

Mistrust Lingers In Black Communities



TRYING A NEW WAY—Sitaniel Wimbley poses for a photo at her office, the headquarters for NAMI Mississippi in Ridgeland, Miss., on July 11, 2022. As director of the Mississippi chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Wimbley is working to strengthen connections between mental health programs and people skeptical of their services. The work takes on a renewed urgency after the federal government launched the United States' first nationwide three-digit mental health crisis hotline on July 16. [AP Photo/Michael Goldberg]

By Michael Goldberg

Associated Press/Report for America

JACKSON, Miss. (AP)—On a few occasions, Sitaniel Wimbley's mother grew manic in her front yard. When neighbors were met with screaming and cursing on their street in Natchez, Miss., they would dial 911.

An officer would arrive to collect Wimbley's mother, who battled chronic bipolar schizophrenia. Her first stop was jail. Then she would be brought to a place she still can't bring herself to drive near decades later: the Mississippi State Hospital in Whitfield. Once there, she would be detained with what she said was little explanation. No one told her how long she would be held for treatment; they just told her she couldn't leave.

Stories like these reverberate through generations, stoking mistrust of the mental health system, especially within Black communities.

As director of the Mississippi chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Wimbley, who is Black, is on the front lines of a local effort with national implications. She is working to strengthen connections between mental health programs and people skeptical of their services. The work takes on a renewed urgency after the federal government launched the United States' first nationwide three-digit mental health crisis hotline on July 16.

The 988 system builds on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, an existing network of over 200 crisis centers staffed by counselors who answer millions of calls annually—about 2.4 million in 2020. The line is designed to work like 911, but will connect callers with trained mental health counselors instead of police, firefighters or paramedics.

The federal government has provided over \$280 million for states to build up their systems.

Federal officials are grappling with how local teams staffing the national 988 lines will contend with suspicion of the medical establishment.

"This is a critical question," said John Palmieri, a senior

medical advisor at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration official. "The suicide rate trends are alarming for Black youth. SAMHSA is committed to working with trusted partners in the Black community to address inequity in access

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



DEPUTY SHOT IN LEG IN N. CAROLINA IN STRUGGLE WITH SUSPECT

ROSEBORO (AP)—Police say a sheriff's deputy in North Carolina was shot in a struggle with a car-theft suspect.

The Sampson County Sheriff's Office tells newsoutlets that the deputy was shot in the leg with her own service weapon during the struggle and is expected to recover.

The sheriff's office said the deputy, Caitlin Emanuel, responded to a vehicle theft outside Roseboro around 2 a.m. Saturday.

She called for backup, and another deputy who responded saw that she had been shot in the leg.

Sampson County Sheriff Jimmy Thornton said the suspect put Emanuel in a stronghold when she approached him after spotting the stolen vehicle.

Police arrested a 36-year-old Pennsylvania man within three hours of the shooting. The sheriff's office did not specify the charges against him.

Emanuel was flown to a hospital for surgery and described in stable condition. She has been with the sheriff's office for more than 2 years.

SUPREME COURT MOVE ALLOWS JACKSON TO TAKE PART IN RACE CASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The Supreme Court on Friday took a step that will allow new Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first Black woman on the court, to take part in a case that could lead to the end of the use of race in college admissions.

Jackson, who joined the court June 30 following the retirement of Justice Stephen Breyer, had pledged during her confirmation hearing to sit out the case involving Harvard's admissions policy because she was a member of the school's board.

The Harvard dispute had been joined to a similar lawsuit involving the University of North Carolina. The court split the case in two, allowing Jackson to hear arguments and vote in the North Carolina case. Harvard is a private institution, while North Carolina is a public university.

Jackson's participation seems unlikely to make much difference in the outcome on a court with a 6-3 conservative majority that is skeptical of the role of race in education, voting and other areas.

Arguments over one of the new term's most highly anticipated issues probably will take place in November or December, but no date has been announced yet.

Jackson was a member of Harvard's Board of Overseers from 2016 until the spring. It is made up of alumni and is one of Harvard's two governing bodies. She is a graduate both of Harvard College and Harvard Law School.

Three other justices also got their law degrees from Harvard: Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Elena Kagan and Neil Gorsuch. Roberts also was a Harvard undergraduate and Kagan was the law school dean for a time.

But none of the other justices has any current or recent role with the university.

Federal law requires all judges to recuse from cases in which their "impartiality might reasonably be questioned," including close ties to a party, a financial interest in the outcome or participation in an earlier stage of the case.

The court has taken similar steps before. In 2020, Justice Sonia Sotomayor discovered a conflict in a dispute from two states over presidential electors. The court abandoned plans to hear them together and eventually issued its major decision in the case in which all the justices participated.

NC LEGISLATURE WON'T HOLD VOTES AT RALEIGH RETURN

(AP)—The North Carolina General Assembly won't work this week when it's scheduled to reconvene, legislative officials said Friday, setting aside for now any attempts to override new vetoes by Gov. Roy Cooper.

The House and Senate plan floor meetings for Tuesday—part of a series of brief work periods lined up every month through December. Republican legislative leaders agreed to that schedule when their chief work session for the year ended July 1.

The consideration of override votes on Cooper's vetoes is among the list of potential matters they can consider during these short intervals in Raleigh. Cooper vetoed four bills last week.

But the House won't hold recorded votes this week, the chief of staff for Speaker Tim Moore told state representatives in a Friday email. And the Senate doesn't anticipate similar votes, according to a spokesperson for Senate leader Phil Berger.

That means floor meetings Tuesday and before the legislature's departure Thursday will be administrative, with very few lawmakers in attendance. Another three-day session is scheduled for Aug. 23.

None of Cooper's vetoes have been overridden since early 2019, after fellow Democrats won back enough General Assembly seats so Republican majorities were no longer veto-proof.

The four bills that Cooper vetoed last week include one that would demand sheriffs learn the immigration status of their jails' inmates and make an effort to hold them for federal agents. Cooper vetoed a similar measure in 2019.

The quick meetings in Raleigh this week also signal that no agreement has been reached on legislation that would expand Medicaid in the state to hundreds of thousands of low-income adults through the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

The House and Senate passed competing Medicaid measures in June but didn't work out a compromise. Despite hopes from some like Cooper for a quick agreement, negotiations have receded since lawmakers adjourned three weeks ago, following passage of a state budget.

N.C. AG WON'T SEEK TO RENEW 20-WEEK ABORTION BAN

(See **REV. SPEARMAN**, P. 2)

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

Emmett Till House Gets Funds

By Don Babwin

Associated Press

CHICAGO, Ill. (AP)—Emmett Till left his mother's house on Chicago's South Side in 1955 to visit relatives in Mississippi, where the Black teenager was abducted and brutally slain for reportedly whistling at a White woman.

