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Civil Rights Groups, Cops Settle Over Protest

(AP)—A city and two law enforcement agencies in a North Carolina county will pay \$336,000 to a group of plaintiffs to settle a lawsuit stemming from a 2020 protest in which demonstrators were pepper-sprayed during a get-out-the-vote rally.

The American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and a Chicago-based law firm announced the agreement in a news release on Wednesday. The lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in November 2020 and named as defendants the city of Graham and Police Chief Kristi Cole, 15 police officers, Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson and 15 deputies.

"It is outrageous that people marching to the polls to cast their ballot were met with police brutality. The right to gather and march in support of a shared cause is at the core of the First Amendment," Chantal Stevens, executive director of the ACLU of North Carolina, said in the news release.

"This agreement is a step in the right direction, but it's insufficient to reckon with the violence and trauma that these community members endured at the hands of police."

Neither Graham Town Manager Megan Garner nor Acting Alamance County Attorney Debra Bechtel immediately returned telephone calls seeking comment Wednesday. The police department said in a news release that while the city admitted no guilt, "it was in the best interest of our community to equitably settle the lawsuit and avoid the expense of extended litigation."

The three groups represented 17 individuals as well as community groups that had organized with hopes of bringing racial justice and ending police violence and other forms of racial oppression, the news release said.

Police had said participants in the Oct. 31, 2020, rally were pepper-sprayed and arrested because they were blocking a street without permission.

Graham police said at the time they issued several warnings to the crowd at Alamance County's courthouse to move from the street before releasing pepper spray and later making eight arrests.

A police department press release said the Rev. Greg Drumwright initially asked police and the Alamance County Sheriff's Office if authorities could block the street for the demonstrators, but the request was never completed because Drumwright "missed the deadline," Graham police said.

Police said protesters stopped in the street for about nine minutes, creating traffic backups "in all directions around court square." At the time, Drumwright said the group was permitted to stand in the courthouse square and was escorted through the streets by police. He also said that the group had "no intention" of having the rally in the street.

Later, police asked the crowd to

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



THIS GESTURE COST THEM—Graham police and Alamance County Sheriff's deputies—some dressed as if they thought they were invading Afghanistan—deploy pepper spray during a get-out-the-vote rally in front of the Alamance County Courthouse. Eight were arrested. The cops and officials agreed to a \$336,000 settlement last week after they were sued.

African Americans Living Overseas Reflect On Juneteenth

BANGKOK (AP) — As the United States marks only the second federally recognized Juneteenth, Black Americans living overseas have embraced the holiday as a day of reflection and an opportunity to educate people in their host countries on Black history.

President Joe Biden moved quickly last year to federally recognize the day Black Americans have been celebrating since the last enslaved people were told they were free in Galveston, Texas, on June 19, 1865, two

years after President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

In Liberia, Saqar Ahhah Ahershu, 45, from Jersey City, N.J., is organizing the country's first "Journey Home Festival."

"Because this is part of that hidden African American history that still hasn't been completely unpacked," he said in Monrovia.

Liberia, Africa's oldest independent republic, was founded by freed slaves repatriated to West Africa from the United States in 1822, exactly 200 years

ago this year. This weekend's event will include a trip to Providence Island, where former slaves settled before moving into what is now mainland Monrovia.

While there are no official statistics tracking Black Americans moving abroad, many are discussing it more openly after the police killing of George Floyd. In the aftermath, many African Americans saw the U.S. "from the outside in" and made up their minds not to return.

Tashina Ferguson, a 26-year-old debate coach, was living in

New York at the time of Eric Garner's death.

She moved to South Korea in 2019 and will celebrate Juneteenth on Sunday with a group of performers at a fundraising brunch for the Marsha P. Johnson Institute.

She has mixed feeling about the newest federal holiday.

"The commerciality of Juneteenth has become this like whole, 'Put it on a T-shirt, put it on ice cream tubs' type of thing," she said. "But as a Black person within the Black community I'm like, 'Yeah, let's celebrate us.'"

She said that only a powerful change would make her consider returning to the U.S.

Chrishan Wright in New Jersey regularly speaks with Black Americans who plan to or already have made the move abroad.

Wright, 47, hosts a podcast "Blaxit Global" and said many of her guests are tired of the U.S.

"They've done all the things to achieve what is supposed to be the American dream, and that yardstick keeps moving. They don't feel like they're on solid ground in terms of being able to retire comfortably or pay off student debt or just cover their bills."

Wright plans to move in 2023 to Portugal. Through her podcast, she already knows of Juneteenth celebrations this weekend in Lisbon, the capital.

In some places with larger

populations of Black Americans, Juneteenth is already part of the program.

LaTonya Whitaker, from Mississippi, has lived in Japan for 17 years. She is executive director of Legacy Foundation Japan, which hosted a Juneteenth gathering of about 300 people at the ritzy Tokyo American Club on Saturday.

She and her husband David didn't plan to live in Japan.

Like Whitaker, many Black Americans at the Juneteenth event came to Japan almost by

coincidence, as Christian missionaries or Peace Corps volunteers. But they made Japan their home.

She now wants to raise their son there because she worries about gun violence in the U.S.

"I realized we really need a community," said Whitaker.

Michael Williams teaches African American history at Temple University in Tokyo and left the U.S. when he was 22. He's now 66 and had lived abroad for much of

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



Participants chat at the Juneteenth event of Tokyo American Club in Tokyo, Japan, Saturday, June 18, 2022. About 300 people celebrated Juneteenth at the ritzy Tokyo American Club Saturday, with speeches, a soul food dinner, prayers and dance music. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)



NORTH CAROLINA MAN DIES AFTER BEING BROUGHT OUT OF SURF

MANTEO (AP)—A North Carolina man has died after he was brought out of the surf at Cape Hatteras National Seashore, the National Park Service said.

