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## Mmoh Take The Title

CARY—#7 seed Michael Mmoh defeated #8 seed Dominik Koepfer 7-5; 6-3 in the final round of the Atlantic Tire Championship today. The tournament was held at the Cary Tennis Park from September 11 to the finals today.

Mmoh won 74% of his first serve points and saved 67% of breakpoints throughout the match to carry him to victory.

Many of you may be familiar with the name Mmoh because Michael's father Tony was a tennis star at St. Augustine's Uni-

versity in the 1980s.

The Atlantic Tire Championship looks forward to retuning next September for its 9th year. This year the tournament experienced a record crowd and the event just continues to grow.

Steve Worthy Photo

## 'The Woman King' Takes Throne

The Viola Davis-led action epic "The Woman King" easily conquered the North American box office in its first weekend in theaters, against a crowded market of new releases. The film, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood, surpassed expectations and earned \$19 million in ticket sales, according to estimates from Sony on Sunday.

"The Woman King" was released by Sony and TriStar in 3,765 locations and carries a reported production budget of \$50 million, which was co-financed by eOne. The film, about the Agojie, the all-female army of the Kingdom of Dahomey in West Africa in the 1800s, got glowing reviews after its debut at the Toronto Film Festival. It



currently boasts a 94% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes. And theatrical audiences seem just as enthusiastic, giving it a rare A+ CinemaScore suggesting that word of mouth will be strong in

the coming weeks.

"This one has great reviews, an epic story and a great star in the lead role," said Paul Der-

(See **WOMAN KING**, P. 2)

## Disabled Voters Win In Wisconsin, But...

By Harm Venhuizen  
Associated Press/Report for America

MADISON, Wis. (AP)—Trudy Le Beau has voted in every major election since she turned 18—a half-century of civic participation that has gotten increasingly difficult as her multiple sclerosis progressed. Now, with no use of her arms or legs, the Wisconsin woman

relies on her husband to help her fill out and return a ballot.

This year, it seemed for the first time that the 68-year-old would have to choose between her physical health and voting.

After the Wisconsin Supreme Court outlawed ballot drop boxes in July, the state's top election official cited a state law that said voters had to place their own absentee

ballots in the mail or return them to clerks in person.

"I certainly don't want to send my husband to jail because he put my ballot in the mailbox," Le Beau said. "I would have to find some way of putting my ballot in my teeth and carrying it to the clerk's office."

Fortunately for Le Beau, she and other Wisconsin voters with

## New Medicaid Plan Offers

By Gary D. Robertson  
Associated Press

North Carolina's hospitals and hospital systems on Friday unveiled an offer that could shake up stalled negotiations to pass legislation that would expand Medicaid to cover hundreds of thousands of low-income adults in the state.

The North Carolina Healthcare Association said the offer sent to Republican legislative leaders and Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper also contained reforms to some state laws that require regulatory approval before certain medical buildings can be constructed or services offered in a region.

Senate leader Phil Berger this summer accused the association of refusing to compromise

on "certificate of need" rules. Changes to these rules were contained in the Senate version of an expansion measure approved in June. Berger said they were needed to increase the supply of medical services that would be needed to treat the growing Medicaid population.

Cooper, a big expansion proponent, told reporters last week that it would make sense for hospitals to negotiate with Berger on those rules, which hospitals contend help community facilities that disproportionately serve the uninsured or underinsured remain open.

"Our board of trustees has made the difficult decision to propose certificate of need law reforms," board chair Dr. Roxie Wells said in a news release. "CON law changes could threat-

en the survival of community hospitals if they are not implemented carefully. We are putting a lot of trust in legislative leaders to do this correctly."

The House passed its own expansion bill during the final week of the General Assembly's primary work session this year that contained none of the medical supply-side proposals that the Senate wanted. House Speaker Tim Moore has said Republicans in his chamber would prefer to handle those provisions separately from expansion.

Moore's office was still reviewing the offer late Friday, Chief of Staff Neal Inman said. Berger spokesperson Lauren Horsch said the same thing, adding: "We

(See **NC HOSPITALS**, P. 2)

## Phony Doc Lands On Docket

By Michael Balsamo  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—When a government document mysteriously appeared earlier this week in the highest profile case in the federal court system, it had the hallmarks of another explosive storyline in the Justice Department's investigation into classified records stored at former President Donald Trump's Florida estate.

The document purported to be from the U.S. Treasury Department, claimed that the agency had seized sensitive documents related to last month's search at Mar-a-Lago and included a warrant ordering CNN to preserve "leaked tax records."

The document remained late Thursday on the court docket, but it is a clear fabrication. A review of dozens of court records and interviews by The Associated Press suggest the document originated with a serial forger behind bars at a federal prison complex in North Carolina.

The incident also suggests that the court clerk was easily tricked into believing it was real, landing the document on the public docket in the Mar-a-Lago search warrant case. It also highlights the vulnerability of the U.S. court system and raises questions about the court's vetting of documents that purport to be official records.

The document first appeared on the court's docket late Monday afternoon and was marked

as a "MOTION to Intervene by U.S. Department of the Treasury."

The document, sprinkled with spelling and syntax errors, read, "The U.S. Department of Treasury through the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Marshals Service have arrested Seized Federal Securities containing sensitive documents which are subject to the Defendant Sealed Search Warrant by the F.B.I. arrest."

It cited a federal statute for collecting financial records in federal investigations. The document also included the two supposed warrants, one that claimed

to be sent to CNN in Atlanta and another to a towing company in Michigan.

Those supposed warrants, though, are identical to paperwork filed in another case in federal court in Georgia brought by an inmate at the prison medical center in Butner, N.C. The case was thrown out, as were the array of other frivolous lawsuits the man has filed from his prison cell.

The man has been in custody for several years since he was found not competent to stand trial after an arrest for plant-

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



### AFTER 4-MONTH LULL, LOW NC UNEMPLOYMENT RATE RISES SLIGHTLY

(AP)—North Carolina's historically low unemployment rate rose slightly in August, the state Commerce Department reported on Friday.

Last month's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.5 percent—ending a four-month run in which the rate stood at 3.4 percent.

For now, the August rate marks the first monthly increase since April 2020, when business restrictions at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the jobless rate to soar to 14.2 percent. Regular annual revisions to the monthly rates have been completed through 2021.

Before this year, the monthly rate hadn't fallen to 3.4 percent since 2000, according to department data.

The August figures show overall employment grew by close to 1,400 workers, to well over 4.9 million. But it was outpaced by an increase of the unemployed of 7,900 to 179,560 people. Still, the number of unemployed has fallen by 57,550 over the past year.

With another counting format based on monthly worksite surveys, the agency reported seasonally adjusted total nonfarm employment rose by 10,100 to 4.8 million. The leisure and hospitality services industry and professional and business services sector saw sizeable numeric increases in employment, while government employment had a decline of 4,900 workers.

