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Dems, 3 Republicans Confirm Jackson

By Mary Clare Jalonick and Mark Sherman

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)— The Senate confirmed Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court on Thursday, shattering a historic barrier by securing her place as the first Black female justice and giving President Joe Biden a bipartisan endorsement for his effort to diversify the court.

Jackson, a 51-year-old appeals court judge with nine years experience on the federal bench, was confirmed 53–47, mostly along party lines but with three Republican votes. Presiding was Vice President Kamala Harris, also the first Black woman to reach that high office.

“This is a wonderful day, a joyous day, an inspiring day— for the Senate, for the Supreme Court and for the United States of America,” exulted Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer. When Harris called the final tally, the chamber erupted in cheers that echoed beyond its doors. The Senate’s upper galleries were almost full for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic two years ago.

Jackson will take her seat when Justice Stephen Breyer retires this summer, solidifying the liberal wing of the 6–3 conservative-dominated court. She joined Biden at the White House to watch the vote, embracing as it came in.

During the four days of Senate hearings last month, Jackson spoke of her parents’ struggles through racial segregation and said her “path was clearer” than theirs as a Black American after the enactment of civil rights laws. She attended Harvard University, served as a public defender, worked at a private law firm and was appointed as a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission.

She told senators she would apply the law “without fear or favor,” and pushed back on Republican attempts to portray her as too lenient on criminals she had sentenced.

Jackson will be just the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She will join three

(See **JACKSON CONFIRMED**, P. 2)



Black Dems Try Luck In Trump Territory

By Andrew DeMillo

Associated Press

PINE BLUFF, Ark. (AP)— Chris Jones would seem to have an ideal biography to run for governor, a job that’s wide open in Arkansas for the first time in eight years.

He’s both an ordained Baptist minister and a nuclear engineer who can talk about his faith as easily as scientific concepts. He’s upbeat and personable, as evidenced by his announcement video that quickly went viral nationwide.

There’s a catch, though. Jones is a Democrat in a state that has gone from red to extremely red in recent years. Donald Trump carried it in 2020 with 62 percent of the vote. And he’s Black, where Black people account for only 16.5 percent of the population and where no African-American has ever won statewide office.

What’s more, if he wins his party’s nomination he’ll probably have to face a nationally known figure: Sarah Sanders, the former press secretary for Trump and daughter

of former Gov. Mike Huckabee. She’s already raised more than \$13.6 million.

Most experienced pols consider the race beyond a long shot, but it represents a change in thinking about how the Democratic Party can rebuild in heartland states where it has become almost extinct as white rural voters migrated en masse to the GOP.

In years past, Democrats in the region usually tried to win over independent and moderate voters by running White establishment

candidates. That approach produced little. Now they’re hoping to mobilize voters who haven’t been involved in the process, especially Black, Latino and younger people.

“It’s clear to me folks are ready,” Jones said during an interview in his hometown of Pine Bluff, a predominantly Black city an hour south of Little Rock. “There’s a moment where folks are saying of all the barriers and the ceilings to be broken, here’s one we want to

(See **BLACK DEMS**, P. 2)



NC COLLEGE REMOVES NAME OF WHITE SUPREMACIST FROM BUILDING

(AP)—A Raleigh women’s college announced on Wednesday that it is renaming a building named after a White supremacist who supported unequal funding for schools based on race.

The board of trustees of Meredith College voted at a meeting last month to rename Joyner Hall after finding out about the background of James Yaddkin Joyner, according to an announcement on its web page.

“We know some may disagree with the Board’s decision, but the ongoing harm done by Joyner’s initiative makes it untenable to continue to honor him—especially as an educator,” the announcement said.

The move is part of Meredith’s Initiative on Anti-Racism. Nearly two years ago, the board joined historians, researchers, diversity consultants, and representative faculty, staff, and alumnae to begin a review of building names on Meredith’s campus, which was built in 1925–26.

In addition to the renaming of Joyner Hall, the Board endorsed placing signs with QR codes on each campus building to provide historical context about all of the individuals for whom the buildings are currently named.

Campus buildings at UNC-Chapel Hill and East Carolina University are also named for Joyner.

MISSISSIPPI MAN EXTRADITED IN 30-YEAR-OLD MURDER CASE

DOBSON (AP)—A Mississippi man arrested for the murder of a woman whose body was found on an interstate 30 years ago has been extradited to North Carolina, authorities said Wednesday.

The N.C. State Bureau of Investigation said Warren Luther Alexander, 71, was arrested March 15 in Diamondhead, Miss., as a result of a joint investigation by the Surry County Sheriff’s Office and the SBI. Alexander was extradited on March 27, the SBI said in a news release. He is being held without bond in the Surry County Jail. His next court date is May 4.

Alexander is charged with murder in the 1992 death of Nona Stamey Cobb, who was 29 when her body was found in the northbound lane of Interstate 77 on the morning of July 7, 1992. Investigators said she had been strangled.

