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Unearth a Story this summer at library

MURFREESBORO -- The Murfreesboro chapter of the Pike County Library will host "Unearth A Story" summer reading program events this July on Tuesdays and Fridays at 1 p.m.

The library will be closed on Friday and Saturday 3-4 for the Fourth of July holiday.

On Tuesday, July 7 the library will host a colored sand art program, and a dinosaur scratch art program on Friday July 10.

Dinosaur sand art will be the feature on Tuesday, July 14, with the Arkansas Game and Fish holding a program on Friday, July 17.

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library program will be held on Tuesday, July 21, with colored sand art held on Friday, July 24.

No registration is needed for any of the events.

For more information, contact the library at (870) 285-2575 or e-mail murfreesboropubliclibrary@gmail.com. The library is open on Tuesdays-Friday from 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. and closed from noon-1 p.m. for lunch.

New book arrivals to the library may be viewed at www.facebook.com/Murfreesboro.Library.



Submitted photos/PC4-H

AWARD WINNING FOOD ... Pike County 4-H had three teams competed at the recent district Food Challenge. "I could not be prouder of these kids!" said Pike County 4-H program assistant Shannon Ballard. The Sassy Spatulas (above) won the junior division with their Spinach Dip, while the Camo Cookers (below) placed second in the senior division with Tommy's Tiny Tacos. These two teams will represent Pike County at the Arkansas Food Challenge in August.

UNEARTH A STORY™

Town Hall over ATVs on city streets July 13

MURFREESBORO -- The City of Murfreesboro will host a town hall meeting on Tuesday, July 13 at 5:30 p.m. over the the topic of ATV use on city streets.

The city is considering a pending ordinance to allow the issue.

The city council will hold their July meeting following the town hall at 6 p.m.

4-H continues summer cereal drive

MURFREESBORO -- Pike County 4-H is seeking to provide children out of school with the most important meal of the day.

As such, the effort is seeking non-perishable and kid-friendly breakfast items such as cereal, oatmeal, toaster pastries and granola bars from June 1-July 31.

"This is for children and families in the county who might otherwise go without," said Pike County 4-H assistant Shannon Ballard.

Items may be dropped off at either the Pike County Extension offices in Murfreesboro or at the Bainum Library in Glenwood.



City council approves sewer rate hike effective in July

BY JOHN BALCH
Nashville News-Leader staff

MURFREESBORO -- The Murfreesboro City Council voted last week during a special meeting to increase the city's sewer rates.

The new sewer rates, which do not affect water rates, will start being charged this week (July 1) with additional increases scheduled into 2027.

The residential base rate will increase from \$13.25 to \$15.55 in 2026 then from \$15.55 to \$16 in 2027. Usage per 1,000 gallons will increase from \$5.30 to \$8.10 in 2026 then from \$8.10 to \$8.36 in 2027, as detailed in Ordinance No.

2026-2 approved by the council.

The ordinance included an emergency clause to put the rates in place by July 1 after a mix-up involving the submission of a rate study conducted by Crist Engineering.

Water Commission Jack Bennett explained that a 2023 rate study done by the company was not registered with the state for some unknown reason. A new rate was then presented around June 1 that showed a need for an increase in the sewer rate with the water rate currently remaining in line with projections.

Bennett said the study shows that there will be no more increases on the sewer rates until 2031. "But, let me put an asterisk on that: We

are facing some major repairs to the water department," he added, "and when I say major, we're looking at a preliminary estimate of \$650,000."

The repairs will included changing out the sand and gravel mixture content that filters the water and the possible replacement of the tile that lines the holding structure. Bennett said the waterworks department will likely have to secure a loan for the repairs and a rate review will also need to be conducted.

An inspection at the water plant is expected to happen toward the end of 2026 or the start of 2027 to determine the extent of the needed repairs.

City, County offices closed Friday for holiday

MURFREESBORO -- The City of Murfreesboro will be closed on Friday, July 3 for the annual Independence Day holiday.

As such, Thursday and Friday's normal sanitation route will be collected Thursday, July 2.

The Pike County Courthouse and associated satellite offices will also be closed on Friday, July 3 for the holiday, but will impact no sanitation collection for the week.

School board hears of plans to sell unused property

MURFREESBORO -- The South Pike County School Board met in short session for their June 2026 meeting.

Superintendent Tanya Wilcher told the board that the carpet installation was ongoing in the office and library areas.

With the start of the school's new fiscal year, the board approved the monthly meetings to be held on the third Tuesdays of the month at 6 p.m., unless otherwise noted.

A \$150 stipend was approved for Denise Stuard as the burgeoning elementary BETA program will now be expanded to the junior high school.

The board also approved a move for the Dean of Students Cheyana Burns role to be expanded from 195 contract days to 205.

As an employee of the district, Steve Martin was allotted no more than \$2,000 as the school's

basketball referee assigner (\$825 last year) as well as a referee for some jamboree games.

The board was told of the plan to disperse land held by the district after the Pike County Tax Collector told them it would now be taxed due to its remote locations not tied to the current school campus.

The land includes two parcels in the former Bowen School District (.87 and .47 acres) off Bowen Road. There is also an acre of land off Highway 26 in the former Brocktown School District. That land is bordered by Potlach and Weyerhaeuser properties.

The school plans to sell the land for fair market value, and Wilcher said she will investigate the legal processes.

"It may be as easy as a bid process," she told the board.

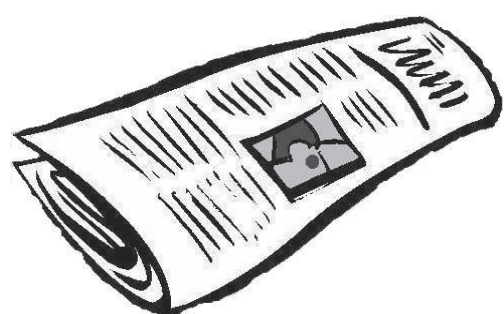
She described the land as "unused vacant

timber scrub" that is not attached to any other district holdings.