The victim, whose name wasn't released, was identified only as a 66-year-old from Buxton, the park service said in a news release. The incident occurred on Wednesday on an oceanside beach across from Sandy Bay on Hatteras Island.

According to the park service, the man collapsed on the beach after being rescued from the ocean by bystanders, who immediately began CPR. Emergency personnel arrived and continued resuscitation efforts, but the man died.

No further details are available.

NORTH CAROLINA NAIL SALON OWNER SENTENCED FOR FORCED LABOR

CHARLOTTE (AP)—A North Carolina woman has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for using verbal, physical and emotional threats to coerce a person to work at her nail salon for nearly two years, according to a federal prosecutor.

Thuy Tien Luong, 38, of Charlotte was also sentenced to two years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$75,000 in restitution to the victim, U.S. Attorney Dena J. King said Wednesday in a news release. Luong was convicted of forced labor on Jan. 8, 2021 after a five-day trial.

Evidence presented at her trial showed Luong punished the victim when she disobeyed the defendant or otherwise failed to perform to the defendant's satisfaction. In one instance, she falsely claimed that the victim owed her \$180,000, made her sign a debt contract and threatened to go to the police if the victim did not continue to work to pay off the fabricated debt, a news release said.

The defendant also beat the victim with nail salon tools, leaving the victim with scars, bruises and marks, prosecutors said.

Luong's scheme caused the victim to continue working for her until a particularly violent assault led her to contact the Davidson Police Department, according to the news release.

NC SPEAKER: PARENTS' BILL WITH LGBTQ LIMITS MIGHT BE SHELVED

(AP)—A North Carolina "Parents' Bill of Rights" measure pushed by Senate Republicans but condemned by LGBTQ activists and Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper may not get a final vote in the House before this year's session ends soon, Speaker Tim Moore said on Wednesday.

The measure was billed by GOP senators as a collection of tools designed to help parents oversee their children's education and health, and to seek redress when their requests of teachers and administrators aren't met. Critics have focused on provisions that would bar instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in K-3 public school curricula and would require schools to contact parents about changes in their children's health and services provided to them.

The bill passed the Senate on a nearly party-line vote two weeks ago, and moved to the Republican-controlled House, where only one affirmative vote would be needed to send it to Cooper, whose veto is likely. Cooper has linked the measure to a new Florida law that opponents labeled the "Don't Say Gay" bill.

Moore told reporters Wednesday that GOP leaders have not de-

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

Independent Booksellers Grow In Number

By Hillel Italic
AP National Writer

NEW YORK, N.Y. (AP)—Laura Romani, a Chicago-area resident with a background in education and library science, had been thinking of a new career.

"I was at home a couple of years ago reflecting on all the experience I gained and how I wanted to contribute to the Latino community, while also allowing myself to be on my own and make use of my love for books

and passion for multilingualism," she says.

The solution: Start a bookstore. With help from a local grant and stimulus checks that she and her husband received during the pandemic, Romani launched Los Amigos Books, initially as an online store last year and now with a small physical outlet with a bright blue front in Berwyn, Ill. It focuses on children's stories in English and Spanish.

"It all goes hand in hand," Ro-

mani says of her decision.

Stores like Romani's helped contribute to a year of solid growth and greater diversity for the American Booksellers Association, the trade group for independent bookstore owners. According to CEO Allison Hill, the association now has 2,010 members, at 2,547 locations, an increase of more than 300 since Spring 2021.

It's the highest ABA total in years, even though the association in 2020 tightened its rules

and permitted only stores which "primarily sell books" (over 50 percent of inventory), as opposed to any stores offering books. The ABA also no longer counts sellers whose memberships are inactive.

Hill attributes some of the rise to owners who delayed renewing their memberships early in 2021, reflecting uncertainty about the pandemic's impact. But a substantial number of additions, well over 100, are stores that have opened over the past year, dozens of them owned by people from a wider variety of racial and ethnic groups. Those stores range from Libelula Books & Co. in San Diego to Yu and Me Books in New York City's Chinatown, from Modern Tribe Bookshop in Killeen, Texas, to Sociallight Society in Lansing, Mich.

The ABA has long been predominantly White, with board president Jamie Fiocco acknowledging in June 2020—after George Floyd's murder—that the association had not done enough to "break down barriers to membership and service for Black, indigenous and people of color." Hill cited numerous recent initiatives, including the expansion of its diversity committee, diversifying its board, increased outreach and—for a time—the waiving of member-

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



INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLERS—Sonyah Spencer stands in front of the Urban Reader bookseller in Charlotte, which she founded. It was one of many independent sellers that opened during 2021.

CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS, COPS SETTLE

Continued from page 1

disperse, giving them a five-minute warning to leave the roadway. After the time passed, police said, they released the spray toward the ground, not "directly" toward any participant. They have said there were small children also present.

Last year, it was reported that both the police department and the sheriff's office failed to com-

ply with a court-ordered deadline for releasing videos that show officers using the pepper spray. The video was to be released to a coalition of news organizations.

In addition to the financial settlement, Cole agreed to have an on-the-record meeting with any of the plaintiffs who would like to join within 60 days in the final resolution of the lawsuit.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

cided whether to vote on the measure before the annual work session ends—likely around July 1—with the "political dynamics being what they are." Republicans would need support from a handful of Democrats for a successful override.

"We've counted the votes and right now as it is we don't see a pathway necessarily to (the bill) becoming law because we don't have enough Democratic members who have indicated that they would join in on a likely veto override," Moore said. He said he is hopeful that Republicans will win enough seats in November to make the House GOP majority veto-proof starting in early 2023.

As for the bill's content, Moore said there are already some laws on the books that may address concerns of legislators about the discussion of sex-related topics in early grades. Comprehensive health education that includes reproductive health topics begins in middle school, for example.

"I want to make sure that we're very careful and methodical on this," Moore said. "It doesn't need to be a political fight."

