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## Evictions Spike As Protections Disappear

By Michael Casey

Associated Press

Jada Riley thought she had beaten homelessness.

The 26-year-old New Orleans resident was finally making a steady income cleaning houses during the pandemic to afford a \$700-a-month, one-bedroom apartment. But she lost nearly all her clients after Hurricane Ida hit last year. Then she was fired from a grocery store job in February after taking time off to help a relative.

Two months behind on rent, she made the difficult decision last month to leave her apartment rather than risk an eviction judgment on her record. Now, she's living in her car with her 6-year-old son, sometimes spending nights at the apartments of friends or her son's father.

"I've slept outside for a whole year before. It's very depressing, I'm not going to lie," said Riley, who often doesn't have enough

money to buy gas or afford food every day.

"I don't want to have my son experience any struggles that I went through."

Eviction filings nationwide have steadily risen in recent months and are approaching or exceeding pre-pandemic levels in many cities and states. That's in stark contrast to the pandemic, when state and federal moratoriums on evictions, combined with \$46.5 billion in federal Emergency Rental Assistance, kept millions of families housed.

"I really think this is the tip of the iceberg," Shannon MacKenzie, executive director of Colorado Poverty Law Project, said of June filings in Denver, which were about 24 percent higher than the same time three years ago. "Our numbers of evictions are increasing every month at an astonishing rate, and I just don't see that abating any time soon."

According to The Eviction Lab, several cities are running far

above historic averages, with Minneapolis-St. Paul 91 percent higher in June, Las Vegas up 56 percent, Hartford, Connecticut, up 32 percent, and Jacksonville, Florida, up 17 percent. In Maricopa County, home to Phoenix, eviction filings in July were the highest in 13 years, officials said.

Some legal advocates said the sharp increase in housing prices due to inflation is partly to blame. Rental prices nationwide are up nearly 15 percent from a year ago and almost 25 percent from 2019, according to the real estate company Zillow. Rental vacancy rates, meanwhile, have declined to a 35-year low of 5.8 percent, according to the Census Bureau.

A report last month from the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that a tenant working full time needs to make nearly \$26 per hour on average nationally to afford a

(See **EVICTIONS SPIKE**, P. 2)



**NOPLACE TO GO**—Jada Riley sits in her car at night with her son Jayden Harris, 6, as she contemplates where she might spend the night. "I've slept outside for a whole year before. It's very depressing, I'm not going to lie," said Riley, who often doesn't have enough money to buy gas or afford food every day. I don't want to have my son experience any struggles that I went through." [Photo by Gerald Herbert/AP]

## Conservatives Eye Constitution

By Nicholas Riccardi

Associated Press

DENVER, Colo. (AP)—The fliers piled up in mailboxes in central South Dakota like snow during a high-plains blizzard: "Transgender Sex Education in Schools?" one asked. "Vote Against Sex Ed Radical Mary Duvall for State Senate."

The mailers were part of a \$58,000 campaign against the five-term Republican lawmaker, an enormous sum of money in a place where the cost of running for a statehouse seat is typically in the low five figures. Despite the subject of the attack ads, Duvall was targeted not for her stance on sex education but for her opposition to a longshot bid by some conservatives to force a convention to amend the U.S. Constitution.

"I knew they were angry at me, but I had no idea this was going to be coming during my primary campaign," said Duvall, who ended up losing her race by 176 votes.

Duvall opposed legislation that would have added South Dakota to 19 other states calling for a gathering known as a convention of states, following a plan mapped out by a conservative group that wants to change parts of the United States' foundational document. When that number hits two-thirds of the states—or 34—under the procedure laid out in the Constitution, a convention would meet with the power to amend the 235-year-old document.

The campaign against Duvall was part of a more than \$600,000 push in at least five states earlier this year by the group, Convention of States Action, and its affiliates in Republican primaries to elect sympathetic lawmakers who could add more states to its column. Much of the money comes from groups that do not have to disclose their donors, masking the identity of who is funding the push to change the Constitution.

Mark Meckler, the group's president and former head of Tea Party Patriots, issued a brief statement saying the group was committed to being active in the midterms "in a big way."

For years, Convention of States Action has been a staple of the conservative political scene. But its engagement in primary campaigns marks an escalation at a time when parts of the conservative movement are testing the limits of the nation's political rulebook, pushing aggressive tactics from gerrymandering to voting restrictions.

The track record of the convention group's spending is spotty. In South Dakota, where the group and its affiliates spent more than \$200,000 targeting four state Senate seats, Duvall was the only one of its targets to lose. And the challenger who beat her, Jim Mehlhaff, said in an interview that he thinks the group's intervention hurt him.

