

## Thousands Rally Across US In Protest

(AP)—Rallies for gun reform were held in Washington, New York, other US cities and around the world on Saturday, seeking to increase pressure on Congress to act following a spate of mass shootings.

In Washington, the son of an 86-year-old victim in the Buffalo supermarket shooting said: "Enough is enough. We will not go quietly into the night."

The March for Our Lives rallies came less than a month after 10 people were killed in the racist attack in Buffalo, New York and 19 children and two teachers were killed at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas.

Other mass shootings, widely defined as shootings in which four people or more excluding the shooter are hurt or killed, have also helped put the issue center-stage.

March for Our Lives was formed in 2018 after a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, Florida, in which 14 students and three adults were killed. Organisers estimated a million people, mostly young, joined protests then.

The group helped force Republicans in Florida to enact reforms including raising the age to buy long guns, including AR-15-style rifles, from 18 to 21; enacting a three-day gap between purchase and access; allowing trained school staff to carry guns; and putting \$400m into mental health services and school security.

Florida lawmakers also approved a "red flag law" that can deny firearms to individuals believed to pose a danger to themselves or others.

Organisers on Saturday were focusing on smaller marches at more locations. The DC protest was expected to draw 50,000. The 2018 march filled downtown Washington with more than 200,000 people.

By noon on Saturday, thousands had gathered around the Washington Monument. Protestors held signs demanding justice for the victims of Uvalde and Buffalo. Speakers included activists, family members of those killed and shooting survivors.

Garnell Whitfield, son of Ruth Whitfield, an 86-year-old killed in Buffalo, told the crowd he and his family were "still in a state of shock". When she was killed, Ruth Whitfield was buying groceries after visiting her husband at a nursing home.

"We are being naive to think that it couldn't happen to us," Garnell Whitfield said. "Enough is enough. We will not go quietly into the night as victims. We hear a lot about prayer, and prayer is wonderful and we thank you for your prayers. But prayer is not a noun, it's a verb. It's an action. You pray, then you get up and you work."

The parents of Joaquin Oliver, a 17-year-old killed in the Parkland shooting, wore shirts bearing a picture of their son.

"I was hoping to avoid attending a march like this ever again," Manuel Oliver said, standing next to his wife, Patricia. "Our elected officials betrayed us and have avoided the responsibility to end gun violence."

The crowd heard from two founders of March for Our Lives,

David Hogg and X Gonzalez, both Parkland survivors.

"All Americans have a right to not be shot, a right to safety," Hogg said. "Nowhere in the con-

stitution is unrestricted access to weapons of war a guaranteed right.

"We've seen the damage AR-15s do. When we look at the in-

nocent children of Uvalde, tiny coffins horrify us. Tiny coffins filled with small, mutilated and decapitated bodies. That should fill us with rage and demands for

change." Hogg emphasized state and local gun legislation passed since 2018. He noted a red flag law that saw a court-ordered disarming of an individual who sent his mother a death threat. He encouraged the crowd to bring the issue of gun control to the polls.

"If our government can't do anything to stop 19 kids from being killed and slaughtered in their own school and decapitated, it's time to change who is in government," Hogg said.

Gonzalez gave an impassioned rebuke to Congress.

"I've spent these past four years doing my best to keep my rage in check. To keep my profanity at a minimum so everyone can understand and appreciate the arguments I'm trying to make, but I have reached my fucking limit. We are being murdered. Cursing will not rob us of our innocence.

"You say that children are the future, and you never listen to what we say once we're old enough to disagree with you, you

(See **PROTEST**, P. 2)



## Maps Blocked For Lack Of Black Districts

By Kevin McGill

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS, La. (AP)—Louisiana's Democratic governor said Monday he will call the Republican-dominated Legislature into special session soon to draw up new congressional district

boundaries, now that a federal judge has blocked use of maps that have only one majority-Black district.

Gov. John Bel Edwards announced his plan at a news conference at the Capitol in Baton Rouge. He spoke to reporters minutes after the 2022 regular

legislative session ended, and a few hours after U.S. District Judge Shelly Dick, also in Baton Rouge, blocked the use of the new maps. Her ruling included an order that the Legislature draw up with a remedial plan by June 20.

Edwards, whose veto of the maps was overridden by lawmakers earlier this year, said there should have been a second majority-Black district among the six districts that were approved, noting that the state's population is almost one-third Black.

Edwards said redrawing the district lines is required by the court order, the Voting Rights Act and by "basic fairness and

basic math."

But, lawyers for Republican Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin, the state's top elected official, swiftly filed a notice of appeal of Dick's order.

Dick's June 20 deadline for drawing new district lines is one month before the sign-up period for the Nov. 8 congressional election.

"If the Legislature is unable to pass a remedial plan by that date, the Court will issue additional orders to enact a remedial plan compliant with the laws and Constitution of the United States," the judge wrote.

The district map was drawn

(See **LA. MAPS**, P. 2)



### BRIDGE OPENING ON NORTH CAROLINA COAST DELAYED OVER MARKINGS

RODANTHE (AP)—The opening of a bridge on the North Carolina coast that would allow locals and tourists to avoid a constantly washed-out route has been delayed because of a problem with pavement markings, state officials said.

Pavement markings installed earlier this week on the Rodanthe "Jug Handle" Bridge in Dare County do not meet N.C. Department of Transportation specifications for quality or reflectivity, the agency said in a news release.

Flatiron, the prime contractor, said it would seek a new subcontractor to replace the standard markings and restripe the bridge and the intersections. Once a new subcontractor is in place, a better timeline on a traffic shift to the new bridge can be established.

Pavement markings are the last step in completion of the 2.4-mile bridge. The \$154 million bridge will take N.C. Highway 12 over Pamlico Sound, bypassing the south end of the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and part of the road that's often washed over by the Atlantic Ocean during storms. Construction on the project started in 2018.

### NORTH CAROLINA REPEAT OFFENDER PLEADS GUILTY TO WIRE FRAUD

CHARLOTTE (AP)—A North Carolina man has admitted stealing mail from residential mailboxes and using stolen information to commit wire fraud, a federal prosecutor said.

Soheil Akhavan Rezaie, 37, entered his guilty plea last Tuesday before a U.S. magistrate judge in Charlotte, U.S. Attorney Dena King said.

Statements and plea documents showed that, beginning last year and through March, Rezaie and others targeted Charlotte neighborhoods and surrounding areas and stole large quantities of mail, including credit cards, tax forms and personal and business bank checks, a news release said.

