the rest of the legal team began trying to contact the people with the power to order immediate lifesaving measures.

But the number for the Tennessee Supreme Court they were specifically given for emergencies went to voicemail. Their two points of contact in the governor's office did not pick up the phone, attorneys said.

In the face of the silence, another attorney drove to the Tennessee Supreme Court to bang on the door.

The state's lawyer in the prison had a cell phone the whole time, Spivey said.

Speedy access to lawyers, courts critical during executions

Pike's attorneys were eventually able to get in touch with a clerk who handles Tennessee Supreme Court cases before the attorney who drove reached the court. They got a hearing before the Tennessee Supreme Court that ended a little bit after 9:05 p.m., roughly an hour after the second dose of pentobarbital had entered Pike's body, Pike's attorneys said.

"While Christa was suffering, being tortured in the execution chamber," said Stephen Ferrell, a lawyer representing Pike from Federal Defender Services of Eastern Tennessee.

Lawyers say state officials were slow to respond during a critical moment in the failed execution of Pike, and the struggle to get to a phone highlighted barriers that disadvantage the condemned.

Emails from the night obtained through a public records request to the Tennessee attorney general's office show Pike's attorney sent an email to a clerk at 8:32 p.m. advising him that they were filing an emergency motion. They appeared to send the filing at 8:36. The clerk responded by email confirming they had received the motion at 8:47.

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AI boom turns data centers into a top Tennessee campaign issue

Kelly Puente

Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Data centers are emerging as a major political flashpoint in Tennessee, drawing bipartisan scrutiny as the artificial intelligence industry pours money and lobbyists into the state.

Kent Syler, a Middle Tennessee State University political science professor and longtime Tennessee political strategist, said data centers have gone from a relatively obscure economic development issue to one of the country's most prominent political debates.

"The data center debate, it more or less came out of nowhere in political terms," Syler said. "It was here in

an instant."

As Tennessee voters decide the governor's race and congressional contests Nov. 3, the data center debate is crossing party lines nationwide and could carry into the 2028 presidential campaign.

Unlike many political fights carefully cultivated by parties, Syler said the backlash largely began in communities grappling with proposed developments and questions about electricity and water use, and environmental impacts.

"This one was organic," Syler said. "This one came from the people."

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A sign along Highway 43 protesting a data center and asking residents to sign a petition on July 9 in Lawrenceburg. MARK ZALESKI/THE TENNESSEAN

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Volume 178 | No. 238
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