"I didn't appreciate the negative tone of their mailers. It probably cost me some votes," said Mehlhaff, a former member

of Pierre's city commission who had his own base of support in

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

## White House Releases Policy Goals for Sub-Saharan Africa

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

The White House has released broad new policy goals for sub-Saharan Africa, with the Biden-Harris administration seeking to tie democratic, economic, and security progress to that region and U.S. national security.

"Sub-Saharan Africa plays a critical role in advancing global priorities to the benefit of Africans and Americans," a senior White House official stated.

"The region will factor prominently in efforts to end the COVID-19 pandemic; tackle the climate crisis; reverse the global tide of democratic backsliding; address global food insecurity; promote gender equity and equality; strengthen an open and stable international system; shape the rules of the world on vital issues like trade, cyber, and emerging technologies; and confront the threat of terrorism, conflict, and transnational crime."

In outlining the new strategy, administration officials contended that greater openness and democracy would help counter harmful activities by China, Russia, and other opposition governments.

The administration believes that Beijing views Sub-Saharan Africa as an "arena to challenge the rules-based international order, advance its own narrow commercial and geopolitical interests, and weaken U.S. relations with African peoples and governments."

The policy outlines how the administration believes Russia "views the region as a permissive environment for parastatals and private military companies, often fomenting instability for strategic and financial benefit."

"We're incredibly concerned about the role of Russian mercenaries," one administration official stated.

According to the White House, nearly 70 percent of Africans strongly support democracy.

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



### MASKS TO BE REQUIRED AGAIN AT GREAT SMOKY NATIONAL PARK

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (AP)—Masks will once again be required for visitors inside all Great Smoky Mountains National Park buildings due to the high transmission of the COVID-19 outbreak.

According to the park's website, the mask mandate will apply to all visitors regardless of vaccination status.

The policy was put in place to be "consistent with (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidance regarding areas of substantial or high transmission," the website said.

The CDC's website shows that Blount, Cocke and Sevier counties, which encompass the park in Tennessee, are currently considered high risk areas. In North Carolina, Swain and Haywood counties that also connect to the park are considered medium risk.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins say there were roughly 431 cases per 100,000 people in Tennessee over the past two weeks, which ranks 28th in the country for new cases per capita.

### NC TEACHERS GROUP CRITICAL OF PROPOSED LICENSE, PAY OVERHAUL

(AP)—Members of North Carolina's leading teacher advocacy group criticized on Tuesday a proposed overhaul of public school instructor pay and licensing, saying that implementing such changes would make existing classroom staffing challenges even worse.

The state Department of Public Instruction released to the State Board of Education in April a "sample" licensure model that stemmed from recommendations made by subcommittees of a state educator preparation and standards commission.

Any final proposal would need formal approval from the state board, and ultimately from the legislature to fund it. But switching from the current licensure and salary model, which largely rewards teachers financially based on years of classroom experience, to one based on performance has the support of Superintendent of Public Instruction Catherine Truitt and board chairman Eric Davis. They said last week the current model is not attracting enough people to teaching and to stay in the field.

At a news conference, North Carolina Association of Educators members said one solution is to raise all teacher pay through the existing salary schedule framework that currently omits experience-based increases for some of the most veteran teachers for a decade. Existing programs to encourage young people to enter the field also should be expanded and new ones created, NCAE Vice President Bryan Proffitt said.

"Our state already has the policies and pathways that we need to support recruitment and retention, but they lack the execution with fidelity and the necessary funding commitment from the leadership of the General Assembly," Proffitt said outside the state education building.

The DPI proposal would create several licensure levels, each with larger base salaries that ultimately would exceed the maximum salary on the current pay schedule, which is \$54,000 for 25 years of experience. The sample model presented earlier this year envisioned advanced-level teachers, with leadership roles in their schools earning \$73,000.

Moving to advanced licensing levels would depend in part on teachers showing instruction competence and improvement in student test scores. Supporters say the model would reward instructors who create better student outcomes. But Proffitt and others said such performance measures are subjective and flawed and will actually discourage people from making public education a lifetime profession.

"We deserve to be paid for our experience, without jumping through hoops or worrying if this year's paycheck will be different than next year's," said Kiana Espinoza, a Wake County middle school teacher and news conference speaker.