Rezaie admitted in court that he altered the amounts of the stolen checks or changed the names of the payees to his own and then deposited them into bank accounts he controlled. He then withdrew the funds before the victims and banks could find out the checks were stolen, prosecutors said.

Rezaie pleaded guilty to wire fraud, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years and a \$250,000 fine. No sentencing date has been set.

Prosecutors said when Rezaie engaged in the fraud, he was on supervised release for a 2017 mail theft conviction. A second revocation of Rezaie's supervised release is pending for violating the terms of his supervised release for the 2017 conviction.

### BILL STRIPS COOPER APPOINTMENT POWER AT BERGER'S HOME CAMPUS

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

## Proud Boys Charged With Conspiracy

By Michael Kunzelman and Alanna Durkin Richer

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The former top leader of the far-right Proud Boys extremist group and other members were charged with seditious conspiracy for what federal prosecutors say was a coordinated attack on the U.S. Capitol to stop Congress from certifying President Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory.

The latest indictment against Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, the former Proud Boys chairman, and four others linked to the group came as the U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6 riot prepared to begin public hearings last week to lay out its findings.

The indictment last Monday alleges that the Proud Boys conspired to forcibly oppose the lawful transfer of presidential power. Tarrío and the others—Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary

Rehl and Dominic Pezzola—were previously charged with different conspiracy counts.

They are scheduled to stand trial in August in Washington, D.C.'s federal court.

The seditious conspiracy charges are among the most serious filed so far, but aren't the first of their kind. Eleven members or associates of the anti-government Oath Keepers militia group, including its founder and leader Stewart Rhodes, were indicted in January on seditious conspiracy charges in a serious escalation in the largest investigation in the Justice Department's history.

Three Oath Keepers have already pleaded guilty to the rarely used Civil War-era charge that calls for up to 20 years in prison. The indictment alleges that the Oath Keepers and their associates prepared in the weeks leading up to Jan. 6 as if they were going to war, discussing things like weapons and training.

Tarrío, the group's top leader, wasn't in Washington, D.C., when the riot erupted on Jan. 6, 2021, but authorities say he helped put into motion the violence that day.

Police arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot and charged him with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. Tarrío was released from jail on Jan. 14 after serving his five-month sentence for that case.

An attorney for Tarrío said his client "is going to have his day in court."

"And we intend to vigorously represent him through that process," said Nayib Hassan.

Defense attorney Carmen Hernandez, who represents Rehl, said her client is "as innocent of these charges as the ones that had already been pending against him."

"Seditious conspiracy requires the use of force, and he never used any force nor thought about

using any force," Hernandez said.

More than three dozen people charged in the Capitol siege have been identified by federal authorities as leaders, members or associates of the Proud Boys, whose members describe it as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists."

They have brawled with antifascist activists at rallies and protests. Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group.

The indictment alleges that the Proud Boys held meetings and communicated over encrypted messages to plan for the attack in the days leading up to Jan. 6. On the day of the riot, authorities say Proud Boys dismantled metal barricades set up to protect the Capitol and mobilized, directed and led members of the crowd

(See **PROUD BOYS**, P. 2)

## Justice Dept. To Probe La. State Police

By Jim Mustian and Jake Bleiberg

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP)—The U.S. Justice Department is opening a sweeping civil rights investigation into the Louisi-

ana State Police amid mounting evidence that the agency has a pattern of looking the other way in the face of beatings of mostly Black men, including the deadly 2019 arrest of Ronald Greene.

The federal "pattern-or-practice" probe announced Thursday

followed an Associated Press investigation that found Greene's arrest was among at least a dozen cases over the past decade in which state police troopers or their bosses ignored or concealed evidence of beatings, deflected blame and impeded

efforts to root out misconduct. Dozens of current and former troopers said the beatings were countenanced by a culture of impunity, nepotism and, in some cases, outright racism.

"We find significant justification to open this investigation now... We received information of the repeated use of excessive force, often against people suspected of minor traffic offenses, who are already handcuffed or are not resisting," said Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke, who oversees the Justice Department's civil rights division. She added there were also reports of troopers targeting Black residents in traffic enforcement and using "racial slurs and racially derogatory terms."

The federal probe, the first such action against a statewide law enforcement agency in more than two decades, comes more than three years after White troopers were captured on long-withheld body-camera video beating, stunning and dragging Greene on a rural roadside near Monroe. Despite lengthy, ongoing federal and state criminal in-

(See **JUSTICE DEPT.**, P. 2)



SCENES LIKE THIS, IN WHICH A BLACK MOTORIST WAS BEATEN, LED TO THE PROBE



# Thousands Rally Across US In Protest—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

decaying degenerates. You really want to protect children, pass some fucking gun laws.”

Gonzalez said Congress had started treating mass shootings as a “fact of life”, like natural disasters. She criticized politicians for their relationships with gun lobbyists, saying: “We saw you cash those fucking checks. We as children did the heavy lifting for you. Act your age, not your shoe-size, Congress. You ought to be ashamed.”

Yolanda King, who spoke at the 2018 March for Our Lives rally when she was nine, spoke of hope for action after Uvalde and Buffalo. Now 14, she evoked her

grandfather, Martin Luther King Jr.

“My grandfather was taken from the world by gun violence. Six years after his death, his mother, my great-grandmother, was killed in church during Sunday service. We have all been touched by tragedy, we have all been lifted up by hope.”

“Today we’re telling Congress, we’re telling the gun lobby and we’re telling the world this time is different. This time is different because we’ve had enough. We’ve had enough of having more guns than people here in America. Together, we can carve that stone of love and hope out

of that mountain of death and despair. Together we can build a gun-free world for all people.”

Dozens of other rallies saw protesters call for stronger legislation. In Buffalo, hundreds protested outside the supermarket where the shooting happened. The group held a moment of silence and chanted “Not one more”.

March for Our Lives has called for an assault weapons ban, universal background checks for gun purchases and a national licensing system.

The US House has passed bills that would raise the age limit to buy semi-automatic weapons and establish a federal “red flag” law. But previous such initiatives have stalled or been watered down in the Senate. The new marches were to take place a day after senators left Washington without reaching agreement in guns talks.

On Saturday, Joe Biden tweeted his support.

“I join them by repeating my call to Congress: do something,” the president said, adding that Congress must ban assault weapons, strengthen background checks, pass red flag laws and repeal gun manufacturers’ immunity to liability.

