

**ON A ROLL  
LADY ACES  
DOMINATING  
9TH DISTRICT  
PAGE B1**



**ABOUT THIS ISSUE**

It's mass-delivery day for the Messenger-Inquirer. We are delivering a newspaper to every household in Daviess County. This special issue has more sections, more news and more advertising than a usual Thursday edition. Nonsubscribers, if you would like to receive the Messenger-Inquirer every day, call us at 926-0123. Once you sample what the Messenger-Inquirer has to offer, we believe you'll want to come back for more.

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Vol. 145, No. 108

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2019

Owensboro, Ky. • \$1.49

## Contaminants found in water

OMU says it's safe

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

At least two of the contaminants Owensboro Municipal Utilities discovered last year in the groundwater around its coal-fired Elmer Smith Station have also been detected at potentially unsafe levels in local drinking water supplies.

In 2014, molybdenum, a naturally occurring trace mineral that is also found in coal ash, was detected in OMU's drinking water at a level almost four times higher than the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's lifetime health advisory. Hexavalent chromium, a toxic chemical compound partially derived from the burning of coal, was also discovered at a level more than 766% higher than the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's public health goal and nearly double the state and national average.

These contaminants are unregulated, however, and local drinking water is in compliance with all relevant state and federal regulations. The EPA doesn't consider unregulated contaminants when determining whether water is legally safe to drink, but according to a statement the EPA drafted Wednesday, the agency may recommend additional actions.

"When exceedances of health advisory



Kevin Frizzell



Barbara Bennett, an Owensboro Municipal Utilities customer who is associated with the Sierra Club environmental activist group, said she has concerns about the quality of the water in OMU's drinking water aquifers.

Photo by Austin Ramsey, Messenger-Inquirer | aramsey@messenger-inquirer.com

SEE WATER/PAGE A2

## City calculates first year of incremental tax revenues

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

State and local incremental tax revenue in the active downtown and Gateway Commons tax increment financing districts totaled more than \$1.3 million, according to city officials.

That is money the city will be due back either from its own general fund or directly from the state government in order to fund public infrastructure projects within those boundaries. At least a year's worth of tax-calculated growth plus the consumer price index since the city's 2015 baseline and minus 20 percent the state will keep all factored into calculated that number.

Barring the state's audit, it represents the amount of money the city will transfer into four separate TIF accounts for infrastructure reimbursements later this year.

"Our two tax increment financing districts were activated last year," said City Manager Nate Pagan. "That means that 2018 is the first year for which we will receive payments from the state for the incremental taxes generated in the TIF districts."

Owensboro's finance staff have completed the arduous process

involved in collecting tax revenue data from all 575 businesses that are either located in both districts or did work within them last year. That process began in December, and Finance and Support Services Director Angela Hamric said it has been both tedious and time-consuming.

"I'll have to say it was a whole lot of mailings, phone calls, assisting with form preparation (and) online research trying to find contacts and information — hours upon hours — to get where we are," she said. "But I'm happy to say that we have successfully pulled together this massive amount of information required by the state for us to submit for reimbursement.

A project like this takes the utmost in organizational and tracking skills and a keen eye to catch something that doesn't look quite right so it can be corrected."

The state increment downtown was \$750,000, while the local increment was \$210,000. The state increment at Gateway Commons was \$300,000, and the local increment was \$110,000. All of those numbers surpassed the preliminary calculations



Nate Pagan



Angela Hamric

SEE TAX/PAGE A2

## Daviess population tops 101,000

Several area counties losing residents

BY KEITH LAWRENCE  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Daviess County's population continues to grow slowly, a new U.S. Census report shows.

The latest estimate, released late Wednesday, says that as of July 1, 2018, the county had 101,104 residents — up 558 from a year earlier.

It was 96,715 during the last census in 2010.

That might not sound like much growth, but the esti-

mates say several western Kentucky counties lost population last year.

Hancock lost 20; Ohio, 49; McCracken, 51; Muhlenberg, 149; Hopkins, 301; and Henderson, 398.

And Jefferson County only grew by 140.

Last year's gain was a little stronger than the census estimated for the previous year when it said Daviess County added 530 residents.

Daviess Judge-Executive Al

Mattingly and Candace Castle Brake, president of the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce, both see the county's slow growth as good.

"I think it speaks well to the efforts of the city and county and our efforts at economic development, workforce development and the marketing of the community by the convention and visitors bureau," Mattingly said.