A cultural preservation organization announced Tuesday that the house will receive a share of \$3 million in grants being distributed to 33 sites and organizations

nationwide that are important pieces of African-American history.

Some of the grant money from the African-American Cultural Heritage Action Fund will go to rehabilitate buildings, such as a bank in Mississippi founded by businessman Charles Banks, who won praise from Booker T. Washington; the first Black masonic lodge in North Carolina; and a school in rural Florida for the children of Black farm workers and laborers.

The money will also help re-

store the Virginia home where tennis coach Dr. Robert Walter "Whirlwind" Johnson helped turn Black athletes such as Arthur Ashe and Althea Gibson into champions, rehabilitate the Blue Bird Inn in Detroit that is considered the birthplace of bebop jazz, and protect and preserve African-American cemeteries in Pennsylvania and a tiny island off the coast of South Carolina.

Brent Leggs, executive director of the organization that is

(See **TILL HOUSE**, P. 2)

Detroit Cash Bail Reforms Target Inequality

By Aaron Morrison

Associated Press

Michigan's largest district court and bail reform advocates agreed Tuesday to settle a federal class-action lawsuit over cash bail practices, which activists say routinely and unconstitutionally jail poor and working class defendants despite evidence of their inability to pay.

Both sides say the reforms

strike at racial inequality in the criminal legal system. On any given day in Wayne County, which includes Detroit, the nation's Blackest city, nearly three-quarters of those jailed are Black, a proportion much higher than their share of the population.

The agreement requires the court to reform bail practices, including limiting its ability to impose unaffordable bail on defendants. Advocates say it

could be a model for court systems nationwide, where race and wealth are significant factors in the administration of justice.

Detroit's 36th District Court, the American Civil Liberties Union and The Bail Project, a nonprofit that pays bail for people in need, said the status quo wrecks unnecessary havoc on defendants' jobs, homes and families.

"This is a historic agreement

that we believe can and should be a template for how courts around the country can adapt their bail practices to what is lawful, constitutional and sensible," said Phil Mayor, senior staff attorney for the Michigan ACLU.

Chief Judge William McCornico of the 36th District Court said settling the class-action lawsuit, filed in 2019 just be-

(See **CASH BAIL**, P. 2)

Rev. Spearman Found Dead At Home

The Rev. T. Anthony Spearman, a civil rights advocate and former president of the North Carolina branch of the NAACP who also served as president of the N.C. Council of Churches, has been found dead, authorities said Wednesday.

Spearman, 71, was found in his home on Tuesday, the Guilford County Sheriff's Office said in a news release. The release

indicated that either family or friends found him, but did not provide any further details.

The death was confirmed earlier in the day by Mark Cummings, a Greensboro attorney who said he was representing Spearman. Cummings declined to provide additional details about the death and did not say what he was representing Spearman for.

"In the mold of Dr. King, he truly was a drum major for justice," Cummings said. "He saw the good in everybody in every situation, even those of his detractors, even those who would criticize him. He always found a way to see the best in them."

Cummings said he would call on state officials to assist local law enforcement in an investigation.

Spearman's family issued a statement calling him "a man of strong conviction who loved his family with every ounce of his being." A family member didn't respond on Wednesday to a request for additional comment.

Spearman was elected as North Carolina NAACP president in 2017 and served one four-year term.

Bishop William J. Barber, who preceded Spearman as the North Carolina NAACP president and who is now president of the national, not-for-profit organization Repairers of the Breach, said in a statement, "I have lost a true brother in the struggle."

"We have lost a scholar, a preacher, a voting rights defender, an advocate for prison reform and for the wrongfully accused and a stalwart soldier in the cause of love and justice for all humankind," Barber said. "This great man's efforts and commitment should be cherished."

Spearman was suspended from the NAACP by the organization's national leadership about five months ago, it was reported, quoting NAACP President and CEO Derrick Johnson as saying that Spearman repeatedly refused to turn over N.C. NAACP property—which included meeting minutes and financial records—after he lost his bid for reelection in 2021.

Spearman filed a lawsuit in June against several state and



FORMER N.C. NAACP PRESIDENT REV. T. ANTHONY SPEARMAN WAS FOUND DEAD AT HIS HOME LAST TUESDAY

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

(AP)—North Carolina's Democratic attorney general declined Thursday to meet Republican legislative leaders' demand that he ask a federal court to lift an injunction on a state law banning nearly all abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

The Republican leaders had asked Attorney General Josh Stein, the state's top lawyer, to return to court to reinstate the restriction—which has been unenforceable since 2019—after the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision overturning nationwide abortion protections removed the legal underpinning for the injunction.

"The Department of Justice will not take action that would restrict women's ability to make their own reproductive health care decisions," Stein said. "Protecting that ability is more important than ever, as states across the nation are banning abortions in all instances, including rape and incest."

A 2019 federal court ruling, affirmed last year by the 4th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, barred the execution of the 20-week ban based on precedents set in *Roe v. Wade* and an associated 1992 ruling, both struck down June 24. The ruling extended the right to an abortion in North Carolina until fetal viability, which typically falls between 24 and 28 weeks of pregnancy.

Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore, on the day of the Supreme Court ruling, warned Stein that his inaction would lead them to take legal action of their own to reinstate the ban, which was part of a 1973 state law.

"No one should be surprised that Josh Stein is in the abortion-on-demand camp," Berger said Thursday. "However, he swore an oath to uphold and enforce North Carolina law, and this is the latest example of his refusal to do his job."

Though Republicans hold majorities in both chambers of the General Assembly, lawmakers did not pass any additional abortion restrictions during the legislative session that ended July 1. Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper is a strong abortion-rights supporter whom Moore said would likely veto abortion legislation, but his veto power could soon be nullified if Republicans win a few additional seats in November.

UK, NORTH CAROLINA SIGN MEMO BOOSTING ENVIRONMENT, TRADE

(AP)—North Carolina and the United Kingdom have entered into an agreement designed to build cooperation on goals to reduce carbon emissions and to expand economic ties.

State Commerce Secretary Mabelle Sanders met last Wednesday in London with Trade Minister Penny Mordaunt for a signing ceremony of the memorandum of understanding, according to Gov. Roy Cooper's office.

"We will deepen economic and cultural ties with the United Kingdom to create new opportunities for trade and economic development as we transition to a clean energy economy," Cooper said in a news release.

The agreement states North Carolina and Britain are cooperating to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions no later than 2050 by working to speed the implementation of clean energy technology. They also want to increase economic opportunities, particularly in underinvested areas and for businesses owned by women and minorities. Environmental justice also is addressed.

The two governments may initiate partnerships among private-sector companies and universities, exchange best-practice information and participate in formal trips.

