

## Fight Over Future Of Library Behind CR Ideas

By Travis Loller

Associate/d Press

A library where Rosa Parks, John Lewis and other civil rights leaders forged strategies that would change the world is mired in controversy over who gets to tell its story.

On one side are preservationists who want to turn the Highlander Folk School library into a historic site. On the other, political organizers say Highlander never stopped pursuing social justice and should recover the building as a stolen part of its legacy.

Enraged by race-mixing at the Highlander Folk School in the 1950s, Tennessee officials confiscated the property and auctioned it off in pieces in a vain attempt at stifling the civil rights movement. The library is one of the few remaining campus buildings.

But Highlander as an institution never really closed—it just moved locations. It lives on today as the Highlander Research and Education Center, whose leaders are rallying opposition to listing



THE LIBRARY ATTRACTED THE LIKES OF ROSA PARKS

the library in the National Register of Historic Places, saying they were frozen out of the process.

David Currey, a board member

at the Tennessee Preservation Trust, has managed the library's restoration since the trust bought the site in 2014, saving it from

development. He said his goal has always been to preserve the site so that visitors can learn about the momentous events that hap-

pened there in the first half of the 20th Century. There would be few books or movies if stories could only be told by those directly involved, he said, and "Nobody owns the past."

"It's a myth that they are best suited to tell our history," said Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, Highlander's first Black co-director. "People who made that history are still alive."

A letter Highlander sent to the historic registry says the Trust is not fit to serve as stewards, stoking racial tension over a place that promoted a shared struggle for interracial harmony.

"Approving the nomination of the Highlander Folk School Library in its current form will allow an elite, White-led institution to coopt and control the historical narrative of a site most significant for its work with Black, multiracial, poor and working-class communities," states the letter, which also accuses trust members of having glorified the Confederacy.

Currey, who is White, frames the issue much differently. He says the trust stepped in to preserve the property when no one else would, and plans to celebrate Highlander's past accomplishments.

"Our cause from the start has been an honorable endeavor to recognize and pay tribute to the history and legacy of the

early 20th century's social justice movements in Tennessee, including labor struggles and Civil Rights, and its leaders," Currey wrote in an email to the AP.

Founded in the 1930s as a center for union organizing, the school in Monteagle, Tenn., counted first lady Eleanor Roosevelt among its early supporters. Protest music was integral to its work, with Woody Guthrie leading singalongs to inspire future demonstrations, and Pete Seeger workshoping "We Shall Overcome" into an anthem sung by activists ever since.

Highlander's co-founder and longtime leader, Myles Horton, a White man, created a space almost unique in the Jim Crow South, where activists White and Black could build and strengthen alliances.

Parks attended a Highlander workshop a few months before refusing to move to the back of a segregated city bus in Montgomery, Alabama. "It was one of the few times in my life up to that point when I did not feel hostility from White people," she wrote in her autobiography.

Lewis had a similar experience, long before he became a civil rights icon and congressman. Highlander "was the first time in my life that I saw Black people and White people not just sitting

(See LIBRARY, P. 2)

## Board Won't Fight Poll Watcher Ruling

By Hannah Schoenbaum

Associated Press/Report for America

(AP)—North Carolina's State Board of Elections will not fight a recent decision by the state rules panel blocking its proposed restrictions on party-appointed poll watchers this fall. But the board pledged Friday to do all it can to help county elections officials maintain a safe and orderly voting environment and to deter any voter intimidation.

The state's Rules Review Commission—a 10-member panel

appointed by the Republican-controlled General Assembly—shot down two temporary rule changes last week that would have more clearly outlined the code of conduct for partisan election observers. The elections board said more than a dozen reported conduct violations during the May primaries prompted the proposed changes.

Comprised of three Democrats and two Republicans, the board had unanimously approved the temporary rule changes—one prohibiting poll watchers from

standing too close to voting machines or pollbooks where they could view marked ballots, and another granting elections officials the authority to remove disruptive observers who try to enter restricted areas or harass voters.

Although the state elections board could have appealed the commission's decision in court or resubmitted a revised proposal, Chairman Damon Circosta said Friday it will instead offer guidance to county boards of elections and county poll workers

to ensure they understand their authority.

Seventy days out from Election Day in a narrowly divided state, Circosta said the board does not "have the luxury of time to go back and forth with the commission or the courts to ensure that our reasonable rules are put in place before voting begins."

"The Rules Review Commission lacks the expertise and the authority to determine how to best maintain order at the polls,"

(See BOARD, P. 2)

## NC Justices Weigh In On Leandro Case

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

(AP)—North Carolina's highest court returned Wednesday to an education funding case originating almost 30 years ago, hearing arguments over whether a judge had unilateral power to allocate hundreds of millions in taxpayer dollars to address unresolved student inequities.