Cobb was last seen on July 6, 1992, getting into the truck with a man at the welcome center on Interstate 85 in Cleveland County near Kings Mountain.

NC COURT UPHOLDS ASHEVILLE’S REMOVAL OF VANCE OBELISK

(AP)—A western North Carolina city’s decision to remove a downtown monument honoring a Civil War-era governor was upheld Tuesday by the state Court of Appeals.

An appeals panel unanimously affirmed Superior Court Judge Alan Thornburg’s decision last year to dismiss a lawsuit filed by a historic preservation group. The Society for the Historical Preservation of the 26th North Carolina Troops opposes the demolition of the obelisk honoring former Gov. Zebulon Vance in Asheville.

The Asheville City Council voted in March 2021 to remove the structure from Pack Square Plaza. The 75-foot tall obelisk was dismantled before the Court of Appeals told the city and Buncombe County in June to stop the demolition while appeals were heard. So the monument base has stayed in place.

The society had entered a formal agreement in 2015 with the city to restore the monument, according to Tuesday’s opinion. The society raised over \$138,000 for that project, but that contract did not require city officials to preserve the 1897 obelisk, as the society contends, Court of Appeals Judge John Arrowood wrote.

Instead, the contract “was for the donation of restoration work, which was completed prior to (Asheville’s) decision to remove the Vance Monument,” Arrowood wrote in upholding Thornburg’s dismissal on grounds a contract breach claim was insufficient. Chief Judge Donna Stroud and Judge April Wood agreed with Arrowood’s ruling.

Vance, who was born in Buncombe County, served as governor from 1862–1865 and 1877–1879. He was also a Confederate military officer and U.S. senator. The city has said the monument is located on

(See **STATE BRIEFS**, P. 2)

Irises Mark Site Of Razed Black Homes

By Janet McConaughy

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS, La. (AP)— Nearly 60 years ago, a historic Black community founded as a home for newly freed slaves was demolished to expand a national park commemorating the Battle of New Orleans and Civil War casualties. Now park rangers and iris enthusiasts believe they may have found a botanical reminder—Louisiana irises and African lilies that the village’s residents may have planted.

Woody Keim, a great-great-grandson of the community’s founder, says he thinks it’s a tragedy that Fazendeville was torn down and wonderful that the dark purple irises and white and pink crinum lilies have been dis-

covered. “Even though the government tried to erase this village, there’s still life raising its little flowery head to show there once was a community here,” he said.

The flowers were first noticed last spring, nearly 60 years after the tiny community was expropriated to join the national park’s two sections. One part was the land where the Battle of New Orleans was fought; the other was a national cemetery where about 7,300 Union soldiers and sailors rest with later U.S. military members.

“We may never know for certain” that the flowers were planted by residents, but it seems very likely, said Gary Salathe, who created a group to rescue native irises and who first no-

ticed those on the battlefield.

The community, called “The Village” by people who lived there, was founded around 1870 by Jean-Pierre Fazende, a grocer from a family prominent in the social class known as free people of color, said Bill Hyland, the official historian for St. Bernard Parish, where the national park is located southeast of New Orleans along the Mississippi River.

Fazende wanted to give recently freed slaves a place to live. So he subdivided an inherited strip of land that was wide enough only for a single row of houses into 33 lots for a “freedmen’s colony.” The land eventually included 30 homes, a church, bars, a grocery store and a school that was used at night as a dance hall.

“Like so many people of his

class, he understood that the transition of the enslaved to freedom would be a long and arduous process,” Hyland said.

For decades families lived and worked in the small community built where American forces had defeated the powerful British military on Jan. 8, 1815.

In the early 1960s, with an eye toward unifying the national park in time for the battle’s 150th anniversary in 1965, the park service tried to buy the land. Owners refused. Eventually, Congress approved expropriation and the community was demolished.

“I think it’s a tragedy that a community that had been there for close to 100 years was not

(See **BATTLEFIELD IRISES**, P. 2)

Officers Not Charged In Fatal Shooting

GAITHERSBURG, Md. (AP)— Four Maryland police officers won’t be charged in the fatal shooting of a 21-year-old Black man in a McDonald’s drive-thru last summer, officials said.

The Montgomery County’s State’s Attorney’s Office announced Monday that an investigation by prosecutors in neighboring Howard County into Ryan

LeRoux’s July 2021 death was complete and a grand jury found the shooting was legally justified under the circumstances, news outlets reported.

Officers were called to the McDonald’s in Gaithersburg on July 16 for a report of a person refusing to leave the drive-thru line. An officer found LeRoux reclined in the driver’s seat with head-

phones on and both hands on his cellphone. The officer said over the radio that he saw a gun on the front passenger seat and asked LeRoux several times to open the passenger-side door, but he did not, officials said.

Officers negotiated with LeRoux for half an hour. Then, when several officers said LeRoux pointed that gun at police, officers

fired. Based on the body camera footage, prosecutors said it was not clear if LeRoux was holding a gun or a cellphone.

