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Budd Embraces Trump, Abortion Ban

By Gary D. Robertson and
Steve Peoples

Associated Press

In competitive races across the U.S., Republican candidates are distancing themselves from their party's most controversial policies and people—namely, abortion and former President Donald Trump—as Election Day approaches.

Not Ted Budd. The North Carolina GOP Senate nominee is leaning into support for abortion restrictions and amity with the former Republican president as Democrats fight for an elusive victory in the Southern swing state.

Democratic optimism remains tempered given the state's recent red tilt, but Democratic officials believe Budd, a low-profile congressman who emerged as the GOP's Senate nominee largely because of Trump's backing, gives them a real chance at flipping a seat—and holding the balance of power in Washington—this fall.

Disregarding his critics, Budd was set to appear alongside Trump on Friday night at a rally in Wilmington. The Budd cam-



NC REPUBLICAN CANDIDATE TED BUDD IS BUCKING A NATIONAL TREND

paign was eager to welcome Trump when the former president's team called, according to adviser Jonathan Felts.

"Trump won North Carolina twice, and an in-person rally is helpful," Felts said, suggesting Trump would help drive turnout,

especially "with unaffiliated and/or undecided voters concerned about the economy." Others aren't so sure.

"The more Trump emerges, the more Trump is in the news, the better for Democrats," said David Holian, a political science professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Indeed, Trump remains overwhelmingly popular with Republican voters but is less appealing to the moderates and independents who often decide swing-state elections. Trump's national favorable ratings have been roughly even with, or worse than, President Joe Biden's in recent weeks.

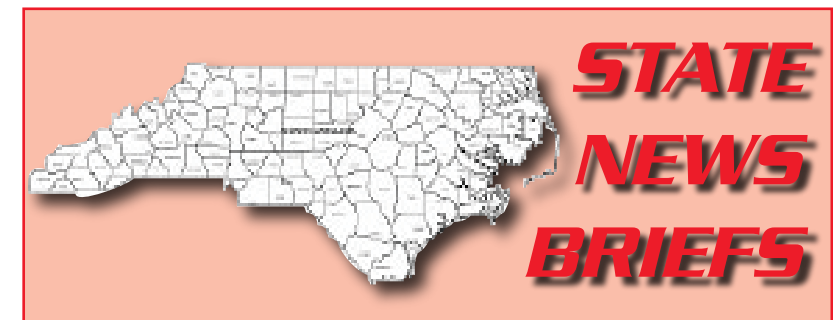
Still, some North Carolina Democrats are far from confi-

dent in a state where they have suffered painful losses in recent years.

Democratic skepticism comes despite the apparent strength of their Senate nominee, former state Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, who has a decided fundraising advantage, a record of outperforming other Democrats in statewide elections and a moderate message. She would be the state's first Black senator if elected.

Yet Beasley is also running against negative perceptions of

(See **BUDD EMBRACES**, P. 2)



YELLEN TO VISIT NORTH CAROLINA AHEAD OF TIGHT MIDTERM RACES

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen heads to the Durham, N.C., area next Tuesday as part of her ongoing tour to promote the Biden administration's legislative agenda ahead of the midterm elections.

Visiting a state with several tight races in the offing, Yellen will focus on record climate investments of \$375 billion over the next decade through the so-called Inflation Reduction Act.

Yellen plans to tour a renewable energy facility, meet with local business leaders and elected officials, and give a speech about the potential economic crisis that could be caused by unmitigated climate change, the Treasury Department said.

Her agency has been tasked with implementing a new tax credit for U.S. buyers of qualifying electric vehicles made in North America through the Democrats' latest law.

Yellen said at a conference hosted by *The Atlantic* magazine on Thursday that elected leaders need to ensure that "as we transition to clean energy, the communities that are dependent on fossil fuels aren't left behind."

"I really think that's contributed to polarization in the country," she said.

Yellen's visit is part of a monthlong national tour she is making as well as a larger White House campaign to highlight new laws passed to boost the economy, spur computer chip manufacturing and revamp the country's infrastructure.

North Carolina this year has tight races for the U.S. Senate, two state Supreme Court seats and a state legislative contest that will determine whether Republicans gain the seats they need to override the Democratic governor's veto.

NC PRISON COMMISSIONER LURED BACK TO RUN NEW CABINET AGENCY

(AP)—The head of North Carolina's prison operations during the COVID-19 pandemic is Gov. Roy Cooper's choice to become secretary of a new standalone Cabinet-level agency tasked with adult corrections.

Cooper announced on Thursday that Todd Ishee, who was named state prisons commissioner in 2019, will lead the Department of Adult Correction, an agency that becomes official on Jan. 1, 2023.

Ishee had been recruited in August to lead the American Correctional Association, but he was persuaded by the governor to "remain in North Carolina to start his new role" in a couple of weeks, according to Cooper's office.

"He is a nationally sought-after leader and I am grateful for his willingness to serve as secretary here in North Carolina and continue his critical work in our corrections system," Cooper said in a news release. As a Cabinet secretary, Ishee will be subject to state Senate confirmation.

Ishee, with a 30-year career in corrections, came to North Carolina after serving within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Office of Reentry and Enterprise Development.