While the taxes on the land would be nominal -- \$20.38 a year -- Wilcher said there was no real point in owning the land for owning's sake as it offered the school no value.

The board voted to rescind the contract offer approved in May to Drake Staggs as an assistant football and baseball coach for the 2026-2027 school year. Wilcher told the board he ended up accepting a job outside Dallas at a salary our district couldn't match.

After further interviews, the board accepted Wilcher's recommendation of hiring Aaron Carter from Manila as the school's new assistant football and baseball coach. Carter has worked in eastern Arkansas for much of his coaching career.



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Howard County man returns to jail after failing to show for trial

MURFREESBORO -- A Howard County man is back in the Pike County jail this week after he missed his jury trial last week.

Timothy Leon Spencer, 37, of Mineral Springs, was due in court the morning of Thursday, June 25 to face a jury trial on charges of residential burglary, theft of property and

possession of a firearm by a certain person. He failed to show up at the appointed time and a bench warrant was issued for his arrest and his bondsman contacted. Spencer was arrested on June 26 and is now in jail awaiting a Nov. 30 pretrial date with no bond.

Spencer was charged in July 2025 involving a

break-in at a Murfreesboro home.

According to case information, the Murfrees-

CRIME
Continued on Page 2

CRIME Continued from Page 1

boro Police Department was dispatched to a home on Worrell Street the night of July 15. The responding officer found the homeowner with her juvenile son and Spencer standing under the carport.

The homeowner told the officer when she arrived at the home they allegedly found a truck parked under their carport. Thinking the vehicle belonged to a visiting friend, the son went inside to tell the truck owner to move so his mother could park in the carport. The son reportedly found Spencer in the kitchen "holding a black handgun in his hand by the barrel," according to case information. Spencer is said to have dropped the handgun and claimed he was in the wrong house.

The mother stated the gun belonged in the home and it was apparent Spencer had taken off his shoes in the master bedroom and was actually wearing the mother's shoes at the time of the encounter. Spencer is also accused of eating and drinking from the refrigerator.

The felony firearm charge against Spencer is due to his status as a convicted felon with a history of multiple felony offenses.

SENTENCES HANDED DOWN

On Monday, June 29 in Pike County Circuit Court, Kartez Rysheem Smith, 36, a former resident of Murfreesboro with a Miller County address, pleaded "true" to violating the terms of his parole. He was sentenced to a total of six years in the Arkansas Department of Corrections (ADC).

On Monday, June 22, Joseph Dutch Forga, 42, of Glenwood, pleaded guilty to aggravated assault on a family or household member. He was sentenced to six years in the ADC with three years suspended. Forga was also ordered to attend six months in an in-patient rehabilitation center.

Shane Williams, 21, of Glenwood, pleaded guilty Monday to a felony charge of fleeing. He was sentenced to six years of probation and fined \$2,500 plus court costs.

Shane McElroy, 35, of Okolona, pleaded guilty tampering with physical evidence and possession of a controlled substance. He was sentenced to five years probation and fined \$2,500 plus court costs.



Submitted photo/SPCSD

CHEER CAMP EXCELLENCE ... The Murfreesboro Junior High cheerleaders recently attended summer camp, where they learned a band chant routine, a game day cheer, and a situational chant — and they performed them with confidence and enthusiasm after only two and a half days. Their hard work paid off as they earned the Technical Excellence Award for outstanding motions and the STAY SAFE Award for excellence in stunting safety. "We are also proud to announce that two of our cheerleaders were selected as All Americans out of the 6 that were nominated!" said squad sponsor Melissa Cornish. "The MJHS cheerleaders have rocked it at camp and worked incredibly hard."

Pre-K accepting applications for '26-'27 school year

MURFREESBORO -- Dawson Pre-K at the Murfreesboro School Campus is holding registration for students for the upcoming school year.

The group is accepting students online at arkansas.mycopa.com/familyportal/childcare.epl.

The following documents are required to complete registration:

- Birth Certificate
 - Social Security Card
 - Current Immunization Record
 - Proof of Income (month's worth of paystubs or 2025 tax return) or a notarized letter of unemployment
 - Proof of Residency
 - Well Child Physical
- For more information, call (870) 246-1450.

State seeks input on transportation improvement program

LITTLE ROCK -- The Arkansas State Highway Commission has released the Draft Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for Federal Fiscal Years 2027-2030.

The public is invited to review and comment on the contents of the Draft STIP through July 28, 2026. The public may view and download the STIP here: www.ardot.gov/STIP. Copies of the Draft STIP are also available by mail when requested through ARDOT's Program Management Division at (501) 569-2262.

The STIP includes all regionally significant transportation projects to be undertaken in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). It is a federally required public document covering four years. The projects listed are the state's overall highway and transit programs and encompass all areas of the state.

With respect to urban areas greater than 50,000 in population, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) are including indi-

vidual projects in their Transportation Improvement Programs. For additional information on projects located within a MPO area, please contact the appropriate MPO.

This program is consistent with Arkansas' long-range plan and includes roadway, bridge, safety, intersection improvement, and transit projects. This document is prepared in response to Title 23 United States Code, Section 135 – Statewide Planning Requirements.

Submit all comments regarding the STIP via mail or email to: Ms. Keli Wylie, P.E. Assistant Chief Engineer – Program Delivery Arkansas Department of Transportation P.O. Box 2261 Little Rock, AR 72203 Email: STIP@ardot.gov

LETTER TO EDITOR POLICY

All letters to the editor must be signed, along with a phone number (that will not be published) provided for confirmation purposes. The Murfreesboro Diamond reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity. Letters must not be libelous or contain any profanities.

Send Letters to P.O. Box 550 • Murfreesboro, AR 71958 or e-mail to mdiamond.editor@windstream.net

Murfreesboro Diamond

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Any erroneous statement published in the newspaper will be gladly and promptly corrected if called to the attention of the management.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE FRIDAYS AT 3:00 P.M.