BEAR EUTHANIZED AFTER INJURING MOTHER, 3-YEAR-OLD IN SMOKIES

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (AP)—Great Smoky Mountains National Park officials say a bear has been euthanized after ripping into a family's tent and injuring a mother and her 3-year-old daughter.

Park officials say the incident happened Sunday at Elkmont Campground. The 350-pound bear was euthanized Monday after likely being attracted to campsite food smells and having previous access to non-natural foods.

Officials say the black bear tore through the sleeping family's tent at 5:20 a.m. and scratched the mother and daughter, causing superficial head lacerations. The father scared off the bear after several attempts.

Officials investigated and trapped the bear, which showed extreme food-conditioned behavior and didn't fear humans.

Officials say it's difficult to deter learned behavior of bears who access human food and it can present unacceptable risk to humans. Food storage regulations exist where bears may be present, and in the rare occurrence of an attack, officials suggest fighting back with any object available.

NC ELEVATOR SAFETY UPGRADE IN COTTAGE RENTALS ADVANCING

(AP)—All elevators inside vacation cottages or similar short-term rentals in North Carolina would have to include life-saving space guards in legislation advancing in the state Senate.

The measure, which cleared a Senate committee on Wednesday and could be on the floor later, is a response to last summer's death of a 7-year-old child at a rental home on the northern Outer Banks. The Ohio boy became trapped between the elevator car and elevator shaft, authorities said.

The bill would no longer exempt elevators in such short-term rentals from state Department of Labor regulation, although annual inspections wouldn't be required. These elevators would have to meet safety standards designed to prevent a small child from becoming trapped. That would include installing space guards or baffles that close the gap.

Sen. Todd Johnson, a Union County Republican shepherding the bill, said such products cost roughly \$150.

The elevator owner would have to tell the Labor Department the improvement was made, the bill says, and if not completed the elevator's electrical supply would have to be disconnected.

The bill, which would have to pass the House as well, also would direct the state building code to require such elevator safety measures in new short-term rental construction.

REPUBLICANS: NC BUDGET-WRITERS CLOSE ON SPENDING ADJUSTMENTS

(AP)—North Carolina House and Senate budget-writers are close to completing their work on proposed adjustments to the second year of a two-year state spending plan approved last fall, top Republican legislators said Tuesday.

House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger separately told reporters they anticipate meeting later this week to negotiate differences over adjustments that the appropriations committee leaders could not bridge.

"So hopefully by... next week we'll have something for folks to vote on," Berger said.

Republicans, who control both chambers, have been deciding what to do with \$6.2 billion in projected revenues above and beyond what they anticipated state government would receive this fiscal year and the next year that begins July 1. The enacted budget already tells state government how to spend about \$27 billion for the next 12 months.

Moore said an agreement had been reached on additional salary changes, while Berger said he expected some kind of tax reduction. Details weren't disclosed. Moore said last week he expected a large amount of money would be earmarked to ensure state construction projects had enough cash to be completed despite inflation.

Reflecting On Juneteenth—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

his adult life, but returned to the U.S. for graduate school in Boston and Baltimore.

America has changed so much, he feels like a tourist when he visits, he laughed.

Williams said he knows about Juneteenth from teaching history.

"I would always end my pre-

sentations that hopefully, someday, this would be a national holiday. And so now it is, and it feels great," he said.

In Taipei, Toi Windham and Casey Abbott Payne are holding multiple events to celebrate Juneteenth. The two, part of Black Lives Matter Taiwan, are hosting performances by Black artists

and musicians.

Both have celebrated with their families long before it was a federal holiday.

Windham has lived in Taiwan for five years, and had always celebrated Juneteenth growing up in Texas. For her, it's an opportunity to educate people about a different part of Ameri-

can culture, even the darker parts.

"A lot of people tend to enjoy hip-hop culture and the attire and certain parts of our culture, but I feel like it's important to acknowledge all parts of Black culture," she said.

Payne, an organizer, has lived in Taiwan for 11 years and said he also celebrated Juneteenth growing up in Milwaukee, which has one of the oldest celebrations nationwide.

"As a kid, I remember the street being lined with street vendors, and there's music going on and there'd be the Juneteenth parade rolling through," he said.

Still for others, the day is a chance to joyfully kick back and rest.

In Bangkok, a group called Ebony Expats organized a silent movie screening, a bike ride in a nature reserve and a dinner for at a Jamaican restaurant serving jerk chicken and pumpkin soup.

Restaurant owner Collin Clifford McKoy served 20 years in the U.S. Army before eventually opening his restaurant during the pandemic in Thailand. He said the Juneteenth holiday is a chance for Black people to share their culture while being so far from home, American or not.

"Overall, it's about coming together regardless of where we are, and it tells how much blood runs deep as a community to come together and enjoy ourselves," he said.



About 20 people of African descent living abroad gather for dinner at a Jamaican restaurant in Bangkok, Thailand to celebrate America's newest federal holiday, Juneteenth on Saturday, June 18, 2022, in Bangkok, Thailand. As the United States marks only the second federally recognized Juneteenth, Black Americans living overseas have embraced the holiday as a day of reflection and an opportunity to educate people in their host countries on Black history. (AP Photo/Annika Wolters)

Independent Booksellers—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ship fees.

"The rise in BIPOC stores is a big change for us," Hill says.

Like Romani, many new owners had previous careers, or still have them on the side. Sonyah Spencer works as a consultant to help finance The Urban Reader in Charlotte, N.C., a store focusing on African-American books that she opened in part because of the Black Lives Matters movement and her concern about a rise in book bans.

In Locust Grove, Ga., Erica Atkins was a college teacher and trainer who, while recuperating from surgery, had a vision—a divine one, she believes—that she should open a store, what is now Birdsong Books.

"I have dedicated my life to knowledge sharing," she says. "Anytime I am having a conversation with someone, I am giving book recommendations."

