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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.

"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."

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.

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(See 50+ NC OFFICIALS, P. 2)

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STATE BRIEFS

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Cisternino fled to Switzerland after learning he was being investigated for fraud in January 2021, officials said. He was arrested in April that year pursuant to an Interpol Red Notice while trying to enter Croatia from Slovenia by way of Italy. He was later extradited to the United States.

The Paycheck Protection Program involves billions of dollars in forgivable small-business loans for Americans struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The money must be used to pay employees, mortgage interest, rent and utilities. It's part of the coronavirus relief package that became federal law in 2020.

U.S. HAS SENT \$8.28 BILLION IN PANDEMIC FUNDS TO LOCAL LENDERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—On the same day the Federal Reserve gave a sobering report on the U.S. economy's trajectory, administration officials highlighted how they have kept some of the nation's smallest businesses afloat through the pandemic.

Roughly \$8.28 billion in relief funds have been disbursed to 162 community financial institutions across the country, through Treasury's Emergency Capitol Investment Program, officials said Wednesday.

Those financial institutions in turn offer loans to micro and small businesses.

The funding regime, abbreviated ECIP, is one of several pandemic relief programs meant to support community financial institutions—which provide loans, grants, and other assistance to small and minority-owned businesses that have difficulty getting funding from traditional banks.

"There is almost \$9 billion on the ground right now" for community banks and lenders, Vice President Kamala Harris said on a call with reporters.

Roughly 96 percent of Black-owned businesses are sole proprietorships and single employee companies. They have the hardest time finding funding and are often the first type of businesses impacted during economic downturns.

On the call with reporters, Harris and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen highlighted some of the program recipients, including Native American Bank, which recently got a \$10 million loan to finance an opioid addiction treatment facility in North Dakota, and a Georgia bank that recently gave a \$650,000 working capital loan to an Atlanta-based, Black-owned affordable housing developer.

Mississippi, Louisiana, North Carolina, California, and Texas have received some of the biggest contributions.

"We've long known that too many Americans face significant barriers to participation in our financial system," Yellen said. "I'm pleased that we've reached a milestone in our work to increase capital to these underserved communities."

There were a record 5.4 million applications for new businesses filed in 2021, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, surpassing the previous peak in 2020 of 4.4 million.

Of that number, a growing share are sole proprietors and businesses without other employees.

"Frankly, a lot of businesses are just recovering from COVID," Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., said on the call. He said that community banks "really do incredible work in reaching small businesses."

ACC MOVING HEADQUARTERS IN NC FROM GREENSBORO TO CHARLOTTE

The Atlantic Coast Conference is relocating its headquarters but remaining in its home state of North Carolina.

The league announced Tuesday it would move its offices from Greensboro—the city where it was founded in 1953—to downtown Charlotte in 2023. In a news release, the league said it will use the 2022–23 academic year as a transition period for the relocation.

The league had also considered remaining in Greensboro while commissioner Jim Phillips said Tuesday in a media call that the league also made multiple visits to Orlando, Fla. But the decision to remain in North Carolina positions the league to obtain \$15 million in state funds, which were earmarked in the latest budget for a "collegiate sports employer" for building a new headquarters in the state. "It really was not Greensboro or not Charlotte," Phillips said of the state's proposal. "It was really a commitment to stay in the state of North Carolina and (the league) select where would be best."

"I think that's an important piece of information, that the state was incredibly neutral towards where the conference office would be located. It just did not want to see it leave the state."

The league cited criteria in a review aided by an outside agency such as location within the Eastern time zone, population trends, access to a large hub airport for accessibility throughout the league's 15-school footprint and financial considerations.

Phillips had been discussing the possibility since last year after taking over for the retiring John Swofford. At the ACC's men's basketball media day last October, Phillips had said the ACC's school presidents and chancellors had inquired about the future of the league's headquarters during his interview process.

At the time, Phillips said the options included remaining at the location along Interstate 85 outside of downtown Greensboro and near the Grandover Resort and Spa.

"This was not an easy decision for the board as we recognize the truly wonderful relationship we've had with Greensboro," Duke president and board chair Vincent E. Price said. "But we are thrilled we are remaining in North Carolina."

