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NC Inches Closer To Medicaid Expansion

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — After a decade of vigorous opposition, most North Carolina Republicans have now embraced the idea of expanding the state's Medicaid program to cover hundreds of thousands of additional low-income adults. Legislative approval finally appears within reach.

During the General Assembly session that ended July 1, the GOP-controlled House and Senate passed separate, bipartisan measures by wide margins that would put the state on the path to Medicaid expansion. Some details remain to be worked out, but there's a real opportunity to hammer out a compromise by year's end.

It's a remarkable political turnabout in North Carolina, sure to be analyzed in the dozen states that have yet to accept the federal government's offer to cover people who make too much to be insured by traditional Medicaid but too little to receive subsidized private insurance.

"If there's a person in the state of North Carolina that has spoken out against Medicaid expansion more than I have, I'd like to meet that person," Senate leader Phil Berger said when he sought to explain his reversal at a news conference in May. "We need coverage in North Carolina for the working poor."

Same-Sex Marriage Bill

By Mary Clare Jalonick

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—When asked if he'd support legislation to protect same-sex marriage, one conservative Republican senator was almost nonchalant.

"I see no reason to oppose it," Ron Johnson of Wisconsin told reporters, bringing Democrats one vote closer to an unexpected victory as they move to safeguard same-sex marriage and other rights after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion nation-

wide.

Johnson's answer, which came after 47 Republicans voted for the bill in the House last week, was reflective of a stark shift in GOP positioning after decades of fighting same-sex marriage. Ten years ago, most Republicans proudly espoused that marriage could only be between a man and a woman. Now, a federal law protecting same-sex marriage is within reach in an election year, with some Republican backing.

The signal of possible support from Johnson—arguably the most vulnerable Republican senator up for reelection

this year—comes as Wisconsin's other senator, Tammy Baldwin, is the lead Democrat charged with persuading the necessary 10 Republicans to vote for the bill. Baldwin, who is the first openly gay senator and has been working on gay rights issues since she first entered state politics in 1986, says the "world has changed," especially since the Supreme Court's 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision upholding gay marriage.

A Gallup poll conducted in May showed broad support for same-sex marriage, with 71 percent of U.S. adults saying they

think such unions should be recognized by law, including 55 percent of Republicans. Polling in Wisconsin mirrors that national survey, with 54 percent of Republicans in the state saying that they favor same-sex marriage in a Marquette Law School poll from April. In May 2014, the state poll found support from only 23 percent of Republicans.

"People began to see that the sky has not fallen," Baldwin said in an interview, and that the 2015 decision gave legal protections to families who did not previously

(See **SAME-SEX**, P. 2)



Bill Russell Dies At 88

Bill Russell hated autographs. Saw no point to them. If he was out dining and got approached by someone asking for his signature, Russell's usual response was to instead ask the person to join him at the table to have a conversation about life.

The autograph-seekers almost always declined. Oh, the stories they missed.

Russell, the greatest winner in the history of team sports, died Sunday at 88. The basketball legacy is beyond well-known: 11 championships in 13 years with the Boston Celtics, first Black coach in the NBA, first Black coach to win an NBA title, Hall of Fame player, Hall of Fame coach, Olympic champion, NCAA champion, member of the league's 75th anniversary team, and the namesake of the NBA Finals MVP award which, had it existed when he played, he would have won at least a half-dozen times.



CO-PILOT DIES AFTER FALL FROM PLANE IN NORTH CAROLINA

(AP)—The co-pilot of a small cargo plane died Friday after falling from the aircraft in North Carolina before it made an emergency landing.

News outlets report that the body of the co-pilot, 23-year-old Charles Hew Crooks, was found in a backyard in the town of Fuquay-Varina, about 30 miles south of the Raleigh-Durham International Airport. He did not have a parachute.

The pilot made an emergency landing at the airport Friday afternoon after reporting that one of the wheels had come off the landing gear. He was treated and released from a hospital with minor injuries.

The pilot was the only person on board the turboprop aircraft when it landed.

Local, state and federal authorities, including the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board, are investigating.

JAELENE DANIELS REFUSES GAY PRIDE JERSEY, SITS OUT NWSL GAME

CARY (AP)—North Carolina Courage defender Jaelene Daniels refused to play Friday night when the team celebrated Pride Night and wore jerseys to support the LGBTQ community.

The Courage played to a 3-3 draw with the Washington Spirit in the National Women's Soccer League.

Daniels previously refused to play wearing a pride-themed jersey for the U.S. women's national team in 2017. She later told a Christian television program that she chose not to wear the jersey because of her beliefs.

The Courage originally scheduled the pride celebration in June but it was postponed because of COVID-19 protocols.

"Jaelene will not be rostered tonight as she has made the decision to not wear our Pride jersey. While we're disappointed with her choice, we respect her right to make that decision for herself," a team spokesman said before the game in a statement provided in Raleigh.

Coach Sean Hahas said after the game against the Spirit that he wanted to make sure the LGBTQ players on the team were celebrated and that Daniels' decision wasn't a distraction.

"What we have to remember is, it's the second time that they've worn those jerseys and I know how powerful it was for them, and how much it means for them. And my number one thing was nothing is going to come in between that, because that's important to them and that means something to them, and I stood by that," Nahas said.

The Courage supporters' group, the Up roar, encouraged fans to go to the game and celebrate the players despite Daniels' decision.

STATES REACH DEAL OVER MARKETING, SAFETY OF GENERIC

Dems Bareknuckle Greens Off Ballot

By Hannah Schoenbaum

Associated Press/Report for America

A day after Connor Harney received anonymous text messages asking him to retract his signature from a petition to qualify Green Party candidates for the November ballot in North Carolina, he said unidentified canvassers brought their "attempts to interfere with democracy" to his doorstep.

A woman claiming to represent the state Board of Elections appeared at his home in Fuquay-Varina in late June, a checklist of street addresses in hand, and repeated the request, he said.

When Harney—a 31-year-old historian at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro—refused and questioned the woman's affiliation, she left with a warning: If Green Party candidates gain ballot access, they could take away votes from Democrats and hand the GOP victories in tight races, namely

the Senate race between Democrat Cheri Beasley and Trump-backed Republican Rep. Ted Budd.

"I told her, 'What you're doing now makes Democrats look very desperate,'" said Harney, a registered independent. "But, more importantly, it goes against the democratic process because you're actively trying to ensure another party doesn't make it onto the ballot."

A dispute over the Green Party's stalled effort to field a Senate candidate has exposed the Democratic Party's bareknuckle efforts to prevent the progressive group from siphoning away crucial votes come November.

The state Board of Elections' Democratic majority rejected the Green Party petition in a 3-2 vote on June 30, citing petition sheets with nearly identical handwriting, incomplete personal information, duplicate names and deceased signatories.

