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N.C.'s Twice-Weekly African-American Newspaper

RALEIGH, N.C.

SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 2022

Medicaid Expansion Gets 1st Senate OK

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

A wide-ranging health care access bill penned by Republicans that includes covering hundreds of thousands of additional North Carolina adults through Medicaid received initial approval Wednesday from the state Senate.

Support was nearly unanimous in the chamber for the measure, which also loosens practice restrictions on specialty nurses and eases government scrutiny of medical construction and equipment.

The bill's anchor—Medicaid expansion—represents a dramatic turn for its prospects in North Carolina after being blocked for a decade by GOP elected officials.

Still, House Republicans aren't interested in considering expansion during the annual work session expected to end around July 1, Speaker Tim Moore said recently, potentially leaving the issue for the fall or 2023. A final Senate vote is expected Thursday before the bill moves to the House.

Senate leader Phil Berger and other Republicans had been adamantly opposed to adding adults to the Medicaid rolls through the 2010 Affordable Care Act. They had argued the state Medicaid program was broken and Washington couldn't be trusted to keep paying 90 percent of the costs for insuring adults who otherwise made too much to receive traditional Medicaid. North Carolina is one of a dozen states that hasn't yet accepted expansion.

But Berger said last fall he was willing to consider expanding Medicaid as part of budget negotiations. Now he says that the state's Medicaid program is fiscally sound and Congress probably won't lower the federal government's 90 percent share. North Carolina also would receive an additional \$1.5 billion over two years to treat traditional Medicaid patients if it signs up.

“Medicaid expansion has evolved to the point that it's good state fiscal policy,” said Sen. Ralph Hise, a Mitchell County Republican, said on the Senate floor before the vote of 44-2. “We will not get a better deal to expand Medicaid than we have right now.”

Last week, Berger, Hise and others unveiled expansion within a multipronged effort that includes several other health care reforms that they say will help increase the number of providers and services in rural areas. Provisions that would allow nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists and others to practice independently without a physician's supervision are opposed by the state's leading doctors association.

Democrats led by Gov. Roy Cooper have sought expansion for years, and senators in his party, while taking issue with portions of the broader bill, praised Republicans for a “monumental” step.

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(See MEDICAID, P. 2)

Parents Bill Of Rights Advances

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

(AP)—North Carolina “Parents’ Bill of Rights” legislation that in part would prohibit instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in K-3 public school curriculum was approved Wednesday by the state Senate.

The near party-line vote suggests a likely veto by Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper if the bill reaches his desk could doom the Republican measure.

The bill's authors said the legislation is needed to give parents more ability to oversee their children's education and health by laying out specific rights and avenues to access information, and to opt out of certain programs. Republicans said it addresses the frustrations of parents who complain that administrators aren't listening to them.

“This bill is critical. It is common sense and it is a safeguard for all of our students,” said Sen. Deanna Ballard, a Watauga County Republican shepherding the measure, which she said will empower parents.

But LGBTQ activists and other critics have blasted the measure as an election-year attempt at censorship that would harm young people, labeling it a “Don't Say Gay” bill similar to one approved in Florida earlier this year amid controversy.

“This bill is about partisan gain, political mandates and flat out prejudice,” said Sen. Jay Chaudhuri, a Wake County Democrat, adding that it would target “our most vulnerable students.”

Opponents also cite provisions directing schools to notify parents about changes to their child's health and services that they are receiving or before they could change a child's name or pronouns in records. They say such requirements could force children of any grade to reveal their sexual identity changes before they are ready, opening up to parental abuse or bullying by classmates.

All Republican senators present and Democratic Sen. Ben Clark of Hoke County—who is running for Congress in the fall—voted for the measure, which passed 28-18. The bill now heads to the House, where a veto ultimately couldn't be blocked unless a handful of Democrats join with Republicans.

Cooper already has signaled his opposition to the measure, saying last week that Republicans should “keep the ‘Don't Say Gay’ culture wars out of North Carolina classrooms.” He mentioned the 2016 “bathroom bill” involving transgender people and signed by GOP

Gov. Pat McCrory. The law, also known as House Bill 2, cost the state billions of dollars in lost business, including canceled sporting events and job

Gov. Pat McCrory. The law, also known as House Bill 2, cost the state billions of dollars in lost business, including canceled sporting events and job

(See PARENTS BILL, P. 2)

Medical Marijuana Gets Bipartisan Support In NC

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

Marijuana would be legalized for medical use in North Carolina with a physician's prescription and purchased through dozens of tightly regulated dispensaries in a measure receiving initial approval Thursday in the Senate.

The legislation, which received strong bipartisan support, could help people facing more than a dozen different “debilitating medical conditions” in which their doctor declares the health benefits of smoking or consuming cannabis outweigh the risks.

The bill's chief sponsors, however, focused on giving relief to patients with terminal illnesses that bring unbearable pain and suffering, while preventing them from having to act illegally.