Insurance provider offers heat-related tips for safety

LITTLE ROCK -- Summer is officially here, and temperatures across Arkansas have been consistently rising over the past few weeks. A higher heat index tends to create more opportunities for dehydration, heat stroke and other heat-related conditions. Follow these tips to prevent and recognize heat-related illnesses.

KNOW WHO IS MOST AT-RISK
While extreme heat poses a risk for anyone, there are a few groups who may be more prone to heat illness than others. Older adults and young children, including babies, are often unable to cool down as well as adults, making them vulnerable to dehydration, heat stroke and more. Pregnant women, individuals with chronic illnesses and people with disabilities are another group that may be disproportionately affected by extreme heat. Athletes and outdoor workers are also more likely to fall victim to heat-related conditions, as well as people without air conditioning, homeless individuals and people using alcohol or drugs.

CHECK IN ON YOURSELF
Taking care of others is important during extreme weather

conditions, but make sure you take care of yourself first. Take simple steps to prepare yourself for higher temperatures, and

HEAT Continued on Page 5

PUBLIC NOTICE

ORDINANCE NO. 2026-2

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE 2024-1 (ENTITLED: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ORDINANCE 2015-2 ENTITLED: "An Ordinance Amending Ordinance No. 244B, Establishing the Rates for Services Rendered by the Water and Sewer System of the City of Murfreesboro, Arkansas, Specifically Providing, and to Establish a Fee for Tampering with a Water Meter and Disconnection Fee, Declaring an Emergency, and for Other Purposes." and AMENDING ORDINANCE 245 ENTITLED: "An Ordinance to Amend Ordinance 244, Fixing Rates for Services Rendered by the Water System of the City of Murfreesboro, Arkansas; and Prescribing Other Matters relating thereto.")

WHEREAS the City of Murfreesboro Arkansas enacted Ordinance 2024-1 to amend rates for services rendered by the water and sewer system on March 11, 2024; and

WHEREAS Act 605 of 2021 and Act 925 of 2025 require an updated rate study; and

WHEREAS the required rate study was conducted by Crist Engineers, Inc.; and

WHEREAS the results of the rate study indicate a necessary increase on sewer rates.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF MURFREESBORO, PIKE COUNTY, ARKANSAS.

SECTION 1. The rates for services established by Ordinance 2024-1 shall be amended as follows:

Sewer:
Residential Rates: Base Rate will increase from \$13.25 to \$15.55 in 2026
Base Rate will increase from \$15.55 to \$16.00 in 2027
Usage per 1000 gallons will increase from \$5.30 to \$8.10 in 2026
Usage per 1000 gallons will increase from \$8.10 to \$8.36 in 2027

SECTION 2. There shall be an annual internal review of revenues and expenditures after which the Water Commission and Mayor will review the results and determine the necessity of a 2% annual increase in water and sewer rates effective January 1, 2028.

SECTION 4. All other provisions in said ordinances No. 245, 2015-2, and 2024-1 shall remain the same.

SECTION 5. The declaration of any part of this ordinance to be invalid shall not serve to void any other part of the ordinance.

SECTION 6. Upon passage of this amendment the Recorder/Treasurer shall publish only this Ordinance, amending all other Ordinances as referred to in the Title.

SECTION 7. The City of Murfreesboro finds that the immediate implementation of this ordinance is necessary for the preservation of the public's peace, health, safety, welfare, and property, an emergency is hereby declared to exist, and that this Ordinance is to be in effect immediately after its adoption.

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 22nd DAY OF JUNE, 2026.

Approved: Jim O'Neal, Mayor
Attest: Penny Lamb, Recorder/Treasurer

This publication was paid for by the City of Murfreesboro, office of the Recorder/Treasurer. The amount paid for this publication is \$ 202.50.

Celebrate our nation's birthday with your family for Stand Up America and the Neal McCoy concert on Saturday, July 4th!

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Garden failures, successes across county

I must unfortunately tell you all that my tomato plant that I talked about in my earliest article lost its bloom and has not produced any fruit.

I thought by now I would be on my porch swing eating a tomato and miracle whip sandwich with a little bit of Tony's, but even though my garden has failed some of y'all have reached out to me about your gorgeous gardens.

I was told that the Pike County Jail has a garden. The garden is way more extensive than I imagined (pictured below). They have gorgeous towering sunflowers and rows upon rows of produce! They grow a variety of peppers, okra, tomatoes, various peas, pumpkins, and so much more. The 309 inmates are the ones who take such good care of this garden!



Little Homestead In The City

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They also use that produce to make lunch and dinner for the other inmates.

Another garden that has been flourishing is the 4-H garden at the extension office. Those kids started their plants as little seeds in styrofoam cups. Now they get to see how much they have grown and what they are producing. At the moment they have only been able to pick banana peppers and squash, but you can already

see blooms on the many others they have. One of the cool things these kids get to do is use that produce for their Cooking Challenge team. I'm sure you have seen their accomplishments through the year.

Also don't forget the County Cow search is still going on! Only a few have participated, but there is still time! Remember to tag me in those pictures!



Obituaries

Rena Gail 'Sandy' Parker, 75

Rena Gail "Sandy" Parker, age 75 of Murfreesboro, Arkansas, passed away on June 25, 2026 at her home surrounded by family.

She was born on April 29, 1951 to Lucille and Terry Bryant.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Jerry Wayne Parker, her parents, Lucille Strouth and Terry Bryant, her favorite son-in-law, Richard Collins and her precious Aunt Grace Stanley.

Those left to cherish her memory include her baby, Sis-

ter; her sons, Jeff Parker and Robert Parker; her daughter, Stacy Collins; her grandchildren; her great-grandchildren, and a very special friend; as well as a host of other relatives and friends.

Graveside services were held at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, June 29, 2026, at Pike City Cemetery with Bro. Brian Doyle officiating, under the direction of Latimer Funeral Home in Murfreesboro.

You may send an online sympathy message at www.latimerfuneralhome.com



Submitted photos/SPCSD

BLANKET FUNDRAISER ... The Murfreesboro cheerleaders are conducting a blanket sale as a fundraiser for the upcoming school year. The NubaySoft blankets will cost \$74.98 and will sold for approximately the next two weeks. Visit <https://www.spectatorsport.com/c/murfreesboro-rattlers-1> or use the QR code pictured on the school's website at www.rattlers.org.



