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Jackson Sworn In To U.S. Supreme Court



By Mark Sherman

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Ketanji Brown Jackson was sworn in to the Supreme Court on Thursday, shattering a glass ceiling as the first Black woman on the nation's highest court.

The 51-year-old Jackson is the court's 116th justice, and she took the place of the justice she once worked for, Justice Stephen Breyer's retirement was effective at noon.

Moments later, joined by her family, Jackson recited the two oaths required of Supreme Court justices, one administered by Breyer and the other by Chief Justice John Roberts.

"With a full heart, I accept the solemn responsibility of supporting and defending the Constitution of the United States and administering justice without fear or favor, so help me God," Jackson said in a statement issued by the court. "I am truly grateful to be part of the promise of our great Nation. I extend my sincerest thanks to all of my new colleagues for their warm and gracious welcome."

Roberts welcomed Jackson "to the court and our common calling." The ceremony was streamed live on the court's website. All the justices except for Neil Gorsuch attended the swearing-in, the court said. There was no immediate explanation for Gorsuch's absence.

Jackson, a federal judge since 2013, is joining three other women—Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Amy Coney Barrett. It's the first time four women will serve together on the nine-member court.

"Her historic swearing in today represents a profound step forward for our nation, for all the young, Black girls who now see themselves reflected on our highest court, and for all of us as Americans," President Joe Biden said in a statement after he returned from a trip to Europe. He also thanked Breyer "for his many years of exemplary service."

Biden nominated Jackson in

February, a month after Breyer, 83, announced he would retire at the end of the court's term, assuming his successor had been confirmed. Breyer's earlier-than-usual announcement and the condition he attached was a recognition of the Democrats' tenuous hold on the Senate in an era of hyper-partisanship, especially surrounding federal judgeships.

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



AMAZON BARS OFF-DUTY WAREHOUSE WORKERS FROM ITS BUILDINGS

Amazon is barring off-duty warehouse workers from the company's facilities, a move organizers say can hamper union drives.

Under the policy shared with workers on Amazon's internal app, employees are barred from accessing buildings or other working areas on their scheduled days off, and before or after their shifts.

An Amazon spokesperson said the policy does not prohibit off-duty employees from engaging their co-workers in "non-working areas" outside the company's buildings.

"There's nothing more important than the safety of our employees and the physical security of our buildings," Amazon spokesperson Kelly Nantel said. "This policy regarding building access applies to building interiors and working areas. It does not limit employee access to non-working areas outside of our facilities."

The notice of the new policy, dated Thursday, says the off-duty rule "will not be enforced discriminatorily" against employees seeking to unionize. But organizers say the policy itself will hinder their efforts to garner support from co-workers during campaigns.

"On our days off, we come to work and we engage our co-workers in the break rooms," said Rev. Ryan Brown, an Amazon warehouse worker in Garner, who's aiming to organize his workplace following the labor win on Staten Island, N.Y., where workers at an Amazon warehouse voted in April to unionize.

"This was a direct response to that, to try to stop organizing by any means necessary," Brown said.

Seattle-based Amazon had previously barred employee access to non-working areas beyond 15 minutes before or after their shifts. The company rescinded that policy in December, when it entered a settlement with the National Labor Relations Board to allow workers to organize more freely. Amazon also agreed to give workers a heads up in the event it chose to "reinstate a lawful rule regarding off-duty employee access" to its facilities. A spokesperson with the NLRB declined to comment on the company's new policy.

In the notice sent to employees, Amazon said it strived to create a safe environment for employees. "One part of this is knowing who is in our buildings at any given time, so we can quickly find and account for everyone in the event of an emergency," the notice said.

NC GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL THAT KEEPS HEMP INDUSTRY LAWFUL

(AP)—North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper signed legislation on Thursday that keeps the state's burgeoning hemp industry operating lawfully.

The General Assembly had given final approval Wednesday to language that would make hemp products for industrial use and others with personal care uses like CBD permanently exempt from the state's list of illegal drugs.

Such language was required by the end of June so that North Carolina growers could keep participating in a production program run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The state had run its own pilot production program for several years until recently.

There are more than 1,500 licensed hemp producers in the state, "Agriculture is North Carolina's largest industry and giving North Carolina farmers certainty that they can continue to participate in this growing market is the right thing to do for rural communities and our economy," Cooper said in a news release announcing he had signed three bills.

Hemp contains a very low amount of the chemical that gives the high to marijuana users. Marijuana remains illegal.

Another bill that Cooper signed into law attempts to crack down on large, organized thefts at stores by raising penalties and regulating high-volume third-party sellers of merchandise at online marketplace sites.

VETO LIKELY AGAIN AHEAD FOR BILL MAKING NC SHERIFFS AID ICE

(AP)—Legislation requiring North Carolina's sheriffs to assist federal agents who are seeking a jail inmate whom they believe is in the country unlawfully nearing final General Assembly approval Thursday with House backing.

The Senate bill is a response by Republicans unhappy with Democratic sheriffs in several urban counties who have stopped working closely with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to hold defendants. The Senate, which voted for the measure in March 2021, now must accept a small change made by the House before sending the measure to Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper. Friday is likely the last day of the General Assembly's primary work session this year.

The House's 65-47 party-line vote signals that Cooper is likely to veto that measure if it goes to his desk. It's only slightly different from a 2019 measure that Cooper vetoed and had solid support from legislative Democrats so it couldn't be overridden.

The bill would require sheriffs and other jail administrators to check whether any person charged with felony drug or violent crimes have ICE detainers seeking their custody. If a detainer is listed, deputies must take the inmate to a local magistrate or judge who will decide whether to issue an order holding them. The additional hold would give ICE agents 48 hours to pick up the inmate.

Bill supporters say the measure is about protecting public safety during a time of increase violence and criminal activity. But groups representing immigrants and the poor argue these demands counter the desires of voters who elected sheriffs with campaign platforms of easing aggressive postures against immigrants. They also say the requirements also would reduce goodwill with the population of recent immigrants to the country.

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

NC Board Rejects Green Party

By Hannah Schoenbaum

Associated Press

The North Carolina State Board of Elections rejected the Green Party's petition for their candidates to appear on November ballots Thursday, citing its ongoing fraud investigation that questions the validity of more than 2,000 signatures that party officials turned in to qualify.

The board denied the North Carolina Green Party bid in a 3-2 party-line vote, with three Democrats voting against certification and two Republicans voting in favor.

The decision led the left-leaning

Green Party to miss Friday's deadline to nominate candidates, meaning the Democratic, Republican and Libertarian parties will be the only ones with candidates for races like U.S. Senate, House and the state legislature.

