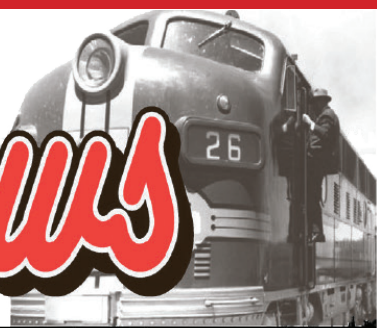


Southern Illinois News



August 2026



New Don Welge Memorial Bridge construction equipment.

Illinois, Missouri celebrate completion of Chester's Don Welge Memorial Bridge

CHESTER – The Illinois Department of Transportation recently joined state and local leaders, along with the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission and the Missouri Department of Transportation, to celebrate the completion of the new Don Welge Memorial Bridge, another achievement made possible by Gov. JB Pritzker's historic, bipartisan Rebuild Illinois capital program. The ribbon cutting marked the culmination of years of collaboration between Illinois and Missouri to replace the vital river crossing connecting Randolph County, Illinois and Perry County, Missouri, via Illinois 150 and Missouri 51.

"The Don Welge bridge is essential to connecting Chester to the region and Illinois to the Midwest," said Illinois Transportation Secretary Gia Biagi. "Through the governor's capital program and the strong partnership with our neighboring states, we look forward to continuing to replace and revitalize these critical

border bridges up and down the state."

The \$307.1 million project replaces the Chester Bridge, built in 1942, with a modern bridge that improves safety, mobility and reliability for the public, commercial vehicles and agricultural traffic that travels between Illinois and Missouri each day. Overseen by MoDOT, the project was made possible through a partnership between Missouri and Illinois, with IDOT investing approximately \$143.2 million in the bridge and the Illinois approach through Rebuild Illinois.

The new bridge features two 12-foot lanes with shoulders, replacing the aging structure with a wider, safer and more

reliable crossing. The improvements ensure the bridge will continue to serve as an important transportation link supporting regional commerce, agriculture, emergency services and local travel in southern Illinois and southeast Missouri.

The bridge, named in honor of longtime Chester resident and bridge advocate Don Welge, carries 7,000 vehicles daily, with approximately 25% being commercial motor vehicle traffic. Visit www.modot.org/donwelge for more information on the project.

Rebuild Illinois is investing a total of \$33.2 billion over six years into the state's aging transportation system, creating

jobs and promoting economic growth. RBI is not only the largest capital program in state history, but also the first that touches all modes of transportation: roads and bridges, transit, waterways, freight and passenger rail, aviation, and bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.

Accomplishments through March 31 of Rebuild Illinois include approximately \$24 billion of improvements statewide on 23,081 miles of highways, 920 bridges and 1,393 additional safety improvements. Visit <https://idot.click/Rebuild-Illinois> for information and highlights of other Rebuild Illinois projects happening throughout the state.



New Don Welge Memorial Bridge Wide View

Rural Health, Inc. Teddy Bear Health Clinic a success



(Southern Illinois) –To help kids become more comfortable with going to the doctor and dentist Rural Health, Inc. (RHI) held a Teddy Bear Health Clinic: Play, Learn & Get Ready for School event on July 14 at the Davie Elementary/ Anna Jr. High School in Anna.

Roughly 100 kids, ages 2 through 8th grade, attended the event where each received a Teddy Bear to name and take through a series of physical, dental, and other "check-up" stations designed to let them experience what it's like to get a physical and dental exam, and learn how to stay healthy and safe. During their visit, kids also received free first aid, dental, and hygiene kits, and a school backpack with supplies for their classroom. Hot dogs, chips, and drinks were provided.

"Physical and dental exams are often frightening to children, but regular check-ups are a vital part of development and establishing healthy habits for life", said Shawna Rhine, RHI Director of Public Relations. "We're thrilled that this event helped so many families make this process easier for their kids."

Families had an opportunity to create memories with their child at the Photo Booth, enjoy the

Story-Time Reading Corner with Stinson Memorial Library, and plan their child's back-to-school physicals, dental, and vaccination appointments with Rural Health, Inc. providers if needed.

Parents and children were also greeted by many local child and family agencies and organizations, Union County Schools, and local businesses, providing support and resources, toys, games, and activities. These included Alliance of Churches, Arrowleaf, Union County



Ambulance Service, Ameren, Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, Centerstone, IL Department of Children and Family Services, Deaconess Illinois Union County Hospital, Dongola Grade School, Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois, Home Health Solutions, Jonesboro Grade School, Shawnee Development Services, Shriners, Southern Illinois Resource and Advocacy Center,

250+ agriculture groups call for bipartisan Senate Farm Bill



More than 250 food and agriculture organizations joined forces to urge the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to advance a bipartisan farm bill out of committee in a letter delivered today. The American Farm Bureau organized the letter, which notes that farmers and ranchers haven’t had a new farm bill in almost ten years.

“As organizations representing a broad swath of food and agriculture, we urge

you to advance the Agricultural Act of 2026 in a bipartisan manner out of the Senate Agriculture Committee,” the letter states.

“The time is now for a full five-year farm bill. American family farms have had to rely on programs and policy that haven’t been updated since 2018, resulting in continued ad hoc support. The President called on Congress to pass a farm bill, and in response, the House has taken action with

bipartisan passage of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026, the first time a farm bill has passed the full House since 2018...