Attorneys for students, their parents and state government's executive branch contend it was proper for Superior Court Judge

David Lee last fall to order that \$1.75 billion be moved from state coffers to three agencies to carry out portions of an eight-year remedial plan. Lee endorsed the plan months earlier.

Lee said that he had the authority to transfer taxpayer funds in part because the state had failed repeatedly to comply with major court rulings in the "Leandro" litigation, named for a plaintiff in the original 1994 lawsuit.

In landmark rulings in the Leandro case in 1997 and 2004,

the state Supreme Court declared there was a constitutionally protected right for children to obtain the "opportunity for a sound basic education" and that the state had not lived up to that mandate.

Melanie Dubis, who has represented Leandro lawsuit plaintiffs for over 25 years, told the justices that Lee and a predecessor judge who monitored the case for years had shown great deference to the legislature and executive branches to comply. Meanwhile, she said, hundreds of

thousands of schoolchildren still lack proficiency in basic skills, and thousands of teacher and staff positions statewide were vacant entering this school year.

"Those branches failed the children," Dubis said during oral arguments. "Now, the future of the children of North Carolina is in this court's hands."

Portions of Lee's order were blocked by the Court of Appeals and then modified in the spring by another judge—lowering the

(See NC JUSTICES, P. 2)

## I Am Serena Williams

NEW YORK (AP) — After all of the many tributes to Serena Williams were done, the celebratory words and the video montages, the standing ovations and the shouts of her name, it seemed appropriate that she herself would provide the defining look at her legacy.

So the last question at the news conference after her last match of the U.S. Open — and, it seems clear, of her career — offered Williams the chance to say how she'd most like to be remembered.

"I feel like I really brought something, and bring something, to tennis. The different looks. The fist pumps. The just crazy intensity. ... 'Passion,' I think, is a really good word. Just continuing through ups and downs," she responded Friday night. "I could go on and on. But I just honestly am so grateful that I had this moment — and that I'm Serena."

That captures so much about her so well. And to think: Williams, who turns 41 this month, did not even mention anything about being an elite athlete or any of the statistics that help define what she did with a racket in her hand.

The 23 championships at the Grand Slam tournaments that have come to define success in her sport. Another 50 singles titles elsewhere. The 14 majors in doubles with her sister, Venus. The 319 weeks at No. 1. The four Olympic gold medals.

So, sure, it's impossible to assess Williams without considering her place in the pantheon of superstars, as worthy as anyone — woman or man, this generation or any other, this sport or any other — of the honorific "Greatest of All Time" (one clever spectator at Williams' 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-1 loss to Ajla Tomljanovic held up a poster with, simply, a drawing of a goat).

"She is an all-time great. Obviously, that's an understatement," said Martina Navratilova, an 18-time major winner who certainly is part of that whole conversation.

But Williams is also about a lot more than that. No Black woman had won a Slam title since Althea Gibson in the 1950s until Williams came along and collected her first at the 1999 U.S. Open at age 17. Over the more than two decades since, Williams and Venus, who earned seven major singles trophies of her own, get credit for inspiring Coco Gauff and Naomi Osaka and countless of others to play tennis, yes, but also for pushing plenty of others to change their views about what can be done and what can't.

"She embodies that no dream is too big," Tomljanovic said. "You can do anything if you believe in yourself, you love what you do and you have an incredible support system around you."

There's more. She won a Grand Slam title while pregnant, went through scary health complications after giving birth to her daughter, Olympia, in 2017, and would return to the tour and reach four more major finals.

She has a venture capital firm that raised more than \$100 million. "Everyone looks at her and tries to be like Serena," said Caroline Garcia, a Frenchwoman seeded 17th and into the fourth round at the U.S. Open. "And I'm sure that's going to be for years to come."

Williams wore what she wanted on a tennis court. She reacted how she wanted, during and away from her matches. She said what she wanted, sometimes addressing social issues, sometimes not, but there always was a sense that she was the one who decided.

There were those who criticized her, of course. Those who wondered whether she was doing things the right way. Just as there were those who thought it was a mistake for her father, Richard, to keep his young daughters away from the junior tennis circuit.

Um, seems as if that worked out, huh? "I will definitely (be) missing her on the courts," Tomljanovic said, surely echoing the thoughts of many. "It will not be the same."

No, tennis most definitely will not be the same without Williams. Not even close.



## IRS Revokes Tax-Exempt Status For NCNAACP

(AP)—North Carolina's influential state chapter of the NAACP has lost its federal tax-exempt status for failing to file tax returns for three years, according to the federal government.

The Internal Revenue Service stripped the civil rights organization's state chapter of its tax-exempt status May 15 under a process that automatically revokes the designation for nonprofits that fail to file federal tax returns for three consecutive years, according to a post on the IRS site. The status change was made public this month.