### NORTH CAROLINA GETS \$100M GRANT TO HELP WIDEN INTERSTATE 85

(AP)—North Carolina is getting \$100 million from last year's federal infrastructure law to widen an often-congested stretch of Interstate 85 near Charlotte and build amenities for modern travel and communications.

The state Department of Transportation's award is one of 26 grants nationwide announced on Thursday by the federal government, at a total of \$1.5 billion.

The Infrastructure Rebuilding America grant will assist the state DOT to widen 10 miles of I-85 in Gaston County from six to eight lanes, which will include improvements at interchanges, overpasses and railroad bridges.

The money also will help build several miles of sidewalks, bike lanes and paths crossing over the route, as well as install electric-vehicle charging stations and broadband improvements in Gaston and Cleveland counties, Gov. Roy Cooper's office said.

"Strengthening infrastructure and making transportation safe, clean and more resilient will build a stronger North Carolina," Cooper said in a news release.

The money originates from the 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law. Thursday's round of competitive grants included money to dismantle Interstate 375, a depressed Detroit freeway built by demolishing Black neighborhoods 60 years ago. The route is being transformed into a street-level boulevard that will reconnect the surrounding neighborhoods.

### NC SENATE HOPEFUL BUDD, BEASLEY AGREE TO DEBATE NEXT MONTH

(AP)—North Carolina's two major-party U.S. Senate candidates have agreed to participate in a televised debate next month.

Spokespeople for the campaigns of Democrat Cheri Beasley and Republican Ted Budd said on Wednesday they would participate in an Oct. 7 debate that will be aired on Spectrum News 1. The cable channel also confirmed the debate, which will occur in Raleigh.

Budd's participation comes after he declined to join his Republican competitors in four televised debates leading up to the May primary. There were no Senate Democratic primary debates aired on live

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



**FIGHTING SIMPLY TO BE ABLE TO VOTE**—Martha Chambers poses in her apartment Friday, Sept. 2, 2022, in Milwaukee. Wisconsin voters with disabilities are celebrating a win after a federal judge, citing the Voting Rights Act, ruled that they may get assistance returning their ballots. [AP Photo/Morry Gash]

(See **DISABLED VOTERS**, P. 2)

# NC Hospitals Offer New Medicaid Plan—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

appreciate the NCHA's willingness to come to the table with a proposal." There was no immediate response late Friday from Cooper's office.

The General Assembly is scheduled to reconvene Tuesday for what's expected to be a three-day administrative session with

no recorded floor votes. They are next scheduled to return to Raleigh in October.

North Carolina is one of a dozen states that have yet to accept the federal government's offer to cover people who make too much to be insured by traditional Medicaid but too little to receive sub-

sized private insurance. The federal government would pay 90 percent of the medical costs of expansion.

The association said its proposal would have hospitals paying a majority of the state's share to cover another 600,000 people at a cost of over \$550 million an-

nually. The state's hospitals also would participate in a federally funded program that would enhance their Medicaid reimbursement rates for providing care, providing new revenues.

The proposal would do away with certificate of need laws for psychiatric inpatient beds and

beds to treat people with chemical dependency. It also, within five years, would scale back regulations for operating rooms within ambulatory surgical centers, which the association says would result in a loss of revenue for them.

"Each day the General As-

sembly waits is a day that harms 600,000 North Carolinians," association president and CEO Steve Lawler said. "We hope that any legislation crafted will be done in a thoughtful way that protects health care facilities that take care of people and improve community health."

# Alabama Duck Compensation For Survivor Of '63 KKK Blast

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Sarah Collins Rudolph lost an eye and still has pieces of glass inside her body from a Ku Klux Klan bombing that killed her sister and three other Black girls at an Alabama church 59 years ago, and she's still waiting on the state to compensate her for those injuries.

Gov. Kay Ivey sidestepped the

question of financial compensation two years ago in apologizing to Rudolph for her "untold pain and suffering," saying legislative involvement was needed. But nothing has been done despite the efforts of attorneys representing Rudolph, leaving unresolved the question of payment even though victims of other attacks, including 9/11, were compensated.

Rudolph, known as the "Fifth Little Girl" for surviving the infamous attack on 16th Street Baptist Church, which was depicted in Spike Lee's 1997 documentary "4 Little Girls," has been rankled by the state's inaction.

Speaking in an interview with The Associated Press, Rudolph said then-Gov. George C. Wallace helped lay the groundwork for the Klan attack with his segregationist rhetoric, and the state bears some responsibility for the bombing, which wasn't prosecuted for years.

"If they hadn't stirred up all that racist hate that was going on at the time I don't believe that church would have been bombed," said Rudolph.

Rudolph attended a White House summit about combatting hate-fueled violence on Thursday, the anniversary of the bombing, and

was recognized by President Joe Biden.

"I visited the church on this day in 2019, and I'll visit with you and always remember what happened," Biden told Rudolph. In Birmingham, hundreds gathered at the church for a commemorative service and wreath-laying at the spot where the bomb went off.

Rudolph said she still incurs medical expenses from the explosion, including a \$90 bill she gets every few months for work on the prosthetic she wears in place of the right eye that was destroyed by shrapnel on Sept. 15, 1963. Anything would help, but Rudolph believes she's due millions.

Ishan Bhabha, an attorney representing Rudolph, said the state's apology — made at Rudolph's request along with a plea for restitution — was only meant

as a first step.

"She deserves justice in the form of compensation for the grievous injuries, and costs, she has had to bear for almost 60 years," he said. "We will continue to pursue any available avenues to get Sarah the assistance she needs and deserves."

Five girls were gathered in a downstairs bathroom at 16th Street Baptist Church when a bomb planted by KKK members went off outside, blowing a huge hole in the thick, brick wall. The blast killed Denise McNair, 11, and three 14-year-olds: Carole Robertson, Cynthia Morris, also referred to as Cynthia Wesley, and Addie Mae Collins, who was Rudolph's sister.

Three Klan members convicted of murder in the bombing years later died in prison, and a fourth suspect died without ever being

charged. The bombing occurred eight months after Wallace proclaimed "segregation forever" in his inaugural speech and during the time when Birmingham schools were being racially integrated for the first time.

The church itself has gotten government money for renovations, as has the surrounding Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, formed by President Barack Obama in 2017 in one of his last acts in office. "But not me," Rudolph said.

Ivey, at the time of the apology, said in a letter to Rudolph's lawyer that any possible compensation would require legislative approval, said press secretary Gina Maiola.

"Additionally, in attorney-to-attorney conversations that ensued soon after, that same point was reiterated," she said.

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

TV earlier this year, as Beasley's top rivals dropped out of the race months before the election.

The Spectrum agreement followed a back-and-forth by the two campaigns, particularly after Budd last week declined a debate offer by the North Carolina Association of Broadcasters.