“He sat up, and he extended his arm in a straight, locked way towards the police, his right arm,” Howard County state’s Attorney Rich Gibson said. “We know that to be the case. The question is, what was in his hand?”

A gun and a cellphone were found in LeRoux’s lap after the shooting, prosecutors said. A crisis negotiator was on the way, but did not arrive before the shooting, prosecutors said.

LeRoux’s father, Paul LeRoux, and activists have protested, saying the situation should have been resolved without deadly force.

“Rhonda and I are deeply saddened that four Montgomery County Police Department officers met our African-American son’s cry for help with 23 shots fired. Ryan LeRoux was in the midst of a mental health crisis — not a crime. The MCPD knew that Ryan needed help — not bullets,” LeRoux said in a statement Monday.

County police said all four officers have been returned to full-time, active duty status and there will be an internal investigation.



Business & Finance

New Board Member Musk Touts "Edit" Button For Twitter

By Tali Arbel

AP Technology Writer

Twitter tweeted Tuesday that it is indeed working on a way for users to edit their 280-character messages, although it says the project has nothing to do with the fact that edit-function fan Elon Musk was just revealed as the company's largest shareholder and now sits on its board.

Twitter said it will test the feature in its paid service, Twitter Blue, in the coming months. It said the test would help it "learn what works, what doesn't, and what's possible." So it may be a while before most Twitter users get to use it, if they ever do.

Twitter spokesperson Catherine Hill declined to say whether an edit feature might be rolled out for all users.

Many Twitter users—among them, Kim Kardashian, Ice T, Katy Perry and McDonald's corporate account—have long begged for an edit button. The company itself recently teased users with an April Fool's Day tweet saying "we are working on an edit button." The official Twitter account said Tuesday that the April 1 tweet wasn't a joke and that it has been working on it since last year.

Twitter also said it didn't get the idea from a Twitter poll launched by Tesla CEO Musk

Monday evening. Musk, himself a Twitter power user, asked followers if they wanted an edit button, cheekily misspelling "yes" as "yese" and "no" as "on." More than 4 million people had voted as of Tuesday evening.

Musk also tweeted that he is looking forward to making "significant improvements to Twitter in coming months!"

Twitter's vice president of consumer product, Jay Sullivan, tweeted Tuesday that an edit function has for years been Twitter's most requested new feature, noting that people want to fix mistakes, typos, and "hot takes."

Former Twitter CEO Jack

Dorsey had said that Twitter had considered an edit button, but in a January 2020 Q&A maintained that "we'll probably never do it." He noted that Twitter's current setup keeps the spirit of its text-message origins—texts can't be edited—and the confusion that could result from users making changes to a tweet that has already been heavily circulated by others. Dorsey stepped down as CEO in November 2021.

People who study Twitter also say adding an edit button would likely change the nature of Twitter, making it less valuable as a historical warehouse that stores official statements by politicians and other high-profile people. Twitter, for better or worse, "has become the de facto news wire," said Jennifer Grygiel, a Syracuse University communications professor and an expert on social media who researches propaganda.

Tweets are often embedded in

news stories, which could cause problems if the users edit important or controversial tweets without leaving evidence of the original statement. Grygiel suggested instead giving Twitter users a window of time to edit their tweets before they publish them.

Letting powerful Twitter users edit their tweets means they would not be historical statements anymore, Grygiel said. "We need to think about what the implications are, what these tweets are, who has power."

The company acknowledged those concerns Tuesday evening when Sullivan tweeted: "Without things like time limits, controls, and transparency about what has been edited, Edit could be misused to alter the record of the public conversation. Protecting the integrity of that public conversation is our top priority when we approach this work."

Musk, too, had said that a

proposal for a post-publication edit window of a few minutes "sounds reasonable."

Musk is someone who could seemingly use an edit button. His tweet about taking Tesla private at \$420 per share, when funding was not secured, led to a \$40 million SEC settlement and a requirement that Musk's tweets be approved by a corporate lawyer. Musk is still embroiled in a fight over that settlement.

Twitter had earlier seemed to be taking a tongue-in-cheek approach to Musk's poll. Twitter's CEO, Parag Agrawal, retweeted the poll with a seeming reference to an earlier tweet by Musk, saying "The consequences of this poll will be important. Please vote carefully." Musk had used the same language in a March tweet describing another of his polls that asked whether Twitter adheres to free speech principles.



Miami Hosts Crypto Convention

By Adriana Gomez Licon

Associated Press

MIAMI, Fla. (AP)—Thousands of cryptocurrency enthusiasts gathered in Miami as the city builds its reputation as one of the key locations to develop the blockchain technology despite its underdog status.

Dozens of companies used the Bitcoin 2022 conference which ran Wednesday through Saturday as a venue to network, pitch ideas and share announcements.

New York City and Silicon Valley continued to lead in funding raised by blockchain startups in 2021, with \$6.5 billion and \$3.9 billion. But Miami is now tied with Los Angeles, where firms pulled in more than \$760 million in funding, according to market research firm CB Insights.