“The Agricultural Act of 2026 builds on this momentum and provides a strong foundation of policy and program updates for the Senate Agriculture Committee to consider and further amend in committee markup. This is the

see **BILL**,
page 3



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BILL
from page 2

furthest we have gotten to a full, modernized farm bill. U.S. food and agriculture, as well as American families who rely upon the food, fiber, and fuel produced from our country’s farmers, ranchers, growers, and producers, deserve a farm bill now.”

Letter:
August 6, 2026
The Honorable John Boozman The Honorable Amy Klobuchar Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Nutrition, and Forestry Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry United

States Senate United States Senate 555 Dirksen Senate Office Building 425 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510 Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Boozman and Ranking Member Klobuchar:

As organizations representing a broad swath of food and agriculture, we urge you to advance the Agricultural Act of 2026 in a bipartisan manner out of the Senate Agriculture Committee. As you know, farmers, ranchers, growers, and producers across the country are grateful for Congress’ continued commitment to American agriculture and rural communities.

U.S. agriculture is facing extreme economic pressure due to several factors. Years of sustained losses due to high inflation and low commodity prices, coupled with severe weather and natural disasters across the country, add layers of uncertainty and stress to farm families already struggling to stay afloat.

The time is now for a full five-year farm bill. American family farms have had to rely on programs and policy that haven’t been updated since 2018, resulting in continued ad hoc support. The President called on Congress to pass a farm bill, and in response, the House has taken action with

bipartisan passage of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026, the first time a farm bill has passed the full House since 2018.

The Agricultural Act of 2026 builds on this momentum and provides a strong foundation of policy and program updates for the Senate Agriculture Committee to consider and further amend in committee markup. This is the furthest we have gotten to a full, modernized farm bill.

U.S. food and agriculture, as well as American families who rely upon the food, fiber, and fuel produced from our country’s farmers, ranchers, growers, and producers, deserve a farm

bill now. We urge you to advance the Agricultural Act of 2026 in a bipartisan manner out of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

By passing a modernized five-year farm bill - ensuring continued access to safe and nutritious food for Americans, delivering year-round E15, updating agricultural research and credit programs, taking steps to reduce input price volatility, expanding support for specialty crops, and more - Congress can help ensure the continued viability and success of American agriculture. Importantly, if the Senate Agriculture Committee fails to advance this farm bill out of

committee, America’s agricultural producers and consumers will go another year without the certainty and support of an updated farm bill. As such, we strongly encourage Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee to advance the Agricultural Act of 2026 out of committee this week in a bipartisan manner.

Thank you for your continued leadership and recognition that investments in our food security help support our nation’s security.

The list of groups can be found at <https://www.fb.org/files/8.6.26-FINAL-Senate-Ag-Farm-Bill-Coalition-Letter.pdf>

See related story on page 4.

Apple picking pointers

Visiting a local apple orchard and picking one’s fill of apples is a quintessential fall activity. Apple picking is an ideal way to spend time outdoors when the weather tends to be cool and pleasant. Gathering fresh-from-the-tree fruit to turn into favorite fall desserts like cobblers and pies is irresistible.

According to the Economic Research Service, Washington state is the leading apple producer in the United States.

It is followed very distantly by New York and Michigan. Apples were first cultivated in Canada by early French settlers, with the first trees planted in Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley around 1633.

Today, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia have become strong players in the apple business. While other areas may not be apple meccas, those looking to pick their own have plenty of options across

North American to enjoy this pastime.

Prior to an apple picking adventure, people can do a little preparation to ensure the afternoon is fun and fruitful.

• **Do some research.** Before individuals head out, they should do research into the available orchards and which apple varieties they specialize in. Ripening seasons vary, so certain varieties may not be available at all times. Call ahead to learn which apples are ripe and when.

• **Visit early.** The best apples are often available early in the season before the trees have been heavily picked over. It’s also a good idea to visit the orchard early in the day, which means cooler temperatures and smaller crowds.

• **Dress appropriately.** Orchards can be dusty, muddy and buggy. The ground also may be uneven. Individuals can wear comfortable clothes and closed-toed shoes that can get dirty.

Also, they should dress in layers, as it can be chilly early in the day and then warmer later on.

• **Pick correctly.** Instead of yanking on the apples, which can damage the tree and apples, people should gently roll or twist the apple upwards from the branch. If the apple is ripe it will detach easily with stem intact.

• **Avoid bruising.** It’s wise to inspect the apples to make sure they are firm and brightly colored.

Those with bruising or insect damage should be left behind.

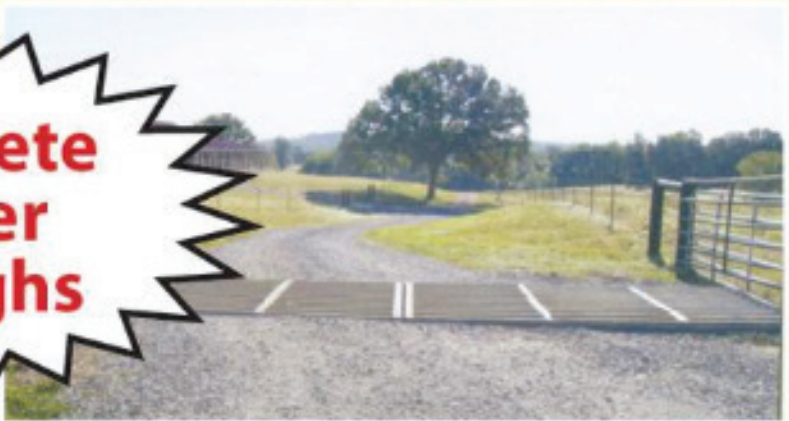
• **Don’t overload.** Only pick what you need. Apples are delicate, and overloading the apples into bags can crush or bruise the ones on the bottom. Plus, over-picking means that the apples may spoil before they can be eaten.