The Green Party then sued as

the board investigates the validity of its signatures, alleging Democratic interference in the petitioning process and asking the court to reverse the board's decision.

Harney is one of more than a dozen signers mentioned in the lawsuit who reported receiving intimidating messages, calls or home visits.

These signers said some canvassers declined to identify themselves or falsely claimed to represent the Green Party or the elections board. Others said they were sent by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee—the driving force working to elect Beasley and other Democratic Senate candidates nationwide.

With the Senate in a 50-50 deadlock, North Carolina is one of the few states where Democrats have strong potential to pick up a seat, said Western Carolina University political science professor Chris Cooper. Despite the stakes, he found the

Democrats' tactics "jaw dropping."

"This is not politics as usual," Cooper said. "We expect political parties to want to win—that's not the problem. It crosses the line when they appear to be resorting to intimidation and, in a few cases, lies."

The Democrats acknowledge asking signers to remove their names, but claim they were merely trying to make sure potential supporters weren't being tricked.

"We reached out to voters to ensure they had not been deceived," DSCC spokesperson Amanda Sherman said.

Sherman said the DSCC is funneling \$30 million into North Carolina and eight other Senate battleground states through its "Defend the Majority" campaign, the largest investment in field organizing the committee has ever made this early in the campaign cycle.

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

NC Supreme Court Okays Speeding Up Arguments In Redistricting Case Appeal

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

In another remapping decision along partisan leanings, the North Carolina Supreme Court has agreed to speed up arguments on further challenges to the boundaries for the state's legislative seats and congressional districts.

By a 4-3 ruling with registered Democrats in the majority, the

justices granted a request by Common Cause to accelerate the redistricting proceedings before them. The group is fighting the state House and Senate maps approved by the General Assembly in February. Oral arguments will be held in early or mid-October, read Thursday's order signed by Senior Associate Justice Robin Hudson.

The order said specifically that the court didn't address a recent

request by Republican legislators to end its appeal of the congressional district boundaries, which a state trial court drew and adopted for use this year only.

But the order said expediting all redistricting appeals was based on "the great public interest in the subject matter of this case, the importance of the issues to the constitutional jurisprudence of this state, and the

need to reach a final resolution on the merits at the earliest possible opportunity."

It's too late for any decision after those oral arguments to alter the district lines for this year's elections, which are already happening under the challenged maps. Any ruling could clarify further how partisan bias is avoided in mapmaking and force the legislature to redraw new General Assembly maps that would be used for the remainder of this decade. A new congressional map for the 2024 elections already will be needed.

Associate Justice Tamara Barringer, opposing Thursday's order for the court's three Republican justices, wrote that it made no sense to speed up the process. Any required map redraws for the 2024 elections wouldn't need to be in place until candidate filing begins in December 2023, she said.

"Common Cause fails to explain how an expedited decision from this court will make any meaningful difference on the legislature's ability to comply with a deadline that is more than 16 months away," Barringer wrote.

With Hudson retiring from the court at the end of the year, and Democratic Associate Justice



THE 4-3 RULING CAME LAST THURSDAY

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

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

Same-Sex Marriage Bill Draws Some GOP—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

have them. She says every member of Congress now has friends, family or staff who are openly gay.

"That probably has the biggest impact on where people land,"

she said. "This is a vote of conscience."

The bill pending in the Senate would repeal the Clinton-era Defense of Marriage Act that allowed states to refuse to recog-

nize same-sex marriages and instead require states to recognize all marriages that were legal where they were performed. The new Respect for Marriage Act would also protect interracial marriages by requiring states to recognize legal marriages regardless of "sex, race, ethnicity, or national origin."

A vote could come as soon as next week, but it will more likely be in September when Congress returns from the August recess.

Republican Sens. Rob Portman of Ohio, Susan Collins of Maine and Thom Tillis of North Carolina have also said they will vote for the legislation; Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski has also supported same-sex marriage in the past. Several other Republicans have said they are undecided, including Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, Missouri Sen. Roy Blunt, Iowa Sen. Joni Ernst and Indiana Sen. Mike Braun.

Notably silent is Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has declined to comment until Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer holds a vote.

Baldwin and other advocates say more GOP senators are quietly contemplating the bill. Democrats need 10 Republican votes to overcome a filibuster and get a bill through the 50-50 Senate.

A range of Republicans voted for the bill in the House, includ-

ing New York Rep. Elise Stefanik, the No. 3 House Republican; Pennsylvania Rep. Scott Perry, the chair of the conservative House Freedom Caucus; and all four Republican members of Utah's congressional delegation.

Still, the majority of House Republicans voted against it, and a similar dynamic is expected in the Senate.

Republicans opposing the bill give a variety of reasons, with most arguing that the Supreme Court is unlikely to overturn Obergefell and that Senate Democrats are playing politics by putting the bill on the floor. Democrats point to Justice Clarence Thomas' concurring opinion to the June ruling overturning Roe in which he said that high court rulings protecting same-sex marriage and the right for couples to use contraception should also be reconsidered.

Asked about their opposition, many Republicans have focused on the process rather than the substance.

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, who is up for reelection this year, told CNN last week that he thinks the bill is a "stupid waste of time." He said later that he believes "there is zero chance, below zero chance, that the Supreme Court or anyone is going to outlaw gay marriage in this country."

Even Johnson blamed Democrats as he said he was unlikely to oppose it, arguing that it was settled law and the vote is unnecessary. He said he still believes that marriage should be between a man and a woman. But "society has pretty well accepted it and moved on," he said.

Other Republicans have made similar arguments, shifting from the more ideologically rigid statements of years past.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who will vote against the bill, said he recognizes that "reasonable people can disagree" with him that marriage should be between a man and a woman, "and there is room for a diversity of views on that question."

North Dakota Sen. Kevin Cramer says he will vote against it "unless I can be compelled somehow." He says he believes because of his evangelical Christian faith that marriage is between a man and a woman, but "it's not like I feel super strongly about it, either."

Cramer said he thinks the Senate will get the 60 votes needed to pass the bill. "It's more that people are ambivalent about it," he said.

Portman, who is pushing to get more votes from his party, notes that public opinion has changed substantially over the years. He has supported same-sex mar-

riage since 2013, when he announced that one of his sons is gay and that he believes people should be respected for who they are.

He faced criticism from some fellow Republicans at the time, but he says people now come up to him frequently to thank him for his support.

It's not just Republicans who have evolved on the issue. Former President Barack Obama didn't publicly support same-sex marriage until 2012, pushed in part by then-Vice President Joe Biden, who had come out in support a few days earlier. When the Defense of Marriage Act passed the Senate in 1996, only 14 Democrats opposed it.

David Stacy, a lead lobbyist for the Human Rights Campaign, says advocates for same-sex marriage faced many setbacks in the early 2000s, including state ballot measures to ban gay marriages. But he says he believes Republicans created a backlash of sorts by trying to use the issue against Democrats.