“We can’t fail the American people again,” the president wrote.

This week, mass shooting survivors brought their message to



**X Gonzalez speaks to the crowd during the second March for Our Lives rally. Photograph: Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP**

Capitol Hill. Among them was Miah Cerrillo, an 11-year-old girl who survived the attack in Uvalde, Texas. She told members of Congress how she covered herself with a dead classmate’s blood.

The actor Matthew McConaughey appeared in the White House briefing room to press for reform and make highly personal remarks about his hometown, Uvalde.

“Responsible gun owners are

fed up with the second amendment being abused and hijacked by some deranged individuals,” he said. “Regulations are not a step back; they’re a step forward for a civil society and – and the second amendment.”

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

(AP)—North Carolina Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper would be stripped of his power to appoint members of the community college trustee board in Senate leader Phil Berger’s home county under legislation approved Wednesday by the state House.

Rockingham Community College has a 13-member board. The local board of commissioners, school board and governor now choose four members each, in keeping with the state law that most community college governing bodies follow. A handful of colleges have board modifications, a bill supporter said.

Under the bill now heading to the Senate, the four appointments currently from the governor would instead be based upon recommendations of the House speaker and Senate leader. And six of the remaining eight spots would now rest with the commissioners, with the school board getting two.

Rep. Reece Pyrtle, a Rockingham County Republican shepherding the bill, said the governance proposal would largely mirror the board’s makeup at Cleveland Community College, in Speaker Tim Moore’s home county, since 2018. Moore and Berger are Republicans.

Pyrtle said the changes would give more authority to the county commissioners, which agreed to put on the ballot a successful sales tax referendum. The tax proceeds go to workforce development efforts at the college. Pyrtle said he had spoken to local leaders about the changes, but not to the governor.

The House approved the bill on a party-line vote. Democratic Rep. Raymond Smith of Wayne County called the bill a “stepping stone” to erode Cooper’s authority statewide.

Berger said later Wednesday he agrees that having more local input for the college board is a “step in the positive direction.” The bill would become law if the Senate agrees to the measure, since local legislation isn’t subject to Cooper’s veto stamp.

The Republican-controlled legislature passed a law in late 2016—weeks before Cooper took office—that eliminated the governor’s power to appoint members of trustee boards at University of North Carolina system campuses.

### NORTH CAROLINA MAN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR ILLEGAL FIREARMS

(AP)—A North Carolina man has been sentenced to 12 years in prison and three years of supervised release for his conviction on charges of possessing a firearm as a convicted felon.

U.S. Attorney Michael Easley said Edward Shaquille Alford, 29, of Lumberton was indicted last July on two counts of possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. On March 9, Alford entered a guilty plea to a single count, Easley said in a news release.

In February 2021, the Lumberton Police Department and the Robeson County Sheriff’s Office executed a search warrant at a residence in Lumberton and found a loaded .45 caliber firearm with an extended magazine in the room where Alford was staying, the news release said.

Alford made bond on state charges but was arrested again on a firearm charge in May 2021, when Lumberton Police tried to make a traffic stop on Alford. He fled the scene but was apprehended nearby and found with an AR-15 rifle in the driver’s side door, according to prosecutors.

Alford had previously been convicted of robbery with a dangerous weapon as well as a prior conviction for possessing a firearm as a convicted felon.

### BILLS ADDRESSING ARSON, RETAIL THEFT GETS NC SENATE SUPPORT

(AP)—New arson crimes and higher penalties for current offenses related to setting buildings on fire received overwhelming support in the state Senate on Monday night.

The measure, a version of which passed the House last year, would create new felony crimes for setting fire to a prison, an occupied commercial structure, and an unoccupied commercial structure. And someone who commits arson also would face a felony if a first responder suffers a “serious injury” because of it.

The measure, which was approved 42-1 and now returns to the House for further consideration, also would require applicants for paid or volunteer fire department jobs to submit to criminal background checks. Any applicant found to have been convicted of arson or a similar felony conviction related to burning or setting a fire couldn’t be hired.

The Senate also voted unanimously on Monday for a measure that attempts to crack down on large, organized thefts at stores. The legislation would create even more serious felonies of “organized retail theft” when the value of property stolen over a 90-day period exceeds \$50,000.

# Proud Boys Charged With—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

into the building.

Prosecutors have said the Proud Boys arranged for members to communicate using specific frequencies on Baofeng radios. The Chinese-made devices can be programmed for use on hundreds of frequencies, making it difficult for outsiders to eavesdrop.

Shortly before the riot, authorities say Tarrío posted on social media that the group planned to turn out in “record numbers” on Jan. 6, but would be “incognito” instead of donning their traditional clothing colors of black and yellow.

Around the same time, an

unnamed person sent Tarrío a document that laid out plans for occupying a few “crucial buildings” in Washington on Jan. 6, including House and Senate office buildings around the Capitol, the indictment says. The nine-page document was entitled “1776 Returns” and called for having as “many people as possible” to “show our politicians We the People are in charge,” according to the indictment.

Nordean, of Auburn, Wash., was a Proud Boys chapter president and a member of the group’s national “Elders Council.” Biggs, of Ormond Beach,

Fla., is a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Rehl was president of the Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia. Pezzola is a Proud Boy member from Rochester, N.Y.

A New York man pleaded guilty in December to storming the U.S. Capitol with fellow Proud Boys members. Matthew Greene was the first Proud Boys member to publicly plead guilty to conspiring with other members to stop Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote. Greene agreed to cooperate with authorities investigating the attack.

Another Proud Boy, Charles

Donohoe, of Kernersville, N.C., pleaded guilty in April to conspiracy and assault charges and also agreed to cooperate in the Justice Department’s cases against other members of the extremist group.

In December, a federal judge refused to dismiss an earlier indictment charging alleged leaders of the Proud Boys with conspiring to block the certification of Biden’s electoral college win. U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly rejected defense attorneys’ arguments that the men were charged with conduct that is protected by the First Amendment right to free speech.

# Justice Dept. To Probe La.—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

vestigations into a death troopers initially blamed on a car crash, no one has been charged.

AP’s reporting found troopers have made a habit of turning off or muting body cameras during pursuits. When footage is recorded, the agency has routinely refused to release it. And a recently retired supervisor who oversaw a particularly violent clique of troopers told internal investigators last year that it was his “common practice” to rubber-stamp officers’ use-of-force reports without ever reviewing body-camera video.