After a day at the orchard, apples can be stored unwashed in a cool, dark place, which will help them stay fresher, longer.

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USDA asks partners to develop AI solutions to accelerate crop innovation

(Washington, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is taking steps to speed up progress in plant science by calling on universities and stakeholders to help build new AI tools that can translate the huge amount of germplasm data the agency collects.

Through the Genesis Mission and the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AgARDA), USDA is expected to launch an Agricultural National Science & Technology Challenge later this year. The Challenge will ask innovators to create practical solutions that pull together different types of information—like images, field data, and lab results—so scientists can quickly spot important plant and seed traits and develop crops that are more resilient and productive.

“USDA is taking concrete steps to give scientists the modern tools they need to innovate agricultural solutions from the vast plant data that they collect,” said REE Under Secretary and USDA Chief Scientist Dr. Scott Hutchins. “When our partners help us to solve agricultural challenges by using AI tools, we’ll unlock faster discoveries with germplasm data and grow better crops that strengthen our food system for many future generations.”

The Genesis Mission, launched in November 2025, is a national effort coordinated by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to leverage artificial intelligence to accelerate scientific discovery. The Mission will bring together America’s scientists, top innovative businesses, world-renowned universities; and data repositories, production plants, and national security sites — to use AI tools to solve the nation’s most complex science and technological challenges. Challenge teams will have access to the American Science and Security

Platform, DOE-built shared infrastructure that will connect datasets, scientific instrumentation, and AI tools to accelerate discovery.

More details on the Challenge are forthcoming. Proposing teams are encouraged to read the full Genesis Mission Executive Order and bring their best ideas to advance America’s future in germplasm innovation.



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October 19

- 6:00 a.m. est • Depart Fredonia
- 6:30 a.m. est • Pickup Eddyville
- 10:30 a.m. est • Lunch Lebanon, TN
- 11:15 a.m. est • Depart
- 3:15 p.m. est • Check-in Hotel
- 4:15 p.m. est • Depart for the Island
- 7:15 p.m. est • DEPART FOR APPLEBARN
- 9:15 p.m. est • Return to hotel for night

October 20

- 6:30 a.m. est • Breakfast Hotel
- 8:00 a.m. est • Depart for Cades Cove Tour
- 10:00 a.m. est • CADES COVE HERITAGE TOUR
- 2:00 p.m. est • Return to Hotel
- 4:30 p.m. est • Leave for Biblical Times Show
- 5:30 a.m. est • BIBLICAL TIMES DINNER SHOW
- 8:00 p.m. est • Return to Hotel

October 21

- 6:30 a.m. est • Breakfast Hotel
- 8:30 a.m. est • Depart for Gatlinburg
- 8:30 a.m. est • DROP OFF GATLINBURG
- 1:00 p.m. est • Depart for Home
- 4:00 p.m. est • Dinner in Lebanon, TN
- 5:00 a.m. est • Depart for Home
- 7:30 p.m. est • Arrive at Eddyville

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Regional Chamber Legislative Summit set for August 27th

SPEAKER PANEL



Representative
Dave Severin
116th District



State Senator
Terri Bryant
58th District



State Senator
Paul Jacobs
59th District



Representative
Patrick Windhorst
117th District

Regional Chamber Legislative Summit, hosted at the Rend Lake Event Center, the Southern Illinois Regional Legislative Summit serves as a premier gathering for those who want to stay informed, connected, and engaged in shaping the future of Southern Illinois. Additional speakers and participating elected officials will be announced as confirmations are received.

AGENDA
Updates from elected representatives to discuss key topics including economic development, infrastructure, workforce challenges, and legislative priorities.

Update from the Illinois and US Chambers

FAQ session with participants and a discussion about civic engagement.

This is your chance to ask questions, share insights, and engage directly with those shaping the future of our region.

Date: Thursday, August 27th, 2026

Time: 11:30 - 1 pm, Lunch service begins at 11 am. Menu TBD

Location: Rend Lake Event Center (Former Artisans Center) at 12476 Golf Course Road, Whittington, IL 62897

Anchor Grill in Sesser

TICKETS
Regional Chamber Member - \$20, Guest - \$25

Registration Deadline is August 13th, after the 13th, limited tickets will be available.

SPEAKERS
State Senator Terri Bryant
State Senator Paul Jacobs
State Representative Patrick Windhorst
State Representative Dave Severin
Illinois Chamber of Commerce: Jimmy Clayton - President & CEO

For questions, please contact the Marion Chamber of Commerce at 618-997-6311.

Register at <https://cca.marionillinois.com/webforms/RepLogin.aspx?dbid2=ILMARI&logintype=EVT&evtid=35985>

HOUSEKEEPING NOTES

Event tickets will need to be paid for when they are reserved. If you need to make other arrangements, please contact the Marion Chamber of Commerce office.

Tickets reservations can be changed through the Monday before the event. If your plans change the week of and you can't attend, we encourage you to



Illinois Chamber President Jimmy Clayton

send a co-worker or guest to represent your organization and network. Once we turn in our catering numbers, limited tickets will be available and refunds will not be issued. Unpaid Invoices will not be allowed to attend.

When putting in your credit card information, please make sure your entered information matches what is on file!

