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School district's savings account expected to dip

By Bridgette Fox
STAFF WRITER

Jacksonville School District 117 officials expect the district's revenue to decrease and its savings account to take a hit in the coming year, but previous savings mean the district remains in good shape, they said.

The district's school board voted Wednesday to approve its budget with a \$51.7 million operating fund for Fiscal Year 2026.

For years, district officials have calculated their budget as conservatively as possible, they said. For Fiscal Year 2025, officials predicted an operating fund of \$51.9 million would leave

the district with a balance of \$33.3 million at year's end; in reality, the operating fund ended with about \$40.8 million.

Those savings are coming in handy now, Superintendent Steve Ptacek said.

"This year's total big-picture budget will probably be the first year that we will have had in a long time that we will end up with a reduction in our savings account or fund balances at the end of the year," Ptacek said.

Organizations including the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Association of School Administrators and the Superintendent Association have cautioned schools districts

about funding dips, Ptacek said.

"We are being warned at every meeting we go to to prepare for three to five years of potential ... RIFs [reduction in force], cuts to programs, everything else," Ptacek said.

One change in revenue was caused by the end of a surge in money from the state's Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax. The district had been getting between \$4 million and \$6 million from that tax in recent years. Last year, it dropped to around \$2 million.

Reimbursements from the state for mandated services such as transportation and spe-

cial education also are predicted to drop by about 10%, Ptacek said.

"The benefit we have, we've built up a large enough fund balance, a savings account, that we are not at all anticipating substantial — or really any — cuts to programs or staff," Ptacek said.

How this happened

That replacement tax revenue generally had doubled statewide between the 2019 and 2023 fiscal years, according to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. A study from the nonprofit credited "pent-up consumer spending" after the

pandemic, high inflation rates and record profits for school districts in the state getting more money from the tax.

That surge is ending, though, meaning there's less money from the replacement tax to go to school districts.

At the same time, the state's evidence-based funding formula calculates how much money a district needs to be "adequately funded," which would take into account funds received from the replacement tax. However, funding from the tax works is based on data from two years prior.

Savings continues on A2

Enforcing city's rules hot button for council

By Shirley Bilyeu
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

BEARDSTOWN — City Council members are focusing attention on what they said is a need to enforce ordinances.

Aldermen said during a meeting this week that it is time to stop talking about the city's ordinances and instead do something to enforce them.

The council tried to come up with solutions on how to enforce ordinances, including the idea of hiring someone full-

Rules continues on A2

HOLIDAY FEELING



Doris Schmaljohn of Jacksonville helps set up items ahead of The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary Holiday on Parade Sale. The sale will take place from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. today and from 8 a.m. to noon Saturday at the Morgan County Fairgrounds' 4-H Building.

SAMANTHA MCDANIEL-OGLETTREE/JOURNAL-COURIER



1825-2025

CELEBRATING 200 YEARS

TODAY IN JACKSONVILLE HISTORY

SEPT. 19

On this day in 1941, Jacksonville's city council voted to lease 8 acres of land as the site of a new munitions factory. The National Enameling and Stamping Co., contracted by the U.S. military to produce shell casings, planned to have the factory operational with several hundred workers by the end of the year. The factory, which sits across Mauvaise Terre Lake from Jacksonville Country Club, now is a manufacturing plant for Reynolds.

Source: Morgan County Historical Society

— Compiled by Madelyn Marie-Sinclair

Congressional contenders' list grows

By Ben Singson
STAFF WRITER

A Sangamon County resident is joining a growing list of people seeking to unseat Mary Miller from her position in Congress.

Judy Bowlby of Riverton held a news conference Thursday to announce her intent to seek the Republican nomination for Illinois' 15th Congressional District. She made the announcement in the House of Representatives chamber at Springfield's

Old State Capitol State Historical Site.

Bowlby is the fifth person to declare a run for Miller's seat and the first person to challenge her as a Republican.

Bowlby invoked Abraham Lincoln's "A House Divided" speech, which he delivered in the Old State Capitol, to explain why she is running for office. She described the state of the nation as divided against itself, decrying the "absence of cooperation" between government

Bowlby continues on A2



Ben Singson/Journal-Courier

Judy Bowlby of Riverton speaks while announcing her intent to run for Mary Miller's seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. Bowlby made the announcement Thursday at the Old State Capitol State Historical Site.

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SAVINGS

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So, there's a lag between the state's funding and the reality of how much money a district is operating with.

Yet, JSD 117 has the benefit of recently being designated a Tier 1 school, meaning it receives a bigger share of funding through the evidence-based funding formula compared to other tiered districts, Ptacek said.

"Right now, we're just reading the tea leaves where we can, basically," Ptacek said.

RULES

From page A1

time to take action against violations.

