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Credit Reporting Agencies To Wipe Out Debt

By Ramishah Marug

CNN

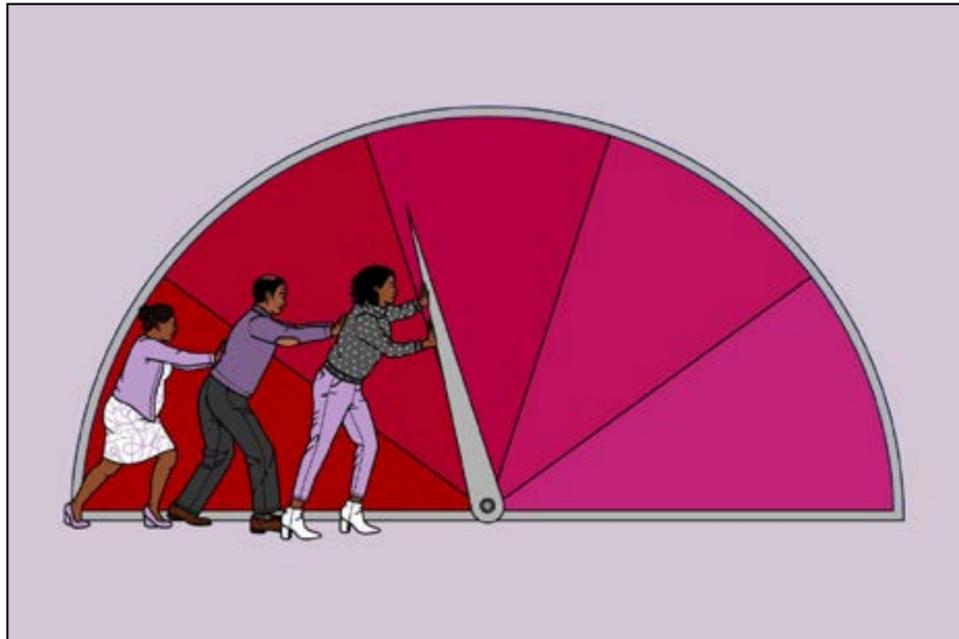
Three of the country's largest credit reporting agencies are removing nearly 70% of medical debt from consumer credit reports, the companies announced in a joint statement Friday.

Equifax (EFX), Experian (EX-PGF) and TransUnion (TRU) will eliminate billions of dollars from the accounts of consumers who faced unexpected medical bills that they were unable to pay. The three firms said they made the move after months of research.

"Medical collections debt often arises from unforeseen medical circumstances. These changes are another step we're taking together to help people across the United States focus on their financial and personal well-being," the companies said in a joint statement.

The announcement follows research from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau showing that Americans had racked up \$88 billion in medical debt on consumer credit records as of June 2021. It's the most common debt collection credit account on credit records, the CFPB said.

Medical debt can be volatile and unpredictable, and can



negatively affect many financially secure consumers. Black, Hispanic, young and low-income consumers are most likely to be impacted by medical debt, the bureau said.

Medical debt concerns have heightened since the Covid-19

pandemic hospitalized millions of people, and CFBP Director Rohit Chopra has been publicly critical of medical debt collections by credit reporting agencies. On March 1, Chopra said the CFPB will be "closely scrutinizing" the Big Three credit

reporting agencies. "We expect them to take seriously their role as major actors in the credit reporting system -- a system whose integrity and accuracy can determine the financial futures of hundreds of millions of people," Chopra said.

Starting July 1, paid medical collection debt will no longer be included on consumer credit reports. Millions of Americans had credit scores previously lowered because debts paid after being sent to collections could appear on credit reports for up to seven years. More changes are expected.

It will now take one year before unpaid medical collection debt appears on a consumer's report, instead of six months, the previous standard.

The three companies also said that starting in the first half of 2023, medical collection debt less than \$500 will no longer be included on credit reports.



2 NORTH CAROLINA INSURANCE AGENTS ACCUSED OF FRAUD (AP)—Two North Carolina insurance agents have been accused of submitting false insurance claims to collect more than \$30,000, authorities said.

The N.C. Department of Insurance said in a news release that Christian LaFabian Ratliff, 34, of Rockingham, was charged with insurance fraud obtaining property by false pretense, both felonies. Ratliff also was charged with two misdemeanor counts of making false statements in an application for insurance.

The department also said Jamel Dante Buie, 43, of Hamlet, is facing similar charges.

Special agents with the Department of Insurance's Criminal Investigations Division accuse Ratliff of obtaining \$29,528 in commissions by submitting life insurance applications containing false information to two insurance companies.

Special agents with the department accused Buie of obtaining \$4,758 in commissions by submitting false applications between November 2020 and August 2021. The department said Ratliff's offenses occurred between October 2020 and August 2021.

FEDERAL JUDGE SAYS EX-FIREFIGHTER'S LAWSUIT CAN CONTINUE

ASHEVILLE (AP)—A federal judge has ruled a discrimination lawsuit filed by a former firefighter who was one of the highest ranking females in a North Carolina fire department can proceed based on a claim of "disparate treatment."

Attorneys for the city of Asheville and Fire Chief Scott Burnette had asked U.S. District Court Judge Martin Reidingner for a pre-trial summary judgment throwing out all claims by ex-firefighter Joy Ponder, the Asheville Citizen Times reported Thursday. Ponder claimed she had endured a hostile work environment and that Burnette and others inflicted emotional distress.

Reidingner dismissed claims against Burnette, writing in his order that he could not be held responsible under the 1964 Civil Rights Act's Title VII against employment discrimination because the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals said "supervisors are not liable in their individual capacities for Title VII violations."

But the city, as the chief's employer, could be held liable for his actions, which may have amounted to disparate treatment of Ponder based on her gender, the judge wrote.

Ponder deferred to her attorney, John Parker, for comment on the ruling.

"The Summary Judgment ruling by the Court had a very positive outcome for us," Parker said in an email. "The Judge found that we had sufficient evidence of gender based discrimination by the City of Asheville to move forward to a jury."

The trial is set for May 9.

Ponder, who resigned from her post as Asheville Fire Department division chief in September 2020, said she faced years of harassment and gender discrimination from Burnette after she led outside research on the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder among city firefighters.

Ponder, who became division chief in 2014, took a leave of absence in early 2019 to battle breast cancer. She said that when she returned at the end of the year, Burnette and the deputy chief "designed and executed an effective demotion and campaign to display me as a poor performer and divisive employee."

She was placed under her bosses' close supervision—"effectively surveillance," she said—told to stay away from the firefighters under her command and moved to an isolated corner office from which she said she "was afraid to even walk to the restroom or copier."

"The continued harassment and abrupt disruption of my schedule and life that I had maintained successfully for many years led to a deterioration in my physical and mental health and I was forced

JOINT INVESTIGATION NETS ARREST IN 30-YEAR-OLD MURDER CASE

(AP)—A Mississippi man has been arrested for a 1992 murder of a North Carolina woman after an investigation by state and local law enforcement agencies, officials said.