The Southern Illinois Regional Legislative Summit brings together business leaders, community stakeholders, economic development professionals, educators, nonprofit organizations, and elected officials for an important conversation about the future of our region.

This annual forum provides a unique opportunity to hear directly from local, state, and federal policymakers as they share updates on

legislative priorities, economic development initiatives, infrastructure investments, workforce challenges, education, healthcare, and other critical issues affecting Southern Illinois communities and businesses. The Summit is designed to encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors, foster meaningful dialogue, and strengthen partnerships that drive regional growth and prosperity.

Attendees will gain valuable insight into current legislative issues, hear perspectives from elected representatives across multiple levels of government, and engage in conversations about the opportunities and challenges facing Southern Illinois. Whether you are a business owner, community leader, educator, nonprofit professional, or engaged citizen, this event will provide actionable information and a greater understanding of how public policy decisions impact our region.

When: Thursday, August 27, 2026 11:00 AM thru 01:00 PM

Where: Rend Lake Event Center
12476 Golf Course Road, Whittington, IL 62897



TEDDY BEAR,

from page 1

Southern Seven Health Department, Stinson Memorial Library, The Stress and Trauma Center, and Two Rivers Child Advocacy Center.

Anna District 37 teachers, staff, and Board Members, Kroger of Anna, Pop 'n Party Creations, and the City of Anna were involved in planning this event. The Union County Chamber of Commerce and the Union County Women in Business provided additional support and outreach.

The Teddy Bear Health Clinic: Play, Learn & Get Ready for School event was coordinated by RHI in partnership with the Rural Health Opioid Response Team of Southern Illinois and Davie Elementary/ Anna Jr. High School, and was presented in cooperation with Union County Schools.

Funding was provided to RHI through the Rural

Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grant; a multi-year, federal initiative funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Rural Health, Inc. (RHI) is a not-for-profit organization serving Johnson, Massac, and Union counties in Illinois, designated by the federal government as a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), whose mission is to provide quality services to all patients in need of healthcare while being committed to the overall health and well-being of the underserved.



Gov. Pritzker signs legislation strengthening support for Illinois service members and veterans

CHICAGO – Governor JB Pritzker recently signed three bills into law that will fortify recruitment to the Illinois National

Guard with newly incentivized peer-to-peer referral practices, as well as connect our state's veterans to continued education

pathways and life-saving breakthrough therapies for suicide prevention.

“Every service member makes a

sacrifice when they take time away from their loved ones,

see **SUPPORT,**
page 7

SUPPORT,
from page 6

career, or education to answer the call to defend our nation,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “This legislation ensures our Illinois veterans can return to the lives they put on pause with the support and resources they need to thrive. The State of Illinois is working to build a strong, capable, prepared National Guard, both by introducing new recruitment pathways and creating programs that assist service members long after their service is complete.”

“Our service members have answered the call to serve our country, and Illinois is committed to serving them in return,” said Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton. “These new laws strengthen support for military families by expanding educational opportunities, increasing access to innovative mental health care, and investing in the future of the Illinois National Guard. It’s one more way we’re honoring their service with meaningful action.”

These bills include:
SB 3737: Requires universities to promptly readmit students following academic military leave, effective January 1, 2027 (Sen. Porfirio/Rep. Stuart)
SB 3818: Incentivizes Illinois National Guard recruitment with peer-to-peer referrals, effective January 1, 2027 (Sen. Porfirio/Rep. Swanson)
SB 3926: Moves the Breakthrough Therapies for Veteran Suicide Prevention Program Advisory Council under the Department of Public Health, effective January 1, 2027 (Sen. Porfirio/Rep. Hirschauer)

Helping Veterans Return to the Classroom After Academic Military Leave
National Guard and U.S. Reserve service members are often called into active duty without advance notice, forcing students to face academic penalties, tuition loss, and other

barriers to completing their degrees.

SB 3737, the Service Member Education Rights Veneration Act, is modeled after the federal SERVE Act and creates a more direct pathway for students to complete their studies after military service interruption. The law requires universities to grant veterans prompt readmission, so long as the student follows the proper reporting process and their leave is no longer than five years.

“Supporting our veterans and service members is about more than recognizing them for their sacrifice and honor; it’s about creating good policy that provides support and relief where they need it most,” said Senator Mike Porfirio (D-Lyons Township). “Whether it’s leading cutting-edge innovations to treat veterans suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or making it easier for military students to return to classes after being deployed, Illinois is on the forefront of policy that will empower our service members throughout their lives.”

Building a Robust and Prepared Illinois National Guard
SB 3818 bolsters recruitment to the Illinois National Guard with new grants incentivizing peer-to-peer referrals through the establishment of the Joint Enlistment Enhancement Program (JEEP) under the Illinois Department of Military Affairs. This program leverages the indispensable knowledge of current Illinois National Guard members to facilitate the enlistment of new soldiers and airmen and provides financial compensation for successful referrals.

Neighboring and peer states have reported increased recruitment through similar programs. Aligning with these measures will allow Illinois to maintain a strong and capable National Guard, prepared to effectively respond to state domestic emergencies and contribute to our nation’s defense.

“The JEEP program authorizes

the Department of Military Affairs to make grants for the purpose of incentivizing recruitment into the Illinois National Guard and would increase recruitment through peer-to-peer referrals,” said Representative Dan Swanson (R-Alpha). “This will make it possible for more Illinoisans to have opportunities to access all the training and job skills that National Guard membership can provide.”