Mordaunt was quoted in Cooper's release as saying the memorandum is part of Britain's effort to remove trade barriers with individual states. Similar agreements with Oklahoma and South Carolina are expected in the coming months, Mordaunt said.

FORMER NC COMMUNITY COLLEGE INTERIM PRESIDENT RETURNS TO JOB

(AP)—A former interim head of North Carolina's community college system will return to the position while its governing board seeks a permanent replacement for President Thomas Stith III, who abruptly resigned last week.

The State Board of Community Colleges voted on Wednesday to appoint Bill Carver as interim president, a position he held in late 2020 while the board decided to choose Stith to succeed Peter Hans.

The board announced Tuesday that it had accepted Stith's resignation, effective Friday, after barely 18 months on the job. His departure came days after the board met privately in part to consider Stith's performance. Board members also have been concerned about high personnel turnover at the system office in Raleigh.

Carver was president of Nash Community College from 2005 to 2019 and served previously in several other roles at the school.

The board plans to form a search committee for a new permanent president, which would mark the fifth for the system since 2015.

NC MAN GETS 12 YEARS FOR SELLING GUNS WITHOUT LICENSE

CHARLOTTE (AP)—A convicted felon from North Carolina was sentenced Wednesday to more than 12 years in prison for selling firearms without a license and illegal gun possession, according to a federal prosecutor.

U.S. Attorney Dena King said in a news release that Anthony Daye, 38, of Statesville was also ordered to serve three years of supervised release.

Court documents and evidence at the sentencing hearing showed that between October 2020 and February 2021, Daye sold illegally in and around Statesville more than 20 firearms and ammunition, including rifles, handguns, "ghost guns," and semiautomatic firearms capable of accepting a large capacity magazine.

Daye also aided and abetted in the sale of additional illegal firearms, and court records showed that some of the firearms he sold had been reported stolen.

Last November, Daye pleaded guilty to dealing in firearms without a license and aiding and abetting and being a convicted felon in possession of firearms. He is currently in federal custody and will be transferred once a facility is designated, the news release said.

Mistrust Lingers In Black...—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to mental health care services."

The specter of what has sometimes happened when authorities intervene—people trapped in overlapping systems rife with mistreatment—complicates efforts to provide care.

"These are the stories that have been passed down," Wimbley said. "That's what hinders us."

The U.S. Justice Department sued Mississippi in 2016, arguing the state had done too little to provide mental health services outside mental hospitals. During a 2019 trial, federal attorneys said mentally ill people were being improperly detained because crisis teams did not respond to incidents. The attorneys said people had also been forced to live far from their families because mental health services were unavailable in their hometowns. A U.S. district court judge ruled Mississippi violated the Americans with Disabilities Act. In 2021, the Justice Department ordered Mississippi to revamp its mental health system.

Improper detentions and other issues contribute to what some experts say is an underutilization of mental health services within communities of color. Only one in three African-Americans who need mental health care receives

it, according to the American Psychiatric Association.

"It's not because people don't want to use mental health services," said Sirry Alang, a professor of sociology and health at Lehigh University. "It is because they're using mental health services in the context of incarceration and police brutality."

As jails outnumber hospitals that offer psychiatric drop-off sites, they have become the largest mental health institutions in some states.

Congress designated 988 as the universal number for the mental health crisis hotline system in 2020 after nationwide protests against cases of police brutality. Organizations such as Mental Health America endorsed 988 as a tool to limit "the number of people who are needlessly involved in the criminal justice system because of a mental health crisis."

The Department of Health and Human Services is urging partners in each community to communicate the distinction between 911 and 988. To break through with such messages, Alang said local crisis response teams also must understand the social fabric of the communities they serve.

"As we think about the national crisis line and rebuilding trust,

it's very important to understand that people don't use the mental health system as individuals," Alang said. "They use them as people in communities and networks."

A new strategy is informed by the idea that family and community networks can drive people toward mental health treatment as quickly as they can drive people away. Proponents say people can be guided to mental health treatment through local institutions they already trust.

As with Wimbley, mental health was also a touchy subject for Joyce Coleman and her mother. Coleman grew up with seven siblings in rural Mississippi. Mental illness afflicted some family members, but treatment was never discussed.

"There was this idea that you don't need treatment, that you just needed to get yourself together, or you needed to pray more," Coleman recalled.

The idea that prayer alone can treat mental illness is one Coleman, a care coordinator at HealthPartners, a Minneapolis health care provider and insurance company, works to dispel. But ministry work has offered her a venue to begin spreading the gospel of mental health care's life-saving possibilities.

"If you want something to spread, church is where it starts," Coleman said. "The fact that I'm connected with a health care organization makes it even better."

Wimbley has taken a similar approach. In June, she spoke at a mental health training event hosted by Jackson State University's Mississippi Urban Research Center for local faith leaders. Pastor Aurelius Williams of New Horizon Church spoke alongside Wimbley at the event.

Williams, a combat veteran who had PTSD, tries to guide congregants toward therapy when he determines they might need it.

"People are normally going to go to their pastor when they are having issues," Williams said. "So pastors can talk in layman's terms and explain to the individual seeking help that it's all right. That it is not a weakness."

Michael Goldberg 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 undercovered issues. Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/mikergoldberg.

Emmett Till House Gets Funds—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in its fifth year of awarding the grants, said the effort is intended to fill "some gaps in the nation's understanding of the civil rights movement."

Till's brutal slaying helped galvanize the civil rights movement. The Chicago home where Mamie Till Mobley and her son lived will receive funding for a project director to oversee restoration efforts, including renovating the second floor to what it looked like when the Tills lived there.

"This house is a sacred treasure from our perspective and our goal is to restore it and reinvent it as an international heritage pilgrimage destination," said Naomi Davis, executive director of Blacks in Green, a local nonprofit group that bought the house in 2020. She said the plan

is to time the 2025 opening with that of the Obama Presidential Library a few miles away.

Leggs said it is particularly important to do something that shines a light on Mamie Till Mobley. After her 14-year-old son's lynching, Till Mobley insisted that his body be displayed in an open casket as it looked when it was pulled from a river, to show the world what racism looked like.

It was a display that influenced thousands of mourners who filed by the casket and the millions more who saw the photographs in *Jet Magazine*—one of whom was Rosa Parks whose refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus to a White man about three months later remains one of the pivotal acts of defiance

in American history.

"It was a catalytic moment in the civil rights movement and through this we lift and honor Black women in civil rights," Leggs said.

And the news follows a recent revelation about the discovery of an unserved arrest warrant of the woman whose accusation put in motion the chain of events that led to the teen's lynching.