CHAMP—Devin Haney, right, of the United States, fights during his bout against Australia's George Kambosos in their WBC lightweight title fight in Melbourne, Australia, Sunday, June 5, 2022. Haney retained his WBC lightweight title and added three more from the weight class with a unanimous points decision over Australian George Kambosos. (James Ross/AAPImage via AP)

Haney Wins In, Out Of Ring

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)—American Devin Haney made it official — and unanimous — on Sunday. He's the undisputed world lightweight boxing champion.

Haney retained his WBC lightweight title and added three more from the weight class after his unanimous points decision over Australian George Kambosos.

The 23-year-old Haney won three of the first four rounds and was well ahead at the halfway point of the 12-round bout to become undisputed champion in the lightweight division.

The judges scored the fight 116-112, 116-112 and 118-110 in Haney's favor. Haney, who proved to be the better technical fighter before a crowd of 41,129 at the covered Marvel Stadium in Melbourne, now has an undefeated record of 28-0 with 15 KOs.

“I was comfortable, just sticking to the game plan,” Haney said. “The game plan was to hit and not get hit. I fought a good smart fight. He couldn't hit me with either of his best shots.”

Haney praised the U.S.-based Kambosos, who was fighting for the first time in his native Aus-

tralia in five years.

“I take my hat off to him, he's a true warrior. Even though he got disrespectful, I stayed a gentleman,” Haney said. “A lot of these so-called champions wouldn't give me my shot, but George has.”

Kambosos, 28, held the WBO, WBA, and IBF lightweight titles heading into the fight. Those now belong to Haney.

Kambosos' unbeaten pro career record has ended — he's 20-1 with 10 KOs. Kambosos won all three of his world titles when he beat Teofimo Lopez in 2019.

“It's amazing for the sport and the country,” Kambosos said after handing over his belts to Haney. “I wanted to take the hardest test and I will give him full respect after his victory. Let him have his time.”



EX-NORTH CAROLINA TROOPER SENTENCED FOR SELLING FIREARMS

GREENSBORO (AP)—A North Carolina man convicted of selling firearms while he was an N.C. State Highway Patrol trooper has been sentenced to three years in prison, federal officials said.

Timothy Jay Norman, 47, of Browns Summit, was sentenced on Thursday, U.S. Attorney Sandra J. Hairston said in a news release. Norman pleaded guilty in March, the news release said. Norman also was ordered to pay a \$15,000 fine and will face three years of supervised release after his prison sentence.

Court documents said that beginning in January 2021, the FBI learned that Norman was selling firearms while he was a trooper. Prosecutors said he sold one weapon to a convicted felon.

In May 2021, law enforcement used a confidential source to buy a decommissioned semi-automatic pistol with the patrol's badge engraved on it. The next month, another confidential source bought multiple items, including a 12-gauge shotgun and an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle from Norman's home.

Later in June 2021, law enforcement says Norman sold a semi-automatic pistol from his patrol car to a source. In July, investigators using a search warrant at Norman's home seized thousands of rounds of ammunition and over 50 firearms, as well as two guns inside his patrol car.

NC MEDICAID EXPANSION GOES TO HOUSE AFTER BIG SENATE VOTES

(AP)—Legislation that would expand North Carolina's Medicaid rolls by hundreds of thousands of adults received final Senate approval on Thursday.

The measure, which also contains several other provisions that its authors say would improve health care access and control patient costs, now goes to the House. Speaker Tim Moore reiterated later Thursday that the bill was too complex and time too limited during this annual work session to consider. GOP leaders want to adjourn around July 1.

The Senate already gave the measure initial approval by a near-unanimous margin on Wednesday following substantial debate. There was little floor discussion before a 44-1 vote on Thursday. Sen. Norm Sanderson, a Pamlico County Republican, voted no.

The lopsided votes symbolize a dramatic turn for Medicaid expansion in the Senate, where Republican chamber leader Phil Berger and lieutenants had been among its most ardent opponents. But Berger changed his mind recently, saying that accepting federal money to cover more low-income adults through the 2010 Affordable Care Act now made fiscal sense for the state.

Other provisions scale back and streamline “certificate of need” laws and to allow nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists and other nurses with advanced instruction to practice without a physician's supervision.

(See CIVIL WAR, P. 2)

(See STATE BRIEFS, P. 2)

Monument Honoring Black Civil War

BOSTON (AP) — A Boston memorial to a famed Civil War unit made up of Black soldiers was rededicated Wednesday after a three-year long restoration with

a ceremony filled with song and somber reflection.

The Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment Memorial — considered the

nation's first honoring Black soldiers — underscores how ending slavery was not just about one man, but many, said Dr. Ibram X. Kendi in his remarks.

