

# Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

## Prosecutors target Trump '16 race



Former President Donald Trump returns to court after a recess during opening statements in his trial for allegedly covering up hush money payments at Manhattan Criminal Court on Monday in New York. **YUKI IWAMURA-POOL/GETTY**

Opening argument claims payments add up to election fraud

By Michael R. Sisak, Jennifer Peltz and Eric Tucker  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump tried to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election by preventing damaging stories about his personal life from becoming public, a prosecutor told jurors Monday at the start of the former president's historic hush money trial.

"This was a planned, long-running conspiracy to influence the 2016 election, to help Donald Trump get elected through ille-

gal expenditures to silence people who had something bad to say about his behavior," prosecutor Matthew Colangelo said. "It was election fraud, pure and simple."

A defense lawyer countered by assailing the case as baseless and attacking the integrity of the onetime Trump confidant, now the government's star witness.

"President Trump is innocent. President Trump did not commit any crimes. The Manhattan district attorney's office should never have brought this case," attorney Todd Blanche said.

The opening statements offered the 12-person jury — and the voting public — radically divergent road maps for a case that will unfold against the backdrop of a closely contested White House race in which Trump is not only the

presumptive Republican nominee but also a criminal defendant facing a possible felony conviction and prison.

It is the first criminal trial of a former American president and the first of four prosecutions of Trump to reach a jury. Befitting that history, prosecutors sought from the outset to elevate the gravity of the case, which they said was chiefly about election interference as reflected by the hush money payments to a porn actor who said she had a sexual encounter with Trump.

"The defendant, Donald Trump, orchestrated a criminal scheme to corrupt the 2016 presidential election. Then he covered up that criminal conspiracy by lying in his New

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## College's venue selection queried

LGBTQ+ students, parents frustrated about graduation

By Hank Sanders  
Daily Southtown

Prairie State College's decision to hold its commencement ceremony at Victory Apostolic Church in Matteson is receiving pushback from parents and students in the community who oppose the religious facility because of its statements in opposition to same-sex marriage.

On its website, the church writes that it does not recognize marriage that is not between a man and a woman, believes "the Bible teaches that homosexuality is a sin," and does not "condone the homosexual lifestyle."

When she found out in December that her school had chosen to hold graduation at a venue that opposes non-heterosexual relationships, graduating student Rebecca Fassbender filed a complaint with the school's Department of Equity and Inclusion.

"I received what I see as a generic response and quite dismissive," said Fassbender, of Park Forest, who identifies as lesbian and is president of Prairie State College's Pride Club. "It included some things about their budget and that this location needed to be within district and within their budget."

But Fassbender questions if this is the only place in the area that would fit the school's criteria. Students of the college have to live within the boundaries of Community College District 515, which spans from Homewood to

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Erika Burwinkel of the Puerto Rico Project, center, distributes food to the homeless with co-worker Luis Rafael, center left, and organization Director Melissa Hernandez, right, on Friday near a tent encampment in the 3000 block of West Chicago Avenue in Chicago. **JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

## Groups battling opioid crisis express frustration

Advocates say Illinois slow at distributing money from legal settlements

By Olivia Olander  
Chicago Tribune

Legal settlements with prescription painkiller manufacturers, distributors and sellers have put Illinois in line for some \$1.3 billion in payouts intended to help in fighting an opioid crisis that's still killing tens of thousands of Americans every year.

The payouts stem from multi-state agreements with major drug distributors, manufacturers and household names such as CVS, Walgreens, and Johnson and Johnson. Payments started in 2022 and will continue well into the next decade, and offer the potential for a significant investment in harm reduction and treatment efforts. Nationwide, more

than \$50 billion is expected from the settlements, according to KFF Health News, which tracks the money.

But so far, the flow of settlement money to organizations in Illinois has remained barely a trickle. A complex bureaucratic process for distributing the funds has put only a tiny fraction of the money into the hands of organiza-

tions dealing with the crisis.

"I am concerned that it doesn't appear that significant funds have been dispersed up to this point," said Tanya Sorrell, director at the Rush Substance Use Disorder Center of Excellence and co-chair of the Illinois Harm Reduction and Recovery Coalition.

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## Chicago-area Jews celebrate Passover

Dozens of practicing Jews observed the first night of Passover Monday evening at a Seder at the Ambassador Chicago hotel in the Gold Coast neighborhood. For many Jews, the first Passover since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack holds special significance. **Chicagoland, Page 3**

## Grocers plan to sell more Illinois stores

Under federal scrutiny over their plans to merge, supermarket chains Kroger and Albertsons say they will sell off about 20 more Illinois grocery stores than originally planned. **Business**

## Experts urge action to slow invasive insects



Vince Burkle, of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, holds an adult spotted lanternfly found in Huntington, Ind., on Aug. 17, 2022. **ANDY LAVALLEY/POST-TRIBUNE**

Residents encouraged to destroy spongy moth eggs to reduce spread

By Avani Kalra  
Chicago Tribune

While Chicagoans were alarmed to learn the spotted lanternfly had been found in Illinois last year, experts say spring is the time to take action against that insect — as well as another damaging invasive species that has made far more inroads and gotten less attention.

The spongy moth, formerly known as the gypsy moth, has been in Illinois for decades and can strip leaves and kill trees, sometimes defoliating large swaths of land.

Kathryn Bronsky, a national policy manager with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, said while it's important to stop spongy moths from killing trees in the 20 states in which they are currently established, it's even more important to limit the insect's expansion across the United States.

Bronsky said spongy moths usually spread around the country in the form of egg masses.

"Egg masses get laid on everything," Bronsky said. "They can lay them on your barbecue or your backyard grill, on your patio furniture, things you'd think there's no way caterpillars could be on."

Egg masses are usually a cream color, according to Greg Dwyer,

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TODAY'S WEATHER



High 67 Low 37

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 12

\$4.00 city and suburbs and elsewhere  
176th year No. 114 © Chicago Tribune