The league's North Carolina roots had become a topic of discussion as the league has expanded in recent decades to 15 basketball members stretched along the entire Eastern seaboard and west into Kentucky and Indiana. Specifically with men's basketball, the league has held its tournament in North Carolina in 54 of 69 years, including 28 in Greensboro and 13 in Charlotte.

More are coming considering the state budget provision that the league hold championship events for numerous sports in the state by the 2032–33 academic year. That includes four men's basketball tournaments, with two of those slated for Greensboro beyond the one already scheduled there for the upcoming season.

Budd Embraces Trump—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

her party.

Trump's rise has fueled a growing sense among some voters in North Carolina, along with those in many other states, that the national Democratic Party has lost touch with the daily struggles of the working class and similar voting blocs. The Democratic-controlled Congress' focus on climate change, for example, hasn't helped inspire voters like Talmage Layton, a 74-year-old farmer from Durham.

Layton said he doesn't know whether a North Carolina Democrat can make a difference on Capitol Hill in lowering gas prices or pushing back against climate change policies that other Democrats have embraced.

"That's not anything against Cheri Beasley," Layton said after a recent meeting with Beasley. "I'm a registered Democrat, and I would have no problem voting for a Democrat. But they've got to think about the little guy here."

Not long ago, it looked as if the Democratic Party was poised to take over North Carolina politics.

In 2008, Obama carried the state, becoming the first Democrat to do so since 1976, and Democrat Kay Hagan upset GOP Sen. Elizabeth Dole. Political experts predicted the Democratic Party would step to dominance as a result of increasing urbanization and out-of-state liberals moving in for tech jobs in the Raleigh-Durham and Charlotte regions.

But Republicans took over the state legislature for the first time in over 140 years following

the 2010 election and retained it thanks to support from exurban and rural voters and favorably drawn districts. A decade later, Trump became a two-time North Carolina winner, though he won the 2020 election by just 1 percentage point.

While Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper managed to win reelection in 2020, Beasley was one of the party's casualties. She lost a bid to remain chief justice to a Republican rival by just 401 votes.

Her near-miss turned her into a rising candidate in the race to succeed retiring GOP Sen. Richard Burr.

In one sign of strength, Beasley has consistently raised more money than Budd. And she appears to be generating momentum by seizing on abortion to energize women and independents, relying on the same playbook Democrats have used elsewhere.

Budd, meanwhile, has been outspoken in his opposition to abortion. He co-sponsored a House version of a national 15-week abortion ban introduced by Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham that even Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell distanced himself from.

"My opponent has been in Congress for six years, and every opportunity he's had to vote for North Carolina, he's voted against us," Beasley charged after meeting with farmers at a produce market in Durham before Graham's bill introduction.

Meanwhile, Republicans in competitive elections in states like Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada and Arizona have distanced

themselves from their rigid anti-abortion stances in recent weeks. Others have stripped their websites of references to Trump or his favorite talking points.

In Virginia, a Republican House candidate removed a Trump reference from her Twitter bio. In New Hampshire, Republican Senate nominee Don Bolduc abruptly reversed himself last week when asked about Trump's false claims that the 2020 election was stolen. After spending much of the last year echoing Trump's lies, Bolduc told Fox News he had done more research and concluded, "The election was not stolen."

Meanwhile, Budd's campaign refused this week to say whether he would accept the 2022 election results, having already voted to block certification of the 2020 election.

Such positions will almost certainly appeal to Trump's base, but political operatives say Budd needs sizable support from moderate, independent voters to be successful. Unaffiliated voters this year surpassed Democrats to become the largest bloc of registered voters in the state.

"Regardless of what your faith background is, you're dealing with skyrocketing energy prices. You're dealing with high grocery costs. You're dealing with high crime. You're dealing with economic uncertainty," Budd said after speaking to pastors recently in Greenville. "And so I want to make life better for all North Carolinians and people in our country by the things that I support."

As Budd has struggled to keep

pace with Beasley's fundraising, outside groups have come to his aid.