In Ossining, N.Y., Amy Hall is a vice president at Eileen Fisher who says her work in fashion inspired her to open Hudson Valley Books for Humanity. She had been looking through her bookshelves and began thinking about how sustainability in clothing could apply to what she reads. She decided to start a store that would offer mostly used books, and otherwise reflect the economic and ethnic diversity of Ossining.

"I wanted to build a bookstore that welcomed people from all of these different segments of our community," she said. The new books she keeps in stock focus on social justice and the environment, among other issues.

After initial worries that the pandemic would devastate book sales, publishers have recorded

strong profits in the past two years and independent sellers have endured. Hill and others had feared that hundreds of member stores might close in 2020. Instead, around 80 shut down, and only 41 went out of business in 2021.

Independent bookselling is a resilient business, but rarely secure. It has for decades been a story of confronting obstacles—whether the rise of Barnes & Noble "superstores" in the 1990s that helped drive thousands of ABA members out of business, the growing power of Amazon.com, or such recent issues as supply chain delays and price inflation.

Spencer at the Urban Bookstore says higher costs, notably for rent and shipping, have made her struggle to break even. Atkins of Birdsong Books has

noticed a big jump in prices for Bibles, with the price of a King James edition increasing by several dollars. At the Changing Hands Bookstores in Arizona, buyer Miranda Myers has noticed several price changes, including for Emily St. John Mandel's *Sea of Tranquility*, one of the top literary releases of the spring, and the upcoming *Lore Olympus* book by Rachel Smythe.

Myers said she was "definitely noticing these price increases happening more and more lately."

At the same time, according to Changing Hands owner Gayle Shanks, sales "are up, way up. We had the best first quarter we've ever had in the store's history and this second quarter is also tracking way up. People seem to be reading more than ever."

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"Forever Chemicals" A Risk At Minute Levels

By Matthew Daly

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Environmental Protection Agency is warning that two nonstick and stain-resistant compounds found in drinking water are more dangerous than previously thought and pose health risks even at levels so low they cannot currently be detected.

The two compounds, known as PFOA and PFOS, have been voluntarily phased out by U.S. manufacturers, but there are a limited number of ongoing uses and the chemicals remain in the environment because they do not degrade over time. The compounds are part of a larger cluster of "forever chemicals" known as PFAS that have been used in consumer products and industry since the 1940s.

The EPA on Wednesday issued nonbinding health advisories that set health risk thresholds for PFOA and PFOS to near zero, replacing 2016 guidelines that had set them at 70 parts per trillion. The chemicals are found in products including cardboard packaging, carpets and firefighting foam.

At the same time, the agency is inviting states and territories to apply for \$1 billion under the new bipartisan infrastructure law to address PFAS and other contaminants in drinking water. Money can be used for technical assistance, water quality testing, contractor training and installation of centralized treatment, officials said.

Several states have set their own drinking water limits to address PFAS contamination that are far tougher than the federal guidance. The toxic industrial compounds are associated with serious health conditions, including cancer and reduced birth weight.

"People on the front-lines of PFAS contamination have suffered for far too long," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement. "That's why EPA is taking aggressive action as part of a whole-of-government approach to prevent these chemicals from entering the environment and to help protect concerned families from this pervasive challenge."

Radhika Fox, EPA's assistant administrator for water, announced the actions at a national

PFAS Conference in Wilmington, North Carolina, where PFAS contamination was discovered in the Cape Fear River watershed.

PFAS is short for per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances, which are used in nonstick frying pans, water-repellent sports gear, stain-resistant rugs, cosmetics and countless other consumer products. The chemical bonds are so strong that they do not degrade or do so only slowly in the environment and remain in a person's bloodstream indefinitely.

The revised health guidelines are based on new science and consider lifetime exposure to the chemicals, the EPA said. Officials are no longer confident that PFAS levels allowed under the 2016 guidelines "do not have adverse health impacts," an EPA spokesman said.

While the new guidelines set acceptable risk below levels that can currently be measured, as a practical matter the EPA recommends that utilities take action against the chemicals when they reach levels that can be measured—currently about four parts per trillion, a senior administration official told reporters Tuesday night.

The EPA said it expects to propose national drinking water regulations for PFOA and PFOS later this year, with a final rule expected in 2023.

In a related development, the EPA said that for the first time it is issuing final health advisories for two chemicals that are con-

sidered replacements for PFOA and PFOS. One group is known as GenX chemicals, while the other is known as PFBS. Health advisories for GenX chemicals were set at 10 parts per trillion, while PFBS was set at 2,000 parts per trillion.

The agency said the advisories provide technical information that federal, state and local agencies can use to address PFAS in drinking water, including water quality monitoring, use of filters and other technologies that reduce PFAS, and strategies to reduce exposure to the substances.

Environmental and public health groups hailed the announcement as a good first step. Advocates have long urged action on PFAS after thousands of communities detected PFAS chemicals in their water. PFAS chemicals have been confirmed at nearly 400 military installations and at least 200 million people in the United States are drinking water contaminated with PFAS, according to the Environmental Working Group, a research and advocacy organization.

"EPA had the courage to follow the science. This is a step in the right direction," said Stel Bailey, co-facilitator of the National PFAS Contamination Coalition.

Erik Olson, senior strategic director for health and food at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said "the science is clear: These chemicals are shockingly toxic at extremely low doses." He called on the EPA to regulate all



GEN X MAKERS SAY THEY'RE BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY, MAY SUE

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e-mail: info@caro.news

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Business & Finance

Mo'Nique, Netflix Reportedly Settle Lawsuit Alleging Bias

LOS ANGELES, Calif. (AP)—Mo'Nique and Netflix reportedly have settled her lawsuit that accused the streaming service of racial and sexual discrimination for allegedly making her a low-ball offer for a proposed comedy special.

The matter has been “amicably resolved,” Michael Parks, an attorney representing Mo'Nique in the suit, told *The Hollywood Reporter*.