Cryptocurrency exchange FTX bought the naming rights for the NBA arena in downtown Miami last year, replacing American Airlines. The largest crypto company to move to Miami so far, Blockchain.com, will house 200 employees at a location in the hip Wynwood district, where other tech firms are setting up shop as well.

"Wynwood just really has that sort of spirit that you are looking for when a new tech sector is built," said Blockchain.com CEO and co-founder Peter Smith.

Many cite a welcoming environment cultivated by local officials, mainly Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, who has attracted national attention by luring tech investment and becoming one of America's crypto-friendly mayors.

Others note that both Miami and Florida are business-friendly and remained open during the pandemic, making it more attractive as a location.

"It's hard to deny this is an amazing opportunity for companies to come here and build out their project in crypto," said John Bartleman, CEO of Plantation, Fla.-based TradeStation, a multi-asset broker.

Bartleman's company commissioned an 11-foot robot-like statue of a bull meant to emulate Wall Street's "Charging Bull." Suarez unveiled the artwork Wednesday to a joyful crowd kicking off the conference in Miami Beach.

"Welcome to the future of finance," the mayor said.

All this enthusiasm strikes a sharp contrast with bitcoin's own rough year. On the financial side, the cryptocurrency hit a high of \$67,553.95 back in November before plunging by almost half as of late January; it remains down roughly 30 percent since that November high. Bitcoin is also largely absent from many of the hottest trends in crypto such as non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, which purportedly offer a way to auction off "unique" copies of digital art and other cyberobjects.

More broadly, critics question the assumptions underlying the claimed value and utility of crypto technology, with some likening

the hype and so-far unrealized promises of blockchain technologies to a Ponzi scheme that benefits early participants but leaves everyone else in the lurch.

Kathy Kraninger leads regulatory affairs for Solidus Labs, a company that monitors digital assets risks. The former director of the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau said the sector is "not the Wild West," but challenges persist.

"We believe many companies in the industry need to come forward and really think through the technical standards on how to protect investors and how to build smartly," she said, adding that 30 companies are joining an effort to train people on best practices, identify manipulative activities and determine what measures could prevent crypto market abuse.

As Miami aims to attract more investment, Bitcoin 2022 organizers say at least 75 companies will be making announcements at the conference.

Last year, El Salvador President Nayib Bukele made international news at the event, unveiling by video that his country would be the first to make cryptocurrency legal tender. Bukele was scheduled to speak at this year's conference but canceled as his country is in a state of emergency after dozens of killings and the arrest of 6,000 suspected gang members over the past week.

One of the most-anticipated announcements may come from 27-year-old Jack Mallers, CEO of bitcoin payment app Strike, who worked with Bukele's government on the bitcoin launch.

Mallers also partnered with Twitter to synchronize his app with the social network to make it possible to send digital money as "tips" without needing a bank like Cash App and PayPal, demonstrating on video how he sent \$10 to a man at a Salvadoran Starbucks.

It remains to be seen what the effort will yield in the future. South Florida saw its population decline by more than 18,000 people between July 2020 and July 2021. And critics worry the city does not have a high-ranking university that could build workforce to make companies thrive, the way the Bay Area and New York do.

But Miami businessman Josip Rupena, who will be speaking about his crypto mortgages startup at the conference, said to give the effort a few years.

SMART DEVICES

Continued from page 2

(GDPR) and California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA). Thanks to this, for instance, you can submit a Data Subject Access Request (DSAR) to the organization that collects your data from an internet-connected device. The organizations are required to respond to requests within those jurisdictions within a month explaining what data is collected, how it is used within the organization and whether it is shared with any third parties.

Regulations are an important step; however, their enforcement is likely to take a while to catch up with the ever-increasing population of internet-connected devices. In the meantime, there are things you can do to take advantage of some of the benefits of internet-connected without giving away an inordinate amount of personal data.

If you own a smart device, you can take steps to secure it and minimize risks to your privacy. The Federal Trade Commission offers suggestions on how to secure your internet-connected devices. Two key steps are updating the device's firmware regularly and going through its settings and disabling any data collection that is not related to what you want the device to do. The Online Trust Alliance provides additional tips and a checklist for consumers to ensure safe and private use of consumer internet-connected devices.

If you are on the fence about purchasing an internet-connected device, find out what data it captures and what the manufacturer's data management policies are from independent sources such as Mozilla's Privacy Not Included. By using this information, you can opt for a version of the smart device you want from a manufacturer that takes the privacy of its users seriously.

U.S. Charges Russian Oligarch, Grabs Assets

By Eric Tucker and Michael Balsamo

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The Biden administration has charged a Russian oligarch linked to the Kremlin with violating U.S. government sanctions, and disrupted a cybercrime operation that was launched by a Russian military intelligence agency, officials said Wednesday.

The actions came as the Justice Department said it was accelerating efforts to track down illicit Russian assets and as U.S. prosecutors helped European counterparts gather evidence on potential war crimes committed by Russia during its war on Ukraine.