“Members of our military, whether serving in unnecessary foreign wars or right here at home in the National Guard, deserve to pursue an education when they return from service,” said Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville). “The SERVE Act ensures that students’ higher education enrollment and student standing are preserved, allowing military members and veterans to return to their education and develop a career beyond their invaluable service to our state and our country.”

“Our nation celebrated its 250th birthday on July 4. In those 250 years, the Illinois National Guard has responded to every major conflict our nation has faced and every major domestic emergency the State of Illinois has faced,” said Maj. Gen. Rodney Boyd, The Adjutant General of Illinois, Commander of the Illinois National Guard, and Director of the Illinois Department of Military Affairs. “We need to recruit and retain dedicated men and women to accomplish both our state and federal missions. The Joint Enlistment Enhancement Program will help us in this endeavor, and it will put us in a better position to meet whatever challenges we might face in the next 250 years and beyond.”

Supporting Access to Breakthrough Therapies for Veterans’ Mental Health
The Breakthrough Therapies for Veteran Suicide Prevention Program Advisory Council was created to advise the State

on the health care infrastructure needed to provide veterans with access to preliminary clinical drug trials that might offer significant mental health benefits. These therapies include MDMA and pharmaceutical-grade psilocybin, which are used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder, treatment-resistant depression, and anxiety – conditions many veterans struggle with after service and combat.

SB 3926 amends the Department of Healthcare and Family Services Law and the Department of Public Health Act, moving the Council under the purview of the Illinois Department of Public Health, which is better equipped to oversee and support this specific program.

“Veterans are at a 58 percent higher risk of dying by suicide, and as advocates for veterans, we witness the challenges each day,” said Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs Director Terry Prince. “SB 3926 exemplifies the state’s commitment to implementing every strategy available to ensure Illinois veterans receive the resources, therapies, and support they need to avoid a crisis and prevent suicide.”

“Our veterans fought for America’s future. We owe them access to the future of medicine,” said State Rep. Maura Hirschauer (D-West Chicago). “Senate Bill 3926 strengthens the expertise needed to responsibly advance FDA Breakthrough Therapies that can bring new hope to veterans facing the invisible wounds of service.”

Governor Pritzker believes that the State is responsible for supporting our service members and veterans with the same level of commitment they have shown defending and serving Illinois. Today’s legislation is an important step in connecting service men and women to teams they can rely on while protecting our state and nation, as well as continued education and crucial mental health treatments after their service ends.

New materials testing and research center opens next to IDOT headquarters in Springfield

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Transportation and Capital Development Board were joined by local officials and industry leaders recently to celebrate the completion of the new \$63 million Materials Testing and Research Center. The cutting-edge facility, on the grounds of IDOT’s headquarters next to the Harry R. Hanley Building, will continue to propel the state in the field of highway construction materials and keep Illinois at the forefront of industry research, while helping to ensure the public is getting value and durability with road and bridge projects.

“Under Gov. JB Pritzker, IDOT has more work taking place than ever before throughout the state. High-quality construction materials are at the foundation of almost everything we are doing,” said Illinois Transportation Secretary Gia Biagi.

Built under the supervision of the Capital Development Board, the new building stretches across 81,000 square feet, nearly half of which is dedicated lab space. Construction started in late 2024. In addition to housing IDOT’s Bureau of Research offices and library, the building will be home to the Bureau of Programming’s traffic instrumentation laboratory, meeting rooms, a loading dock and the materials lab for District 6, which serves 15 counties in Central Illinois.

The new location puts the lab within walking distance of both District 6 headquarters and the Hanley building on South Dirksen Parkway, centralizing IDOT’s testing operations in Springfield. The building replaces facilities at First and Ash streets in Springfield built in 1934. The outdated structures required frequent expensive repairs and lacked the space needed to efficiently handle samples and

equipment. “The Illinois Department of Transportation’s materials lab is a smart investment that prioritizes efficiency and productivity,” said state Sen. Doris Turner (D-Springfield). “Now, the lab will have the necessary space to adequately test the materials used for bridges and roads that not only help travelers get from point A to point B smoothly, but also safely.”

Each year, IDOT spends more than \$1.5 billion on construction materials, which account for about half of all construction costs. Through its lab facilities, IDOT tests a wide range of these materials, including asphalt, concrete, crushed stone, sand, gravel, soil, steel reinforcement, structural fasteners, bridge components, pavement marking and striping materials, reflective sign sheeting, and much more.

“This new laboratory represents an investment not only in Springfield, but in the future of transportation across Illinois,” said Springfield Mayor Misty Buscher. “By providing a modern facility to test the materials used to build and maintain our roads and bridges, this project strengthens public safety, supports innovation and reinforces Springfield’s important role in transportation and infrastructure.”

The Materials Testing and Research Center is accredited in more than 100 test methods by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, which develops standards and protocols for the country’s state departments of transportation.

The lab’s impact will reach far beyond IDOT. Local agencies throughout Illinois refer to IDOT’s list of tested and qualified materials lists for improvements in cities, towns and rural areas outside of the agency’s jurisdiction.