Michael Bitzer, a politics professor at Catawba College in Salisbury, said if the Green Party had received certification, it might have divided progressive voters and paved the way for GOP victories in tight races, including the hotly contested Senate race between Democrat Cheri Beasley and Republican U.S. Rep. Ted Budd.

"The Green Party is the more

progressive, more liberal side of North Carolina politics," Bitzer said this week. "Democrats could see a real concern about the Green Party spoiling efforts for Beasley and perhaps other candidates."

Green Party representatives earlier this year submitted more than 22,000 signatures to the board. County boards of election validated just under 16,000 of those signatures—seemingly catapulting them over the 13,865-signature threshold set in state law.

But several county boards in

(See **GREEN PARTY**, P. 2)

Some Cities Nix Fireworks For July 4th

By Anita Snow

Associated Press

PHOENIX, Ariz. (AP)—The skies over a scattering of Western U.S. cities will stay dark for the third consecutive Fourth of July as some major fireworks displays are canceled again this year—some over wildfire concerns amid dry weather and others because of enduring pandemic-related staffing and supply chain issues.

Phoenix canceled its three major Independence Day displays because it couldn't obtain professional-grade fireworks. Shows in several other cities around Phoenix are still on.

"Unless you're in a really re-

mote area where that was the only show, most people will be able to find a show nearby," said Julie Heckman, executive director of the American Pyrotechnics Association.

Overseas shipping, transportation in the U.S., rising insurance costs and labor shortages have led to the canceled displays, along with demand for fireworks shows at concerts, sports stadiums and the Fourth of July holiday that largely were absent during the first two years of the pandemic, Heckman said.

"The demand is so high that it's almost like a perfect storm," Heckman said, adding that not having enough crew to work the shows or rental trucks to trans-

port materials have added to the crunch.

China produces most of the professional-grade fireworks that shoot up into the air and produce colorful, dazzling bursts in various shapes. The shortage doesn't lie in manufacturing, Heckman said, but in congestion at U.S. ports.

Heckman said some companies recently chartered about a dozen vessels, each carrying 200-250 containers of consumer-grade fireworks that are considered hazardous material, and shipped them to ports in Alabama and Louisiana to free up space at ports on the West Coast.

Other cities around the country are halting the displays be-

cause of the threat of wildfire. Flagstaff in northern Arizona will carry out its annual Independence Day parade through the city's historic downtown, but a new laser light show will replace the standard pyrotechnic display.

Three large wildfires skirted the mountainous city this spring alone, prompting hundreds of people to evacuate, closing down a major highway and destroying some homes.

"The decision was made early because we wanted people to be able to make plans with their families," said Flagstaff city spokesperson Sarah Langley.

Many local jurisdictions have

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

Clergy Lead Faithful In Praise, Lament

By Holly Meyer and David Crary

Associated Press

Praise and lament for the overturning of abortion rights filled sacred spaces this weekend as clergy across the U.S. rearranged worship plans or rewrote sermons to provide their religious context—and competing messages—about the historic

moment.

Abortion is a visceral issue for deeply divided religious Americans. Some are sad or angry in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's seismic *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision. Others are grateful and elated.

At St. Paul Cathedral in Pittsburgh, the Very Rev. Kris Stubna discarded his planned Sunday homily and focused on the decision, calling it "a day of great joy

and blessing." He said the overturning of the nearly 50-year-old *Roe v. Wade* ruling was the result of prayers and efforts of many Catholics and others.

"This law violated the very law of God, that every life is sacred," he said. "A person cannot support abortion and still be a faithful member of the church."

Stubna's comments would be considered divisive by some since U.S. Catholics disagree

on abortion rights. Supporters include high-profile members of the faith like President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi who face Communion restrictions as a result.

Not everyone sat through Stubna's entire homily. Although unable to ask their reasons, an Associated Press photographer saw one woman leave during it. Security personnel estimated three others also exited early.

Views on abortions are not just polarizing within denominations; the divisions span the religious landscape.

"SCOTUS just dealt a terrible blow to women, to girls, to all childbearing people, to freedom," said the Rev. Jacqui Lewis, senior minister at Middle Collegiate Church, a multicultural Protestant congregation in Manhattan.

She mourned the overturning of *Roe*, expressing deep emotions during a service Sunday, saying, "It took safe legal abortions off the table, opening the door for states to rush in and crush reproductive justice. We are reeling. Spinning. So hurt we can hardly move. We are feeling the loss, the pain of it."

A majority of adults from Buddhist, Hindu, historically Black Protestant, Jewish, mainline Protestant, Muslim and Orthodox Christian faiths support legal abortion in all or most cases, ac-

(See **CLERGY LEAD**, P. 2)



NOT ALL CLERGY SHARE THE SAME VIEWS ON ABORTION

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

MAN CHARGED IN SHOOTING OF NORTH CAROLINA POLICE OFFICER

CHARLOTTE (AP)—A man has been arrested and charged in the shooting of a North Carolina police officer wounded while responding to a report of shots fired into a building, officials said.

Toddric McFadden, 32, is charged with discharging a weapon into occupied property, two counts of attempted murder, and two counts of assault on a law enforcement officer, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police said in a news release on Wednesday.

The unidentified officer, who was shot in the leg, has been released from the hospital and is resting at home, police said.

An issue with a customer at The Blind Pig in the NoDa section of Charlotte led to the shooting, officials said. The customer was asked to leave the bar after an altercation occurred, according to police.

The shooting on Tuesday marked the third time in a week that a CMPD officer has been fired upon while responding to a 911 call, Chief Johnny Jennings said in a tweet.

ELEVATOR IMPROVEMENTS IN NC VACATION RENTALS GO TO GOVERNOR

(AP)—Safety improvement requirements to prevent injury or death from elevators inside North Carolina vacation cottages and short-term rentals received final legislative approval on Wednesday.

The House voted unanimously to accept a version of legislation passed in the Senate last week by a similar margin, and sent the bill to Gov. Roy Cooper's desk.

The bill, called "Weston's Law," was prompted by last year's death of a 7-year-old Ohio boy who became trapped between the elevator car and elevator shaft at a rental home on the northern Outer Banks.

The bill would require that the gap between landing and car doors for elevators at such rentals be no more than 4 inches (10.2 centimeters). That can be addressed by installing a space guard on the landing door.

The bill also sets minimum force requirements on elevator car doors and gates. The landlord must document the improvements with the state Insurance Department. Without the improvements, the elevator must be turned off. The bill also would direct the state building code to require such safety measures in new short-term rental construction.