The terms of the settlement between the streaming giant and the comedian and Oscar-winning actor weren't disclosed Wednesday, when they jointly filed in a Los Angeles federal court for the case's dismissal.

Netflix didn't respond to a request for comment, and the law firm representing the company in the suit declined comment.

Mo'Nique's lawsuit said Netf-

lix officials warmly praised her work before they offered her \$500,000 in early 2018 for a comedy special and refused to negotiate further. Her suit said that reflected a company tendency to underpay Black women.

In contrast, the suit claimed, Netflix was willing to negotiate with other comics and made deals reportedly worth tens of millions of dollars for comedy specials from Chris Rock, Ellen DeGeneres, Dave Chappelle and Ricky Gervais.

Netflix denied the main allegations of the suit, filed in November 2019, in a statement made at the time.

“We care deeply about inclusion, equity, and diversity and take any accusations of discrimination very seriously,” Netflix said then. “We believe our opening offer to Mo'Nique was fair—

which is why we will be fighting this lawsuit.”

The suit alleged that Netflix violated California's fair employment and civil rights laws and is representative of the major pay inequity in all employment for Black women.

“I had a choice to make,” Mo'Nique said in a post on her Instagram account after the filing. “I could accept what I felt was pay discrimination or I could stand up for those who came before me and those who will come after me. I chose to stand up.”

Mo'Nique, whose birth name is Monique Angela Hicks, first gained fame as one of stand-up's Queens of Comedy and starred in the UPN series “The Parkers.” She won an Academy Award for best supporting actress for the 2009 film *Precious*.



T-shirts? Ice cream? Many Retailers Cash In On Juneteenth

NEW YORK (AP) — Retailers and marketers have been quick to commemorate Juneteenth with an avalanche of merchandise from ice cream to T-shirts to party cups.

But many are getting backlash on social media for what critics say undermines the day, designated as a federal holiday last year to honor the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. A search for Juneteenth items among online sellers like Amazon and J.C. Penney produced everything from toothpicks with pan-African flags to party plates and balloons.

Walmart, the nation's largest retailer, apologized last month after getting slammed for a Juneteenth ice cream flavor — swirled red velvet and cheesecake — under its store label Great Value. Walmart said it's reviewing its product assortment and will remove items “as appropriate.” As of Friday, Walmart's site was still offering lots of T-shirts and party plates.

Meanwhile, the Indianapolis Children's Museum removed a Juneteenth watermelon salad from its menu and issued a mea culpa earlier this week. In a statement posted on its Facebook page, the museum blamed a lapse in vendor oversight, noting the label and salad were not reviewed by museum staff.

“We are an imperfect institution, but we are committed to improvement and will work tirelessly to regain your trust,” the museum wrote on its Facebook page.

The backlash comes as com-



A Juneteenth T-shirt is for sale in Los Angeles, Friday, June 17, 2022. Retailers and marketers from Walmart to Amazon have been quick to commemorate Juneteenth with an avalanche of merchandise from ice cream to T-shirts to party favors. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

panies promised after the police killing of George Floyd in May of 2020 to no longer stay silent and vowed to take an active role in confronting and educating customers and employees on systemic racism. According to the preliminary results of a survey by Mercer of 200 employers, 33% are of-

fering Juneteenth as a paid holiday to their staff. That's up from 9% last year in a survey of more than 400 companies conducted shortly before Juneteenth was declared a federal holiday.

At the same time, many have cashed in on a holiday that Black Americans have observed

since June 19, 1865, when Union Major General Gordon Granger proclaimed freedom for enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, in alignment with President Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation.

Many experts believe that if retailers and other marketers plan to recognize the day, they

should either sell merchandise from Black-owned businesses or invest in campaigns that would help Black communities. Amazon, for instance, does have a Black-owned business storefront that's live all year-round for customers who want to support and shop Black-owned businesses selling on the site.

“This is a serious and reflective moment — I am excited and grateful for the recognition,” said Ramon Manning, chairman of the board at Emancipation Park Conservancy, a nonprofit organization aimed to restore the park, which was purchased in 1872 by a group of former enslaved people to commemorate the anniversary of their emancipation.

“However, I feel like it is also brought back everybody else out of the woodwork who are opportunists more so than folks who are looking at the history of this country and looking at where a group of people have come from,” he added.

Manning, who is also founder and chairman of Ridgegate Capital, a private investment fund, further wondered: “Who is this going to benefit?”

Sheryl Daija, founder and CEO of Bridge, a group of marketing and diversity, equity and inclusion executives, noted there's a disconnect between the seriousness of the holiday and the merchandise on display.

“A lot of companies have good intentions, but unfortunately good intentions can go awry, and this is what we have seen,” said Daija, who

found Walmart's Juneteenth ice cream particularly egregious because it used the holiday moniker to brand a new ice cream flavor.

Companies have a long history of commercializing holidays and other moments in order to cash in. Take Cinco de Mayo, which has become in the U.S. a celebration of all things Mexican, with companies selling everything from beans to beer to sombrero hats. The holiday has spread from the American Southwest, even though most have no idea about its original ties to the U.S. Civil War, abolition and promotion of civil rights for Blacks. In fact, it's often mistaken for Mexican Independence day.

Meanwhile, every October, retailers are awash in pink merchandise to celebrate Breast Cancer Awareness month, but critics say many make misleading claims about supporting cancer groups. And Memorial Day, a federal holiday day designated to mourn the U.S. military who have died while serving in the U.S. armed forces, has morphed into all-day mattress sales at stores.

But what makes the move by companies to cash in on Juneteenth worse is that it comes as the U.S. remains fraught with racial tensions, said Darnise Martin, clinical associate professor of African American studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

“It is weird to merchandise around it, but that's what America does,” Martin said.