The state chapter has been a prominent voice in decrying the policies of the state's Republican-controlled legislature, including challenging voter access laws in recent years. Earlier this month, the civil rights group scored a victory when the state Supreme Court ruled a lower court must consider nullifying a voter ID mandate approved by citizens in 2018.

The loss of federal tax-exempt status was first reported by The News & Observer in Raleigh. The newspaper reports that experts on charitable giving say losing

the status could hinder fundraising efforts and potentially drain the organization's resources through taxes on donations and fines.

The newspaper also reported that the national NAACP intervened in 2019 to place the state chapter under a punitive administratorship, giving the national organization more input in how the state branch is staffed and operated. The state and national organizations are working to restore the branch's tax-exempt status.

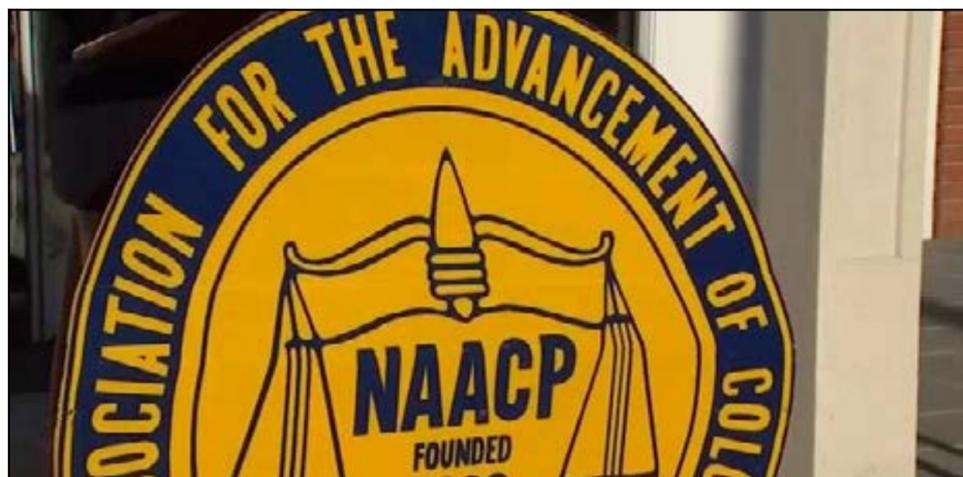
Da'Quan Love was recently

appointed by the national organization to serve as executive director of the North Carolina NAACP. He told WRAL-TV he views his role as a consultant to help the state chapter shore up its finances as the national organization performs a multi-year audit of its finances. He previously served as a leader of the Virginia branch of the NAACP.

"The national NAACP has launched a financial audit, a full financial, multi-year audit of the state conference as well as all the branches in the state of North Carolina to rectify these issues and get to the bottom of these challenges and ensure that this does not happen again and we're in good financial standing," Love told WRAL.

He said the national organization will provide the state chapter with resources and support so it can continue its civil rights work including get-out-the-vote efforts ahead of the November election.

The loss of tax-exempt status became public weeks after former state chapter president The Rev. T. Anthony Spearman was found dead in his home. A cause of death has not been released. Spearman, who lost a bid in 2021 for reelection to lead the state chapter, had filed a lawsuit against state and national NAACP officials accusing them of defaming him and conspiring to remove him from the presidency.



IT WAS BECAUSE THE ORGANIZATION FAILED TO FILE TAXES



## POLICE: NC MAN KILLED IN HIT-AND-RUN AFTER PARKING DISPUTE

CONCORD (AP)—A man was killed in a hit-and-run crash after a dispute over a parking space at a Walmart in North Carolina on Thursday night, police said.

Concord police officers were called to the Walmart on Thunder Road Northwest for a report of a hit-and-run crash with injuries, officials said in a news release. Emergency medical personnel pronounced Leon Phillip Fortner, 55, of Charlotte dead at the scene, police said.

Crash investigators obtained a description of the suspect vehicle and driver. Officers later arrested Anthony Scott Amey and charged him with felony hit and run, police said. Investigators determined that the incident began as a dispute over a parking space.

Amey received a \$50,000 secured bond. He waived his right to an attorney at an appearance in Cabarrus County District Court on Friday, according to court records, and his next appearance is set for Sept. 22.

## TROPICAL STORM DANIELLE STRENGTHENS INTO HURRICANE

MIAMI, Fla. (AP)—Tropical Storm Danielle strengthened into a hurricane Friday morning—the first of an unusually quiet storm season.

The storm is not currently a threat to any land.

The storm's maximum sustained winds were clocked at 75 mph, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

The hurricane center said the storm is expected to meander in the Atlantic over the next few days.