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UAMS HOUSE CALL

Dr. Bala Simon is an associate professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine in the College of Medicine at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences.

Q: How are migraines managed?

A: A migraine is a disorder of the brain and neurological system. The condition is most commonly associated with intense pain, and its occurrences typically cannot be predicted. The American Migraine Foundation estimates that more than 40 million people in the United States are affected by migraines.

The exact cause of migraines is unclear. Those with a family history of migraines are more at risk. Migraines generally start to occur in people between the ages of 10 and 40. Medical conditions such as anxiety, bipolar disorder, or epilepsy are also a factor. Hormonal changes, certain foods, stress, and changes in weather can also accentuate the risk of migraines. Women are more affected by migraines than men.

Symptoms of migraines include moderate to severe throbbing pain on one or both sides of the head, nausea and vomiting, and sensitivity to light, noise and smells. "Migraine with aura" is a common type of migraine which results in changes in vision, difficulty speaking, muscle weakness, and numbness and tingling.

Migraines cannot be cured. A CT or MRI scan may be performed to rule out other causes of pain. Treatment includes managing symptoms with either prescription or over-the-counter medications. Contact your healthcare provider if you have questions.

Email your health questions to housecall@uams.edu.

PIKE COUNTY SKYWATCHERS BY RICK FLOYD

Seeking the 'Goldilocks' zone

Earth's elliptical orbit around the Sun will have it at its farthest place from the Sun this year on July 6. This place in our planet's orbit is called aphelion which is a word that borrows from two languages. Ap is a Latin prefix meaning away from, and helion is from the Greek word for the Sun, helios.

Astronomers who look for planets around stars in our galaxy that might support life (and hundreds have been found so far) call the zone in a planetary body's orbit the Goldilocks Zone when it is in a favorable position to support life. This zone for the planet is not too hot or too cold. So Earth's northern hemisphere, in its "just right" zone, is spared some of the heat of the Sun when summer comes because we are at our farthest point away from it. When the cold of January comes Earth is at its closest to the Sun (perihelion) for a little extra warmth.

Early risers can see Mars less than a degree below the Pleiades (the small dipper looking asterism in the constellation Taurus) on July 4 about an hour before sunrise.

Summer is here in the night sky. The Summer Triangle rises in the east each evening parading three bright stars and their constellations. You can see the triangle by visually connecting the brightest star, Vega, in the constellation Lyra to Altair in Aquila (the Eagle), and Deneb in Cygnus (the Swan). Vega is the brightest of the three, and in fact the second brightest star in our northern sky. It glows a steady white and is used by astronomers as the standard measure for the brightness of all stars. Vega was actually the North Star 12,000 years ago. This is because the Earth wobbles on its axis like a spinning top so that the northernmost spot in the night sky changes over time. Vega will once again be the North Star in the year 13,727 (give or take a year).

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Farm Bureau survey says costs up 4% nationwide for July 4th cookout

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. — As Americans prepare to celebrate the Fourth of July, and mark the nation's 250th anniversary, many families will gather in a familiar way: around the grill with burgers, sides, lemonade and dessert.

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation's 2026 Summer Cookout Cost Survey, a classic Independence Day cookout for 10 people will cost \$73.82, or about \$7.38 per person. That is an increase of \$2.90, or 4%, from last year.

The basket includes summer cookout staples such as cheeseburgers, chicken breasts, pork chops, potato chips, pork and beans, fresh strawberries, homemade potato salad ingredients, fresh-squeezed lemonade ingredients, chocolate chip cookies and ice cream.

While this year's total is the highest since Farm Bureau began conducting the summer cookout survey in 2016, the increase closely reflects broader inflation. The cost of the cookout basket rose about 4%, while overall inflation in the United States increased 4.2% over the 12 months ending in May. That means families are seeing higher prices at the grocery store, but this year's cookout cost is generally moving in line with the broader economy.

INFLATION--ADJUSTED COST

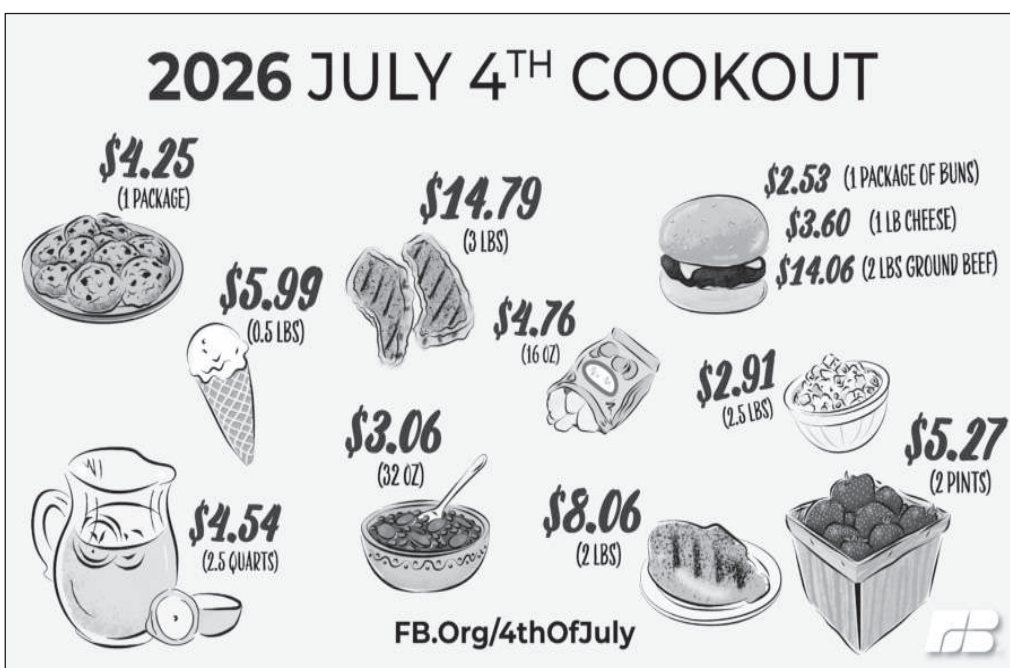
The sticker price of a Fourth of July cookout is higher this year, but inflation-adjusted figures provide perspective. When deflating the value using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the cost of the basket is \$22.03 in 1982-84 dollars, slightly lower than the \$22.06 observed in 2025. On a per-person basis, the inflation-adjusted cost is \$2.20, compared to \$2.21 last year.