The N.C. State Bureau of Investigation said in a news release that it was joined by the Surry County Sheriff's Office in breaking the case.

On the morning of July 7, 1992, the body of Nona Stamey Cobb was found alongside the northbound lanes of Interstate 77 in Surry County.

In April 2021, special agents from the SBI's Cold Case Investigation Unit and investigators from the Surry County Sheriff's Office reviewed the physical evidence, which was re-examined to include DNA. While working with a company that specializes in forensic genetic genealogy, agents were able to identify Warren Luther Alexander, 71, as a possible suspect in Cobb's murder using DNA.

Last Tuesday, Alexander was arrested in Diamondhead, Miss., the news release said. Alexander is charged with murder and is being held at the Hancock County Jail awaiting extradition to North Carolina, the NCSBI said. The investigation is continuing into whether there are more victims.

FLORIDA COUPLE PLEADS GUILTY TO \$881K COVID-19 RELIEF FRAUD

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP)—A Florida couple has pleaded guilty to stealing nearly \$900,000 in COVID-19 relief funds.

Amber Bruey, 35, of Lehigh Acres, pleaded guilty Wednesday in Fort Myers federal court to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, wire fraud, conspiracy to commit money laundering and illegal monetary transactions, according to court records. Her husband, Anthony Bruey, pleaded guilty to the same charges last month. A sentencing date wasn't immediately set for the couple.

Jackson Prepares For Senate Confirmation

By Mary Clare Jalonick

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Engaging in lawyerly small talk, Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley was telling Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson this past week how he met his wife while clerking at the high court.

Jackson already knew the story, he discovered. She even "filled in some of the details for me."

"So I thought—she's very well prepared."

Jackson was prepared, as well, for the Republican senator's questions about Guantanamo Bay detainees she represented 15 years ago as a public defender and, after that, in private practice. Hawley said after the meeting that he is still concerned about that part of her record but found her forthcoming and engaging, with a "very high

degree" of legal acumen. "I think her hearings will be very substantive," he said.

Jackson, who sits on the federal appeals court and would replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer, is unlikely to need support from Hawley or any other Republican to be confirmed, and may not win over any of them. But as she makes the rounds at the Capitol, traversing from one Senate office to the next before her confirmation hearings later this month, Jackson is networking with zeal, restoring a collegial tone to a confirmation process that had grown increasingly embittered during the Trump era.

"I want to make this a bipartisan vote," Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said after Breyer announced his retirement. "I think it is not only good for the Supreme Court, it's good for the Senate."

Democrats and the White House are hoping that Jackson's enviable resume, empathetic style and historic potential as the first Black female justice will win at least a few crossover votes. And because her confirmation to replace the liberal-leaning Breyer wouldn't shift the ideological balance of the court, Republicans aren't expending much political energy opposing her.

Durbin and President Joe Biden have been reaching out to some GOP senators personally, promising to answer any questions and give them extended time with the nominee.

The most gettable Republican vote is Maine Sen. Susan Collins, who has already received three calls from Biden and met Jackson for more than 90 minutes on Tuesday. Collins, one of only three Republicans to vote for Jackson when she was confirmed

to the circuit court last year, called the meeting "lengthy and very productive." She signaled that the nominee is likely to have her vote.

"She takes a very thorough, careful approach in applying the law to the facts of the case, and that is what I want to see in a judge," Collins said.

Jackson was prepared for the small talk in that meeting, as well, telling Collins in the first few minutes that she got engaged to her husband in Maine.

"She passed that test," Collins joked to reporters in her office as the two women smiled together for the cameras.

Even if other Republicans don't vote for Jackson, it's clear that she has impressed many of them as she has navigated the awkward ritual of the meet and greet. Texas Sen. John Cornyn

(See JACKSON, P. 2)

African-Americans Doubt Police Reform

By Aaron Morrison and Hannah Fingerhut

Associated Press

NEW YORK, N.Y. (AP)—Few Americans believe there has been significant progress over the last 50 years in achieving equal treatment for Black people in dealings with police and the criminal jus-

ice system.

Most Americans across racial and ethnic groups say more progress is necessary, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But Black Americans, many whom may have held hope in Democrats' promises on racial justice initiatives in 2020, are

especially pessimistic that any more progress will be made in the coming years.

Overall, only about a quarter of Americans say there has been a great deal or a lot of progress in achieving racial equality in policing and criminal justice. Roughly another third say there's been "some" progress. An overwhelm-

ing majority of adults say more progress is needed for racial equality, including about half who say "a lot" more.

"There's more attention around certain issues and there's a realization—more people are waking up to a lot of corruption in the system," said Derek Sims, a 35-year-old bus driver in Austin, Texas, who is Black. He considers himself more optimistic than pessimistic that change will happen.

However, Sims said: "People don't really want to come together and hash out ideas. There's just too much tribalism."

Among those who think more progress is needed on achieving fair treatment for Black Americans by police, 31 percent say they are optimistic about that happening in the next few years, while 38 percent are pessimistic. Roughly another third say they hold neither opinion.

Only 20 percent of Black Americans who think more needs to be done are optimistic; 49 percent are pessimistic.

The AP-NORC poll results reflect what some criminal justice advocates have warned elected leaders about for more than a year: that unless something definitive is done soon to begin transforming police and the criminal justice system, it could become more difficult to mobilize dissatisfied Black voters in the midterm elections.

And already, Democrats' pivot to the center on racial justice issues has given advocates pause. During his first State of the Union address earlier this month, Presi-

(See POLICE, P. 2)



BLACKS NOT SO HAPPY WITH PACE OF POLICE REFORM—There was a burst of reform in the wake of nationwide protests of the killing of George Floyd, which netted murder convictions in that and other cases. But now, things are calming down, with many convinced that police reform is under way. Not so much for African-Americans, who see little reform coming in the future.

(See STATE BRIEFS, P. 2)

Leaders Respond After Police Sickout In Mississippi City

COLUMBUS, Miss. (AP) — Police officers in a northeast Mississippi city tell a newspaper that they blame the police chief for low morale attributable that led to a sickout earlier this month when an entire five-officer shift called in sick.

Four Columbus officers and a supervisor didn't appear for

work on the morning of March 11, all calling in sick. Police Chief Fred Shelton and other officers covered the shifts.

Officers speaking anonymously to *The Commercial Dispatch* of Columbus say that Chief Fred Shelton and other city officials are to blame for unhappiness. Shelton said he may be able

to address some officer concerns, but said others are "sour grapes."

A longtime officer, Shelton said the complaints did not surprise him.

"I've been through eight chiefs, and some of the stuff they're complaining about is stuff I complained about," he said.

The department has had a history of officer unrest, dating back at least to the 2015 shooting of Ricky Ball, a Black man, by white officer Canyon Boykin. The officer was indicted for manslaughter in Ball's death, but Republican Attorney General Lynn Fitch dropped the charges after taking office in 2020.

Complaints allege a culture of favoritism and retaliation, which along with low pay drives officers to leave. They also say Mayor Keith Gaskin has allowed the problems to persist.