### MUSK SAYS TWITTER DEAL COULD MOVE AHEAD WITH 'BOT' INFO

Elon Musk said Saturday his planned \$44 billion takeover of Twitter should move forward if the company can confirm some details about how it measures whether user accounts are 'spam bots' or real

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

## FTC Looking To Corral Tech Firms' Data Collection

WASHINGTON (AP) — Whether it's the fitness tracker on your wrist, the "smart" home appliances in your house or the latest kids' fad going viral in online videos, they all produce a trove of personal data for big tech companies.

How that data is being used and protected has led to growing public concern and officials' outrage. And now federal regulators are looking at drafting rules

to crack down on what they call harmful commercial surveillance and lax data security.

The Federal Trade Commission announced the initiative Thursday, seeking public comment on the effects of companies' data collection and the potential benefit of new rules to protect consumers' privacy.

The FTC defines commercial surveillance as "the business of collecting, analyzing and prof-

iting from information about people."

In Congress, bipartisan condemnation of the data power of Meta — the parent of Facebook and Instagram — Google and other tech giants that have earned riches by aggregating consumer information used by online advertisers, has brought national data privacy legislation to its closest point ever to passage.

Around the country, parents'

concern has deepened over the impact of social media on children. Frances Haugen, a former Facebook data scientist, stunned Congress and the public last fall when she exposed internal company research showing apparent serious harm to some teens from Instagram. Those revelations were followed by senators grilling executives from YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat about what they're doing to ensure young users' safety in the wake of suicides and other harms to teens attributed by their parents to their usage of the platforms.

As concerns rise, social media platforms from Snapchat to TikTok to Instagram are adding new features they say will make their services safer and more age appropriate. But the changes rarely address the algorithms pushing endless content that can drag anyone, not just teens, into harmful rabbit holes.

The Democratic members of the FTC said Thursday it's imperative for Congress to pass a new law, but that the agency was taking action in the meantime by issuing the notice of proposed rules.

"Mass surveillance has heightened the risks and stakes of data breaches, deception, manipulation and other abuses," the FTC

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





# Business & Finance

## OSHA Investigates Deaths Of Amazon Workers In Jersey

By Haleluya Hadero

AP Business Writer

Federal work-safety investigators are looking into the death of an Amazon worker and an injury that potentially led to the death of another employee, adding to a probe already underway following a third fatality during the company's annual Prime Day shopping event in mid-July.

All three Amazon workers died within the past month and were employed at company facilities in New Jersey.

The new Occupational Health and Safety Administration investigations are putting fresh scrutiny on Amazon's injury rates and workplace-safety procedures, which have long been criticized by labor and safety advocates as inadequate.

Department of Labor spokesperson Denisha Braxton confirmed Thursday that the most-recent fatality took place last week at an Amazon facility in Monroe Township, about 20 miles northeast of Trenton. The second probe is looking into a July 24 accident at an Amazon facility in Robbinsville. The worker involved in that accident died three days later, according to Braxton.

In a statement, Robbinsville Police Chief Michael Polaski said police responded to the warehouse, called PNE5, on July 24 after

receiving a report that a worker fell from a three-foot ladder and struck his head.

Polaski said the worker was conscious and alert when police arrived. But police were told CPR was conducted on the person by other workers prior to their arrival, he said. The person was transported to a hospital and OSHA was notified of the incident on the same day, he added.

Police in Monroe Township didn't immediately reply for a request for comment on the incident there.

The two most recent deaths were first reported by the USA Today Network.

OSHA officials declined to provide additional information about any of the deaths, citing the open investigations. The agency has up to six months to complete each probe.

Sam Stephenson, a spokesperson for Seattle-based Amazon, said in a statement the company was "deeply saddened by the passing of our colleagues and offer our condolences to their family and friends."

"Our investigations are ongoing and we're cooperating with OSHA, which is conducting its own reviews of the events, as it often does in these situations," Stephenson said.

Last month, OSHA launched another investigation into a worker

fatality at an Amazon warehouse in the New Jersey town of Carteret during the company's Prime Day shopping event, which turned out to be the biggest in the company's history. Federal officials haven't released additional details about the death, but news reports have identified the worker as 42-year-old Rafael Reynaldo Mota Frias.

A spokesperson for Amazon said the company's internal investigation into the Carteret death shows it "was not a work-related incident, and instead was related to a personal medical condition."

"OSHA is currently investigating the incident, and, based upon the evidence currently available to us, we fully expect that it will reach the same conclusion," the spokesperson said.

News of the deaths comes amid broader scrutiny into the company's operations. In late July, OSHA officials inspected Amazon facilities in New York, Illinois and Florida after receiving referrals alleging health and safety violations from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York.