Residents also will be able to make complaints about violations online and those complaints will be registered and investigated.

Mayor Tim Harris said he would like to have someone who could do routine inspections on rental properties. Other ordinance violations under discussion included those covering abandoned vehicles.

In other business, the council discussed the problem of people speeding in the city.

Harris requested Police Chief Martin Coad have officers watch for people speeding, especially around schools.

Council members also said a homeless shelter, Matthew 25, has opened to serve the community.

Kennedy's advisory panel is expected to vote on hepatitis B and MMRV vaccines

By Mike Stobbe and Laura Ungar

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ATLANTA — Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s new vaccine advisory committee will vote Thursday on new guidance for shots against hepatitis B and chickenpox, raising worries among public health experts that the votes and discussions will create unwarranted vaccine concerns among parents.

The panel's vote may also influence insurance coverage and a government program that pays for vaccines for low-income families, experts warned. And on Friday, the panel will discuss shots against COVID-19.

Kennedy, a leading anti-vaccine activist before becoming the nation's top health official, has made or proposed numerous changes to the nation's vaccine system, including firing the entire 17-member panel earlier this year and replacing it with a group that includes several anti-vaccine voices.

The morning's discussion focused on a combination vaccine called MMRV, which protects against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox, which is also known as varicella.

The advisers planned to vote on a proposal recommending the shot not be given to children younger than 4 because of rare instances of feverish seizures associated with the first dose that is currently given to kids between ages 1 and 2.



Mike Stewart/AP file photo

Demonstrators rally for support of the CDC during a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, June 25, 2025, in Atlanta.

On Thursday, committee member Dr. Cody Meissner said such seizures may be "a very frightening experience" for families, but medical experts agree they're not linked to brain function or school problems.

The panel last dealt with the issue in 2009, when it said either the combination shot or separate MMR and varicella shots were acceptable for the first dose, but that separate doses were generally preferred. Today, 85% of kids receive separate doses for the first round, according to information presented at the meeting.

Some doctors and public health experts say they are not aware of any new safety data that would explain the revisiting of those vaccination recommendations — and, in fact, many of the studies discussed Thursday were more than a decade old.

Dr. Richard Haupt, a vice

president at Merck, which makes the MMRV vaccine ProQuad, said it's been evaluated through clinical trials and post-approval studies, and the slight increase in feverish seizures after first dose led to current CDC recommendations. Combination vaccines improve completion and on-time vaccination at a time when the nation is seeing a troubling decline in vaccination coverage, he said.

"Considering these trends, any policy decision that compromises the clarity or consistency of vaccination guidance ... has the potential to further diminish public confidence," he told the committee.

Dr. Mysheika Roberts, health department director in Columbus, Ohio, said one of the benefits of the combined vaccine is it limits the number of shots a child gets, which is useful in certain populations of patients,

such as newly arrived immigrants who need lots of vaccines at the same time.

But she also acknowledged concerns about feverish seizures among children under age 4 and said, "maybe the guidance needs to be tweaked a little bit on that."

The panel, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, makes recommendations to the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on how already-approved vaccines should be used. CDC directors have almost always accepted those recommendations, which are widely heeded by doctors and guide vaccination programs.

In his opening remarks, committee Chairman Martin Kulldorff defended the group against critics who say it leans toward anti-vaccine views.

"The members of this ACIP Committee are committed to reassuring the public and restoring public confidence by removing unnecessary risks and harms whenever possible. That is a pro-vaccine agenda," Kulldorff said.

He later added: "We welcome scientific critique of any of our votes, as there are gray areas due to incomplete scientific knowledge."

The panel is currently discussing a vaccine against the liver disease hepatitis B.

Information on the meeting agenda suggests the committee may be poised to roll back — at least partly —

a longstanding recommendation that virtually all U.S. children get an initial dose of hepatitis B vaccine right after birth.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and many public health officials support that decades-old practice.

Roberts said rates of the liver disease among children have dropped tremendously since it was put into place. "I don't understand the rationale of why we would stop providing that vaccine and that guidance to babies when we've seen such great progress in that area," said Roberts, who was scheduled to join the vaccine panel but was dismissed by Kennedy. "If it's not broken, why change it?"

Doctors' groups and public health organizations have voiced alarm about Kennedy and his new panel. Concern intensified in May, when Kennedy announced he was removing COVID-19 shots from the CDC's recommendations for healthy children and pregnant women. The move was heavily criticized by doctors' groups and public health organizations, and prompted a lawsuit by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other groups.

The committee is scheduled to make COVID-19 vaccine recommendations on Friday. The AAP and some others groups have issued their own vaccination recommendations, which disagree with recommendations put out by federal officials this year.