Other candidates on the ballot for the Senate seat being vacated by Republican Richard Burr are Libertarian Shannon Bray and Matthew Hoh of the Green Party.

## NC GOVERNOR WANTS LOAN FORGIVENESS EXEMPT FROM STATE TAX

(AP)—North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper wants the General Assembly to pass legislation exempting individuals from state income tax on the student loan forgiveness announced by President Joe Biden last month.

The White House has said the value of that forgiveness—up to \$20,000 for some—is exempt from federal income tax, citing language in the 2021 American Rescue Plan law. But North Carolina appears to be one of a half-dozen states where amounts would be subject to state tax without a change.

The Democratic governor pointed out that the General Assembly passed legislation in 2021 that exempted loans from the Paycheck Protection Program for businesses from state income tax and allowed recipients to deduct expenses paid with those loans.

"Republican legislators were quick to help businesses and should now fix this fundamental unfairness for many hardworking people who will get hit hard by this," Cooper said in a Wednesday news release. North Carolina's individual income tax rate of 4.99 percent falls to 4.75 percent in 2023.

The General Assembly's primary work period for the year ended July 1. Lawmakers have held monthly three-day administrative floor sessions since then. The next such meeting is next week. Lawmakers have authority to consider substantive legislation during these sessions.

## STORM FIONA POSES THREAT FOR PUERTO RICO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

MIAMI, Fla. (AP)—Tropical Storm Fiona passed near Guadeloupe on Friday evening, hitting some of the Caribbean's easternmost islands with strong rain and wind as forecasters warned the storm could later threaten Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic with dangerous rains.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami said Fiona was then likely to become a hurricane near the Bahamas next week.

Meanwhile, Tropical Storm Lester in the eastern Pacific was on a projected path that could bring landfall near the Acapulco area on Mexico's southwestern coast Saturday.

The center said Fiona would pass into the eastern Caribbean during Friday night and would then slow its forward movement. It was predicted to be close to Puerto Rico late Saturday and then cross over the Dominican Republic on Monday.

The forecast called for rainfall totals of as much as a foot in places across eastern and southern Puerto Rico and 16 inches in the eastern Dominican Republic. That much rain could cause flash floods and mudslides in higher terrain, and life-threatening surf was possible from Fiona's winds, the hurricane center said.

The Atlantic hurricane season's sixth named storm had maximum sustained winds of about 50 mph late Friday afternoon, the center said. Little change in strength was expected during the next few days.

Fiona was moving westward at 15 mph, and was centered about 15 miles north-northwest of Guadeloupe. Tropical storm warnings were in effect for most of the Leeward Islands.

In the Pacific, Lester was expected to remain a tropical storm until hitting the Mexican coast Saturday, but forecasters warned of potential dangers from heavy rains.

The storm had maximum sustained winds of 40 mph early Friday evening. It was centered 215 miles southeast of Acapulco and moving to the northwest at 12 mph.

A tropical storm warning was up from Puerto Escondido to Zihuatanejo. The hurricane center said Lester could drop from 8 to 12 inches of rain on the coasts of upper Guerrero state and Michoacan state, with isolated areas getting 16 inches.

# Phony Doc Lands On Docket—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ing a fake explosive outside the Guardian Building, a skyscraper in Detroit. Since his incarceration, he has filed a range of lawsuits and has impersonated the Treasury Department, claimed to be a federal trustee and claimed to be a lawyer for the Justice Department, a review of court records shows.

In the Georgia case, the man alleged that Trump and others had "acquired" millions of un-redacted classified tax returns and other sensitive financial data, bank records and accounts of banking and tax transactions of several million Americans and federal government agencies," court documents say.

The judge in that case called his suit "fanatic" and "delusional," saying there was no way to "discern any cognizable claim" from the incoherent filings.

The man has repeatedly impersonated federal officials in court records and has placed tax liens on judges using his false paperwork, two people familiar with the matter told the AP. Because of his history as a forger, his mail is supposed to be subjected to additional scrutiny from the Bureau of Prisons.

It's unclear how the documents—the fake motion and the phony warrants—ended up at the court clerk's office at the courthouse in West Palm Beach, Fla.

A photocopy of an envelope, included in the filing, shows it was sent to the court with a printed return address of the Treasury Department's headquarters in Washington. But a postmark shows a Michigan ZIP Code, and a tracking number on the envelope shows it was mailed Sept. 9 from Clinton Township, Mich., the inmate's hometown.

The AP is not identifying the inmate by name because he has a documented history of mental illness and has not been charged with a crime related to the filing.

"There is simply nothing indicating that he has any authorization to act on behalf of the

United States," the judge in the Georgia case wrote.

But despite the clear warning signs—including a stamp noting the Georgia case number on the phony warrants—the filing still made its way onto the docket.

Spokespeople for the Justice Department and the Treasury Department would not comment. They declined to answer on the record when asked if the document was false and why the government had not addressed it.

Representatives in the court clerk's office and the magistrate judge overseeing the search warrant case did not respond to requests for comment.

# 'The Woman King' Takes —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

garabedian, Comscore's senior media analyst. "People want to go to the movie theater and audiences are back in the habit of expecting new movies in theaters."

The horror movie "Barbarian," a 20th Century Studios release, took second place in its second weekend with \$6.3 million.

It was a jam-packed week for new releases at the domestic box office that included the A24 horror prequel "Pearl," Searchlight's starry mystery pic "See How They Run," NEON's David

Bowie documentary "Moonage Daydream," Paramount and Miramax's "Confess, Fletch," with Jon Hamm, and Focus Features' "The Silent Twins." But even though most boasted good reviews, it was still a slower week for the business overall.

"See How They Run," a 1950s-set murder mystery with Saoirse Ronan and Sam Rockwell, is estimating a \$3.1 million domestic debut from 2,404 locations.

Ti West's "Pearl" also took in estimated \$3.1 million. A24 released the film starring

Mia Goth as a farmgirl who dreams of movie stardom on 2,935 screens. The first film "X" opened \$4.3 million in March and the studio has already greenlit a third film, "MaXXXine."

Brett Morgen's Bowie documentary "Moonage Daydream," meanwhile, debuted exclusively on IMAX screens this weekend, where it made \$1.2 million in North America and landed in 10th place. "This may not be a blockbuster-filled corridor, but this is a great weekend," said

Dergarabedian. "There's all this talk of the post summer doldrums or slowdown, but there's a lot of new movies out there. You just have to look for the gems."

Next week will see the release of Olivia Wilde's much-discussed "Don't Worry Darling," which could give a boost to the box office. But blockbuster numbers likely won't return until October and even November when the superhero movies return with "Black Adam" and "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."

# Disabled Voters Win In Wis.—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

—a major push by Republicans since former President Donald Trump's false claims of a stolen election in 2020—don't affect everyone equally.