The house and the story of the casket highlight the risks that the remnants of such history can vanish if not protected. As recently as 2019 when it was sold to a developer, the red brick Victorian house built more than a century earlier was falling into disrepair before it was granted landmark status by the city of Chicago. And the glass-topped

casket that held Till's remains was only donated to the Smithsonian Institution because it was discovered in 2009 rusting in a shed at a suburban Chicago cemetery where it was discarded after the teen's body was exhumed years earlier.

That discovery of the casket, which only happened because of a scandal at the cemetery, underscores how easily significant pieces of history can simply vanish, said Annie Wright, whose late husband, Simeon, was sleeping with his cousin, Emmett, the night he was abducted.

"We got to remember what happened and if we don't tell it, if people don't see (the house) they'll forget and we don't want to forget tragedy in these United States," said Wright, 76.

Detroit Cash Bail Reforms—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

fore he became the chief, presented an opportunity to show that law enforcement and activists can work together to change the criminal legal system.

"Other African-American cities will be able to point to what one of the largest district courts in the country is doing to address this issue," said McConico, who is Black. "That's why it is so important that this is starting in a major Black city, that it is not being rolled out in a suburban city or a small court."

The reforms, shared with The Associated Press exclusively ahead of Tuesday's announcement, do not bar judges from imposing cash bail, especially if defendants are deemed a flight risk or a danger to the public. However, all Detroit judges and magistrates must say on the record how imposing bail would protect the community or prevent a failure to appear. Judges must also make an on-the-record determination as to how much a defendant can afford to pay.

The parties also agreed that any defendant who is at 200 percent of the federal poverty level or less is to be assumed unable to post cash bond. According to the 2022 federal guidelines, 200 percent of the poverty level is annual earnings of roughly \$27,000 for an individual and \$55,000 for a family of four.

"This should largely eliminate the practice of imposing what may seem to some like small amounts of cash bail, which effectively serve as a jail sentence for somebody who hasn't yet been convicted of a crime," Mayor said.

The sides also agreed to new rules stipulating when and what triggers a bail redetermination hearing, if a defendant's bail has been set but goes unpaid. The hearing would allow for a bail amount to be reduced or withdrawn altogether if it is later deemed unaffordable.

The reforms in Detroit come as some states and local jurisdictions across the U.S. have either rolled back or are considering rollbacks of bail reforms in response to a pandemic-era increase in crime. From San Francisco to New York City and cities in between, rhetoric around the uptick in violence and nuisance crimes has slowed political momentum despite bipartisan agreement that mass incarceration is expensive and has no proven positive effect on public safety.

"We are still moving forward in a very thoughtful way, to say that the presumption of inno-



STARMAINE JACKSON AND BABY CELEBRATE

cence matters, that mass incarceration of pretrial people needs to be reversed, and that racial disparities at the pretrial stage need to be addressed in a very real way," said Twyla Carter, The Bail Project's outgoing national legal and policy director.

The ACLU, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, The Bail Project and the law firm Covington & Burling LLP sued the chief judge, court magistrates and the Wayne County sheriff in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan in 2019, on behalf of seven Black plaintiffs. The plaintiffs alleged the only reason they remained in jail was because they couldn't afford bail.

At the time of her incarceration in April 2019, one plaintiff, Starmaine Jackson, an impoverished single mother of 2- and 4-year-old children, had her bail set at \$700 over outstanding traffic tickets and a charge alleging domestic violence. Because she could not afford to pay, Jackson, who had never been arrested before, was separated from her children for the first time in their lives.

"I was devastated," said Jackson, 27. "It was nerve wracking, scary and disappointing, because we depend on our justice system to keep us safe and on track."

She said her family couldn't locate her for two days, as jail officials struggled to confirm where she was being held. As a result of her incarceration, Jackson, a certified nurse's assistant, said she lost a new nursing home job when she didn't show up for her first shift and was evicted from her apartment after she used her rent money to help pay her bond. The domestic violence charge was ultimately dropped and Jackson never

served another day in jail.

The settlement makes for a happy ending to what ended up being a nightmare, said Jackson, now a mother of four children.

"I'm ecstatic because I'm able to help people to overcome some of the difficulties in our justice system, which is already jacked up," she said.

As part of the settlement, Jackson and the other plaintiffs will split a payment of \$14,000. Lawyers for the plaintiffs said the amount was agreed to with the knowledge that the court would also spend money to track bail and pretrial detention. The court did not admit wrongdoing as part of the settlement.

According to a 2020 report of the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration, between 2016 and 2018, Black men made up 29 percent of the jail admissions in the counties the task force sampled, even though they were just 6 percent of the resident population in those counties. Between 2018 and 2019 in Wayne County,

REV. SPEARMAN FOUND DEAD

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national NAACP officials, accusing them of defamation and conspiracy to remove him from the presidency. He alleged that his support of a woman who said she was sexually harassed by a member of the state conference led to the effort to have him ousted and made him a target of retribution, the story said.

The man who was accused, the Rev. Curtis Gatewood, has in the past denied any kind of sexual assault or intentional sexual harassment, although he told The Associated Press in a 2019 statement that he didn't "deny the feelings of my accus-

ers."

In a Facebook post on Tuesday, Gatewood added, "I have no other comments regarding the specifics of the matter at the time and believe enough has been said, documented, and presented for God to allow even a blind man to 'see' if seeing is truly desired."

Gatewood said in a separate post on Tuesday that while he and Spearman disagreed on issues involving the state NAACP, "I loved the brother."

"I wanted the news of his demise to be untrue," Gatewood wrote. "I forgave him."

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Business & Finance

Jury Says Tesla Only 1% To Blame For Fiery Florida Crash

By Freida Frisaro

Associated Press

MIAMI, Fla. (AP)—A jury in Florida has found Tesla just 1 percent negligent in a fiery crash that killed two teens, for disabling a speed limiter on the electric car.

Tuesday's verdict placed 90 percent of the blame on the driver, Barrett Riley, and 9 percent on his father, James Riley, who brought the lawsuit against Tesla.

It's the first known case involving a Tesla crash that has gone to trial, said Michael Brooks, acting executive director at the Center for Auto Safety, a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization.

Barrett Riley and his friend Edgar Monserrat Martinez were about to graduate from their private school in South Florida when they died in the May 2018 crash near Fort Lauderdale Beach. A backseat passenger

was ejected and survived.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined he was driving at 116 mph in a 30 mph zone, and the most likely cause of the crash "was the driver's loss of control as a result of excessive speed."

James Riley claimed the crash was "entirely survivable" and that it was the ensuing fire that killed the teenagers, but the judge dismissed his lawsuit's claim that Tesla designed defective lithium ion batteries that "burst into an uncontrollable and fatal fire" upon impact.

James Riley also said Tesla removed a speed limiter without his permission. He had ordered the instrument installed to prevent his son from driving at more than 85 mph.