“The Black soldiers of the 54th were as much the great emancipators as Abraham Lincoln,” the author of “How to Be an Antiracist” and founder of Boston University's Center for Antiracist Research said. “The 54th are a testament to ‘We freed us.’ There wasn't a single person that abolished slavery. It was something we did together.”

Dr. David Blight, a Yale history professor, said the memorial is considered the country's greatest work of public art not just because of its beauty but also because of the message it tells.

He pointed to the memorial's Latin inscription, which he said is translated: “He gave up everything to serve the Republic.”

“We have a Republic today in trouble. We have a democracy in great peril,” Blight said. “What are we giving up for the Republic?”

The towering bronze relief by American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens captures the stirring call to arms answered by Black soldiers who served in the unit, which was popularized in the 1989 Oscar-winning movie “Glory.”

The unit's heroism during its failed assault on Fort Wagner in South Carolina inspired tens



Civil War reenactors march at the start of re-dedication ceremonies for the Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment Memorial, that commemorates the famed Civil War unit made up of Black soldiers, on the Boston Common, Wednesday, June 1, 2022, in Boston.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

EX-NURSE SENTENCED FOR INJECTING OPIOIDS MEANT FOR PATIENTS

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (AP)—A Virginia woman who worked as a nurse in North Carolina has been sentenced to more than four years in prison after investigators said she injected herself with opioids intended for surgical patients and replaced them with saline solution, authorities said.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of North Carolina said in a news release that Emilee Kathryn Poteat, 32, of Danville, Va., pleaded guilty last December to tampering with a consumer product. She was sentenced on Wednesday.

Poteat also has to pay a \$3,000 fine and will be on three years of supervised release once she is out of prison, the news release said. She's already serving a three-year prison sentence for tampering with consumer products at a Danville hospital.

Prosecutors said Poteat worked as a contract nurse at a Winston-Salem hospital from July to November 2020 and had access to a machine that stored vials of injectable hydromorphone, an opioid derived from morphine.

Poteat removed the vials and injected the drug, then injected saline solution into the vials to cover her actions and used glue to replace the vial lids, prosecutors said. An investigator said Poteat admitted that she had tampered with the vials of hydromorphone.

SMOKIES US PARK SEEKS HELP IDENTIFYING HISTORIC HOME SITES

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (AP)—Great Smoky Mountains National Park is seeking help identifying sites of historic homes within its boundaries.

According to a park news release, Volunteer-In-Park Frank March estimates the park has more than 2,400 former homesites, with more than 70 percent identified.

The park's Records Collection Center has documents associated with the purchase of approximately 1,200 farms between 1920 and 1940 to create the park. However, officials say European habitation in the park dates back to the 1790s and many of the homesites predating the 20th century are not documented.

The park is asking people to bring in photos of old homesites, hand drawn maps or other identifying documents. Park officials will discuss the initiative Saturday at Blount County Library in Maryville, Tennessee.

NORTH CAROLINA LIFTS SUSPENSION ON POULTRY SHOWS, SALES

(AP)—The suspension of poultry shows and public sales in North Carolina has been lifted effective Wednesday, the state veterinarian said.

State Veterinarian Mike Martin announced in a news release that all exhibitions, farm tours, shows, sales, flea markets, auction markets, swaps and meets pertaining to poultry and feathered fowl in North Carolina can resume. The suspension had been in effect since April 5.

On May 12, the last High Path Avian Influenza control area was ended since no additional positive cases had been reported since April 11, the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services said in the news release.

Martin is encouraging poultry owners to follow strict measures and monitor their flocks for signs of illness. He said that with warmer temperatures, officials hope the threat of HPAI is minimized for now.

Going back to March 29, avian flu was detected at seven commercial poultry facilities in Johnston and Wayne counties. More than 90,000 turkeys and more than 280,000 broilers were killed and composted on-site to prevent further spread of the virus.

This type of avian flu is considered a low risk to people, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

NC HOUSE CANDIDATES TIED UP AFTER CANVASS; RECOUNT NEXT

ASHEVILLE (AP)—Election officials in a western North Carolina county prepared for a recount of a state House primary in which complete results show the two candidates with exactly the same number of votes.

Results from the May 17 Republican primary for the 115th House District nomination have Pratik Bhakta and Sherry M. Higgins each receiving 3,145 votes.

The 50-50 split followed tabulations during last week's Buncombe County canvass of in-person, traditional absentee and provisional ballots. State law directs a recount now must be performed. That is set to begin Wednesday morning, Buncombe elections director Corinne Duncan said.

If the election remains tied after the recount, Bhakta and Higgins will participate in a runoff July 26, unless one of them decides to withdraw. Should the runoff also result in a tie, then Buncombe County Republican Party activists would choose a nominee.

The GOP nominee will take on Democratic candidate Lindsey Prather in the November general election.