"Voting restrictions aimed at the general public can have a disparate impact on people with disabilities," said Jess Davidson, communications director for the American Association of People with Disabilities.

Voters and state agencies in Alaska, New York and Alabama have also raised challenges to absentee voting programs that don't provide accessible ballots for people with visual impairments or disabilities that make it difficult to fill out a print ballot privately. Advocacy groups in New York reached a settlement in April that requires the state elections board to create

a program for disabled voters to fill out and print accessible online ballots.

Wisconsin voters with disabilities expressed frustration at having to fight for equal voting rights when federal law already lays out specific provisions for accessibility.

"This whole issue was absolutely ridiculous to start out with. It shouldn't matter if you need assistance returning your ballot," said Stacy Ellingen.

Ellingen, 37, has athetoid spastic cerebral palsy because of complications at birth. She lives in Oshkosh, Wis., and with no accessible transportation options, absentee voting is the only way she can cast a ballot. She said if it weren't for the ruling handed down two weeks ago, she wouldn't have been able to

vote this fall.

"I'm not going to risk having caregivers get in trouble for putting my ballot in the mailbox. Especially when we have such a caregiver shortage," she said.

Republican lawmakers have yet to offer any resistance to the Wisconsin ruling. But Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, a law firm that frequently litigates for conservative causes, raised concern that the ruling could perpetuate fraud. They unsuccessfully pressed the Wisconsin Elections Commission to require anyone returning a ballot on someone else's behalf to sign a statement saying the voter has a disability and requires assistance.

Davidson, of the American Association of People with Disabilities, called the argument that voter assistance will lead to fraud "simply

inaccurate, and motivated by anti-democratic interests."

Martha Chambers was paralyzed in a horseback riding accident 27 years ago. She uses her mouth to hold pens, paintbrushes and mouth sticks, which allow her to use a computer. Chambers also relies on a power wheelchair to get around.

Because she can't use her arms, she's unable to return her own ballot to a mailbox or polling location. A caregiver returned her ballot in Wisconsin's August primary, and Chambers said she joined the lawsuit so it wouldn't be illegal in future elections for caregivers to give such help.

"Why did we even have to go through all of this to begin with? Our lives are difficult enough with the challenges that we have on a daily basis," she said.

# More Coaches Named In SC Cheerleader Suit

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A lawsuit alleging the rampant sexual abuse of underage athletes at a competitive cheerleading gym in South Carolina has been amended to name six more coaches as defendants and three more accusers.

The accusers — now seven female and two male — say in the federal lawsuit amended Thursday that they were sexually abused by coaches at Rockstar Cheerleading and Dance in Greenville, which is in the northwestern corner of the state. The accusers' lawyers allege that sexual abuse at the gym could date back two decades and that there could be 100 more victims who haven't come forward.

One of the plaintiffs' lawyers, Bakari Sellers, likened the case to that of Larry Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor who is serving a minimum of 40 years in prison after admitting that he molested some of the nation's top

gymnasts for years.

None of the Rockstar coaches have been charged and The Associated Press is not naming them. State and federal law enforcement agencies are investigating the gym and other cheerleading outlets and have seized computers, cellphones and other evidence, one of the accusers' lawyers, James Bannister, said earlier this month. He said the agencies asked lawyers not to identify them.

According to the lawsuit, the abuse ranged from rape and forced oral sex to molestation and pressuring children as young as 13 to send nude photos of themselves to coaches. The lawsuit also details instances in which coaches gave students alcohol and cannabis at their homes and in hotel rooms during cheerleading competitions.

The allegations first centered on the gym's founder, Scott Foster, who was found dead in his car on Aug. 22. The coroner determined

he died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

Kathy Foster, his widow, announced in earlier this month that Rockstar Cheerleading and Dance would close "indefinitely."

"Although this was a difficult decision, I believe it is the best option under the circumstances," Foster said in a statement reported by local NBC affiliate WYFF. "Over the past 15 years, our incredible athletes have worked hard to build a winning legacy and I will always be extremely proud of each of them. I ask for privacy for my children and for those personally affected during this difficult time."

The amended suit details several instances in which it alleges that athletes were abused outside of South Carolina at events sanctioned by Varsity Spirit, which runs competitions, and the U.S. All Star Federation, the country's cheerleading governing body.

Varsity Spirit President Bill

Seely said in a Sept. 1 statement that the accusations detailed "abhorrent criminal, predatory conduct" and were "devastating to hear." In an Aug. 30 statement, USASF said the organization was "devastated to learn of allegations about potential abuse." The statement declined to comment on developments while law enforcement investigations are underway and reiterated that members should report any allegations.

The plaintiffs' attorneys said they expect to file more lawsuits naming other perpetrators at other gyms around the country.

"We're talking about serious repeated abuse that was reported to everyone including the Greenville County Sheriff's Department," attorney Bakari Sellers said in a statement. "For Varsity Spirit, the USASF and Bain Capital, these survivors didn't matter. Their checks did. They did nothing to stop this abuse then and they're doing nothing now."

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# Business & Finance

## Treasury Recommends Exploring Creation Of Digital Dollar

By Fatima Hussein

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The Biden administration is moving one step closer to developing a central bank digital currency, known as the digital dollar, saying it would help reinforce the U.S. role as a leader in the world financial system.

The White House said on Friday that after President Joe Biden issued an executive order in March calling on a variety of agencies to look at ways to regulate digital assets, the agencies came up with nine reports, covering cryptocurrency impacts on financial markets, the environment, innovation and other elements of the economic system.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said one Treasury recommendation is that the U.S. “advance policy and technical work on a potential central bank digital currency, or CBDC, so that the United States is prepared if CBDC is determined to be in the national interest.”

“Right now, some aspects of our current payment system are too slow or too expensive,” Yellen said on a Thursday call with reporters laying out some of the findings of the reports.

Central bank digital currencies differ from existing digital money available to the general public, such as the balance in a bank account, because they would be a direct liability of the Federal Reserve, not a commercial bank.

According to the Atlantic Council nonpartisan think tank, 105 countries representing more than 95 percent of global gross domestic product already are exploring or have created a central bank digital currency.

The council found that the U.S. and the U.K. are far behind in creating a digital dollar or its equivalent.

Treasury, the Justice Department, the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, the Securities and Exchange Commission and other agencies were tasked with contributing to reports that would address various concerns about the risks, development and usage of digital assets. Several reports will come out in the next weeks and months.

Eswar Prasad, a trade professor at Cornell who studies the digitization of currencies, said Treasury’s report “takes a positive view about how a digital dollar might play a useful role in increasing payment options for individuals and businesses” while acknowledging the risks of its development.

He said the report sets the stage for the creation of agency regulations and legislation “that can improve the benefit-risk tradeoff associated with cryptocurrencies and related technologies.”