An investigation found that about a month before the crash, the teen asked workers at Tesla's Dania Beach dealership to return the car to normal operating mode

while it was being serviced.

Tesla denied negligence in disabling the speed limiter. The company argued that the teen's parents were negligent in allowing him to drive the vehicle "when they were aware of his history of speeding and reckless driving," according to the judge's instructions to the jury.

Brooks, at the Center for Auto Safety, said other lawsuits are pending against Tesla involving the vehicle's autopilot and full self-driving systems.

Jurors recommended awarding the teen's mother Jenny Riley \$6 million for pain and suffering, and \$4.5 million to the father, the newspaper reported.

But the apportionment of responsibility means Tesla will only be liable for \$105,000, which is equivalent to 1 percent of the negligence as determined by the verdict, according to Curt Miner, an attorney representing the Riley family.



MOSTLY NOT THEIR FAULT—After a fiery crash in 2018 in Florida which killed two teenagers and injured a third, the father of the driver sued Tesla, saying that faulty batteries caught fire and killed the teens. A jury last week found the automaker only 1 percent at fault, and that excessive speed was the proximate cause of the deaths. It was established that the driver was going 116 mph at the time of the crash.

Automakers Target Average Joes

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

WARREN, Mich. (AP)—In their first rollouts of electric vehicles, America's automakers targeted people who value short-range economy cars. Then came EVs for luxury buyers and drivers of pickups and delivery vans.

Now, the companies are zeroing in at the heart of the U.S. auto market: The compact SUV. In their drive to have EVs dominate vehicle sales in coming years, the automakers are promoting their new models as having the range, price and features to rival their gas-powered competitors.

Some are so far proving quite popular. Ford's \$45,000-plus Mustang Mach E is sold out for the model year. On Monday night, General Motors' Chevrolet brand introduced an electric version of its Blazer, also starting around \$45,000, when it goes on sale next summer.

Also coming next year: An electric Chevy Equinox, with a base price of about \$30,000, whose price could give it particular appeal with modest-income households. There's also the Hyundai Ioniq 5 and Volkswagen's ID.4 in the \$40,000s and Nissan's upcoming Ariya around \$47,000 with a lower-priced version coming.

All start off considerably less expensive than Tesla's Model Y small SUV, the current top EV seller, with a starting price well

into the \$60,000s.

The new models, which can get about 300 miles per electric charge, are aimed at the largest segment of the U.S. market: Modest-size SUVs, representing about 20 percent of new-vehicle sales. Industry experts say entering the smaller SUV segment, with its reach into a broader demographic of buyers, is sure to boost electric vehicle sales nationally.

"Going to the smaller utility segment gives you the opportunity to access the most customers in one (market) segment," said Stephanie Brinley, principal analyst for S&P Global Mobility. "To make a transition from (internal combustion engines) to electric, you have to be in more space. You have to be in more price points. You have to be in more sizes."

Brinley noted that the small and midsize SUV segments meet many people's needs, something that previous electric vehicles did not.

"If it's a price you can reach but it's a product that you can't put your kids and your dog in, you're not going to buy it," she said.

Chevrolet says the Blazer will get a minimum of 247 miles per charge. Pricier high-end versions could go up to 320 miles. The Blazer will be available with Chevrolet's SS performance package with a zero-to-60 mph time of under four seconds. There will be

a police version, too.

"Early on, the demographic composition of an EV buyer was certainly someone that perhaps had higher education, higher household income," said Steve Majoros, Chevrolet's marketing director. "That's very indicative of early adopters. But as we move up that curve, the intention and where we're pricing this product is to certainly make it more available for more mainstream buyers."

To attract buyers of modest means, EVs need to be priced even lower, in the \$30,000-to-\$35,000 range, GM CEO Mary Barra said in an interview this week with The Associated Press. Electric vehicles, she said, also have to have the range and charging network so they can be the sole vehicle that some people own.

"Most electric vehicle owners today own multiple vehicles, so they have an internal combustion vehicle to jump into depending on their needs," Barra said.

Automakers have been pushing to fully restore a \$7,500 tax credit for people who buy EVs to jumpstart sales. But the measure is stalled in Congress. It's especially important for GM, Tesla and Toyota, which have maxxed out the number of credits they are allowed and can no longer offer them to buyers. Other automakers are approaching the limit, too.

Amazon Sues Over Fake Reviews

By Haleluya Hadero

AP Business Writer

Amazon has filed a lawsuit against administrators of more than 10,000 Facebook groups it accuses of coordinating fake reviews in exchange for money or free products.

The Seattle-based e-commerce giant said in a statement posted on its website Tuesday the Facebook groups were set up to recruit people "willing to post incentivized and misleading reviews" across its stores in the U.S. the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Japan.

The problem over phony reviews is not new for Amazon, or e-commerce as a whole. Amazon itself has previously sued people it said were offering fake testimonials, though lawmakers and regulators have questioned whether the company was doing enough to combat the issue. Last year, U.K. competition regulators launched a probe into whether the online retailer and Google were taking adequate actions to protect shoppers.

In the statement, Amazon said one of the Facebook groups it's targeting, called "Amazon Product Review," had more than

43,000 members. The company said Facebook removed the group this year, but it was able to dodge the platform's detection by "changing letters in phrases that might set off Facebook's alarms."

Amazon noted since 2020, it has reported more than 10,000 fake review groups to Meta, the parent company of Facebook. Meta has removed half of these groups and is investigating the others, Amazon said.

The retailer's announcement comes as another side of the company's operations is facing more scrutiny. On Tuesday, federal labor officials confirmed to the AP the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has opened inspections at Amazon facilities in New York, Illinois, and Florida after receiving referrals alleging safety and health violations from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York.

Nicholas Biase, a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's Office in New York, said federal labor officials entered the Amazon warehouses on Monday morning after their office made referrals about "potential workplace hazards," including "Amazon's required pace of work for

its warehouse employees."

Labor and safety advocates have long criticized Amazon's injury rates and its "time off task" tool, which dings workers for taking too many breaks. Biase said the civil division of the U.S. attorney's office is investigating safety hazards at the company's warehouses across the country, as well as "fraudulent conduct designed to hide injuries from OSHA and others."

Amazon CEO Andy Jassy acknowledged in a shareholder letter this April the company's warehouse injury rates "were a little higher than the average" compared to other warehouses. But Jassy said the "courier and delivery" side of their operations saw lower injury rates, making the company "about average" compared to its peers.

"We'll of course cooperate with OSHA in their investigation, and we believe it will ultimately show that these concerns are unfounded," Amazon spokesperson Kelly Nantel said in a statement.

The U.S. Attorney's Office is encouraging current and former Amazon warehouse workers to report workplace safety issues directly to them.