The storm comes amid what had been a calm hurricane season. It is the first time since 1941 that the Atlantic has gone from July 3 to the end of August with no named storm. Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach had told The Associated Press earlier.

There are no coastal watches or warnings in effect.

In the north Pacific, Tropical Storm Javier formed overnight. Forecasters said that late Thursday it was 210 miles southwest of Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, with maximum sustained winds of 45 mph.

Javier is moving northwest at 9 mph (about 14 kph).

There are no coastal watches or warnings in effect.

## NORTH CAROLINA NAMES WINNERS FOR \$206M IN BROADBAND GRANTS

MEBANE (AP)—Gov. Roy Cooper's administration announced \$206 million in broadband grants on Wednesday, by far the largest tranche of high-speed internet awards coming from federal recovery funds for North Carolina.

Cooper's office said the competitive matching grants to internet providers and an electric cooperative should benefit nearly 85,000 households and over 2,400 businesses in 69 counties. The Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology, or GREAT grants, are designed for unserved and underserved areas.

Winning providers also must offer low-income residents a \$30-per-month discount on high-speed internet or access to a comparable program.

Cooper unveiled the awards at an event at the Mebane Public Library also attended by the CEO of Lumos, a fiber-optic internet provider receiving grants for services in Alamance and Randolph counties.

"These funds will go a long way in closing the digital divide by bringing equitable access to both rural and urban communities," said Jim Weaver, secretary of the state Department of Information Technology.

Legislation approved by the General Assembly and signed by Cooper laid out how federal American Rescue Plan funds would be used for broadband. The state this summer already announced \$54 million in GREAT grants out of the \$350 million allocated.

## POLICE: 1 KILLED, 2 HURT IN APPARENT STABBING AT HIGH SCHOOL

One person was killed and two were injured Thursday in an apparent stabbing on the fourth day of class at an eastern North Carolina high school, police said. Three teenagers have been charged.

Two minors were taken to Naval Medical Center Camp Lejeune with injuries, and one later died, Jacksonville Police Chief Mike Yaniero told a news conference. He said the attack at Northside High School in Jacksonville appeared to be a stabbing but that the investigation was ongoing. A teacher was also injured, but not stabbed, and received on-site medical treatment, he said.

The chief said a school resource officer responded within about 20 seconds of receiving word of the attack, which happened about 7 a.m., and a student suspect was taken into custody. By the end of the day, three teens were arrested and charged. The attack happened inside the school in a common area, and many students witnessed it, the police chief said. He declined to release names.

A 16-year-old boy was charged with voluntary manslaughter, possession of a weapon on school property, assault with a deadly weapon and assault on a school official, police said late Thursday afternoon. Two other boys, ages 15 and 16, were each charged with assault and disorderly conduct on school property. All were charged as juveniles, and their names weren't released.

A lockdown lasted until 8:45 a.m., after which the school began a dismissal process to release students to their parents. Nearly all students had left with their parents by the time police held a midmorning news conference.

All sporting events and activities were canceled for the remainder of the week, and Friday was to be a virtual school day. School will resume in person on Tuesday with crisis counselors present. The district had just begun classes on Monday.

# Fight Over Future of Library—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

down together at long tables for shared meals, but also cleaning up together afterward, doing the dishes together, gathering together late into the night in deep discussion," he wrote in a memoir.

The school's success made it a target—labeled communist, investigated by the FBI and raided by the state of Tennessee, which eventually revoked its charter. Original buildings were destroyed. The library was converted to a single-family home.

But Highlander didn't disappear—it just moved three hours northeast to New Market, Tenn., near Knoxville.

"The property was stolen from us because it was bringing Black

and White people together to preserve democracy," Henderson said. "The land should be repatriated, back to the Highlander Folk School, which is now the Highlander Research and Education Center."

The trust has spent seven years restoring the library to its original form. Local Grundy County donors contributed most of the funding, but Currey said he's also spent thousands of his own dollars. His vision is to spin off a nonprofit, separate from the trust, that would own and operate the library as both a historic site and community resource, and Highlander could run a program explaining its ongoing justice and

education work.

Henderson said she's grateful the trust stepped in when the center couldn't afford to, but she doesn't see the old Folk School as separate from Highlander now, which is celebrating 90 years of organizing with a homecoming later this month. She said the center recently offered to buy the library from the trust, but got no definitive answer.

"If there's going to be a transfer, why wouldn't it be to Highlander?" Co-director Allyn Maxfield-Steele asked. If Highlander controlled the building, it would develop a plan for its use together with "folks on the ground in Grundy County," he said.

Currey still hopes the trust and center can work together to promote the legacy of a building both organizations see as incredibly important.