The Blockchain Association, which lobbies lawmakers on Capitol Hill, said in a statement that the White House reports are “a missed opportunity to cement U.S. crypto leadership.”

“These reports focus on risks—not opportunities,” the statement reads, “and omit substantive recommendations on how the United States can promote its burgeoning crypto industry, including job creation, improvements to the financial system, and expanded access for all Americans.”

On Capitol Hill, lawmakers have submitted various pieces of legislation to regulate cryptocurrency and other digital assets.

Sheila Warren, CEO of the Crypto Council for Innovation, said in an emailed statement that the report “seem to kick the can down the road” she said, “we don’t see clear recommendations.”

The director of the National Economic Council, Brian Deese, told reporters that “we’ve seen in recent months substantial turmoil in cryptocurrency markets and these events really highlight how, without proper oversight, cryptocurrencies risk harming everyday Americans’ financial stability and our national security.”

“It is why this administration believes that now more than ever,” he said, “prudent regulation of cryptocurrencies is needed.”

He said on Friday that the Administration plans to “execute a comprehensive action plan with priority steps to mitigate key risks of cryptocurrencies—among others, money laundering and financing for terrorism.”



**SAYS IT WILL SPEED UP PAYMENTS**—The Treasury Department wants to bring the aging greenback into the 21st century with a “digital dollar.” How that will go over with the government able to track every transaction you make—with the ability to freeze your money if it wants—remains to be seen.

## Legal Gambling Looks Good In NJ

By Wayne Parry

Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP)—New Jersey’s casinos, horse tracks that offer sports betting and the online partners of both types of gambling outlets won \$470.6 million from gamblers in August, up more than 10 percent from a year earlier, according to figures released Friday by state gambling regulators.

The amount of money won from in-person gamblers at casinos was nearly \$274 million, up 4.4 percent from a year earlier. But that total still lagged behind the level of August 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic hit, when the total was more than \$286 million. Returning to pre-pandemic levels for in-person gamblers has been the main goal of Atlantic City’s nine casinos, regardless of the fact that money from internet and sports betting continues to grow.

Those revenue streams are misleading, casino executives say, because casinos do not get to keep all that money; it must be shared with third parties including tech platforms and sportsbooks. By some estimates, as much as 70 percent of internet and sports betting money is not retained by the casinos.

“It has been a great summer for Atlantic City and the region,” said James Plousis, chairman of the New Jersey Casino Control Commission. “The recent efforts to create impressive in-person experiences will continue to provide positive momentum going into the fall.”

Comparing results from the

three summer months to the same period last year, Atlantic City’s casino winnings grew more than 6 percent and total gambling revenue exceeded \$1.2 billion, up 9 percent, Plousis said.

Jane Bokunewicz, director of the Lloyd Levenson Institute at Stockton University, which studies the Atlantic City casino industry, called the casinos’ August performance “a solid showing.”

She noted that in-person casino winnings, while trailing the pre-pandemic level of August 2019, still exceeded every other August since 2015.

“The relatively slow growth of brick-and-mortar gaming revenues compared to the increasing contribution of internet gaming to total revenue could potentially suggest a change in consumer behavior that doesn’t cannibalize in-person gaming but includes significant internet gaming activity,” she said. “A decreased reliance on exclusively in-person gaming activity has the potential to keep the New Jersey casino industry competitive with its neighbors and make it more resilient to market disruptions that might potentially occur in the future.”

For the month of August, five of the nine casinos reported increases in the amount of money won compared to a year earlier. They are: Borgata (\$120.7 million, up over 29 percent); Hard Rock (nearly \$54 million, up 2.8 percent); the Ocean Casino Resort (nearly \$40 million, up nearly 14 percent); Bally’s (just over \$20 million, up nearly 30 percent); and Resorts (\$18.7 million, up 0.2 percent).

Four casinos reported revenue declines compared with a year earlier. They are: Golden Nugget (\$44.5 million, down 2.7 percent); Tropicana (\$35.1 million, down 7.8 percent); Harrah’s (just over \$25 million, down 10.4 percent); and Caesars (just over \$22 million, down nearly 13 percent).

The Borgata had its second-best month ever in August, trailing only the \$124 million it won from gamblers in July. Both those figures represent the highest totals ever achieved by an Atlantic City casino since legal gambling began here in 1978.

Among internet-only entities, Resorts Digital won \$43.5 million, up nearly 26 percent, and Caesars Interactive NJ won \$8.9 million, down 10 percent.

For the first eight months of this year, the casinos, tracks and their partners have collectively won \$3.38 billion, up 13.2 percent from the same period last year.

The casinos and tracks took in \$546.7 million worth of sports bets in August, and kept \$65.2 million of that as revenue after paying off winning bets and other expenses. The Meadowlands Racetrack in East Rutherford, just outside New York City, won \$33.1 million; Freehold Raceway won \$2.7 million, and Monmouth Park in Oceanport, near the Jersey Shore, won \$1.8 million.

Internet casino games brought in \$131.4 million in August, up over 16 percent from a year earlier. On Wednesday, a state legislative panel indicated that New Jersey lawmakers are prepared to extend authorization for online gambling in the state for another 10 years, through 2033.

## FedEx Report Spooks Wall Street

By Damian J. Troise and Alex Veiga

AP Business Writers

Wall Street closed out the stock market’s worst week in three months with more losses Friday, as a stark warning from FedEx about rapidly worsening trends in the economy rattled already anxious investors.

The S&P 500 fell 0.7 percent, with all but two of its 11 company sectors ending in the red. The benchmark index sank 4.8 percent for the week, with much of the loss coming from a 4.3 percent rout on Tuesday following a surprisingly hot report on inflation. The last time it posted a bigger weekly decline was the week ended June 17.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.5 percent and the Nasdaq composite dropped 0.9 percent. The Russell 2000 index of smaller companies took the heaviest losses, falling 1.5 percent.

All the major indices have now posted losses four out of the past five weeks.

FedEx sank 21.4 percent for its biggest single-day sell-off on record after warning investors that

profits for its fiscal first-quarter will likely fall short of forecasts because of a dropoff in business. The package delivery service is also shuttering storefronts and corporate offices and expects business conditions to further weaken.

Industrial giant General Electric also helped put traders in a selling mood after its chief financial officer said the company is still bogged down by supply chain problems that were raising costs. GE shares fell 3.7 percent.

The worrisome corporate updates hit a market already on edge because of stubbornly high inflation as well as the higher interest rates being used to fight it, which will slow the economy. Wall Street is bracing for another hefty interest rate hike from the Federal Reserve next week following a meeting of central bank policymakers.

“Based on this week’s market results there’s no question that investors are going into the weekend, No. 1 very concerned about the U.S. economy looking into the balance of this year and No. 2, with all eyes focused on next week’s Fed action,” said Greg Bassuk, CEO at AXS In-

vestments.