Democrats Widen Scrutiny Of Tech Over Abortion Data Privacy Concerns

By Marcy Gordon

AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Democratic representatives are widening their scrutiny into the role of tech companies in collecting the personal data of people who may be seeking an abortion, as lawmakers, regulators and the Biden administration grapple with the aftermath of the Supreme Court ruling last month ending the constitutional protections for abortion.

In a new volley of congressional letters, six House Democrats have asked the top executives of Amazon's cloud-service network and major cloud provider Oracle about the companies' handling of consumers' location data from mobile phones, and what steps they have taken or planned to

protect the privacy rights of individuals seeking information on abortion.

The decision by the court's conservative majority to overturn Roe v. Wade has resulted in strict limits or total bans on abortion in more than a dozen states. About a dozen more states are set to impose additional restrictions. Privacy experts say that could make women vulnerable because their personal data could be used to surveil pregnancies and shared with police or sold to vigilantes.

Online searches, location data, text messages and emails, and even apps that track periods could be used to prosecute people who seek an abortion—or medical care for a miscarriage—as well as those who assist them, experts say.

Privacy advocates are watching for possible new moves by law enforcement agencies in affected states—serving subpoenas, for example, on tech companies such as Google, Apple, Bing, Facebook's Messenger and WhatsApp, services like Uber and Lyft, and internet service providers including AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile and Comcast.

"Data collected and sold by your company could be used by law enforcement and prosecutors in states with aggressive abortion restrictions," the House Democrats, led by Rep. Lori Trahan of Massachusetts, said in the letters. "Additionally, in states that empower vigilantes and private actors to sue abortion providers, this information can be used as part of judicial proceed-

ings.

"When consumers use apps on their phone and quickly tap 'yes' on 'use geolocation data' pop-ups, they should not be worried about the endless sale of their data to advertisers, individuals or law enforcement. And it most certainly should not be used to hunt down, prosecute and jail an individual seeking reproductive care. Companies can take action today to protect individual rights."

The letters also went to executives of Near Intelligence Holdings and Mobilewalla. Along with Oracle and Amazon Web Services' Data Exchange, the companies were described as leading data brokers—businesses that gather, sell or trade location data from mobile phones, which could be used to track people who have visited abortion clinics or have gone out of state seeking abortion services.

Five other Democrats active in tech issues signed the letters with Trahan: Reps. David Cicilline of Rhode Island, Yvette Clarke of New York, Debbie Dingell of Michigan, Adam Schiff of California and Sean Casten of Illinois.

Spokespeople for Amazon and Oracle didn't respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press.

Also last week, Massachusetts' two U.S. senators, Democrats Elizabeth Warren and Edward Markey, sent letters to four companies raising concerns that the software they use to monitor students' online communications could be used to punish students who seek information about abortion services and reproductive health care. They asked the companies—Bark Technologies, Gaggle.net, GoGuardian and Securly—whether their software flags students' online searches for abortion and other related

terms.

"It would be deeply disturbing if your software flags words or activity that suggest students are searching for contraception, abortion or other related services, and if school administrators, parents and even law enforcement were potentially informed of this activity," Warren and Markey wrote.

Generally, the so-called "ed tech" companies say the monitoring is intended to stop the next school shooter or student suicide, and that the scans are mostly limited to school e-mails or activity on school computers or internet networks, not private accounts.

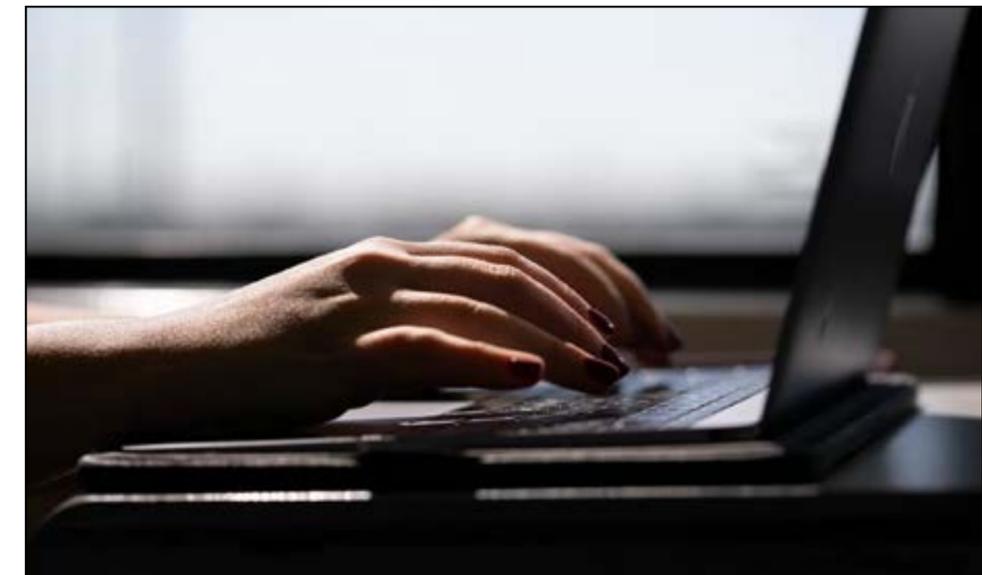
Earlier this month, President Joe Biden, under mounting pressure from fellow Democrats to be more forceful in response to the Supreme Court ruling, signed an executive order to try to protect access to abortion. The actions Biden outlined are intended to head off some potential penalties that women seeking abortion

may face after the ruling, but his order cannot restore access to abortion in the more than a dozen states where strict limits or total bans have gone into effect.

Biden also asked the Federal Trade Commission to take steps to protect the privacy of those seeking information about reproductive care online. On June 24, the day the high court announced its decision, four Democratic lawmakers asked the FTC to investigate Apple and Google for allegedly deceiving millions of mobile phone users by enabling the collection and sale of their personal data of all kinds to third parties.

In May, several Senate Democrats urged the CEOs of Google and Apple to prohibit apps on the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store from using data-mining practices that could facilitate the targeting of individuals seeking abortion services.

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DEMOCRATS WANT TO MAKE SEARCH AND OTHER DATA OFF LIMITS FOR COPS

Classifieds



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The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Granville County out for bid: C-XXXX C.A. Dillon Youth Development Center—Mini Split HVAC. The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 08/11/2022. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/14923500.pdf>

Opinion



Water, Water, No Longer Everywhere

By Mel Gurtov

Portland State University

“Water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.” Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is only halfway descriptive of the planet’s current water situation. Water is drying up everywhere; oceans and rivers are becoming more polluted and poisoned; watersheds are being drained at a phenomenal rate to meet the needs of industry, sports, and agriculture. Quality drinking water, especially in developing countries, is becoming a major challenge. And everywhere, good water, access to which should be a human right, is becoming expensive and privately owned.