In other words, while families are paying more dollars at checkout, the purchasing-power cost of the basket is nearly flat from last year. Inflation-adjusted cookout costs have also remained relatively stable over the last several years and remain below the peak of \$23.84 reached in 2022.

ON THE GRILL

As grills heat up across the country, several of the main proteins on the picnic table are costing more. Two pounds of ground beef increased 73 cents from last year to \$14.06, a 5.5% increase and the highest beef price recorded in this survey. Beef prices remain elevated as ranchers continue to face obstacles to rebuilding the cattle herd such as years of severe drought and elevated operating costs. Those drought conditions reduced the size of the national cattle herd and tightened supplies. Rebuilding takes time, so consumers may continue to see higher beef prices.

Other burger staples had smaller but notice-



able increases. One pound of cheese costs \$3.60, up 6 cents, or 1.7%, from last year. Hamburger buns increased 18 cents to \$2.53, a 7.7% rise, reflecting higher production, labor and transportation costs.

Chicken breasts also moved higher. Two pounds now cost \$8.06, up 27 cents, or 3.5%, from 2025. Pork chops rose as well after dropping last year. Three pounds of pork chops cost \$14.79, up 66 cents, or 4.7%, from 2025. Even with this year's increase, pork chops remain below the 2024 price of \$15.49.

FOURTH OF JULY FIXINS

Side dishes and summer favorites had some of the biggest changes in this year's survey. Strawberries posted one of the largest increases in the basket. Two pints cost \$5.27, up 58 cents, or 12.4%, from 2025. A damaging frost in Florida affected young strawberry plants early in the spring, while higher labor, fuel, refrigeration and transportation costs also continue to put pressure on fresh fruit and vegetable prices.

Lemonade also costs more this year. Ingredients for 2.5 quarts cost \$4.54, up 17 cents, or 3.9%, from last year. Lemon prices increased 18 cents, while sugar held steady at 97 cents per pound. Pork and beans had the largest percentage increase in the basket, rising 13.8% to \$3.06 for 32 ounces. Higher aluminum costs raised the production cost of cans, contributing to the increase. Desserts also moved higher. A package of chocolate chip cookies rose 25 cents to \$4.25, a 6.3% increase. A half-gallon of ice cream increased 30 cents to \$5.99, up 5.3% from last year.

Two tracked items declined in price. Potato salad fell 63 cents to \$2.91, a 17.8% decrease from 2025. Lower egg prices were a major factor, as egg-laying flocks have recovered considerably from highly pathogenic avian influenza, which drove egg prices to historic highs in recent years. Four eggs now cost 71 cents, down from \$1.34 last year. Lower potato prices helped decrease the cost of both potato salad and potato chips. A 16-ounce bag of potato chips fell slightly to \$4.76, down 4 cents, or 0.8%, from 2025.

JULY FOURTH OF JULY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Where you celebrate this year will also impact your wallet. The West is the most expensive region for a Fourth of July cookout at \$80 for 10 people, or \$8 per person, more than \$6 above the national average.

Grill masters in the Northeast will see the lowest regional cost at \$71.35, followed closely by the Midwest at \$71.45 and the South at \$72.08. These regions came in below the national average of \$73.82.

Western shoppers saw the highest prices for several staples, including ground beef, chicken breasts, buns, cheese, chips, cookies, pork and beans, and ice cream. Regional differences also showed up elsewhere: strawberries were most

expensive in the Northeast.

THE FARMER'S SHARE

Higher grocery prices do not necessarily mean higher profits for farmers and ranchers. After expenses, farmers receive less than 6 cents of every food dollar. Most of what consumers pay at the grocery store reflects costs that come after the farm gate, including processing, packaging, transportation, marketing and retail.

At the same time, the farmer's cost of production continues to climb. Farmers and ranchers are paying more for labor, fuel, fertilizer, equipment, land, repairs and other inputs, while many commodity prices remain below recent highs. Those pressures make it harder for farms to absorb weather disasters, animal disease, supply chain disruptions and market volatility.

Even in a challenging farm economy, farmers and ranchers remain committed to producing a safe, affordable and abundant food supply. But keeping that food supply strong will require support and stability.

That commitment is especially important as the U.S. celebrates 250 years of independence and looks toward the future. A strong, modernized, five-year farm bill will help provide the support, stability, research investment and risk management tools farmers and ranchers need to keep America's food supply strong.

CONCLUSION

This year's Fourth of July cookout will cost more, with the national average rising to \$73.82 for 10 people. Ground beef, pork chops, chicken breasts, strawberries, hamburger buns, pork and beans, cookies and ice cream all contributed to the increase, while lower potato salad and potato chip costs helped offset some of the rise. The broader picture, however, is more balanced. The 2026 cookout basket increased at about the same rate as overall inflation, and CPI-adjusted costs are nearly flat compared to last year.

As families gather for cookouts, parades and fireworks this Independence Day, the meal on the table reflects both the pressures of today's economy and the strength of America's food system. Keeping that system strong will require continued investment in the farmers and ranchers who make these traditions possible.

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By Buddy Ray, Murfreesboro Church of Christ

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it agrees or disagrees with our own convictions. The hearing of faith is completely in agreement with what God commands us to do to be saved. We are to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29) Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sin-

ners; and purify your hearts you double-minded. James 4:7,8 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up. James 4:10 Therefore, to him that knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin. James 4:17 Paul and James insist by inspiration that the hearing of faith involves paying clear attention to God's revealed will and being faithfully obedient to it. To do less is sin. To do more is also rebellious. If you are a child of God, continue to grow in God's grace and truth. If you are not a child of God, be born again of water and the Spirit. Repent and be baptized for the remission of your sins and God will cleanse you and add you to His Church. (Acts 2:38-47).