Ishee's term as manager of North Carolina's 50-plus prisons was marked by difficulties filling correctional officer positions and by litigation and initiatives during the pandemic to remove prisoners at higher risk for COVID-19 complications and others to serve out their terms at home.

The state's prison population is currently just over 29,900. Almost 60 prisoners have died of COVID-19 since 2020, according to state prison data.

Ishee had been working within the Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, which sits within the Department of Public Safety. The 2021 state budget directed that adult correction services be separated effective at the start of 2023. The change will mean the transfer of over 20,000 state positions to the new department. A new Division of Juvenile Justice will remain within the Department of Public Safety.

FLORIDA MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO \$7.2M COVID-19 RELIEF FRAUD

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP)—A Florida man who fled the U.S. and was eventually arrested in Croatia has pleaded guilty to stealing more than \$7.2 million in COVID-19 relief funds.

Don V. Cisternino, 46, of Chuluota, pleaded guilty Tuesday in Orlando federal court to wire fraud, aggravated identity theft and illegal monetary transaction, according to court documents. His hearing is scheduled for Jan. 5 where he could face up to 32 years in federal prison. As part of a deal with prosecutors, Cisternino has already agreed to forfeit the money from the fraud, as well as any assets connected to the crimes.

According to the plea agreement, Cisternino fraudulently secured more than \$7.2 million in emergency funds through a Paycheck Protection Program loan in May 2020. Cisternino's PPP loan application falsely claimed that his business, MagnifiCo, had 441 employees and monthly payroll expenses in 2019 of more than \$2.8 million. The company actually had no employees other than Cisternino. Along with his loan application, Cisternino submitted false W-2s, many of which listed the names and Social Security numbers of real people who had not authorized him to use their identities. After receiving the money, Cisternino spent it on a Lincoln Navigator, a Maserati, a Mercedes-Benz and a 12,579 square-foot home in Seminole County, Fla.

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

White House Hosts 50+ NC Officials

By Josh Boak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The White House on Thursday launched a new effort to show local governments what it can do for their communities, hosting North Carolina officials to highlight funding opportunities and hear firsthand how coronavirus relief, infrastructure dollars and other policies are faring locally.

The event reflects an expansion of the use of the White House campus as pandemic restrictions have eased. It's also part of a larger initiative to host

municipal, county and state officials on a weekly basis from all 50 states, coinciding with campaigning for November's midterm elections as the White House tries to energize Democratic voters.

"We're entering into a phase of our administration when we can do more in terms of convening at the White House," said Julie Rodriguez, director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. "It's incredibly inspiring for us to get more proximate to the impact we're having on Americans' everyday lives."

One of the key messages for

the visit by North Carolina officials is the recovery in manufacturing. Steady hiring since the middle of last year has brought the U.S. manufacturing jobs total to 12.85 million, the most since late 2008 as the financial crisis triggered more than 2 million layoffs in the sector.

Officials and the group from North Carolina discussed plans by Wolfspeed to invest \$5 billion in building a silicon chip factory that is forecast to create an estimated 1,800 jobs in the state.

That discussion followed the first group visit recently by officials from Ohio. President Joe

Biden earlier this month spoke at the groundbreaking for a new Intel plant near Columbus. Both Ohio and North Carolina have open Senate seats this year.

Thursday's half-day included Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan, who's from North Carolina. Rodriguez and Keisha Lance Bottoms, a former Atlanta mayor who is now a White House senior adviser, also were to talk to the group.

In attendance were more than 50 North Carolina officials, in-

(See **50+ NC OFFICIALS**, P. 2)

Sidney Poitier Documentary Shows Heart

By Mark Kennedy

AP Entertainment Writer

Sidney Poitier was not expected to live. He was born two months premature to uneducated tomato farmers in the Caribbean. His father planned to use a shoe box as a makeshift coffin.

Poitier's rise from that humble origin to become an Oscar-winning box office draw and civil rights figure who remade Hollywood seems almost scripted, almost too good to be true, but such was Poitier, a life well-lived. The new documentary *Sid-*

ney respectfully traces that life, delivering a portrait of a striver hoping to improve everything he did every day. "I truly, truly try to be better tomorrow than I was today," he says to the camera.

Written by Jesse James Miller and directed by Reginald Hudlin, *Sidney* is executive produced by Oprah Winfrey—who lent several hours of her own interviews with Poitier—and members of his family. It glows with respect for a man who earned it.

Poitier became the first Black actor to win an Academy Award for best lead performance and

the first to be a top box-office draw. He died this year at 94.

For much of the film, a grey-haired Poitier addresses the camera in a grey suit jacket with a pocket square and a white open-necked button-down shirt—flawlessly elegant, as always. Sometimes old interviews are added from a younger Poitier, making it seem as if he is in conversation with himself.

Highlights include the devastating confrontation with racism as a teen in Miami, the fun story of his first encounter with a subway and how a classified ad

looking for actors changed his life. "I can be many things here," he thought. Tossed out of the American Negro Theater for being lousy, he took acting classes and lost his Caribbean accent by buying a radio for \$14 and learning to mimic a newsreader he admired.