"Apparently, people are starting to understand what we as a community have

SEE DAVIESS/PAGE A2

## 'Shake, Rattle & Stroll': Popular Friday After 5 returns May 17

BY KEITH LAWRENCE  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Get ready to "Shake, Rattle & Stroll."

That's the theme of Friday After 5's 23rd season of free downtown entertainment every Friday from May 17 to Aug. 30.

More than 60 bands are scheduled to perform.

"Our guests can enjoy almost a mile of music and fun for free this season," Meredith Keller, festival

chairwoman, said Wednesday.

"We're producing seven venues of entertainment every Friday for 16 consecutive weeks filled with music, food and fun with the magic of the Lazy Dayz playground, costume characters and special themes each week."

The festival draws about 50,000 people to the riverfront each summer.

New this year will be "Glenn's Movie Night at the

Museum" — five free family-friendly movies at the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum.

The lineup includes "Grease," "Back to the Future," "The Wizard of Oz," "The Sandlot" and "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?"

The movies will be sponsored by Glenn Family Services, which also sponsors Gospel on the River and Worship

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Weather forecast: High 67, Low 48. Details, Page A8.

Advertisement for John Deere equipment. Includes 3032E Compact Tractor (\$139), 1023E Sub-Compact Tractor (\$99), Z930M Zero-Turn Mower (\$300 OFF), and X330 & X350 Select Series Mowers (NOW \$300 OFF). Contact information for Wright Implement in Owensboro, KY.

# Ivanka Trump says Africa would inspire father

BY CATHERINE LUCEY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast — On a trip to Africa to promote women's economic empowerment, Ivanka Trump said Wednesday the White House should be judged by its actions toward a continent that her father has privately disparaged.

In an Associated Press interview, the president's daughter and senior adviser pointed to visits to Africa by herself, first lady Melania Trump and others, and said: "Our commitment to Africa is clear." She added that she hopes Presi-

dent Donald Trump will visit. "I've been deeply, deeply inspired by my trip here. And I think he will be as well," she said.

Ivanka Trump spoke on the last day of her four-day trip to Ethiopia and Ivory Coast, which has featured a mix of carefully choreographed diplomacy and visits to business ventures as she advances a White House program to give an economic boost to women in the developing world.

The trip was initially viewed with some skepticism, given the president's persistent efforts to cut foreign aid and his disparaging comments about African countries.

But there no public signs of tension as his daughter posed for photos with officials and announced development grants.

The president was criticized last year after his private comments referring to "s—hole countries" in Africa and other regions were leaked to journalists. "Our actions are speaking for themselves in terms of our dedication to seeing Africa prosper," Ivanka Trump said. "I'm very excited about continuing my work to specifically focus on advocating and advancing the role of women on this continent and beyond."

## DAVISS

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

known for years," he said. "We are a great place to live, work and raise a family."

"This is just the kind of news we love to hear," Brake said. "The fact that we continue to grow steadily is an affirmation of Greater Owensboro's placemaking efforts and talent recruitment/retention strategies. The quality of life that our community has to offer is putting us on the map in different ways every day. And this steady growth is a by-product."

She added, "This kind of sustained momentum is what happens when people across the community work toward a common goal of making us the best Owensboro we can be."

Warren County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the state.

It added 2,269 people between 2017 and 2018, the census report estimates.

That took Warren's population to 131,264.

Hardin County also grew rapidly last year.

The report said it added 2,130 people, making its total population 110,356.

Fayette County grew by 1,587, the report said, taking it to 323,780.

The Owensboro metropolitan area — Daviess, Hancock and McLean counties — had a population last year of 119,114, the census bureau estimated.

That was up from 118,543 the previous year.

It was 114,772 in 2010 during the last census.

Population estimates for cities will be released later this year.

Keith Lawrence, 270-691-7301, klawrence@messenger-inquirer.com

## TAX

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Commonwealth Economics projected except the state increment at Gateway Commons. That could be due to delays in several projects at the multimillion-dollar lifestyle center near the Kentucky 54 retail corridor, Hamric said.

Projects the city could use for incremental revenue include construction of the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum, second downtown public parking garage or relighting of the Glover H. Cary "Blue" Bridge.

In February, officials with the city projected that modifications made last year to Kentucky's tax code would have a net positive effect on the amount of money the city could be due in reimbursements.