Getting listed in the National Registry would open up new sources of funding in a state that doesn't provide tax incentives for historic preservation, Currey said. He worries that the controversy over Highlander will make preservationists less likely to take on a similar project in the future.

"It's already so difficult in Tennessee to save some of our historic resources," Currey said. "This may be one of the most high-profile civil rights sites—as John Lewis told me—in the nation."

# Board Won't Fight Ruling—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Circosta said. "It is our duty to the voting public to protect their right to vote, and it will be protected."

The board's decision comes as North Carolina is gearing up for several tight races, including a high-profile U.S. Senate contest, two state supreme court races and several crucial state legislative elections that will determine whether Republicans gain the few seats they need to override the Democratic governor's veto.

State law allows political parties to appoint precinct-specific and at-large poll watchers to

monitor election proceedings from designated areas inside the voting facility on Election Day and during one-stop early voting. Observers can report concerns to a precinct manager but are prohibited from interacting with voters, distributing information or interfering with the duties of poll workers.

North Carolina Republicans, including some with close ties to former President Donald Trump, have been leaders in opposing the proposed rule changes since July, arguing that tighter restrictions for poll watchers could

undermine the integrity of elections in a crucial swing state. The Republican National Committee and the North Carolina Republican Party also wrote to the rules commission urging it to reject the changes.

Trump's debunked claims that the 2020 presidential election results were fraudulent have prompted thousands of his supporters to scrutinize elections operations nationwide, popularizing the poll-watching practice and leading several states to reevaluate their existing rules.

Paul Cox, associate legal counsel to the elections board, said the state's existing guidelines for election observers "are not models of clarity," which had motivated the board's bipartisan collaboration.

*Hannah Schoenbaum is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues. Follow her on Twitter @H\_Schoenbaum.*

# NC Justices Weigh In—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

necessary amount to \$785 million. But Republican legislative leaders argued Lee got it wrong because the state constitution clearly says the authority to appropriate funds rests solely with the legislature.

"The drafters of the constitution intended the General Assembly to have the exclusive power of the purse... in order to ensure that the people, with their elected representatives, had full and exclusive control of the state's expenditures," said Matthew Tilley, an outside lawyer representing House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger. Dubis said Lee's transfer doesn't fit the definition of an appropriation.

As with other cases, the justices at the close of the 100 minutes of arguments didn't say when they'd rule. But with at

least one Democratic justice retiring and another on the November ballot, a court in which Democrats currently hold a 4-3 majority is likely to rule by year's end. The majority has already issued consequential rulings this year favoring Democrats and their allies on redistricting and voter ID.

Both major parties have controlled at one time the General Assembly and the Executive Mansion since the 2004 ruling. But Democrats led by Gov. Roy Cooper have embraced the remedial plan, developed by his office and the State Board of Education and based upon an outside consultant's report. Republican legislators weren't parties in the litigation until recently and have touted state budget laws that keep increasing K-12 spending and education policy improve-

ments.

All seven justices asked questions. Chief Justice Paul Newby, a Republican, repeatedly questioned Dubis and a state attorney over whether Lee had any basis to impose a statewide remedy because the 2004 Supreme Court ruling was expressly limited to the schools in rural Hoke County—whose school board is a plaintiff. Dubis said Lee or his predecessor received statewide education data as evidence over the years. She cited eight times between 2005 and 2020 when the judges declared there had been such a statewide violation.

Leading to Wednesday, the case attracted numerous friend-of-the-court briefs, including one from a collection of 145 social, religious and civil rights organizations and another from nearly 60 business leaders in the state.

Both group urged the justices to uphold Lee's actions. Business leaders putting their name to a brief include retired Bank of America CEO Hugh McColl Jr. and former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles, a private equity investment firm founder.

Across the street from Supreme Court building during oral arguments, about 100 education activists and ministers gathered to pray and urge the justices to uphold Lee's authority to order new spending.

"If there's an injury, there has to be a remedy," Angus Thompson of Lumberton, an original plaintiff in the 1994 lawsuit with his daughter, told the audience. "Until we get what we deserve—the remedy—'til somebody pays up, we're gonna protest, we're gonna pray and we're gonna vote."

# Cheerleaders Sexually Abused By Coaches?

By Jeffrey Collins

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP)—Multiple cheerleading coaches in South Carolina—including a coach who recently killed himself—sexually abused at least six boys and girls and provided them with drugs and alcohol, a federal lawsuit alleges.

A "coven of sexual predators" surrounded Rockstar Cheer of Greenville for more than a decade, according to one of the lawyers for the alleged victims.

Attorney Bakari Sellers contends that what happened is a result of the same kind of institutional failure seen in the case 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.

The lawsuit was filed Thursday by four girls and two boys who said they were abused by Scott Foster and others affiliated with Rockstar gyms. It suggests there could be up to 100 more survivors of the abuse.

