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 MWCD discusses Ohio bill, conservation work  
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**'What If?'**  
 PHS, Williamstown boys place 2nd at state  
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# The Parkersburg News and Sentinel

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## Pierce indicted in Gretchen Fleming's death

**Gwen Sour**  
 Staff Reporter

A Wood County grand jury indicted Preston D. Pierce on Friday in connection with the disappearance and death of Gretchen Fleming, whose case has remained under investigation since she was reported missing in December 2022. Law enforcement officials held a briefing Friday evening.

Pierce, 58, was indicted on charges of first-degree murder, felony murder, concealment of a deceased human body and kidnapping, Parkersburg officials said during a Friday news conference. He was arrested Friday afternoon in the Asheville, N.C., area by agents with the U.S. Marshals Service Southern District of West Virginia



Photo by Gwen Sour  
 From left, Lt. Mike Stalnaker listens as Parkersburg Police Chief Matthew Board discusses the indictment made in the case of Gretchen Fleming Friday evening.

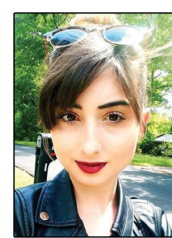
CUFFED Task Force and the Carolina Regional Fugitive Task Force.

Fleming was last seen early Dec. 4, 2022, and was reported missing to the Parkersburg Police

Department on Dec. 12, 2022. Parkersburg Police Chief Matthew Board said investigators determined early in the case that Pierce was the last person Fleming was known to have been seen with.

In a December 2023 story in the Parkersburg News and Sentinel, Board confirmed the person of interest as Pierce, who has also gone by the name Darrell Lott. Pierce was a former police officer across different municipalities in West Virginia.

"Our investigation from the onset quickly determined that Mr. Pierce was the last person Gretchen was known to be seen with," Board said. "As the investigation proceeded, it revealed that Mr. Pierce was a



Fleming

person of interest in this investigation."

Board said the case was never considered cold by investigators, who continued working on it for more than three years. He credited Lt. Mike Stalnaker, Det' James Zimmerman, the Wood County Prosecutor's Office represented by Prosecutor Pat Lefebure, the FBI, West Virginia State Police and other local, state and federal partners with moving the case forward.

A major break came in September 2025, when human remains were found in Wirt County, officials said. At the time the remains were found, West Virginia State Police said a

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Photo by Gwen Sour  
 Students at Parkersburg High School line up to have the chance to sit in a HH60 Black Hawk Helicopter Friday

## Guard gives display at PHS, South

**Gwen Sour**  
 Staff Reporter

PARKERSBURG – Students at Parkersburg High School and Parkersburg South High School got an up-close look at the West Virginia Army National Guard on Friday as recruiters visited the schools with aircraft displays and information about service opportunities.

The visit included a Black Hawk helicopter and a Lakota helicopter, which Sgt. 1st Class Justin Ware with the West Virginia Army National Guard described as a "static display"

meant to give students a chance to meet Guard members and learn more about what the organization offers.

"What we're doing is we're just kind of letting the students know that the West Virginia Army National Guard is an option," Ware said. "You don't have to move away to serve your country. You can do it right here in your local populace and get college education benefits all the way up to a master's degree on us, while serving part time in your local community."

Ware said the Guard is one of several military options available to students, but it may appeal to those

who want to stay close to home while serving and pursuing education.

Ryan Bargerstock, resource officer at Parkersburg High School, said recruiters regularly speak with students, but Friday's visit offered a broader look at the Guard beyond what many students may already know.

"Everyone, when they think National Guard, they just think it's reserve duty, you go and train, but there's other elements to it," Bargerstock said. "It's just kind of to

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## Waste Management to provide Parkersburg trash service under temporary contract

**Evan Bevins**  
 City Editor

PARKERSBURG – A potential referendum over a contract Parkersburg City Council approved with Waste Management has not been settled, but the company will begin providing trash service July 1 on an interim basis.

Mayor Tom Joyce made the announcement in a press release Friday afternoon. He said the city will continue to bill residents and the monthly sanitation fee of \$21, which includes a \$1.50 recycling surcharge to support that service under a separate contractor, will remain unchanged.

Residents will be provided with a 96-gallon cart prior to July 1 at no charge, the release said. Residents can have two bulky goods collected monthly and will be notified of those collection dates before the transition on July 1.

"The other option would have been to repeal and amend sections of Article 955 (of the city code); requiring all residents to obtain their own private solid waste collection provider," Joyce said in the release. "This was considered, but ultimately I believe this temporary measure will be the most beneficial to the community as a whole; one provider and centralized billing are important for consistency and accountability. (M)aking 12,000 residents responsible for obtaining their own service would have created confusion, and most residents would have been required to pay for (three) months

of service in advance."

City officials began looking into privatizing sanitation last year, following the suspension of curbside recycling amid manpower issues for the Sanitation Department. There were double-digit vacancies in the department, which was budgeted for 27 employees. As requests for proposals were sought and contracts reviewed, the number of workers dwindled to just two, with employees from other departments being paid time and a half and temporary workers used to cover the duties of sanitation workers.

"As I have previously expressed publicly on several occasions, the city is unable to maintain trash collection service by City employees in the current manner," Joyce said in the release. "For several months, we have neglected other services and projects that are equally valuable to our community and residents."

Residents opposed to the move have argued the city should have increased wages and done more to maintain the city-owned service, which was known for taking almost anything residents threw out. Joyce and other city officials have said their efforts were unsuccessful and contracting out the service, with the city maintaining billing and oversight to ensure all trash is picked up, is the best alternative.

Opposition grew into a referendum petition effort to force council to reconsider the ordinance

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## Morrissey highlights rural health

**Gwen Sour**  
 Staff Reporter

Gov. Patrick Morrissey visited WVU Medicine Camden Clark Medical Center to discuss West Virginia's Rural Health Transformation Program, which he says aims to improve overall health of West Virginia residents and to draw more people into the workforce.

Morrissey said the program is focused on prevention, education and upfront investments intended to reduce health care costs, improve care

and help more West Virginians remain healthy enough to work. He was joined by Arvin Singh, West Virginia's secretary of health, who is leading the state's rural health transformation efforts.

"This is going to make a real big difference," Morrissey said. "And it's very rare, you know, you just don't see this kind of investment that comes in on the front end to make progress."

Sean Smith, president and chief executive officer of WVU Medicine Camden Clark Medical Center, said

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Photo by Gwen Sour  
 Gov. Patrick Morrissey shares his hopes for the collaboration between medical centers and the Rural Health Transformation Program Friday afternoon.

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### MORNING NEWS BRIEFING

Teen of the Week: Watkins looks to a future in medicine

Twirling a baton requires dedication, focus and coordination. That is the approach Harmony Watkins takes to life as she is already on a path to have a career in medicine.

Details, Page D1

Trump weighs Taiwan arms package after summit

President Donald Trump says he's not yet made a decision on whether a major sale of U.S. arms to Taiwan can move forward following his three-day visit to China. The president spoke to reporters Friday as he flew back on Air Force One.

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### READER

Thank you,

**Vicki Fielder**  
 of Parkersburg

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