TIFs are financial economic development tools that apply a certain percentage of state and local tax growth dollars within a geographic footprint to pre-approved public infrastructure projects that helped facilitate that growth.

Slightly higher state tax rates in both of Owensboro's active TIFs won't necessarily mean more public infrastructure dollars in the long run, because both special districts will eventually expire in 2038 or once they reach an economic growth cap set by the state. Still, officials say higher tax rates will mean that dollars accumulate faster and the caps may even be reached before prior projections.

The Gateway Commons TIF is capped at \$20.5 million and the downtown TIF is capped at \$24.5 million.

Austin Ramsey, 270-691-7302, aramsey@messenger-inquirer.com, Twitter: @austinramsey

### POPULATION SHIFT

County 2017 2018 change

#### KENTUCKY

Christian	71,252	71,671	417
Daviess	100,546	101,104	558
Fayette	322,193	323,780	1,587
Hancock	8,778	8,758	-20
Hardin	108,226	110,356	2,130
Henderson	45,989	45,591	-398
Hopkins	45,369	45,068	-301
Jefferson	770,377	770,517	140
McCracken	65,397	65,346	-51
McLean	9,219	9,252	33
Muhlenberg	30,923	30,774	-149
Ohio	24,136	24,087	-49
Warren	128,995	131,264	2,269

#### INDIANA

Perry	18,988	19,102	114
Spencer	20,417	20,327	-90
Vanderbergh	180,900	180,974	74

## WATER

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Levels of unregulated contaminants are identified in drinking water, EPA recommends that states consider additional actions, such as taking additional sampling, notifying the public and, if necessary, conducting mitigation," the statement read. "EPA will continue to support state and local actions as they work to address drinking water concerns in their communities."

Officials at OMU say it is not yet possible to determine the source of the contaminants.

In small amounts, molybdenum is part of a healthy diet, but in excess, it has been linked with a change in blood chemistry that spikes the body's production of uric acid and causes gout-like symptoms, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

Federal code regulations list hexavalent chromium, or chromium-6, as cancer-causing. High exposure reportedly increases a person's risk of developing oral or intestinal cancers.

Last month, the Messenger-Inquirer reported that both molybdenum and chromium-6, among other contaminants, had been detected by a groundwater monitoring system in 2018 around ponds where OMU temporarily stores the power plant's spent coal ash. The amount of molybdenum, in fact, exceeded the EPA's groundwater protection standards, triggering the installation of an additional monitoring well and requiring that OMU assess potential corrective measures.

Those ash ponds are very near 11 of Owensboro's more than 60 municipal drinking water production wells, and drawing on comparisons between the utility's own data may lead to one of the nation's clearest examples of coal ash drinking water contamination, said Washington D.C.-based Earthjustice Senior Counsel Lisa Evans.

"It seems to me that there's a red flag here — that the contamination that was documented by the Environmental Working Group in 2014 is the same contamination that we're seeing in the coal ash ponds that are very close to the (drinking) water intakes," she said. "I understand that OMU (may not) believe that's the source, but good pro-

### IS MY WATER SAFE TO DRINK?

In 2014, Owensboro Municipal Utilities detected levels of two drinking water contaminants — molybdenum and hexavalent chromium — that surpassed an EPA health advisory and what the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment has set as a public health goal whereby it can assure that the contaminants pose no risk to health. No further testing has been done since then, and both of those contaminants (among many others) were also detected in the groundwater near OMU's coal-fired Elmer Smith Station. Drinking water wells are just a stone's throw away.

OMU's drinking water, however, remains in compliance with all relevant state and federal regulations.

If you do have concerns about either of these contaminants, the Environmental Working Group recommends a reverse osmosis filter plumbed-in to a separate tap. Reverse osmosis systems utilize pressure and semi-permeable membranes to filter out up to 99% of waterborne pollutants and contaminants from water. The EWG's updated water filter buying guide can be found online at ewg.org/tapwater/water-filter-guide.php.

protective practices require that OMU test the water for the contaminants that are in that groundwater. It's common sense and good practice to make sure that drinking water doesn't contain unsafe levels of contamination."

OMU was only required to test for molybdenum and chromium-6 in 2014 during the third iteration of the EPA's Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule, which applies a new list of scientifically derived contaminants every five years to annual tests water utilities are already required to do.

According to Sonya Dixon, a spokeswoman with the utility, OMU issued a UCMR report in 2014 because public notification is only required when contaminants reach detectable levels. During the 2004 and 2009 iterations of the rule, there were none.