"Scott Foster and his allies did their best to intimidate and isolate their targets, making these young people feel alone and somehow responsible. Well, they're not alone anymore," attorney Jessica Fickling said in a statement announcing the suit.

Foster, 49, was found dead in his car at a state park on Aug. 22. He shot himself in the head, the Greenville County Coroner's Office ruled.

"He knew this was going to be a moment when the light was going to be shined on what I think will turn out to be a coven of sexual predators surrounding Rockstar," said attorney James Bannister.

A number of people either knew Foster was abusing his cheer students and ignored it or did not have rules and procedures in place to stop the abuse, the lawsuit says.

Foster and other coaches not named in the lawsuit had sex with cheer students, sent and asked for explicit photos over social media, gave them alcohol and marijuana at their homes and in hotel rooms at cheer com-

petitions and warned them to not tell anyone about it, according to the lawsuit.

"We have video of Scott Foster on Snapchat with beer bongs drinking with his underage cheerleaders," Sellers said at a news conference this week.

The suit also names Varsity Brands, which runs cheerleading competitions; the U.S. All Star Federation, which is an organizing and governing body for competitive cheerleading across the country; Bain Capital, which bought Varsity in 2018, and others.

State and federal police are investigating Foster's Rockstar Cheer and other cheerleading outlets, seizing computers, cell phones and other evidence, Bannister said. He said the investigating agencies asked lawyers

not to identify them.

Several state and federal agencies have refused to tell news outlets whether they are involved.

Foster's wife, Kathy, promised to cooperate with "all involved" to make sure athletes can safely learn and grow.

"I am heartbroken by the recent allegations made by current and former athletes from Rockstar Cheer and other cheer gyms across our community," she said in a statement released this week. "I hope the survivors are seeking and receive the support they need. I am sympathetic to their stories."

Varsity Brands President Bill Seely called the accusations devastating.

"Our hearts are broken right

alongside yours," he tweeted Thursday. "The alleged conduct runs counter to everything the cheer and dance community is intended to represent."

Bain Capital didn't return an email seeking comment.

Rockstar Cheer's name is on more than a dozen gyms in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Arizona.

Ten of the gyms said in a statement this week that they had no connection with Foster and would be dropping the Rockstar brand name.

Foster opened his Greenville gym in 2007, according to his website.

Follow Jeffrey Collins on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JSCollinsAP>.

# Board Says Candidate Can Still Run

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

(AP)—The Democratic nominee for a key North Carolina legislative seat this fall remains a candidate, the State Board of Elections ruled on Friday, rejecting a local decision that found evidence she didn't live in the district where she's running.

Along party lines, the Democrat-majority board voted 3-2 to reverse the findings of the Currituck County Board of Elections, which last week declared there was "substantial evidence" that Valerie Jordan didn't meet the residency requirement to run for the 3rd Senate District seat.

Jordan's Republican rival, current Sen. Bobby Hanig, had filed the candidate protest against Jordan, contending that she actually resided in Raleigh, instead of Warren County, which is one of the 3rd District's 10 counties. The state constitution requires legislative candidates to have lived in the district for which they are running at least one year before Election Day.

"Our job is to look at the documents before us, see if there was substantial evidence under the law," board Chair Damon Circosta, a Democrat, said before voting yes to reverse. "And I just don't find (Hanig's) protest to meet that

burden."

Hanig said late Friday that he was weighing whether to appeal to Superior Court. The protest result affects a race that could decide whether Senate Republicans gain a veto-proof majority in the November elections. Such a margin would make it easier for the GOP to override bills that Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper vetoes.

Ballot printing in the 10 northeastern counties has been delayed in case Jordan was removed as a candidate and Democrats had to

pick a replacement. State election officials said the counties must order printing by Wednesday morning so ballots are ready to send to absentee voting applicants.

Jordan, a state Board of Transportation member and consultant who grew up in Warren County, had bought a house in Raleigh in the late 1990s and worked there. Hanig's protest in part included photos of vehicles at Jordan's house in Raleigh that suggested she stayed there 23 consecutive nights in July and August.



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# Business & Finance

## Tech Tool Offers Police 'Mass Surveillance On A Budget'

By Garance Burke and Jason Dearen

Associated Press

Local law enforcement agencies from suburban Southern California to rural North Carolina have been using an obscure cellphone tracking tool, at times without search warrants, that gives them the power to follow people's movements months back in time, according to public records and internal emails obtained by The Associated Press.

Police have used "Fog Reveal" to search hundreds of billions of records from 250 million mobile devices, and harnessed the data to create location analyses known among law enforcement as "patterns of life," according to thousands of pages of records about the company.