The filmmakers have a charismatic change-maker as their focus, but credit to them for also exploring when he missed his high ethical standards, as when he had a long affair with Diahann

(See **POITIER DOC**, P. 2)

How Steep Fed Rate Hikes Affect Your Finances

By Cora Lewis

AP Writer

Mortgage rates have jumped, home sales have slumped and credit cards and auto loans have gotten pricier. Savings rates are slightly juicier, though.

As the Federal Reserve has rapidly increased interest

rates, many economists say they fear that a recession is inevitable in the coming months — and with it, job losses that could cause hardship for households already hurt worst by inflation.

Wednesday, the Federal Reserve sharply raised its key short-term rate by three-quarters of a point for a third

straight time, even as its previous rate increases are being felt by households at all income levels.

The Fed's latest move has raised its benchmark rate to a range of 3% to 3.25%, the highest level in 14 years. Its steady rate increases have already made it increasingly costly for consumers and businesses

to borrow — for homes, autos and other purchases. And more hikes are almost surely coming. Fed officials are expected to signal Wednesday that their benchmark rate could reach as high as 4.5% by early next year.

HOW DOES RAISING INTEREST RATES REDUCE INFLATION?

If one definition of inflation is "too much money chasing too few goods," then by making it more expensive to borrow money, the Fed hopes to reduce the amount of money in circulation, eventually lowering prices.

WHICH CONSUMERS ARE MOST AFFECTED?

Anyone borrowing money to make a large purchase, such as a home, car, or large appliance, will take a hit, said Scott Hoyt, an analyst with Moody's Analytics.

"The new rate pretty dramatically increases your monthly payments and your cost," he said. "It also affects consumers who have a lot of credit card debt — that will hit right away."

That said, Hoyt noted that household debt payments, as a proportion of income, remain relatively low, though they

(See **FED RATE HIKE**, P. 2)



THE CRISIS IS OVER? Residents of the Golden Keys Senior Living apartments receive water delivered by the AIDS Healthcare Foundation in Jackson, Mississippi, September 1, 2022. © 2022 [AP Photo/Steve Helber]

Business & Finance

U.S. Allows Tech Firms To Boost Internet Access In Iran

By Fatima Hussein

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—American tech firms will be allowed to expand their business in Iran, where most internet access has been cut off in response to anti-government protests, the Treasury Department said Friday.

Iran has been cracking down on demonstrators protesting the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in the custody of its morality police. Iranian state TV suggests that as many as 26 protesters and police have been killed since violence erupted over the weekend.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the move will help counter the government's surveillance efforts.

"It is clear that the Iranian government is afraid of its own people," Blinken said in an emailed statement. "Mahsa Amini is senselessly, tragically dead, and now the government is violently suppressing peaceful protesters rightly angry about her loss."

The morality police detained Amini last week, saying she didn't properly cover her hair with the Islamic headscarf, known as the hijab. Amini collapsed at a police station and died three days later.

U.S. sanctions were imposed Thursday on the morality

police and leaders of other law enforcement agencies.

The Treasury Department said an updated general license issued Friday authorizes tech firms to offer more social media and collaboration platforms, video conferencing and cloud-based services.

The updated license also removes the condition that communications be "personal," which Treasury said was burdening companies with the need to verify the purpose of the communications.

"As courageous Iranians take to the streets to protest the death of Mahsa Amini, the United States is redoubling its support for the free flow of information to the Iranian people," Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a statement.

"With these changes, we are helping the Iranian people be better equipped to counter the government's efforts to surveil and censor them."

The United Nations has called for an investigation into Amini's death.

Amir Rashidi, an exiled Iranian who is director of internet security and digital rights at Miaan Group, said lifting restrictions will help Iranians bypass censorship.

"Also it's going to provide Iranians with safety and security," he said. "When you can have

your data outside the country Iranian security services cannot unlawfully access your data because your data is protected by international law outside Iran."

In 2014, Treasury's sanctions arm issued a license authorizing exports of software and services to Iran that would allow the free exchange of communication over the internet, with the intent to foster the free flow of information to Iranian citizens.

Even so, U.S. firms have been reluctant to do business in Iran, due to fears of violating existing sanctions and other laws that impose penalties.

On Monday, Tesla CEO Elon Musk tweeted that his satellite internet firm Starlink would seek permission to operate in Iran. National security adviser Jake Sullivan said it was up to Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control to decide on Starlink's next steps.

The White House said the move, along with a recent increase in sanctions, does not affect the administration's plans to reenter the Iran nuclear deal.

"We have concerns, we do, with Iran," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, but pursuing the Iran deal "is the best way for us to address the nuclear problem."

Associated Press writer Frank Bajak contributed to this report from Boston.



GETTING AROUND CENSORSHIP—In this photo obtained by the AP outside Iran, protesters chant slogans during a protest over the death of a woman who was detained by the morality police, in downtown Tehran, Iran, Sept. 21. [Uncredited/Associated Press]

GM To Convert Factory To Electric

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

TOLEDO, Ohio (AP)—General Motors says it will spend \$760 mil-

lion to renovate its transmission factory in Toledo, Ohio, so it can build drive lines for electric vehicles.

