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The Daily Item

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MONDAY

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September 3, 2018

SUMMER STORMS

Outdoor workers backlogged by rain



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item
Bob Gordner, of Pennsylvania Painting and Wall Covering, Bloomsburg, applies a coat of paint to a doorway at the Thomas Beaver Free Library in Danville.

Wet conditions keep painters, landscapers inside

By Justin Strawser
jstrawser@dailyitem.com

This summer's seemingly never-ending rain has left outside workers stranded indoors.

These laborers — painters, landscapers, gardeners and contractors — who do much of their work outside say it's one of the worst seasons for rain in recent memory. AccuWeather reported that Selinsgrove's and Lewisburg's rainfall is at least 7 inches above normal for June, July and August.

"The rain's been killing us this year," said Bob Gordner, foreman of Pennsylv-

See **RAIN**, Page A2



Justin Strawser/The Daily Item
Volunteer gardener Cynthia Reed weeds the landscape at the St. Matthew Episcopal Church at 32 N. Front St., Sunbury.

Kavanaugh, farmers and office lights on to-do list

Congressional agenda takes form ahead of fall elections

**By Kevin Freking
and Matthew Daly**
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Keep the government running and confirm Brett Kavanaugh as the next Supreme Court justice.

Those are the big-ticket items that Republican leaders in Congress hope to accomplish as lawmakers look to wrap up their work and head home to campaign for the November elections.

Democrats want to keep the government open, but they also are fighting to derail the nomination of Kavanaugh, the second Supreme Court nominee from President Donald Trump.

Other items on the agenda when Congress returns Tuesday:



Brett Kavanaugh
Supreme Court nominee

leged.

Republican leaders are expected at the White House on Tuesday for a meeting with Trump on their goals.

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Archbishop: Nix youth conference

The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The archbishop of Philadelphia has asked Pope Francis to cancel a bishops' conference focusing on youth in the wake of the child sex abuse crisis roiling the Catholic Church.

A spokesman for the archdiocese confirmed Saturday that

Archbishop Charles Chaput made the request by letter, but he declined further comment, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported.

The Youth Synod, which would include bishops from the around the world, has been planned for two years and its website says it is to be focused

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State proposal could deflate administrators' golden parachutes

The bill would trim perks for departing school leaders

By John Finnerty
jfinnerty@cnihi.com

HARRISBURG — State Rep. Brad Roae, R-Crawford County, wants to limit school boards' ability to give golden parachutes and other expensive compensation and perks to departing school superintendents.

In a memo to other lawmakers, Roae said his plan would bar districts from giving severance packages to superintendents. The legislation also would bar school districts from bringing back former administrators to serve as acting superintendents or consultants.

In addition, the proposal would link the pay and number of paid sick and

personal days given to administrators to the compensation and benefits provided to the teachers in the district.

Roae said he was inspired to author the legislation by events in the Penncrest School District in Crawford County.

There, the school district paid retiring superintendent Michael Healey a

severance package worth \$63,134.96 in benefits and \$29,291.20 in salary earlier this year, according to documents obtained by The Meadville Tribune.

"The former superintendent at Penncrest received a large payout to not work when he left and was replaced by a new superintendent that received a large payout to leave and not work at his prior district," Roae said. "When you are done working, the paychecks should stop."

Healey was succeeded at Penncrest by Timothy Glasspool who'd been given a \$184,000 severance package by his prior school district in Allegheny County, according to the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

Roae is by no means the only person to raise concerns over severance packages for departing school administrators.

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DEATHS A5

SARFINE, Chris,
53, Sunbury

TODAY IN HISTORY

In 1939, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany, two days after the Nazi invasion of Poland; in a radio address, Britain's King George VI said, "With God's help, we shall prevail." The same day, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the British liner SS Athenia, killing more than 100 out of the 1,400 people on board.