Although the EPA sets minimum safe drinking water contaminant level advisories for molybdenum in its 2018 Drinking Water Standards and Health Advisories report, the transition metal is, for now, an unregulated contaminant, and it is not among those OMU will be required to test for during the fourth iteration of the UCMR later this year.

The EPA lists specific one-day and 10-day healthy limits of molybdenum for a 22-pound child, and OMU drinking water surpassed both of those in some cases, but, because it remains unregulated, surpassing those limits is not illegal nor does it require any further testing.

The agency will use data it collected from the third UCMR round of testing in deciding whether there is a substantial likelihood that the contaminant will occur in public water systems with a frequency and at levels of public health concern, but that determination may not be made until 2021.

"If I lived in Owensboro, I would be on red alert,"

said Wendy Bredhold, a senior campaign representative for the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign in Indiana and Kentucky. "I would want to know how my water source is being protected because coal ash is not on people's radar. When people look at coal-fired power plants, they're always worried about air quality, but in order to clean up the air, we've created a drinking water problem. It's every coal power plant's dirty little secret that these problems exist."

OMU supplies the city and three surrounding county water districts or associations with water from a deep aquifer that borders the Ohio River from downtown Owensboro northeast to Elmer Smith Station. There, OMU's wellhead protection plan indicates that, instead of flowing north toward the river, groundwater that feeds the aquifer flows directly toward drinking water wells, partly because of the suction vacuum they cause underground.

Barbara Bennett, who is associated with the Sierra Club in western Kentucky and is an OMU customer herself, said she is particularly concerned about what these reports may indicate about the levels of molybdenum in the city's drinking water aquifer.

"I have been very proud to be from a community that has municipal utilities," Bennett said. "I think that's a very responsible thing for a community to provide, and, for the most part, it's very cost-effective for the citizens of a community who have municipal-provided utilities — not private enterprise. Most of us, myself included, take for granted that it will be safeguarded. I take clean water for granted."

Although most Daviess County water districts reported similar levels of molybdenum and chromium-6 during the 2014 UCMR, not all did. The East Daviess County Water Association, for example,

detected no molybdenum in drinking water, pointing to the extreme range of reportable data samples returned. True also is that only the highest reportable ranges of molybdenum and chromium-6 were unsafe, according to the EPA, Environmental Working Group and California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment health guidelines.

In a phone interview last week, OMU General Manager Kevin Frizzell said he fully trusts that local water is safe to drink. Safety, he said, is a daily priority that the utility takes seriously.

OMU's newest groundwater monitoring well, in fact, has returned preliminary data with lower concentrations of molybdenum than the initial 2018 tests had shown, he said.

"You take multiple samples so you make sure you've got a good database of analysis," Frizzell said. "(From) the initial sample that we've done there, though, we are not seeing that molybdenum at (the plant) boundary. But that's just initially; we have more sampling to do under the rule. The purpose of adding this well is really to see how far away from the presumed source — which, in our case, would be the ash pond — that the constituent may have traveled. It's really independent of where other wells may be. Like I said, it's very preliminary data. I wouldn't make a judgment on what that means either way, whether we saw molybdenum or we didn't. I do think it's encouraging that we didn't, but we have to go through the process of the sampling rounds and the analysis to make sure that we understand and that we properly analyze the data. It's not uncommon, in these situations ... for all these facilities to have some level of some constituents at the ash pond boundary."

Molybdenum ore does exist naturally in bedrock across North America. In 2017, researchers at Duke

University and The Ohio State University determined that numerous coal ash disposal sites in southeastern Wisconsin were not the source of high levels of molybdenum contamination there, despite what many environmental groups had claimed.

Using forensic isotopic fingerprinting and age-dating techniques, the researchers were able to distinguish between what would be relatively young molybdenum recharged by the burning of coal and much older molybdenum ore with unique ratios of boron and strontium isotopes that exists naturally.

Data the new well gives OMU may lead it to do further testing, Frizzell added. He said he has not ruled out choosing to test for molybdenum or chromium-6 regularly, even though that isn't required by the EPA at this time.

Asked whether he personally believed that the EPA should crack down on unregulated contaminants that are linked to coal ash, Frizzell had a mixed response.

"There is a lot of science and analysis that is done to set these levels, and I'm not qualified to (determine that)," he said.