BOWLBY

From page A1

officials and saying most people are "stuck in the middle" between far-right and far-left stances, not identifying with either the Democratic or Republican parties.

"I am just a middle-class person from the middle of the state trying to bring government together to solve the real problems that people face," Bowlby said.

Miller's office did not

return a request for comment.

Bowlby said her decision to run also was motivated by observing rallies and events of various groups across the political spectrum. She said she was especially moved by people who brought homemade signs to the events rallying for causes like Social Security, Medicare and financial security.

"I looked into their eyes and what I saw was a variety of emotions," she said. "I saw hurt, anger, frustra-

tion and fatigue. It moved me."

Although Bowlby worked as a government affairs lobbyist for nearly 30 years — including serving on a task force on the pharmaceutical industry for late Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar — a win would make this her first time holding elected office. She cited that time, when she helped pass bills in the state legislature, as giving her the necessary experience to hold office and an insight into the mindset of both Democratic and Re-

publican lawmakers.

"I've probably passed more bills than Mary Miller has at this point," she said.

If Bowlby ends up winning the position, she would like to be part of committees concerning agriculture and health care, she said, noting both are relevant to residents of the 15th District. She believes her experience working with legislators would be "a huge benefit to the Republican Party."

Bowlby said she plans on being "a lot different"

from Miller. She said she plans to make herself available to her constituents and visit small towns in the district; Miller has been criticized for skipping out on town hall meetings to which she had been invited. Bowlby also criticized Miller for taking on topics irrelevant to her constituents and not requesting earmark funds for the 15th District.

"I don't know how she goes back to her district and justifies not requesting that money," Bowlby

said. "Her other Illinois (delegates) are doing that and when she doesn't request that money, they are just losing out on things that improve their water system, their septic — there's a whole variety of issues that you can use public funds for."

Miller defeated Democratic candidate Erika Weaver in the 2020 general election to serve as the 15th District's representative. She has won both elections since, including running unopposed in the 2024 general election.

POLICE BEAT

Jacksonville Police

ARRESTS, CITATIONS

• A 15-year-old boy was arrested at 7:24 a.m. Wednesday in the 1900 block of West Morton Avenue on a charge of possession of stolen property. He was accused of being in possession of a vehicle that had been reported stolen.

DISTURBANCES

• Police were called at 3:49 a.m. Thursday to a disturbance in the 800 block of Hoagland Boulevard. Those involved

were separated.

• Police were called at 3:22 a.m. Thursday to a disturbance in the 800 block of South West Street involving a report of an intoxicated woman refusing to leave. Officers said the woman agreed to leave.

• Police were called at 2:17 p.m. Wednesday to a disturbance in the 300 block of Washington Street. Those involved were separated.

• Police were called at 10:59 a.m. Wednesday to a disturbance in the 100

block of West Chambers Street. Those involved agreed to separate.

• Police were called at 10:50 a.m. Wednesday to a disturbance in the 800 block of West Lafayette Avenue. Those involved were separated.

ACCIDENTS

• A 19-year-old Mount Vernon man was cited on a charge of failing to yield and a 24-year-old Jacksonville woman was arrested on charges of driving while license is suspended and operating

an uninsured vehicle after their cars collided at 5:46 p.m. Wednesday at West College Avenue and South Fayette Street. The man was taken to Jacksonville Memorial Hospital for treatment, according to a police report.

VANDALISM

• A restroom at the Illinois College softball fields was vandalized, according to a report filed at 11:01 a.m. Wednesday.

• A headstone was damaged at East Cemetery, 600 Myrtle St., according to a report filed at 7:11 a.m. Wednesday.

OTHER REPORTS

• Police were called at 6:59 p.m. Wednesday to City Place for a report of a

man climbing on a water tower. Officers said he agreed to leave the area.

South Jacksonville Police

ARRESTS, CITATIONS

• A 45-year-old Jacksonville man was arrested at 1:06 p.m. Monday in the 300 block of Dewey Drive on charges of possession of methamphetamine and possession of drug paraphernalia.

• A 43-year-old Jacksonville man was arrested at 1:44 p.m. Sept. 12 at Lincoln Avenue and Massey View Road on a charge of driving while license is revoked or suspended.

DISTURBANCES

• Police were called at 12:11 p.m. Tuesday to a disturbance in the 100 block of West Greenwood Avenue. Those involved were separated.

THEFTS, BURGLARIES

• A vehicle was stolen from the 600 block of West Greenwood Avenue, according to a report filed at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday.

OTHER REPORTS

• Police were called at 9:06 a.m. Saturday to the 1700 block of South West Street for a report of a nude woman sitting in a yard. She was taken to Jacksonville Memorial Hospital for evaluation, according to a police report.

David C.L. Bauer



FALL FESTIVAL & Holiday Guide

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