US Failed To Stop Fraud In COVID Loan Program, Rep. Clyburn Says

The U.S. failed to take basic steps at the start of the coronavirus pandemic to prevent fraud in a federal aid program intended to help small businesses, depleting the funds and making people more vulnerable to identity theft, the chairman of a House panel examining the payouts said Tuesday.

Democratic Rep. James Clyburn blamed the Trump administration for the problems in the COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, overseen by the U.S. Small Business Administration, amid revelations that as much as 20% of the money — tens of billions of dollars — may have been awarded to fraudsters.

Clyburn said the Biden administration has implemented measures to identify potential fraud

and directed loan officers to address indications of fraud before approving loans, while Congress has invested in fraud prevention and accountability.

Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican, said the Trump administration and Congress worked together at the beginning of the pandemic, when uncertainty was rampant and much of the economy was locked down, to deliver “much needed relief as fast as we could to help save as many jobs as we could” and prevent the economy from crashing.

Scalise, R-La., said Democrats are undermining the successes, and he asked why the House coronavirus panel Clyburn chairs wasn't looking into the enhanced unemployment insurance

program that was plagued by “egregious and unprecedented fraud” and is a “leading contributor” to the high inflation rates.

“I hope that in our oversight of pandemic programs, my Democratic colleagues will be able to recognize the difference between what was needed to save the economy during an unprecedented pandemic versus pushing a partisan, inflation-inducing agenda,” he said.

Clyburn, of South Carolina, said the subcommittee will determine what more must be done to bring perpetrators of fraud to justice and how to protect future emergency programs.

Clyburn said he supports extending the statute of limitations for this kind of fraud case to give investigators more time

to untangle complex potential crimes. Witnesses at the hearing suggested standardizing the data collected by states to make it easier for federal authorities to spot possibly fraudulent patterns.

The SBA's Office of the Inspector General has estimated that at least \$80 billion distributed from the \$400 billion EIDL program could have been fraudulent, much of it in scams using stolen identities. Separately, staff for the select subcommittee on Tuesday issued a report that found that some 1.6 million applications for the loans may have been approved without being evaluated.

The subcommittee's staff found that those loans were approved in batches of up to 500 applications at a time. Applications were allowed to move through even if they had certain red flags for fraud — such as international client locations or phone numbers not associated with the business or the owner — so long as they weren't too many of them. The process meant that while software analyzed the applications, they were not even opened by officials before being greenlighted for funding.

The SBA's inspector general, Hannibal “Mike” Ware, said initially there was a huge struggle at the agency about the “need for speed versus the need for controls.” He said he was “screaming” about the need for fraud controls. He said the most concerning thing was self-certification, which meant applicants could say they had a business or a certain number of employees and get money.

The subcommittee hearing also tackled broader fraud concerns with the flood of pandemic aid from multiple federal government programs for states, local

governments, businesses and the unemployed. The \$5 trillion in total aid, delivered in a series of bills signed by Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, have come with numerous complications.

Fraud overwhelmed enhanced unemployment insurance programs funded by the federal government and administered by the states. There was so much aid to governments that many struggled to find a way to spend it all under the original regulations. And there have been questions about whether the Paycheck Protection Program to keep employees working was worth it.

The Secret Service said in December that nearly \$100 billion has been stolen from COVID-19 relief programs, basing that estimate on its cases and data from the Labor Department and the Small Business Administration. The White House downplayed the estimate, saying it was based on old reports.

The Federal Emergency Man-

agement Agency may have been double-billed for the funerals of hundreds of people who died of COVID-19, the Government Accountability Office said in April. States and cities continue to be slow to spend their pandemic relief money.

The select subcommittee said Tuesday that more than \$10 billion allocated under two massive business loan programs has been returned because of investigations and bank actions. Federal prosecutors have charged nearly 1,500 people with crimes related to fraud against the government over the business loans and enhanced unemployment insurance programs.

The government's Pandemic Response Accountability Committee says inspectors general for various federal agencies have at least 1,150 ongoing investigations into fraud from the different aid funds. Officials say it could take years to untangle all the problems.



A Store For Rent sign is displayed at a retail property in Chicago, on June 20, 2020. As much as 20% of a federal pandemic relief program intended to help small businesses weather the COVID-19 outbreak is believed to have gone to fraudsters, while some 1.6 million applications for the loans may have been approved without even being evaluated. The program overseen by the U.S. Small Business Administration is one of the key targets of a Tuesday, June 14, 2022, congressional hearing that is expected to look more widely at the fraud that bedeviled many of the federal COVID-19 relief programs. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh, File)

Classifieds



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The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Greene County out for bid: C-11488 Greene CI Roofing Repairs. The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 08/04/2022. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/14886800.pdf>

Opinion



January 6th Hearing: Don't Let Motives Obscure Facts

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

The boilerplate Republican response to last Thursday's prime-time, televised hearing of the U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol runs something like this:

It wasn't really a "hearing." It was a campaign infomercial for the Democratic Party and the anti-Trump wing of the GOP. Its goal was partially to save the Democrats' bacon in the November midterms, and partially to protect the two Republican members of the committee from pro-Trump primary challengers, by leaning into the narrative of, essentially, an attempted coup d'etat by the disgraced former president.

I'm inclined to agree with that assessment. If truth in advertising laws applied to Congress, the committee's name would use the word "exploit" rather than "investigate." Politics being politics, it's always safest to assume ulterior motives.

An intention to exploit the facts, however, does not change those facts. And the facts are these:

Donald Trump attempted to, and conspired with others to, overthrow the government of the United States.

Trump lost the 2020 presidential election.

Trump knew he lost the presidential election. His attorney general told him, in no uncertain terms, that claims to the contrary were "bullshit." His legal proxies withdrew every court challenge in which they were accorded standing and invited to present evidence, because they knew they had no such evidence. Not a single investigation or audit—not even fake stunt "audits" such as the one in Arizona—produced any evidence of fraud sufficient to have changed the results.