"I don't have access to all that data and all the information that they use to set these levels. The reality is, they have not yet, so it's not of a high level of concern to the EPA, and, if you look at that lifetime level, that's based on a certain amount of liters of drinking water with those amounts of, in this case, molybdenum in them consistently. We haven't seen that. ... We have a range, and that range likely changes over time. The other thing with molybdenum is, it is naturally occurring. There may be some level that's already there. Certainly, it also is a component that we see in the fly ash, so I'm not saying that is all of it. I don't want to give that impression. I think we have to look at, from our perspective, what is EPA telling us? What are they regulating? What are they focusing on? And that's what we focus on to make sure we are in compliance with those regulations and providing quality drinking water to our customers."

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## MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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'Solid' debut

John Augenstein shoots 73 in first PGA round • Page C1

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BEST OF BESSIE

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2019

Owensboro, Ky. • \$1.49

## Contaminant a factor in plant closing

### OMU officials respond to water quality story

BY AUSTIN RAMSEY  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

The discovery of at least one groundwater contaminant near Owensboro's only coal-fired power plant last year played a small role in the City Utility Commission's decision to push up a timeline by which its units would close, officials said Thursday.

According to Owensboro Municipal Utilities General Manager Kevin Frizzell, when it was determined that the trace element molybdenum had been detected at a statistically

significant level in the groundwater near Elmer Smith Station's temporary coal ash disposal site, he and others considered the cost of bringing that site back into compliance with federal regulations. Retrofitting the three coal ash ponds there could have cost OMU upward of \$40 million, Frizzell said — a financial factor among many that led the public utility to schedule the plant for closure next year and at least one year ahead of schedule.

"It did have some impact because we knew to (retrofit the ponds) we would have to spend \$30 (million) to

\$40 million," he said. "It wasn't directly tied into the decision we made, but it was one of many, many financial factors we considered."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gives utilities with coal ash contamination levels above the groundwater protection standard until October of next year to retrofit or close them down. OMU is scheduled to stop burning coal at the Elmer Smith Station on June 1, 2020.

Frizzell's comments Thursday came after the Messenger-Inquirer reported that some of the same con-

taminants found in the groundwater near the coal ash ponds were also present in local drinking water supplies — at potentially unsafe levels, based on EPA guidelines.

In 2014, molybdenum, a naturally occurring trace mineral that is also found in coal ash, was detected in OMU's drinking water at a level almost four times higher than the EPA's lifetime health advisory. Hexavalent chromium, a toxic chemical compound partially derived from the burning of coal, was also discovered at a level more than 766% higher than the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's



Kevin Frizzell



Sonya Dixon

SEE WATER/PAGE A2

## Eight indicted on federal firearms charges

BY JAMES MAYSE  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Local and federal officials announced Thursday that eight city residents have been indicted on federal firearms charges, a move that officials say will hopefully deter others from engaging in gun crimes in the future.

U.S. Attorney Russell Coleman announced the indictments while flanked by other local and federal officials Thursday morning at the Owensboro Police Department.

In announcing the indictments, officials criticized the state's criminal justice system, which offers parole to offenders as an alternative to incarceration. Parole doesn't exist in the federal system.

"It's frustrating for our state prosecutors as well, but the deterrent effect of our state court has been marginalized," Coleman said in an interview after Thursday's presentation.

The indictments are "going after the worst offenders," Coleman said when asked about the decision to take the cases to the federal grand jury. "We are looking to where we have some tools that have an impact on violent crime."

The eight men indicted were served with warrants earlier this



Photo by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer | geans@messenger-inquirer.com

United States Attorney Russell M. Coleman, right, speaks Thursday during a press conference at the Owensboro Police Department as Owensboro Police Chief Arthur Ealum stands at left. Coleman announced that a federal grand jury has returned felony indictments against individuals in Owensboro and promised to be better partners outside of the Louisville region.

SEE CHARGES/PAGE A2

## Report: Trump tried to end probe

BY NANCY BENAC,  
CHAD DAY, ERIC TUCKER  
AND MICHAEL BALSAMO  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Public at last, special counsel Robert Mueller's report revealed to a waiting nation Thursday that President Donald Trump tried to seize control of the Russia probe and force Mueller's removal to stop him from investigating potential obstruction of justice by the president. Trump was largely thwarted by those around him who refused to go along.