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Living...in a troubled world

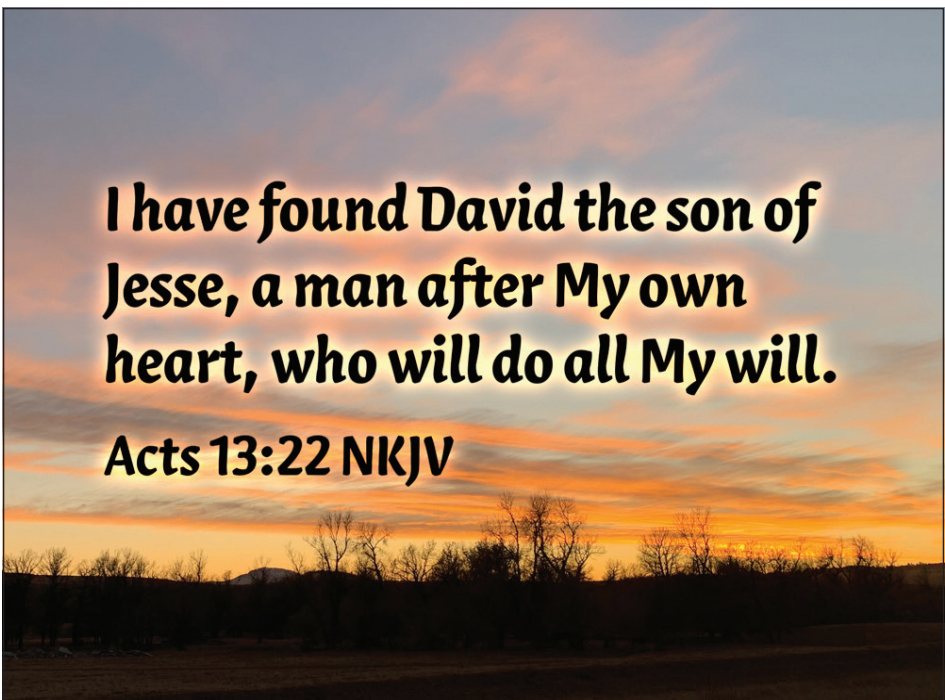
Mercy and Forgiveness

Eight defining moments reveal secrets to David’s heart

By Teresa LeNeave
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The biblical life of King David is often remembered for military victories, political leadership, and personal failures. Very often his personal failures are what preachers choose to teach from the pulpit. Yet a closer examination of Scripture reveals another defining characteristic—his remarkable capacity for forgiveness and mercy, even toward those who sought his life.

David’s relationship with King Saul illustrates this theme. Although Saul repeatedly pursued David with the intent to kill him, David consistently refused to retaliate. On two occasions, he had the opportunity to take Saul’s life but instead chose re-



straint, declaring that he would not harm “the Lord’s anointed” (1 Samuel 24). Even cutting a corner from Saul’s robe troubled David’s conscience, demonstrating his deep respect for God’s authority.

David’s mercy continued after Saul’s death. Rather than celebrating the fall of his greatest enemy, he mourned both Saul and Jonathan, composing the famous “Song of the Bow” (2 Samuel 1). Significantly, David’s lament praised Saul’s strengths and never mentioned his failures, offering a striking example of honoring an opponent instead of dwelling on past wrongs.

The same response appeared when Saul’s son, Ish-bosheth, was murdered. Expecting praise, the assassins presented David with the victim’s severed head. Instead, David condemned their actions and ordered their execution, refusing to endorse revenge disguised as

justice.

David’s compassion extended even to his own rebellious son, Absalom. After Absalom’s death, David openly grieved, crying, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son!” His sorrow overshadowed any sense of political victory, revealing a father’s heart rather than a conqueror’s.

His loyalty also endured beyond Jonathan’s death. Honoring a covenant made years earlier, David sought out Jonathan’s disabled son, Mephibosheth, restoring Saul’s estate to him and welcoming him to the king’s table. Later, when conflicting reports arose concerning Mephibosheth’s loyalty during Absalom’s rebellion, David chose a measured response instead of acting out of anger.

David’s final recorded example of selflessness came after his sinful census brought judgment upon Israel. As the nation suffered, David accepted full responsibility and pleaded with God to spare the people, describing them as “these sheep” and offering himself in their place.

Although David’s life included serious moral failures which include adultery, deceit, and the arranged death of Uriah, scripture consistently portrays him as a man whose heart sought after God. As a result, even God called David “a man after His own heart”. The secret: A heart of mercy and forgiveness which is the same kind of heart God has.

OUR GUIDE FOREVER

Bro. Brandon G. Bramlett
Blandana Baptist Church

We never saw him again. Even when we hid, we barely caught a glimpse of him. But before we parted ways, he smiled and said, “And that concludes our tour of Marvel Cave, ladies and gentlemen.” Our tour guide was off to lead another party of curious cavers after escorting us through the winding passages, and dripping cavernous chambers within his historic cave which lies 500 feet beneath Silver Dollar City. His only job was to direct us through a cave—not back to our cars, hotels, or other attractions in Branson, Missouri. While our guide knew every-

thing about caves, he wasn’t an expert in everything—he could only take us as far as his knowledge would take him.

There is, however, a Guide whose knowledge is limitless—and therefore, whose guidance is limitless. “For this God is our God for ever and ever,” wrote the psalmist, “he will be our guide even unto death” (Psalm 48:14, KJV). The Lord leads His people through every season of life and His guidance does not end until He brings them to their heavenly home. The great Shepherd steers His saints through life and toward life everlasting: “Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory” (Ps. 73:23-24).

He can straighten the most winding paths with His wisdom, brighten the darkest valleys by His illuminating light, and carry His people through the most tempestuous of life’s storms. No matter how heavy the burden, how confusing the decision, or how uncertain tomorrow may be, the God who knows the end from the beginning promises, “the LORD will guide you continually” (Isa. 58:11a). Even if you rode to the edge of the galaxy on the rays of the sun or descended to the floor of the ocean, the Lord would be there to lead the way: “If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me” (Ps. 139:9-10). And while every tour guide eventually says goodbye, the Lord says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). Moreover, He doesn’t merely tell believers where to go—He goes with them: “It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you” (Deut. 31:8a).