First, the basic facts on the global water crisis, as provided by UNICEF:

- Four billion people—almost two-thirds of the world’s population—experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year.
- Over two billion people live in countries where water supply is inadequate.
- Half of the world’s population could be living in areas facing water scarcity by as early as 2025.
- Some 700 million people could be displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030.
- By 2040, roughly 1 in 4 children worldwide will be living in areas of extremely high water stress.

Reports from around the world bring home these trends.

Italy is experiencing an intense, protracted heatwave. A water emergency is about to be declared in the Lombardy region. The drought has hit northern regions particularly hard, where a parched Po River, Italy’s longest waterway, is 80 percent lower than usual, wreaking havoc on everything from farming and hydroelectric power to supplies of drinking water.

In Australia, a report by the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group describes Australia and the Asia-Pacific as a “disaster alley” for climate change, but says governments in Canberra have not properly planned for the impact of “cascading and compound events.” The report cites predictions that 2°C of warming may see southeast Asia’s crop production decline by one-third per capita by 2040. It says small island developing states in the Pacific are especially vulnerable to the effects of drought and flooding on food production.

China faces a water crisis in which as many as half the population does not have access to clean water. Nearly all groundwater is contaminated. Agricultural runoff and industrial toxic waste dumping are among the major causes of the crisis. Weak enforcement of environmental regulations, and sheer disregard of sound environmental practices by domestic and multinational corporations alike, contribute to the crisis.

The South African city of Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), home to nearly a million people, is on the verge of “Day Zero,” when water runs out. Climate change—long-term drought—is certainly a factor, though a corrupt city government has failed to fix thousands of leaks in water pipes. Black working-class people suffer most from intermittent water supplies.

Here at home, a Utah newspaper reports:

“The Colorado River Basin is experiencing a 22-year drought and low runoff conditions, and reservoirs within the basin are at historic low levels. There are extensive impacts throughout the Colorado River Basin, including water for homes and crops and the generation of electricity in the seven basin states, 30 tribes and Mexico.”

Lake Powell and Lake Mead are below one-third of normal levels. Water for seven states will probably have to be restricted. Meantime, California’s two largest reservoirs—Shasta Lake and Lake Oroville—are at critically low levels, and the Great Salt Lake in Utah set a new record low level on July 4.

The world’s oceans have been especially hard hit, leading the UN secretary-general to declare an “ocean emergency.” As reported by the *Guardian*: “Sea level rise, ocean heating, ocean acidification and greenhouse gas concentrations all reached record levels last year, according to the World Meteorological Organization’s state of the global climate report in 2021... pollution is creating vast coastal dead zones.” Fish stocks are being rapidly depleted by overfishing. “Nearly 80 percent of the world’s wastewater is discharged into the sea without treatment.”

Among the many toxic substances that are regularly dumped into national and international waterways, plastics and oil rank among the most constant and dangerous. China, India, and the U.S. are the top producers of disposable plastics which, according to a UN estimate, by 2050 will account for about 12 billion tons of plastic waste worldwide. As we’re all aware, plastic bottle and other items choke waterways, clog drainpipes, and, if burned, pollute the air. Banning plastics is catching on, but very slowly and with plenty of push-back from manufacturers. Policing plastics use is difficult, though in India—which now bans certain plastic packaging but not plastic bags—some states have found that fining people is effective. China is supposed to phase out plastic bags nationwide by the end of this year, while Canada will ban all single-use plastics in December. Only a few U.S. states, including Oregon, have limited the use of plastic items.

I cannot leave that last topic without noting the companies and investors that stand behind the major plastics producing countries. The top plastics manufacturers are ExxonMobil, Dow, Sinopec (China’s state oil company), Indorama Ventures (a global petrochemical company based in Singapore and Bangkok), and Saudi Aramco. The leading investors, aside from governments themselves, are Vanguard and BlackRock, outfits that crow about their commitment to sustainability.

Oil rig accidents are always large-scale threats to the ocean environment, the fishing industry, and public health. Recall the Deepwater Horizon spill: 134 million gallons dumped into the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Now, a liberal president is caught between oil industry and Republican pressure to open more leases to drilling, supposedly to help reduce gas prices, and pressure from environmental organizations and some state governments to dramatically reduce if not reject any more drilling. Fact is, the industry has millions of acres already approved for drilling. Biden will be forced to act soon, and if the past is any guide, he’ll take the middle road, approving some new leases—Alaska’s Tongas looks most likely to be chosen—but not all, making for unhappy lobbyists all around.

As numerous scientific reports have made plain, we’re headed toward environmental catastrophe, and in the U.S. it’s equally plain why: the political power of right-wing politicians, the fossil fuel com-

panies that fund them, and a malicious Supreme Court majority that takes its cue from them. Paul Krugman puts the issue succinctly:

“What’s important right now is that the United States is the only major nation in which an authoritarian right-wing party—which lost the popular vote in seven of the past eight presidential elections yet controls the Supreme Court—has the ability to block actions that might prevent climate catastrophe.”

The ballot box therefore might not be the most effective path to changing national environmental policy. But at the local level, people are fighting in a novel way: demanding that water be accorded legal standing, in the same way corporations, estates, and universities are represented in court. In Florida, for example, a constitutional ballot initiative is before voters that would grant a “Right to Clean and Healthy Waters.” Legislators can be held accountable in court for failing to protect water supplies. Elizabeth Kolbert reports in *The New Yorker* on the history of efforts to give nature “rights.” In Oregon, my home state, protecting wetlands, which are a major carbon sink, is now undergoing review to strengthen regulations. In the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state, protection of rivers, forests, and fisheries is expanding.

We’ll need a lot more action like that, right now, to save waterways.

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



White Supremacists Want ‘Their’ Country Back

By Robert C. Koehler

PeaceVoice

Is an insurrection percolating in the MAGA universe? A civil war? One thing I notice as I read the growing warnings that this is the case is the assumption that suddenly the USA has become a divided nation, a splintered democracy, when, in point of fact, it has always been deeply—and for much of its history, good God, legally—divided.

Indeed, Jim Crow America was the prime model for a certain would-be European dictator.

You may have heard of Adolf Hitler. In *Mein Kampf*, the biography he wrote before he came to power, he “praises America,” according to Alex Ross, writing in the *New Yorker*, “as the one state that has made progress toward a primarily racial conception of citizenship.”

And history.com, citing James Q. Whitman’s book, *Hitler’s American Model*, points out that two laws passed by Nazi Germany in 1935—the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor, known collectively as the Nuremberg Laws, which laid the legal groundwork for the Holocaust—were inspired by U.S. law at the time.

“America in the early 20th century was the leading racist jurisdiction in the world,” writes Whitman. “Nazi lawyers, as a result, were interested in, looked very closely at, (and) were ultimately influenced by American race law.”