NC LEGISLATORS WANT 20-WEEK ABORTION BAN TO BE RESTORED

(AP)—North Carolina Republican legislative leaders asked Democratic Attorney General Josh Stein on Friday to act so a state law banning nearly all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy can be enforced in light of the U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning abortion protections.

Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore want Stein and the state Justice Department to seek relief from a 2019 federal court decision that struck down the 20-week law. The 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals upheld last year the decision of District Judge William Osteen, who had based his decisions upon *Roe v. Wade* and a related 1992 Supreme Court ruling that were struck down Friday.

Osteen extended the right to an abortion until fetal viability, which is generally between 24 and 28 weeks.

Moore and Berger want Stein to tell them by July 1 what he intends to do. Otherwise, they wrote, "we stand ready to take the necessary steps" to restore the 20-week limit—likely through filing their own request to lift an injunction blocking the law's enforcement.

Stein spokesperson Nazneen Ahmed declined earlier Friday to comment on what steps the department would take regarding the law, saying it was still reviewing the Supreme Court opinion. Lawyers from Stein's office have defended the law in court, but Stein recused himself from the appeal because he is an abortion rights supporter. He is still not participating in the case, according to Ahmed.

Abortion is still permitted in North Carolina after Friday's opinions by the justices.

FELON WHO SHOT AT NC DEPUTY GETS 10 YEARS IN PRISON

(AP)—A man who shot at a North Carolina sheriff's deputy has been sentenced to 10 years prison on a charge of being a felon in possession of a firearm, prosecutors said.

Rodriguez Crudup pleaded guilty to the charge in March, U.S. Attorney Michael F. Easley Jr. said.

A deputy with the Warren County Sheriff's Office responded to a domestic disturbance call on Dec. 28 at a residence in Warrenton, according to court documents and information presented in court.

The deputy was told Crudup, who was at the residence, took the victim's loaded firearm and ran into the woods, the news release said. The deputy heard Crudup running and went toward him. Crudup fired a shot that the deputy heard pass over his head, prosecutors said. The deputy retreated and took cover at his vehicle as he called additional units.

Crudup, who was sentenced on Wednesday, was arrested and the loaded gun, which apparently jammed after he fired the shot, was found in the woods where he had been.

Judge James C. Dever rejected Crudup's arguments that it was an accidental discharge and found he intentionally fired his weapon at a law enforcement officer.

Jackson Sworn In—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The Senate confirmed Jackson's nomination in early April, by a 53-47 mostly party-line vote that included support from three Republicans.

Jackson had been in a sort of judicial limbo since, remaining a judge on the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C., but not hearing any cases. Biden elevated her to that court from the district judgeship to which she was appointed by President Barack Obama.

Glynda Carr, president of Higher Heights for America, an organization that advocates for the growth of Black women's political power, said the timing of Jackson's swearing-in was bittersweet.

"Although we celebrate her today, one Black woman or a cohort of Black women can't save this democracy alone. We are a piece of it and we are doing our work, our part. She's going to forever reshape and shape that court. But she's just a piece of

the work that needs to happen moving forward," Carr said.

Because of Jackson's appointment, Judith Browne Dianis, a Black lawyer in Washington, said she intends to end her protest against joining the Supreme Court Bar. She started it when Justice Clarence Thomas was confirmed in 1991. She said that even the series of conservative rulings from the court over the past week cannot take away from the significance of Thursday's ceremony.

"This is a momentous occasion and it's still a beautiful moment," said Dianis, executive director of the civil rights group Advancement Project.

But, Dianis added, "she's joining the court at a time when conservatives are holding the line and trying to actually take us back, because they see the progress that's being made in our country. It's like the Civil War that never ended. That's the court that she's joining."

Jackson will be able to begin work immediately, but the court will have just finished the bulk of its work until the fall, apart from emergency appeals that occasionally arise. That will give her time to settle in and familiarize herself with the roughly two dozen cases the court already has agreed to hear starting in October as well as hundreds of appeals that will pile up over the summer.

She helps form the most diverse court in its 232-year history and is the first former public defender to be a justice. The court that Jackson is joining is the most conservative that it has been since the 1930s. She is likely to be on the losing end of important cases, which could include examinations of the role of race in college admissions, congressional redistricting and voting rights that the court, with its 6-3 conservative majority, will take up next term.

Today's court now is surround-

ed by fencing, and justices and their families have 24-hour protection by the U.S. Marshals, the result of a law passed days after a man carrying a gun, knife and zip ties was arrested near Justice Brett Kavanaugh's Maryland house after threatening to kill the justice. The bill was introduced in May shortly after the leak of a draft court opinion that would overrule *Roe v. Wade* and sharply curtail abortion rights in roughly half the states.

The court issued final opinions earlier Thursday after a momentous and rancorous term that included overturning *Roe v. Wade's* guarantee of the right to an abortion. One of Thursday's decisions limited how the Environmental Protection Agency can use the nation's main anti-air pollution law to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants, a blow to the fight against climate change.

Associated Press writer Aaron Morrison in New York contributed to this report.

NC Board Rejects Green Party—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

May alerted the state board of irregularities, elections board Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell said, and the number of questioned signatures were enough to cast doubt on the outcome. She cited examples on submitted petition lists of similar handwriting, incomplete personal information including partial dates of birth, and duplicate voters.

"We feel like there is a cloud over how many signatures are valid," Bell said at Thursday's board meeting. "There's just a lot of concern around what we're finding, and the amount of irregularities and possible fraud that have been identified already within the signature pages that we have received."

The board said the investigation also identified 145 signatories who sought to revoke their

signatures, three individuals who claim they did not sign the petition and several signatures from deceased voters.

"What this seems to indicate to us is a submission of signature sheets from when the Green Party had a petition effort prior to 2018," Bell said.

Katelyn Love, legal counsel to the board, said the investigation could warrant criminal action for those found guilty of signing the name of another individual.

Republican board members Tommy Tucker and Stacy "Four" Eggers pushed the board to vote Thursday, despite Chair Damon Circosta's recommendation to delay the review and allow more time for the investigation.

Prior to Thursday's meeting, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee acknowl-

edged contacting signatories on the Green Party's petition to request they retract their signatures. The DSCC is working to get Beasley and the party's other Democratic Senate candidates nationwide elected in November.

"We're reaching out to voters to ensure they have not been deceived," DSCC spokesperson Amanda Sherman Baity said.