Officers also complain about selective discipline, lack of equal access to training and promotion, commanders and poor equipment.

The department is budgeted for 64 officers but has fewer than 50 now. Officers say even then, there aren't enough patrol cars to go around.

Gaskin said he and Shelton had talked about "probably every issue that has been brought up."

"Officers tell me it's not so much pay but morale," the may-

or said. "It's a young staff and they're having to deal with a lot of pressures, and the city doesn't have a plan of training them or a clear path to higher salaries or promotion."

Gaskin said the city is trying to buy more cars, but said improving equipment is hard because of limited money.

Shelton said training decisions are made by supervisors, but said he doesn't want officers to load up on training only to seek work elsewhere.

"You bring that training back to benefit the police department," Shelton said. "If someone wants to be a firearms instructor, I'm not going to send him to 40-hour training if he's going to leave."

Shelton said if officers feel they are being retaliated against or discipline is improper, they can file a grievance. However, he said no officers have filed grievances. Shelton said he's also trying to accelerate promotional exams.

Gaskin and Shelton agreed that a recent anonymous survey of police officers would help provide a road map for bettering the department.

"(Shelton) and I have to bring morale up," Gaskin said. "That's the main thing. We know we can't give pay raises right now."

"I wish I could write a check and cover it all, but I can't," Shelton said. "We've got to be able to sustain it."

Justice Thomas Hospitalized

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Clarence Thomas has been hospitalized because of an infection, the Supreme Court said Sunday.

Thomas, 73, has been at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, D.C., since Friday after experiencing "flu-like symptoms," the court said in a statement.

The court offered no explanation for why it waited two days to disclose that the justice was in the hospital.

It also provided no additional details about the infection, but said Thomas is being treated with antibiotics and his symptoms are abating.



He could be released in the next couple of days, the court said.

The Supreme Court is meeting this week to hear arguments in four cases. Thomas plans to participate in the cases even if he misses the arguments, the court said.

Thomas has been on the court since 1991. News of his hospitalization came as the Senate Judiciary Committee prepared to begin hearings Monday in the nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson, who President Joe Biden named to replace Stephen Breyer. He is retiring at the end of the session.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

According to court documents, the Brueys conspired to submit a total of 26 fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan applications to the Small Business Administration, as well as approved lenders and loan processing companies, between April 2020 and June 2020. The applications contained numerous false and fraudulent representations, including the applicant's dates of operation, payroll, gross revenues, total number of employees and the criminal histories of the applicants or business owners.

Lenders and the SBA approved 12 of the loans, allowing the Brueys to collect \$881,058.35 in PPP and EIDL funds. The couple used the money to buy a \$211,457 home in North Carolina, two vehicles and to make a \$23,566 restitution payment in a previous criminal case for Amber Bruey.

The Paycheck Protection Program represents billions of dollars in forgivable small-business loans for Americans struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's part of the coronavirus relief package that became federal law in 2020.

SHERIFF: MAN FIRES SHOT AT GRANDMOTHER, ASSAULTS HER

BURLINGTON (AP)—A North Carolina man has been charged after he got into an argument with his grandmother and fired a shot at her with a rifle, a sheriff's office said.

The Alamance County Sheriff's Office said in a news release on Wednesday that deputies responded to a call from a residence in Burlington on Monday about an assault. When the deputies arrived, they saw the suspect assaulting his grandmother in the front yard, according to the news release.

Deputies stopped the assault, adding that the grandmother suffered minor injuries. During the investigation, deputies learned that the suspect fired a high-powered rifle in the direction of his grandmother. No one was hit.

Authorities arrested Noah Church, 19, and filed multiple charges, including felony assault with a deadly weapon with intent to kill, and assault on a female. His status couldn't be determined on Wednesday.

NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE OFFICIALS CONFIRM AVIAN FLU CASES

Wildlife experts in North Carolina have confirmed that birds in four separate counties have died from the avian flu.

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission said in a news release last Tuesday that a snow goose in Hyde County, a redhead duck in Carteret County, a red-shouldered hawk in Wake County, and a bald eagle in Dare County, have all died from the flu.

According to the news release, the snow goose was collected at Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge by refuge staff. The other birds were collected by N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission staff. Both the snow goose and redhead duck were observed with neurological signs consistent with avian flu prior to being euthanized.

The hawk and eagle were found dead, the news release said. A lab in Ames, Iowa, confirmed the flu in each of the birds.

The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy reported on its web page last week that avian flu has been reported in 357 birds in 20 states this year.

Jackson Prepares For Senate—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

praised her experience as a public defender and said she was "charming." North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis noted how prepared she was, a move he said was "wise." Nebraska Sen. Ben Sasse shook her hand and congratulated her while the two smiled for cameras under a large buffalo head on his office wall.

The effusiveness from some Republicans is a sharp departure from the last several Supreme Court nominations.

In 2016, after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, the Republican majority denied a vote on President Barack Obama's nominee, now-Attorney General Merrick Garland, and most Republicans refused even to meet him. Democrats' frustration over their jilted nominee was ever-present when President Donald Trump nominated Neil Gorsuch to fill the post the next year.

In 2018, Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh to replace retiring Justice Anthony Kennedy; his confirmation came after an explosive, combative hearing in

which Christine Blasey Ford accused him of sexually assaulting her in high school, which Kavanaugh denied.

And Democrats had few words of praise for Justice Amy Coney Barrett, who Trump nominated to replace the liberal icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg after her death just weeks before 2020 presidential election.

Republican reaction to Jackson hasn't all been positive. Before Biden named her as the nominee, several Republicans, including Hawley, criticized the president's pledge to nominate a Black woman to the post. Hawley called the pledge "hard woke left." Texas Sen. Ted Cruz said it was "offensive" to have that criteria. Mississippi Sen. Roger Wicker likened it to affirmative action.

The good vibes could dissipate in the hearings, as well, if race moves to the forefront or if some Republicans make more personal arguments against her. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell has so far signaled

to his ranks to avoid that kind of questioning and keep the focus on issues they see as more damaging to Democrats, like inflation.

Asked about Biden's pledge to nominate a Black woman, McConnell replied: "Honestly, I did not think that was inappropriate."

Still, Republicans are sure to question Jackson aggressively at her confirmation hearings, which begin March 21, and criticize her for any rulings that they see as too far to the left. Hawley, Cornyn and Tillis—all members of the Senate Judiciary Committee—said they have questions about whether Jackson is guided by any specific judicial philosophy.

Democrats who have met with the nominee appear thrilled with Biden's choice, gushing over Jackson's eight years as a federal judge, her time as a public defender and her ability to connect with others—a quality they say could help her bring the Supreme Court closer together, as well.

Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono, a member of the Judiciary panel, said that when she met with Jackson she asked the judge what stood out to her most about Breyer, whom she had clerked for many years ago. She said Jackson replied that it was the justice's ability to reach out to other members of the court.

"Even if she can't convince other people to her way of approaching a case, I think that that willingness to talk, and understanding another perspective, is a very important aspect of the kind of person she is," Hirono said.

