



Dear Dáithí

Is using weight loss drug cheating?

Life/Style Page 11

Dear HSE

How much is my life worth?

Analysis Page 9



Flying start

Buckley shines as Cork cruise to victory

Sport Pages 2-3

Cunha believe it?

Revitalised United stun leaders Arsenal

Sport Pages 12-13



Monday, January 26, 2026

www.irishexaminer.com

No. 63,630

€2.60 (£1.70 in N. Ireland)



A federal agent points a weapon at a protester in Minneapolis after thousands took to the streets to demand ICE agents leave the city.

Picture: Brandon Bell/Getty

Brazen falsehoods surround shooting

On the street corners of Minneapolis on Saturday night, people were gathering in groups of five or 10.

Bracing the freezing cold, they stood in silent vigil holding candles to remember another one of their own who had been shot dead by Donald Trump's federal agents.

Alex Pretti was an ICU nurse. His colleagues described him as a "good, kind person who lived to help".

Like thousands of fellow Minnesotans, he was doing what he could to combat a large-scale ICE enforcement operation in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St Paul.

It's the kind of response you'd hope your own community would show in the face of what many are likening to Nazi Germany — the comparison feels less hyperbolic each day.

Some people are delivering food and supplies to families afraid to leave

Sean Murray
Minneapolis



their homes. Others are leading community patrols and informing others when ICE is in the area.

Pretti was one of many observers documenting ICE actions in real time, which routinely feature indiscriminate targeting, raids of family homes, and people being pulled from their cars.

He was observing ICE in South Minneapolis on Saturday morning when he was shot dead by federal agents. When I arrived in the state of Minnesota for the *Irish Examiner* last week, locals from various backgrounds were united on the key points. They said Trump's government is smearing the people of this city, that this is more than a

simple immigration crackdown, the longer ICE stays here the capacity for harm heightens each day, and that ICE needs to get out of Minneapolis.

All of those points were forcefully re-emphasised on Saturday. Videos of the killing have circulated widely online. They are horrific.

Pretti had a licence to carry a gun, but two sworn witness testimonies of the incident have said he was not brandishing a weapon at any time when he approached federal agents.

He approached them after a woman was knocked to the ground, appearing to try to help her up. After he was hit with what looked like pepper spray or another chemical agent by an ICE agent, he was outnumbered in a melee on the ground before he was shot multiple times.

Stephen Miller, the deputy White House chief of staff who many see as the architect of this terror being

unleashed on Minneapolis, described the incident as an "assassin trying to murder federal agents".

Greg Bovino, the head of the US border patrol, said it "looks like a situation where an individual arrived at the scene to inflict maximum damage on individuals and to kill law enforcement".

To believe this — what Pretti's family has described as "sickening lies" — is to deny the reality of your own eyes.

Compounding the fear and violence the Trump administration is inflicting upon a city that doesn't vote for him and doesn't want his goons around are the brazen and shameless falsehoods being uttered to justify the indefensible.

It happened when Renee Good was killed earlier this month. It has happened again with Alex Pretti. In between, the image of five-year-old Liam Ramos, who was taken by ICE and sent

hundreds of miles away to a detention centre, encapsulates the pointless cruelty of it all.

As state governor Tim Walz put it: "You ask for peace, we give it — and we get shot in the face on the streets."

Like when George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in 2020 despite pleading he couldn't breathe, Minneapolis has become the epicentre of a crisis that has been inflicted upon it.

Locals have no say in the matter. And they can't take much more of this.

Watching from afar when I return home, I wonder how many more Renee Goods, Alex Prettis, and Liam Ramoses there will be by the time our Taoiseach is all smiles in a bowl of shamrock in Washington just a few weeks from now.

Special report: 5
Editorial: 8

35% of pupils in disadvantaged schools miss at least a month

■ 27% of primary schools record increase in days lost

Jess Casey

Education Correspondent

Pandemic-era "chronic" school absenteeism shows little sign of improvement, as 35% of children attending the most disadvantaged schools are missing at least a month of school.

Schools in poorer areas and special schools are experiencing higher rates of school absences than mainstream schools in more affluent locations, an analysis shows.

During the 2023/24 school year, 35% of students in Deis urban band one schools and 31% of students in special schools missed 20 or more days of school — compared with 17% of students in non-disadvantaged schools.

A report by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), in partnership with Tusla Education Support Service, found that 30% of primary schools experienced a rise in "chronic absences" between 2022/23 and 2023/24.

