THE COLUMBUS
Telegram

Home opener Shamrock boys drop two games

SPORTS, B1

A flavor-packed chocolate pound cake

FOOD, A3

Tuesday, March 25, 2025 WHERE **YOUR STORY** LIVES columbustelegram.com

Colleges cut ties with DEI nonprofit

CHEYANNE MUMPHREY AND JOCELYN GECKER
Associated Press

It was a little-known program to help Black and Latino students pursue business degrees.

In January, conservative strategist Christopher Rufo flagged The PhD Project in social media posts that caught the attention of Republican politicians. The program is now at the center of a Trump administration campaign to root out diversity, equity and inclusion programs in higher education.

The U.S. Education Department this month said it was investigating dozens of universities for alleged racial discrimination, citing ties to the nonprofit organization. That followed a warning a month earlier that schools could lose federal money over "race-based preferences" in admissions, scholarships or any aspect of student life.

The investigations left some school leaders startled and wondering what prompted the inquiries. Many scrambled to distance themselves from The PhD Project, which aimed to help diversify the business world and higher education faculty.

The investigations highlight the climate of fear and uncertainty in higher education, which President Donald Trump's administration began policing for policies that run afoul of his agenda as he moves to dismantle the Education Department.

The PhD Project was not well known before Rufo began posting about it, said Jonathan Fansmith, senior vice president of government relations at the American Council on Education, an association of college presidents.

"It's not hard to draw some lines between that incident and why 45 institutions that were partners with The PhD Project are getting this investigation announced," he

Please see **EDUCATION,** Page A6

GODOFREDO A. VÁSQUEZ, ASSOCIATED PRESS
People protest the Trump administration Wednesday at the University of California campus in Berkeley.

DEDICATED TO HIS CRAFT

JARED BARTON, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM
Dr, Dillon Clarey poses for a photo in an exam room at the Columbus Community Hospital Dermatology Clinic.

Dr. Dillon Clarey talks about being CCH's first permanent dermatologist

JARED BARTON
The Columbus Telegram

For the past year and a half, Dr. Dillon Clarey of Columbus Community Hospital's dermatology clinic has been the man to talk to about skincare, and now he's available to do so full time.

"I grew up in Columbus and I have a lot of family here," Clarey said. "I like living here."

Clarey spent around nine years in Omaha and Lincoln, first attending medical school and then a residency. In that time, he saw a lot of patients driving in from Columbus and the surrounding area and he thought this area needed somebody to come to it, rather than the other way around.

"I knew there wasn't a dermatologist full time in Columbus and watching people wait or have to drive or have conditions that I thought would be treated earlier kind of pulled on my heart, I suppose, a little bit," Clarey said.

Dermatology came to him through a doctor named Robert Fonda, with whom he worked during his first year of medical school. The pair did dermatological examinations together and Clarey started taking an intense interest in it.

"I looked at a lot of different specialties, you know, kind of give them all a fair shot, and ultimately decided I liked seeing dermatologic conditions, taking care of patients, young to old, minor surgeries to acne," Clarey said. "It's a specialized field that not that all that many people are practicing in rural Nebraska."

While Columbus does have a couple of dermatologists who make their rounds locally, CCH didn't have one on staff until Clarey came along. Being full time in one place means better and more immediate

Please see **CLAREY,** Page A6

Experts say 'Buy Tesla' comment broke law

BERNARD CONDON
Associated Press

NEW YORK — When a White House adviser in the first Trump administration told TV viewers to "Go buy Ivanka stuff," top government lawyers sprang into action, telling her she violated ethics rules and warning her not to do it again.

Government ethics experts have varying opinions on whether the 2017 criticism of Kellyanne Conway went far enough, but many agree such violations now might not even draw an official rebuke.

A week after President Donald Trump turned the White House lawn into a Tesla infomercial for Elon Musk's cars, a second sales pitch by a U.S. official occurred, this time for Tesla stock.

"It will never be this cheap," U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Wednesday. "Buy Tesla."

