

Week in review

THESE SUMMARIES OF FULL STORIES WERE DRAFTED BY AI AND EDITED BY OUR JOURNALISTS

Our best-read local news stories



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This fall, about 550 students are expected at Mary E. Britton Middle School in eastern Lexington, the first middle school to open in Fayette County in over two decades.

New Fayette middle school opens after 21-year gap

Mary E. Britton Middle School opened Aug. 13 as Fayette County’s first new middle school in 21 years. This fall, the school is welcoming 550 students to the \$82 million, 185,000-square-foot facility on Polo Club Boulevard. The school features workforce-focused programming including a Baptist Health-sponsored medical sciences lab and an agricultural science facility with a chicken coop. Principal Dave Hoskins emphasizes preparing students for high school and be-

yond through specialized programs in health sciences, business marketing, and robotics. The facility includes flexible seating, collaborative spaces, and energy-efficient design, with capacity to eventually serve 1,200 students. The school honors Mary Ellen Britton, Lexington’s first licensed female physician and civil rights activist.

Reported by Valarie Honeycutt Spears, published Aug. 12

Lexington to lower property tax rates but bills may rise

Lexington will slightly lower its property tax rates next year, but homeowners may not see decreased bills due to rising property values and new developments. The Lexington-

Fayette Urban County Council approved a tax rate generating a 4% revenue increase during a work session Aug. 12. The city’s portion represents only 6% of total property taxes, with 64% going to Fayette County Public Schools. For a \$260,000 home, the city tax rate drops from 7.6 to 7.5 cents per \$100 assessed value,

reducing the general fund payment from \$197.60 to \$195. Urban services fees for waste pickup, street lights, and street sweeping will decrease slightly from \$455 to \$449.80. The council will hold a public hearing and final vote on Aug. 28.

Reported by Beth Musgrave, published Aug. 13

Lexington considers wastewater pump on horse farm

A Lexington council committee voted Aug. 12 to explore placing a wastewater treatment pump on Mill Ridge Farm, outside the city’s urban service boundary, sparking debate about development implications. The city needs to replace its current pump off Mint Lane as part of an EPA agreement to improve wastewater treatment. Water Quality Director Charlie Martin noted the city typically keeps infrastructure within urban boundaries to prevent sprawl, saying placing expensive infrastructure outside encourages development. Price Bell of Mill Ridge Farm declined to discuss potential development plans but noted sewage overflow issues, stating they had 3 million gallons of sewage on their farm last year. The historic horse farm, founded by Alice Chandler in 1962, has raised over 41 Grade 1 prize winners since 2000. Martin will return with analysis results in March, with the city allocating \$2 million for site analysis.

Reported by Beth Musgrave, published Aug. 13

Fayette County schools superintendent makes \$381,767

Fayette County Public Schools Superintendent Demetrus Liggins earned a total compensation package of \$381,767 for the 2024-2025 school year, making him among the highest-paid superintendents in Kentucky. His pay increase of \$12,625 was automatic under his contract terms and did not require a school board vote. Only Jefferson County superintendents earn more, with current superintendent Brian Yearwood receiving \$389,000 and his predecessor Marty Pollio earning \$636,354 in his final year due to a large sick day payout. The salary disclosure comes as Fayette County

faces a \$16 million budget deficit and increased scrutiny over spending, including a proposed occupational tax that was later withdrawn].

Reported by Valarie Honeycutt Spears, published Aug. 11

Fire destroys lodge hall at Red River Gorge camp

A fire destroyed the lodge hall at Aldersgate Camp and Retreat Center in Ravenna on Aug. 10, according to the Millers Creek Fire Rescue Department. The fire at the United Methodist Church ministry camp was reported just before noon, with crews taking about 15 minutes to reach the scene. Firefighters found heavy flames throughout the first floor, and it took about four hours to control the blaze that spread through the roof. No injuries were reported, and no campers were present as summer camps had concluded. The cause was under investigation.

Reported by Christopher Leach, published Aug. 11

Lexington teen wins national film competition

Seventeen-year-old Jonathan Conley from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School won the nationwide “Mosaic Film Experience: Nourishing Narratives” competition for his short film about food insecurity. Despite having no prior filmmaking experience, Conley created “A Just Plate: Food For All,” which explores food justice and his belief that all people should have access to fresh, affordable meals. The film highlights his internship at Lexington-based nonprofit FoodChain, where he works in an aquaponics farm that grows vegetables without soil using 90% less water than traditional gardening. As a competition winner, Conley received a grant to further his food justice advocacy efforts.