"Chronic absence" is defined as missing 20 or more days of school.

Some 27% of primary schools also recorded an increase in days lost per student.

The report found: ■ Higher levels of absence are found in multi-denominational schools than in Catholic or minority faith schools; ■ Students in disadvantaged

areas lose the most time at school, averaging 20.07 days per student;

■ Fee-paying schools recorded less "chronically absent" students and fewer days lost per student;

■ Small primary schools were found to have better attendance levels on average.

Pooled data from all primary schools indicated that 46.7% of all absences were due to illness.

This was followed by unexplained absences (24.7%), "other reasons" (12.8%), holidays (12.1%), and urgent reasons (3.6%).

At post-primary level, the most common reason for absence is unexplained (48%), followed by illness (31%), other reasons (16.1%), holidays (1.9%), and urgent reasons (2.6%).

Among post-primary schools, 42% saw an increase in chronic absence. Some 48% reported an increase in days lost per student.

The study found there was no "statistically significant" association between being a mixed-gender primary school and the number of days lost, compared to single gender schools.

However, at post-primary level, boys' schools were associated with significantly lower absence than mixed schools.

The study notes how there is "no evidence" that the passage of time since the pandemic is likely to solve attendance issues.

Anna Moya, the co-author of the report, said: "Greater absence among schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people is concerning, as it is likely to contribute to inequality in later life.

"It is particularly worrying that attendance in primary and post-primary Deis schools is not recovering as well as non-Deis schools in the post-covid period."

The findings provide an important evidence base for targeting support to schools with high levels of absence, according to co-author Emer Smyth of the ESRI.

Ms Smyth said: "Matching data on the background of individual students to the school-level information would yield greater insights into the factors driving absenteeism, thus helping to address these issues."

A spokesperson for the Department of Education said that tackling school attendance is a key priority for education minister Hildegarde Naughton.

Key measures taken include issuing attendance grants to all schools in December to "promote and support regular school attendance".

"Schools will be asked to utilise this grant to reach and engage children and young people identified as being at risk of poor attendance," the department spokesperson said.

No policy for 'giftedness'

Jess Casey

Deirdre Jacob knew her son was different from other children.

At the age of two and a half, he started to develop an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the names and different classifications of dinosaurs, animals, and sea creatures inspired by a love of watching *National Geographic*.

He related better to adults than children his own age.

By five, he could give a 10-minute presentation on the different habitats of the Amazon rainforest that would rival a university student.

"We realised when he was very young that there was something there," Deirdre said. She just didn't know what.

"Different people would say: 'Oh my God, he reminds me of *Young Sheldon*.'"

"But I'd never watched the programme so I didn't know what they were talking about. There were things we were noticing, but we didn't have the expertise to understand what was going on with him."

Ireland does not have any legislation or national policy defining "giftedness", the term most commonly used to describe exceptionally advanced ability and potential.

News: 2

Cabinet set to amend laws over deploying Irish troops

Tadgh McNally
Political Reporter

The Government will be required to undertake annual expert reviews of new laws which change how Ireland deploys troops abroad.

Ministers are expected to approve a series of amendments to new laws which would dismantle Ireland's triple lock system for deploying soldiers abroad, by removing the need for a UN mandate for peacekeeping missions.

At present, the triple lock mechanism bars the deployment of 12 or more troops abroad unless there is a UN mandate, government approval, and a Dáil resolution.

The new laws will also increase the number of troops that can be deployed without a Dáil vote up to 50.

It is expected Cabinet will approve the laws as early as this week.

While the laws are mostly unchanged from those proposed last year, defence minister Helen McEntee is bringing forward two amendments.

This includes a stronger annual review of Irish troops deployed abroad as part of international forces.



Irish troops on parade at Camp Shamrock, situated near the border with Lebanon and Israel.

One government source suggested these expert reviews could be carried out by members of the judiciary or other senior legal professionals.

There will be a new statutory mechanism introduced which would require the defence minister to write to the Oireachtas defence and national security committee if the Government is deploying 50 troops or less abroad.

Government sources have said the changes address issues raised by the Oireachtas defence and national security committee.

The committee had recommended that, before troops are deployed abroad as part of an international force, there should be an independent legal review.

The committee said findings should be made available to Oireachtas members and that a version, redacted where necessary, be made public.

It is understood Ms McEntee has asked officials in the Department of Defence to outline possible options for a legal oversight mechanism surrounding laws to remove the triple lock.