And yet Trump both privately and publicly asked figures ranging from Georgia's secretary of state to his own vice-president to steal the election for him.

Trump's campaign recruited fake electors and urged them to "complete secrecy" pending attempts to fraudulently replace the real electors so that he could steal the election.

Trump publicly addressed a mob he had scammed into believing he won the election, inciting them to march on the Capitol to help him steal the election.

One need not like the uses those facts are being put to as a condition of acknowledging that they are, in fact, facts.

Who's to blame for those facts being put to these uses?

Donald Trump.

Nobody forced him to lie about the election's outcome.

Nobody forced him to conspire with others to steal the election.

Nobody forced him to whip a mob into a frenzy.

His choices produced predictable consequences.

If Trump had any desire to honestly address the committee's exploitation of his actions, he could just quote Richard Nixon's 1977 characterization of Watergate: "I gave them a sword and they stuck it in and they twisted it with relish. And I guess if I'd been in their position I'd have done the same 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



Is Our Democracy At Risk? Actions We All Can Take To Protect It

By Melinda Burrell

National Association for Community Mediation

"The threats became much more specific, much more graphic, and included not just me by name but included members of my family..." This is how Al Schmidt, the former City Commissioner of Philadelphia and a Republican member of the election board, described the intimidation he faced during and after the 2020 election.

He's not alone. Nearly one in five local election officials say they are likely to leave their jobs before the 2024 Presidential election, according to a recent Brennan Center survey. Many cite threats as the reason for their departure.

The January 6th Committee is showing us how fragile our democracy is. Our trust in each other and in our institutions is waning—in both parties. Norms of peaceful, inclusive democratic activity are being eroded, as we see from reports about professional election officials being intimidated.

This doesn't have to continue. We can act now to protect our democracy, at a minimum, taking a stance against politically motivated violence. This is an important line to hold. Even the threat of violence chills democracy. People grow reluctant to speak about issues, voters are afraid to cast ballots, good people are deterred from running for office.

Fortunately, there are many ways we can protect our democracy, without spending any money or investing a lot of time.

We can start by working from the outside to protect our election infrastructure. We can reach out to our local level election officials to find out what support they need. Many are volunteers struggling with threats to their safety, a deluge of misinformation, and partisan pressure. Do they need help combatting misinformation, equipment or training, or protection by law enforcement?

We can also work with state and county officials and law enforcement to make sure they are upholding norms of respectful, nonviolent democratic participation. With a letter, tweet, or a petition, we can ask officials to publicly pledge to count every vote and respect the will of voters. Speak Up Now got Oregon Governor Kate Brown to make such a commitment using nothing more than the comment function on the governor's website. Similarly, we can ask law enforcement to publicly pledge to protect voters, election officials, and

peaceful protesters.

We can also work with candidates. We can urge all candidates in our local races to pledge not to use hate or inciting speech. Leaders' messaging matters, so we should hold our leaders to standards of democratic speech.

Another crucial way to protect our democracy is from the inside, as poll workers. We can sign up to be poll workers, and recruit friends and family. Poll workers help voters check in, understand their ballots, and cast their vote. Fewer poll workers mean fewer polling places or polling places that run more slowly, another democracy drain. I've found this work fulfilling, and others do as well. As a young woman at my early voting center said to me this week, "It's been fun – helping all regardless of their party or beliefs. I know everyone is as passionate about their vote as I am about mine, and I like making sure every vote counts." She enjoys performing a civic duty. We all can—and our democracy needs us.

Melinda Burrell, PhD, @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.



Co-Opted: The UN's Misguided Mission To Xinjiang

By Mel Gurtov

Portland State University

The top UN human rights official recently traveled to Xinjiang province in China, hoping to persuade Beijing's leaders to stop the internment of approximately 1.5 million Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims in one of the world's greatest human-rights catastrophes.

It was a thoroughly misguided mission.

Call it a cultural genocide, a crime against humanity, or (as I prefer) a genocide, the repression in Xinjiang Province is a well-documented Chinese government policy authorized by the specific order of President and communist party leader Xi Jinping.

On top of all the previous evidence of crimes against the Uyghurs, such as the testimony and documents presented late last year at the Uyghur Tribunal in London, we now have something unprecedented: hacked data, known as the "Xinjiang police files," that contains images of more than 5,000 imprisoned Uyghurs, police spreadsheets, and confidential documents from two counties in Xinjiang.

The data, from internal police networks, proves that so-called re-education camps are in fact internment centers, and that top Chinese leaders are directly responsible for creating them as part of a mass campaign to eradicate the Uyghur culture. The photographs also give us a look at the conditions that prisoners face in the centers.

As Dr. Adrian Zenz, a leading authority on the camps, says, "We have images of actual police drills showing how police are handcuffing detainees, shackling them, marching them off, and then even putting them into the ominous tiger chair for interrogation."

Michelle Bachelet, the UN's high commissioner for human rights, has been sitting for many months on a report on Chinese policy in Xinjiang. Many observers, especially people in Uyghur overseas communities and human rights organizations, have eagerly anticipated her report.

Rather than release it, Bachelet spent six days in China, including two in Xinjiang, at the invitation of Xi Jinping's government. Though initially her office suggested the trip was an investigation, at its end she denied that, saying its chief purpose was "direct discussions... with a view to supporting China in fulfilling its obligations under international human rights law."

In a public recounting, she complimented the Chinese leadership for its cooperation, lauded its social and economic achievements, and assured one and all that she had raised troubling human-rights issues with senior Chinese officials.

Considering Bachelet's background as a victim of torture in the Pinochet era in Chile, she was surely aware that visiting a country under authoritarian rule is a potential trap. She had no real control over such a trip's most important item: the agenda.

Indeed, Bachelet reported she was "unable to assess the full scale" of the so-called vocational education centers in Xinjiang—that is, the internment facilities—but was "assured" they had been "dismantled." She spoke with civil society groups, jurists, and legal authorities—all no doubt hand-picked to reflect the views of the party-state.