Other outside organizations, including Elias Law Group, an influential Democrat-aligned law firm that serves as the DSCC's general counsel, submitted letters alerting the board of some discrepancies included in the investigation.

Oliver Hall, a lawyer for the Green Party, accused the board of kowtowing to the Green Party's political opponents, calling the decision an anti-democratic

effort to suppress voter choice.

"The board is selectively relying on evidence submitted by partisan operatives acting for their own political advantage and disregarding the facts in the record as they recognize them," Hall said in an interview after the meeting.

The campaign of Matthew Hoh, who was considered the Green Party's U.S. Senate candidate, wrote in an email that it "will continue and explore all options for its rightful place on the ballot."

Schoenbaum is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on uncovered issues.

Some Cities Nix Fireworks—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

banned the use of fireworks amid a punishing drought, even with an early start of the annual rainy season that already has led to flooding in the U.S. Southwest. Fireworks always are prohibited in national forests.

A popular northern San Joaquin Valley fireworks show that in pre-pandemic times brought tens of thousands of people to Lake Don Pedro, Calif., also was canceled because of drought concerns, including the lake's projected low level.

"The safety of our guests and being good stewards of the land entrusted to us are our highest priorities," the Don Pedro Recreation Agency said in a statement.

Lompoc on California's central coast and Castle Rock in Colorado canceled their pyrotechnic displays over worries about wildfires. Still, an Independence Eve fireworks show with live music by the Colorado Symphony is planned July 3 at Denver's Civic Center Park.

In New Mexico, the most destructive wildfire season in modern history won't stop that state's major cities, including Albuquerque and Santa Fe, from holding Fourth of July fireworks displays under fire department supervision.

The Southgate Mall in Missoula, Montana, canceled its annual Fourth of July celebration and

fireworks show without giving a reason.

Elsewhere in the U.S., some North Carolina towns canceled displays after a recent fireworks-related explosion killed a man on a small farm and a large cache of fireworks were destroyed in a related fire.

In Minneapolis, a fireworks display over the Mississippi won't be held because of staff shortages and construction at a nearby park.

Those who plan to light up consumer-grade fireworks like bottle rockets, firecrackers and ground-level fountains at home can expect to pay more for them. The American Pyrotechnic As-

sociation estimates that costs are up 35 percent across the industry.

Fire officials in some cities worry that the cancellations of community displays could prompt some people to ramp up their use of consumer-grade fireworks.

"We are typically worried about exposure of sparks and fire to homes and dry brush," said Phoenix Fire spokesperson Capt. Evan Gammage. "We get so many calls around this time of year."

AP writers Morgan Lee in Santa Fe, N.M., and Felicia Fonseca in Flagstaff, Ariz., contributed to this story.

Clergy Lead Faithful In—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

according to a Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study.

Rabbi Sarah DePaolo carved out time at the start of Friday night's Shabbat service at Congregation Shir Ha-Ma'alot in Irvine, Calif., to express her disappointment, urging community members to support each other and create space for the fearful.

"One of the most upsetting things about this decision is that while it claims to represent people of faith, it does not represent our faith," DePaolo said. "It does not reflect our Jewish law. It does not reflect our traditions. It does not reflect our community."

Catholics are split on the issue while most evangelical Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints say abortion should be illegal in all or most instances, according to the Pew Research Center study.

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, views the ruling as a moral and spiritual victory. On Sunday, he told his California congregation at New Season that now is the time for an unprecedented adoption movement.

"We're gonna adopt babies, but we're gonna adopt moms, pregnant moms... who have abortions because they can't afford to have a baby," he said.

Southern Baptists, who are members of the nation's largest Protestant denomination, are staunch supporters of anti-abortion views. On Sunday, several pastors praised the ruling from their pulpits.

The congregation at First Baptist Concord in Knoxville, Tenn., broke into applause when Pastor John Mark Harrison addressed it. He invited a panel of advocates to explain how everyone can continue supporting those with unwanted pregnancies via mentorship, fostering, adoption, addressing systemic issues and

more.

"There's so much anger and emotion," Harrison said. "What we need to understand is that we're not called to fuel the emotions of the right or the left. We're called to walk in and through the gospel of Jesus Christ... and minister to real people in real times of crisis."

At Central Church, in College Station, Texas, lead Pastor Phillip Bethancourt echoed that overturning *Roe* is not the finish line: "It's the starting gate of a new chapter. Abortion should be not just be unlawful but unnecessary and unthinkable."

David Rhoades, lead pastor of Broadview Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas, said in an email the court decision was on a par with the Emancipation Proclamation and Juneteenth, and will reverberate for years.

He hoped church members left Sunday's service with a clear understanding of what they must do next, including "minister to both the baby and its mother, and continue to work to elect pro-life representatives."

Other faith leaders doubled down on their support for abortion rights.

Women should be able to make their own decisions, preached the Rev. Fletcher Harper at the Episcopal Church of Our Saviour in Secaucus, N.J.

"Outlawing abortion is a sinful act that perpetuates male domination and the subjugation of women," he said. "It extends the coercive power of the state into a place where it should have no business."

During a service Sunday at the Unitarian Universalist Church of the South Hills in Mt. Lebanon, Pa., director of music Mary Pratt read aloud a denominational statement affirming it would remain "committed to reproductive justice."

Pratt said members were shocked and grieving, although

they expected the outcome. "They were looking for reminders of why we need to get back out and fight," she said.

The start of services at Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Durham included two verses of "We Shall Overcome" and a prayer by the Rev. Melinda Keenan Wood for those outraged, heartbroken and fearful about *Roe's* demise.

"We know that this decision will be measured in deaths, incarcerations and life-altering trauma as politicians rush to control the most painfully intimate of decisions," Keenan Wood said.

A prominent Black pastor in Columbus, Ohio—Bishop Timothy Clarke of the First Church of

God—tried to strike a balance in his Saturday message to congregants, acknowledging conflicting views on abortion and calling on the church to show compassion.

"I know and love persons in both camps," Clarke said. "They are sincere, committed... They truly see this as a life altering issue."

Meyer reported from Nashville, Tenn., and Cray from New York. AP Religion Team members Peter Smith and Jessie Wardarski in Pittsburgh; Luis Andres Hena, in Princeton, N.J.; Mariam Fam in Winter Park, Fla.; Deepa Bharath in Los Angeles; and AP writer Tom Foreman Jr. in Winston-Salem contributed.



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Business & Finance

NC, Colonial Pipeline Reach Agreement On Handling Spill

(AP)—Colonial Pipeline has agreed to a consent order which says it should be held accountable for a gasoline spill in a North Carolina nature preserve that was found to be far worse than what the company initially said, a state agency said Thursday.