The S&P 500 fell 28.02 points to 3,873.33. It’s now down 18.7 percent so far this year.

The Dow dropped 139.40 points to 30,822.42 and the Nasdaq slid 103.95 points to 11,448.40. The Russell 2000 gave up 27.04 points to 1,798.19.

Technology stocks, banks and energy firms had some of the biggest losses. Adobe fell 3.1 percent, Bank of America dropped 1.1 percent and Chevron slid 2.6 percent.

Makers of household goods, which are typically considered less risky investments, held up better than the rest of the market. Campbell Soup rose 1.3 percent.

The Federal Reserve is aggressively raising interest rates in an effort to cool the hottest inflation in four decades, but that has raised worries that it could hit the brakes too hard and slide the economy into a recession. The central bank has already raised interest rates four times this year and economists expect another jumbo increase of three-quarters of a point when the Fed’s leaders meet this week.

reward calculation.

A recent bombshell whistleblower report from Twitter’s former head of security alleges that the social media company has been negligently lax on cybersecurity and privacy protections for its users for years.

While worrisome for anyone on Twitter, the revelations could be especially concerning for those who use it to reach con-

stituencies, get news out about emergencies and for political dissidents and activists in the crosshairs of hackers or their own governments.

“We tend to look at these companies as large, well-resourced entities who know what they’re doing—but you realize that a lot of their actions are ad hoc and reactive, driven by crises,” said Prateek Waghre, policy director

at the Internet Freedom Foundation, a digital rights nonprofit in India.

“Essentially, they’re often held together by cello tape or chewing gum.”

Peiter “Mudge” Zatkó, who served as Twitter’s security chief until he was fired early this year, filed the complaints last month with federal U.S. authorities, alleging that the company misled regulators about its poor cybersecurity defenses and its negligence in attempting to root out fake accounts that spread disinformation.

Among Zatkó’s most serious accusations is that Twitter violated the terms of a 2011 FTC settlement by falsely claiming that it had put stronger measures in place to protect the security and privacy of its users.

Waghre said the allegations in the complaint about India—that Twitter knowingly allowed the Indian government to place its agents on the company payroll where they had “direct unsupervised access to the company’s systems and user data”—were particularly worrisome. He also pointed to an incident earlier this month where a former Twitter employee was found guilty of passing along sensitive user data to royal family members in Saudi Arabia in exchange for bribes.

The consequences of privacy and security lapses can range from inconvenience and embarrassment—such as when an Indiana State Police account was

hacked and tweeted “poo-poo head” earlier this year—to much worse. In October 2021, a Saudi humanitarian aid worker was sentenced to 20 years in prison because of an anonymous, satirical Twitter account that the kingdom says he ran. It’s possible that the case is linked with the men accused of spying on behalf of the kingdom while working at Twitter.

As an advocate for dissidents and others detained in Saudi Arabia, Bethany Al-Haidari has been concerned for years about Twitter’s user privacy safeguards. The new whistleblower allegations make her all the more worried.

“Given what we know about how social media is used around the world, that is incredibly problematic,” said Al-Haidari, who works for The Freedom Initiative, a U.S.-based human rights group. The possibility of hackers or governments exploiting the alleged cybersecurity lapses at Twitter to get users’ identities, private messages or other personal information “is quite disturbing to me,” she said.

Chinese-Australian artist and activist Badiucao, who regularly publishes art that criticizes the Chinese Communist Party, expressed concern about the whistleblower’s allegations, noting that many users provide their phone numbers and emails to Twitter.

“Once that personal information is leaked, it could be used to trace your identity,” he said. Ba-

diucao said he regularly receives death threats and propaganda from what appears to be bot or spam accounts.

But the artist plans to keep using Twitter, saying it’s probably the best option Chinese-speaking activists and artists have for a “shelter for free speech.”

Twitter says the whistleblower claims present a “false narrative” about the company and its privacy and data security practices, and that the claims lack context. “Security and privacy have long been company-wide priorities at Twitter and will continue to be,” the company said in a statement.

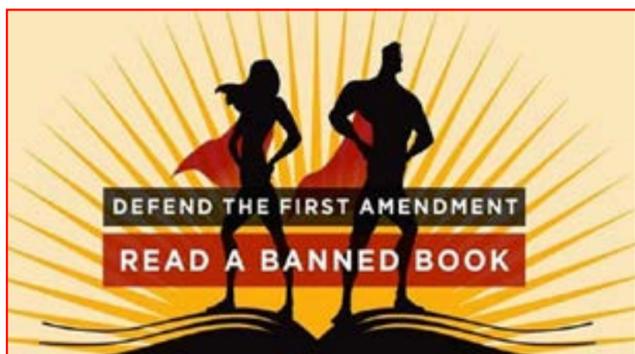
Despite the heightened concerns sparked by Zatkó’s claims, none of the groups The Associated Press spoke to this week plan to stop using Twitter. Security experts say while the whistleblower’s claims are alarming, there’s no reason for individual users to delete their accounts.

High-profile Twitter users and world governments may be at greater risk than average users, experts say. In 2020, for instance, Twitter suffered an embarrassing hack by a teenager who accessed the accounts of former President Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg and a number of tech billionaires including Tesla CEO Elon Musk and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. Musk is currently embroiled in a battle with Twitter as he tries to back out of a \$44 billion deal to buy the company.



THEY CLAIMED TO HAVE THEIR PROBLEMS UNDER CONTROL. MAYBE NOT.

# Opinion



## BOOK BANS ARE AN ATTACK ON THE FREEDOM TO READ, TEACH AND LEARN

By Ben Jealous

People for the American Way

Truth is a threat to authoritarianism. Reading is a path to truth. That's why the freedom to read is essential to the freedom to learn. And that's why the freedom to learn is often attacked by those who abuse power and those who cling to it.

Every year, the American Library Association and partner organizations observe Banned Books Week to highlight and push back against these threats. This year's Banned Books Week runs from September 18–24 amidst a wave of book bans and other attempts to restrict what people can learn.

These efforts have a long and dishonorable history.

Before the Civil War, many slave states made it a crime to teach enslaved people to read. Slaveholders feared that being able to read might help enslaved people gain their freedom or organize rebellions. In Virginia, a judge could order that any slave or free person of color caught learning to read or write be whipped.

In our day, attacking the freedom to read is once again a political strategy for those seeking to take and keep power. And once again, Black people are a primary target.

State legislators and governors are making it illegal to teach honestly about the history and reality of racism in our country. Far-right activists are trying to purge schools and libraries of books that feature Black people, LGBTQ people, and others they deem unworthy of students' attention.

The MAGA movement's attacks on teaching about racism and sexuality have led to what the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom has called an "astronomical" increase in challenges to books.

