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Vol. 27 • Issue 10

Sat., March 7, 2026

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## Northern Lakes Lightning Section 6A champs in overtime thriller

In a heart-pounding showdown Feb. 26 at the St. Cloud MAC, the Lightning battled past Sartell in overtime, securing a 3-2 victory and punching their ticket forward in dramatic fashion.

With the game deadlocked at the end of regulation, the Lightning refused to let the moment slip away. In overtime, they delivered the decisive goal, sealing the win and sending players, coaches and fans into celebration.

The championship roster includes Samuel Suja, Waylon Katterhagen, Tristan Soular, Kyler Rikala, Derek Berg, Max Raushel, Lucas

Martin, Sutton Sullivan, Bodie Nybakken, Jacob Peterson, Eli McNevin, Josiah Reier, Leyton Cable, Huck Balmer, Landen Cartie, Griffen Hannah, Parker Fulton, Damon John, Nolan Hall and Colton Vry.

Leading the team are coaches Thomas Klein and Brett Reed, who have guided the Lightning through a hard-fought season to reach the section's top spot.

The journey continues this week. After press time, Northern Lakes is set to face Warroad at Grand Casino Arena on Wednesday, March 4 at 8 p.m.



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## After rejected 2025 referendum Aitkin will vote again

Aitkin voters will soon decide the future of their schools as the Aitkin Public School District #1 seeks approval of a \$55.3 million investment plan in a special

election set for Tuesday, April 14. Early voting is already under way.

The proposal asks residents to consider funding a new PreK-6 school to replace

aging Rippleside Elementary, along with improvements to district transportation facilities and the addition of a shared gymnasium for school and community use.

"At nearly 70 years old, Rippleside Elementary has serious health, safety, and infrastructure problems that are failing our students and limiting learning opportu-

nities," said Superintendent Dan Stifter. "After careful planning and listening to the community, we believe this plan meets our most urgent

Continued on Page 4



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# Brainerd Police Chief John Davis announces April 30 retirement

Brainerd Police Chief John Davis will retire at the end of April, stepping down earlier than planned after learning his bladder cancer has returned. Davis announced his decision in a February letter to the Brainerd City Council. Council members formally accepted his resignation during their meeting Monday, March 2, and approved an updated job description for the police chief position as the city begins the transition process. In his letter, Davis said he had originally intended to retire in March 2027 but chose to move the date forward following the recent health development. While

his prognosis remains favorable, he expects to undergo additional treatments in the coming months. "After careful consideration, I have decided that it is in the best interest of my health, my family, and the City of Brainerd that I move my retirement forward," Davis wrote, noting his final day of service will be April 30. Davis said he has been working closely with Deputy Chief Runde to ensure continuity within the department. "To ensure a smooth transition and honoring the council's previous preference for internal succession, I have been working closely with Deputy Chief Runde," he

wrote. "I can state with absolute confidence that he is prepared and fully capable of leading this department should the council choose him as the next Police Chief. "It has been a profound privilege to serve the City of Brainerd and an honor to lead the men and women of this department." Davis was appointed chief in March 2023 following the retirement of Mike Bestul. He joined the Brainerd Police Department as a patrol officer in 2005 and brings more than 30 years of public safety experience in Crow Wing County. His career also includes 13 years as a paramedic with Crosby Ambulance, North

Memorial Health Ambulance and North Memorial Health Air Care. Council members expressed regret in accepting Davis' resignation and thanked him for his leadership.

The hiring process is expected to be completed before Davis' departure at the end of April.