The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality filed the order with Mecklenburg County Superior Court, according to a news release. Colonial Pipeline would be required under the order to apply specific remedies and pay nearly \$5 million related to the August 2020 spill in the Oehler Nature Preserve near Huntersville, about 14 miles north of Charlotte.

Last November, NCDEQ filed a 29-page lawsuit in which it called on Colonial to take a number of steps, including removal, treatment or control any source of petroleum, polyfluoroalkyl, also known as PFAS, or other contaminants that have the potential to contaminate groundwater.

Colonial Pipeline, based in Alpharetta, Ga., issued a state-

ment saying it will “take every appropriate step at the site to remediate it consistent with all regulatory requirements.”

“The Consent Order requires Colonial to meet its obligations to the communities impacted by the release, starting with an accurate accounting of the spill volume,” said NCDEQ Secretary Elizabeth S. Biser in the news release.

The terms of the proposed consent order include a civil penalty of \$4.5 million plus \$250,000 in investigative costs and additional stipulated penalties for failure to perform activities or meet the required schedule, the news release said.

In September 2020, Michael Regan, then-secretary of the NCDEQ, said 273,000 gallons of gasoline spilled in the nature preserve near Huntersville, *The Charlotte Observer* reported. The county had reported the previous month that 63,000 gallons were spilled.

But Colonial Pipeline reported to regulators in January that the

estimated amount of gasoline released from the underground pipeline was 1.12 million gallons. According to an NCDEQ news release at the time, Colonial recovered more than 1.23 million gallons of petroleum product from the site, according to the news release, but the department said it failed to provide an updated volume estimate of the release.

If the court determines a hearing is necessary, it will be scheduled for July 26.

The Colonial Pipeline, which delivers about 45 percent of the fuel consumed on the East Coast, was hit in May 2021 with a cyber-attack by hackers who locked up computer systems and demanded a ransom to unlock them. The hackers did not gain control of the pipeline operations, but Colonial shut down the pipeline to contain the damage.

The resulting disruption caused long lines at gas stations in the Southeast due to distribution problems and panic-buying, draining supplies at thousands of gas stations.

estimated amount of gasoline released from the underground pipeline was 1.12 million gallons. According to an NCDEQ news release at the time, Colonial recovered more than 1.23 million gallons of petroleum product from the site, according to the news release, but the department said it failed to provide an updated volume estimate of the release.

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Cyberattack Disrupts UI Benefits

By Jonathan Mattise and Alan Suderman

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP)—A cyberattack on a software company has disrupted unemployment benefits and job seeking assistance for thousands of people in several states.

In Tennessee, the website for unemployment benefits remained down Thursday morning after the vendor, Geographic Solutions Inc., told the state Sunday that service would be interrupted. Some 12,000 Tennesseans rely on the unemployment program, and for now, they're not getting their payments.

The company said that it expects Tennessee's system to be back online before July 4.

“With a recession looming, it is unacceptable that Tennesseans cannot receive the unemployment benefits they deserve,” said state Republican Sen. Paul Bailey, commerce and labor committee chairman.

In a statement dated Wednesday evening, Geographic Solutions' president said initial investigation findings indicate that no personal data was accessed and no data was removed from its network operations center.

The president, Paul Toomey, said his company identified “anomalous activity” on its network and immediately took the Tennessee system offline to halt the activity.

“With the help of third-party specialists, we are conducting a full investigation to determine the cause and scope of the incident,” Toomey said. “That investigation is still ongoing, and we are taking steps to help prevent this from happening again.”

Unemployment websites in several other states were affected too. In Louisiana, people seeking to file unemployment online are directed to use a call center instead. The website to file claims in Nebraska was taken offline and the state said it did not have an exact timeline for when it would be back up.

“Individuals cannot file for unemployment until the system

is back online,” Nebraska Department of Labor spokeswoman Grace Johnson said in an email.

It's still unclear if it was a ransomware attack or some other type of cyber incident that affected Geographic Solutions. Nor is it clear how many states are affected.

Geographic Solutions' website was not working Thursday morning. The Florida-based company has said its clients include more than 35 states and territories.

Some state-run job seeking sites were also taken offline because of the attack, including Tennessee's. Florida said it was temporarily waiving a job search requirement for those receiving unemployment payments. Texas created a new website for its job seekers with links to popular work search sites such as LinkedIn.

Nebraska said Geographic Solutions indicated that no user's personal data was compromised. Florida said there were no indications any of its state systems were breached.

A majority of the electricity

NY Rules Against Bitcoin Plant

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP)—New York officials denied required air permit renewals Thursday to a bitcoin-mining power plant on the grounds that it was a threat to the state's climate goals.

The permitting decision was another example of New York putting the brakes on a cryptocurrency bonanza that has alarmed environmentalists. It also comes at a time when cryptocurrency prices have plunged, wiping out fortunes, fueling skepticism and sparking calls for tighter scrutiny.

The state's permitting decision involved Greenidge Generation, an old coal-fired plant by the shore of Seneca Lake which had once been shut down, but was converted from coal to natural gas several years ago and began bitcoin mining in earnest in 2020.

A majority of the electricity

produced by the plant is now used to run more than 15,000 computer servers for bitcoin mining, which guzzles massive amounts of electricity.

In rejecting the renewals, the state Department of Environmental Conservation said the plant's conversion to a cryptocurrency mining operation meant it was creating a significant new demand for energy “for a wholly new purpose unrelated to its original permit.”

“Instead of helping to meet the current electricity needs of the state as originally described, the facility is operating primarily to meet its own significant new energy load,” the agency said in its letter to the company.

The company said it would continue operating under its current permit while it challenged the decision. It said there was “no credible legal ba-

sis” for the denial.

“It is absurd for anyone to look at these facts and rationally claim that renewing this specific permit—for a facility that makes up a small fraction of the state's electricity generation capacity—would impede New York's long term climate goals. It simply would not,” the company said.

Climate activists who see Greenidge as a test case had asked Gov. Kathy Hochul's administration to deny renewal of the plant's air quality permit and to block similar projects.

The decision comes as Hochul is deciding whether to sign into law a two-year moratorium on new and renewed air permits for fossil fuel power plants used for proof-of-work mining.

Greenidge is not affected by the first-of-its-kind moratorium measure, which covers new applications.

New NHTSA Chief: Agency Will Scrutinize Auto-Driver Technology

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The new head of the government's road safety agency says it will intensify efforts to understand the risks posed by automated vehicle technology so it can decide what regulations may be necessary to protect drivers, passengers and pedestrians.