NC MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO STORMING CAPITOL TO DISRUPT CONGRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—A North Carolina man has pleaded guilty to charges that he stormed the U.S. Capitol last year to disrupt Congress from certifying the Electoral College vote, court filings show.

Matthew Mark Wood pleaded guilty to all six counts in his March 2021 indictment, including a felony charge of obstructing an official proceeding. The other five counts are all misdemeanors.

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta is scheduled to sentence Wood on Sept. 23.

A day before the riot, Wood drove from North Carolina to Washington, D.C., with his grandmother and another relative. Less than a week earlier, Wood sent a text message to another person that said, "If they want to raid Congress, sign me up," according to a court filing accompanying his guilty plea.

Medicaid Expansion—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"It does my heart good that even though it took 10 years, y'all are there. Praise the Lord," said Sen. Gladys Robinson, a Guilford County Democrat. "Nothing is more important than a person's health."

The expansion proposal would likely cover 500,000 or 600,000 people whose income reaches up to 138% of federal poverty guidelines. Although about 2.7 million North Carolina residents are now enrolled in Medicaid, some current consumers whom the state has been

required to keep on the rolls during the COVID-19 pandemic would ultimately be covered by expansion.

The state's 10 percent share of expansion expenses would be paid through a new assessment on hospitals. The "NC Health Works" program also would include a work requirement for expansion recipients. Similar mandates by other states have been struck down by federal courts or blocked by President Joe Biden's administration. Expansion would go forward even if a work man-

date doesn't get approved by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The bill also would scale back and streamline "certificate of need" laws that require health regulators to sign off on expansion plans by medical providers. The legislation would require health insurers in the state to cover telehealth services. And in-network health facilities would have to alert patients before an appointment when out-of-network providers are scheduled to pro-

vide care.

The conservative John Locke Foundation and the state chapter of Americans for Prosperity opposed the legislation, saying that expansion would result in higher federal deficits, not better health care.

"For years, most state senators have rightfully recognized that Medicaid expansion is bad medicine for North Carolina," said Locke Foundation CEO Amy O. Cooke said in news release. "Their changed view is disappointing."

Parents Bill of Rights—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

expansion.

"Everyone agrees that parents should be involved in their children's education," Sen. Michael Garrett, a Guilford County Democrat, said during the debate. But this measure, he added, is "nothing but HB2, classroom edition."

Republicans have said repeatedly that the measure is different from the Florida law, particularly that North Carolina teachers and students could still mention their same-sex family members or spouses, for example. But it's inappropriate to insert LGBTQ topics into curriculum in these early grades,

said Sen. Michael Lee, a New Hanover County Republican.

Bills have been introduced or considered in at least 32 states this year that would prohibit educators teaching about LGBTQ issues or talking about them, according to Movement Advancement Project, a think tank emphasizing LGBTQ research. Florida is one of six states that suppresses discussion of LGBTQ people or issues in schools, the group says.

The measure would broaden the rights parents already have in state and federal laws. Parents would be provided a "guide to

student achievement" at the start of each school year and notice of how they can obtain information. School districts would be required to create complaint and appeal processes for parents, leading in some cases to litigation. Republicans say schools already are required to report apparent abuse and neglect to social service workers and they shouldn't be keeping information about children from their parents.

"It is not my right to be involved in the care of my child," said Sen. Ralph Hise, a Mitchell County Republican. "It is my responsibility for the care of my

child."

On broader health matters, the bill says physicians and nurses could be subject to disciplinary action by licensing boards and fines should they fail to obtain parental consent before completing non-urgent medical treatments for a child that aren't otherwise exempt.

After the final Senate vote, a couple of people in the gallery opposed to the legislation began chanting, causing General Assembly police to intervene and Senate leader Phil Berger to stop the floor session for about 10 minutes.

Medical Marijuana Gets—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

leaders are aiming to adjourn this year's work session around July 1.

Still, the Senate's affirmative vote, which included a "yes" from chamber leader Phil Berger, shows how far political and public sentiment has come in the Bible Belt state on medical marijuana. Rabon has said that polls show support is strong for the idea across all population groups, including among evangelical Christians.

The bill worked its way through several committees last

summer before resurfacing this week. Senators have heard from impassioned speakers with severe illness who say marijuana can ease pain or help them lead more normal lives.

Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia allow the medical use of cannabis products, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

"The time for action in North Carolina is now," said Democratic Sen. Wiley Nickel of Wake County, who recalled how his

father used marijuana unlawfully three decades ago as he was dying of cancer. Marijuana for recreational use would remain illegal.

Bill opponents have said the health benefits of marijuana remain uncertain and the health risks are great.

"We spent billions of dollars... to stop people from smoking (and) we're now voting on a new version of Big Tobacco," said Sen. Jim Burgin, a Harnett County Republican who voted no.

Under the bill, other qualifying conditions that could lead to legal marijuana access include epilepsy, Crohn's disease, HIV/AIDS, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and post-traumatic stress disorder. An advisory board could add to that list. Physicians initially would have to receive 10 hours of training to offer a cannabis prescription.