While the advocates lost many of those fights, "we were educating the public and moving public opinion," Stacy says.

Associated Press writers Hannah Fingerhut in Washington and Scott Bauer in Madison, Wis., contributed to this report.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

OPIOIDS

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP)—A former opioid manufacturer has agreed in principle to pay up to \$2.4 billion in a deal with a dozen states over its marketing and product safety practices, state attorneys general announced Friday.

The company, Allergan, is now part of AbbVie but sold its generics division Actavis, including its opioid products, to Teva Pharmaceuticals six years ago. Under the settlement, payments will be made to state and local governments, Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro said.

The agreement means pharma companies have consented to pay more than \$40 billion to settle opioid crisis claims regarding manufacturers and distributors, The Associated Press has found.

The agreement came days after a similar, \$4.3 billion agreement was reached with Teva Pharmaceuticals.

Teva spokesperson Kelley Dougherty declined comment. Shapiro said the settlement involved claims that Allergan, which produced Norco and Kadian brand generic opioids, downplayed the risk of addiction in marketing and did not act sufficiently to prevent the drugs from being improperly diverted.

Negotiations with Allergan and Teva continue over their business practices and transparency, Shapiro's office said.

It's a global agreement that involves California, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Other states will be able to sign on, Shapiro spokeswoman Jacklin Rhoads said. New York settled with Allergan in December.

The opioid addiction and overdose epidemic has been linked to more than 500,000 deaths in the U.S. over the last two decades.

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein said Friday that over 2020, nine people in his state died daily from overdoses.

FLORIDA ELECTRIC-BOAT MAKER BUILDING NORTH CAROLINA PLANT

MARION (AP)—A Florida-based company planning the production of electric-powered boats has decided to build a plant in western North Carolina, creating 170 jobs, officials announced on Thursday.

Forza X1 Inc., which is developing recreational boats that are powered by electric outboard motors and lithium battery packs, plans a \$10.5 million investment in Marion, Gov. Roy Cooper said in a news release.

The average wage for the expected jobs will be \$51,047, compared to the current average wage in McDowell County of \$39,071, according to Cooper.

The announcement by Forza X1—like parent company Twin Vee PowerCats Co. based in Fort Pierce, Florida—came after a state panel earlier Thursday approved an incentives package. The state could distribute nearly \$1.4 million in cash payments over 12 years if the project meets job-creation and investment thresholds.

BRIDGE DESIGNED TO AVOID FLOODED ROAD OPENS ON NC COAST

RODANTHE (AP)—The N.C. Department of Transportation officially opened another bridge on the Outer Banks on Thursday which will allow residents and tourists to avoid a constantly washed-out route which is the sole link between the barrier islands and the mainland.

The Rodanthe "Jug Handle" Bridge opened to southbound traffic shortly before noon, and northbound lanes were opened at 12:20 p.m., according to a news release from NCDOT.

Officials delayed the opening in June because pavement markings which had been installed did not meet department specifications for quality or reflectivity.

The new 2.4-mile bridge extends over Pamlico Sound between the southern end of the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge and the village of Rodanthe, bypassing a section of N.C. 12 that is extremely vulnerable to ocean overwash. Construction of the \$155 million project began in July 2018. That section of N.C. 12 will be removed.

According to a news release, intermittent daytime lane closures on the bridge will be necessary in the coming weeks to allow Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative to connect electric, phone and internet transmission lines onto the new bridge.

The Captain Richard Etheridge Bridge over New Inlet was completed in 2017, and the Marc Basnight Bridge over Oregon Inlet opened in 2019.

NC WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO SELLING UNAPPROVED COVID-19 REMEDY

CONCORD, N.H. (AP)—A North Carolina woman has pleaded guilty to charges that she sold unapproved drugs on her website that claimed to be remedies and treatments for COVID-19, the U.S. Department of Justice said.

U.S. Attorney Jane E. Young said in a news release that Diana Daffin, 69, of Charlotte, N.C., pleaded guilty on Wednesday to selling unapproved drugs with the intent to defraud or mislead the Food and Drug Administration.

Court documents and statements made in court showed that in March 2020, the FDA learned that she was selling unapproved drugs on her website. In April and August of that year, the FDA sent Daffin warnings asking her to correct the violation.

Although she told the FDA that she removed the products from her website and would stop distributing them, she continued to do so and took steps to defraud and mislead the agency, a news release said.

Dems Bareknuckle Greens—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Though Democrats had little success dissuading progressive voters from backing the Green Party ballot bid, their lawyers, including Elias Law Group, general counsel for the DSCC, lobbied the board to scrutinize irregularities among the signatures.

With its petition rejected, the Green Party missed the July 1 deadline to nominate its candidates for the November ballot. Now the party's choice for Sen-

ate, Matthew Hoh, could appear only by court order or legislative action from the General Assembly, which concluded its work session on July 1, elections board spokesperson Patrick Gannon said.

The board will present the findings of its fraud investigation on Monday, one week before the Green Party lawsuit gets its first hearing on Aug. 8.

Hoh's campaign manager Rose Ruby said their uphill battle

to reach the ballot illuminates the many barriers third-party candidates face nationwide. But she embraces Hoh's role as a disruptor of the status quo and says Democrats have only themselves to blame if the Greens "spoil" their election.

"The spoiler label is an antidemocratic characterization of what it means to have a healthy democracy," Ruby said. "If Democrats don't want to fear that there's a split in their vote,

then it's their job to earn those votes and to put out the kind of policies that the Green Party is getting out."

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 undercovered issues. Follow her at twitter.com/H_Schoenbaum.

NC Supreme Court Okays—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Sam Ervin IV up for reelection, it's possible a GOP majority would have heard the case if arguments had waited until early 2023.

The contested lines replaced other sets of boundaries that the GOP-controlled House and Senate drew last fall based on 2020 census population changes. The Supreme Court, in an identical 4-3 ruling, struck down those first batch of maps. The court called the lines illegal partisan gerrymanders that failed to treat voters who back Democrats fairly and told legislators to try again.

A panel of three trial judges upheld the replacement maps for the 170 legislative districts

drawn by lawmakers, but retooled the second congressional map. The state Supreme Court refused to delay their use with this year's elections.

The appeals didn't end, as Common Cause and the other plaintiffs in redistricting lawsuits said the Senate map, or the district boundaries for both chambers, still harm Black votes and fail to fully give Democrats the chance at governing majorities. GOP legislative leaders appealed the interim congressional plan.

House Speaker Tim Moore, Senate leader Phil Berger and other GOP lawmakers asked July 13 to withdraw their congressional map appeal. Phil Strach,

a lawyer for the Republicans, wrote there's no need to spend time and taxpayer dollars on boundaries that will be used in 2022 only.