It's the first GM engine or transmission plant to begin the long transition from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles. The company has a goal of making only electric passenger vehicles by 2035.

The move will keep the jobs of about 1,500 hourly and salaried workers at the Toledo plant, which now makes four transmissions used in pickup trucks and many other GM internal combustion ve-

hicles and transmission factories across the U.S., and their futures are uncertain as the switch to electric vehicles picks up momentum.

"Of course there's always worry," said Jeff King, shop chairman for the United Auto Workers union local at the plant. "I think it reflects on the workforce that we have here, the quality of product that we build."

Most workers gathered for the announcement Friday were happy to hear details that their plant would live on.

"This is great news for our individual plant because we're going

Lawsuit Says Utility Targeted Asians For Pot

By Don Thompson

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—Extraordinary use of electricity has long been a telltale sign of illegal grow houses producing thousands of marijuana plants hidden in seemingly ordinary homes.

But a lawsuit filed by a data privacy watchdog says a Northern California utility went too far by racially profiling Asian communities as it routinely fed customers' power use information to police without requiring a warrant or any suspicion of wrongdoing, in violation of state laws.

The data disclosure deliberately targeted Asian Americans, with resulting disproportionate penalties against those of Asian descent, the suit says.

The suit illustrates a flashpoint in law enforcement's efforts to combat illicit drugs.

In 2018, federal and state law enforcement agents seized about 100 Northern California houses that they alleged were bought with money wired to the United States by a Chinese-based crime organization, one of many such actions against alleged perpetrators of Asian descent.

Earlier this year Asian Americans filed at least two lawsuits against Siskiyou County's sheriff alleging racial bias particularly against the Hmong community in his department's effort to combat widespread illegal marijuana cultivation.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District scoured entire ZIP Codes worth of power usage information for the Sacramento Police

Department but left out homes in a predominantly White neighborhood, says the lawsuit. And a police analyst removed non-Asian names from a list provided by the utility, forwarding only Asian-sounding names for more investigation, the suit claims.

The utility would turn over a list of customers who used more than a certain threshold amount of energy in a month, the lawsuit alleges. For instance, while a typical household might use less than 1,500 kilowatt hours of electricity in a month, the suit says the utility would disclose homes using more than 3,000 kWhs.

The bulk disclosure "turns its entire customer base into potential leads for police to chase," the lawsuit says. It says the utility "liberally discloses" customers' Social Security, driver's license and telephone numbers.

SMUD and Sacramento police said they couldn't comment on pending litigation, but SMUD spokeswoman Lindsay VanLaningham denied any wrongdoing.

"We agree that our customer usage data should be (and is) treated with care," she said Thursday, but she said state law allows and sometimes requires sharing the information with law enforcement agencies.

"We share the information on specific properties to stop what we've identified and believe to be power theft and when we are required to do so per local law enforcements' request to assist them with their investigations," she said in an email.

"We look forward to being available for questions once legal pro-

ceedings have concluded," Sacramento police Sgt. Zach Eaton said.

The suit was filed Wednesday by the watchdog Electronic Frontier Foundation on behalf of the non-profit Asian American Liberation Network and SMUD customer Khurshid Khoja, who is described as being an Asian American Sacramento resident, cannabis industry attorney and cannabis rights advocate.

Megan Sapigao, co-executive director of the network, said the "mass surveillance program is unlawful, advances harmful stereotypes, and overwhelmingly impacts Asian communities."

"It's unacceptable that two public agencies would carelessly flout state law and utility customers' privacy rights, and even more unacceptable that they targeted a specific community in doing so," she said in a statement.

EFF Senior Staff Attorney Aaron Mackey said the foundation isn't aware of any other California public utilities that are sharing data in the same way as SMUD.

Private utilities like Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric are barred from disclosing customer utility data to law enforcement without a court order under state law and California Public Utility Commission rules, he said.

Public utilities like SMUD aren't regulated by the commission, but state law bars them "from disclosing entire neighborhoods' worth of data to law enforcement absent a court order or ongoing investigation," Mackey said.

SMUD is the nation's sixth-largest community-owned electric ser-

vice provider, serving more than 600,000 customers, the suit says.

Southern California Edison's policy generally requires a warrant or subpoena to share information with law enforcement. The other two major private utilities did not immediately respond to queries from The Associated Press about whether they have similar information-sharing programs, nor did the California Public Utilities Commission comment.

The lawsuit comes as officials are struggling to curtail illegal cannabis grows that are stunting the growth of the legal, licensed recreational marijuana production that California voters approved in 2016.

Disguising illegal cannabis farms in ordinary appearing homes became prevalent nearly two decades ago as authorities disrupted outdoor plots they could spot from helicopters and other surveillance flights.

Law enforcement authorities often discovered the illegal grow houses because of their extraordinary use of electricity to run high-intensity lights, ventilation fans and other devices to grow thousands of marijuana plants, often enabling several harvests each year.

Sacramento officials estimated in 2017 that there might be as many as 1,000 illegal grow houses in California's capital city.

The foundation said the crackdown "has been highly lucrative" for Sacramento, since a city ordinance in 2017 allowed police to levy large penalties on the owners of properties where marijuana was found.



hicles. No new hiring is expected.