A new Medical Cannabis Production Commission would award licenses to 10 entities that would grow cannabis, process it and sell it.

Monument, Civil War—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of thousands of Black men and others to sign up for the Union Army, helping turn the tide of the war.

Blight, in his remarks, also acknowledged the memorial's place in the broader debate over the removal of Civil War monuments lionizing the Confederacy.

"This monument has always been here for more than 100 years saying that the Confederacy did not win that war," he said. "This monument tells a story like no other monument about that war. It says African Americans had to die to be counted as people, and from that the American Republic can be reinvented and reimagined."

While prominent Black Bostonians championed the creation of the monument in the aftermath of the Civil War, the Shaw memorial still didn't escape scrutiny amid a national reckoning on racism sparked by the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in 2020.

The memorial depicts Shaw, the unit's white commanding officer, riding on horseback while his Black soldiers walk in the background — a visual that some find problematic.

The memorial reopened last May following a \$3 million restoration that involved careful restoration of the bronze relief, shoring up the monument's brick plaza and concrete foundation and adding a stainless steel frame between the bronze and the marble structure that surrounds it.

The work was initially planned to take less than half a year, but due to the coronavirus pandemic and other factors, ended up taking more time.

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Civil War reenactor Larry Harris, of Philadelphia, right, marches past the Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Regiment Memorial, left, that commemorates the famed Civil War unit made up of Black soldiers, during re-dedication ceremonies of the memorial on the Boston Common, Wednesday, June 1st.

Some Dems Vote GOP To Block Trump

By Steve Peoples and Aaron Kessler

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP)—Diane Murray struggled with her decision all the way up to Election Day.

But when the time came, the 54-year-old Georgia Democrat cast a ballot in last week's Republican primary for Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger. While state law allowed her to participate in either party's primary, she said it felt like a violation of her core values to vote for the Republican. But it had to be done, she decided, to prevent a Donald Trump-backed "election denier" from becoming the battleground state's election chief.

"I feel strongly that our democracy is at risk, and that people who are holding up the big lie, as we call it, and holding onto the former president are dangerous to democracy," said Murray, who works at the University of Georgia. "I don't know I'll do it again because of how I felt afterward. I just felt icky."

Raffensperger, a conservative who refused to support the former president's direct calls to overturn the 2020 election, probably would not have won the May 24 Republican primary without people like Murray.

An Associated Press analysis of early voting records from data firm L2 found that more than 37,000 people who voted in Georgia's Democratic primary two years ago cast ballots in last week's Republican primary, an unusually high number of so-called crossover voters. Even taking into account the limited sample of early votes, the data

reveal that crossover voters were consequential in defeating Trump's hand-picked candidates for secretary of state and, to a lesser extent, governor.

Gov. Brian Kemp did not ultimately need Democrats in his blowout victory against his Trump-backed opponent, but Raffensperger probably did. The Republican secretary of state cleared the 50 percent threshold required to avoid a runoff election by just over 27,000 votes, according to the latest AP tallies. Based on early voting data alone, 37,144 former Democrats voted in the Republican primary. The total number of crossovers including Election Day votes, set to be revealed in the coming weeks, may be even higher.

Crossover voting, also known as strategic voting, is not exclusive to Georgia this primary season as voters across the political spectrum work to stop Trump-backed extremists from winning control of state and federal governments. The phenomenon is playing out in multiple primary contests, sometimes organically and sometimes in response to a coordinated effort by Trump's opponents.

While Trump railed against the practice over the weekend, there is nothing inherently wrong with crossover voting. Dozens of states make it legal and easy for voters to participate in either party's primary. And there are several isolated incidents of both parties engaging in strategic voting over the years.

Still, Trump warned conservatives about crossover voting while campaigning Saturday in Wyoming, another state where the former president's oppo-

nents are calling for Democrats to intervene—this time to help save Rep. Liz Cheney from a Trump-backed primary challenger. Cheney, like Raffensperger and Kemp, refused to embrace Trump's lies about the 2020 election. She also voted for his second impeachment after the Jan. 6 insurrection.

"Don't let the Democrats do what they did in another state last week," Trump told Wyoming supporters, complaining about what happens "when you allow Democrats to vote in a Republican primary."

While the practice has Trump's attention, it is often ineffective. Trump's opponents encouraged Democrats to help defeat U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene in her Georgia primary last week. The congresswoman, who has embraced election lies and spoken at an event organized by a White nationalist, won by more than 50 percentage points.

And in some cases, Democrats have been too focused on their own competitive primaries to cast a Republican ballot. That was probably the case in Pennsylvania, where some Democrats openly encouraged their base to vote for the Republican candidate for governor, Doug Mastriano, whose extreme views they felt made him more beatable in November.