But Narendra Ghosh, a lawyer representing some voters who are backed by a national Democratic redistricting group, argue the Republicans' dismissal request is "pure gamesmanship" designed to strengthen their position in upcoming U.S. Supreme Court arguments over the power of state courts to scrutinize congressional maps.

Last month, the nation's highest court agreed to hear the North Carolina Republicans' separate appeal of the map for the state's 14 U.S. House seats.

The U.S. justices could decide by next year whether state courts have authority to change the rules for federal elections and congressional redistricting plans. Barringer criticized the refusal of her Democratic colleagues to grant the legislators' dismissal motion, adding that "the majority's decision on both of these motions... reeks of judicial activism and should deeply trouble every citizen of this state."

In contrast to the legislature's original congressional map, which likely would have resulted in Republicans winning 10 of the 14 seats, the interim plan would give Democrats a reasonable opportunity to win seven of the seats.

Biden Hails Passage Of Economic Bill

By Alan Fram and Lisa Mascaro

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—President Joe Biden hailed a nascent Democratic package of climate, health care and tax initiatives as "a giant step forward" for the country Thursday as congressional leaders began nailing down votes for a campaign-season bill they've cast as a boon for voters struggling with inflation.

A day after Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and conservative Sen. Joe Manchin stunned Washington by resurrecting components of a compromise many thought dead, early signs were encouraging for the party.

After Schumer briefed Democratic senators on the 725-page measure, Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., said lawmakers' reaction has been "uniformly positive." And Reps. Tom Suozzi, D-N.Y., and Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., suggested they could back the measure even though it lacks higher federal tax deductions for state and local taxes that they've championed in the past.

"We're taking a giant step forward as a nation," Biden said at the White House. In a message to lawmakers, he called it a compromise that was "the strongest bill you can pass" to address health care, climate, energy and families' living costs. "Pass it, pass it for the American people."

The measure's phoenix-like rebirth came Wednesday, when Manchin unexpectedly agreed to add tax, energy and environment provisions to a plan he'd earlier said he wanted limited, for now, to prescription drug price curbs and health care assistance. He told reporters Thursday that his talks with Schumer had contin-

ued and disputed that he'd reversed himself.

"I've never been in reverse in my lifetime and I never walked away," Manchin, who has COVID-19 and has stayed away from the Capitol, said in a conference call. He also described what he said he's endured during the past year, when he repeatedly forced Biden and top Democrats to whittle down what was initially a \$3.5 trillion proposal.

"No one in their right mind would go through all the protest, harassments" that he faced, Manchin said, after he scuttled a roughly \$2 trillion version that the House had passed after he insisted on cuts. He said Democrats "turned the dogs loose" on him two weeks ago after he told Schumer that he wanted a measure limited to health care this month because of inflation fears.

He said he was now backing the expanded bill "because I know I'm not adding to inflation" with the agreement. And he acknowledged that he wants the Mountain Valley Pipeline, which will deliver natural gas from West Virginia to Virginia, to be at "the top of the heap" under permitting procedures that Biden and congressional leaders have pledged to move through Congress this fall.

Loose ends remain in a 50-50 Senate where support from every Democrat—plus Vice President Kamala Harris' tie-breaking vote—are needed to overcome unanimous Republican opposition that seems preordained. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., who last year joined Manchin in forcing cuts and changes in larger versions of the plan, declined to tell reporters her stance.

In the narrowly divided House, Democrats can lose no more than four votes and prevail. Rep. Stephanie Murphy, D-Fla.,

a leader of the centrist House Blue Dog Coalition, said she wouldn't yet comment on her views. "I don't think there's anybody wildly pleased," said No. 2 House Democratic leader Steny Hoyer of Maryland. "But I think the overwhelming majority think the things that are in it are good things."

Overall, the emerging package would raise \$739 billion over a decade from higher taxes on huge corporations and hedge fund owners, beefed up IRS tax collections and lower federal costs from trimming pharmaceutical prices. It would spend \$369 billion on energy and climate change initiatives, what analysts and environmentalists called the largest federal investment ever on clean energy. Another \$64 billion would be to extend health insurance subsidies for three years, leaving \$306 billion for a modest swipe at massive federal deficits.

The measure is markedly less ambitious than the \$3.5 trillion version that stumbled, shrank and ultimately died in Congress last year, largely due to Manchin's opposition. The new bill lacks many of the party's initial goals including funds for a more generous child tax credit, paid family leave, expanded Medicare benefits and health care aid for poor families in the dozen states—mostly Republican and in the South—that refused to expand Medicaid under President Barack Obama's health care law.

Even so, the surprise agreement moves Biden and Democrats to the edge of claiming victory on top priorities like addressing global warming and easing consumers' health care costs, and boosting levies on the affluent to pay for it.

"It's bigger than nothing," said Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., who

with other progressives fought vainly last year against Manchin's efforts to trim the proposal. After Manchin prevailed, "A lot of us thought this was done unless we had more Senate seats, and the fact that we're able to still get something quite substantial done is impressive."

Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., another of his party's more conservative lawmakers, called the bill's prescription drug provisions "the most important piece of legislation we'll vote on in this Congress" besides last fall's infrastructure measure.

As leaders sold the plan to their members, the government reported that the economy had constricted for a second straight quarter. Worries that a recession was coming only intensified concerns over the nation's worst bout with inflation since the 1980s.

Both parties know inflation and economic anxiety is on top of voters' minds. With Republicans expected to win control of the House and perhaps the Senate too, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., turned his fire on Democrats' measure.

"Our colleagues across the aisle have already completely lost Americans' trust on the economy, before this reckless taxing and spending spree. Apparently they want to see how much farther they can fall," he said.

The bill would create tax credits for low- and middle-income buyers of electric vehicles, plus grants and tax breaks to spur clean energy technology and reduce carbon emissions. Medicare would begin negotiating for the pharmaceuticals it buys, prescription price increases would be limited and Medicare beneficiaries' out-of-pocket drug costs would be capped at \$2,000 annually.

AP reporter Matthew Daly contributed to this report.

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Business & Finance

Amazon Posts 2nd Qtr. Loss But Revenue Tops Estimates

By Haleluya Hadero

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK, N.Y. (AP)—Amazon on Thursday reported its second-consecutive quarterly loss but its revenue topped Wall Street expectations, sending its stock sharply higher.

The Seattle-based e-commerce giant also said it is making progress in controlling some of the excess costs from its massive expansion during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Amazon lost \$2.03 billion, or 20 cents per share, in the three-month period ended June 30, driven by a \$3.9 billion write-down of the value of its stock investment in electric vehicle start-up Rivian Automotive.

That compared to a profit of \$7.78 billion a year ago. It posted a loss of \$3.84 billion in this year's first quarter, its first quarterly loss since 2015, which was also marked by a large Rivian write-down. Analysts had been expecting a 12-cent profit in the latest quarter, according to FactSet.