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Local

Outdoor workers backlogged by rain

RAIN, from Page A1

vania Painting and Wall Covering, of Bloomsburg. “It’s the worst we’ve had like this for as long as I can remember. I’ve been in business for 30 years. It’s the worst summer we’ve had with rain. It’s unbelievable.”

The family-owned business has at least 50 commercial and residential projects a year across the state at places like the Danville School District and the new Northumberland County Prison. When the rain took a break over the last two weeks, Gordner and his crew came to the Thomas Beaver Free Library in Danville to paint the railing and frames of the windows and doors.

The rain causes them to push back exterior projects and wait until nicer weather, but once the weather clears, even more people come looking for businesses to do projects. Gordner said the projects are backed up about six weeks.

“Most people are understanding,” Gordner said. “We work as long as we can to get the work done and keep people happy. We’re working seven days a week, 10 hours a day to try to catch up.”

Matt Persing, of Northumberland, started Primal Lawncare this past summer and has faced the same issues as Gordner. He offers landscaping, maintenance, lawnmowing, weedwacking and tree trimming services.

“It’s been a little rough with all the rain,” Persing said. “It puts you back a couple days, because you can’t do anything when it’s raining real hard like that. Then the ground gets saturated, and a lot of the properties hold the water pretty good.”

Persing also said that most people are understanding, and he had a lot of requests once the weather cleared.

“I finally got all my lawns caught up at the end of last week,” Persing said.

On Aug. 27, Persing was working on taking a small tree down at the home of Dustin and Amber Beaver.

“The rain made that tree go crazy,” Amber Beaver said. “It was growing into the neighbor’s house, and into the powerlines. Now that the rain slowed down, we realized we need the tree gone.”

Cynthia Reid and Frances Zartman are volunteer gardeners at the St. Matthew Episcopal Church at 32 N. Front St. They took advantage of the dry weather to pull some weeds and landscape the front area outside the Sunbury church.

“This has been a bad year,” Reid said. “Too much water kills the plants. You have to tear stuff out, and hope it comes back next year.”

The biggest issue is finding good days to do the work. It’s been too wet, but also too hot on some of the days this past summer, Reid said.

“This is only our third time out here this year,” Zartman said. “Everything is growing like crazy. It’s aggressive.”

Brian Bontomase, owner of No Sweat Mowing in Lewisburg, said the weather has been bad for business.

“You can’t get out there when you want to, and when you finally get out there, the grass is knee high, and you need to go over it two or three times,” he said.

Zack Peachey, a manager at



Robert Inglis/The Daily Item

Matt Persing, of Primal Lawncare, cuts down a tree for a customer in Sunbury.

JC Landscape in Lewisburg for the last five years, said this summer has been stressful. The company is losing jobs to try to catch up on other jobs, employees are working weekends to make up for missed time due to rain and typical easy areas are muddy and soggy.

“We’re getting stuck a lot more, and having to avoid areas where we never had a problem. Places we used to mow every single week and know like the back of our hands,” Peachey said.

Most customers are understanding, but it’s been difficult,

he said.

“It’s most definitely one of the wettest years we’ve seen,” Peachey said.

PennDOT Spokesman David Thompson said PennDOT has just more than 90 active projects this year throughout the state. Whether contractors work through rain depends on the type of weather.

“The weather impacts or limits many of our operations including paving, seal coat, bridge work and roadside activities,” Thompson said. “When possible, crews focus on projects that can be accomplished safely

in the rain without negatively impacting our roadways such as ditching, pipe installation and cleaning drainage structures.”

Since the construction season still has several months to go, Thompson said it’s “too soon to determine how it will impact the completion of our projects. The expectation of some inclement weather is taken into account with our contracts.”

AccuWeather Meteorologist Tom Kines, out of State College, said rainfall in the Susquehanna Valley has been above normal. Typically, in Selinsgrove and Lewisburg, the rainfall total is

12 inches, but there are reports of both 19 and 21 inches in Selinsgrove and 19.33 inches in Lewisburg.