Government ethics experts said Lutnick broke a 1989 law prohibiting federal employees from using "public office for private gain," later detailed to include a ban on "endorsements." Although presidents are generally exempt from government ethics rules, most federal employees are not and are often punished for violations, including rebukes like the one Conway got.

As of Friday, no public action had been taken against Lutnick and it was unclear whether he would suffer a similar fate.

"They're not even thinking of ethics," Richard Painter, Trump critic and former Republican White House ethics czar, said of administration officials.

Painter has equally low expectations of that other possible brake to future violations — public opinion: "I don't know if people care."

The reaction to Conway's "Ivanka stuff" comment suggested certain lines couldn't be crossed.

Within days of Conway's TV comments, the head of the federal ethics agency, the Office of Government Ethics, wrote a letter to the White House saying Trump's adviser may have broken the law and urged a probe. A White House lawyer then met with Conway to remind her of the law and reported to

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Weather
Some sun and breezy
High 65 • Low 28
FORECAST • A3

Inside

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OBITUARIES

Theresa Petr

JULY 22, 1952—MARCH 22, 2025

Theresa Petr, age 72, retired information specialist, passed away Saturday, March 22, 2025, in Columbus, Neb.

Theresa was born in Hastings, Neb., on July 22, 1952, to George and Loretta (Schreiter) Petr. She lived on a farm in Deweese until moving to Hastings in 1966. She graduated from St. Cecilia High School as valedictorian of her class, attended St. Mary's College, and earned her Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture from the University of Nebraska. She was employed at Fleischer Manufacturing for many years, then Columbus Irrigation, and spent 10 years at Loup Power District until retiring.

Photography was always her passion. At Fleischer, Theresa used that skill along with her technical writing to produce literature for Buffalo farm equipment. At Loup, she spearheaded the publications department.

Outside activities included teaching Junior Achievement for many years, where she got to know many of the kids. Theresa was currently president of the Platte County Historical Society and produced their monthly newsletter. She helped produce the new trails map for the local CART group, and was active with Friends of Music. She was very involved with her parish of St. Bonaventure. Friends describe her as kind hearted, but very 'techy' and detail oriented. She loved her dogs over the years, and more recently enjoyed her Jeep.

Theresa is survived by brother, Don (and Kathy) of Pennsylvania; sister, Kathy (and Tom) Kachovec of Ohio; brother, Dave (and Lisa) of California; nephews, Michael and Ryan; nieces, Sarah, Jessica, Amanda and Emily; and grandnephews, Jerome, Logan and Owen; and grandnieces, Bernadette, Faustina and Edith.

Visitation will be 5 to 7 p.m., followed by a vigil service, on Tuesday, March 25, at McKown Funeral Home in Columbus. Visitation starts at 9:30 a.m., and funeral Mass at 10:30 a.m., on Wednesday, March 26, at St. Bonaventure Catholic Church in Columbus. Lunch will be served in the parish hall following the service. Burial will be at 2:30 p.m., in Parkview Cemetery in Hastings.

Memorials may be directed to St. Bonaventure Parish or Platte County Historical Society.

www.mckownfuneralhome.com.

Delores Irwin

March 22, 2025

Delores Irwin of Columbus died Saturday, March 22, 2025 at Emerald Nursing and Rehab in Columbus.

Services are 2:00 pm Thursday, March 27 at McKown Funeral Home. Visitation is on Thursday from 1-2:00 pm at the funeral home.