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ABRIDE FOR ISAAC
ELIEZER, ABRAHAM'S STEWARD HAVING REACHED THE LAND OF HIS MASTER'S BIRTH, THE LAND OF THE CHALDEES, IS NOW READY TO SEEK A WIFE FOR ISAAC, ABRAHAM'S SON...

...IT HAS BEEN A LONG, DRY JOURNEY AND WATER IS THE FIRST CONCERN, FOR BOTH MAN AND BEAST...

YONDER IS THE TOWN WELL!

...THE CARAVAN HALTS AT THE WELL OUTSIDE OF THE CITY OF NAHOR...

O LORD, I WAIT AT THE WELL... SOON, MAIDENS OF THE CITY WILL COME TO DRAW WATER. LET IT BE A SIGN THAT THE DAMSEL WHO GIVES ME WATER, AND MY CAMELS ALSO, BE THE ONE THOU HAST ALREADY APPOINTED AS ISAAC'S WIFE!

ELIEZER AND HIS PARTY WAIT WITH PATIENCE FOR THE WOMEN TO COME AND DRAW THE EVENING WATER FOR IT IS STRICT ETIQUETTE OF THESE ANCIENT DAYS THAT A STRANGER NEVER TAKES WATER FROM A WELL THAT DOES NOT BELONG TO HIM, BUT WAITS UNTIL IT IS OFFERED TO HIM AND HIS ANIMALS!

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BEVERAGES

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ACROSS

1. Every which way
5. *Whole milk has about 8 grams of this per cup
8. Sound rebound
12. Not yet final, in law
13. Tibetan teacher
14. Twig of willow tree
15. Bad wishes
16. Like certain tradition
17. Separated
18. *Fermented tea
20. Trampled
21. Hermey and Buddy, e.g.
22. Pronoun
23. *Bee's favorite beverage
26. Like blabbermouth
30. Freud's concern
31. Becoming
34. Uncontrolled swerve
35. Type of heron
37. Unidentified John
38. Pocket change
39. Ding follower
40. Kenya's neighbor
42. "Five down" fighter pilot
43. Cuddle, romantically speaking
45. Eras
47. Film director's cry
48. Opinion
50. ___ Bora
52. *Blended fruit beverage
55. *Most-consumed beverage
56. Abbreviation, abbr.
57. Miniature whirlpool
59. The Brady Bunch, e.g.
60. Hanukkah gift
61. Came by horse
62. "For ___ the Bell Tolls"
63. Schiller's famous poem, e.g.
64. One-armed bandit

DOWN

1. "Wheel of Fortune" purchase
2. *Most popular choice for official state beverage
3. Nobel Peace Prize capital
4. It's meant to be
5. Travesty
6. Wet nurses
7. Samoan money
8. *Caffeinated "shot"
9. Bye, in Palermo
10. *Group of bovine milk producers
11. Table scrap
13. Mona Lisa's home
14. Presidential promises, e.g.
19. Detonation
22. *Plant-based "milk" choice
23. Must-haves
24. Encourage (2 words)
25. Cornua, sing.
26. Late country singer-songwriter Campbell
27. Relating to ilium
28. *Popular party beverage
29. Affirmatives
32. Competitive advantage
33. New Zealand's bygone bird
36. *Milk+carbonated water+syrup
38. Head of a body part, anatomically speaking
40. Preceding month
41. Send back to mother country
44. Road-crossing helper
46. Not these or those
48. Implant
49. Like duchess or count
50. Johann Sebastian of music fame
51. Sgt. Snorkel's dog
52. Palm starch
53. Object of worship
54. Starchy tuber
55. "Amazing!"
58. Thus far

CROSSWORD												
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HEAT Continued from Page 2

focus on staying hydrated, cool and connected. Drink water every 20 minutes even if you're not thirsty, avoid sugary or overly caffeinated drinks as well as alcohol and eat healthy food to replace any salt you lost while sweating. Know where air-conditioned places like malls, libraries and cooling centers or shaded spots outside are in case your air conditioning goes out. Take cool showers and baths, limit outdoor activity to cooler times of day like early morning or late evening and wear loose clothing in lighter colors. You should also wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen (with at least SPF 15) to protect yourself from the sun. Those who have a chronic condition, are pregnant or are taking medication should keep in touch with their doctors, and everyone should sign up to receive local alerts about cooling centers.

CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

Aside from checking in with loved ones and neighbors, keep an eye on people in your area who are more vulnerable to heat illnesses. Call, text, visit or look out for older people, outdoor workers, athletes and others as temperatures rise. Help them stay hydrated by reminding them to regularly drink water, and remind them to wear lighter, looser clothes to help them stay cool. Create a plan in case someone's air conditioning goes out, and gather supplies to help keep electronics charged and medicines cool in case of a power outage. Remember not to leave children or pets alone in a parked car, check in at least twice a day on community members who are most at risk and encourage athletes and outdoor workers to use a buddy system.

ACT FAST TO TREAT HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

If your body cannot cool itself down properly, you may develop heat illness. Some are more serious than others, but there are different types of heat-related conditions to look out for this summer.

Heat cramps happen when you sweat too much and serve as a warning that your body is overheating. Sit down and rest in the shade, drinking water or a sports drink if needed every 20

minutes. Get medical care if cramps last more than two hours or drinking water makes you feel sick to your stomach.

Heat exhaustion is a result of heavy water and salt loss through heavy sweating. Symptoms include overall weakness, cool and clammy skin, muscle cramps, dizziness, fainting and nausea. Stop to rest and drink water, then loosen your clothes and place a cool, wet cloth on your neck. Go to the emergency room if you start vomiting, don't feel better within an hour or have heart or kidney problems.