It is no wonder why generations of believers have prayed and found comfort in singing the words of “He Leadeth Me” by J. H. Gilmore (1834—1918), which says, “He leadeth me: O blessed thought! O words with

heavenly comfort fraught! Whate’er I do, where’er I be, still ‘tis God’s hand that leadeth me. Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom, sometimes where Eden’s flowers bloom, by waters calm o’er troubled sea, still ‘tis God’s hand that leadeth me.”



Salvation
is as
easy as
ABC

A - Admit to God That You Are A Sinner
For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. - Romans 3:23 Repent, turn away from your sin. - Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9

B - Believe Jesus Died for Your Sins
For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that WHOEVER believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16

C - Confess Jesus is Lord
If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved. - Romans 10:9

Crossword Puzzle

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13						14				15			
16						17				18			
19				20					21				
			22					23				24	
25	26	27		28				29			30		
31			32		33		34					35	
36				37		38			39				40
	41				42				43		44		
			45					46		47		48	
49	50		51				52				53		
54		55				56					57	58	59
60					61					62			
63					64				65				
66					67				68				

CLUES ACROSS

1. Bleated

6. Snakelike fish

9. Database management system

13. Social evolution anthropologist Service

14. American rocker Grohl

15. Greek personification of compassion

16. Negatives

17. Rescued

18. Self-immolation by fire ritual

19. Assigns tasks

21. Popular type of cigar

22. Discounts

23. The whole quantity

24. New York Giants legend

25. Indicates before

28. Lentils

29. Extremely angry

31. Body part

33. “North Star State”

36. David __, US playwright
38. Lower and raise one’s head

39. Private rendezvous

41. In a way, improved

44. A place to play

45. Astronomical period of 18 years

46. Automobile

48. Something you can take

49. A radio band

51. Jaws of a voracious animal

52. Short-billed rails

54. Chinese province

56. Shameless

60. Horizontal passage from the surface into a mine

61. Indian respectful titles

62. Fail to entertain

63. Dried-up

64. Central Utah city

65. Southern U.S.

66. German river

67. Necessary for breathing

68. Put into play

CLUES DOWN

1. Curved segment

2. Wings

3. Yellowish volatile liquid

4. Makes less severe

5. Debit note

6. Overhang

7. The nights before

8. Type of light

9. Lacking enthusiasm

10. Tattle

11. Some is “heavy”

12. One who is canonized

14. Indicates date and place of writing

17. “Peace” in Arabic

20. “Olaf” actor Josh

21. Fragmented rock

23. They __

25. Advanced degree

26. Backside

27. Influential architect and design couple

29. An act of undue intimacy
30. Words from which later words are derived

32. 10 meters

34. Neither

35. Fungal sacs

37. The law of God revealed to Moses

40. A woolen cap of Scottish origin

42. A promise

43. Challenges

47. British Air Aces

49. Large bank

50. Served as an omen

52. Cavalry sword

53. Vaccine developer

55. Belgian WW2 resistance leader Jules

56. Italian Seaport

57. Hip joint

58. __ Clapton, musician

59. Insect repellent

61. Constrictor snake

65 “The First State” (abbr.)

PUZZLE SOLUTION

B	A	A	E	D			E	E	L		D	B	M	S
E	L	M	A	N		D	A	V	E		E	L	E	A
N	A	Y	S		S	A	V	E	D		S	A	T	I
D	E	L	E	G	A	T	E	S		C	U	B	A	N
			S	A	L	E	S		A	L	L		L	T
P	R	E		D	A	L		I	R	A	T	E		
H	E	A	D		M	I	N	N	E	S	O	T	A	
M	A	M	E	T		N	O	D		T	R	Y	S	T
	R	E	C	O	V	E	R	E	D		Y	M	C	A
		S	A	R	O	S		C	A	R		A	I	M
C	B		M	A	W		S	O	R	A	S			
H	O	P	E	H		B	A	R	E	F	A	C	E	D
A	D	I	T		B	A	B	U	S		B	O	R	E
S	E	R	E		O	R	E	M		D	I	X	I	E
E	D	E	R		A	I	R			E	N	A	C	T

Word Search

FAIR DAYS

WORD SEARCH

U I K C O T S E V I L Z C T T R B S D S
E G X H D Q U G B B F X H M X U N K C W
I R E T S A O C U T J I U K L X V Z L B
V N Q Y C A R N I V A L R Y G Y B E X S
T Q X D C B W N L K F G R Q D W S Q T E
P X P N K C W W A W P M O G B U K A L G
Z G T A R C O N C E R T R N O Q Z P I D
Z D L C T E E R T A M A Z R E F F O U U
L L H N L E V P J Q N K A O E U N P Q J
L E M O N A D E K D A C O R N N J C H S
N L C T N T O L S I D Z R N O Q I O E M
S U O T Q K M T L M E I E B W W X R P T
K E U O X O A W R S S L B M P N S N Z D
C T M C Q N C O E W C I I H A J Z W T M
O S Q A D W F L H A R D L E X H I B I T
R E Z H G R P E K E W F B F E E X K C X
N K C H I P E E U A V U O R C Z Q X Y W
D Y G E A L N L Y P X V M S A I P Y D E
O C S E Y H B T R A C I N G H R C M N S
G V J K F M U T R A C T O R B P W D W P

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

ANSWERS IN B SECTION

WORDS

- APPLES
- BLUE RIBBON
- CARNIVAL
- CAROUSEL
- CHURRO
- COASTER
- CONCERT
- CORNDOG
- COTTON CANDY
- EXHIBIT
- FERRIS WHEEL
- FRIES
- FUNNEL CAKE
- GAMES
- GRAND STAND
- JUDGES
- LEMONADE
- LIVESTOCK
- MIDWAY
- POPCORN
- PRIZE
- QUILT
- RACING
- TRACTOR

Sudoku Puzzle

How it Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle! Good Luck!