FBI and Justice Department officials announced the moves on the same day that the U.S. separately revealed sanctions against the two adult daughters of Russian President Vladimir Putin and sanctions that blocked two key Russian banks.

"We have our eyes on every yacht and jet. We have our eyes on every piece of art and real es-

tate purchased with dirty money and on every bitcoin wallet filled with proceeds of theft and other crimes," Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said, adding that "our goal is to ensure that sanctioned Russian oligarchs and cyber criminals will not find safe haven."

The indictment against Konstantin Malofeyev, a Russian media baron and founder of Russian Orthodox news channel Tsargrad TV, is the first of an oligarch since Russia's war with Ukraine began in February. Malofeyev has trumpeted the invasion as a "holy war" and has supported Russia-aligned separatist groups in Ukraine.

He was sanctioned by the Treasury Department in 2014 for financing Russians promoting separatism in Crimea. Though those sanctions barred him from doing business with U.S. citizens, prosecutors say Malofeyev evaded those restrictions by hiring an American television producer to work for him in television networks in Russia and Greece and enlisted his help in trying to acquire a TV network in Bul-

garia. It was all part of an effort to spread pro-Russia propaganda throughout Europe, the Justice Department said.

Jack Hanick, a former CNBC and Fox News employee, was arrested last month for his work as a television producer for Malofeyev. That case is pending.

Malofeyev is not in custody and is believed to be in Russia. It was not immediately clear if he had a lawyer to speak on his behalf. The two sanctions charges each carry a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison.

The Justice Department said it is seeking the seizure of a \$10 million investment that Malofeyev had illegally transferred to a business associate in Greece.

Federal authorities also announced that they had taken down a botnet—a network of hijacked computers typically used for malicious activity—that was controlled by the Russian military intelligence agency known as the GRU. The botnet, which in this case involved thousands of infected network hardware devices, was dismantled before it

could do harm, said FBI Director Christopher Wray.

Wednesday's announcements came two days after U.S. officials seized a huge yacht in Spain belonging to a Russian oligarch, Viktor Vekselberg, with close ties to Russian President Putin.

After the war began, the Justice Department set up a task force to enforce sanctions against Russian oligarchs and target ill-gotten proceeds.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said Wednesday that Justice Department prosecutors were also helping international efforts to uncover potential war crimes committed by Russia. U.S. officials have met with European prosecutors to develop a plan for gathering evidence, he said.

"We have seen the dead bodies of civilians, some with bound hands, scattered in the streets. We have seen the mass graves. We have seen the bombed hospital, theater, and residential apartment buildings," Garland said. "The world sees what is happening in Ukraine. The Justice Department sees what is happening in Ukraine."

Chinese Hackers Targeting Indian Power Grid

By David Rising

Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP)—India's power sector has been targeted by hackers in a long-term operation thought to have been carried out by a state-sponsored Chinese group, a U.S.-based private cybersecurity company detailed in a new report.

Over the past several months, the Insikt Group, the threat research division of Massachusetts-based Recorded Future, said it has collected evidence that hackers targeted seven Indian state centers responsible for carrying out electrical dispatch and grid control near a border area disputed by the two nuclear

neighbors.

The group primarily used the trojan ShadowPad, which is believed to have been developed by contractors for China's Ministry of State Security, leading to the conclusion that this was a state-sponsored hacking effort, the group reported.

"ShadowPad continues to be employed by an ever-increasing number of People's Liberation Army and Ministry of State Security-linked groups, with its origins linked to known MSS contractors first using the tool in their own operations and later likely acting as a digital quartermaster," Recorded Future said in the report late Wednesday.

China's Foreign Ministry

spokesman Zhao Lijian said Thursday the report had been "noted" by Beijing, but that China "firmly opposes and combats any form of cyberattacks, and will not encourage, support or condone any cyberattacks."

"I would like to advise the company concerned that if they really care about global cybersecurity, they should pay more attention to the cyberattacks by the U.S. government hackers on China and other countries, and do more to help promote dialogue and cooperation among countries, instead of using the cyberattack issue to stir up trouble and throw mud at China," he told reporters.

Indian External Affairs Minis-

try spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said India hasn't discussed the issue with China.

"We have seen reports. There is a mechanism to safeguard our critical infrastructure to keep it resilient. We haven't raised this issue with China," he said.

Indian Minister of Power R.K. Singh said the report was not a cause for concern.

"We are always prepared," he said. "We have a very robust security system. We are always alert."

Insikt Group already detected and reported a suspected Chinese-sponsored hack of 10 Indian power sector organizations in February 2021 by a group known as RedEcho. The more recent hack "displays targeting and capability consistencies" with RedEcho, but there are also "notable distinctions" between the two so the group has been given the working name of Threat Activity Group 38, or TAG-38, as more information is gathered.

Following a short lull after its first report, Recorded Future said the Insikt Group again started tracking hacking attempts on India's power grid organizations. Over the past several months, through late March, it identified likely network intrusions targeting at least seven of India's so-called "State Load Dispatch Centers"—all in proximity to the disputed border in Ladakh, where Chinese and Indian troops clashed in June 2020, leaving 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese dead.