The civil division of the U.S. attorney's office is also investigating safety hazards at Amazon warehouses and "fraudulent conduct designed to hide injuries from OSHA and others," according to a spokesperson for the office.



**A DANGEROUS PLACE TO WORK?** Three deaths of workers at Amazon "fulfillment centers" (warehouses) in New Jersey were just random accidents, says the internet shopping behemoth. But OSHA isn't so sure, especially after complaints of health and safety violations at the facilities.

## MGM, Ring Plan To Put On Reality Show From Viral Doorbell Videos

NEW YORK, N.Y. (AP)—Two Amazon-owned companies—Ring and Hollywood studio MGM—are teaming to create a TV show in the mold of "America's Funniest Home Videos" using viral footage from Ring's doorbell and smart-home cameras.

The half-hour show, called "Ring Nation," will be hosted by actor and comedian Wanda Sykes and premier in syndica-

tion on Sept. 26, MGM said.

The studio noted audiences should expect to see the usual things that go viral—marriage proposals, neighbors saving neighbors and silly animals.

The series showcases Amazon's fusion of its various business arms, this time to highlight what MGM called "interesting moments from communities across the country."

"You have one company that

owns two juggernauts and (has) just figured out how to leverage one against the other," said Robert Passikoff, president of the brand research firm Brand Keys. He noted that unlike scripted movies or shows, a reality series using Ring footage will likely be cheaper to produce.

The show also presents a branding opportunity for the Seattle-based e-commerce and retail giant, which bought Ring in

2018 for \$1 billion and has dealt with rounds of privacy concerns around Ring and its relationship with police departments across the country.

Last month, Amazon revealed it had provided Ring doorbell footage to law enforcement 11 times this year without the user's permission—all in response to emergency requests, according to the company.

MGM, which Amazon pur-

chased for \$8.5 billion, said in a statement Thursday that "Ring Nation" will offer audiences "daily dose of life's unpredictable, heartwarming and hilarious viral videos" shared by people from their cameras.

"Many of these have been previously shared online," Amazon spokesperson Nick Schweers said. "Others were sent directly to the team." Ring Nation secures permissions for each vid-

eo from the owner and anyone identifiable in the video, or from companies that hold the rights to the clips, he said.

Amazon's deal to purchase MGM was closed earlier this year, though the Federal Trade Commission has said it still retains discretion to challenge it. Big Fish Entertainment, a production company owned by MGM, will also be part of the partnership.

## Climate Bill Consequences: Could Coal Communities Shift To Nuclear?

By Jennifer McDermott and Mary Katherine Wildeman

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP)—A major economic bill headed to the president has "game-changing" incentives for the nuclear energy industry, experts say, and those tax credits are even more substantial if a facility is sited in a community where a coal plant is closing.

The transformative bill provides the most spending to fight climate change by any one nation ever in a single push. Among the many things it could do nuclear energy experts say it spur more projects like one Bill Gates is planning in Kemmerer, Wyoming. Gates' company, TerraPower, plans to build an advanced, nontraditional nuclear reactor and employ workers from a local coal-fired power plant scheduled to close soon.

Companies designing and building the next generation of nuclear reactors could pick one of two new tax credits available to carbon-free electricity gen-

erators, such as wind and solar. To ensure coal communities have a place in the energy transition, both tax credits include a 10-percentage point bonus for facilities sited where residents have relied on fossil fuel plants or mining—a "sizeable incentive" to locate them there, according to Matt Crozat, senior director for strategy and policy development at the Nuclear Energy Institute.

That could include towns in coal-dependent West Virginia, since the state eliminated a ban on nuclear power plants this year. Or in Maryland, where the state announced a partnership in June to look at repurposing a fossil fuel site for a small nuclear reactor. Or in Montana, where lawmakers are looking at advanced nuclear reactors as a possible replacement for coal boilers.

Staffan Qvist, an expert in energy systems analysis and decarbonization strategies, has extensively researched the feasibility of replacing coal plants with emissions-free alternatives in China and Poland. He found

that coal plants often make ideal sites for advanced, high-temperature nuclear reactors.

"It's a growing trend," Qvist said, "now it's being talked about everywhere." Qvist is also founder of Qvist Consulting Limited in the United Kingdom. "You have a site, you have a grid connection. You have equipment that can remain in use, and you have a workforce that could be retrained."

A design by NuScale Power is the first to be fully certified in the United States and the company is planning to begin operating a small modular reactor in 2029 at the Idaho National Laboratory. The company's chief financial officer, Chris Colbert, said former coal plants are ideal locations for advanced nuclear technology, in part because transmission lines are already in place.