To cast a ballot in the May 17 GOP primary, however, voters needed to register as Republicans ahead of the contest because Pennsylvania has a "closed primary" system. And on the same day, Democrats were deciding their own high-stakes Senate primary.

If the advance vote in Penn-

sylvania is any indication, few Democrats heeded the call to vote GOP.

Of Republican primary voters who cast early or absentee ballots this year, only 1.7 percent voted Democratic in the 2020 primary. Those 2,600 votes, even if ultimately bolstered by more Election Day participants, were unlikely to have moved the needle in an outcome in which Mastriano beat his closest rival by nearly 320,000.

On the forefront of the crossover movement, Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., has called for an "uneasy alliance" between Democrats, independents and Republicans to take down pro-Trump candidates in GOP primaries whenever and wherever possible. Some states have open primaries like Georgia that allow people to vote in either primary, while other states have more restrictive rules.

In an interview, Kinzinger said he was pleasantly surprised by the Democrats' response in some races. He said he never expected the movement to be an "earth-shattering game-changer" right away.

Kinzinger's political organization, Country First, targeted thousands of former Georgia Democrats with mailers and text messages urging them to support Raffensperger for the sake of democracy.

A Country First text message widely distributed to Georgia voters in the days before the election read: "Don't wait for until the general election to go after the extremes. Vote in the Republican Primary for the candidate that supports truth and democracy."

The Carolinian

(ISSN 00455873)

1504 New Bern Avenue, Raleigh, North Carolina 27610

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 25308

Raleigh, North Carolina 27611

Periodical Postage Paid at Raleigh North Carolina 27611

Warrenton Address: P.O. Box 536

Warrenton, NC 27589

Postmaster

Send all address changes to:

The Carolinian

1504 New Bern Avenue

Raleigh, NC 27610

PUBLISHED SIX TIMES MONTHLY

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

One Year\$45.00

Payable in advance. Address all communications and make all checks and money orders payable to The Carolinian.

Founded by P.R. Jervay, Sr. in 1940

The Carolinian Newspaper, Inc. of Raleigh

Publisher Adria Jervay

Production Manager Howard Barnett

Sales Consultant Paul R. Jervay, Jr.

Circulation Manager Andrew Alston

Jervay Agency, National Advertising Representative

www.TheJervayAgency.com

Member:

North Carolina Black Publishers Association

National Newspaper Publishers Association

HUB Certified MWBE

The Publisher is not responsible for the return of unsolicited news, pictures or advertising copy unless necessary postage accompanies the copy.

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Business & Finance

NC Bill Seeks Standards For “Forever Chemicals,” Rebates

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

North Carolina state regulators would set maximum acceptable levels of “forever chemicals”—like those discharged for decades into the Cape Fear River—for drinking water in legislation considered Thursday by a state House committee.

The measure also would give the state environment secretary power to order a company responsible for excessive levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, to pay for public water system improvements designed to remove the chemicals or lessen concentrations.

Without naming the company, the legislation would target The Chemours Co., which a state investigation found had discharged a type of PFAS from its Fayetteville Works plant in Bladen County into the air, water and groundwater.

But the measure faced strong pushback from several business and trade groups, and not just Chemours—a signal that it could be set aside for the rest of this year’s session.

For years, a little-studied chemical known as GenX flowed down the Cape Fear, which is the primary drinking water source for several hundred thousand residents, including those in Wilmington. Chemours said in 2017 that it would stop discharging the chemicals into the river. Groundwater seepage means high PFAS levels are still showing up downstream.

Leaders of two public utilities in the Wilmington region told committee members they were having to raise rates significantly on water customers to pay for roughly \$150 million in aggregate improvements to lower or

remove PFAS concentrations. Brunswick County Public Utilities raised rates by 40 percent in January, director John Nichols told the committee.

“Ratepayers should not be responsible for paying for equipment to treat the water contaminated by PFAS, caused by a responsible party, so they can have safe drinking water to give to their customers,” bill sponsor Sen. Ted Davis, a New Hanover County Republican, said at a news conference that also included an endorsement from state environment Secretary Elizabeth Biser.

Biser said there are currently no federal drinking water standards for PFAS chemicals. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is currently working on national standards.

Critics of the measure told committee members it gave too much power to the Environmental Management Commission, which would set PFAS concentration levels that are acceptable for human consumption. The bill says the standards themselves would be exempt from the state’s rule-making process, which usually gives the legislature the opportunity to reject executive branch actions.

“This bill circumvents the traditional processes for new regulations on job creators,” Peter Daniel with the North Carolina Chamber told judiciary committee members. “There’s no need for a state-by-state approach when the federal government is leading on the issue with a predictable, national, multifaceted and well-funded approach.”

As for Chemours, lobbyist Jeff Fritz told the committee the company had already agreed in 2017 to eliminate all plant-operating emissions to the Cape Fear River

and that it was following a 2018 consent agreement with the state.