Opinion

Fighting the Corruption of Power

By Ben Jealous

People for the American Way

(TriceEdneyWire.com)—We keep learning more about the attack on the U.S. Capitol. And we keep learning more about the many schemes former President Donald Trump and his team tried to use to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

In some ways, it is discouraging. We know just how badly Trump's inner circle was corrupted by his desire to keep power at all costs. We had lawyers writing memos about how to break the law and stop Congress from affirming Trump's defeat. We had members of Congress repeating his lies about a stolen election and trying to take the decision away from the voters.

In other ways, it is encouraging that the truth continues to come out. News stories that expose lies and corruption remind us of the importance of a free press. The investigation by the Jan. 6 select committee reminds us how much we need the checks and balances that are built into our system.

Those checks and balances—like the ability of Congress to conduct oversight of the Executive Branch—are necessary to prevent abuses of power and hold politicians accountable.

But for those protections to work, we must have public officials who are committed to upholding the rule of law. That's not what we're seeing from former Trump staffers and advisers. Just the opposite. They are stonewalling the congressional investigation and defying its subpoenas.

And with just a few exceptions, congressional Republicans are not acting honorably. Rather than embracing the search for truth, they try to discredit the investigation. Rather than face up to the anti-democratic rot in their party, they would like to sweep it all under the rug.

Let's be clear. Trump and his lawbreaking friends are trying to keep Americans from learning the truth about the attack on Congress and the attempt to overthrow the will of the voters.

Specifically, Trump and his supporters are trying to run out the clock. They are counting on their allies taking a majority in the House of Representatives in this year's elections. And then they'll shut the investigation down before the full truth can come out.

That would be disastrous for our democracy.

Consider just a few of the things we have learned recently. We learned that Ginni Thomas, a hard-right activist and wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, was in regular contact with Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows in the days and weeks after the presidential election. She embraced even the most extreme and ridiculous far-right conspiracy theories about the election.

She even said she hoped it was true that members of the "Biden crime family," reporters, and elected officials were being arrested and would be held on barges in Guantanamo Bay to face military trials for sedition. She urged Trump not to concede defeat.

It just so happens that Justice Clarence Thomas was the only Supreme Court justice who backed Trump's attempt to keep White House records from being shared with the Jan. 6 committee. It was an 8-1 vote. That explains why so many people are now calling on Thomas to resign—or at the very least to recuse himself from any other cases about the insurrection that came before the Court.

We can't make Clarence Thomas act honorably. But that doesn't mean we are powerless to protect our democracy.

It was we the people who voted Trump out of power. Trump's ability to pressure and bully election officials and legislators into joining his corrupt schemes was limited by the fact that he lost in multiple battleground states, not just one. His supporters' ability to shield him from accountability will be determined in part by what happens in this year's elections.

When Americans go to the polls this fall to elect members of Congress, we will not only be participating in democracy. We will be determining its future.

Ben Jealous serves as president of People For the American Way and Professor of the Practice in the Africana Studies Department at the University of Pennsylvania where he teaches leadership. Jealous has decades of experience as a leader, coalition builder, campaigner for social justice and seasoned nonprofit executive. In 2008, he was chosen as the youngest-ever president and CEO of the NAACP. He is a graduate of Columbia University and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar and he taught at Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania.



Who Speaks For The World?

By Lawrence S. Wittner

SUNY/Albany

Russia's brutal war upon the nation of Ukraine should remind us that, for thousands of years, great powers have used their military might to launch military assaults upon smaller, weaker societies.

Since World War II alone, these acts of aggression have included France's colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, Britain's military intervention in the Middle East and Africa, the Soviet Union's military conquest of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan, China's invasions of Tibet and Vietnam, and America's wars in Indochina, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Today, great power crimes against humanity, often driven by imperial arrogance and ambition, remain a plague upon the world.

Centuries ago, farsighted thinkers began suggesting that wars of aggression could be prevented by establishing a federation of nations to safeguard the peace. Writers such as Dante Alighieri, Immanuel Kant, Alfred Tennyson, and H.G. Wells promoted the idea of moving beyond individual nation-states to create a government representing all of humanity.

By the 20th century, even officials of national governments began to take this idea seriously, particularly after the vast slaughter of World Wars I and II exposed the terrible consequences of international conflict and great power imperialism. The result was the formation of the League of Nations and, when this international confederation proved too weak to cope with the world crisis of the 1930s and early 1940s, the United Nations.

Launched in 1945 with the primary goal of saving future generations from "the scourge of war," the United Nations moved the world closer to a peaceful, governed planet. The signers of its Charter agreed to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." Its General Assembly provided a forum for discussion of global issues by all nations, large and small. Its Committee on Decolonization supervised the end of colonialism across vast swathes of the globe.