"This investment helps build job security for our Toledo team for years to come, and is the next step on our journey to an all-electric future," Gerald Johnson, executive vice president of global manufacturing for GM, said in a statement Friday.

Electric drive lines take power from the batteries and convert it to motion at the wheels.

The 2.8 million-square-foot Toledo plant, built in 1956, will make drive lines for future electric trucks including the Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra pickups, along with GMC Hummer EVs.

The announcement Friday at the plant is good news for the workers in Toledo, who have worried about the future of their plant. GM employs about 10,000 workers at

to get a new product," said worker Kim Hunter Jones of Adrian, Mich. But she said she's concerned about workers at other GM engine and transmission plants that don't yet have assurances that they'll build electric-vehicle components.

GM's Johnson, though, said the company wants to bring all of its employees along during the transition. "Our goal is to make sure everybody who is with General Motors today has an opportunity to move into the all-EV future," he said.

Another worker, Patrice Harris of Toledo, said the announcement means she won't have to move from her hometown. Other GM workers have been forced to move when their plants closed or didn't get new products to make.

Sen. Warnock: Biden's Electric Car Tax Credit Needs Some 'Flexibility'

By Russ Bynum

Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP)—U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock urged the U.S. Treasury secretary Friday to use "maximum flexibility" in implementing a revised tax credit for Americans buying electric

vehicles, a perk that Hyundai stands to lose as the automaker invests billions of dollars to open its first American EV plant in the Democratic senator's home state of Georgia.

Warnock sent a letter to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen raising concerns that the revised

tax credit President Joe Biden signed last month as part of a sweeping climate and health law could place some automakers at a competitive disadvantage. That's because the new law says the credit of up to \$7,500 only applies if the EVs and their batteries are manufac-

tured in North America.

That means vehicles made by South Korea-based Hyundai would no longer qualify for the credit until the company starts producing EVs in Georgia, which isn't expected until 2025.

"I urge you to offer maximum flexibility for vehicle manufacturers and consumers to take full advantage of the electric vehicle tax credits available under the law," Warnock's letter said.

The U.S. Treasury Department is responsible for adopting regulations to carry out revisions to the EV tax credit approved by Congress. Warnock's letter doesn't request any specific remedy from the department.

In an interview, Warnock said he hopes to see Treasury officials interpret Congress' revisions in a way that "we don't end up punishing the very companies, like Hyundai, that are helping us bring this clean energy future."

Hyundai announced in May plans to build a \$5.5 billion plant for manufacturing EVs and the batteries that power them in Bryan County, west of Savannah. The company plans to hire at least 8,100 workers.

Hyundai spokesman Michael Stewart said in an emailed statement the company was "disappointed" with the tax credit revi-

sion.

"We are hopeful that a solution through the U.S. federal government can be found that takes into consideration Hyundai's significant past and committed future investments in the U.S. market, including the \$5.54 billion EV plant in Georgia," Stewart said.

Stewart did not say whether the issue might affect Hyundai's plans to produce up to 300,000 EVs per year in Georgia. The state and local governments agreed to give the automaker tax breaks and other financial incentives worth \$1.8 billion.

But the tax credit issue is causing some anxiety among officials in Georgia working closely on the project.

"Hyundai is quite concerned about the lack of the tax credit," said Trip Tolleson, president and CEO of the Savannah Area Economic Development Authority, who frequently meets with Hyundai officials to discuss the planned Georgia plant.

"All of us really hope that the Biden administration, in partnership with our two U.S. senators, can really get this fixed and work this out," Tolleson said. "There's a lot riding on this project."

A freshman senator, Warnock is seeking reelection this fall

against Republican challenger Herschel Walker, a Georgia football hero and close friend of former President Donald Trump, in a swing state where Democrats have no guarantee of holding political ground they gained in 2020.

A spokesman for Walker's campaign said Warnock was "trying to clean up his own mess" after voting in favor of the law that included the tax credit that would exclude Hyundai vehicles.

"Maybe next time a massive bill comes up, Raphael Warnock will take the time to read the bill and how it would impact Georgia instead of blindly coming out in support a day after it is announced," Walker spokesman Will Kiley said in a statement.

Warnock insisted the climate and health bill that Democrats pushed through Congress was a big win for Americans, and it "signals that we're serious about the role electric vehicles will play in the future."

"As we see this expansion in South Georgia, the prospects of building electric vehicles made by Georgia workers, we need to do everything we can at the federal level to strengthen that work and not to hamper it," Warnock said.



WARNOCK WANTS GA'S NEW HYUNDAI PLANT TO GET THE CREDITS

Opinion



Avoiding A War Without A Winner: How We Could Ease The Deadly U.S.–China Dispute

By Jacopo Demarinis

Citizens for Global Solutions

In a world haunted by the specter of nuclear war, needlessly aggressive competition among nations could lead to an apocalyptic catastrophe. Yet, from January 1st to August 30th of 2022, 92 “close encounters” occurred between the military forces of the United States and China, both heavily armed nuclear powers. What is driving this conflict and how can we de-escalate it?