“There’s no doubt that it rained more times this summer than in a normal summer,” Kines said. “Some places in the state, it’s been the worst and wettest June, July and August ever.”

The last two weeks have been relatively dry, and Kines expects the same for Labor Day week.

“It will be a very warm and humid week,” Kines said. “It wouldn’t shock me if these days have stuff popping up, but it will be hit or miss.”

State proposal could deflate golden parachutes

STATE, from Page A1

Auditor General Eugene DePasquale has repeatedly criticized school districts for the amounts spent on severance packages for superintendents and the lack of transparency in many of the deals.

DePasquale said last week he couldn’t comment directly on Roae’s proposal because he had not reviewed it yet. But he said he’s glad the attention being given to the issue is translating into legislation.

“There is an unacceptable amount of money going to superintendents who fail and go out the door,” he said. “All that money that goes to the superintendents is money that should be going to the classroom.”

In addition to the cases cited by Roae,

UNDER THE RADAR
State Legislation beyond the front page



DePasquale flagged at least nine cases in which school districts had agreed to severance packages for administrators. In seven of those cases, the payouts were in the six-figure range.

The largest examples were in the Central Bucks School District in Bucks

County and the Carbondale School District in Lackawanna County. A 2015 audit of Central Bucks revealed that a superintendent’s contract was bought out for almost \$400,000 after he’d been on the job for less than a year. A 2013 audit found that Carbondale had paid out \$690,000 in severance packages for the former superintendent and two departing principals.

This isn’t a new controversy, said Annette Gray, a spokeswoman for the Pennsylvania School Board Association. A revision to the school code in 2012 included language limiting how much districts can pay in superintendent contract buyouts. That legislation was spawned by attention drawn to the \$905,000 contract buyout given to Philadelphia schools chief Arlene Ackerman in 2011.

“Currently, the severance package for a superintendent cannot exceed either one or one-and-a-half years’ worth of pay, depending on how much of the contract remains,” Gray said.

The school board group would be opposed to legislation handcuffing their ability negotiate with, hire and manage administrators, she said.

“School districts want to be able to offer competitive compensation packages to attract and retain the best candidates for the job. Some school districts are already experiencing difficulties in attracting highly qualified candidates,” she said. “Fewer people are seeking to become superintendents.”

Mark DiRocco, executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators and former superintendent of the Lewisburg Area School

District, pointed to the 2012 move that capped the amount that superintendents can get in contract buyouts as a “fair” solution.

Providing the severance payments is needed because administrators may find it takes months to find a similar job or find another career, he said.

Superintendents “have bills to pay like anyone else,” he said.

Roae said he plans to introduce the legislation in September. Since the measure has not been introduced yet, it’s not clear how much support it will garner from other lawmakers.

If it doesn’t pass the General Assembly in the fall session, he will reintroduce the bill in 2019, he said.

“Many bills are introduced for several years before they get enough traction to pass,” Roae said.

Kavanaugh, farmers and office lights on to-do list

LIST, from Page A1

Supreme Court vacancy

The Senate Judiciary Committee begins confirmation hearings for Kavanaugh, a federal appeals court judge, on Tuesday with his introduction and opening statements from lawmakers. Questioning of the nominee will begin the next day and testimony from the American Bar Association, outside legal experts and those who know him best will follow.

Trump nominated Kavanaugh to succeed Justice Anthony Kennedy, considered the swing vote on some of the most important issues decided in recent years. Democrats are worried that Kavanaugh’s confirmation will cement a right-leaning court for many years to come.

They contend his elevation could lead the court to restrict a woman’s right to choose an abortion, equal rights for gays and lesbians and environmental protections.

With liberal advocacy groups adamantly opposed to Kavanaugh and Democrats wanting to fire up their base for the coming election, Senate questioning will be aggressive and opening statements forceful. But Republicans with their 50-49 majority have the edge.