She also said she had raised a number of concerning issues with the Chinese government, such as "allegations of the use of force and ill treatment" of prisoners and "the application of counter-terrorism and de-radicalization measures" to Chinese Muslims. She "encouraged" the Chinese government to ensure that those measures conformed with international human rights law. (China has signed but not ratified the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as she pointed out.) And she did offer a few critical remarks on human-rights issues in Tibet and Hong Kong.

In all, her trip turned out to be a propaganda coup for Beijing. The visit was a classic Potemkin village experience in which the authorities kept Bachelet away from the victims of abuse and presented a false front to hide actual conditions. Of course she could not "assess the full scale" of the internment camps. Nor did she have any way to look into other aspects of Chinese policy, such as forced labor, separation of families, and deployment of prison labor to other provinces.

With little to say about the scope of the repression, she could not challenge China's official narrative that justifies its abuses in the name of counter-terrorism. Even though the Chinese supposedly agreed to maintain a dialogue on the Uyghurs, rest assured any such dialogue will be just as one-sided if it occurs at all.

One might excuse Ms. Bachelet's decision to go to China on the grounds that she could present the world community's concerns about the Uyghurs directly to China's leaders. She did so, but not in a way that has any hope of improving life for the Uyghurs, whether in or out of internment.

As the representative of the world community, and apparently a candidate for UN secretary general—though following this trip, she decided not to seek a second term as HCR leader—she should not have put herself in position to be used by a regime that is eminently successful at hiding what it doesn't want outsiders, or even its own people, to see.

Besides, what could possibly be learned in two days of a guided tour in Xinjiang? Imagine accepting an invitation from Vladimir Putin to evaluate war crimes in Ukraine by spending two days in Crimea.

This trip was an embarrassment both personal and institutional,

symbolized by a presentation to Bachelet of a book of Xi's thoughts on protecting human rights at the end of her visit. She should have given the Chinese the Xinjiang police files in return. Before she retires, she should release the report on Chinese policy.

Mel Gurtov is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Portland State University and blogs at *In the Human Interest*.



The Nuclear Weapons Treaty Ban In The Footsteps Of 1982'S Million-Person March

By John LaForge

NukeWatch

Last Sunday marked the 40th anniversary of the June 12, 1982 million-person march in New York City for a "freeze" on nuclear weapons building, followed two days later by a mass nonviolent action at the consular offices of nuclear weapons states. Some 1,700 people, myself included, were arrested as we sat in the street blocking the nuclear-armed consulates, confronted by horse-mounted cops literally chomping at the bit while we nervously sang "We Shall Not Be Moved" and stared up at the menacing police.

We were moved out of the street that day in 1982, but the movement wasn't deterred. We've pushed on for decades in spite of ridicule, harassment, and imprisonment, seeing to the slashing of the U.S. nuclear arsenal from over 60,000 in those days, to today's approximately 5,000—an amount still grotesque enough to incinerate and contaminate most of the living beings on Earth.

After millions marched in England and across Europe in the 1980s, tens of thousands of U.S. nuclear weapons were withdrawn from the Continent—nuclear gravity bombs, artillery shells, land mines, missiles (Pershing and Cruise) and more. (Roughly 100 are still positioned in NATO states, about 20 apiece at air bases in Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands and Turkey—all in violation of the letter of the Nonproliferation Treaty.) After hundreds of nonviolent protests, the number of U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles has also been cut from 1,000 to 400.

These numbers are as meaningless in military terms now as they were then, because the detonation of even one modern thermonuclear warhead causes such vast, uncontrollable, and indiscriminate blast, fire and poison that binding international humanitarian law (Hague Regulations and Geneva Conventions) prohibits any deliberate use of them. Military authorities who order such use would be subject to war crimes prosecutions for committing massacres.

Fast-forward 40 years, and this week Vienna, Austria is hosting the First Meeting of States Parties, UN member states that have agreed to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). More than 100 governments will participate.

The great majority of the world's representatives—122 countries—voted their approval of the TPNW in 2017, 86 have formally signed, and 62 have since ratified it. The treaty has entered into force, and only the tiny minority of nuclear-armed governments and their military allies continue to reject it—for "deterrence" reasons that have been shown to be irrational and unachievable.

Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Ukraine prove that nukes don't deter war. Instead, they needlessly create the real possibility of globalized, radioactive catastrophe, all the while stealing hundreds of billions of dollars, and mountains of brain power, away from programs that are crucial and urgently needed.

A colossally expensive nuclear arms race is again underway among the richest militaries in spite of global climate chaos, refugee crises, pandemics and other medical emergencies, and food shortages, all of which must be confronted if we want to survive. The world's nine nuclear-armed countries spent \$82.4 billion upgrading their arsenals in 2021, the biggest spender being the United States, according to "Squandered," the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons' annual report on nuclear spending.

Nuclear weapons states always claim their H-bomb budgets are for "refurbishment" of old, dangerous systems—something that their bedfellows in the nuclear reactor biz never admit about their old units. The power industry's dangerous, outdated GE and Westinghouse junkers are never said to need retirement, but "license extensions," and 93 out of 94 have been allowed to blow past their engineered 40-year shutdown mandates and into today's deadly game of Fukushima Roulette—a crap shoot with suicide the public never agreed to join.

Germany's clean phase-out of its 17 power reactors, and South Africa's and Libya's abandonment of nuclear weapons, have shown that both sides of denuclearization are possible. Now the TPNW presents the world with the practical, international means of eliminating the Bomb. With enough million-person marches, we can still shame the twin nuclear devils and bring the era of nuclear threats to an end.

John LaForge is Co-director of NukeWatch, a peace and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, and is co-editor with Arianne Peterson of Nuclear Heartland, Revised: A Guide to the 450 Land-Based Missiles of the United States.