In some cases, troopers omitted uses of force such as blows to the head from official reports, and in others troopers sought to justify their actions by claiming suspects were violent, resisting or escaping, all of which were contradicted by video footage.

“This systemic misconduct was blessed by top brass at the Louisiana State Police,” said Alannah Odums, executive director

of the ACLU of Louisiana. She described a “culture of violence, terror, and discrimination” within the agency, calling Greene’s death “the tip of the iceberg.”

Clarke said the civil “pattern-or-practice” probe is aimed at driving needed reforms, if necessary by suing to implement a federal consent decree. She added that Gov. John Bel Edwards and the head of the Louisiana State Police, Lamar Davis, have pledged their cooperation. The state police did not respond to requests for comment Thursday.

Black leaders have been urging the Justice Department for months to launch a broader investigation into potential racial profiling by the overwhelmingly White state police, similar to other probes opened over the past year in Minneapolis, Louisville and Phoenix.

By its own tally, 67 percent of state police uses of force in recent years were against Black people, who make up 33 percent

of the state’s population.

The action comes as Edwards prepares to testify before a bipartisan panel of state lawmakers investigating Greene’s death. AP reported last month that the Democratic governor and his lawyers privately watched video showing Greene taking his final breaths during his fatal arrest—footage that didn’t reach prosecutors until nearly two years after Greene’s May 10, 2019, death.

Federal prosecutors also are still investigating whether police brass obstructed justice to protect troopers in the Greene case—and whether they sought to conceal evidence of troopers beating other Black motorists.

The head of the state police at the time of Greene’s arrest, Kevin Reeves, has denied the death was covered up but current commanders have told lawmakers investigating the state’s response that it was. The agency’s own use-of-force expert called what troopers did to Greene “torture

and murder.”

The AP also found that a former trooper implicated in three separate beatings, Jacob Brown, tallied 23 uses of force dating to 2015, 19 of which involved Black people. In one case that resulted in federal charges, Brown was seen on body-camera video beating Aaron Larry Bowman 18 times with a flashlight after deputies pulled him over for a traffic violation in 2019. State police didn’t investigate the attack until 536 days later, and only did so after a lawsuit from Bowman, who was left with a gash to the head and a broken jaw, ribs and wrist.

“Finally!!!” Bowman’s attorney, Donecia Banks-Miley, said in a text message upon hearing of the pattern-or-practice probe. “We still need transparency and accountability to help bring restoration to the pain that continues to occur with LSP and other law enforcement agencies.”

# After 5 Years, NC Reveals Action Plan For GenX

WILMINGTON (AP)—Five years after the state’s initial investigation of GenX turning up in the Cape Fear River, Gov. Roy Cooper and his environmental chief unveiled a three-pronged strategy Tuesday to address further efforts to reduce and remedy a broad category of “forever chemicals” in water sources.

Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Elizabeth Biser, who also chronicled state government’s efforts so far to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, said there remains more to do to protect human health and the environment.

“We’ve come a long way in the last few years in identifying these chemicals, stopping the polluters

and charting a path forward,” Cooper said at a news conference in Wilmington near where the Cape Fear and Northeast Cape Fear rivers merge. “The challenge of PFAS is bigger than any one company or any one chemical.”

A state investigation that began in June 2017 found that The Chemours Co. had discharged a type of PFAS called GenX from its Fayetteville Works plant in Bladen County into the air, water and groundwater for years. GenX is used in the manufacturing of nonstick coatings and for other purposes.

Chemours said in 2017 that it would stop discharging the chemical into the Cape Fear River, the

drinking water sources for several hundred thousand people in southeastern North Carolina, including Wilmington. But groundwater seepage means high PFAS levels are still showing up downstream and in private drinking wells. Public utility systems are upgrading their infrastructure to remove those high levels.

Studies have linked PFAS exposure to increased cancer risk, developmental delays in children and damage to organs such as the liver and thyroid, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“We want to ensure that in the future, no community experiences what you have already been through, Biser said. “We are all working toward a common goal—protecting North Carolinians and their access to clean drinking water.”

The state’s investigation led to a consent agreement finalized with Chemours in early 2019 that included a \$12 million penalty, the sampling and replacement of drinking water supplies for private well users, and measures to reduce drastically air emissions and other PFAS pollution from leaving the plant.

The Department of Environmental Quality’s PFAS action plan focuses on identifying people across the state who may face a health risk from PFAS; proposals for setting groundwater, surface water and drinking water

standards to avoid unnecessary human exposure; and setting remediation goals for contaminated sites that leads to “health-protective outcomes.”

Biser said the plan builds on past work and is designed to complement or supplement action that is expected on PFAS from the federal government, particularly through the Environmental Protection Agency. Last fall, EPA chief Michael Regan—Biser’s immediate predecessor at the Department of Environmental Quality—announced a road map to address PFAS nationwide, which also includes drinking water standards.

Biser and Cooper also both urged state lawmakers to pass proposed legislation debated last week that in part would require Chemours to pay for public water system improvements designed to remove the chemicals or reduce concentrations, not the ratepayers. Two Wilmington-area utilities have said they are spending roughly \$150 million on aggregate improvements to address PFAS pollution.

Chemours said last week that the company has spent or committed to spend \$400 million on improvements such as on-site emissions control technology at the plant and remediation. A 2020 lawsuit filed by Attorney General Josh Stein’s office seeking monetary damages for the state from the GenX releases is pending.

## JUDGE BLOCKS LA. MAPS

Continued from page 1

up in a special session earlier this year during a legislative special session called to redraw government district lines to account for population shifts show in the 2020 census. Edwards vetoed the maps but his veto was overridden. That led to a lawsuit by voting rights advocates.

Ardoin filed a notice of appeal with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. Ultimately, the case could wind up before the Supreme Court, which earlier this year put on hold a

lower court ruling that Alabama must draw new congressional districts before the 2022 elections to increase Black voting power.

Ardoin’s office declined comment on the litigation.

In blocking the use of the map pending further elections, Dick said those filing the lawsuit were likely to prevail with their argument that the new districts violate the federal Voting Rights Act. She blocked Ardoin from conducting any elections using the new map.

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# Business & Finance

## Facebook Fails Again To Detect Hate Speech In Advertisements

By Barbara Ortutay

AP Technology Writer

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (AP)—The test couldn't have been much easier—and Facebook still failed.

Facebook and its parent company Meta flopped once again in a test of how well they could detect obviously violent hate speech in advertisements submitted to the platform by the nonprofit groups Global Witness and Foxglove.