In addition, the United Nations smoothed the path for political settlements of numerous small wars, issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established an International Criminal Court, and developed significant programs for economic development, world health, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

Even so, despite these concessions to civilized norms, the great powers were not willing to give up their traditional dominance of world affairs. Structurally, this was expressed through the UN Security Council, with five imperial powers being granted permanent

membership and veto power. Behaviorally, it was expressed by their powerful armies, by their wars of aggression against smaller nations, by their development of nuclear weapons, and by their insistence upon their right to retain and use them. Again and again, their rulers showed that they really did think that they had the right to run the world.

Are the people of the world condemned to live forever under the heels of the great powers? Or is it still possible to take another step along the road to a peaceful, humane planet?

At the moment, the United Nations is the major governmental structure that transcends the desires of a particular nation's rulers and acts in support of all humanity. When it comes to peace, climate change, world health, women's rights, refugee resettlement, the eradication of poverty, and a host of other issues, the United Nations invariably defends the interests of the entire world. Given this vital role on a planet still riven by the belligerence of rogue nations, hasn't the time arrived to strengthen it?

Some of the ways to strengthen the United Nations have been evident for years.

One of the most obvious is to remove the permanent membership and the veto power of the great powers in the UN Security Council. There is no logical reason for them to have these privileges. Furthermore, they have often abused them.

Another is to create a UN Parliamentary Assembly, with elected delegates from throughout the world. Such an assembly would enhance the world organization's democratic and participatory character by adding an entity chosen by people, rather than by governments.

Yet another is to give the United Nations power to levy taxes to cover its expenses. A UN tax on currency speculation (the "Tobin tax"), for example, would end the organization's impoverishment, free it from the need to beg for emergency funds from the great powers, and enable it to adequately fund vital global programs.

These kinds of UN reforms are based on the principle that no single country or small group of countries adequately represents the world and its multiplicity of peoples. The world can and should speak for itself.

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Beyond Deterrence

By Winslow Myers

War Preventive Initiative

While the invasion of Ukraine is a body blow to worldwide hopes for peace, it is still an opportunity to reassess establishment thinking about nuclear deterrence.

You might say: odd time to bring this up, when possibly the only thing keeping Mr. Putin in check is the nuclear arsenals of the West, just as the only thing keeping us from giving even more military aid to Ukraine is Russia's nuclear arsenals.

The major powers are still firmly wed to the paradigm that it is nuclear deterrence that will prevent catastrophe rather than cause it. They see the risk of fundamental change as unacceptable—even as the potential of nuclear war between Russia and the West may be rising to the Cuban Missile Crisis level.

Deterrence apologists argue that it has prevented world war for 70 years. So far, so good. But we have also been almost miraculously fortunate. How long will our planetary luck hold? The world simply cannot continue forever with the instability of we-build/they-build arms races.

The nuclear powers obviously see change beyond deterrence as containing even greater risks than maintaining the status quo—an odd blindness to the reality that the avoidance of nuclear war is a vital (!) interest for each country shared by all—a universal fear of annihilation.

We have not worked hard enough to emphasize this shared interest as the basis for moving beyond the fatalism of deterrence by means of verifiable, reciprocal disarmament protocols. Yes, super-challenging. But are we trying hard enough? No, because it's so much easier just to rely passively on how well deterrence works—until it doesn't.

Unfortunately, the eventual breakdown of deterrence is downright inevitable due to the complexity of command and control in combination with human misunderstanding and error at moments of high tension. We are 60 years beyond the Cuban crisis without having faced this challenge as an international community.

Now we must add to the mix an isolated and deluded autocrat who has run into major unexpected obstacles with his cruel campaign to subdue another sovereign nation. Without knowing what Putin might do, President Biden and his NATO allies must walk the fine line between aiding Ukraine and slipping into World War III.

The "idealism" of putting in place robust international institutions to pursue nuclear disarmament conforms more closely to the real choices the planet faces than the "realism" of the present paradigm. Our biggest problems, like the climate emergency, transcend the borders of nations. They require the resources and creativity presently being sucked into the rathole of war, attempted deterrence of war, and preparation for further war.

All nations, nuclear and non-nuclear, share a common interest in not being annihilated, and in reducing, ideally to zero, the possibility of a nuclear war that would have no winners and potentially affect everyone, either by nuclear winter or radiation carried by the wind. What sounds like a stick is really a carrot; with reciprocal nuclear disarmament, everyone wins. Who knows, it is even possible that some nuclear powers, even a pariah state like North Korea, might feel relief in letting go a terrible drain on their limited resources.

Given the global community's vulnerability to the unilateral acts of dictators like Putin, we are all watching to see if the sanctions put in place so far might set some limits on his behavior. While sanctions failed to prevent war in Ukraine, in an increasingly interdependent global economic system, sanctions may have the potential in themselves to become an effective deterrent, even eventually replacing the unworkable nuclear deterrence system at the same time deterring nuclear violations. Sanctions are a potentially powerful stick.

Here the 60 nations, small as many of them are, that have signed and ratified the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons may have some leverage upon other nations who have not signed or ratified the treaty. They can publicize and advocate for the treaty, as NGOs like the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons have done, creating an educational tool to mobilize civil society worldwide.