## LEGAL NOTICE

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Feb. 21, 28, & Mar. 7, 2026)

### TOWNSHIP OF LITTLE PINE NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting for the Township of Little Pine will be held on Tuesday, March 10, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. In the case of inclement weather the meeting will instead be held on Tuesday, March 17, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. The meeting will be held at Emily City Hall 39811 State Highway 6, Emily, MN 56447. The meeting is also accessible via Zoom Meeting ID: 780 450 6554 Password: 56447 Dated: February 10, 2026 ABRA HAWLEY Little Pine Township Clerk 3.6

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, March 7, 2026)

### NORLAND TOWNSHIP REQUEST FOR GRAVEL QUOTES

Norland Township will be accepting quotes for 5,000 cubic yards of crushed gravel with an option to purchase additional yards to be placed on town roads during 2026 as directed by the town board. Quotes will be accepted until 6:45 p.m. on Thursday March 12th, 2026 at the regular town board meeting. Please contact the town clerk at 763-370-2308 or mathew.nix@gmail.com for the required quote forms and job requirements. Dated: February 27, 2026 MATHEW NIX, Clerk Nordland Township 3.35

(Published in NewsHopper Sat., Feb. 28 & Mar. 7, 2026)

### LIBBY TOWNSHIP BOARD OF AUDIT

The Libby Township Board of Audit will be held at the Palisade Community Center on Tuesday, March 10, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. Dated this 17th day of February 2026 JANE GRIMSBO JEWETT, Clerk Libby Township 2.0

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Feb. 28 & Mar. 7, 2026)

### WEALTHWOOD TOWNSHIP CHANGE OF MEETING NOTICE

Wealthwood Township Board regular meeting will be changed to Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. due to the Annual Meeting and Election at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 10, 2026. Dated: February 6, 2026 LINDA WENDLANDT, Clerk Wealthwood Township 2.4

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Feb. 28 & Mar. 7, 2026)

### WEALTHWOOD TOWNSHIP NOTICE OF ELECTION AND ANNUAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given to the voters of Wealthwood Township. The annual election of Wealthwood Township will be held at the Wealthwood Town Hall on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, to elect one Supervisor for a three (3) year term, and a special election for one Supervisor for a one (1) year term. The polls will be open from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. The annual meeting will convene at 8:15 p.m. to conduct all necessary business as prescribed by law. In case of inclement weather, the election and meeting will be postponed until Tuesday, March 17, 2026. Dated: February 6, 2026 LINDA WENDLANDT, Clerk Wealthwood Township 4.5

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(Published in NewsHopper Sat., Feb. 28 & Mar. 7, 2026)

### LIBBY TOWNSHIP ANNUAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given to the qualified voters of Libby Township, County of Aitkin, State of Minnesota, that the Annual Town Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 10th, 2026 at the Palisade Community Center. The Annual Meeting will commence at 1:00 p.m. to conduct all necessary business prescribed by law. In case of inclement weather, the meeting may be postponed until the third Tuesday in March. Dated this 17th day of February 2026 JANE GRIMSBO JEWETT, Clerk Libby Township 3.3

(Published in NewsHopper Sat., Feb. 28 & Mar. 7, 2026)

### HAZELTON TOWNSHIP NOTICE OF 2026 ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Notice is hereby given to the qualified voters of Hazelton Township, County of Aitkin, State of Minnesota that the Hazelton Township Annual Election of Officers and Annual Town Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at the Hazelton Townhall. The Election Poll hours will be from 1:00pm to 8:00pm at which time voters will elect: 1 Supervisor - 3 year term 1 Clerk - 2 year term Vote on question: Whether to move the town election to November? The Annual Meeting will commence at approximately 8:15pm, following the close of polls, to conduct all necessary business prescribed by law. In case of inclement weather, the meeting and election may be postponed until the third Tuesday in March; March 17, 2026, at the same time and location. The Board of Canvass will meet following the Annual Meeting to certify the official election results. Dated this 16th day of February 2026 KAY OLSON, Clerk Hazelton Township 6.2

# Walz, Ellison testify before Congress

Gov. Tim Walz and Attorney General Keith Ellison testified last week before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform as Republicans accused Minnesota's top elected officials of failing to act decisively against widespread fraud in state-administered federal programs.