Taiwan is of paramount importance. The U.S. government’s “one China” policy is based on the idea that there is only one China, and its Shanghai Communiqué of 1972 formalized its acknowledgement of People’s Republic of China leadership. Subsequent statements solidified the U.S. commitment to respecting China’s “territorial integrity.”

Even so, through its “Six Assurances,” the U.S. government made concurrent, contradictory commitments in support of Taiwanese sovereignty and self-governance. And, in recent years, its stance on the subject has become markedly pro-Taiwan. The U.S. government has made large arms sales to Taiwan, the U.S. military has stepped up its patrols of the Taiwan Strait, and top U.S. politicians like Nancy Pelosi have begun visiting Taiwan. Pelosi’s Taiwan visit prompted China’s Foreign Ministry to cancel three valuable avenues of dialogue between the U.S. and Chinese militaries.

Intense economic and technological competition and allegations of economic coercion are also pivotal issues, while polarizing posturing in both countries has further widened the divide. The recent closure of Confucius Institutes in the United States, despite any clear evidence of Chinese Communist Party propaganda and indoctrination, attests to growing American distrust of China. Anti-China sentiment has also assumed a racist undertone, with one U.S. op-ed warning of the ubiquity of Chinese Communist Party “termites.” Conversely, the intensification of Chinese nationalism has fomented anti-American sentiment in China.

To ease U.S.-China tensions, we should discern the core factors escalating tensions. According to Professor Stephen M. Walt of Harvard, the root cause is not each country’s political system or leadership style, but a zero-sum mentality about the global distribution of power. According to this zero-sum way of thinking, the more global and regional power China enjoys, the less powerful and secure the United States is.

A more productive approach would be to look for areas in which the United States and China could cooperate.

Climate change is clearly a major issue on which the United States and China can and should work together. Both countries should collaborate to jointly develop green technologies and promote compliance with international agreements like the Paris Accords. Another possibility for collaboration has been suggested by Zhou Bo, a top retired Chinese military officer and a senior fellow of the Centre for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University, who has promoted joint U.S.-China UN peacekeeping operations in Africa to strengthen ties between the two countries. Furthermore, the denuclearization of North Korea is a key project that might generate consensus between the two nations.

U.S.-China relations can also be improved by enhancing economic interdependence. The current calls to decouple the U.S. economy from China’s are not only economically unwise, but would greatly hamper both countries’ capacity to address global threats like climate change. Yoichi Funabashi, a prominent Japanese journalist and foreign policy scholar, advocates for a new Trans-Pacific Partnership that includes China and the United States. Such an agreement could enhance peace in the Indo Pacific by improving U.S.-China economic relations and enabling middle powers like Japan to assume a more active political role in the region. Greater economic interdependence would help guard against military escalation in East Asia.

In addition, the United States and China could enhance cultural connections by reopening Confucius Institutes in the United States, investing in organizations that promote intercultural dialogue like the Asia Society, the U.S.-China Cultural Institute, and the United States Heartland China Association, and increasing the number of Chinese and American students studying abroad. The Asia Society, for example, has organized a “Story Circle” program to foster intercultural dialogue between American and Chinese students. Strengthening interstate cultural ties would not only ease U.S.-China tensions, but would greatly benefit the United States by enabling American journalists to better educate the Chinese public about the United States and by retaining talented Chinese professionals working in the United States.

Moreover, reforming international institutions like the United Nations and strengthening global governance could provide crucial steps toward improving U.S.-China relations.

For example, the UN Security Council consists of five permanent members that have veto power and make all the decisions, including Russia, China, and the United States. Unfortunately, this makes the Security Council ground zero for great power rivalry. By increasing the number of permanent members in the UN Security Council and eliminating the veto, the UN could strengthen the legitimacy of the Security Council and enhance its ability to address regional conflicts, including great power competition. New forms of global governance could also dampen US-China tensions, such as a “United Federation of Nations” promoted by world federalist organizations like Citizens for Global Solutions.

A final reform is placing conflict resolution front and center in U.S.-China diplomacy. The UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs’ Standby Team of Mediation Experts could increase its involvement in mediating between the United States and China. Furthermore, coalitions of middle powers like the EU and ASEAN could cooperate to foster internal unity among their member states, strengthen multilateral institutions in East Asia, and demand peaceful U.S.-China relations in the Indo Pacific. Involving civil society and non-governmental organizations in U.S.-China relations is crucial, as this could de-escalate interstate tensions by challenging polarizing rhetoric.

The world is tending toward isolationism as populist politicians repudiate multilateral organizations in favor of stronger national sovereignty. Yet, to avoid the destruction of our global commons—either through a quick nuclear catastrophe or the slow violence of environmental devastation and inequality—we must not simply counter this troubling trend. We must pluck up the courage to create a world radically reimagined and rewired through compassion and cooperation, fundamentally reflective of our truest selves.

Jacopo Demarinis is a Research and Analyst Intern with Citizens for Global Solutions.



Active Today Or Radioactive Tomorrow?

By Robert Moore

Coalition for Peace Action

As I write, there remains a grave danger that the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Energy plant in Ukraine, Europe’s largest, could have a meltdown, similar to the catastrophic one at Chernobyl. All it would take is for the electricity needed to keep the cooling pools where the used fuel rods are stored to end; and that has already happened for brief periods three times recently.