President Donald Trump

Mueller laid out multiple episodes in which Trump directed others to influence or curtail the Russia investigation after the special counsel's appointment in May 2017. Those efforts "were mostly unsuccessful, but that is largely because the persons who surrounded the President declined to carry out orders or accede

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### INSIDE

- Key takeaways from the report;
  - Congress faces obstruction dilemma
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### Correction

A story on Page A1 Saturday about the list released by the Diocese of Owensboro of credibly accused priests should have said William Odom-Green was dismissed from public ministry by the Diocese of Oakland in 1999.

## Lawmakers call legislative session a success

BY JAMES MAYSE  
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Members of the Owensboro area's legislative delegation said Thursday morning that the 2019 General Assembly session was a success, with more than 200 bills passed, improvements to school safety made and progress completed on reducing pension contribution spikes for agencies such as universities and health departments.

But legislators' work on pension increases was vetoed by Gov. Matt Bevin, who said he would call a special session before July for lawmakers to fix what Bevin sees as problems with the bill.

Area House and Senate members who spoke at Thursday's forum at the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce said Bevin should not call a special session without first putting forward a pension



Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | awarren@messenger-inquirer.com

Republican Rep. Suzanne Miles, second from left, answers questions about the 2019 General Assembly session during a Legislative Recap forum on Thursday morning at the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce. Sen. Matt Castlen left, Rep. Jim Gooch and Rep. Scott Lewis, far right, also took turns answering questions during the forum for chamber members.

plan that both the House and Senate will accept.

The forum, for chamber members, was attended by

Republicans Sen. Matt Castlen, Rep. Suzanne Miles, Rep. Jim Gooch and Rep. Scott Lewis. Democrat Rep. Jim Glenn did

not attend.

"When you consider that we didn't have a lot of time, we did get a lot passed" during the 30-day legislative session, Gooch said. Bills legislators mentioned as successes were a school safety bill, and a bill that reduced the property tax rate for heavy equipment such as farm machinery and exempted nonprofit groups from some taxes.

But lawmakers said they disagreed with Bevin's veto of House Bill 358, which kept employer contribution rates for quasi-government agencies the same for the next year, while giving those agencies a way to exit the Kentucky Retirement System. Quasi-government agencies include health departments, rape crisis centers and domestic violence shelters. The bill also affected certain

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# McConnell eyes upping age requirement to buy tobacco

BY BRUCE SCHREINER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOUISVILLE — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Thursday he plans to introduce legislation to raise the minimum age to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21 nationally, rating the health initiative as one of his top priorities. The Senate leader said his bill will cover all tobacco products, including vaping devices. The Kentucky Republican represents a state that for generations was a leading tobacco producer in the U.S. But tobacco production has dropped dramatically for more than a decade in the state.

McConnell said his bill will continue to hold retailers responsible for verifying the age of anyone buying tobacco products. His office said 12 states have already enacted laws raising the minimum legal age to 21.

McConnell made the announcement at the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky in Louisville, an organization that promotes health initiatives. The senator said he intends to introduce the bill next month.

"I hope and I expect this legislation to achieve strong bipartisan support

in the Senate," McConnell said. "As you all know, I'm in a particularly good position to enact legislation. And this is going to be a top priority that I'll be working on."

Smoking, the nation's leading cause of preventable disease, is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths each year.

Smoking-related illness costs to society exceed \$300 billion each year including \$170 billion in direct medical costs, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As of 2017, about 34 million American adults smoked cigarettes, and every day about 2,000 youngsters under age 18 lit up their first cigarette, it said.

McConnell's home state is plagued by high cancer rates connected to smoking.

The Kentucky Republican has been a key player in tobacco-related legislation before. More than a decade ago, McConnell helped win the multibillion-dollar tobacco buyout, which compensated U.S. tobacco growers and others for losing production quotas when the government's price-support program ended.

McConnell said Thursday he considers teen vaping to be the "most serious threat" his new legislation will seek to combat. Vaping is an electronic form of smoking.

The CDC said earlier this year that the vaping boom is the most likely reason that cigarette smoking rates among U.S. high school and middle school students has flattened in the past three years, after declining fairly steadily for decades.

Among officials joining McConnell at the announcement Thursday was former Kentucky Democratic Congressman Ben Chandler, now president and CEO of the foundation.

Chandler said raising the minimum purchase age is an effective way to reduce smoking rates.

"Because most smoking and most other tobacco use starts before the age of 18," Chandler said, "every time we prevent an adolescent or teen from buying tobacco, we increase the probability that he or she will avoid tobacco throughout their lives."