The Government has repeatedly said the triple lock is no longer fit for purpose, citing the fact that the UN Security Council has not approved a peacekeeping mission since 2014.

The opposition has criticised the proposals, accusing the Government of moving Ireland away from neutrality.

Inside

News

Storm Éowyn roared through Ireland last year, but it also managed to help uncover skeletal remains at the ancient monastic site at Lemanaghan bog. **Page 3**

Outdoor

A meitheal was a co-operative labour system used in rural Ireland — an environmental charity is now using the method to tackle invasive trees to help create native woodlands. **Page 13**



Business

All the indicators globally are that the biopharma industry is moving toward a tech-driven future, characterised by a surge in AI-powered drug-discovery research, as the industry grapples to offset the losses from an upcoming €300bn patent cliff. **Page 15**

‘Focused anger’ helping locals stand up to ICE as Minnesota teeters on the brink

DONALD Trump once famously — or maybe infamously — declared that he could “stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody and [he] wouldn’t lose any voters, OK?” “It’s, like, incredible,” he added. Exactly 10 years to the day since those remarks, last Friday, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of one of the biggest cities in the US to put forward their version and say: “No, you can’t just shoot somebody and not face consequences.”

We, of course, know that the president of the United States did not pull the trigger and shoot mother of three Renee Good three times in South Minneapolis this month.

That was Jonathan Ross, an agent of Trump’s dreaded and hated Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), with footage showing him calling her a “stupid bitch” after fatally shooting her so recklessly and callously.

There was another shooting in the city at the weekend, the third involving federal agents this month and the second fatal one. The footage of agents killing Alex Pretti is profoundly disturbing.

It all comes after the Trump administration’s deployment of thousands of ICE agents, who have been harassing and terrifying the residents of the twin cities of Minneapolis and St Paul in the midwest state of Minnesota since early December.

It is the second large-scale upheaval in the lives of all ordinary people in this decade after the city became the epicentre of the Black Lives Matter movement following the killing of George Floyd in 2020. Or third — if you count covid.

Minnesotans have had enough. Small acts of resistance against the might and power of the federal government being brought to bear on their city are all adding up to more than the sum of their parts. But there’s only so much they can do when, in the words of state governor Tim Walz, “you ask for peace, we give it — and we get shot in the face on the streets”.

Meanwhile, Mr Trump says he supports protesters in Iran. Yet here his well-funded, heavily armed private police force — which outnumbers the regular police five to one — is inflicting chaos on this liberal city.

The people say they are acutely aware how important it is to stand up to this now. They want the world to know what is happening. They want it to be known what they’re doing about it.

People are being pulled from their beds by agents wielding assault rifles, children are being detained and sent away on flights to destinations hundreds of miles away, and individuals with black or brown skin are unwilling to leave their home in case they don’t come back. They believe this will be unleashed on another city, and another, if it is left continue unchecked.

There’s something rotten in the state of Minnesota. And Minneapolis is teetering on the brink.

‘Not just one isolated’ incident

Drogheda native Dermot Cowley moved to the US 40 years ago. For the last 27 years, he has run O’Donovan’s pub in downtown Minneapolis — one of the last Irish-owned Irish pubs here.

Before covid and the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the queue for his pub was out the door and downtown was buzzing. It’s right across the road from the stadiums that are home to the city’s baseball and basketball teams. He employs people from all sorts of backgrounds.

But it’s been one thing after another, and all of it adds up to keeping people away from the city. This latest action from ICE is just the latest and worst step. There’s barely any traffic on the roads and footfall was slow when the *Irish Examiner* visited O’Donovan’s late last week. “It’s the energy in the city, it’s just been hindered so much by all of this,” says Mr Cowley.

“It’s not just one isolated thing, it’s a combination and we’re being show-cased now on a national and world level like Minneapolis is a horrible place. Which it really isn’t.

“Probably half the restaurants in downtown are gone since covid. And the others that are open, like myself, we’re probably operating at 60% of what we used to.”

Nearing the age of 60, Mr Cowley has lived his entire adult life in the US. He says what’s happening now with ICE’s invasion of the city is unlike anything he has ever seen, ensuring any recovery in the downtown area is firmly on hold.

“I just became a grandad. She’s a little one-year-old, and I’m looking at her and thinking ‘what’s her future?’,” he says.

“And my kids have come to me going: ‘We don’t want to raise our daughter in this environment’.”