In an interview Wednesday, Steven Cliff, who was confirmed last month as head of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said the agency is assessing crash data recently reported by automakers and tech companies.

Any new regulations NHTSA may impose would fill what critics say is an urgent need to address the growing use of driver-assistance systems on U.S. roads. The systems have been linked to crashes involving deaths and serious injuries, though they also have enormous potential to prevent crashes. There are no

federal regulations that directly cover either self-driving vehicles or those with partially automated driver-assist systems such as Tesla's Autopilot.

Before developing any new federal standards, Cliff said, NHTSA wants to better understand how the new technology should perform.

Cliff spoke Wednesday to The Associated Press in his first on-the-record interview since being confirmed by the Senate.

He said that when he first joined the agency in February 2021, he was surprised to discover that NHTSA had no data on automated vehicle crashes. As a result, Cliff said, he challenged the agency to require such reporting. Last month, NHTSA released data from July 2021 to May, concluding that automated vehicles were involved in nearly 400 crashes.

Cliff cautioned that while he believes federal standards are needed to regulate driver-assisted technology, he wants to

avoid rushing to embrace new rules that might potentially end up compromising safety.

“Any time we put a regulation on the books, we have to define not only what standard that technology needs to be held to, but we need to have an objective way to measure the performance of the system to ensure that it actually complies with the regulation,” he said from his office at the Department of Transportation's headquarters in Washington.

The agency, Cliff said, is also working on performance standards for automatic emergency braking, which it plans to require on all new passenger vehicles and heavy trucks. The braking systems, which can detect and stop for pedestrians, other vehicles and obstacles, show great potential to help stem rising traffic deaths in the U.S., he said.

NHTSA, he said, will set metrics for how the braking systems detect objects to ensure that the systems respond appropriately. “That's part of any of the stan-

dards that we put in place,” he said.

Cliff declined to discuss any details of regulations that might be forthcoming.

“It's important for us to take the data that comes from those incidents, better understand it in an engineering context,” he said. “I think it's important to move quickly but not so fast that we're getting it wrong.”

Of the nearly 400 crashes that were reported by manufacturers, Teslas were involved in more than all other automakers combined. But Cliff noted that Tesla has driver-assist technology operating on nearly all of its roughly 830,000 vehicles on U.S. roads, which makes neat comparisons to other automakers difficult. The company also provides nearly instantaneous wireless reporting of crashes, so it receives data faster than other automakers.

Since Cliff's arrival, the agency has stepped up enforcement efforts aimed at Tesla, including a push for a dozen recalls since the start of 2021. The agency is investigating why Teslas working on Autopilot seem to crash into emergency vehicles parked along freeways. And it has received more than 750 consumer complaints involving Teslas braking unexpectedly for no apparent reason.

At the same time, Cliff added, Tesla has been cooperative with NHTSA since his arrival at the agency.

“I think we work well with them,” he said, “and when we have identified that there are risks, they've taken action, and that's appropriate.”

Cliff, 52, whose background is in chemistry and air pollution regulation with little auto safety experience, takes over the agency at a critical time. NHTSA has estimated that nearly 43,000 people were killed on U.S. roads last year, the highest such figure in 16 years.

Safety advocates say NHTSA has become more aggressive in regulating automakers since Cliff's arrival from the California Air Resources Board, the

state's pollution regulator. Cliff, who first joined the California board in 2008 as an air pollution specialist, rose to become its deputy executive officer. Years earlier, he received a bachelor's degree and doctorate in chemistry from the University of California, San Diego.

He concedes that he has had to become a quick study on auto safety. But he said that assessing the science and the data is similar to the work he did in California.

In December, Cliff told the Senate Commerce Committee that he would work to adopt regulations such as those urging seat belt use, and would implement mandates under the new federal infrastructure law to re-

duce drunken driving.

He said he believes that automatic emergency braking in new vehicles should help reduce fatalities and that the agency will take a “safe systems approach” to stem the deaths. Those approaches could include roadway design and reductions in speed limits.

In addition, he said, NHTSA is trying to understand why Black Americans die in crashes at a greater rate than other groups.

“In some cases,” Cliff said, “a lot of that has to do with infrastructure, but also the vehicles themselves. So improving the new vehicle fleet is part of the solution, but it's also important that we educate drivers.”

Classifieds



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SELF-DRIVING TECH HAS LED TO NEARLY 400 CRASHES SINCE BEING INTRODUCED

Opinion



Good Guys With Guns?

By Robert C. Koehler

PeaceVoice

Ready, aim, fire:
“I believe in Jesus, guns and babies.”
So declares Kandiss Taylor, GOP candidate for governor of Georgia, in a campaign ad.

Or how about: “I’m Eric Greitens, Navy SEAL, and today, we’re going RINO-hunting.” This is not about killing rhinoceroses. “RINO” stands for Republican in Name Only—you know, anti-Trumpers. Greitens, former governor of Missouri, who resigned in the wake of a sexual abuse allegation, is now running for the Senate—running fully armed and dangerous as hell, at least according to his little TV ad, which features him and a bunch of guys dressed up in camouflage outfits, fully armed, kicking someone’s door open, tossing in a smoke bomb.

Ta da! Greitens walks into the empty house with his rifle and tells the viewer: “Join the MAGA crew, get a RINO hunting permit. There’s no bagging limit, no tagging limit, and it doesn’t expire until we save our country.”

And then of course we have a frowning Marjorie Taylor Greene, looking like James Bond, clutching an assault rifle in an ad for her congressional run. Next to armed Marjorie is a picture of Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib: “hate America leftists want to take this country down.” Marjorie will save us! What could be simpler?

“We need strong conservative Christians to go on the offense against these socialists who want to rip our country apart,” Greene’s ad informs us. She looks ready to take her gun into a shopping mall or maybe an elementary school.

Last month the *New York Times* ran a story headlined “In More Than 100 GOP Midterm Ads This Year: Guns, Guns, Guns.” Snarky men and women toss slogans at us, sometimes, a la Kandiss Taylor, mixing homicide (excuse me, self-defense) with religion and/or cuddly newborns. Josh Mandel, in the GOP Senate primary in Ohio, declared himself: “Pro-God, pro-gun, pro-Trump.” In the Arkansas Senate primary, Jake Bequette reached out to his would-be constituents with: “Babies, borders, bullets.”