But Wall Street was cheered by Amazon's \$121.2 billion in revenue, topping expectations of \$119 billion. The results came as the company attempts to navigate shifting consumer demand and higher costs, while curtailing the glut of warehouses it acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shares in Amazon.com Inc. rose almost 14 percent in after-hours trading.

CEO Andy Jassy said in a statement that Amazon is seeing its revenue accelerate as it invests in its Prime membership and offers more benefits to members, such as its recent deal to give free access to meal delivery service Grubhub for a year.

Subscription services have grown 10 percent compared to the prior year. Some analysts estimate the company generated roughly \$4.6 billion in revenue during its Prime Day shopping event, which it held during the second quarter last year but moved to the third in 2022. Amazon noted sales have also been dampened by foreign exchange rate fluctuations.

"Against this context, Amazon's performance is reasonable enough—but it is still a very long way from the stellar numbers Amazon usually produces," said Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData.

Jassy noted the company continues to feel inflationary pressure from higher energy and transportation costs, but it's been making progress controlling expenses related to its fulfillment network.

Between 2019 and 2021, Amazon nearly doubled the number of warehouses and data centers it leased and owned to keep up with rising consumer demand. But as consumers shifted their habits, Amazon found itself with too many workers and too much space, which added billions in extra costs. The company has been subleasing some of its warehouses, ending some of its leases and deferring construction on others to deal with the problem.

Amazon's Chief Financial Officer Brian Olsavsky said during a media call Thursday the company is slowing down its expansion plans for this year and the next to better align with customer demand. He said the company is also planning to shift capital investments towards its cloud-computing unit AWS.

Amazon's retail operations both internationally and in North

America reported operating losses, showing the company is suffering the same fate as Walmart and Target, Saunders said. Costs are outpacing sales and growth, though Amazon can dip into other profit pools—like AWS—to protect its overall performance, he said.

AWS, which is facing increasing competition from Microsoft Azure, earned \$19.74 billion in revenue, a 33 percent jump from last year. While Amazon's advertising unit, another burgeoning moneymaker, pulled in \$8.76 billion, an 18 percent increase from last year.

On the labor side, Amazon has been able to reduce its headcount through attrition and staffing levels were more in-line with demand, Olsavsky said. The company had 1.52 million employees by the end of June, down 6.1 percent from the first quarter. The performance of the broader economy is expected to shape its hiring plans moving forward.

"I don't think you'll see us hiring at the same pace we did over the last year, or in last few years," Olsavsky said, adding the company will continue to hire targeted positions for profitable units, like its advertising business and AWS.

Despite Wall Street's celebration, the e-commerce and tech giant's revenue growth still landed at a relatively sluggish 7 percent, about the same as the first quarter of this year and its slowest in about two decades. It comes as the pandemic-induced consumer reliance on online shopping dies down and Americans are shifting their spending habits away from things like home improvements towards traveling and eating out.

Consumers and businesses are also feeling the weight of surg-



STRUGGLES CONTINUE—First, Amazon and other online retailers struggled to keep up with surging customer demand during the COVID lockdown. Now that the pandemic is largely over and consumers are dealing with soaring prices and have turned away from Amazon, they are stuck with warehouse space they don't need. Thus, billions of dollars in lost revenue.

ing inflation, which is at its highest in 40 years. Faced with rising costs of food and gas, Americans have dialed back purchases on discretionary items, forcing Walmart, Target and other retailers with extra inventory to offer more discounts on items like electronics. Though Olsavsky

said inflation hasn't cooled down demand.

"We saw demand increase during the quarter and had a very strong June," he said.

Olsavsky also noted third-party sellers represented 57 percent of total units sold on Amazon during the quarter, the highest in

the company's history.

Amazon is expecting to post between \$125 billion and \$130 billion in revenue for the third quarter, a growth of 13 percent to 17 percent compared to the same period a year ago. Analysts are expecting \$126.49 billion, according to FactSet.

Congress OKs Computer Chip Bill

By Kevin Freking

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The House on Thursday passed a \$280 billion package to boost the semiconductor industry and scientific research in a bid to create more high-tech jobs in the United States and help it better compete with international rivals, namely China.

The House approved the bill by a solid margin of 243-187, sending the measure to President Joe Biden to be signed into law and providing the White House with a major domestic policy victory. Twenty-four Republicans voted for the legislation.

"Today, the House passed a bill that will make cars cheaper, appliances cheaper, and computers cheaper," Biden said. "It will lower the costs of every day goods. And it will create high-paying manufacturing jobs across the country and strengthen U.S. leadership in the industries of the future at the same time."

As the vote was taking place, Biden was discussing the economy with CEOs at the White

House. During the event, he was handed a note informing him it was clear the bill would pass—a development that produced a round of applause before the tally was final.

Republicans argued the government should not spend billions to subsidize the semiconductor industry and GOP leadership in the House recommended a vote against the bill, telling members the plan would provide enormous subsidies and tax credits "to a specific industry that does not need additional government handouts."

Rep. Guy Reschenthaler, R-Pa., said the way to help the industry would be through tax cuts and easing federal regulations, "not by picking winners and losers" with subsidies—an approach that Rep. Joseph Morelle, D-N.Y., said was too narrow.

"This affects every industry in the United States," Morelle said. "Take, for example, General Motors announcing they have 95,000 automobiles awaiting chips. So, you want to increase the supply of goods to people and help bring down inflation? This is about in-

creasing the supply of goods all over the United States in every single industry."

Some Republicans viewed passing the legislation as important for national security. Rep. Michael McCaul, the top Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said it was critical to protect semiconductor capacity in the U.S. and that the country was too reliant on Taiwan for the most advanced chips. That could prove to be a major vulnerability should China try to take over the self-governing island that Beijing views as a breakaway province.

"I've got a unique insight in this. I get the classified briefing. Not all these members do," McCaul said. "This is vitally important for our national security."

The bill provides more than \$52 billion in grants and other incentives for the semiconductor industry as well as a 25 percent tax credit for those companies that invest in chip plants in the U.S. It calls for increased spending on various research programs that would total about \$200 billion over 10 years, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Senate Deal To Help EV Buyers

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—The surprise deal by Senate Democrats on a slimmed-down bill to support families, boost infrastructure and fight climate change also is likely to jump-start sales of electric vehicles.

The measure agreed to by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and holdout Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia would give EV buyers a \$7,500 tax credit starting next year, through the end of 2032. There's also a new \$4,000 credit for those buying used EVs, a move to help the middle class go electric.

But as things often go in Washington, there are a bunch

of strings and asterisks.

To be eligible, the electric vehicle has to be assembled in North America, and there are limits on annual income for buyers. There also are caps on the sticker prices of new EVs—\$80,000 for pickups, SUVs and vans, and \$55,000 for other vehicles—and a \$25,000 limit on the price of used electric vehicles.