Another Democrat on the committee, Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal, said after his meeting that Jackson has a "really engaging personality" as well as a superior intellect.

"What really struck me most was her personal depth and warmth, and her intuitive interest in how real people are affected by her decisions beyond the abstract legalisms," Blumenthal said.

Blacks Doubt Police Reform—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

dent Joe Biden said the answer to reported rises in violent crime "is not to defund the police."

"The answer is to fund the police with the resources and training they need to protect our communities," Biden said in remarks that have been seen as a clear disavowal of some Black Lives Matter activists' rhetoric.

In 2020, following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, many Americans across racial and ethnic backgrounds called for criminal justice reforms in nationwide protests. On Capitol Hill, consensus on reforms, via the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, has not been reached nearly two years later.

"What we saw from the George Floyd case, we in the Black community know that those officers were found guilty because of the outcry," DeAnna Hoskins, president and CEO of JustLeadershipUSA, a New York-based nonprofit criminal justice reform advocacy group, told the AP.

"The only reason why you get

results is because there was an outcry that included Black and White people. You've got a much larger voter base saying something has to be done," she said.

Due to vastly different lived experiences, it's been harder to get Americans across racial and ethnic groups to sustain their outcries and demand an end to systemic racism, Hoskins added.

The poll shows there is common ground on the issue across racial and ethnic groups, but also suggests there is urgency felt among Black Americans more than White Americans. More White Americans than Black Americans say there has already been significant progress toward racial equality in policing, 30 percent vs. 10 percent. Among Black Americans, 40 percent say there has been no progress at all.

And while at least three-quarters of White and Black Americans say more progress is needed, Black Americans are much more likely than White Americans to say a lot more needs to be done, 70 percent vs. 47 percent.

Last year marked 50 years since a war on drugs was declared in America. The bipartisan public policy at the federal and state levels saw the nation's incarceration rate skyrocket to the highest in the industrialized world. Black Americans, in particular, bore the brunt of police militarization and laws that imposed mandatory minimum prison terms.

There were also post-incarceration consequences, such as losing the right to vote, being barred from public housing and certain college financial aid programs, and struggling to find employment with a felony record.

Compared with views on policing and criminal justice, Americans are more likely to think there has been significant progress over the last 50 years in achieving equal treatment for Black Americans in political representation, access to good education, access to good health care and access to good jobs. And there's more pessimism about progress over the next few years

in policing and criminal justice than in the other areas.

Heydy Maldonado, 30, blames how crime is covered by TV and print news outlets—which she said often frame violence in a way that suggests it is only endemic to Black and Hispanic communities—for the lack of hope in reforms.

"We get targeted," said Maldonado, whose family is Honduran and Salvadoran. "I'm sure there's more crime out there, and it's not just our race, it's not just people of color. It's an ongoing battle."

"I do feel like we need to be united and speak to each other and keep fighting for change," she added. "Eventually, hopefully, this could all be a thing of the past."

The AP-NORC poll of 1,289 adults was conducted Feb. 18-21 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

Black Population Is Moving To Smaller Cities

By Mike Schneider

Associated Press

Brandon Manning and his wife were both born in the U.S. South and had been itching to return, but Manning didn't want to go back to his native Atlanta because of the traffic, housing costs and sprawl. So, when he was offered a job teaching at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, the couple decided to give the smaller city a chance.

They weren't alone. The largest African-American population growth in pure numbers over the past decade didn't take place in Atlanta or Houston, long identified as hubs of Black life, but rather in less congested cities with lower profiles: Fort Worth; Columbus, Ohio; Jacksonville, Florida; and Charlotte. Each gained between 32,000 and 40,000 new Black residents from 2010 to 2020, according to 2020 census figures.

Meanwhile, Black residents left the nation's largest cities, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, by the tens of thousands.

"The sprawl of a Houston or an Atlanta, it's just massive and traffic makes it hard to get around," said Manning, an assistant professor of Black Literature and Culture, who moved to Fort Worth from Las Vegas. "We wanted something that was manageable."

The Mannings are part of an emerging pattern of Black migration from larger cities to smaller ones, primarily in the South, according to Sabrina Pendergrass, an assistant professor for African-American and African Studies at the University of Virginia.

After a decades-long migra-

tion by Black people to Atlanta, "there's this feeling that... it might be tougher to get an economic foothold if you wanted to open a business," Pendergrass said. "In cities like Charlotte, there's not as much competition."

From the 1910s to the 1960s, millions of Black Americans took part in the Great Migration, moving to northern cities to escape the overt racism of the Jim Crow South. But many learned over time that racism was also pervasive in northern cities, in less-obvious but equally insidious forms such as home loan restrictions that reinforced segregated neighborhoods. Now, in a trend known as "reverse migration," some of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those original migrants have been moving back to Southern cities for years.

Moving back to the region was important to the Mannings, who have relatives in Jackson, Miss.

"We needed to return to the South to be closer to family and closer to a way of life that we were more familiar with," Brandon Manning said.

Fort Worth, Columbus, Jacksonville and Charlotte all saw explosive growth—from 15 percent to 24 percent—in their overall populations over the past decade. vidual cities rather than larger metropolitan areas to get a more nuanced sense of where Black population growth took place.

Columbus is the only city included in the newest areas to which Black people are moving that is not in the South. David Jones recalled that when he visited his grandparents in Columbus in the 1970s and '80s, the restaurant scene consisted

of "Ponderosa after Ponderosa." Now, he said, it's a "real" city with diverse eateries and a vibrant culture. Jones discovered the change when he moved there from Washington in March 2020 to pursue a romance and be closer to family.

"It has that Midwestern relaxed nature. It's more relaxed than D.C., where everything is a little more stressful, certainly more expensive," he said. "The people here are just more genuine. They're not always looking to get something from someone else. I think it's refreshing."

Ohio State University, a large number of corporate headquarters, a diverse manufacturing base, a relative low cost of living and a burgeoning arts community make the city attractive, said Columbus Councilmember Shayla Favor.

"There are a lot of opportunities for individuals to move upward," Favor said.

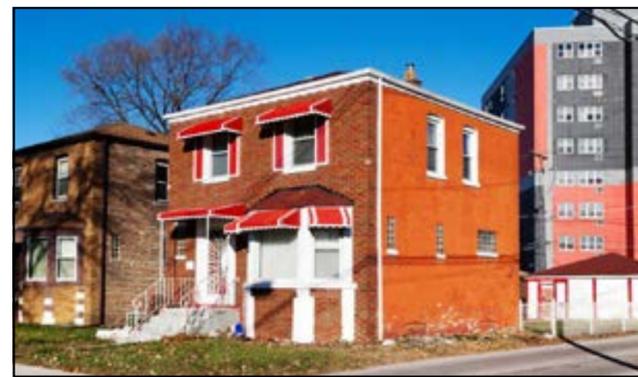
The city's politics reflect the influx: A U.S. congresswoman and the city council president, police

chief and schools superintendent are all African-American. Columbus also has had an influx of Somali immigrants, reflecting the fact that roughly 10 percent of Black people in the U.S. were born in another country.