Each small incremental step toward the final goal is valuable, building confidence that further steps are possible, even unilateral ones. Ex-Secretary of Defense William Perry has suggested that the United States could abandon its entire land-based ballistic missile system with no loss of security.

Even as we admire Ukrainian courage, try to help, and mourn their losses with them, it is not too early to address and overcome the fatalism which has allowed the nine nuclear powers to rely on the tenuous instability of nuclear deterrence for so many decades. Our lives depend upon it.

Winslow Myers, author of Living Beyond War: A Citizen's Guide, serves on the Advisory Board of the War Preventive Initiative.



The Slap felt 'Round My World—And Yours

By Leslie D. Gregory

Right to Health

When Will Smith slapped Chris Rock in front of the audience at the Academy Award ceremony I, like undoubtedly many people of color who saw it, felt a remote and intangible sorrow and trauma born of generations of marginalization in this country.

My body tensed, my teeth gritted and my heart broke a little. These two prominent men carried, and we bore witness to, pain they likely couldn't even express. Neither could we, the witnesses.

The pain was felt by all who saw and yet none could understand, though opinions flowed like water from the press, the theater community, and pundits across our nation.

The sadness, though, is that no one specifically spoke to the collective trauma and healing strategies that could've been beneficial to this divided and traumatized country. That is what we antiracist, nonviolent advocates seek to do. It requires maturity, nuance and a love of country and fellow man that isn't taught in our current education system.

This is what we call trauma-informed awareness. This is what we need to be truly inclusive and diverse. This is what is a clinical approach to institutional racism as a public health crisis and what CDC refuses to do. This is what CDC is tasked as their control and prevention mandate. This is how their refusal to do so literally defines gas lighting as Camara Jones and other clinical antiracists have asked of them. This is what we as a nation must demand.

It is not enough to castigate Will Smith, who only responded after feeling his wife's pain and disdain, channeling the degradation of generations of Black women, nor to commend Chris Rock for channeling his quasi-privilege of the generations of Black entertainers as each of them carries more than their individual experience in that moment. These speak to traditions of maladaptive behaviors conditioned out of necessity in the face of oppression.

It was directly indicative of our nation's oversimplification of these complex phenomena and criminality and concurrent victimization by a false narrative of entitlement and torture. How might the ethnicity and gender of these men have impacted their behavior and our interpretation of their actions?

The "backlash" we saw after Obama's administration that led to Trump's election was another symptom of this institution unique to America in its brand of racism and the "John Henryism" weighs on Black people from generations of chattel slavery and Jim Crow. It makes for a petri dish breeding unconscious bias, systemic inequity, and hate-driven illness for black and white citizens alike.

It's not enough to decry the damage; how do we heal? I am Black, I am a woman and mother, and I am a frontline healthcare clinician. I can tell you that this approach can be directly correlated with that of COVID 19, and lessons learned from it.

1. Politics has no place in healing.
2. Thought errors can be deadly.
3. Bringing healing into Community keeps vulnerable patients out of clinical environments.
4. Resources must be diverted and prioritized to those most vulnerable.
5. Fear will obstruct progress, so courage is needed even when most difficult.
6. We must not let economics, politics, class, or gender obscure the multifaceted approach needed.

This is precisely why the approach needed is clinical and data-driven rather than emotionally contaminated by our history. It is why even while our care teams are burned out and overwhelmed, we need their compassion and de-escalation work to intercede and be supported.

How do we accomplish these things? We listen to frontline workers, and most acutely, Black healers and mothers. We go to those for whom these have been missions for the longest. We avoid fallacies of logic, especially gaslighting, straw men, appeal of authority, bandwagon, hasty generalization, black and white (literally), and slippery slope—among others.

We must as a nation begin to mature past these thought errors as they have, like our planet's evolution, become more costly with each generation. We can learn from these errors and from our very natural environments how to elevate the conversation from pettiness and false narratives to heal us all.

But it will require a clinical approach such as we've seen with COVID 19 and it will require humility at a time when we are just coming back together after two years of sequestration.

This will be difficult as emotions are running high and fear threatens us at nearly every turn. So much turmoil contaminates emotions and steals attention.

The question is: Will we deem it necessary for our children, our planet, our culture, and our legacy? Time will tell and the cost is high if we continue to ignore these traumas and the measures requisite to healing them.

Those of us on the front line of this health crisis are offering our expertise, our vulnerability and our investment. Will you meet us? Will you listen? Will you elevate the voices of these frontline workers or will you let this virus continue to spread to our detriment?

We are here. We are engaged, sad witnesses to this folly. Where are the spiritual leaders who should be standing in the shoes of Martin King? We are missing the voices of the ecumenical community in this struggle. We are here calling for unity, strength, faith, and peace in this critical time.

Yes, this is a lot from witnessing one Black man slap another. But all of us carry triggers with deep histories. Can yours and mine meet to move forward in a new light together?