Although Minneapolis and St Paul historically did have strong numbers of Irish people coming over, and has a strong enough Irish-American population to sustain multiple Irish dance schools and a strong music and arts scene, the number of Irish-born immigrants living here is relatively small compared to other major US cities.

Donnelly visa

Born and raised in Tullamore, engineer Ruairi Barnwell recently moved to Minneapolis from Chicago and set up the Ireland Network Minnesota to link with other Irish-born people living in the twin cities and wider state.

“The Department of Foreign Affairs does a fantastic job connecting with the diaspora around the globe, and here in

After a second fatal shooting in a matter of weeks, Irish immigrants and Irish Americans are among thousands taking to the streets, amid freezing temperatures, to fight off the intimidation, writes **Sean Murray**



Minnesotans have taken to the streets in protest over the ICE crackdown on in their neighbourhoods and the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

Picture: Stephen Maturen/Getty

America,” he says.

“But I would say we too often lean into the ‘ah sure isn’t it great we have 32m Irish Americans’.

“There’s only about 130,000 off-the-boat Irish in America, which is way down from the ‘Donnelly visa’ days.

“In the state of Minnesota, there’s only about 500 and that’s conservative.”

The “Donnelly visa” was a special US immigration lottery programme in the late 1980s/early 1990s that gave tens of thousands of Irish people a pathway to legal residency, having been introduced by congressman Brian Donnelly.

Mr Barnwell adds: “There’s not many Irish illegals here, so what’s happening now isn’t having that direct an impact. But it’s that wider community part too.

“This is affecting the whole city what’s going on.”

‘Precaution worth taking’

Belfast-born musician Danny Diamond moved to Minneapolis in the winter of 2019, so his time here has taken in the mass demonstrations and chaos that followed the murder of George Floyd by a police officer.

“I felt a bit stunned as it played out in front of me,” he says.

“But there was a huge energy coming off of people, the people were really rising up. It was destructive at times, but it was really powerful.

“And what’s happening now feels more oppressive. It feels like it’s coming from top down upon us, and it feels worse. But it also engenders a lot of oppositional energy, a lot of anger, and focused anger from the people en masse can do great things.”

Like so many others, Mr Diamond has taken to dressing his passport with him everywhere he goes. In case after case, it is clear that ICE is engaging in racial profiling, with people of colour much more likely to be stopped by ICE than white people.

This indiscriminate targeting is making people afraid to go to shops, work, or school. Even people with the legal right to be here — and even citizens — are being apprehended



Ruairi Barnwell, the founder of the Ireland Network Minnesota, and O’Donovan’s pub owner Dermot Cowley react to the protests.



People mourn at a makeshift memorial in the area where 37-year-old Alex Pretti was shot dead by federal immigration agents late last week.

Picture: Roberto Schmidt / AFP via Getty

by ICE in terrifying situations before later being released because there’s no cause to keep them.

In this context, carrying your passport around is a “precaution worth taking”.

“You don’t fully realise until you check yourself and say: ‘Jesus, I’m doing that now,’” says Mr Diamond.

“My friends back home, they don’t do that. It’s markedly different.”

Despite these challenges, Mr Diamond is among the many residents of the twin cities who express pride at the action being taken against ICE.

Community activists are braving the freezing cold temperatures at all hours of the day to patrol their neighbourhood, warn others when ICE agents are in the area, and film agents to try to ensure they don’t breach people’s rights.

People are delivering food and other supplies to the homes of families who are afraid to leave the house.

Tens of thousands of people, meanwhile, take to the streets in downtown, in -25C temperatures, calling for ICE to get out of their city.

All the while they are ignoring the smears of the federal government labelling them domestic terrorists and paid agitators.

“I’m really proud that we live here, because I do feel that there must be something in this community that aggravates or threatens the regime,” says Mr Diamond.

“It’s almost like a symbol or beacon of resistance that they really want to hit

here first and hit here hard. It’s horrible, but we must be doing something right to be in that position.

“If everyone helps, they can’t arrest the entire city, you know what I mean? Not yet, anyway. There’s great power in that.”

Little time for action

ICE can turn up on your street at any time. The shock-and-awe tactics of turning up at a house with heavily armed agents to arrest people can blindside people, leaving little time for action.

But communities are rallying around the communal places targeted by ICE: Schools, places of worship, even bus stops.

Aoife* began to notice attendance falling off a cliff in the aftermath of Renee Good’s murder.