Still, even with the restrictions, the credits should help stimulate electric vehicle sales, which already are rising as automakers introduce more models in different sizes and price ranges, said Jessica Caldwell, an analyst for Edmunds.com.

"The tax credits for electric vehicles in the bill will benefit consumers and cut costs for low- and middle-income

families," the Sierra Club said of the measure, which still must be approved by both chambers. "We're hoping for swift adoption."

For the first half of this year, electric vehicles accounted for about 5 percent of U.S. new vehicle sales, with 46 models on sale. S&P Global Mobility expects that to hit 8 percent next year, 15 percent by 2025, and 37 percent by 2030.

At present, many new EVs, including two of sales leader Tesla's four models, wouldn't be eligible for the credits because they're priced higher than the bill's limits, Caldwell said. But the number of eligible vehicles will grow as automakers roll out more mainstream EVs during the next few years, she said.

Navy Expedites Waterborne Drones To Counter China's Growing Influence

By David Sharp

Associated Press

Facing a growing threat from China, the Navy envisions drone ships keeping an electronic eye on enemy forces across the vast Pacific Ocean, extending the reach of firepower, and keeping sailors out of harm's way.

The Navy is speeding development of those robotic ships as an affordable way to keep pace with China's growing fleet while vowing not to repeat costly shipbuilding blunders from recent years.

The four largest drone ships are being used together this summer during a multinational naval exercise in the Pacific Ocean.

Other smaller waterborne drones are already being deployed by the Navy's 5th Fleet in the waters off the Middle East.

The goal in coming years is to see how these research vessels' radar and sensors can be combined with artificial intelligence, and integrated with traditional cruisers, destroyers, submarine and aircraft carriers, to create a networked fleet that's resilient

because it's spread over greater distances and more difficult for enemies to destroy, the Navy says.

"It's about moving the technology forward, and having confidence in the capability. Everything takes time," said Cmdr. Jeremiah Daley, commanding officer of Unmanned Surface Vessel Division One in California.

The Navy believes the technology can help with the three keys for military success—weapons range, scouting, and command and control—at a lower cost and

risk to personnel, said James Holmes, a professor at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.

But all of those benefits must be proven, along with long-term durability in a harsh saltwater environment, he said.

"We're sort of in Jerry Maguire 'show me the money' territory with the tech. It will undoubtedly be useful, but whether it will be a game-changer is far less clear," said Holmes, who doesn't speak for the Navy.

Before moving forward, the Navy must first win over a skeptical Congress after a series of shipbuilding debacles.

Its speedy littoral combat ships have had propulsion problems, leading to early retirements. The "Advanced Gun System" on its stealth destroyer was a bust because of expensive ammo. And its newest aircraft carrier had problems with elevators and a new system to launch aircraft.

Critics said the Navy rushed to cram too much new technology onto those ships, leading to failures and growing costs.

"We can't just throw all the resources at (robotic ships) with the track record of 20 years of failed ship programs," said Democratic Rep. Elaine Luria of Virginia, who is a retired Navy officer.

The Navy's Unmanned Task Force is taking a new approach, using a military equivalent of a venture capital model to expedite new ideas, and moving forward only after technologies are proven, said Michael Stewart, the director of the task force.

This summer, four large drone ships are working alongside conventional ships during the war

games called RIMPAC.

Those include the Sea Hunter and Sea Hawk, diesel-powered ships equipped with outriggers for stability in rough seas. The other two are Ranger and Nomad, which are based on oil platform replenishment ships. They have large flat decks from which a missile was successfully fired last year.

While those larger vessels are tested in the Pacific, the Navy is already seeing promising results with smaller, commercially available vessels that are being assessed by Task Force 59, which is part of the 5th Fleet in Bahrain, said Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, 5th Fleet spokesperson.

One of the vessels that received attention is the Saildrone, a sail-powered vessel with solar-powered systems. Equipped with radar and cameras, Saildrones are touted as being able to operate autonomously for months at a time without maintenance or resupply.

Based on the success of multinational exercises last winter, the 5th Fleet said the U.S. Navy and international partners intend to deploy 100 crewless vessels by next summer.

All told, Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, envisions a mix of 150 large crewless surface vessels and undersea vessels by 2045. That's on top of more than 350 conventional battle force ships.

The Navy's spending proposal for the new fiscal year includes \$433 million for crewless surface vessels and \$284 million for undersea vessels.

Those vessels coupled with artificial intelligence have the potential to make the Navy's fleet much more effective, said Gilday, the Navy's top officer. But the

Navy is going about research and development "in an evolutionary, deliberate, informed kind of way," he said.

The biggest advantage of robotic ships is that they could be built at a fraction of the cost of conventional warships as the Navy struggles to keep pace with China and Russia, said Loren Thompson, defense analyst at the Lexington Institute. The U.S. already lags behind China in ship numbers, and the gap is growing each year.

But Congress isn't rushing into funding new programs, said Bryan Clark, a defense analyst at the Hudson institute. "Congress wants the Navy to have a good plan—and then pursue it aggressively," Clark said.

On Capitol Hill, Luria said there may be a place for crewless ships, perhaps in replacing missile capability for ships the Navy wants to retire. But there's a lot of research and development necessary to convince Congress to heavily invest in ships without any sailors.

"I just don't think the technology is mature enough now to make a wholesale investment," said Luria, D-Virginia.

Sen. Mazie Hirono, chair of the seapower subcommittee, said Gilday has assured her that the Navy is "conscious of not moving too quickly on unproven technology."

"The Navy must get this right the first time and support rigorous testing with prototypes before committing to buying a fleet," said Hirono, D-Hawaii.

Sharp reported from Portland, Maine. Associated Press writer Jennifer McDermott contributed to this report in Providence, Rhode Island.



GOING UNMANNED—The Navy is pinning its hopes on a new fleet of drones—some small, some the size of regular ships but without sailors on board—as it looks to cut costs and ensure the safety of personnel. Congress is wary, however, as the Navy has had some fiascos of late and the technology is unproven.

Opinion



Does Anyone Really Care About African-American Boys and Men?

By Dr. Salvatore J. Giorgianni, Jr. PharmD. and Dr. Jean Bonhomme, MD MPH.

National Black Men's Health Network

Over two and a half years ago, in the article “African-American Boys and Men in America Are Killing Themselves and No One Seems to Care,” I wrote about the national disgrace that is the heavier toll of suicide facing African-American boys and men. I said that in minority communities, people often misunderstand what a mental health condition is, and therefore, discussing the subject is uncommon. A lack of understanding leads many to believe that a mental health condition is a personal weakness or a form of punishment. African-Americans are also more likely to be exposed to factors that increase the risk for developing a mental health condition, such as discrimination, social isolation, homelessness, and exposure to violence.