Alternatively, if a demilitarized zone is not quickly established, conventional weapon attacks could result in the plant becoming a “dirty bomb,” spewing deadly radioactive materials over a very wide area, rendering vast areas inhospitable to the survival of life. President Zelenskyy has correctly characterized Russia’s military actions as turning the nuclear plant into a kind of nuclear weapon.

Thankfully, some rays of hope are emerging. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) experts recently did an independent inspection of the plant, and two have remained for ongoing monitoring. And there are reports that Russia and Ukraine are negotiating for some kind of agreement—but probably short of a demilitarized zone—to prevent military attacks on the plant.

However, it remains uncertain whether those negotiations will succeed; I fervently pray they will. However, it’s not too soon to conclude that continued reliance on nuclear energy to generate electricity can be weaponized, as we never know when a plant might become a military target. If a conventionally powered power plant had an accident or became a military base, the area near it could recover. That’s just not the case with nuclear energy.

Moreover, Russia has a policy that if they appear to be on the verge of losing a military conflict—and they have just lost a vast area previously occupied by the Russian army—they are willing to then use a so-called tactical nuclear weapon (these are as powerful as the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki) to force the opponent to back off and make concessions. Putin did a lot of nuclear saber rattling earlier in the war, and is now under considerable pressure from the hawks in Russia to forcefully counter recent Ukrainian gains.

In addition to strongly supporting the negotiations for demilitarizing Zaporizhzhia, the U.S. and our western allies should join in declaring a policy of No First Use of nuclear weapons. This would be strongly supported by the global community as a crucial step away from the very real danger of the Ukraine War becoming a nuclear war.

It would also match the longstanding No First Use policy of China. Top military analysts are warning of a growing danger of war with China—forecast as likely within the next five years—over their aggressive steps to assert control over Taiwan. If, God forbid, such a war did break out, it would be an extremely important barrier to it becoming a nuclear war to have No First Use of nuclear weapons as a policy by the US matching that of China.

We must move toward globally banning nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear energy, to prevent these nightmare outcomes and step back from the brink of nuclear annihilation.

Movement toward that ambitious goal only has a chance of succeeding if millions in the US and around the world undertake renewed activism. History frequently shows us that “leaders” only act when pushed hard by the people.

Those interested in participating in this renewed effort to prevent nuclear annihilation—from nuclear weapons or energy—are urged to visit peacecoalition.org.

The Rev. Robert Moore has been Executive Director of the Princeton-based Coalition for Peace Action since September 1981.



The Cruelty of Exploiting Vulnerable People for Political Advantage

By Ben Jealous

People for the American Way

There is always a new low for Trump Republicans. And that is pretty frightening.

Take the latest exercise in lawlessness, dishonesty, and cruelty from Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. He chartered a plane to send dozens of mostly Venezuelan asylum seekers from Texas to Martha’s Vineyard, an island community off the coast of Cape Cod in Massachusetts. He clearly was gleeful about the idea of sticking it to liberals and gloating about it on right-wing media.

It wasn’t even an original idea. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott had already been putting migrants on buses to cities like Washington, D.C., where they have been dropped off in front of Fox News and outside the Vice President’s residence—a giveaway that the purpose is publicity.

The news of the DeSantis flight made it clear that he was exploiting vulnerable people for his own political advantage. And the more we learn, the worse it gets.

A lawsuit filed on behalf of people deceived into taking the flight says the migrants were approached in San Antonio by people pretending to offer humanitarian assistance. They were promised that jobs, housing, and other assistance were waiting for them if they were willing to get on a plane.

None of it was true. These vulnerable people were reportedly told lies about where they were going, and given brochures with false information about help that would be waiting for them. Even worse, they may have unknowingly threatened their asylum claims by making it likely that they would miss court appointments scheduled far from where they had been flown.

DeSantis and his henchmen hadn’t contacted government officials or nonprofit organizations in Massachusetts. It was a photo op. It was def-

nately political. And it was possibly illegal. The sheriff in Bexar County, Texas, has opened a criminal investigation into the false pretenses under which people were lured onto the planes. A lawsuit has been filed on the migrants’ behalf.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre slammed DeSantis for “alerting Fox News and not city or state officials about a plan to abandon children fleeing communism,” calling it “a cruel, premeditated political stunt.”

Of course, it’s not the first time that dishonorable politicians have exploited vulnerable people. In fact, racist White southerners who were resisting segregation in the early 1960s did almost the same thing to Black Americans 60 years ago.

The *Washington Post* recently highlighted that history. A group of segregationists organized “Reverse Freedom Rides” in 1962 as retaliation for the Freedom Rides that carried civil rights activists throughout the South in 1961. According to the *Post*, “The plot was organized by White supremacist Citizens’ Councils in Arkansas, who bought radio ads and made fliers advertising the ‘opportunity’ to African-Americans.” One Arkansas woman and nine of her children were dropped off on Cape Cod near the Kennedy family’s compound because she had been falsely told that Kennedy was going to greet them. Sounds awfully familiar, doesn’t it?

