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THE ROANOKE TIMES

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ROANOKE, VIRGINIA \$2

Funding strategy for I-81 revived

Lawmakers are pursuing a last-minute agreement in closed-door meetings.

By Amy Friedenberger
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RICHMOND — A small group of lawmakers is meeting this week behind closed doors to discuss Interstate 81 legislation, and negotiations are ongoing about whether a funding mechanism can be agreed to that would pay for improvements to the congested highway.

Lawmakers on a conference committee are debating two bills that at one point proposed the installation of tolls along the highway. Regional disputes among lawmakers led to the legislation being rewritten to scrap the tolls and instead create a fund to hold future revenue.

The House and Senate bills are nearly identical, but lawmakers are hashing out ideas in the private meetings about whether they can still find a funding mechanism, according to lawmakers familiar with those discussions. The funding ideas emphasize placing more of a financial burden on the trucking industry. Those ideas include raising the diesel tax, earmarking a portion of tractor-trailer registration fees toward I-81, and tolls.

Del. Steve Landes, R-Augusta, the chief patron of the House bill, said Tuesday that state

See I-81, 4



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TAP organizes celebration of black history



STEPHANIE KLEIN-DAVIS | The Roanoke Times

TAP's Headstart kids perform as part of a black history celebration on Tuesday at St. John's Episcopal Church in Roanoke. More than 200 people gathered to honor key figures in the Roanoke Valley's historically black neighborhoods.

MORE INSIDE Read more about TAP's Black History Month celebration. **Virginia 1**



Benjamin Arthur Crockett

Man pleads guilty to child abuse

A prosecutor detailed the defendant's violent acts against three boys in their Christiansburg home.

By Mike Gangloff
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Victoria Ashley Crockett

CHRISTIANSBURG — Benjamin Arthur Crockett pleaded guilty Tuesday to abusing his wife's three young sons, with a prosecutor saying one boy was hit so hard with the back of an

Army knife that it chipped his cheekbone and another was "hogtied" to a bed.

Police have said that Crockett and his wife, who also faces child abuse charges, lived with their children in a grimy Christiansburg home filled with dogs. Besides three counts of child abuse and neglect, Crockett, 33,

pleaded guilty to possessing a firearm as a nonviolent felon. Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Robert Turk imposed the sentence recommended in a plea agreement: five years on each charge, to run consecutively for a total term of 20 years, with all to be suspended after Crockett served two years and 11 months.

Crockett will be supervised by the probation office for 10 years after his release,

Turk said. The remaining prison time can be reimposed if Crockett violates the terms of his release. One requirement will be that Crockett have no contact with the three boys who were the victims in the case, Turk said.

The mother, Victoria Ashley Crockett, 31, who also faces three charges of child abuse, has a May 4 plea

See CROCKETT, 4

Court upholds federal agency's approval of pipeline

An appellate court on Tuesday rejected claims by groups of opponents who challenged the controversial project.

By Laurence Hammack
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An appellate court made short work Tuesday of a sweeping chal-

lenge of the federal government's approval of the Mountain Valley Pipeline, dismissing 16 claims made by opponents.

"None of the challenges succeeds," a three-judge panel of the

U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia wrote in a five-page order.

In perhaps the most comprehensive legal attack on the controversial pipeline, opponents had hoped to find a fatal flaw in the key approval it received from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in October 2017.

The determination by FERC that there was a public need for the natural gas to be transported through the 303-mile pipeline opened the gate for a series of other approvals by state and federal agencies.

Although several of the permits have since been suspended, Mountain Valley construction

crews have been able to continue work over the past year with FERC's ultimate authority intact.

"It is unfortunate the Court failed to give substantive consideration to our many concerns," several members of community groups who were part of the legal

See PIPELINE, 4

Where is it?

Here's your guide to what's inside.

Obituaries	Virginia 3	Extra	Extra 1
Comics	Extra 4	Business	Page 6
Puzzles	Extra 5	Lottery	Virginia 1
Opinion	Nation & World 2	Talk of the Day	Page 2

WEATHER

Roanoke	New River
32 32	32 31
HIGH LOW	HIGH LOW

Full forecast and weather data. **VIRGINIA 6**





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