The hateful messages focused on Ethiopia, where internal documents obtained by whistleblower Frances Haugen showed that Facebook's ineffective moderation is "literally fanning ethnic violence," as she said in her 2021 congressional testimony. In March, Global Witness ran a similar test with hate speech in Myanmar, which Facebook also failed to detect.

The group created 12 text-based ads that used dehumanizing hate speech to call for the murder of people belonging to each of Ethiopia's three main ethnic groups—the Amhara, the Oromo and the Tigrayans. Facebook's systems approved the ads for publication, just as they did with the Myanmar ads. The ads were not actually published on Facebook.

This time around, though, the group informed Meta about the

undetected violations. The company said the ads shouldn't have been approved and pointed to the work it has done to catch hateful content on its platforms.

A week after hearing from Meta, Global Witness submitted two more ads for approval, again with blatant hate speech. The two ads, written in Amharic, the most widely used language in Ethiopia, were approved.

Meta said the ads shouldn't have been approved.

"We've invested heavily in safety measures in Ethiopia, adding more staff with local expertise and building our capacity to catch hateful and inflammatory content in the most widely spoken languages, including Amharic," the company said in an emailed statement, adding that machines and people can still make mistakes. The statement was identical to the one Global Witness received.

"We picked out the worst cases we could think of," said Rosie Sharpe, a campaigner at Global Witness. "The ones that ought to be the easiest for Facebook to detect. They weren't coded language. They weren't dog whistles. They were explicit statements saying that this type of person is not a human or these type of people should be starved to death."

Meta has consistently refused to say how many content mod-

erators it has in countries where English is not the primary language. This includes moderators in Ethiopia, Myanmar and other regions where material posted on the company's platforms has been linked to real-world violence.

In November, Meta said it removed a post by Ethiopia's prime minister that urged citizens to rise up and "bury" rival Tigray forces who threatened the country's capital.

In the since-deleted post, Abiy said the "obligation to die for Ethiopia belongs to all of us." He called on citizens to mobilize "by holding any weapon or capacity."

Abiy has continued to post on the platform, though, where he has 4.1 million followers. The U.S. and others have warned Ethiopia about "dehumanizing rhetoric" after the prime minister described the Tigray forces as "cancer" and "weeds" in comments made in July 2021.

"When ads calling for genocide in Ethiopia repeatedly get through Facebook's net—even after the issue is flagged with Facebook—there's only one possible conclusion: there's nobody home," said Rosa Curling, director of Foxglove, a London-based legal nonprofit that partnered with Global Witness in its investigation. "Years after the Myanmar genocide, it is clear Facebook hasn't learned its lesson."



**STILL NOT THERE**—Facebook has for years tried to rid its platform of violent hate speech. But a series of test "ads" submitted by Global Witness containing the worst of the worst hate language showed there is still much room for improvement. All the ads were cleared to run, though Global Witness never ran them.

## Schwartzel Wins Richest Golf Event Prize Amid Saudi Outcry

ST. ALBANS, England (AP) — Former Masters champion Charl Schwartzel banked \$4.75 million on Saturday by winning the richest tournament in golf history, while the event's Saudi backers faced renewed backlash after a 9/11 victims' group called for American players to withdraw from the rebel series.

Schwartzel held on for a one-shot victory at the inaugural LIV Golf event outside London to secure the \$4 million prize for the individual victory — along with another \$750,000 from his share of the \$3 million purse earned by his four-man Stinger team for topping the team rankings.

Schwartzel collected more prize money from winning the three-day, 54-hole event than he had from the last four years combined. Not that it could match the sense of sporting achievement that he felt after his win at Augusta National in 2011.

"Money is one thing but there you're playing for prestige, history," he said. "Winning a major will always top anything you do."

This hefty pay check has come at a cost to Schwartzel's career status, having resigned his membership of the PGA Tour to play on the unsanctioned series without a waiver.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I think we could play for that

much money in golf," Schwartzel, who had not won a PGA or European tour event since 2016, told the crowd.

Pressed in the news conference, he dismissed criticism of the windfall coming from the Saudi sovereign wealth fund.

"Where the money comes from is not something ... that I've ever looked at playing in my 20 years career," the South African said. "I think if I start digging everywhere where we played, you could find fault in anything."

Fellow South African Hennie Du Plessis, who was selected for Stinger by team captain Louis Oosthuizen in the draft, earned \$2.875 million by finishing second at Centurion Club, located between Hemel Hempstead and St. Albans.

Schwartzel entered the final day with a three-shot lead and did just enough to hold off Du Plessis despite finishing with a 2-over 72 for a 7-under total of 203.

It is the first of eight events in the first year of LIV Golf, which began against the backdrop of the PGA Tour banning players who signed up. The European tour has yet to comment on any sanctions for players who jumped to the series without its approval.

Twenty players have now defected from the PGA Tour, with

Patrick Reed the latest former Masters champion confirmed on Saturday as signing up to LIV Golf as the final round was being completed.

However, the lucrative rewards for joining the Public Investment Fund-backed series have not been enough to entice any players ranked in the world's top 10.

Reed, who has won almost \$37 million in a decade on the PGA Tour, is ranked 36th. The 31-year-old American's only major win was the 2018 Masters.

Having appeared at three Ryder Cups, where he has been one of the brash characters on the American team, Reed's decision could see him ineligible for selection in the future.

Reed said he would make his debut on the second stop of the LIV Golf series in Portland, Oregon, on June 30-July 2.

Saudi Arabia's track record of human rights violations has sparked criticism from groups, including Amnesty International, that the country is "sportswashing" its image by investing in signing up sports stars.

LIV Golf CEO Greg Norman, who would not speak to the media at the event, called the series a "force for good" in a speech at the victory ceremony, without addressing criticism of the Saudi project.

## \$5 Gas Is Here: Hits New High

NEW YORK (AP) — The nationwide average price for a gallon of gasoline has hit \$5 for the first time ever.

Auto club AAA said the average price on Saturday was a fraction of a penny over \$5.00. Motorists in some parts of the country, especially California, are paying far above that.

The national average price has jumped 19 cents in just the past week, and it is up \$1.93 from this time last year.

The high cost is taking a toll on people who need their vehicles to earn a living.

It was bad enough for cab driver Joseph Pierre when it cost \$25 to fill his tank. Now he shells out \$40 or \$45.

"I'm losing money because some passengers I pick up, they don't care about that, they don't tip you," Pierre said Saturday as he pumped gas at a BP station in Brooklyn.