The McConnell-aligned Senate Leadership Fund and the National Republican Senatorial Committee have spent \$17.3 million combined on advertising opposing Beasley, according to Federal Election Commission filings. The Senate Majority PAC, which supports Democratic candidates, and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee have spent close to \$4 million in North Carolina while investing far more in high-profile contests in states like Pennsylvania and Arizona.

"We're committed to making sure voters continue seeing and hearing the truth about Ted Budd," Senate Majority PAC spokesperson Veronica Yoo said.

An arm of the pro-abortion-rights EMILY's List announced this month spending \$2.7 million to criticize Budd on abortion as well.

During a recent stop at Perkins Orchard in Durham, Beasley chatted with farmers who gathered around picnic tables and near fresh pumpkins for sale. Some said afterward they were glad to see her interest in their plight.

Jason Lindsay, 34, a first-generation Black farmer from Rocky Mount, said he's been frustrated with the divisive political environment but is encouraged by Beasley.

"Her temperament here today gave me the first sign of hope that I've had in a long time," he said.

Peoples contributed from New York.

WH Hosts 50+ NC Officials—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cluding U.S. Rep. Kathy Manning, state lawmakers, the mayors of Charlotte, Wilmington, Fayetteville, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Chapel Hill, Raleigh, Concord, Kinston and Durham, in addition to leaders from Wake and Guilford counties.

Just as administration officials want to hear local stories, they also want to emphasize the possible opportunities that local governments might have because of the bipartisan infrastructure law, the incentives for developing

ing computer chips and scientific research, and the recent package to encourage climate-friendly energy sources and limit prescription drug prices.

As part of the day's events, the White House connected those officials with regional media outlets in a sign that they're trying to bring the message to the wider public. That will be crucial in terms of political messaging. Republicans seeking control of the House and Senate have blamed high inflation on Biden's \$1.9 trillion

coronavirus relief package, while the administration say the prices are a byproduct of global events such as the pandemic and Russia's February invasion of Ukraine.

The White House says its efforts have helped workers by swiftly bringing down unemployment rates to a low 3.7 percent, but the Republican drumbeat is that consumer prices are up 8.3 percent from a year ago and the primary reason for voter concern. Gasoline prices have

eased since peaking in June, but the Federal Reserve estimated Wednesday that unemployment will likely rise to bring down inflation.

"The inflation rate plateauing above 8 percent does not mean that families are catching a break—it means exactly the opposite," Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said in a Monday speech to the Senate. "It means that families are continuing to see prices go up and up and up all the time."

Sidney Poitier Documentary—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Carroll, triggering a divorce that split the family.

Poitier's moral compass was stronger than most. Early in his career, he turned down an exploitative part, an unheard of decision at the time. And then after he had made his way to the top and opened the door for other unrepresented actors, he was criticized.

Some called him out for being too accommodating in *The Defiant Ones*, chained and helping a White Tony Curtis, or for loving a White woman in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?* The pioneer became passe as Black militancy grew strength. So Poitier pivoted to directing and producing, still helping others up the ladder.

The film benefits from the candid memories of Poitier's

children and ex-wife, as well as friends like Morgan Freeman, Harry Belafonte, Quincy Jones, Andrew Young, Spike Lee, Denzel Washington, Louis Gossett Jr. and Robert Redford.

Other voices are less effective, showing a star-pulling flex but with little connection to the man. Barbara Streisand adds little—"He was like, Wow! Movie stars should be, 'Wow!'—and we learn that Halle Berry wanted to marry him.

Even Oprah seems a little suspect interviewing herself but she makes it count when she recalls meeting Poitier for the first time at her 42nd birthday, a time in her life when she was being criticized by the Black community for not doing enough, just as Poitier had been.

"It's difficult when you're carrying other people's dreams," he told her. "And so you have to hold on to the dream that is inside yourself and know that if you are true to that, that's all that matters."

For those unfamiliar with some of Poitier's more famous moments, news of a pivotal slap will come as a surprise. Fifty-five years before Will Smith smacked Chris Rock at the Oscars, Poitier's Detective Virgil Tibbs slapped an actor playing

a White plantation owner on-screen in the film *In the Heat of the Night*. It was electrifying, coming in 1967 as the civil rights movement was reaching its heights. Listening to how it profoundly affected future Black stars is powerful.