The company says it has spent or committed to spend \$400 million on improvements such as on-site emissions control technology at the plant and remediation.

“We have engaged with public utilities and counties in the region and have been, and continue to be, willing to find meaningful solutions,” the company said in an emailed statement later Thursday.

Democratic Rep. Pricey Harrison of Greensboro said she was “just appalled” by the opposition, saying residents must be protected from dangerous chemicals.

Some research shows high levels of certain PFAS may lead to increased risks for kidney or testicular cancer, increased cholesterol levels and health challenges for children, according to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. GenX is used in industrial processes to make things like nonstick coatings and fire suppression foams.

Emily Donovan of Brunswick County with the group Clean Cape Fear pleaded with legislators to pass the bill, saying Chemours “contaminated our water supply” and PFAS concentrations remain high despite the consent order.

“The stakes for my family and my community are too high,” Donovan said. “No one wants to pay to fix something they didn’t break.”

No committee vote was taken Thursday. Davis said after the meeting that he would be speaking to House leadership about the next steps for the bill. House Speaker Tim Moore said later Thursday the issue could have to wait until the General Assembly session in 2023.



THE FAYETTEVILLE MANUFACTURER OF GEN-X IS THE FOCUS OF THE BILL

Calif. Regulators OK Robot Cabs

By Michael Liedtke

AP Technology Writer

California regulators on Thursday gave a robotic taxi service the green light to begin charging passengers for driverless rides in San Francisco, a first in a state where dozens of companies have been trying to train vehicles to steer themselves on increasingly congested roads.

The California Public Utilities Commission unanimously granted Cruise, a company controlled by automaker General Motors, approval to launch its driverless ride-hailing service. The regulators issued the permit despite safety concerns arising from Cruise’s inability to pick up and drop off passengers at the curb in its autonomous taxis, requiring the vehicles to double park in traffic lanes.

The ride-hailing service initially will consist of just 30 electric vehicles confined to transporting passengers in less congested parts of San Francisco from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Those restrictions are designed to minimize chances of the robotic taxis causing property damage, injuries or death if something goes awry. It will also allow regulators to assess how the technology works before permitting the service to expand.

Cruise and another robotic car pioneer, Waymo, already have been charging passengers for rides in parts of San Francisco in autonomous vehicles with a back-up human driver present to take control if something goes wrong with the technology.

But now Cruise has been cleared to charge for rides in vehicles that will have no other people in them besides the passengers—an ambition that a wide variety of technology companies and traditional automakers have been pursuing for more than a decade. The driverless vehicles have been hailed as a way to make taxi rides less expensive

while reducing the traffic accidents and deaths caused by reckless human drivers.

Gil West, Cruise’s chief operating officer, in a blog post hailed Thursday’s vote as “a giant leap for our mission here at Cruise to save lives, help save the planet, and save people time and money.” He said the company would begin rolling out its fared rides gradually.

Waymo, which began as a secret project within internet powerhouse Google in 2009, has been running a driverless ride-hailing service in the Phoenix area since October 2020, but navigating the density and difficulty of more congested cities such as San

other cities, some transportation experts urged the Public Utilities Commission to move cautiously.

“Many of the claimed benefits of (autonomous vehicles) have not been demonstrated, and some claims have little or no foundation,” Ryan Russo, the director of the transportation department in Oakland, Calif., told the commission last month.

Just reaching this point has taken far longer than many companies envisioned when they began working on the autonomous technology.

Uber, the biggest ride-hailing service, had been hoping to have 75,000 self-driving cars on the road by 2019 and operating



Francisco has posed more daunting challenges for robotic taxis to overcome.

That’s one of the reasons Cruise’s newly approved driverless service in San Francisco is being so tightly controlled. Besides being restricted to places and times where there is less traffic and fewer pedestrians on the streets, Cruise’s driverless service won’t be allowed to operate in heavy rain or fog either.

While Cruise’s application for a driverless taxi service in San Francisco won’t be allowed to operate in heavy rain or fog either, while Cruise’s application for a driverless taxi service in San Francisco won’t be allowed to operate in heavy rain or fog either, while Cruise’s application for a driverless taxi service in San Francisco won’t be allowed to operate in heavy rain or fog either,

driverless taxi fleet in at least 13 cities in 2022, according to court documents filed in a high-profile case accusing the company of stealing trade secrets from Waymo.

Uber wound up selling its autonomous driving division to Aurora in 2020 and still relies almost exclusively on human drivers who have been more difficult to recruit since the pandemic.

And Tesla CEO Elon Musk promised his electric car company would be running robotic taxi fleet by the end of 2020. That didn’t happen, although Musk is still promising it eventually will.