Katisha Thompson, who paid \$79 for 13 gallons of premium at the same station, said the price is "becoming overbearing."

"It's a lot, especially when you are trying to feed a family," she said. "And it's not just gas. It's groceries, everything is going up."

Americans are still burning



less gasoline than they did before the pandemic, with many people still working from home instead of commuting. But there are early signs that higher prices might be affecting drivers' habits, too.

The amount of fuel consumed last week was down 3% from the previous week and 6% from this time last year, according to preliminary figures from the Oil Price Information Service.

There are several reasons for the surge in gasoline prices.

Americans typically drive more starting around Memorial Day, so demand is up. Global oil prices are rising, compounded by

sanctions against Russia, a leading oil producer, because of its war against Ukraine. And there are limits on refining capacity in the United States because some refineries shut down during the pandemic.

Add it all up, and the cost of filling up is draining money from Americans who are facing the highest rate of inflation in 40 years.

While this is the first time breaking the \$5 barrier, it's still not a record when inflation is taken into account. Gas peaked at \$4.11 a gallon in July 2008, which would be equal to about \$5.40 a gallon today.

## Crypto Meltdown Leads To Calls For Regulation By Many, Including Bitcoin

By Ken Sweet and Fatima Hussein

The Associated Press

NEW YORK, N.Y. (AP)—Meltdowns in the cryptocurrency space are common, but the latest one really touched some nerves. Novice investors took to online forums to share tales of decimated fortunes and even suicidal despair. Experienced crypto supporters, including one prominent billionaire, were left feeling humbled.

When the stablecoin TerraUSD

imploded last month, an estimated \$40 billion in investor funds was erased—and so far there has been little or no accountability. Stablecoins are supposed to be less vulnerable to big swings—thus the name—but Terra suffered a spectacular collapse in a matter of days.

The Terra episode publicly exposed a truth long-known in the always-online crypto community: for every digital currency with staying power, like bitcoin, there have been hundreds of failed or

worthless currencies in crypto's short history. So Terra became just the latest "sh-coin"—the term used by the community to describe coins that faded into obscurity.

Terra's quick collapse came just as bitcoin, the most popular cryptocurrency, was in the midst of a decline that has wiped out nearly half of its value in a couple of months. The events have served as a vivid reminder that investors, both professionals and the mom and pop variety, can be

rolling the dice when it comes to putting money into digital assets.

After being mostly hands-off toward crypto, it appears that Washington has had enough. On Tuesday, two senators—one Democrat and one Republican—proposed legislation that seeks to build a regulatory framework around the cryptocurrency industry; other members of Congress are considering more limited legislation.

What's surprising, however, is that the cryptocurrency industry is signaling its cooperation. Politicians, crypto enthusiasts, and industry lobbyists all point to last month's collapse of Terra and its token Luna as the possible end of the libertarian experiment in crypto.

Stablecoins are typically pegged to a traditional financial instrument, like the U.S. dollar, and are supposed to be the cryptocurrency equivalent of investing in a conservative money market fund. But Terra was not backed by any hard assets. Instead, its founder Do Kwon promised that Terra's proprietary algorithm would keep the coin's value pegged to roughly \$10. Critics of Terra would be attacked on social media by Kwon and his so-called army of "LUNatics"

Kwon's promise turned out to be worthless. A massive selling event caused Terra to "break the buck" and collapse in value. Reddit boards dedicated to Terra and Luna were dominated for days by posts referencing the National Suicide Prevention Hotline.

Terra's ascendance attracted not only retail investors but also

better-known cryptocurrency experts. One notable "Lunatic" was billionaire Mike Novogratz, who tattooed his upper arm with the word Luna and a wolf howling at the moon. Novogratz told his followers that the tattoo "will be a constant reminder that venture investing requires humility."

Michael Estrabillo entrusted his crypto investments to stablecoins, an investment vehicle that he says had assured him and other investors that the funds were secured in USD Coin, one of the largest stablecoins. Then, on May 9, he said he was informed his money was locked up in Terra.

"Had I known I was involved in a currency that was backed by an algorithm, I would have never invested in that," Estrabillo la-

mented.

Washington may also be waking up to the fact that what used to be niche part of the internet and finance has gone mainstream and can no longer be ignored.

The total value of crypto assets hit a peak of \$2.8 trillion last November; it's now below \$1.3 trillion, according to CoinGecko. Surveys show that roughly 16 percent of adult Americans, or 40 million people, have invested in cryptocurrencies. Retirement account giant Fidelity Investments now offers crypto as a part of a 401(k) plan. Sen. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey, has repeatedly pointed out that crypto is particularly popular among Black Americans, a community long distrustful of Wall Street.

### Classifieds



#### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Halifax County out for bid: C-11457R-anoke River Waste Pump Panel Replacement. The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 06/30/2022. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/14861100.pdf>





# Opinion



## Civil War Is Not the Solution to Mass Shootings

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

As an op-ed writer, I'm a slave to the news cycle. That means that whenever one or more mass shootings heat up the topic of "gun control," I tend to weigh in. And my usual take these days, as opposed to arguing about the Second Amendment, etc., is to simply note that a significant percentage of the more than 100 million Americans who own more than 400 million guns would just say "no" to giving up those guns, and make their "no" vote stick.

The usual retort to that position is pretty simple, and best summed up by a reply op-ed from Rob Kall, publisher of OpEdNews.com.

Disclaimer: Rob often disagrees with me. Rob also publishes most of my columns whether he agrees with them or not. I love Rob and I love OpEdNews, and urge you to check it out. This column is NOT intended as a slam on Rob or on the site. But since it gives me material to work with:

"If, as Knapp appears to predict, people decide to break the law, and use their weapons to fight police, then they are terrorists and they should be arrested or killed... If they resist, arrest them. If they shoot, give them a chance to surrender, then blow up their homes. Have the military do it with a missile fired by a fighter jet or helicopter. It won't take many houses being blown up to persuade people to give up their AR-15s and related weapons."

A related observation from Twitter user AbiSpeaks:

"[T]he Federal government can obliterate your entire block. Even if you buy the killingest killing machine you can find anywhere, you're bringing a water gun to a tanks-and-laser-sighted-bombs fight."

My reply to that tweet:

"The federal government was able to obliterate entire blocks in Afghanistan, but that didn't stop them from getting their asses kicked by farmers with 60-year-old AKs and 100-year-old Mosin-Nagants."