That's why the annual celebration of the freedom to read that is Banned Books Week is especially meaningful this year. In addition to the librarians, authors, booksellers, teachers, and other anti-censorship activists who lead Banned Book Week activities, all of us have a role to play in ensuring the voices of our communities are not silenced.

Books by and about Black people and other people of color—and by and about LGBTQ people—dominate the ALA's annual list of most frequently challenged books. This year's honorary chairman, George Johnson, is an award-winning Black author whose *All Boys Aren't Blue* is high on the list of books most challenged last year, along with others dealing with racism, racial identity, and sexuality.

"This is a fight for the truth that has always existed even if it rarely gets told," Johnson says. "When the youth are empowered with stories about the experiences of others, they become adults who understand the necessity for equity and equality and have the tools to build a world the likes of which we have never seen."

But far-right activists tell parents that words like "equity" are code for Marxism and something they should fight. Trump Republicans are encouraging MAGA activists to take over their school boards by running propaganda campaigns about "critical race theory."

Trumpish state legislators are introducing laws to make it illegal to teach anything that might make White students experience "discomfort." One Texas lawmaker demanded information from schools on 850 books he thought were suspect; his list included works on history and human rights. In Virginia, Gov. Glenn Youngkin set up an email hotline for people to report teachers suspected of "divisive" practices.

Books targeted in the current war on truth include a memoir by Ruby Bridges, which tells the true story about her walking through angry mobs when she was a six-year-old who became the first Black student to attend a New Orleans elementary school that had previously been off-limits to non-White students.

This is an important part of our history. We cannot build a future together if we are not willing to honestly face the truth about our past and our present.

Banned Books Week is a good time to commit ourselves to defending the freedom to read, teach, and learn about our history—and to opposing those who want to make it illegal to teach about that history or make it impossible for educators to do so without being smeared and harassed.

*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.*



## Why Attendance Awareness Matters

By Jill Cox

President and CEO, Communities In Schools NC

As students return to the classroom for the new school year, it is important to remember the obstacles many face in being able to consistently attend school. According to data released last week by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, almost 25 percent of the state's students were chronically absent during the 2020/2021 school year, and that number has nearly doubled since the beginning of the pandemic. The importance of regular school attendance cannot be overstated, and students who fall behind due to absence face extreme difficulty catching up.

Absence predicts performance, and, as early as 6th grade, it can predict high school graduation. Students with better attendance tend to have better grades and test scores, and they stay in school longer, creating a strong link between student attendance, relationships with adults in the school building and overall school climate and culture. Furthermore, absence can have a classroom-wide impact as teachers have to constantly re-teach materials to help absent students, resulting in limited exposure to new materials for many in the class. State test scores are also lower, impacting students' ability to advance to the next grade or qualify for college acceptance.

Students who are chronically absent—meaning missing two days a month or 10 percent of the year—are at risk of eventual school dropout and diminished opportunities for a productive life. The fiscal and social costs of not finishing school are high: studies have found that the lifetime earning gap between a high school dropout and an

individual with a bachelor's degree is between \$550,000 and \$2 million, and 2019 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate high school graduates earn nearly 20 percent more than dropouts.

For many students, absence from school goes beyond a lack of interest in education. Students miss school for multiple reasons including illness, taking care of family members, unreliable transportation, and feelings of unsafety or discomfort in a classroom. Students of color, students in low-income communities, and students with disabilities are more likely to face a significant obstacle to consistent school attendance, further exacerbating existing inequities.

Chronic absenteeism is an issue that needs to be addressed throughout our communities, and everyone can help. Parents can emphasize the importance of school and take action by participating in school activities, providing a quiet space for homework, and by making sure their student is prepared every morning. Health providers can take action by talking to students about regular school attendance, by helping parents take steps to prevent and address chronic illness so it does not affect school attendance, and by scheduling appointments outside of school hours. Employers can take action by promoting engagement with their children's schools and providing time for them to attend parent-teacher conferences. Neighbors and businesses can proactively express concern when they see children not in school during school hours. Communities of faith, human services agencies, and civic organizations can take action by communicating the importance of school attendance through printed materials, parenting classes, or other supports to students and families.

Communities In Schools helps schools and communities realize the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism and craft solutions that best fit their students' and families' needs. Integrated Student Supports give students a caring adult to engage with, who in turn ensure that they have the support they need and are well-equipped to thrive. Left unaddressed, chronic absenteeism can further existing inequities in education and widen academic achievement gaps that may never be closed. When students attend school, they build routines, engage with peers, develop their academic and personal skills, and set themselves up for a lifetime of success.



## Ron DeSantis's Immigrant Trafficking Stunt Keeps Looking Weirder and Dumber

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

When I wrote my last column on Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's latest scheme to use his state's treasury as a presidential campaign fund, the whole thing looked pretty silly and counter-productive. With more than half a million unfilled job openings in his state, why is he scooping up immigrants and flying them to Massachusetts instead of letting them improve Florida's economy?

At the time, I didn't know the half of it. The whole thing is starting to look, to steal a phrase from Neal Stephenson's novel *Cryptonomicon*, "fractally weird." That is, any single part of it is just as weird as the whole thing.

Let's start with my first big mistake (or, rather, the first fact I hadn't known or noticed when writing the previous column):

Ron DeSantis didn't pay Vertol Systems, Company Inc. \$615,000 to fly immigrants from Florida to Massachusetts. He paid Vertol Systems, Company Inc. \$615,000 to fly immigrants from TEXAS to Massachusetts.

Wait, what?

Yes, really.

For all his posturing about immigrants being such a thorn in Florida's side that he needed a \$12 million legislative appropriation to "deport" them to other states, he had to go all the way to San Antonio (nearly a thousand miles from Tallahassee) just to find enough immigrants to fill a plane for his stunt.

Is that even legal? Here's where it gets even weirder. The \$12 million appropriation specifically calls for "a program to facilitate the transport of unauthorized aliens from this state [Florida]."

Not Texas, Florida. Addressing that issue at a press conference, DeSantis threw a Hail Mary. Many of the immigrants were "intending to come to Florida," he said, so "you got to deal with it at the source."

If you hold your mouth just right and pretend words don't mean things, he was just generously saving them some travel time, see?

But it looks like he partly covered his bases on the legal end, too. He had the immigrants flown from Texas to Florida before flying them from Florida to Martha's Vineyard.