Sold by Virginia-based Fog Data Science LLC, Fog Reveal has been used since at least 2018 in criminal investigations ranging from the murder of a nurse in Arkansas to tracing the movements of a potential participant in the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. The tool is rarely, if ever, mentioned in court records, something that defense attorneys say makes it harder for them to properly defend their clients in cases in which the technology was used.

The company was developed by two former high-ranking Department of Homeland Security officials under former President George W. Bush. It relies on advertising identification numbers, which Fog officials say are culled from popular cellphone apps such as Waze, Starbucks and hundreds of others that target ads based on a person's movements and interests, according to police emails. That information is then sold to companies like

Fog. "It's sort of a mass surveillance program on a budget," said Bennett Cyphers, a special

adviser at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital privacy rights advocacy group.

The documents and emails were obtained by EFF through Freedom of Information Act requests. The group shared the files with The AP, which independently found that Fog sold its software in about 40 contracts to nearly two dozen agencies, according to GovSpend, a company that keeps tabs on government spending. The records and AP's reporting provide the first public account of the extensive use of Fog Reveal by local police, according to analysts and legal experts who scrutinize such technologies.

Federal oversight of companies like Fog is an evolving legal landscape. On Monday, the Federal Trade Commission sued a data broker called Kochava that, like Fog, provides its clients with advertising IDs that authorities say can easily be used to find where a mobile device user lives, which violates rules the commission enforces. And there are bills before Congress now that, if passed, would regulate the industry.

"Local law enforcement is at the front lines of trafficking and missing persons cases, yet these departments are often behind in technology adoption," Matthew Broderick, a Fog managing partner, said in an email. "We fill a gap for underfunded and understaffed departments."

Because of the secrecy surrounding Fog, however, there are scant details about its use and most law enforcement agencies won't discuss it, raising concerns among privacy advocates that it violates the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which protects against unreasonable search and seizure.

What distinguishes Fog Reveal from other cellphone location technologies used by police is that it follows the devices through their advertising IDs,

unique numbers assigned to each device. These numbers do not contain the name of the phone's user, but can be traced to homes and workplaces to help police establish pattern-of-life analyses.

"The capability that it had for bringing up just anybody in an area whether they were in public or at home seemed to me to be a very clear violation of the Fourth Amendment," said Davin Hall, a former crime data analysis supervisor for the Greensboro Police Department. "I just feel angry and betrayed and lied to."

Hall resigned in late 2020 after months of voicing concerns about the department's use of Fog to police attorneys and the city council.

While Greensboro officials acknowledged Fog's use and initially defended it, the police department said it allowed its subscription to expire earlier this year because it didn't "independently benefit investigations."

But federal, state and local police agencies around the U.S. continue to use Fog with very little public accountability. Local police agencies have been enticed by Fog's affordable price: It can start as low as \$7,500 a year. And some departments that license it have shared access with other nearby law enforcement agencies, the emails show.

Police departments also like how quickly they can access detailed location information from Fog. Geofence warrants, which tap into GPS and other sources to track a device, are accessed by obtaining such data from companies, like Google or Apple. This requires police to obtain a warrant and ask the tech companies for the specific data they want, which can take days or weeks.

Using Fog's data, which the company claims is anonymized, police can geofence an area or search by a specific device's ad ID numbers, according to a user agreement obtained by AP. But,



**ARE THEY TRACKING YOU NOW?** Greensboro is one of the jurisdictions using Fog Reveal, which uses commercial purchasing apps to track suspects back as far as several months. Privacy advocates are concerned.

Fog maintains that "we have no way of linking signals back to a specific device or owner," according to a sales representative who emailed the California Highway Patrol in 2018, after a

lieutenant asked whether the tool could be legally used.

Despite such privacy assurances, the records show that law enforcement can use Fog's data as a clue to find identifying infor-

mation. "There is no (personal information) linked to the (ad ID)," wrote a Missouri official about Fog in 2019. "But if we are good at what we do, we should be able to figure out the owner."

## Manufacturing Grants Go Out

By Josh Boak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The government will send \$1 billion worth of federal grants for manufacturing, clean energy, farming, biotech and more to 21 regional partnerships across the nation, President Joe Biden and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo announced Friday.

The 21 were chosen from 529 initial applicants vying for grants that were part of last year's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. The Biden administration has repeatedly laid out a vision for the economy that is more self-sufficient and driven by high-tech manufacturing and the development of renewable energy.

"We designed this program by thinking about people and places," Biden said at a White House event. "This is about jobs in their communities for them, not having to leave or not having to go on unemployment."

Unlike much of the pandemic aid that was meant to address immediate needs, the grants are part

of a longer-term effort to revitalize parts of the country that have needed an economic jolt. The money will include funds for existing industries and capital for new ventures. The grants are the largest ever for local economic development provided by the Commerce Department, Raimondo said.