Gov. Tim Walz and Attorney General Keith Ellison before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

Republicans on the panel alleged Walz and Ellison stalled efforts to halt payments to suspected fraudulent providers, placing political considerations ahead of program integrity. Committee Chair James Comer and other GOP members also accused Walz of misrepresenting when he first became aware of fraud tied to Feeding Our Future and other state programs.

legal barriers — were cited internally as reasons for allowing payments to continue. The committee further contends that federal law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, never directed state officials to maintain payments to suspected fraudulent providers, contradicting previous public statements from the governor's office. The report estimates that approximately \$300 million in federal child nutrition funding tied to Feeding Our Future was lost to fraud. It also cites U.S. Department of Justice estimates that as much as \$9 billion in Medicaid-related funds across 14 "high-risk" Minnesota programs may have been lost or placed at risk since 2018. Walz and Ellison defended their records during testimony, emphasizing the complexity of administering large federal programs and the need to balance due process protections with fraud prevention. They have previously pointed to increased oversight measures and cooperation with federal prosecutors following the exposure of Feeding Our Future.

Lawmakers further noted that 82 of the 92 individuals charged so far in the Feeding Our Future case are Somali Americans.

According to the report's executive summary, senior officials in the governor's office and the attorney general's office were aware of credible fraud concerns as early as 2019 within the Department of Human Services and by April 2020 within the Department of Education. The report alleges state agencies had clear authority to suspend or halt payments to providers suspected of fraud but repeatedly failed to do so.

The hearing follows the release of an interim staff report issued March 4 by the committee majority. The report summarizes findings from an investigation launched in December 2025 into fraud within Minnesota's federally funded social services pro-

In the case of Feeding Our Future, the report states that the Minnesota Department of Education continued payments even after identifying significant program deficiencies. It also asserts that litigation threats and concerns about accusations of discrimination — rather than



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**Aitkin 2026 school referendum | Continued from Page 1**

needs while offering long-term value to our taxpayers.”

Voters will see three separate questions on the ballot:

- Question One proposes a \$49.79 million investment to replace Ripplside Elementary school with a new PreK-6 building.
- Question Two proposes a \$3.19 million investment

to replace the bus garage located near the railroad tracks and improve storage space of district vehicles and equipment.

- Question Three proposes a \$2.325 million investment to build an additional gymnasium attached to the new PreK-6 school for school and community use.

A similar proposal was narrowly rejected by voters in November 2025. In the months since, district leaders worked with community members, engineers and architects to refine the plan. By scaling back square footage for the school, gym and bus storage areas, officials say the estimated annual tax impact

of the April referendum is 33 percent lower than last fall's proposal.

“This referendum is an important community decision about the future of our schools and community,” said School Board Chair Cindi Hills. “We know our residents have questions, and we are committed to

providing clear answers so they can make an informed choice when they vote.”

Residents have three options for casting their ballots:

- Early in-person voting is available at the Aitkin County Auditor's Office, 307 Second Street NW in Aitkin, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. through April 13.

- Early voting by mail is available by requesting an absentee ballot and returning it before Election Day.

- Election Day voting will take place from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday, April 14, at the Aitkin Public Library, 110 First Ave. NE.

More information about the referendum — including detailed project plans, a property tax calculator, frequently asked questions and voting details — is available at [WeAreAitkin.org](http://WeAreAitkin.org).

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**Winter Specials**

<p><b>Thursdays 4PM-8PM</b> All You Can Eat** <b>Broasted Chicken</b> Your choice of white or dark meat. Served with mashed potatoes &amp; gravy, seasonal vegetable, coleslaw &amp; a dinner roll <b>\$19</b></p> <p><b>Fridays 5PM-8PM</b> All You Can Eat** <b>Fish Fry</b> Served with coleslaw, french fries, seasonal vegetable &amp; a dinner roll <b>\$21</b> <small>(**No to go containers for reorders on AYCE specials**)</small></p>	<p><b>Saturdays 4PM-8PM</b> <b>Chef's Choice Dinner Special</b></p> <p><b>Sundays 9AM-Noon</b> <b>Crepe Bar</b> Crepe's filled with your choice of Peach, Strawberry or Blueberry compote. <b>\$4/each</b></p>
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**Ruttger's Retail**