PUBLIC RECORD

Columbus Fire Department Activity Log

March 18

Fire Calls

5:05 p.m., E 23rd St and E 18th Ave, fire alarm

9 p.m., 6th St and 11th Ave, carbon monoxide alarm

Rescue Calls

11:44 a.m., 36th St and Meridian Rd

12:07 p.m., 53rd Ave and 34th St

3:04 p.m., 6th St and 2nd Ave

8:46 p.m., 38th St and 48th Ave

March 19

Fire Calls

9:57 a.m., 21st St and 31st Ave, carbon monoxide alarm

10:36 a.m., 13th Ave and 7th St, elevator alarm

Rescue Calls

6:06 a.m., 13th St and 35th Ave

8 a.m., Solar Pl and 45th Ave

10:40 a.m., 38th St and 39th Ave

10:48 a.m., 40th Ave and 27th St

11:25 p.m., 36th St and 35th Ave

5:52 p.m., 47th Ave and 27th St

9:46 p.m., 10th St and 16th Ave

March 20

Fire Calls

12:07 a.m., 280th St and 13th Ave, fire alarm

Rescue Calls

8:50 a.m., 27th St and 37th Ave

10:08 a.m., 25th St and 35th Ave

11:38 a.m., E 11th Ave and E 23rd St

5:23 p.m., 40th Ave and 27th St

5:43 p.m., 13th St and 36th Ave

6:31 p.m., 36th Ave and 83rd St

March 21

Fire Calls

None

Rescue Calls

9:43 a.m., 25th St and Meridian Rd

6:05 p.m., 53rd Ave and 34th St

8:16 p.m., Center Rd and Service Rd

March 22

Fire Calls

None

Rescue Calls

12:34 a.m., 38th St and Don Zornes Healthcare Dr

3:54 a.m., 38th St and Meridian Rd

4:20 a.m., E 29th Ave and E Country Villa Rd

12:23 p.m., 12th St and 19th Ave

March 23

Fire Calls

5:21 p.m., 43rd Ave and 27th St, fire alarm

Rescue Calls

5:43 a.m., # 28th St and E 41st Ave

12:23 p.m., 12th St and 19th Ave

1:50 p.m., 27th St and Pershing Rd

5:21 p.m., 43rd Ave and 27th St

10:43 p.m., 12th St and 19th Ave

11:05 p.m., 5th St and 21st Ave

THINGS TO DO

Tuesday, March 25 —5:30 to 6:30 p.m. — Alzheimer's Education Series at Columbus Senior Center, 3111 19th St. Tuesday's class is "Building Foundations of Caregiving." This free class is designed to increase caregiver confidence while reducing stress. It offers helpful ways to approach the responsibilities of caring for someone living with dementia using a person-centered approach.

Wednesday, March 26 — 2 to 5 p.m. — Makerspace Open Hours in the Creator Studio at Columbus Public Library. Everyone is welcome to use the library's Cricut, laminator, sublimation printer, heat and mug press, VHS and MP4 video conversion, and large format printer during the staffed hours.

Thursday, March 27 — 10:30 a.m. to noon and 1:30 to 3 p.m.— StoryArt at Columbus Public Library's Children's Room. StoryArt is designed for young children and their families. Each session consists of a 30-minute storybook reading followed by an art craft and playtime. Snacks are provided.

Thursday, March 27 — 12 p.m. — Community Builders town tour in Clarkson. Registration begins at noon with lunch at K & L Brass Rail, 227 Pine St. Tours will include Clarkson Bakery, JLS Fitness & Beyond/JLT Gymnastics/Fit Fuel Café, The Barn, and Take Root Nursery/Little Blue Barn Coffee Truck. For reservations call Jessica at Cornhusker Public Power District, 402-564-2821 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays, or email her at jessicak@cppd.us. Those planning to attend are asked to RSVP by Friday, March 21. **Thursday, March 27 — 6:30 to 7:45 p.m.** — Adult Book Club at Columbus Public Library. The meeting will be held on the second floor in the FNBO Conference Room. Books for the current month may be picked up from the display table in front of the first-floor service desk.

Friday, March 28 — 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. — Ninth-grade orientation at Lakeview High School. The orientation is for eighth graders, not currently Lakeview students, interested in attending Lakeview High School this coming fall. Check-in is at 1:30 p.m. and the orientation will conclude at about 3:30 p.m. There will be a math placement exam. Students also should bring a copy of their first, second and third quarter report card, and any MAPS data they may have. Contact Cindy Wendt in the school office at 402-564-8518.