“It got to a point where the school district said they had to find an alternative,” she says.

“Some of these families are not leaving their homes. When we found this out, our first concern was food — how do we get food to them without revealing who they are?”

“So we have to try match up resources. And what I’m seeing is people coming together. They might not be the people who are going out protesting, but they’re collecting food and they’re getting food to hubs.”

Unions have played a role in supporting teachers through issuing guidance on how to be safe if signing up to be community witnesses to video ICE activities and get it out there to the world.

Aoife took part in this herself and faced the consequences.

“After one incident, I was followed aggressively in a car by what I think were agents trying an intimidation tactic. And again, this is in my own neighbourhood. I’m a science teacher. This is not normal.

“And then there’s this layer of guilt

as well, knowing that I can just walk out and go to a grocery store and I’m safer than some of my neighbours just because of the way I look, and it’s fundamentally un-American to treat people differently, especially based on the way that they look.

“This is just a vile thing. I was so upset by things that were happening last week that in my body it just didn’t feel like my own.”

The racial profiling is so intense that anyone who isn’t white can feel unsafe.

This immigrant hunt is based so heavily on race and “looking different” that even Native Americans in their ancestral lands are being targeted.

Mary LaGarde is the executive director of the Minneapolis American Indian Centre. She says a lot of the members of her community are afraid to leave their homes.

“Initially, I know even I was scared. Now, it’s not being scared,” she says.

“Now, it’s more [like] I’m angry. I’m angry at what is happening to our community. I’m angry that families are being torn apart and children are being detained. This is disgusting.”

She describes a situation where a Native American colleague witnessed ICE activity, but was subsequently boxed in her car by agents who had followed her.

“Our community patrols were out, and they saw what was happening, ran over there, and surrounded her vehicle, and they were able to get her safely out and into a building so that she wouldn’t be detained by ICE,” says Ms LaGarde.

“At this stage, all we want is ICE to leave Minnesota and quit terrorising our community.”

The legal route

One of the ways that communities are fighting back is through the legal route.

If someone is lifted by ICE, even in cases where their rights are breached, lawyers can still advocate for them.

Many turn to the Immigrant Law Centre of Minnesota and its policy manager, Julia Decker. Given how indiscriminate the actions are, they are advising each person, regardless of their status, to consider the worst-case scenario.

“Our detention hotline has been expanded to four days a week, with staff getting training, and the phone is just constantly ringing because it’s either people in detention or family members of people who are detained,” says Ms Decker.

She highlights how many of those detained are being taken out of the state.

They include five-year-old Liam Ramos, who was taken to a detention camp in Texas in a case that caused fresh fury last week.

His father has no apparent criminal record and a pending asylum case. They were taken away from their homes regardless. Liam’s school said an ICE agent told the boy to knock on the door and ask to be let into their house “in order to see if anyone else was home — essentially using a five-year-old as bait”.

Cases where people who were going through the correct routes to get status, or citizenship, but then get taken by ICE anyway are presenting a huge challenge for lawyers.

“It sounds like a philosophical or existential question of what does legality mean if the federal government is just passing the line of what is legal all the time?” says Ms Decker.

“When the law becomes irrelevant, what do you do? We were literally not trained to answer that question.

“I think it can be scary sometimes, knowing that certainly the federal government has not been shy about its dislike for people like us who are doing this work — in addition to, obviously, its dislike of immigrants. But this is what the moment calls for [us standing up], and we’re here to do that.”

Everyone has an opinion of why Trump and his administration has chosen here for his first large-scale crackdown. Very few believe it is purely to do with immigration. This is very much a Democrat-voting state, and it has been for decades.

Governor Tim Walz was the running mate of Kamala Harris, who lost out to Mr Trump in the 2024 presidential election. Mr Trump enflamed the situation in mid-January after alleging a billion-dollar fraud involving Somali immigrants, which are tens of thousands strong in Minnesota.

Regardless of the reasons behind ICE descending in such numbers on the city, it’s happening now and nobody knows how long it will last. What most agree on is that, with each passing day, the harm deepens. Tens of thousands marched on Friday calling for ICE to get out of their city. The very next day, agents shot a man dead.

“Minnesota has had it,” says Mr Walz. “This is sickening. The president must end this operation. Pull the thousands of violent, untrained officers out of Minnesota. Now.”

Such pleas have fallen on deaf ears so far. The longer it goes on, there is fear that things could still get far worse before they get better.

■ Name changed to protect identity
Editorial:8