[ruttgersretail.com](http://ruttgersretail.com)

**The Garage** Winter Hours  
Monday - Saturday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
Sunday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**End of Season Sales**  
**50% off**

**POOL OPEN**

**Front Desk/ Lobby Shop/ Pool Hours**  
Sunday-Wednesday 7 a.m.- 8 p.m.  
Thursday-Saturday 7 a.m.- 10 p.m.

Call 218-678-2885 to **BOOK A FUN POOL PARTY** for your kids, friends, or family celebrations.

**2 Indoor Pickleball Courts**  
Sunday-Wednesday 7 a.m.- 8 p.m.  
Thursday-Saturday 7 a.m.- 10 p.m.  
Call 218-678-2885 to reserve.

**Bay Lake SALON & SPA**  
at Ruttger's

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.  
or by Appointment Call 218-678-4667

[ruttgers.com/spa](http://ruttgers.com/spa) • 17455 Old Hwy. 6, Deerwood

**Upcoming Events:**  
Mark Your Calendars for Our Annual Job Fair  
March 28 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. in the ballroom.  
Easter Weekend April 4-5  
Poke the Bear Maple Tap Weekend April 10-12

**Ruby's & Bear Pine Bar**

Winter Hours: Thursdays 4-8 p.m.,  
Fridays 11 a.m.-8p.m., Saturdays 8 a.m.-8p.m.,  
& Sundays 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**Happy Hour**  
Thursday & Friday 4 p.m.-6 p.m.  
Saturday 1 p.m.-4 p.m.  
Sunday 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

- ½ price glasses of wine
- \$4 draft beer**
- \$4 well drinks**
- ½ price build your own pizzas
- \$5 off buckets of broasted chicken**
- ½ price appetizers

**St. Patrick's Weekend Celebration**

**March 13-15**  
**Friday 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.**  
**Saturday 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.**  
**Sunday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

**Irish Burger** \$19 House blend patty of ground lamb and corned beef. Swiss cheese, sauerkraut, bell peppers & Irish mustard sauce. Served with fries or chips.

**Drunken Poutine** \$18 French fries covered in Guinness onion gravy, cheese curds, seasoned ground lamb & sauerkraut.

**WEEKEND DRINK SPECIALS**

- Pot of Gold Bloody Mary** \$10
- Green Draft Beer** \$4 • **Guinness** \$4
- Lucky Leprechaun** \$9  
Jameson Irish whiskey, Blue Curacao, pineapple juice, lime garnish
- Green Leprechaun** \$8 Northland Vodka, Midori, Lemonade, Club Soda & Lime
- Top o' the Morning Sunrise** \$8 Blue Curacao, OJ, sparkling wine

**DINNER Friday & Saturday 4-8 p.m.**

- Shepherds Pie** \$26 Served with a dinner roll and soup of the day or salad with your choice of dressing
- Corned Beef & Cabbage** \$23 served with a dinner roll and soup of the day or salad with your choice of dressing

**BREAKFAST Saturday 8-11 a.m. & Sunday 9 a.m.-3 p.m.**

- Shamrock Flapjacks** \$15 All you can eat, buttermilk pancakes with mint & chocolate chips. Served with one serving of your choice of bacon or sausage.
- Green Eggs & Ham** \$15 Spinach & Parmesan scrambled eggs, grilled ham, hashbrowns & choice of toast.
- Corned Beef Hash** \$18 House corned beef, peppers, onions and baby red potatoes, two eggs your way and choice of toast.

**SUNDAY ONLY 9 a.m.-12 p.m.**

- Crepe Station** \$4 Peanut butter & caramelized banana, Nutella & Fluff, strawberry & blueberry

25039 Tame Fish Lake Rd., Deerwood  
**218-678-2885 • [ruttgers.com](http://ruttgers.com)**



**CASH 4 JUNK CARS AND MACHINERY**

**Call 218-839-3371**