Colbert also said he thinks potential customers will be more interested in the company's small advanced reactors because of the incentives in the bill.

There are nearly \$375 billion in climate incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act. Among them, there's a new tax credit available to any carbon-free electricity generator. That includes new advanced nuclear reactors that begin construction in 2025 or later. Existing nuclear plants that expand their output could get credit for that additional electricity production. The credit is worth at least \$25 per megawatt-hour for the first decade the plant operates, according to NEI, the industry's trade association.

Or, owners of a new carbon-free electricity generator could take advantage of an investment tax credit, worth 30 percent of the amount they paid to build the facility.

The bill also has \$700 million to produce the uranium fuel in the United States that many advanced reactors need. And there's a tax credit for existing nuclear plants worth up to \$15 per megawatt hour from 2024 to 2032. That's enough of a boost that it's highly likely no nuclear plants will close during that period for economic reasons, Crozat said. There are expanded options for how the credit can be used, with direct payments for certain owners, such as municipal utilities.

The incentives are a game changer for the nuclear energy industry, said Jacopo Buongiorno, professor of nuclear science and engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Buongiorno has studied the future of nuclear energy in a carbon-constrained world.

"This is really substantial," he said as he read the list of tax credits. "This should move the needle in terms of making these technologies economically viable right off the bat."

Buongiorno liked that the credits are available to many carbon-free technologies.

"It's not just nuclear, it's not just solar, it's all of the above, which is what we have been preaching as the right approach for decarbonization," he said. "You need to sort of push everybody here."

But Grant Smith, a senior energy policy adviser at the Environmental Working Group, said tax credits for small modular nuclear units is a waste of taxpayer dollars. They divert resources from commercially-viable emerging technologies,

Smith said, and stokes "the continuing false narrative of cheap, easily-deployed nuclear technology that the sector has been spinning for decades." Smith leads the nonprofit's work on accelerating the transition to renewables.

Georgia has the only nuclear project currently under construction in the U.S. Two traditional large reactors were projected to cost \$14 billion and are now expected to cost more than \$30 billion.

Because of that, Buongiorno said he'd be shocked if there is another order for a traditional large reactor in the U.S. The perception of financial risk, or project risk overall, would be too high, he said.

There are roughly 40 serious concepts in development for the next generation of advanced nuclear reactors worldwide, Qvist said. China was the first to connect one of the next generation of reactors to its grid to produce about 200 megawatts of electricity. A high-temperature, gas-cooled reactor began operating last year.

Kairos Power has applied for

a permit to construct a test reactor in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. GE Hitachi is working on a reactor in Ontario, Canada, and if it's successful, there's a lot of interest in it in the United States, Poland and elsewhere in Europe, Qvist said.

The largest public power company in the U.S., the Tennessee Valley Authority, launched a program this year to develop and fund new small modular nuclear reactors as part of its strategy to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The TVA is focused on GE Hitachi's design.

At least a dozen advanced reactors are projected to come online in the 2020s.

"It's not far off and it's not speculative and it's not on paper," Qvist said. "There are actually a lot of things really happening."

Wildeman reported from Hartford, Conn.

Associated Press climate and environmental coverage receives support from several private foundations. See more about AP's climate initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

## Classifieds

### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

Sealed proposals will be received until 2:00 PM on August 30, 2022, in NCDPS Central Engineering, 2020 Yonkers Road, Raleigh, NC 27699, Door 4, for the construction of Greene C.I. Roofing Repairs SCO IS 21-22996-01A at which time and place bids will be opened and read. If a bidder elects to mail their bid, we strongly urge that the bid be mailed to ensure receipt at our mailing address 48 hours prior to the bid opening to ensure receipt prior to the designated bid opening date and time.

Complete plans and specifications for this project can be obtained from Rebecca Cunningham, Phone: 919-324-1265, email: [rebecca.cunningham@ncdps.gov](mailto:rebecca.cunningham@ncdps.gov), 2020 Yonkers Road, Raleigh, NC 27699, Door 4 during normal office hours after June 13, 2022.

A mandatory pre-bid meeting (if not previously attended) will be held at 11:00am on August 15, 2022 at the project site at Greene Correctional Institution, located at 2699 NC Hwy 903, Maury, NC 28554. Additional details noted in the Notice to Bidders.

The state reserves the unqualified right to reject any and all proposals.



**NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED**—The climate change bill recently sent to President Joe Biden's desk contains incentives for solar, wind and other "green" energy sources, including scaled-down nuclear facilities.