Another rich vein is revealed in the relationship between Poitier and Belafonte, which one of the former's children likens to having the dynamic of an old married couple. They bonded, they fought, they reconciled, they once even outran the KKK. There seems almost to be another film here about these two charismatic men.

But let us first celebrate Poitier, a man of impossible dignity and ethics, a man who Lenny Kravitz in the film says "came to this Earth to move it."

Sidney, an Apple TV+ release in select theaters and on Apple TV+, is rated PG-13 for adult themes and racial slurs. Running time: 112 minutes.

Mark Kennedy is at <http://twitter.com/KennedyTwits>.

How Steep Fed Rate Hikes —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

have risen lately. So even as borrowing rates steadily rise, many households might not feel a much heavier debt burden immediately.

"I'm not sure interest rates are top of mind for most consumers right now," Hoyt said. "They seem more worried about groceries and what's going on at the gas pump. Rates can be something tricky for consumers to wrap their minds around."

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT CREDIT CARD RATES?

Even before the Fed's decision Wednesday, credit card borrowing rates have reached their highest level since 1996, according to Bankrate.com, and these will likely continue to rise.

And with inflation raging, there are signs that Americans are increasingly relying on credit cards to help maintain their spending. Total credit card balances have topped \$900 billion, according to the Federal Reserve, a record high, though that amount isn't adjusted for inflation.

John Leer, chief economist at Morning Consult, a survey research firm, said its polling suggests that more Americans are spending down the savings they accumulated during the pandemic and are using credit instead. Eventually, rising rates could make it harder for those households to pay off their debts.

Those who don't qualify for low-rate credit cards because

of weak credit scores are already paying significantly higher interest on their balances, and they'll continue to.

As rates have risen, zero percent loans marketed as "Buy Now, Pay Later" have also become popular with consumers. Yet longer-term loans of more than four payments that these companies offer are subject to the same increased borrowing rates as credit cards.

HOW ARE SAVERS AFFECTED?

The rising returns on high-yield savings accounts and certificates of deposit (CDs) have put them at levels not seen since 2009, which means households may want to boost savings wherever possible. You can also now earn more on bonds and other fixed-income investments.

Though savings, CDs, and money market accounts don't typically track the Fed's changes, online banks and others that offer high-yield savings accounts can be exceptions.

These institutions typically compete aggressively for depositors. (The catch: They sometimes require significant high deposits.)

In general, banks tend to capitalize on a higher-rate environment to boost their profits by imposing higher rates on borrowers, without necessarily offering juicier rates to savers.

WILL THIS AFFECT RENTS? HOME OWNERSHIP?

Last week, the average fixed mortgage rate topped 6%, its highest point in 14 years,

meaning that rates on home loans are about twice as expensive as they were a year ago.

Mortgage rates don't always move perfectly in tandem with the Fed increase, instead tracking the expected yield on the 10-year Treasury note. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note has reached nearly 3.6%, its highest level since 2011.

Asking rents are up 11% from last year, said Daryl Fairweather, an economist with the brokerage Redfin. But price growth has slowed, and some renters are moving to more affordable areas.

WILL IT BE EASIER TO FIND A HOUSE IF I'M STILL LOOKING TO BUY?

If you're financially able to proceed with a home purchase, you're likely to have more options than at any time in the past year. Sales of both new and existing homes have dropped steadily for months.

HOW HAVE THE RATE HIKE'S INFLUENCED CRYPTOCURRENCIES?

Cryptocurrencies like bitcoin have dropped in value since the Fed began raising rates. So have many previously high-valued technology stocks. Bitcoin has plunged from a peak of about \$68,000 to under \$20,000.

Higher rates mean that safe assets like Treasuries have become more attractive to investors because their yields have increased. That makes risky assets like technology stocks and cryptocurrencies

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 Mian 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



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.

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.

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.

"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.

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vider, 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.

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

vices. 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.

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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

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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 manufactured

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 revision.

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 de-nuclearization 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 Peace-building 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 defi-

nitely 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 third-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 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."