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SPORTS, 1B

Oshkosh Northwestern

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QUIRKY CAMPUS

Wisconsin's crunchiest college is one you've probably never heard of

Kelly Meyerhofer Milwaukee Journal Sentinel | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

It was a moonless night, perfect for stargazing. They moved some of their tents to a clearing in the woods for a better view. • Waiting for darkness to settle over the Kickapoo Valley, they paid attention to their surroundings. The earthy smell of mud caking their boots. The lingering crackle of their campfire. The owls' hoots and coyotes' howls echoing into the night. • Students are taught to notice nature at Thoreau College, a small experimental school in western Wisconsin that operates very much offline. Assigned readings are in the form of books or paper handouts. Phones are banned during classes, meals, meetings and field trips. **See THOREAU, Page 4A**

ABOVE: A laying hen, named February, leaps to grab a mealworm from student Nalia Higgins on March 3, in Viroqua. The house the students live in has a coop for laying hens.

TOP: Students Anson Bond, left, and Opal Smith feed a fire on Feb. 11, during winter camping, part of a program offered by Thoreau College near Lafarge. The college, founded in 2015, offers gap semester programs offering hands-on experiences in folk arts, homesteading skills, outdoor expeditions and other programs. The school is in nearby Viroqua. PHOTOS BY MARK HOFFMAN/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

FLOCK SAFETY CAMERAS

Possible contract renewal draws ire

Justin Marville

Oshkosh Northwestern

USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

OSHKOSH - Flock no?

The community appears to have concerns about the motion-activated Flock Safety automatic license plate reader that's designed to catch high-resolution, actionable images of vehicles and their identifying characteristics.

If Common Council is seeking public approval, they're probably not getting it, as 80-odd residents turned up at Oshkosh Public Library April 15 to express concerns about the city potentially renewing its Flock camera contract.

The hour-long community-led public discussion focused on security vulnerabilities, privacy erosion and Flock Safety's data-sharing concerns.

What are Flock cameras and what are they used for?

Solar-powered cameras, Flock Safety readers are surveillance tools mounted on a pole used to capture the rear of vehicles and analyze license plates to provide other vehicle data in a system.

The company's client base is composed of more than 5,000 law enforcement agencies, which can search the system for plate numbers, vehicle color, vehicle type or a distinguishable feature to receive real-time alerts tracking stolen automobiles or vehicles associated with

See FLOCK, Page 6A



Flock Safety license plate reader cameras are set up to scan all vehicles passing on a road.

PROVIDED BY FLOCK SAFETY

Dems hoping gas prices influence 2026 elections

Poll: 76% of Americans disapprove Trump's handling of fuel costs

Phillip M. Bailey

USA TODAY

As rising gas prices force Americans to change their spending habits, Democrats are revving their 2026 midterm messaging on the potentially potent issue.

The last time the average retail price to fill up went over \$4 a gallon was Au-

gust 2022. Republicans put a relentless focus on gas prices and successfully took back Congress, stalling the rest of former President Joe Biden's agenda.

Now, Democratic challengers in swing districts and competitive states are looking to use the same weapon against Republicans by noting that President Donald Trump's ongoing war with Iran caused prices to skyrocket by more than \$1 per gallon in a matter of weeks.

The issue also helps Democrats position themselves as fighting for economic relief.

Experts say price hikes in gas infuriate Americans more than increases for most other goods.

"It's a sign that people can't do as much as they want," Patrick De Haan, an analyst at GasBuddy, which monitors fuel prices, told USA TODAY. "That's why rising gas prices become so bitter for Americans. It really feels oppressive in a different way."

John Mark Hansen, a professor of political science at the University of Chicago, said the price at the pump "is particularly visible for lots of people because we're a very car-dependent soci-

ety," he said. "When people go to the gas station they have to shell out more cash or get charged more on their credit cards when they fill up."

Global markets determine the price at the pump more than the president or Congress, he said, but Trump's fingerprints are more on the recent spike because the war he started led to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which carries 20% of the world's oil shipments and about 20% of the world's seaborne liquefied natural gas.

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