According to CDC data, about 8 percent of high schoolers said they had recently smoked ciga-

rettes in 2018, and about 2 percent of middle schoolers did.

Those findings were about the same seen in similar surveys in 2016 and 2017.

It also found that about two in five high school students who used a vaping or tobacco product used more than one kind, and that the most common combination was e-cigarettes and cigarettes.

Also, about 28 percent of high school e-cigarette users said they vaped 20 or more days in the previous month — nearly a 40 percent jump from the previous year.

The CDC findings came from a national survey conducted last spring of more than 20,000 middle and high school students. It asked if they had used any tobacco products in the previous month.

Kentucky lawmakers rejected this year's state initiative to raise the minimum legal age for buying tobacco products to 21.

That bill had support from the tobacco industry, including Altria, one of the world's largest tobacco companies, which bought a \$13 billion stake in the vaping company Juul in December.



Sen. Mitch McConnell



Photo by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer  
Confiscated firearms are displayed on a table Thursday during a press conference at the Owensboro Police Department.

## CHARGES

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

week by local and federal agents. They are: Joseph Lennon Howell, 32, of the 3000 block of Flamingo Avenue; Larry Andrew Barnett Jr., 31, of the 4900 block of Millers Mill Road; Jeremy Leonard Morrow, 27, of the 3600 block of Arlington Drive; Christen Shane Stewart, 30, of the 700 block of Walnut Park Drive; Seth Aaron Fenwick, 28, of the 100 block of Plum Street; Jonathan Robert Miller, 24, of the 400 block of Cedar Street; Carl Dikeith Warren, 33, of the 3800 block of Bintree Drive; and Jeremy Vance Denson, 27, of the 1400 block of West 11th Street.

All were charged with being a felon in possession of a firearm. Howell was also charged with possession of methamphetamine with the intent to distribute and use of/carrying a handgun in relation to a drug trafficking crime.

A person charged with being a felony in possession of a firearm faces up to 10 years in federal prison upon conviction. A person convicted of possessing a gun while engaged in drug trafficking in the federal system receives additional prison time on top of their trafficking sentence. The additional sentence ranges from five years to life.

Coleman said the federal indictments are in response to increases in violent crime between 2017 and 2018 in Owensboro.

Owensboro Police Chief Art Ealum said in 2017, there were 27 gun-

related incidents in the city. In 2018, however, there were "224 gun-related crimes," he said. This year, there have been 14.

Incidents of officers finding or seizing guns have also increased. In 2017, officers were finding or seizing 15 firearms a month on average, Ealum said. So far this year, he said, officers are finding or seizing an average of 22 firearms a month.

If a person convicted of a gun charge receives a five-year sentence in the federal system, "that's five years of victims that individual won't have," Ealum said.

"My hope would be other would-be offenders would say, 'Johnny just got five years of federal time,'" Ealum said. "Maybe that will cause people to think twice."

L.C. Cheeks Jr., assistant special agent in charge with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Louisville, said the investigation into the eight men began with local agencies. The information came from a variety of sources, he said.

"It can be everything from tips from concerned citizens," Cheeks said. "All information we use to try to identify individuals who are prohibited from possessing firearms, or individuals who are actually using firearms to protect their drug trafficking."

Coleman said other investigations into weapons charges are ongoing in the city.

"There is more to come," he said.

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L.C. Cheeks Jr.

# North Korea says it tested new weapon

BY FOSTER KLUG  
AND KIM TONG-HYUNG  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Thursday that it had test-fired a new type of "tactical guided weapon," its first such test in nearly half a year, and demanded that Washington remove Secretary of State Mike Pompeo from nuclear negotiations.

The test, which didn't appear to be of a banned mid- or long-range ballistic missile that could scuttle negotiations, allows North Korea to show its people it is pushing ahead with weapons development while also reassuring domestic military officials worried that diplomacy with Washington signals weakness.

Separately, the North Korean Foreign Ministry accused Pompeo of playing down the significance of comments by leader Kim Jong Un, who said last week that Washington has until the end of the year to offer mutually acceptable terms for an agreement to salvage the high-stakes nuclear diplomacy. Both the demand for Pompeo's removal from the talks and the weapon test point to North Korea's displeasure with the deadlocked negotiations.