Friday, March 28 — 4 to 5 p.m.— YA Anime Club at Columbus Public Library's Creativity Corner. Tweens in grades 9-12 are welcome to watch anime and enjoy snacks.

Friday, March 28 — 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. — Fish Fry at Silver Creek American Legion Post 263. Cost of the all-you-can-eat fish fry is $15. Takeout meals are available. Call 308-773-2160 to order.

Monday, April 7 — 6:30 p.m. — Schuyler Historical Society Banquet and Annual Meeting at the Eagles Club, 322 E. 11th St., in Schuyler. A chicken fried steak dinner will be served. The social begins at 6 p.m. with the dinner at 6:30 p.m. The cost is $20 per person. A Colfax Veterans Memorial update will be given by Lumir Jedlicka and Mike Benesch. A raffle and live auction will follow. Reserved must be paid in advance. A payment of $20 per person should be mailed by Monday, March 31, to Schuyler Historical Society, 309 E. 11th St., Schuyler NE 68661. For more information, call Betty Brichacek at 402-615-0857.

Trump

the ethics office that she assured him she would abide by it in future.

This time, there is no head of the Office of Government Ethics. He was fired by Trump. Ditto for the inspector generals of various agencies who would head any investigation.

"What is likely to happen now? I really don't know," said Kedric Payne, chief lawyer at the Campaign Legal Center, a nonprofit watchdog that sent a letter calling for an investigation to the government ethics office Friday. "We no longer have the head of the Office of Government Ethics to push the Commerce Department to make sure the secretary acknowledges the law."

Payne said Lutnick's comment on TV may seem like a small transgression but it could snowball into a bigger problem if not punished.

"It starts with one TV appearance, but can develop into multiple officials asking people to support companies and products," Payne said. "If there are no consequences, you get into a danger zone of a corruption."

When it comes to endorsing products, presidents used to be far more circumspect.

Their comments were mostly quick asides expressing opinions of taste, such as when Harry Truman called Pillsbury flour the "finest" or John F. Kennedy said United Airlines was "reliable."

Ronald Reagan famously enthused about his jelly beans habit, remarking that they were the "perfect snack."

Trump had five Teslas lined up in the White House driveway last week as he praised Musk's company. Then he slipped into a red Model S he targeted for personal purchase, exclaiming, "Wow. That's beautiful."

"Presidents are allowed to have personal opinions on products they like and dislike," said ethics lawyer Kathleen Clark, referring to the Truman through Reagan examples. "But what Trump did was transform the White House into a set for advertising the products of a private company."

"It's the difference between holding an extravaganza and holding an opinion."

In the aftermath of the Tesla White House event, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and three other senators wrote a letter calling for an investigation to the Office of Government Ethics saying that, while presidents are exempt from ethics law banning endorsements, Elon Musk isn't.

A spokeswoman from Warren's office said the government ethics office had not responded about what it planned to do about the White House Tesla endorsement. The Office of Government Ethics itself said it would not comment on either the Warren letter or Lutnick's TV appearance.

The Commerce Department did not respond to requests for comment.

Asked whether Lutnick would be reprimanded or an investigation opened, White House spokesman Kush Desai defended Lutnick, lauding "his immensely successful private sector career" and his "critical role on President Trump's trade and economic team."

Former White House ethics chief Painter said Democrats also played loose with the ethics law.

Painter blasted former President Joe Biden for not removing his name from a University of Pennsylvania research institute when he was in office even though it appeared to be helping draw donations overseas.

However, Painter said the slide from caring about ethics laws and norms to defiance has hit a new low.

"There's been a deterioration in ethics," he said. "What Biden did wasn't good, but this is worse."

Clarey

From A1

care for potentially life-threatening conditions, he said. In rural areas, dermatologists are few and far-between, so having a resource that's close could mitigate a lot of damage.