Don't get me wrong. I don't think a government war on America's gun owners would be anything like Afghanistan.

I think it would be far worse, for both the government and for Americans, gun owners and non-gun-owners alike.

Only 2,448 members of the U.S. armed forces died in Afghanistan. The approach Rob suggests would likely produce at least Vietnam-level casualties (58,281 dead)... and an outcome similar to both those wars.

"Enemy" and civilian casualties were much higher than U.S. military casualties in both wars. And that would likely be true of this one as well.

I have difficulty believing that Rob, and people who think like Rob, would be happy with tens of thousands of American cops and soldiers, and hundreds of thousands of American civilians, dead—and at the end of the carnage, more guns on the streets than before.

I prefer to believe that Rob, and people who think like Rob, just haven't thought this through very carefully.

Because, make no mistake about this, what Rob is calling for is civil war.

I hope we can all agree that that would be a bad thing.

**Thomas L. Knapp** (Twitter: @thomasknapp) is director and senior news analyst at the William Lloyd Garrison Center for Libertarian Advocacy Journalism (thegarrisoncenter.org). He lives and works in north central Florida.



## An Ounce Upstream

By Tom H. Hastings

Portland State University

I tapped the drunken man on the shoulder. "David," I said, "we need your two dollars cover charge."

He whirled and punched me in the face.

Fortunately, not only was his aim a bit high so that his fist landed hard on my even harder forehead, but in seconds we surrounded him with four nonviolent men who used non-pain compliance physical bulk to hustle him outside where we could talk him down.

(Irony Alert): This took place a few decades ago at a peace group benefit. We provided the band—friends of the peace movement—and the bar made out because we filled their place. We did our own bouncing, and David provided the only occasion that evening for such a need. Nothing quite like getting smacked in the head at a peace dance, believe me.

I thought about it after, of course, and decided where I could have done a few things to make David far less likely to lose it.

When we think about it, virtually all of our human conflicts, by the time they erupt visibly or audibly or in the form of physical violence, are best managed long before that moment.

It's all about the Benjamins. Franklin famously said, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

But how does that work with humans in severe disagreement?

We can often anticipate conflict and that gives us a chance to act constructively long before something destructive could break out. Often the key is to simply acknowledge to ourselves this growing potential and to deal with it compassionately, respectfully, and proactively. At most stages of the best conflict management, listening is vastly more important than talking.

Of course there is no guarantee with any method of managing conflict. We have the horrifying record of violence in our cities, in our schools, in our workplaces, and in our homes to suggest that there

are conflicts that cannot be foreseen and that are simply what nuclear war planners call a "BOOB" attack, a bolt out of the blue.

But what if we could "only" prevent the first 90 percent of destructive conflicts? I suspect that, given the extremely high cost of those adversarial outbursts, we would rationally choose to follow Ben's sagacity.

This is why, in literally every class I teach at the upper division level in the university, students in their 20s, 30s and older remark at some point, Geez, I wish they had taught me this in elementary school.

In every one of those classes, I assign a midterm paper that is some form of autobiography of some aspect of conflict and conflict transformation. The instructions are basically to use our course materials to analyze how they have been exposed to, suffered from, managed, or are currently confronted by conflict.

Over the decades since I started teaching at colleges and universities, the overwhelming wish for much earlier conflict transformation education is a strong recurring theme as students reflect on their own histories and wish that they and those around them had more adaptive conflict prevention and deescalation skills.

Perhaps if I had my life to live over, I would choose to be an elementary school teacher so I could do that education myself, but mostly what I hope happens is that these subjects are taught younger and younger by competent teachers who have taken such courses as they prepare to become the educators we need for our young ones.

Some schools already do such education, which is a good sign, and we need so much more. I earned my doctorate in education and there were zero courses in how to teach conflict transformation that were part of that degree.

This lack is costing us, as we see every day on the streets, in schools, in Congress, in our international relations, and in many families. This is certainly as important as any other subject taught to our children. Turning out high school graduates who are adept at transforming destructive conflict into creative relationships could be a major factor in helping heal our divided, dysfunctional society.

**Dr. Tom H. Hastings is Coördinator of Conflict Resolution BA/BS degree programs and certificates at Portland State University, PeaceVoice Senior Editor, and on occasion an expert witness for the defense of civil resisters in court.**



## Why Would I Talk To Them? Research Shows We Can Talk Across Our Political Divides

By Melinda Burrell

National Association for Community Mediation

As we look at the pictures from Uvalde, Buffalo, and other mass shootings, we're having agonized conversation. It seems inconceivable that "the other side" could look at those same photos yet reach utterly different conclusions about their meanings.

I've been researching how liberals and conservatives experience talking across our divide. Three things stand out: we all tend to experience those conversations the same way, we all try hard to avoid them, and each cross-divide interaction adds to overall conflict dynamics in our country—both positively and negatively.

We all avoid talking to the other side for similar reasons: the other person won't listen, will get too emotional, and there would be no point. Essentially, we're united in how uncomfortable these exchanges make us feel.

If we do engage, we often do aggressively. We usually don't ask questions to try to understand the other person, but instead throw out statements of identity and values ("Well, I'm a Democrat and I think..."). Worse, we use demeaning language ("I can't believe someone as smart as you would think like that," a conservative woman reported hearing frequently.)

These sharp interactions just escalate conflict, confirming our negative thoughts about the other side and making us even less likely to want to interact across the divide. As one liberal White woman said, "I find it harder, as time goes on, doing your best not to vilify the other side." A conservative White man took it further, describing us as having "a society and a culture politically where people are not happy unless they're mad."

But my research also showed that sometimes we engage because we are tired of feeling cut off from others. As an Asian-American man said, "I don't want to be so alone, being a conservative in a very liberal-leaning workplace. I feel it's important to figure out how to talk to people." He was echoed by a liberal White man living in a red state: "It's about getting closer to my neighbors so I can be friendly. It feels good. It's educating."

Just as negative encounters intensify our country-wide conflict dynamics, positive encounters relax them. Almost everyone I interviewed said they wanted to be able to have these conversations not only to feel more connected to their families and communities, but also for the health of our democracy. "Neither side is going away, so we have to talk and work together," said a young, liberal African-American woman. People who described having had good cross-divide conversations also said they wanted to do it more often—a virtuous circle.

What did people think would enable more such conversations? Most said they'd do it if they knew the other side would listen and be respectful, rather than descend into personal attacks. Essentially, they wanted ground rules and support. Happily, many organizations offer exactly that, from Living Room Conversations and Braver Angels, to community mediation centers around the country.