Reported by Jake McMahon, published Aug. 12



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Our best-read U.S. & World stories

Trump takes over DC police, declares emergency

President Donald Trump announced on Aug. 11 he would take federal control of Washington D.C.’s Metropolitan Police Department by invoking the 1973 Home Rule Act, declaring crime in the district “out of control.” Attorney General Pam Bondi now has direct control over MPD, with DEA administrator Terry Cole installed as interim commissioner. Trump also activated hundreds of D.C. National Guard troops to assist law enforcement. The president cited violent crime, car thefts, and homelessness as justification, despite data showing violent crime at seven-year lows. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser called comparisons to war-torn countries “hyperbolic and false.” The ACLU noted the president has limited power to take over police “under special conditions of an emergency.”

Reported by CQ-Roll Call, published Aug. 11

Japan faces record low births in demographic crisis

Japan recorded its lowest birth rate since 1899 with only 686,061 births in 2024, while deaths reached 1.6 million, causing the population to shrink by 908,574 people. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba called the situation “a quiet emergency.” The fertility rate dropped to 1.15 children per woman, despite government incentives and generous parental leave policies. Citizens aged 65 and older now comprise 30% of the population, making Japan second only to Monaco in elderly population proportion. To address labor shortages, Japan is easing immigration rules to triple its foreign workforce by 2040. Experts cite economic anxieties, rising living costs, and childcare burdens as key factors driving the demographic decline.

Reported by Newsweek, published Aug. 8



ABACA PRESS Habboub Ramez/Abaca/Sipa USA

Mourners pray during a group funeral for Palestinians, including journalists and a medic, killed in an overnight Israeli strike, outside the al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, on August 11.

Palestinian journalists killed by Israel mourned in Gaza

Hundreds of mourners gathered in Gaza on Aug. 11 for funerals of five Al Jazeera journalists killed in an Israeli strike on a press tent outside al-Shifa Hospital. The victims included reporter Anas al-Sharif, correspondent Mohammed Qreiqeh, and video journalists Ibrahim Zaher, Moamen Aliwa, and Mohammed Noufal. Israel alleged al-Sharif was a Hamas member, which Al Jazeera denied. The net-

work condemned the “targeted assassination” and accused Israeli forces of deliberately striking journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists called for accountability, while the UN condemned the killings as a “grave breach of international humanitarian law.” At least 242 Palestinian journalists have been killed in Gaza since Oct. 7, 2023.

Reported by UPI, published Aug. 11

Israel’s plan to seize Gaza City sparks international outrage

Israel’s Security Cabinet approved Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s plan to expand military operations to seize control of Gaza City, marking a major escalation in the nearly two-year war. The decision has drawn widespread international condemnation, with UN Secretary General António Guterres expressing grave alarm over potential catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Germany, one of

Israel’s strongest supporters, announced it would suspend military equipment exports that could be used in Gaza. The plan aims to disarm Hamas, return hostages, and establish Israeli security control over Gaza. Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid criticized the decision as catastrophic, warning it could endanger remaining hostages and Israeli soldiers.

Reported by dpa, published Aug. 8

These roundups were produced using AI tools, which summarized stories reported and written by McClatchy and partner journalists. It was edited by journalists in our News division.

Medicare will start using AI to help make coverage decisions

Starting in January, Medicare will test an artificial intelligence pilot program called the Wasteful and Inappropriate Service Reduction (WISer) Model to help make prior authorization decisions for certain procedures. While final decisions remain with human employees, the six-year pilot will cover services like skin substitutes, nerve-stimulator implants, and knee arthroscopy in six states. Critics worry that contractors will be incentivized to deny coverage since they receive payments for reducing costs. CMS Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz said the program aims to “crush fraud, waste, and abuse” while bringing Medicare into the 21st century. A 2024 Senate report found AI tools linked to denial rates 16 times higher than human-only decisions.

Reported by Newsweek, published Aug. 8

Trump replaces Billy Long as IRS boss after less than two months

President Donald Trump replaced IRS Commissioner Billy Long after less than two months on the job, with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent taking over temporarily. Long, who was confirmed in June and sworn in as commissioner with a term lasting through November 2027, announced his departure on social media and plans to become Iceland’s ambassador. Long had limited tax experience and previously supported abolishing the IRS. The agency has been dealing with significant workforce cuts, with plans to reduce its 102,000 employees by up to 40%. Seven different people will have led the IRS since Trump’s election victory.

Reported by UPI, published Aug. 8