Bang!
This is the Second Amendment in full-on action: Republicans running for office gleefully pretending to defend the country from 1/4 whomever. Only a good guy with a gun can stop a politician with a big mouth. A literal civil war is fomenting, or so it seems, and Jan. 6 was just a practice run.

How did the Republican Party get so unhinged? Easy as it is to blame Donald Trump, I blame something far more deeply entrenched. Call it armed patriotism. We wage war on anything and everything: America is the shining light of global belligerence and animosity, with our trillion-dollar annual, and ever-expanding, military budget.

As Norman Solomon points out:

“The mindset of U.S. mass media and mainstream politics has become so militarized that such realities are routinely not accorded a second thought, or any thought at all. Meanwhile, the Pentagon budget keeps ballooning year after year...”

“To heighten the routine deception, we’ve been drilled into calling the nation’s military budget a ‘defense’ budget.”

The Trump-era Republicans are, you might say, the first mainstream political party to break through the bipartisan political correctness that has hardened over the last half century or so, fusing a toned-down version of the ‘60s (civil rights and women’s rights and, oh my God, gay rights) with ongoing, unquestioned militarism. The Trumpers, of course, are fine with the militarism. Their guns are aimed at the progressive agenda still hovering in the political margins, as well as at the non-Trump Republicans.

From the point of view of the American tradition of racism, the new GOP seems to have claimed the best of both worlds. White nationalism hasn’t simply rearmed, it has reclaimed a mainstream respectability, giving Republican candidates the opportunity to pull Hollywood energy into their campaign ads. Eric Greitens’ RINO-hunting ad, for instance, had over a million views within three hours of being posted on Twitter. Yeah, there was plenty of negative response, but so what? In the simplistic world of us vs. them, there’s no such thing as bad publicity. Guns sell a political candidate as readily as they sell a movie plot.

Is a pro-gun-control ad, replete with bipartisan compromises, going to corral a million views of Twitter?

But then there’s Rep. Lucy McBath of Georgia, a proponent of gun sanity, whose 17-year-old son was murdered (by a man with a gun) in 2012. She talks about learning the news of your child’s death:

“When the agony will not let you breathe... You cry out to God in your grief...”

“This is the moment. It may be the only moment we have. We are facing the challenge of our lifetime. And this is the issue of our era and we must summon the courage to do what is right, the courage to protect our kids. And the courage—my God, we have to have the courage—to protect America.”

I hope to see McBath’s words spread beyond gun control to militarism itself: to the \$8 trillion spent, to the near-million people killed directly and to the unknown, far larger number of people killed indirectly—by disease, starvation, displacement—by this country’s last 20 years of war.

My God, we have to have the courage... to protect every child on this planet.



Dear Mainstream Media: Please Retire The Word “Conservative”

By Michael Dover

Swing Left Western Massachusetts

Leave politics aside for a moment, if you can. What does the word “conservative” mean to you, outside of that cursed arena? To me, it connotes respecting tradition, caution when it comes to change, and hewing to the tried and true. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as “tending or disposed to maintain existing views, conditions, or institutions; marked by moderation or caution; and marked by or relating to traditional norms of taste, elegance, style, or manners.”

Returning to the political realm, does any of that apply to so-called conservatives today?

When Mitch McConnell refused even to hold hearings on Merrick Garland’s nomination to the Supreme Court on the specious grounds that it couldn’t be considered in a presidential election year, what manner of existing views, conditions or institutions was he maintaining?

And when he upended that supposed rule to rush Amy Coney Barrett through the confirmation process just weeks before the 2020 elections (when early voting was already underway), how did that show moderation or caution?

When candidate Donald Trump mocked a disabled journalist and trashed the parents of an American soldier killed in action, what traditional norms of taste or manners was he upholding?

Once in office, when he lied again and again about almost anything, what principle of honest government was he serving?

And when he knowingly and repeatedly lied that the 2020 election was stolen, and plotted to overthrow the results, how does that in any way conform to any reasonable concept of conservatism?

Fox TV’s Tucker Carlson is often described as a “conservative commentator.” How so? In what way does he respect tradition, caution or moderation?

When he praises—“idolizes” is probably a better word—Hungarian autocratic prime minister Viktor Orbán, what part of his tenure does he most appreciate: curtailing press freedom, moving to restrict or eliminate LGBTQ rights, or embracing “Christian democracy”?

As if following Carlson’s playbook, the annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) was held in Budapest this year. Speakers included Trump and Mark Meadows, his former chief of staff. Another speaker was described in *The Guardian* newspaper as a “notorious Hungarian racist who has called Jews ‘stinking excrement,’ referred to Roma as ‘animals’ and used racial epithets to describe Black people.” This is “conservative”?

And what is conservative about the members of Congress who have tried to portray the January 6 mob as a bunch of “tourists” quietly visiting the Capitol, or those at the podium that day urging the crowd to “fight like hell,” or Senate Republicans refusing to approve an investigation into that day’s deadly violence?

Words matter. Calling McConnell or Carlson or a January 6 rioter conservative is to normalize their behavior. “Conservative” is such a comforting word; it connotes thoughtful consideration, reasoned debate, consideration of others’ viewpoints. It suggests adherence to the law, not gaming the system or trying to overturn an election based on lies. It allows the reader or hearer to relax: These are not crazy people, they’re just conservatives and patriots.

When McConnell said when he took over as Senate majority leader that his first job was to ensure that President Obama was a one-term president, that was not a conservative statement. It was an extremist saying he had no interest in governing despite the fact that he was leading a government institution. When Missouri Senator Josh Hawley raised a fist in salute to the January 6 insurrectionists, that was not a conservative act. It was a direct violation of his oath of office.

There are other words the mainstream media can use for these people. My favorite happens to be “extremist.” It’s short and businesslike. It doesn’t need any explanation; it nicely stands on its own. It could be modified, if desired, as in “right-wing extremist” or “anti-democracy extremist,” though that’s probably not necessary.

Some members of this crowd can of course be further identified as White supremacists, neo-Nazis, racists and other such categories. I hope the wordsmiths in the media can and will find many other terms that both clarify and elaborate on “extremist” or “extremism.”

What’s essential is to give the extremists no quarter, no place to hide behind comforting, compromising, euphemistic—and deceptive—words like “conservative.”

Michael Dover is a co-founder of Swing Left Western Massachusetts.



Is Male Birth Control Finally At Hand?

By Rob Okun

Voice Male Magazine

With the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade threatening to severely curtail women’s reproductive rights, it might seem an odd moment to report good news about male birth control. Nevertheless, researchers recently announced that male birth control trials with mice were wildly successful—99 percent effective at preventing pregnancy.