Black professionals moving from northern cities to Charlotte to take banking and tech jobs over the past decade not only helped North Carolina become more of a purple state politically, they also brought along their culture. Pendergrass notes that she learned "Chicago steppin," a popular style of dancing, not in the Windy City but in Charlotte, where she was doing research.

In many ways, it's a case of cultural boomerang, just as Black culture in northern cities was shaped by the experiences migrants from the Great Migration brought from the South, Pendergrass said.

"Now we have people moving South, and they are almost remixing it in this Southern context," Pendergrass said.



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Business & Finance

Fully Autonomous Vehicles Are Here Now—On The Farm

By Scott McFetridge

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP)—For years Americans have been told autonomous technology was improving and that driverless vehicles were just around the corner.

Finally they're here, but to catch a glimpse of them, you'll need to go to a farm rather than look along city streets.

Beginning this fall, green 14-ton tractors that can plow day or night with no one sitting in the cab, or even watching nearby, will come off the John Deere factory assembly line in Waterloo, Iowa, harkening the age of autonomous farming.

The development follows more than a decade-long effort by the world's largest farm equipment manufacturer, and marks a milestone for automation advocates, who for years have been explaining why driverless cars aren't quite ready for prime time.

"I'm glad to see they're coming out and will stimulate the other technologies," said Raj Rajkumar, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University and an expert in autonomous cars.

Deere isn't saying yet how much the autonomous tractors will cost but the new technology will be added onto tractors that sell for about \$500,000, said Ben Haber, a company spokesman. The company plans to operate the autonomous tractors on 10 to 50 farms by this fall before significantly increasing the number in following years.

For the past decade, the supposedly imminent debut of autonomous vehicles on city streets and freeways has been repeatedly pushed off as companies

struggled to guarantee their safety.

But, Rajkumar notes, tractors have it easier because they don't need to contend with other vehicles, pedestrians or the complexities of an urban scene. Tractors can make use of consistent GPS data, unlike cars that can lose contact traveling through tunnels or amid tall buildings.

Or as Joel Dawson, a Deere production director, put it, "You aren't going to see a crosswalk in most cornfields in Iowa or Nebraska."

Modern tractors already have GPS guides that handle steering and turning to ensure optimum plowing, seeding and harvesting. They also use real-time streams of data to make changes if needed because of soil conditions, the amount of fertilizer applied or other factors.

The autonomous tractor will now let farmers hook up a plow behind a tractor, start the machine with a swipe of a smart phone and then leave it to rumble up and down a field on its own.

The driverless tractors are equipped with six pairs of cameras that work like human eyes and can provide a 360-degree image. When filtered through computer algorithms, the tractor is able to determine where it is in the field and will abruptly stop if there is anything unfamiliar in its path.

Farmers often grow crops on different parcels of land that are miles apart, so while the tractor plows in one field a farmer can work at another, drive into town for supplies or spend time with their families at home.

Given that less than 2 percent of Americans work on farms and rural populations have dwindled

for decades, the autonomous tractors also are expected to help with chronic labor shortages.

The shift to ever-more sophisticated tractors is part of a movement that emphasizes planting, fertilizing and harvesting during narrow windows of time when conditions are perfect. If new technology can help farmers complete a job when soil and air temperatures are just right ahead of approaching wet weather, for example, it can mean more plentiful crops months later.

"If I don't get this field tilled today and it rains tonight, that could mean we don't get the field planted for another week and that has real cost implications in a lot of operations," said Ryan Berman, who works on agricultural technology issues at Iowa State University. "If you can move an extra 80 or 100 acres into that optimal window, that can be worth thousands of dollars every year, probably tens of thousands."

Still, the tractor won't be for everyone.

Ed Anderson, director of research for the Iowa Soybean Association, cited the substantial cost, and noted that some farmers prefer hands-on work rather than overseeing operations via a smartphone.

Another industry giant, CNH Industrial, also is developing autonomous capabilities for its Case and New Holland tractors, and other companies are exploring using numerous smaller autonomous machines to handle other farm work.

Follow Scott McFetridge on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/smcfetridge/>



JOHN DEER WILL PLOW FOR YOU—Full auto vehicles already working—on farms. John Deere is producing a number of self-driving tractors. It is easier to keep them on the straight and narrow than self-driving cars because there is no other traffic or surprise obstacles in the field.

SUVs, Pickups Hit More Pedestrians

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—Drivers of bigger vehicles such as pickup trucks and SUVs are more likely to hit pedestrians while making turns than drivers of cars, according to a new study.

The research released Thursday by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety points to the increasing popularity of larger vehicles as a possible factor in rising pedestrian deaths on U.S. roads. The authors also questioned whether wider pillars holding up roofs of the larger vehicles make it harder for drivers to spot people walking near the corners of vehicles.

"The link between these vehicle types and certain common pedestrian crashes points to another way that the increase in SUVs on the roads might be changing the crash picture," said Jessica Cicchino, a study author and vice president of research for the institute.

Although the study mentioned previous research showing blind spots caused by the "A-pillars" between the windshield and the cabin, the authors said more study is needed to link the blind spots to the increased deaths.

In 2020, the last year for which complete statistics are available, 6,519 pedestrians were killed in the U.S., according to government data. That's up 59 percent since 2009, and a 4 percent increase from 2019, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said.

Over the same time period, SUV and pickup truck sales have skyrocketed. In 2009, pickup trucks, SUVs and vans accounted for 47 percent of all U.S. new vehicle sales, according to Motorin-

telligence.com. Last year, light trucks were more than three-quarters of new vehicle sales.

Not all SUVs and pickup trucks have the blind spots, though. Compact SUVs, for instance, are now the largest part of the U.S. market.

The study also found that the larger vehicles were more likely than cars to be involved in crashes where pedestrians were standing, walking or running near the edge of the road and away from intersections.

Researchers studied federal crash statistics in which pedestrians were killed, as well as all pedestrian crashes reported to police in North Carolina from 2010 through 2018.

The North Carolina statistics showed that pickups were 42 percent more likely than cars to hit pedestrians while making left turns. SUVs were 23 percent more likely to hit people than cars. There was no significant difference in the odds of a right turn crash for the different types of vehicles, the study showed.

Outside of intersections, pickups were 80 percent more likely than cars to hit a pedestrian along the road. SUVs were 61 percent more likely, and minivans were 45 percent more likely to hit people than cars, IIHS said.

Trucks, SUVs and vans typically have thicker "A-Pillars" than cars because of federal roof-strength standards to prevent collapse in rollover crashes, the IIHS said. The pillars typically are wider because they have to withstand the higher weights of the bigger vehicles.

And the pillars aren't the only things creating blind spots in the bigger vehicles. *Consumer Reports* found last year that high hoods also obstructed driver

views of pedestrians crossing in front of the vehicles.

"To see over that high hood, you're going to be looking further down the road," said Jennifer Stockburger, director of operations at *Consumer Reports'* auto test center.