Heat stroke is a severe and potentially life-threatening condition that requires immediate medical care, especially if someone loses consciousness. High body temperature, rapid heartbeat, confusion, headache, dizziness or fainting and nausea or vomiting can all signal heat stroke. Call 911 and move the person to

a cooler place, then remove excess layers of clothing. Cool them down with a wet cloth or cool bath and have them drink water or a sports drink if possible.

Keep yourself and your loved ones safe this summer by being aware of the signs of heat-related illnesses. Find more information about preparing for extreme heat at www.redcross.org.

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AGFC urges safe boating practices over July 4 holiday

ARKANSAS -- The coming Independence Day holiday weekend is shaping up to be one of the biggest boating celebrations of the decade. This year, tens of thousands of anglers, waterskiers, kayakers and pleasure boaters will converge on Arkansas water to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Second Continental Congress's formal adoption of the Declaration of Independence. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is asking everyone to enjoy their holiday weekend but to boat responsibly and avoid situations that could ruin the celebration — namely, boating under the influence of alcohol or narcotics.

According to Sgt. Sydney Grant, AGFC Boating Law Administrator, Arkansas game wardens will conduct their annual Operation Dry Water campaign July 3-5 to increase safety on Arkansas water and reduce boating accidents that result from boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

"Operation Dry Water is an annual program where boating enforcement agencies across the country increase water patrols during the Independence Day holiday, the heaviest boating traffic weekend of the year," Grant said. "We always patrol and keep a watchful eye out for intoxicated boaters, but with the holiday landing on a Saturday and many people receiving the day off on Friday, the extended weekend will likely bring many more people to the water. Add in the celebrations for America's

250th birthday, and I expect that total to be even larger."

Boating while intoxicated can be even more dangerous than driving a car while intoxicated, as most boaters have less experience operating a boat. Boats also don't have brakes and are slower to maneuver than cars. These slower reaction times to a sudden danger can be the difference between life and death.

Grant adds that the effects of alcohol are magnified by the conditions that boating creates.

"Sun, heat, wind and wave action all intensify alcohol's impact," Grant said. "A person who normally wouldn't feel much

BOAT Continued on Page 6

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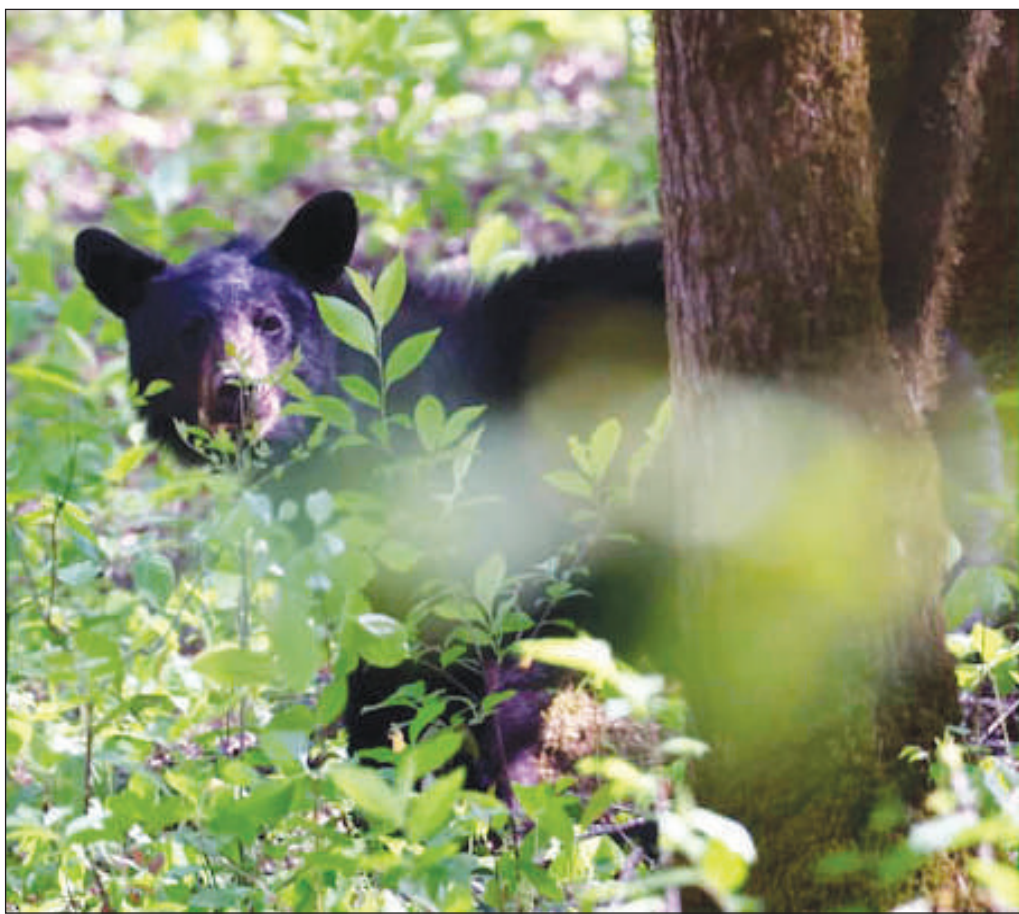
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Bears around, but encounters uncommon BOAT Continued from Page 5

BY TRACI RUSHING
University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture



MONTICELLO, Ark. — As Arkansans spend more time outdoors during the summer months, wildlife experts say residents may notice an increase in black bear sightings, but they emphasize that bears are generally wary of people and rarely pose a threat.

Although Arkansas experienced two tragic black bear attacks last fall — the first fatal attacks in more than a century — Don White, wildlife ecologist and bear expert with the Arkansas Forest Resources Center based at the University of Arkansas at Monticello, said such incidents are exceptionally uncommon for our state.

“Most bears are naturally afraid of people and will leave an area when they know a human is nearby,” said White, who is also the James White Endowed Professor of Wildlife Ecology at UAM. “Their sense of smell is incredibly acute, allowing them to detect us long before we know they are nearby. In most cases, bears quietly move away without ever being seen.”