The new pill, created by a team at the University of Minnesota, blocks proteins from binding to vitamin A, which is crucial to fertility and virility in mammals. In addition to the drug being virtually able to block all pregnancies, the researchers said the pill has no apparent side effects. The findings were shared in March at the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society.

“Most contraceptives are designed for people with uteruses, leaving few pregnancy prevention options for those with testes,” noted Corryn Wetzel, a freelance science journalist, writing in *The Smithsonian*.

The sexism behind birth control is blatant. Why do women bear most of the burden of preventing pregnancy? Researchers have traditionally paid much more attention to birth control for women than men, male birth control researchers acknowledge—from pills to patches to intrauterine devices. Seeing men expand birth control options—including taking more responsibility—is essential, especially now.

When male mice were given the drug orally for just four weeks, researchers found they had such a steep drop in sperm count that they became sterile. Yet, when the team stopped dosing the animals, the drug’s effects reversed: the mice bounced back to normal virility in four to six weeks.

Depending on the result of human trials, the drug could soon be the first effective form of birth control for those with testes apart from condoms or vasectomies. Why has it taken so long?

“Scientists have been trying for decades to develop an effective

male oral contraceptive, but there are still no approved pills on the market,” said Md Abdullah al Noman, a chemist at the University of Minnesota’s Institute for Therapeutics Discovery and Development, who worked closely on developing the drug.

Because this contraceptive is nonhormonal, it’s likely to have fewer side effects, researchers say. Earlier attempts at male birth control pills largely worked by blocking testosterone, which can lead to depression, weight gain, and decreased libido. Even when scientists super-dosed the mice with the new drug, the rodents seemed to do just fine, Noman noted.

“When we went to even 100 times higher dose than the effective dose, the compound didn’t show any toxicity,” Noman told Alex Wilkins in *New Scientist*. Researchers emphasize that the drug’s success in rodents doesn’t guarantee the same result in humans, which is why scientists—and activists promoting reproductive rights—will be closely watching human clinical trials.

“Most female contraceptives target sex hormones such as estrogen and progesterone,” Noman explained. “Efforts have been made to develop male birth control pills by targeting the male sex hormone testosterone.”

As noted, the side effects of weight gain, depression, and increased levels of LDL, made testosterone not a good choice. “Since men do not have to suffer the consequences of pregnancy, the threshold for side effects from birth control pills is rather low. This is a big barrier to developing a male contraceptive. That’s why we are trying to develop nonhormonal birth control pills to avoid hormonal side effects,” Noman said.

Prof. Richard Anderson, Ph.D., a professor of clinical reproductive science who was not involved in the research, told *Medical News Today*, “The hormonal approach to male contraception continues to be developed, but men make millions of sperm every moment, and that needs to be completely stopped. Anderson, deputy director of Scotland’s Center for Reproductive Health at the University of Edinburgh, added that while there have been “some very promising approaches to a nonhormonal method... often these haven’t worked or had safety issues when the studies have moved from the lab/animal models to humans.”

Medical professionals are hopeful that the recent breakthroughs in male birth control will allow people of all genders to take control of their reproductive health. Meanwhile, another male contraceptive, a gel rubbed on the shoulder daily, is currently in clinical trials.

“Our track record as a gender for assuming birth control responsibility is not stellar,” Jesse Mills, director of the Men’s Clinic at UCLA, told *Healthline*, in a colossal understatement. “Women overwhelmingly outnumber men for going through surgical sterilization procedures even though a female tubal ligation is far more invasive than a vasectomy,” said Mills. “I am eager to see what the human trials show.”

Rob Okun writes about politics and culture. He is editor-publisher of Voice Male magazine.



Vow Of Silence (But Not Quite Yet)

By Tom H. Hastings

Portland State University

Dear Fellow Men,

Time to let women speak their minds about the Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade. Men have spoken, made rules, passed laws, literally pontificated, and generally exercised dominator control over women far far too long.

Do you want women telling you what you must eat, drink, smoke, or what sorts of healthcare procedures you can and cannot have?

Yeah, didn’t think so.

It is women and women only who bear the burden, the pain, and sometimes the existential threat of pregnancy. It is women and women only who should make these decisions about their own bodies, for goshsakes.

This is not an occasion for me or any other man to tell the rest of us whether abortion should be legal or not. Men should have the grace to refrain from voicing those opinions.

Do I think abortion is a Good Thing? This is not my place to say, and if any man is doing so right now, that man is hurting traumatized women. Grow up, dude. Learn to stop feeling like everyone needs your opinion on everything at all times.

“All mortal sins must be illegal,” I hear some of you say.

Who decides what are mortal sins?

Catholics, apparently, and their examples of mortal sins include things like taking advantage of the poor and powerless, in which case Donald Trump is well and truly damned. No other religion declares the concept of mortal sin and Catholics refer to the concept as a sin that results in death of the soul, possibly presaging an afterlife in hell.

Of course, this is by far the most Catholic of any U.S. Supreme Court—John Roberts, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh, Neil Gorsuch, Amy Coney Barrett, and Sonia Sotomayor, and the only Catholic voting against overturning Roe, of course, was Sotomayor, who doesn’t let her religion govern her votes.

Arguably the most radical Catholic on the SCOTUS is Clarence Thomas, who seems to be arguing for more “mortal sins” to be stripped of any legal protections. For instance, LGBTQ rights, pursuant to the biblical sin of impurity against nature—sodomy and homosexual relations (Genesis 18:20).

Indeed, the Old Testament is a brutal, sexist, genocidal, retributive screed. Even if Jesus putatively said he came to bring a new way, enough Catholics stick to the Old Testament to show us a Supreme Court poised to further devolve and unravel basic human and civil rights.

There are three women on the court—soon to be four after the swearing in of Ketanji Brown Jackson this summer. If the Justices were actually just, the men would have recused themselves from an opinion and let the women decide. Barrett would be in the minority, and if she had a sincere commitment to respect the separation of church and state she would obviously choose to recuse.

As we drift toward a dystopian Handmaid’s Tale society run by men or internally oppressed anti-feminist women like Barrett, Lauren Boebert, or Marjorie Taylor Greene, men will do their children, grandchildren, and all their descendants a good turn by working to elevate more feminist women to leadership and decider positions.

Women won’t wait, however, and women-led people power movements will meet the male anti-feminist dominators with creative, nonviolent workarounds and are doing so already. I now silence myself in deference to what women have to say in this moment of official backsliding from freedom to oppression, but also in a moment of determined practical alternatives.

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