The magazine and website found that pickup truck hood heights have risen 11 percent since 2000. The hood of a 2017 Ford F-250 heavy-duty pickup was 55 inches off the ground, as tall as the roofs of some cars, Stockburger said.

Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, which sell the bulk of the large SUVs and pickups in the U.S., all declined comment on the study. Messages were left seeking comment from Auto Innovators, an industry trade group.

Automakers could use stronger metals to make the A-Pillars smaller and increase visibility, said Wen Hu, an IIHS senior transportation engineer and another study author. "These larger vehicles, they need stronger pillars, we all understand that," she said. "Increasing the size of the A-Pillar is not the only way to increase the strength."

IIHS, which is funded by auto insurance companies, studies vehicle safety.

Stockburger said the industry could also examine sight lines on the bigger vehicles, as well as add automatic emergency braking systems that detect pedestrians.

Most automakers have promised to make automatic emergency braking standard equipment on nearly all of their new models by September of this year. In addition, federal safety regulators are proposing to make the systems mandatory on all new vehicles.



War Exposes Putin's Leaky Controls

By Frank Bajak and Barbara Ortutay

AP Technology Writers

BOSTON, Mass (AP)—Long before waging war on Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin was working to make Russia's internet a powerful tool of surveillance and social control akin to China's so-called Great Firewall.

So when Western tech companies began cutting ties with Russia following its invasion, Russian investigative journalist Andrei Soldatov was alarmed. He'd spent years exposing Russian censorship and feared that well-intentioned efforts to aid Ukraine would instead help Putin isolate Russians from the free flow of information, aiding the Kremlin's propaganda war.

"Look, guys the only space the Russians have to talk about Ukraine and what is going on in Russia is Facebook," Soldatov, now exiled in London, wrote on Facebook in the war's first week. "You cannot just, like, kill our access."

Facebook didn't, although the Kremlin soon picked up that baton, throttling both Facebook and Twitter so badly they are effectively unreachable on the Russian internet. Putin has also blocked access to both Western media and independent news sites in the country, and a new law criminalizes spreading information that contradicts the government's line. On Friday, the Kremlin said it would also restrict access to Instagram. By early Monday, the network monitor NetBlocks reported the social network throttled across multiple Russian internet providers.

Yet the Kremlin's latest censorship efforts have revealed serious shortcomings in the government's bigger plans to straightjacket the internet. Any Russian with a modicum of tech

smarts can circumvent government efforts to starve Russians of fact.

For instance, the government has so far had only limited success blocking the use of software known as virtual private networks, or VPNs, that allows users to evade content restrictions. The same goes for Putin's attempts to restrict the use of other censorship-evading software.

That puts providers of internet bandwidth and associated services sympathetic to Ukraine's plight in a tough spot. On one side, they face public pressure to punish the Russian state and economic reasons to limit services at a time when bills might well go unpaid. On the other, they're wary of helping stifle a free flow of information that can counter Kremlin disinformation—for instance, the state's claim that Russia's military is heroically "liberating" Ukraine from fascists.

Amazon Web Services, a major provider of cloud computing services, continues to operate in Russia, although it says it's not taking on any new customers. Both Cloudflare, which helps shield websites from denial-of-service attacks and malware, and Akamai, which boosts site performance by putting internet content closer to its audience, also continue to serve their Russian customers, with exceptions including cutting off state-owned companies and firms under sanctions.

Microsoft, by contrast, hasn't said whether it will halt its cloud services in the country, although it has suspended all new sales of products and services.

U.S.-based Cogent, which provides a major "backbone" for internet traffic, has cut direct connections inside Russia but left open the pipes through subsidiaries of Russian network providers at exchanges physically outside

the country. Another major U.S. backbone provider, Lumen, has done the same.

"We have no desire to cut off Russian individuals and think that an open internet is critical to the world," Cogent CEO Dave Schaeffer said in an interview. Direct connections to servers inside Russia, he said, could potentially "be used for offensive cyber efforts by the Russian government."

Schaeffer said the decision didn't reflect "financial considerations," although he acknowledged that the ruble's sharp drop, which makes imported goods and services more expensive in Russia, could make it difficult to collect customer payments. Meanwhile, he said, Cogent is providing Ukrainian customers free service during the conflict.

Schaeffer said these moves might impair internet video in Russia but will leave plenty of bandwidth for smaller files.

Other major backbone providers in Europe and Asia also continue to serve Russia, a net importer of bandwidth, said Doug Madory, director of internet analysis for the network management firm Kentik. He has noted no appreciable drop in connectivity from outside providers.

Cloudflare continues to operate four data centers in Russia even though Russian authorities ordered government websites to drop foreign-owned hosting providers as of Friday. In a March 7 blog post the company said it had determined "Russia needs more Internet access, not less."

Under a 2019 "sovereign internet" law, Russia is supposed to be able to operate its internet independent of the rest of the world. In practice, that has brought Russia closer to the kind of intensive internet monitoring and control practiced by China and Iran.

Opinion

PATHS TO A WORLD FEDERATION

From the diversity, world federalists believe that the best way to build a world federation is to build a world of nations that are united by their shared interests and values, and that are able to work together to solve the world's problems.

In addition, we also support and encourage the development of a world federalist movement that is based on the principles of democracy, justice, and equality, and that is able to work together to solve the world's problems.

With these goals in mind, we have created a world federalist movement that is based on the principles of democracy, justice, and equality, and that is able to work together to solve the world's problems.



The U.S. Campaign for Democratic World Federation

By Bob Flax

Citizens for Global Solutions

The current crisis in Eastern Europe underscores the need to strengthen the international security system. This approach to building a more peaceful world goes back decades and continues to demand our attention today.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the most destructive war in human history, a mass movement developed among people in the United States and other lands who were determined to create the kind of united world that could avert future human catastrophe. Among their leaders were the acclaimed physicist Albert Einstein, Nuremberg War Crimes Prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz, presidential advisor Grenville Clark and feminist activist Rosika Schwimmer.

In February 1947, during a massive snowstorm, 327 delegates representing several world federalist organizations from across the United States gathered in Asheville, North Carolina, to launch one of the most significant peace efforts of the twentieth century. Among those present were Norman Cousins, editor of the *Saturday Review* and later president of the World Federalist Association; Thomas K. Finletter, later President Harry Truman's Secretary of the Air Force; Florence Harriman, former U.S. ambassador to Norway; Cord Meyer, Jr., World War II decorated Marine officer and, subsequently, president of United World Federalists; and Harris Wofford, later U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania.

Each of the world federalist associations was created by individuals who recognized that the growing horror and destruction of modern warfare could only be halted by a world organization with the power to deal with aggressors and the buildup of armaments. The urgency was intensified by the dropping of the atomic bomb, and thousands responded in recognition of the need to prevent future devastation.

Their declaration, adopted on November 2, 1947, stated that they believed:

"that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice, of law, of order—in short, of government and the institutions of government; that world peace can be created and maintained only under a world federal government, universal and strong enough to prevent armed conflict between nations, and having direct jurisdiction over the individual in those matters within its authority."