Last year, journalist Adam Serwer published a book called *The Cruelty is the Point: The Past, Present, and Future of Trump’s America*. Serwer has made the point that Trump is a symptom, not the cause, of a cruel streak in American politics. There is a long history of backlash against progress, going back to the post-Reconstruction period in which white supremacists used violence to reverse the enfranchisement of Black people.

DeSantis’s scheme to deceive, manipulate, and harm vulnerable people seeking asylum in our country is evidence that the cruelty wielded by Trump and embraced by so many of his followers will continue to poison our politics if Trump or DeSantis or someone of their ilk is the Republican presidential nominee in 2024.

Recognizing this truth is important to understanding the work we have ahead of us. We must also recognize that the cruelty in our past and our present is not our whole story.

Our story also includes good people in Hyannis in the 1960s and in Martha’s Vineyard this year who responded by mobilizing to welcome and support the arrivals. It includes the people of all colors and faiths who have repeatedly built movements to expand civil rights and promote human dignity, and who have given their time and treasure to elect political leaders who appeal to our national ideals rather than trash them.

We should be outraged at the cruelty displayed by some of our leaders. Let us also be motivated, and optimistic, that we can out-organize and overcome them.

Ben Jealous serves as president of People For the American Way and Professor of the Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. A New York Times best-selling author, his next book Never Forget Our People Were Always Free will be published by Harper Collins in December.



Financial Fairness At Risk With Proposed TD Bank-First Horizon Merger

By Charlene Crowell

Center for Responsible Lending

As banks grow larger through mergers and focus on growing online and mobile services, serious concerns emerge on how fair and how accessible banking will be to traditionally underserved Black and Latino communities. In most cases, consumers and small businesses alike view bank branch accessibility and convenience as key to serving their communities.

Consumer advocates currently are urging bank regulators to thoroughly examine a proposed TD Bank merger, particularly in light of the lender’s record with home loans and overdraft fees.

Earlier this year, TD Bank announced its plan to acquire First Horizon Bank and its \$85 billion in assets and 417 locations, largely in the South. If approved by federal regulators, the merger would create the sixth-largest bank in America.

TD Bank already has more than \$1.3 trillion, 27 million customers and over 1,100 locations spread across 15 states and the District of Columbia. In Atlanta and Dallas, the bank does business as TD Ameritrade. Its largest number of branches by state are located in New York (367), Florida (355), and New Jersey (367).

According to its website, “Black experiences, in all their diversity, are at the heart of our drive for positive, sustainable change.”

But as Sportin’ Life, a character in the immortal folk opera, *Porgy and Bess*, said: “It ain’t necessarily so.” Indeed, TD’s business record sends a different message.

Earlier this year, WHYY, the National Public Radio station serving the Philadelphia metro area, reported that in its region between 2018 and 2020, “TD Bank was more likely to approve a mortgage loan for a low-income White applicant than a high-income Black applicant...”

TD Bank had the lowest mortgage approval rate for Black applicants in its entire metro area. During this time, “the institution denied 20 percent of all purchase mortgages, but denied nearly 40 percent of all Black applicants,” according to the data, which was culled from Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data. By comparison, the denial rate among White applicants was 20 percent.”

A similar finding appeared in a 2018 investigative article by *Reveal News*: “African-American and Latino borrowers are more likely to get turned down by TD Bank than by any other major mortgage lender. The bank turned down 54 percent of Black homebuyers and 45 percent of Latino homebuyers, more than three times the industry averages.”

Then there’s TD Bank’s poor record on overdraft fees.

Just two years ago the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) entered into a consent order with TD Bank that provided \$97 million in restitution to 1.42 million consumers, and the CFPB charged the firm a \$25 million civil penalty. The bank had illegally charged customers overdraft fees without first obtaining their consent before enrolling them in its optional overdraft.

Overdraft fees often exploit consumers’ short-term cash needs. The vast majority of overdraft fee revenue comes from people with account balances that average less than \$350.

TD Bank’s business model relies far more on overdraft fees than other large banks. While some of its peer institutions eliminated overdraft fees, TD charges a \$35 overdraft fee as many as three times a day.

Fortunately, consumer advocates are registering their serious concerns with federal regulators.

“TD Bank cannot serve the needs of low-income communities while insisting on maintaining this large stream of revenue that, by definition, depends on consumers who lack funds,” testified Nadine Chabrier, Senior Policy and Litigation Counsel with the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL), at a recent hearing on the merger proposal. She noted that in deciding whether to approve a merger, government regulators, by law, must consider whether community needs would be served.

In an August 23 joint letter sent to the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) and the Federal Reserve, agencies whose approval of the deal is required, consumer advocates made clear their opposition.

“This merger will result in a significant presence in the Southeast, in states like Tennessee, Texas, Arkansas, and Florida, among others, where there is a concentration of Black and Latino communities and poverty, often overlapping. These communities bear the acute and disproportionate burden of overdraft fees, calling into the question whether the needs and convenience of the community will be met,” wrote the advocates. Elsewhere, they note, “Many affected by relentless overdraft fees end up having their checking account closed, and reentry into the banking system is difficult.”