In a statement issued under the name of Kwon Jong Gun, director general of the American Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry, North Korea accused Pompeo of "talking nonsense" and misrepresenting Kim's comments.

At Texas A&M on Monday, Pompeo said Kim promised to denuclearize during his first summit with President Donald Trump and that U.S. officials were working with the North Koreans to "chart a path forward so we can get there."

The North Korean statement said Pompeo was "misrepresenting the meaning of our requirement" for the negotiations to be finalized by the year's end, and referred to his "talented skill of fabricating stories." It said Pompeo's continued participation in the negotiations would ensure that the talks become "entangled" and called for a different counterpart who is "more careful and mature in communicating with us."

## WATER

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

public health goal and nearly double the state and national average.

These contaminants are unregulated, however, and local drinking water is in compliance with all relevant state and federal regulations. The EPA doesn't consider unregulated contaminants when determining whether water is legally safe to drink.

Frizzell criticized the newspaper for failing to report on what he called "a plan for addressing the issue," though he admitted the article was factually correct.

"It is typical for the ash ponds at retired coal-fired plants to be covered and converted into ash landfills," Frizzell read from a

statement Thursday at a regularly scheduled utility commission meeting. "However, our plan is to remove all coal ash from the site so that there will be no coal ash remaining at Elmer Smith after it is closed. To the extent that the Elmer Smith ash ponds may be the source of these contaminants, that source will be completely removed. We will continue to monitor the groundwater throughout this process."

That plan, however, was not intended to address any specific contaminants, said Sonya Dixon, OMU's communications and public relations specialist. It was written in 2016 — two years prior to molybdenum being detected in groundwater near the ash ponds.

"Obviously the decision had been made before the testing for molybdenum," she said. "Certainly, that

was a plan that was already in place when the contaminant was detected, but I think it reinforced the fact that we needed to remove all the ash from that site. It confirmed that was the right plan and not capping the site or another means of cleaning it."

According to the plan, total decontamination of the ash ponds and adjacent areas could take up to three years after the last coal ash deposit. But that doesn't end the process. The EPA requires utilities to monitor groundwater contamination around former coal ash disposal sites for up to 30 years.

Although molybdenum is unregulated in drinking water, the EPA strictly regulates it in groundwater near coal ash ponds.

In Frizzell's statement Thursday, he also said the utility recently kicked off

a Drinking Water System Master Plan Study, the focus of which is source water. It will evaluate future wellfield expansion, maintenance of existing wells and source water quality and quantity.

Such studies are common and considered best management practices by the EPA.

"The amount of coal ash in there is going to be reduced by one-third when Unit 1 shuts down on June 1," said commission Vice Chairman Tony Cecil. "And then when Unit 2 shuts down. ... It's not going to be like we just fill these things in. They're actually going to be removed."

Officials have not said that they are able to determine that coal ash is the source of contamination in the drinking water. Contamination in the ground-

water, however, appears more clear. According to the utility's 2018 groundwater monitoring report, "the source of the observed (statistically significant levels) in the downgradient groundwater monitoring

wells is attributable to the ash ponds."

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## SESSION

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state universities.

"I don't know if there will be a special session" unless the House, Senate and Bevin "can be on the same page" to revise House Bill 358, Lewis said.

Miles, who is a member of the House majority leadership, said Bevin has to put forward a plan lawmakers will accept before attempting to call a special session.

"The main thing I've advocated since the veto is making sure the governor brings us something ahead of time, and all parties are in agreement," Miles said. The bill lawmakers passed was the result of a "lot of

work" with input from the universities, she said.

"The Senate and the House passed a bill there was agreement on," Castlen said. Now, "the governor ... has to present a bill to the House and Senate."

Gooch said he thinks the governor needs to "take the lead" on revising the pension bill.

When asked their views on allowing larger cities like Owensboro the authority to establish local option sales taxes, lawmakers said a change like that would best be made as part of a comprehensive tax reform package.

Smaller cities are able to establish local option sales taxes. Obtaining the ability for Owensboro to start a local option sales tax is a priority for the chamber.

"We need to be careful when we talk about changing things for local rule," Miles said.

Gooch said he thinks "everyone in the General Assembly recognizes local government needs more options to raise revenue," but it would need to be part of a future "comprehensive tax reform package."

Lewis, whose district includes Ohio County, said the local option sales tax has been used effectively in Beaver Dam to create an amphitheater and spur downtown development.

"We just need to make sure when we pass something like that, there are safeguards," he said.

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