ANSWERS IN B SECTION

	8						3	
						2		
			2	1			4	7
		1		5				6
		7	3	6				
						9		
		4	5		2			9
	9	5			7		1	4
6					4			

Coloring Fun



USDA, HHS, EPA join forces to bolster consumer protections

(Washington, D.C., — Today, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin announced an updated Memorandum of Understanding (PDF, 2.3 MB) to reaffirm their shared commitment to protecting consumers from heavy metals and other contaminants in food.

For decades, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have coordinated through the National Residue Program to monitor and regulate meat, poultry, and egg products. This updated MOU strengthens collaboration under this program and adopts new methods to better detect and address potential risks.

“American farmers, ranchers, and producers grow and raise the safest, most abundant, and most affordable food supply in the world. Together with our partners at HHS and EPA, we are strengthening the health of American families and giving consumers confidence in the safety of our food supply,” said Secretary Rollins. “This new MOU modernizes how our agencies work together and streamlines the way we share information, coordinates scientific expertise, and improves how we detect and address potential risks. This is the Trump Administration improving the way our government works so we can better protect the American people and ensure the safety of our food supply, which is truly a national security and health priority.”

“Protecting Americans from harmful contaminants in food is a core priority of the Trump Administration,” said HHS Secretary Kennedy. “We are strengthening oversight, improving detection, and coordinating across the federal government to reduce exposure to heavy metals and other toxins. I appreciate Secretary Rollins and Administrator Zeldin for their leadership as we work together to protect American families and Make America Healthy Again.”

“At the Trump EPA, we are excited to help advance new policies to Make America Healthy Again. Today’s announcement ensures a safer food supply by supporting new testing methods to reduce metal residues in produce, meat, and, for the first time ever, processed foods,” said Administrator Zeldin. “We want Americans to feel confident the food on their plate has been held to the highest standards of safety. It’s an honor to serve on the MAHA Commission, led by Secretary Kennedy, working with great partners like Secretary Rollins to pave the way for a healthier nation for generations to come.”

As part of this effort, the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) has already taken steps to modernize monitoring for heavy metals in foods by implementing a new, streamlined laboratory method to measure the quantity of 18 heavy metals at extremely low levels. If elevated or unusual levels are detected, FSIS conducts science-based assessments to determine when the agency should take action to keep risky products out of the food supply. Additionally, FSIS will also expand its surveillance for heavy metals to include processed foods, such as sausages and ready-to-eat meals, which combine ingredients from multiple sources.

The data collected by FSIS shows heavy metal contamination of raw meat and poultry products is extremely rare and FSIS will continue to publish results of this surveillance testing online, ensuring transparency for industry and consumers.

This updated MOU further advances efforts to Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) and builds on the MAHA Report’s goal of reducing children’s exposure to heavy metals, PFAS, and other harmful contaminants.

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2026

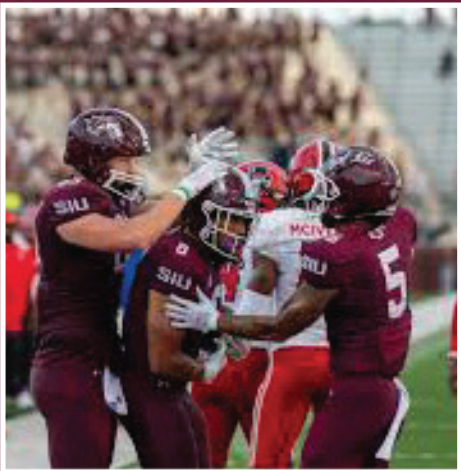


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SEPTEMBER 03, 2026 • 6 PM • AWAY

Samford

Birmingham, AL



SEPTEMBER 12, 2026 • 6 PM • HOME

SEMO

Carbondale, IL | Saluki Stadium



SEPTEMBER 19, 2026 • 1 PM • AWAY

Illinois

Urbana-Champaign, IL



SEPTEMBER 26, 2026 • 6 PM • AWAY

Murray State

Murray, KY | Roy Stewart Stadium



OCTOBER 03, 2026 • 4 PM • HOME

Youngstown State

Carbondale, IL | Saluki Stadium



OCTOBER 10, 2026 • 1 PM • AWAY

South Dakota

Vermillion, SD | The Dakota Dome



OCTOBER 17, 2026 • TBD • HOME

Illinois State

Carbondale, IL | Saluki Stadium



OCTOBER 24, 2026 • 1 PM • HOME

Northern Iowa

Carbondale, IL | Saluki Stadium



NOVEMBER 07, 2026 • 6 PM • AWAY

Indiana State

Terre Haute, IN | Memorial Stadium



NOVEMBER 14, 2026 • 1 PM • HOME

South Dakota State

Carbondale, IL | Saluki Stadium



NOVEMBER 21, 2026 • 1 PM • AWAY

North Dakota

Grand Forks, ND | Memorial Stadium



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