Other research shows that we agree about more than we realize, as our divisions are about partisan labels rather than policy substance. Maybe it's time for us to become anthropologists of our own culture: taking a deep breath, formulating genuinely curious questions about how other Americans see things so differently, and having those connection-building conversations.

**Melinda Burrell, Ph.D., @MelindaCBurrell, was a humanitarian aid worker and now trains on the neuroscience of communication and conflict. She is on the board of the National Association for Community Mediation, which offers resources on cross-divide engagement.**

## Sleepwalking Into Climate Nightmares

By Rivera Sun

Nonviolence News

How can anyone sleep at night? My first nightmare about environmental crisis occurred in 1990. I was eight years old. In it, acid rain poured from the sky, scalding the skin of humans and stripping holes in the leaves of trees. On either side of a long, ashen-gray street, billowing plumes of smog chugged out of smokestacks. I was running, searching for sanctuary from the toxic waste. Nowhere was safe.

It's 2022. I'm turning 40 this summer and my bad dreams are noth-



ing compared to reality. The climate crisis is crashing down in cascades of disasters—forest fires, torrential floods, crop failures, ferocious hurricanes, heat domes... the stuff of nightmares.

And while I wrestle with existential dread and horrified insomnia, our political leaders are asleep at the wheel. They're dreaming of midterm elections, business-as-usual, yet another war, and hoping to pass the buck on dealing with the non-negotiable need for a swift transition away from fossil fuels.

We're running out of time.

When I was a teenager, the epic movie *Titanic* rolled through the movie theaters. Leonardo DiCaprio starred as a doomed, but handsome lower-class artist named Jack who fell in love with an upper-class woman played by Kate Winslet. The ship hit the iceberg. The band played on. The poor drowned in droves. The rich tossed children out of lifeboats to secure their own safety. It was the epic symbol of our times, a powerful metaphorical augury.

It would take DiCaprio 22 years to find a more apropos image. In *Don't Look Up*, he stars as a freaked-out scientist warning of an inevitable collision with a massive, extinction-causing asteroid. In this film, he doesn't survive either.

In 2003, Drew Dellinger wrote these haunting lines:

*It's 3:23 in the morning*

*and I'm awake*

*because my great great grandchildren*

*won't let me sleep*

*my great great grandchildren*

*ask me in dreams*

*what did you do while the planet was plundered?*

*what did you do when the earth was unraveling?*

The poem goes on to ask: what did you do, once you knew?

Some of us can't sleep. We know it's the eleventh hour. We know we're 100 seconds to midnight on the Doomsday Clock. We know the ecological debts racked up by our parents and grandparents are coming due. We know the future is increasingly uncertain with every minute, every second spent spewing out more fossil fuels into the atmosphere.

We can't sleep... and we need to use our insomnia to wake up those who are dozing in denial. In the halls of power and corporate boardrooms, on Wall Street and on governing boards, we need them to gasp awake and jerk us out of this devastating collision course with proverbial icebergs that are melting and collapsing in skyscraper-sized chunks.

All my life, I've had nightmares about the realities we're living now. The poets and storytellers are hard at work, screaming for sanity and a swift transition. The activists are mobilizing and turning up the street heat as the climate crisis intensifies. The schoolchildren are walking out of school, demanding that we act. It's time for the rich and powerful to do their part. We don't have another decade. We don't have another planet. We don't have another life.

**Rivera Sun has written numerous books, including *The Dandelion Insurrection*. She is the editor of *Nonviolence News* and a national trainer in strategy for nonviolent campaigns.**

## Amid The Carnage In Ukraine, It's Time For World Leaders To Rethink Their Priorities

By Derek Royden

PeaceVoice

According to a study by a number of organizations called Ceres 2020, which was backed by the government of Germany, world hunger could mostly be ended by 2030 for \$330 billion. This is a very large number, it's true, but when we look at what the United States spends on its military budget each year, now in excess of \$800 billion, it's obvious that it's skewed priorities, especially in richer countries that result in so much unnecessary hunger and suffering, especially south of the equator.

Besides this massive military budget, just a few weeks ago on May 19th, the U.S. Senate approved an aid package for Ukraine with a price tag of \$40 billion. With just \$3.4 billion of this set aside for food aid, it's clear the lion's share of this assistance will go to Raytheon, General Dynamics and other companies that profit from providing the means for mass slaughter, filling the pockets of their shareholders and executives with blood-soaked banknotes in the process.

The war in Ukraine has turned out to be an even greater disaster for those already suffering from hunger around the world in that, combined, Russia and Ukraine produce a little more than a quarter of the world's wheat, a staple food in almost every country.

Ignoring this reality, the usual suspects in Western media, think tanks and among the political class argue not for negotiations between Russian and Ukrainian leaders to bring the conflict to an end but further escalation, with the most unhinged calling early on for a NATO enforced no fly zone that would almost certainly widen the war, and bring it to the brink of nuclear apocalypse.

This is not to lay blame for the actual conflict anywhere but where it belongs, at the feet of the leadership of the Russian Federation, whose war of aggression is a crime of monstrous proportions that has led to thousands of casualties and millions of refugees. Still, it's worrying to hear people like U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin argue that this war should be allowed to continue for years to "weaken" Russia rather than calling for diplomacy to save as many lives as possible.

When Noam Chomsky and Henry Kissinger agree on the foolishness of something like this, it's wise to at least consider it.

The two main solutions to almost every war are a decisive victory or a negotiated settlement. Even when the former appears to be the case as we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan (twice), this doesn't end the conflict but often just changes its form.

It's true that diplomacy can fail. The war in Ukraine is also the result of Russian claims that Ukraine has failed to honor the Minsk Accords of 2014 that were intended to end the low intensity conflict in the Donbas region. The problem with this is that Russia itself has also repeatedly violated the agreement.

Regardless, another eight years without widespread conflict would be better for Ukrainians than the current carnage and would allow regional and international bodies to concentrate on other things, whether it's helping to end other conflicts or working to realize the goal of ending world hunger.

Neither side will be happy with such a result but keeping politicians and diplomats happy is not worth one single human life.

It should shock us that at least 10 percent of the world's people are going hungry while the media indulges war fever over Ukraine and highlights other stories that are even less consequential. With climate change already here and putting the food supply at ever greater risk, we need our governments and mass media to change their priorities.

Lending all support and incentives to ending the war in Ukraine would be a good place to start.