They concluded that, "while endorsing the efforts of the United Nations to bring about a world community favorable to peace, we will work to create a world federal government with authority to enact, interpret and enforce world law adequate to maintain peace."

With those words, the United World Federalists was born. In the 75 years that followed, the organization changed its name several times (it's now Citizens for Global Solutions) and served as the main U.S. branch of a global body, the World Federalist Movement. The U.S. movement had some important early successes, including resolutions passed by 23 state legislatures supporting the establishment of a world federal government.

Together with the worldwide movement, the U.S. world federalist movement also worked on the successful campaign for the Partial Test Ban Treaty (1963), which prohibited the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons (1963), the establishment of the International Criminal Court (1998), and the acceptance by all UN member nations of the Responsibility to Protect (2005), a commitment to safeguard all populations from mass atrocities and human rights violations.

Although these were steps in the right direction, today's crises necessitate further action toward global governance. The lethality of warfare has become unimaginable, dwarfing the destructiveness of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are now an existential threat, as we move toward irreversible planetary tipping points; and we are over two years into a disease pandemic that has claimed nearly six million lives worldwide, including roughly 966,000 in the United States.

Our current system of 195 sovereign nations, each pursuing its own self-interest while bound together in a loose confederation through the United Nations, has demonstrated its inability to solve the greatest problems of our time. As our organization's founders clearly stated 75 years ago, humanity needs a democratically elected, global federal government with enforceable world law. More of the same just won't do.

Through our outreach efforts and public education programs, Citizens for Global Solutions continues to work toward this goal. At the same time, we advocate for our more immediate objectives of strengthening and democratizing the United Nations, global institutions, and our current system of international law.

Bob Flax, Ph.D., is Executive Director of Citizens for Global Solutions and an Adjunct Faculty Member in the Transformative Social Change Program at Saybrook University.



The Tragedy of Ukraine and New Thinking

By Winslow Myers

War Preventive Initiative

As we lock horns with the cruel and out-of-touch Putin, once again we're at a moment that too closely resembles the Cuban crisis of 1962. We really don't seem to have learned very much since then. Sixty years is a long time not to have figured out that nuclear chicken is a game with no winners.

While some pundits assert that it is NATO's expansion to the East that has caused Putin to react so irrationally, others explain that, no, his mind is somewhere back in another century, caught up in imperial fantasies of renewed Russian glory. Some argue that by not enforcing a no-fly zone over Ukraine we are slipping into an appeasing Hitler model, making WW3 more likely. Others argue the opposite, that we must avoid WW3 by the kind of delicate and creative restraint presently practiced by Biden and Blinken.

In our helplessness we all want to at least have an opinion and even better to be right, but we sometimes fail to understand that the lead-up to war, escalation, is a system in which all sides participate, with roots in historical grievances and fears extending into the distant past. We project malign motives onto Putin and he projects

malign motives onto the U.S. and NATO. In this projection we act in unawareness of our own darkness, conveniently forgetting that the U.S. too has attacked sovereign nations when we thought it was in our interest.

The nuclear nations are so based in power competition that so far—even after Cuba—they have not awakened to the possibility that their fundamental interests are compromised by the threat of annihilation. They refuse to see their shared interest in building a security system based in no one needing to possess WMDs rather than one that incentivizes every nation to want them.

Here are parts of a response to me (I had asked about nuclear policy) from one of our most intelligent and thoughtful U.S. senators: "... as long as nuclear weapons exist, the potential use of these weapons cannot be ruled out, and the maintenance of a safe, secure, and credible nuclear deterrent is our best insurance against nuclear catastrophe..."

"...malign actors who seek to upset global peace and security must remain convinced that the costs of attacking the United States—or our allies and partners—far outweigh any benefit they seek to derive. This policy, in fact, has prevented the use of nuclear weapons for over 70 years..."

"...I fully understand the apparent paradox of the theory of deterrence—that we must build, maintain, and credibly prepare for the employment of these awful weapons, all in order to reduce the chances of their use. Until we achieve a nuclear-free world, this is almost certainly our best insurance against the nuclear catastrophe all of us rightly fear..."

These words can fairly be said to represent establishment thinking across Washington (and Moscow and Beijing). The problem with this thinking is its spirit of fatalism. It gives lip-service to the hope of a nuclear-free world, but other than that, no specifics about how to get there or how crucial it is to get there. And there are gigantic questionable assumptions: first, that the deterrence system is safe and secure, which assumes no mistakes forever—a bridge way too far—and second, that our weapons are good and non-threatening but the weapons of others are bad and are a threat.

Such reasonable-sounding but ultimately empty rhetoric indicates a collective mind-set that has been, to put it bluntly, stuck on stupid since the Cuban crisis. We can do better. How?

First, accept reality out loud. There is no way out of the nuclear deterrence paradox, which is not "apparent" but all too real. Unless we actively change the paradigm, nuclear war lies ahead somewhere down the time stream, possibly within days or weeks in the present crisis, or within years as further conflict inevitable rises. Governments need to say, as I hope the United States government, to its credit, is saying to itself right now, first principle, nuclear war is off the table: how else can we respond?

Second, have some faith in our own creativity. Is the "tragic realism" of nuclear deterrence really the best we can do? Most nations don't think so—86 are signatories and 59 have also ratified the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The U.S. can make significant unilateral confidence-building moves, including former Secretary of Defense William Perry's suggestion that we can retire our entire land-based ballistic missile system with no essential loss of security. Or bring home a Trident submarine to base and invite others to make similar small gestures of good will.

Third, the community of nations can prioritize the issue far more, by activating an ongoing conference of the nine nuclear powers through the U.N., or as many who are willing to participate, to take small steps in the right direction, starting from the premise that we never want to be this close to nuclear war again. Let's not freak out about bad actors like North Korea. If suddenly the U.S. and NATO possessed zero nuclear weapons and North Korea made hostile moves, our conventional forces would be more than sufficient to deter their acting rashly. Verification of violations is no longer a technological hurdle, and we are finding out just how powerful economic sanctions can be when applied uniformly. Sanctions can become a far safer and more effective means of deterrence.

It is hardly my place, sitting safe in a warm house in rural Maine, to advise the Ukrainian people that they might have been better off had they chosen Gandhian forms of active nonviolent resistance. Zelensky himself has pleaded with the Russian people to do so, and his own countrymen and women have tried standing bravely in front of Russian tanks. Though Ukraine understandably has chosen to take up arms in response to Russian brutality, nonviolent tactics must never be forgotten, because they often work quite effectively, and can still be effective to creatively combat Russian occupation. The expert tactician of nonviolent political struggle Gene Sharp has suggested 198 ways to refuse cooperation with occupiers, tactics with a successful track record in Poland, the Philippines, and elsewhere, and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict published an expanded list last year.