OK, the country has been changing over the years, but its blatantly racist history cannot be ignored. Excuse me, yes it can. Just attach some academic name to it—how about Critical Race Theory?—and start stoning it to death. The problem, from the MAGA point of view, is that this isn’t enough, bringing up the point political scientist Barbara F. Walter made in a recent *Washington Post* interview.

Walter, who has studied and written about the causes of modern civil wars around the world, cites several factors precipitating an attempted governmental takedown. One of them is the coming together of groups who begin organizing, not around complex issues, but “almost exclusively around identity: ethnic, religious or racial identity.” You know: We’re better than you.

This is different from, for instance, the civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, the environmental movement, all of which were focused on complex institutional change—on inclusion and awareness rather than me vs. you. Their aim was and is the creation of fairer, more sustainable social structures, and they have had an impact over the last half century or so—which is part of the problem, from, say, the Jan. 6 insurrectionists’ point of view. The goal of that insurrection wasn’t complex social change. The goal was getting Joe Biden’s ass out of the White House and reinserting the MAGA monarch, Donald Trump.

America was born as a slaveholding, racist country. African-Americans, whether slave or free, were three-fifths human. It was also sexist. Women couldn’t vote; their job options were limited, keeping them financially dependent on men. They certainly weren’t allowed to choose to get a medically safe abortion if they got pregnant (they always had the back alley, of course). While these realities began changing politically and legally in the 1950s and ’60s, they remained psychologically embedded in part of the country. As I have previously noted, this remains the national divide, defined with a razor cut across the soul. White supremacists fear their racism is being taken away.

So it’s no surprise that an insurrection is brewing. The insurrection has already, seemingly, captured the Republican Party, whose members have either shrugged their shoulders at the Jan. 6 melee or participated in it. And while the Republican-controlled Supreme Court has repealed *Roe v. Wade*, shattering women’s choice and reclaiming legal control over their bodies, the Court, along with Congress, have relaxed legal interference in gun rights and the availability of military-grade weapons.

Civil war! Civil war!

So are we looking at the collapse of the American democracy? Well, ironically, those who are in the process of helping it collapse think so. *The New York Times* recently quoted none other than Donald Trump, who delivered the keynote address at the Faith and Freedom Coalition’s annual Road to Majority conference last month.

“The greatest danger to America is not our enemies from the outside, as powerful as they may be,” he said. “The greatest danger to America is the destruction of our nation from the people from within. And you know the people I’m talking about.”

Uh, the Jan. 6 mob? Apparently, he meant the Democrats. And others tossed further big-screen glory at the situation: “The backlash is coming,” Sen. Rick Scott of Florida said. “Just mount up and ride to the sounds of the guns, and they are all over this country. It is time to take this country back.”

His words conjured up not just the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, but also at least some of the country’s mass murderers, who have taken it upon themselves to make grocery stores White again, to start eliminating people of color, “illegal aliens” and such.

As Katherine Stewart put it in the *New York Times* story: “Christian nationalism isn’t a route to the future. Its purpose is to hollow out democracy until nothing is left but a thin cover for rule by a sup-

posedly right-thinking elite, bubble-wrapped in sanctimony and insulated from any real democratic check on its power.”

The only positive I see in all this is the fact that the participants feel a need to “take the country back.”

Robert Koehler (koehlercw@gmail.com), syndicated by *PeaceVoice*, is a Chicago award-winning journalist and editor. He is the author of *Courage Grows Strong at the Wound*.



Practicing Safe Protest: Just Say No To Violence

By Tom H. Hastings

Portland State University

“Get the f_ k out of here!” screamed the young woman.

I understood. She was enraged, yelling at a small group of evangelicals with their powerful loudspeaker, at the end of the Pride parade last month.

While such parades are becoming more common across the U.S., the Pride parade is such a signature Portland, Oregon event, one of joy, color, lots of children, hundreds of parading organizations in their own forms of celebration of just being alive, being accepted as full human beings, expressing themselves with smiles, cheers, and nods of appreciation to each other and to thousands of Portlanders lining the parade route on the sidewalks.

But of course, as we know, the lives of countless gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, and uniquely identified people have been both physically and psychologically traumatized by dominating, aggressive people who cannot seem to attain a level of maturity that accepts all. Rising above the hurt to enjoy a day in the sun, a day of utter acceptance by thousands, a day to proclaim their authentic selves, harming no one, supporting each other—that is a day that can offer profound comfort and an emotional “battery recharge” that can last a while.

I’m a member of the Portland Peace Team. We are unarmed. We have a code of nonpartisan nonviolence. When organizers of events invite us to come help with public safety, we ask if the code of conduct they are advertising for their event is unarmed nonviolence. We ask if they will announce from the stage or with their megaphone that they have invited us to help keep conflict from escalating.

If they say yes, we are happy to help, small as we may be. We’ve been doing this for a decade in the streets of Portland. We’ve helped at Pride several years, we’ve gone to some BLM events, we’ve helped a few times with the children’s climate strikes, with the Women’s March, refugee and immigrant rallies, and much more.

Our goals: 1) keep everyone safe, 2) help deescalate conflicts. We have no special authority, just the moral authority given to us by those who have worked hard to organize an event.

When conflict escalates and there is no code of nonviolence, Portlanders know what happens. Many organizers and many activists are righteously enraged by injustice, and yet without nonviolent discipline, and especially with aggressive rage, their campaigns often alienate the public, actually reversing their intended goal of generating mass support for the policies they want put into effect.

The protest atmosphere in the U.S. in general and in Portland in particular is rougher than it was even a few years ago. Downtown Portland and other areas of town have seen personal violence and property destruction that has no rational justification (I say this as someone who does understand when it may be justified and explainable).

Pride this year was a bit tougher than in the past. Tempers are shorter. Violence is closer to the surface. All 10 of us from the Portland Peace Team who were on hand that day focused on trying to deescalate the hot conflict at the extremely offensive evangelical loudspeaking, where happy Pride people were being told they were going to hell, etc.

It got physical a few times. Eventually the loudspeaker equipment was damaged and the evangelicals left. Now they have new trauma that may affect their behavior in the future.

By far the most effective of those who confronted the rude loudspeakers were some young people holding a colorful blanket up in front of the speakers and singing and dancing. Their joy was under their control, not extinguished by the objectionable interrupting loudspeakers. We attempted to convince the few who were enraged to dial it down, with mixed success.

After, one of our members said, “I am positive it would have been far worse if we weren’t here today.”

Our peace team is one of many across the U.S. and we hope more and more folks seek training in more and more towns so we can return to protest that is very assertive, but not aggressive, not alienating to the public, and everyone stays safe.

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