"I think that's really important for a number of reasons," Clarey said. "One, continuity of care, and then two, if you let some of these conditions be unmanaged or untreated for potentially a bit longer, it could have serious consequences for people, not (only) in terms of morbidity, but also mortality, too, when you're talking about skin cancer," Clarey said.

Skin cancer screenings — which Clarey encourages everyone to get — take up much of his time, with skin cancer and acne being the two conditions he deals with most.

"It's nice to have a full-time practice here so that people don't have to wait or if they have something they're really concerned about, even if it's not cancerous or something that, to us, may not seem like a big deal, it's a big deal to them," Clarey said.

Nancy Rinkol, practice manager at the Columbus Otolaryngology Clinic, said Clarey's return is a blessing, one that the clinic had needed for a while.

"We are rural and we see a lot of farmers that just delayed their care historically because they didn't have the time, they didn't have local access to a dermatologist," Rinkol said. "We're seeing those patients now come in and, hopefully, going forward those skin cancers will be treated quicker, earlier, so they don't progress to be a more expensive condition."

Dr. Dillon Clarey speaks at a ribbon-cutting for the dermatology clinic at Columbus Community Hospital when it opened in September 2023.

JARED BARTON, THE COLUMBUS TELEGRAM

Education

From A1

said.

Those include public universities such as Arizona State, Ohio State and the University of California, Berkeley, along with private schools like Yale, Cornell, Duke and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The Education Department sent letters informing universities that its Office for Civil Rights received a complaint and they were under investigation for allegedly discriminating against students on the basis of race or ethnicity because of a past affiliation with The PhD Project. The letters set a March 31 deadline for information about their relationship with the nonprofit.

In a statement, the PhD Project said it aims to "create a broader talent pipeline" of business leaders. "This year, we have opened our membership application to anyone who shares that vision," it said.

Most of the universities' leaders issued brief statements saying they will cooperate with investigators and refused further comment.

The Trump administration showed willingness to withhold federal funding over issues involving antisemitism allegations, diversity programs and transgender athletes. At Columbia University, under fire for its handling of pro-Palestinian protests, the administration pulled $400 million in federal money and threatened billions more if it does not comply with its demands.

"There is a concern that if one university steps up and fights this then that university will have all of their funding cut," said Veena Dubal, general counsel for the American Association of University Professors.

"They are being hindered not just by fear but a real collective action problem. None of these universities wants to be the next example."

Some colleges moved swiftly to stop working with The PhD Project.

The University of Kentucky said it severed ties with the nonprofit Monday. The University of Wyoming said its college of business was affiliated with the group to develop its graduate student pipeline, but it plans to discontinue its membership.

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas said three professors participated in the program, but two no longer work at the university and a third was killed in a campus shooting in 2023. Arizona State said its business school is not financially supporting The PhD Project this year and told faculty in February the school would not support travel to the nonprofit's conference.

Similar fallout came in Texas earlier this year, when Rufo began posting about the PhD Project.

"Texas A&M is sponsoring a trip to a DEI conference," Rufo posted on Jan. 13. Rufo, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, accused the university of "supporting racial segregation and breaking the law."

The next day Republican Texas Gov. Greg Abbot posted on social media that the university "president will soon be gone" unless he immediately "fixed" the matter. Texas A&M withdrew from the conference, and soon after at least eight other Texas public universities that previously participated in The PhD Project's conference also withdrew, the Texas Tribune reported.

Rufo did not respond to a request for comment.

Six other colleges are being investigated for awarding "impermissible race-based scholarships," the Education Department said. Additionally, the University of Minnesota is being investigated for allegedly operating a program that segregates students on the basis of race.

Hundreds gathered Wednesday on the University of California, Berkeley, campus known for student protests.

This rally was organized by faculty members, who stood on the steps of Sproul Hall, known as the birthplace of the free speech movement in the 1960s.

"This is a fight that can be summed up in five words: Academic freedom is under assault," Ula Taylor, a professor of African American studies, told the crowd.