White said that the lowest likelihood of encountering a bear occurs during winter when bears are typically denning. Sightings are more likely in the spring and fall simply because more people are recreating outdoors in bear territory.

“When you plot the times of the year when black bear-human encounters take place, spring and fall come out on top,” White said. “These are also the times when people are most active in bear country. Whenever people and black bears occur in the same place at the same time, conflicts can occur, although those conflicts are remarkably rare in our state.”

Spring encounters are sometimes associated with female bears protecting young cubs, while fall conflicts are more often tied to food availability.

This time of year, residents may be more likely to spot young male bears moving through new areas. According to Spencer Daniels with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, yearling males are often dispersing from their mother’s territory in search of a home range of their own.

“These young bears stayed the winter with their mother but were kicked out of her territory to start their lives on their own,” Daniels said. “They can travel very long distances in search of a new place to call home. This uptick

in bear activity makes seeing a bear walking on the side of the road or through a wooded area near a home fairly common in Arkansas.”

UNDERSTANDING BLACK BEAR DIETS

Black bears are highly adaptable omnivores, with approximately 75 to 90 percent of their diet consisting of plant material, White said. In spring, they feed heavily on green vegetation, tender shoots, roots and insects. As summer arrives and moves into fall, they shift to berries and fruits such as blackberries, blueberries, pawpaws, persimmons and muscadines. Fall is their most important feeding season as they consume acorns and hickory nuts, often gaining 20 to 30 pounds per week in preparation for winter denning.

Approximately 10 to 25 percent of a black bear’s diet consists of animal matter. As opportunistic feeders, black bears will readily scavenge carrion, including animals found dead in forests or along roadsides, and may occasionally consume fish, bird eggs and small rodents.

While bears primarily rely on natural food sources, they can be attracted to unsecured human food sources.

“Wildlife feeders, unsecured trash with food scraps, and pet and livestock foods left outside are major attractants for bears trying to stock up after a long winter,” Daniels said. “Young male bears are even more likely to take advantage of these foods as they travel to new locations and determine whether an

area holds adequate resources.”

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission encourages residents living in bear country, particularly in the Ozark and Ouachita regions, to remove these attractants to help keep bears wild.

BEING BEAR AWARE

“The best way to avoid conflicts with black bears is to be BearWise,” Daniels said. “Especially never intentionally feed bears.”

Intentionally feeding bears not only increases the likelihood of property damage and nuisance behavior but can also create dangerous situations by causing bears to lose their natural fear of people, White said.

Although summer bear sightings may become more common as both people and bears remain active across the landscape, White emphasized that Arkansas’ black bear population continues to pose very little risk to people.

“Bears are simply going about the business of being bears,” White said. “Seeing one can be an exciting reminder that Arkansas still has healthy wildlife populations. With a little awareness and by removing attractants, people and bears can continue to co-exist successfully.”

For more information about living responsibly in bear country, visit BearWise.org.

effect of one or two beers in an air-conditioned home may find themselves impaired by the same amount of alcohol on the water.”

Even passengers should pay attention to their consumption levels.

“Drinking too much can lead to a dangerous situation or poor decisions for anyone,” Grant said. “We’ve also caught many people who enjoyed a day on the water, but then got in a car for the ride home, still under the effect of alcohol. Practicing a little restraint during your boating day helps us make both the roadways and waterways of the state safer during this big family holiday.”

Grant emphasizes that Operation Dry Water isn’t a competition or initiative to see how many tickets wardens can issue; in fact, it’s much the opposite.

“If we didn’t have to give a single ticket this weekend for intoxicated boating, I think every game warden in Arkansas would celebrate,” Grant said. “Our job is to make sure people can enjoy the water safely and come home with great stories from their weekend. We’re not here to ruin the fun; we simply ask everyone to be responsible, avoid overindulging, and always make sure you have a sober boat operator and designated driver.”

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ACCEPTING CONSIGNMENTS BY APPOINTMENT MONDAY - FRIDAY FROM 9AM-5PM.

CONSIGNORS CONTACT TODD MORRIS FOR MORE INFO (870) 845-9200

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Encouraged by our educators

By Bruce Westerman
United States Representatives (AR-04)

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- For decades, a student’s dyslexia diagnosis meant falling behind or underperforming academically with long-lasting impacts reverberating into adulthood. Studies have shown that students who lack critical reading skills are more likely to drop out of school early, less likely to find well-paying jobs, and even risk time in the criminal justice system.

This week, we’ve seen some great reports coming out of the state of Arkansas regarding improved student outcomes on state assessment exams. This is especially encouraging given that the National Council on Teacher Quality found that 94% of Arkansas teacher preparation programs have scored a grade of A or A+ for preparing elementary school teachers to use science-backed instructional methods for teaching reading, placing Arkansas well above the national average of 53%.

Before my time in Congress, I had the privilege of serving as school board president and in the Arkansas General Assembly where I dealt more closely with education policy. Because of this, I developed a greater understanding around dyslexia and how important a scientific understanding of this learning disability is. But understanding alone is not enough. It is also necessary to have science-of-reading based instructional programs to help students with dyslexia. With 94% of our higher education reading programs that teach our educators how to teach in Arkansas scoring A or A+, the expectations for our students is high.

Coming to Congress and serving as co-chair of the Congressional Dyslexia Caucus, I’ve used my deeper understanding of dyslexia to be a strong advocate for legislation like the 21st Century Dyslexia Act that highlights the need for a more scientific understanding and approach to prevent the harm that unidentified learning disorders can inflict on our young students.

The results we’ve seen in recent reports are certainly encouraging. Beyond that, they are further proof that when we give students and teachers the tools they need to gain a greater understanding around dyslexia and other learning disabilities, everyone comes out as a winner. Students feel more encouraged and eager to learn; teachers feel empowered and equipped to support their students in reaching their full potential.

Learning disabilities should never prevent students from succeeding in the classroom. I’m certainly encouraged by these excellent results and grateful for the leadership on the state level and in Congress to continue advocating for efforts that create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all learners.

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