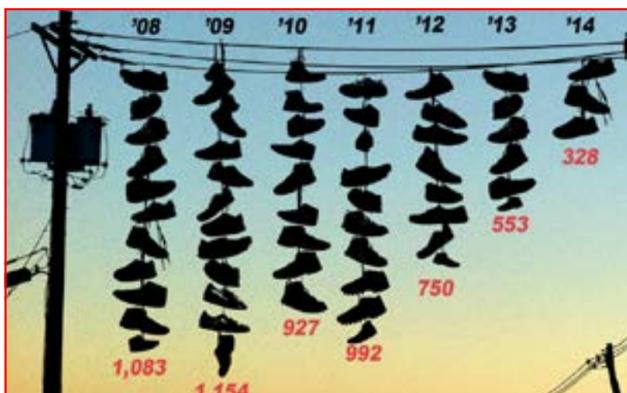
So it's all good, right? Except one wonders where he got the money to import those immigrants to Florida before exporting them to Massachusetts. The appropriation doesn't seem to cover that.

Perhaps weirdest of all is his choice of Martha's Vineyard as a destination. I hear conservatives chuckling about giving the "coastal elites" a dose of immigrant presence, but the island in question isn't exactly an elite place, or light on immigrant numbers. Fully 20 percent of its population are Brazilian immigrants, not counting people from other countries, and its per capita income lags both Massachusetts's as a whole... and Florida's.

Sure, a lot of the "elites" vacation on Martha's Vineyard. But they vacation AND retire in Florida. And hey, we've got TWO coasts. How "elite" does that make us?

The only one way to make any sense of this whole circus is to treat the \$12 million appropriation as a taxpayer contribution to Ron DeSantis's presidential campaign fund. He's a poster boy for the old saying that politics makes people stupid.

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



## Nikes on a wire

By Robert C. Koehler

PeaceVoice

There they were again. The dangling irony of memorial Nikes...

I was walking home from my neighbor's house. They'd just had a piano recital and I was still full of music when I saw the pair of tennis shoes flung over the telephone wire that crosses my street—instantly redefining, at least for me, this moment, this piece of earth and sky. Oh my God. I don't believe it.

Here?

In front of my house?

Every now and then I see a pair of tennis shoes flung over a telephone wire—that wire stretching through a nearby McDonald's parking lot, for instance—and every time I do, I think about a 12-year-old boy named Jose, who shoved a bit of reality in my face 20 or so years ago. He did so as a student of mine.

I was a volunteer writing teacher at the time. This was part of my decade-long struggle with the Chicago Public Schools, which my daughter attended. One day, when she was in third grade—this is when the school system begins the farce known as standardized testing, and "education" started to mean teaching to the test—she came home angrily and declared: "Dad, I hate writing!"

Writing had become nothing more than spelling and grammar, plus an opening sentence, yada yada, conclusion. The writer's actual knowledge and life experiences—the writer's voice, the writer's soul—were irrelevant. Writing was not about saying something. All that mattered was conforming to the test format. Students' words were emptied of meaning. That no longer mattered. In fact, it was a nuisance, since meaning was determined by the writer herself and often went off in its own direction; it couldn't easily be reduced to a number.

No wonder she hated writing!

I was beside myself with frustration. I believed in the public schools. But their (politically forced) conformity to standardized testing—good numbers meant adequate funding—was just plain wrong. As a writer myself, there was no way—no way—I could allow my own kid to be robbed of her developing writer's voice.

This was a long struggle, but the beginning was here at Franklin Elementary School. I wound up having a conversation with the school's principal, who actually listened to my concerns and got my point. While she had no power to change the system, she suggested, if I was interested, that I could do some teaching at the school. I wasn't working fulltime at that point and had some free time in my week, so she arranged with one of the teachers for me to work with a small group of kids once a week.

Well, what the heck. It was better than nothing. At that point I had done a little bit of teaching, at the college level—just enough to know how difficult it was. I was anything but confident that I knew what I was doing, but I did have a game plan. Back when I was in college, I'd had a fabulous writing teacher and mentor who helped me shatter my own long-established self-censorship with a process he simply called "free writing." Step one: Sit down and write without stopping for 10 minutes, 20 minutes or whatever. Let it flow. If you can't think of anything to say, write "I can't think of anything to say," and keep going!

This was the essence of it. Writing starts to become an internal process. Later one's words can be clarified and reorganized, but first you have to hear yourself and learn to let your truth emerge.

OK, so suddenly there I am, sitting in a circle—yes, definitely a circle, we're all equals—with a small group of 12-year-olds. We talk for a while, then, yeah, start writing! They go for 10 minutes, then everyone reads his words aloud to the group.

How much difference, if any, did it make in their lives? I have no idea. And my daughter wasn't part of the group (but eventually, over the years, overcame the "I hate writing" curse and became a poet)—but I know for sure that one participant in that group learned something of value. Me!

I learned that teaching flows in both directions. As a teacher, you can know that you're accomplishing something if the students start becoming your teachers—which leads me to Jose and the dangling tennis shoes. We'd been talking about gang life, a reality for lots of Chicago public school students. Jose talked about the ritual of tossing someone's shoes over a wire... if he's shot, if he's killed.

He wrote:

"One of my friends he got stabbed with a pencil because he was in a gang, but now he isn't in a gang because he doesn't want his family to see his shoes dangling from a telephone wire. And he wants to go back and fix all the things he has done wrong and now he never wants to have a relation with a gang member. Now he is in my house to play video games."

Since then, yeah, every now and then I'd see it... grief and shoelaces hovering above the city. Maybe the shoes had been tossed as a joke or a prank, not a memorial, but how could I know? All I know is that the city is not the same anymore—it's more than bricks and lawns and sidewalks, traffic lights and convenience stores. It's a mortal being, in quiet pain this very moment, as I walk home.

And it's speaking to me, in a language I learned from a 12-year-old boy.

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



## Moving Toward Nov. 8th in Crisis

By Dr. John E. Warren

Publisher, San Diego Voice & Viewpoint

While America is caught in the crises of the pandemic, fires, floods, heat and drought, much of this is just an add-on for so many of us who were already suffering from the efforts of surviving homelessness, new homelessness, rent, food, lack of healthcare and too little income for the daily struggle.

This is a time to remember that each of us represents a link to survival from the beginning of time, even though we might not know where we came from. We can do much today to determine where we go from here.

Since politics is about who gets fed, we must make sure that we are at the table. We can only do that by participating in the process, at whatever level we find ourselves.

If it's a matter of jobs, then let's look at who is getting hired, and whether they are getting a job you might have had because you are qualified, but you didn't know about it.

Are you looking for a job or a position? Once again, are you registered to vote? Do you care who and what's on the coming ballot? You should. It will affect you whether you vote or don't vote. What are the money issues that you are concerned about? Rent, food, gas prices? Which candidates or issues reflect your concerns? We can't stop the heat, fires or the floods, so do we find ways to help each other?

What do you know about the local people running for office? Are you and your vote even on their radar? The coming November Midterm Election must be on all our radars. Our quality of life for the next two years of our immediate future will depend on what we do or don't do. This is not a push for either political party; if in doubt, register as an Independent. But register and be prepared to vote. Election Day is coming and with it all our futures, whether or not we participate.