Meanwhile we are desperate for a new paradigm where leaders turn to international institutions like the World Court to adjudicate difficult conflicts—as Belize and Guatemala have done to resolve an ongoing dispute about borders. Yes, many schemes have been tried and have failed, including the Kellogg-Briand treaty to outlaw war from 1928—which is still in force by the way. But the nuclear context adds the greatest possible urgency to the deliberations of diplomats and leaders.

Meanwhile one of the most galling aspects of Putin's invasion is its utter irrelevance to any of the real problems the planet, including Russia itself, faces together. While Ukrainian suffering is horribly real, Putin's nationalist motivations seem unreal, belonging to some other moment of historical time when the world was not challenged by transnational challenges like pandemics, the climate emergency, finding adequate clean sources of energy, and feeding all the children of the Earth.

Winslow Myers, syndicated by PeaceVoice, author of Living



Thinking About the Unthinkable in the Ukraine Crisis

By Mel Gurtov

Portland State University

We might be inclined to think that the most urgent decisions on Ukraine have been made: decisions on military aid to the Ukraine government, on humanitarian aid to refugees and Ukrainian civilians still in the country, and on support of NATO countries bordering Russia.

But to think so would be mistaken. As the military and humanitarian situation in Ukraine deteriorates, Thomas Friedman writes, "It will become more and more obvious that our biggest problem with Putin in Ukraine is that he will refuse to lose early and small, and the only other outcome is that he will lose big and late."

Putin can't stand to lose, which means a preference for total destruction of Ukraine rather than a settlement. More devastation will confront the U.S. and NATO with frightening choices.

Here are some that come to mind.

First, as Ukraine cities burn in the wake of Russian targeting of

civilian structures, we will face another Grozny or Aleppo—that is, utter destruction by a military machine that is impervious to reason. Will the West simply stand by helplessly as Kyiv is reduced to rubble?

Second, the humanitarian disaster will reach appalling proportions. Food, fuel, housing, and water will be unavailable to large parts of the Ukraine population. Look at Mariupol; it may become the norm for trapped populations. Will the West be willing and able to deliver assistance in defiance of the Russians? Can eastern Europe absorb the millions more people who are trying to get out of Ukraine?

Third, continued Ukraine resistance will be heroic but very costly in casualties. If we witness Russian forces committing atrocities—killing captured soldiers and otherwise violating the laws of war—will the West do anything to rescue resistance fighters?

Fourth, should a Ukraine insurgency make headway, with support from outside Ukraine, it is conceivable that Russia will detonate a "tactical" nuclear weapon or use a chemical or biological weapon to inspire fear and promote surrender. How, if at all, will the West respond? (Note, by the way, the Russian disinformation campaign, being echoed in Chinese media, about supposed U.S. bioweapon laboratories in Ukraine and a U.S. program to assist Ukraine's nuclear weapon program.)

Fifth, Ukraine's leadership might be captured and killed, confined outside the country, or put on trial. Can that valiant leadership be saved?

Sixth, Russian fire might be directed, by accident or design, at NATO forces that are providing military aid from within Poland or the Baltic states. Will NATO respond to such attacks?

Seventh, another Ukraine nuclear power plant might be taken over by the Russians, only this time creating radiation leakage. Will there be a response to such an event?

The world community will be shocked and outraged by events like these. But shock and outrage have happened many times before, yet rarely have they led to a strong, unified response.

The challenge for NATO is that up to now, the Russians have controlled the rules of engagement. NATO is constantly searching for low-risk counteraction, for now rejecting options such as sending Soviet-era fighter jets to Ukraine, establishing a total or limited no-fly zone in Ukraine, or creating an escape corridor for refugees.

But as the Ukraine situation moves from dire to catastrophic, political pressure in the U.S. and Europe is likely to mount for "taking the gloves off"—challenging Putin to respond to high-risk NATO initiatives. The argument that we must let sanctions on Russia take full effect, and rely in the meantime on Ukraine's guerrilla resistance, is likely to weaken as the tragedy unfolds on TV and in social media.

There are no easy answers here: sitting by while a country is destroyed vitiates the UN Charter, Europe's security, and NATO's reason for being, whereas taking forceful action may lead to a conflict involving weapons of mass destruction and the commitment of NATO armies.

Either way, we can't avoid confronting worst-case scenarios of the kind I have outlined. As two writers conclude in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, "The West and Russia may now be entering into the terminal stages of an insecurity spiral—a series of mutually destabilizing choices—which could end in tragedy, producing a larger European conflagration even if it doesn't go nuclear."

We're at a perilous moment. The administration has to make decisions and invite public debate on how, or whether, to save Ukraine.

Mel Gurtov, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Portland State University and blogs at In the Human Interest.



War in Ukraine Is A Test For Peace And Unity

By Wim Laven

PeaceVoice

There are many important questions and conversations emerging about the current war in Ukraine. People want to know who is to blame, what is the cause of this mess, and what will be the way out?

The fact that wars are costly and unsustainable is not reassuring while casualties continue to grow. The organizations that normally monitor and document the impacts of violence and war as well as possible war crimes are facing conditions so grim, they have left the country. Indeed, many questions will be hard, if not impossible, to answer. Hundreds of civilians including many children are already among the dead. Why?

After the end of World War I there was great resolve to see that the horrors would not be repeated. The League of Nations surfaced as a global body to enforce war prevention, but they failed. World War II renewed the necessity of peace and showcased the failures of the League.

The United Nations emerged as a new effort, as 377 (V). Uniting for peace says, "To maintain international peace and security," and "To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace."

Numerous episodes of violent conflict and genocide highlight the inadequacies of the United Nations. The atrocities in the Balkans and Rwanda in the 1990's, for example, lead to the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect principle. It codifies and clarifies obligations to protect populations at risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, while balancing against a commitment to state sovereignty—the idea is that the UN should not meddle in the affairs of states but does have an obligation to safeguard vulnerable populations.

There have been many tests to these noble ideas, and the UN routinely misses the mark in protecting those in need. Russia and China voted as members of the UN's Security Council to veto humanitarian responses in Syria, which would have saved lives.

But states are also challenged in acting on their own; Donald Trump vetoed a bipartisan effort to rebuke his support of Saudi Arabia and involvement in the Yemen War, and promises and recognitions from other world leaders (including President Biden) stress "the necessity to end the war" but "the worst international response to a humanitarian crisis in the world" continues.

The UN will succeed in ushering peace and unity when their actions align with their goals and necessary contributions are made. Russia is not the only power with nuclear weapons capable of ending life as we know it. The terrorist threat—the nuclear option—needs to be permanently removed. No nation on Earth should have the capacity to cause extinction. Where is the focus on ending this global threat?

Questions of equal rights and self-determination should also be free from conflicts of interest. Russia should have every right to advocate for interests diplomatically but should not be empowered to veto efforts aimed at restraining their violent attacks on another sovereign nation. Blatant hypocrisy needs to be curbed; we cannot permit occupation denying basic human rights in some geographies while condemning it in other locations.

We cannot be surprised that corruption and injustice beget violence or that illegitimate regimes cling to power through brute violence. Coup d'état has become all too common and undermines global security.