Keeping government open

Lawmakers face a Sept. 30 deadline to pass spending bills to keep the government open.

The House and Senate have both approved a series of measures, but have not agreed on a unified bill that could go the president’s desk.

Lawmakers hope to approve at least three compromise bills that fund a large portion of the government, including the military and most civilian agencies, before the new budget year begin Oct. 1.

In a shift from previous years, the Senate has approved nine of 12 mandatory spending bills, enough to fund nearly 90 percent of the government.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., called that “an important step forward” and evidence that “Congress is in good hands” under GOP majorities in the House and Senate.

Still, lawmakers from both parties remain wary of a government shutdown, which Trump has threatened unless he gets a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Democrats have resisted Trump’s plan to spend \$25 billion to fulfill that key Trump campaign promise.

A shutdown just weeks before the November elections would be the third under unified Republican control of Washington, following stoppages in January and February.

That prospect has provoked widespread anxiety among Republicans facing tough re-election fights.

Trump has called a possible shutdown “a great political thing, because people want border security.”

The Farm Bill

Negotiating farm Congress has until Sept. 30 to reauthorize farm programs that, among other things, provide payments to farmers when prices for major crops decline. Pleas from farm groups for action come as they deal with the Trump administration’s decision to use tariffs as leverage in trade disputes; major trading partners have responded with tariffs of their own on farm products from the U.S.

The farm bill also would extend food aid for low-income Americans. House-passed legislation significantly tightens existing work requirements for aid recipients, an approach Trump has said he hopes makes it into the final bill. But the Senate version takes a more bipartisan approach and makes only modest changes to the food stamps, formally known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Led by Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., House Republicans have dug in on retaining work requirements in the bill.

Social media

Executives at some of the biggest social media companies will be on the hot seat in separate hearings this month.

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey and Facebook’s chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg are scheduled to testify Wednesday before the Senate intelligence committee. Lawmakers want to know how their companies are dealing with efforts by Russia and other countries to influence social media platforms and interfere in U.S. elections.

Dorsey is set to testify later Wednesday before the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which wants to know how Twitter monitors and polices content. Conservatives complain that Twitter is limiting their reach on the web, a cry that Trump has taken up.

The first hearing is part of the Senate committee’s Russia investigation. The committee is expected to issue additional reports in the coming weeks, including one on Russia’s interference on social media.

Aviation programs

Congress also has until Sept. 30 to extend FAA programs that fund airport and air traffic system improvements.

If the FAA’s authority were to expire, it would still continue to operate the nation’s air traffic system and controllers would work without pay. But some of the agency’s other work would come to a halt.

The House passed a bill extending FAA activities for five years back in April, but action stalled in the Senate amid a dispute over rules for meals and rest breaks for truckers. The chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said lawmakers were pursuing “all potential avenues to get the bill on the president’s desk.” and signed into law before the deadline.

The Senate bill includes new consumer protections, authority for developing new drone policies, safety enhancements and funding for aviation infrastructure.

Archbishop to pope: Cancel youth conference in October

YOUTH, from Page A1

on “young people, the faith and vocational discernment.” An international panel of young people is expected to join the council of bishops for the event.

“I have written the Holy Father and called on him to cancel the forthcoming synod on young people,” Chaput said at a conference Thursday at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, according to LifeSite News, a conservative Catholic website.

“Right now, the bishops would have absolutely no credibility in addressing this topic.”

Instead, Chaput asked that the synod be refocused on the life of bishops.

A nearly 900-page grand jury re-

port released last month said more than 300 Catholic priests abused at least a thousand children over the past seven decades in six Pennsylvania dioceses, and senior figures in the church hierarchy systematically covered up complaints.

A description of the purpose of the Oct. 3-28 synod at the Vatican begins with the following words: “Taking care of young people is not an optional task for the Church, but an integral part of her vocation and mission in history.”