What has changed—for better and for worse—since then? Do African-American men and boys continue to have a higher death rate from suicide and violence than others? Is the male suicide rate in the United States still far higher than women? Is suicide still a leading cause of death for minority males? Are African-Americans still more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population? Sadly, the answer to all of these questions remains yes.

What has gotten worse? As I've said previously, African-American youth who are exposed to violence have a 25 percent higher risk of developing PTSD than non-Black youth. Violent crime rates in U.S. cities have only increased since 2019. This is especially true amongst young African-American men. These two facts seem inextricably tied together: violence leads to PTSD; PTSD leads to violence, over and over again.

Minority access to mental health-related diagnoses and care is impeded by barriers and challenges that are also experienced by minorities who need addiction and recovery support and resources. There also seems a strong correlation between mental health issues and overdose rates. A recent *JAMA* study suggests that during the COVID epidemic, specifically from January 2019 through mid-2020, opioid overdoses decreased 24 percent among Whites in Philadelphia. Conversely, opioid overdoses actually increased amongst Black Philadelphians by over 50 percent. According to the U. S. Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, only one third of Black adults diagnosed with mental illness receives treatment. According to the American Psychiatric Association's “Mental Health Facts for African-Americans” guide, Black adults are less likely to be included in research and receive quality care, while being more likely to use an emergency room as primary care.

I recently spoke with Dr. Jean Bonhomme, founder of the National Black Men's Health Network, who relayed to me some other startling recent statistics. In 2020, African-Americans made up about 13.5 percent of the U.S. population, while they also made up over 55 percent of homicide victims, with a more than a 65 percent increase in homicides relative to 2019. Other stark figures that Dr. Bonhomme shared were from a recent CDC study.

In the same period—2019 through 2020—drug overdose death rates for non-Hispanic Black persons increased by 44 percent, while for non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) persons the drug overdose death rates increased by 39 percent. Other numbers that jump out include the 2020 death rate from overdose among Black males aged 16-65 years (52.6 per 100,000) as being nearly seven times that of non-Hispanic white males of a similar age. Meanwhile, treatment for substance use was at the lowest for Black persons (at 8.3 percent). One factor in the mental health crisis disproportionately facing the Black community is shown in data from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors. This data indicates that the number of people admitted to psychiatric hospitals (and other residential facilities) in the U.S. declined from 471,000 in 1970 to 170,000 in 2014. This reduction in the availability of a potential intervention opportunity appears to have led to growth in incarceration and similar non-therapeutic interventions, which, in the absence of these other options, take the place of actual psychiatric help. We must also consider that the life circumstances of young Black men must also be the driver of many of these differences and disparities. Out of decency alone, the U.S. needs to find a way to identify and target systemic changes to benefit these populations, which have the most urgent need.

Data like this can seem overwhelming, but this only highlights how disparities tend to cascade through any system, like an engine with one worn part eventually damaging another. The United States has deferred system-wide maintenance in the places that have needed them most for far too long: the health and mental health care systems. The outcome is predictable, yet we remain shocked when the situation worsens.

Are there any positives that can impact minority mental health? Absolutely! The new nation-wide 988 crisis number launch went live July 16th of this year, and text-based services will be included. Studies suggest that over 75 percent of those using text on existing crisis services are under 25. Minority populations in the USA have a higher percentage of people in younger age groups than Whites. Therefore, better serving an underserved community is an outcome that is a clear improvement on the current situation.

Post-pandemic societal trauma, proper focusing on framing gender equity, gender identification, and gender expression are all areas of special concern within minority communities. For example, a Black teen in a city school district might not find the same resources and support as a White teen in the suburbs. This can trigger high mental stress that may follow them into and throughout adulthood. Issues like these, and the struggle to keep issues relevant to mainstream media, are just the tip of the iceberg of challenges facing any effort to improve the existing situation surrounding minority men's mental health.

What can be done? The ACA (Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare), as passed by Congress, does not provide for Well-Man visits. I continue to urge insurance companies and other payers to include adequately-reimbursed Well-Man medical visits similar to the yearly Well-Woman Visits available under the ACA.

Men's Health Network redoubles its recommendation that those charged with the health and social welfare of boys and men consider the following:

1. Acknowledge the heterogeneity of boys and men and the unique needs of diverse populations
2. Develop culturally appropriate male-focused screening tools
3. Develop guidelines that recognize the need to regularly and routinely screen boys and men for both physical and mental health issues
4. Address the poor reimbursement for behavioral health clinical services

5. Establish culturally and gender-appropriate programs to identify, interrupt, triage, and manage mental health issues in African-American boys and men, providing education and training for those in the community who interact with boys and men.

With this said, Men's Health Network, Healthy Men, Inc., the National Black Men's Health Network, and the Men's Health Caucus, have launched a public awareness campaign, “You OK, Bro?” (<https://www.youokbro.org/>) and will be hosting a workshop summit on Thursday, Oct. 13, 2022 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. to build awareness of the mental health crisis now erupting in the male population of the U.S. This important event will be live-streamed. The goal of the summit is to examine and return recommendations to help reverse the recent increase in mental health crises. Behavioral experts from multiple organizations will share research, trends and discoveries, and supply information to men, boys, and their loved ones to help them identify the signs of mental distress, and recommend ways to improve mental and emotional fitness.

“You OK, Bro?” is the beginning of a dialog that can start with those words, whether between just two men, or at a national scale. We hope “You OK, Bro?” can change the way the U.S. sees and talks about men's mental health.

MEN'S HEALTH NETWORK Men's Health Network (MHN) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to reach men, boys, and their families where they live, work, play, and pray with health awareness and disease prevention messages and tools, screening programs, educational materials, advocacy opportunities, and patient navigation.



Get Brittney Griner Back? Sure—but Release Her Counterparts in America, Too

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

On July 27, the Biden administration offered their Russian counterparts a deal: Release WNBA player Brittney Griner and alleged U.S. spy Paul Whelan, in return for the U.S. releasing Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.

Griner, currently on trial, faces a 10-year sentence if convicted of possessing cannabis. She was arrested at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport on February 17 after officials allegedly found vape cartridges containing “hash oil” in her possession.

I'd personally like to see Griner released. I suspect most Americans agree with me. But the political outrage over her arrest feels quite manufactured given that hundreds of thousands of Americans get treated like Griner every year by their own governments.

Even though a super-majority of Americans support legalization of marijuana, and even though a number of states have moved in that direction on both medical and recreational use, the Center for American Progress reports that U.S. law enforcement agencies still make more than 600,000 marijuana arrests every year. At any given time, tens of thousands of Americans languish behind bars for the very “crime” Griner stands accused of in Russia.

There's no doubt that marijuana is winning, and was always going to win, the “war on marijuana.”