Firm Proposes Taser-Armed Drones

By Matt O’Brien and Michael Balsamo

AP Technology Writer

Taser developer Axon said this week it is working to build drones armed with the electric stunning weapons that could fly into schools and “help prevent the next Uvalde, Sandy Hook, or Columbine.” But its own technology advisers quickly panned the idea as a dangerous fantasy.

The publicly traded company, which sells Tasers and police body cameras, floated the idea of a new police drone product last year to its artificial intelligence ethics board, a group of well-respected experts in technology, policing and privacy.

Some of them expressed reservations about weaponizing drones in over-policed communities of color. But they were not expecting Axon’s Thursday announcement that it wants to send those Taser-equipped drones into classrooms to prevent mass shootings by immobilizing an intruding gunman.

Axon’s stock price rose with the news. But the announcement

angered members of the ethics board, some of whom are now likely to quit in protest.

“This particular idea is crackpot,” said Barry Friedman, a New York University law professor who sits on the Axon AI Ethics Board. “Drones can’t fly through closed doors. The physical properties of the universe still hold. So unless you have a drone in every single classroom in America, which seems insane, the idea just isn’t going to work.”

Friedman said it was a “dangerous and fantastical idea” that went far beyond the proposal for a Taser-equipped police drone that board members—some of them former or current police officials—had been debating in recent months.

“We begged the company not to do it,” Friedman said of the company’s announcement. “It was unnecessary and shameful.”

Board members who spoke with The Associated Press said they were taken aback by the school drone proposal—which they got notice of only earlier this week—and cobbled together a unanimous

statement of concern that described Axon’s decision as “deeply regrettable.” The company tweeted out the board’s dissent shortly after its own Thursday announcement.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if there were resignations,” said another ethics board member, Ryan Calo, a law professor at the University of Washington. “I think everyone on the board has to make a choice about whether they want to stay involved.”

Friedman and Calo both described this week’s process as a sharp turnaround from the respectful relationship that Axon executives have had with the board in recent years on controversial topics such as facial recognition—which Axon decided against using in its body cameras—and automated license plate readers.

“Sometimes the company takes our advice and sometimes it doesn’t,” Friedman said. “What’s important is that happens after thoughtful discussion and coordination. That was thrown out the window here.”

U.S. Has More Than 750 Complaints About Teslas Braking Without Warning

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—More than 750 Tesla owners have complained to U.S. safety regulators that cars operating on the automaker’s partially automated driving systems have suddenly stopped on roadways for no apparent reason.

The National Highway Traffic

Safety Administration revealed the number in a detailed information request letter to Tesla that was posted Friday on the agency’s website.

The 14-page letter dated May 4 asks the automaker for all consumer and field reports it has received about false braking, as well as reports of crashes, injuries, deaths and property damage claims. It also asks whether the

company’s “Full Self Driving” and automatic emergency braking systems were active at the time of any incident.

The agency began investigating phantom braking in Tesla’s Models 3 and Y last February after getting 354 complaints. The probe covers an estimated 416,000 vehicles from the 2021 and 2022 model years. In February, the agency said it had no reports of crashes or

injuries.

The letter gives Tesla a deadline of June 20 to respond to the information request but says the company can ask for an extension.

Shares of Tesla Inc. tumbled more than 9 percent Friday.

A message was left early Friday seeking comment from Tesla.

In opening the probe, the agency said it was looking into vehicles equipped with automated driver-assist features such as adaptive cruise control and “Autopilot,” which allows them to automatically brake and steer within their lanes.

“Complainants report that the rapid deceleration can occur without warning, and often repeatedly during a single drive cycle,” the agency said.

Many owners wrote in their complaints that they feared a rear-end crash on a freeway.

In the letter, NHTSA asks for the initial speed of when the cars began to brake, the final speed, and the average deceleration. It also asks if the automated systems detected a target obstacle, and whether Tesla has video of the braking incidents.

The agency is now seeking information on warranty claims for phantom braking including the owners’ names and what repairs were made. It’s also seeking information on Tesla’s sensors, any testing or investigations into the braking problems, or if any modi-

fications were made.

The letter focuses on Tesla’s testing of the automated systems when it comes to detecting metal bridges, s-shaped curves, oncoming and cross traffic, and different sizes of vehicles including large trucks. The agency also wants information on how cameras deal with reflections, shadows, glare and blockage due to snow or heavy rain.

The probe is another in a string of enforcement efforts by the agency that include Autopilot and

“Full Self-Driving” software. Despite their names, neither feature can drive the vehicles without people supervising.

It’s the fourth formal investigation of the Texas automaker in the past three years, and NHTSA is supervising 23 Tesla recalls since January of 2021.

The agency also is investigating complaints that the automatic emergency braking systems on more than 1.7 million newer Hondas can stop the vehicles for no reason.



NOT WHAT I TOLD IT TO DO—The NTSB is investigating complaints from not only Tesla owners but auto-drive Hondas as well that suddenly brake “for no reason.”

Classifieds



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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>