The only winners in that “war” have been black market drug dealers, law enforcement budgets, and opportunistic politicians.

Everyone else loses. Not just marijuana users. Non-user taxpayers have to not only foot the bill, but put up with the possibility that they and their family members and friends may, at any moment, suffer police harassment and search on suspicion of harboring the devil weed in their cars, homes, blood, or urine.

The U.S. government cares about Brittney Griner because she's a celebrity who's been arrested by America's Enemy of the Week.

If she'd been one of us nobodies and had been arrested anywhere else in the world—including in the U.S. itself—she'd have been just another number in the war on marijuana's ugly casualty statistics. We'd have never seen her name outside of local police blotter and court reportage.

That doesn't mean she should go to prison. She shouldn't. But neither should anyone else, anywhere, go to prison for possession of a beneficial plant.

Bring Brittney Griner home... and send her U.S. counterparts home, too. Release them from America's prisons, expunge their convictions, end the war on marijuana, and let them—and the rest of us—get on with our lives without further ado.

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



Essential Workers—Who Gets A Place In The Pandemic Picket Line?

By Chris Langevin

University of Massachusetts Boston

At a time of children with popsicle-covered faces running around and summer music festivals—many are celebrating the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond celebrations though, parents of children under 5 scramble to pediatrician offices while immunocompromised folks try to navigate daily life with deadly risks. Healthcare workers face long-term burnout and abuse from patients, long past praise as heroes and applause at the turn of shifts.

The response to the pandemic and surrounding conversations are about much more than masks, vaccines, and school policies. Beyond the vote, petitions and protests have been an advocacy tool for either

stronger protections or the removal of pandemic restrictions.

The spectrum of protest and political engagement may have the appearance of representing a range of voices in the spirit of democracy. In a country where free speech is paramount, aren't all voices heard if they simply speak loudly enough?

The reality is that for many of those most impacted by COVID—the migrant ‘essential workers’ that kept the service economy afloat during the pandemic—their protest and dissent are not tolerated the same way as other groups.

Immigrants across the United States work alongside American citizens in every industry, including healthcare, food, sanitation, and transportation—critical jobs society depends on daily.

A substantial population of U.S. agricultural laborers are immigrants, notable at a time when global food insecurity is at a critical point. The crops harvested to keep food on dinner tables could not be harvested via Zoom.

Every work shift for them, beyond navigating transportation, childcare, and other obstacles, carried the potential for additional exposure to the virus.

Once enough people were sick, we also saw that, thanks in part to social determinants of health, diverse and immigrant communities were more vulnerable to severe illness from COVID-19. According to the CDC, Native American, Black, and Hispanic persons were 2.2–3 times more likely to be hospitalized and 1.7–2.1 times more likely to die of COVID than non-Hispanic white people. Last year, NPR reported on the shockingly high COVID deathrates for Filipino nurses, despite being 4 percent of the RNs working in the U.S.

Survey data from our work at the Immigrant Visibility and Political Activism Research Collaborative (IVPARC) shows that U.S. host communities tolerate political participation from immigrants less than activism by native-born citizens.

Even among immigrants, Americans perceive a hierarchy, with 13 percent of survey respondents believing that naturalized citizens do not have the right to protest, compared to 23 percent for immigrants with a temporary visa, 33 percent for undocumented veterans, and 53 percent for undocumented migrants in general.

With deeply entrenched expectations concerning how and if people from different backgrounds should voice their opinions, those who were most harmed by the pandemic, ‘essential workers’ or not, have less of a voice.

This intolerance has harmful, even deadly consequences. Peaceful protests turn violent when met with counter-protesters. Rising rates of U.S. hate crimes against immigrants, with a disproportionate impact on Asian-American communities, make it clear that it's not just the virus threatening safety. Even as many immigrants endure insecurity and marginalization, their efforts to speak up for rights and protections are met with suspicion, fear, and outright intolerance.

It's an incredible privilege to speculate how others should advocate for themselves in life-or-death circumstances. When critiquing these voices and how they're expressed, we owe it to ourselves to consider what would be acceptable? Is it the way they are protesting or that they are speaking up at all?

Moving forward productively requires an honest look at the fact that we expect political silence and invisibility from those same workers who have risked and suffered so much for the collective good.

Chris Langevin is a doctoral researcher at University of Massachusetts Boston in Global Governance and Human Security.



Nonviolence Is The Best Antidote To Political Violence

By Andrew Moss

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Aquilino Gonell felt rage. The U.S. Army veteran and 16-year member of the Capitol Police force was listening to Cassidy Hutchinson tell the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack how Donald Trump had spurred on his followers even though he knew many were armed.

Sitting in on that June 28 hearing, Mr. Gonell later explained his reaction: “of course, I never would have imagined that an American president would not only come to the aid of law enforcement officers defending the Capitol but encourage that crowd to march on it. Instead of being notified about the danger, my colleagues and I were kept in the dark and thus walked into an ambush.”

Mr. Gonell sustained injuries that required multiple surgeries, left him in chronic pain, and cut short his career. As with so many others, including the five Capitol police officers who died (four by suicide) as a result of that day, Mr. Gonell encountered the full force of a political violence unleashed by the former president.

In response to the violence, the Jan. 6 committee made significant strides in documenting the administration's role in fomenting and orchestrating the mayhem, in laying the groundwork for potential legal action, and in raising awareness of the threats posed to democracy by the January 6 insurrection. But political violence continues, appearing, for example, in hundreds, if not thousands, of threats to election workers, threats that reportedly have caused many workers to resign their posts.

It's time to bring forth a more comprehensive vision, a vision not invoked very frequently, if at all, in recent mainstream political discourse. It's a vision of nonviolence.

Now, when many people think of nonviolence, they may call to mind nonviolent actions or campaigns that resulted in profound transformations, e.g., Gandhi's Salt March (1930), or the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, or the marches that helped spur the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and others knew well that nonviolence is more than a repertoire of collective actions; it derives its power from the application of certain principles, including the importance of overcoming injustice rather than defeating an adversary. Time after time, this principle, combined with a disciplined refraining from violence of any kind, helped maintain a laser-like focus on the injustice at hand.

Whereas violence draws its power from fear in order to intimidate, nonviolence appeals to truth, representing the power to heal, to uplift, and to restore community. This stark contrast gives to us a precise measure of the ethical uses of power, offering a moral compass that points the nation in a direction of enlarged, not diminished, human possibilities.

To some, such ideas may seem lofty in a country where violence and violence-wielding heroes are celebrated in film, video, video games, and in countless other cultural forms. But nonviolence is ultimately about action. Skilled practitioners of nonviolence understand the strategic and collaborative dimensions of nonviolent campaigns and movements: the need for intense democratic discussion and analysis, the necessity for well-thought-out strategy based on the needs and priorities of a particular time.