She said the effort is personal for her. Her father lost his job at a watch factory in Rhode Island.

"The whole point of this is we're not going to let you get left behind as we transition to a more digital economy, to a more technical economy, to a green economy," Raimondo said in an interview.

The grants include \$65.1 million for California to improve farm production and \$25 million for a robotics cluster in Nebraska. Georgia gets \$65 million for artificial intelligence. There is \$63.7 million for lithium-based battery development in New York. Coal counties in West Virginia would receive \$62.8 million to help with the shift to solar power and find new uses for abandoned mines.

"I can't tell you how much this means to our hardworking people

in West Virginia," said that state's Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin, who attended the announcement virtually.

Raimondo estimated that the investments, which will be provided over five years as reimbursements, will result in at least 100,000 jobs.

Solidly Republican states such as Oklahoma and South Dakota received funding, and money also is going ahead of November's midterm elections toward political battlegrounds that could decide control of Congress. There is \$44 million for regenerative medicine in New Hampshire, where Democrat Maggie Hassan is defending her U.S. Senate seat. Pennsylvania, which has an open Senate seat, is set to receive \$62.7 million for robotics and artificial intelligence.

Raimondo said the winners were chosen based on merit rather than politics.

"Let me ask you: How is this going to play out on the political scene?" Biden asked the Pennsylvania team attending Friday's event virtually.

## Tech CEO Found Guilty Of Fraud

By Olga R. Rodriguez

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (AP)—A Silicon Valley executive who prosecutors said lied to investors about inventing technology that tested for allergies and COVID-19 using only a few drops of blood and charged up to \$10,000 per allergy test was found guilty of health care fraud, authorities announced Friday.

A federal jury on Thursday convicted Mark Schena, of Los Altos, Calif., of paying bribes

to doctors and defrauding the government after his company billed Medicare \$77 million for fraudulent coronavirus and allergy tests, the U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement.

Schena, 59, claimed his Sunnyvale, Calif.-based company, Arrayit Corporation, had the only laboratory in the world that offered "revolutionary microarray technology" that allowed it to test for allergies and the coronavirus with the same finger-stick test kit, prosecutors said.

Alexandra Block, an attorney

representing Schena, did not immediately return a phone message Friday seeking comment.

The case against Schena shared similarities with a more prominent legal saga surrounding former Silicon Valley star Elizabeth Holmes, who dropped out of Stanford University in 2003 to found a company called Theranos that she pledged would revolutionize health care with a technology that could scan for hundreds of diseases and other issues with just a few drops of blood, too.

## 17 States Weigh Adopting California's New Electric Vehicle Mandate

By Steve Kamowski

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (AP)—Seventeen states with vehicle emission standards tied to rules established in California face weighty decisions on whether to follow that state's strictest-in-the-nation new rules that require all new cars, pickups and SUVs to be electric or hydrogen powered by 2035.

Under the Clean Air Act, states must abide by the federal government's standard vehicle emissions

standards unless they at least partially opt to follow California's stricter requirements.

Among them, Washington, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon and Vermont are expected to adopt California's ban on new gasoline-fueled vehicles. Colorado and Pennsylvania are among the states that probably won't. The legal ground is a bit murkier in Minnesota, where the state's "Clean Cars" rule has been a political minefield and the subject of a legal fight. Meanwhile, Republicans are rebelling in Virginia.

The Minnesota Auto Dealers Association says its reading of state and federal law is that the new California rules kick in automatically in the state, and it's making that case in court as it tries to block them.

"The technology is such that the vehicles just don't perform that well in cold weather," said Scott Lambert, the trade group's president. "We don't all live in southern California."

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency officials say the state would have to launch an entirely

new rulemaking process to adopt California's changes. And in court filings and legislative hearings, they've said they are not planning to do that now.

"We are not California. Minnesota has its own plan," Gov. Tim Walz said in a statement. He called Minnesota's program "a smart way to increase, rather than decrease, options for consumers. Our priority is to lower costs and increase choices so Minnesotans can drive whatever vehicle suits them."

Oregon regulators are taking public comments through Sept. 7 on whether to adopt the new California standards. Colorado regulators, who adopted California's older rules, won't follow California's new ones, the administration of Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said.

"While the governor shares the goal of rapidly moving towards electric vehicles, he is skeptical about requiring 100 percent of cars sold to be electric by a certain date as technology is rapidly changing," the Colorado Energy Office said in a statement.

Regulators in Pennsylvania, which only partially adopted California's older standards, said they won't automatically follow its new rules. Under Democratic Governor Tom Wolf, Pennsylvania started the regulatory process last year to fully conform with California's rules, but abandoned it.

Virginia had been on a path to adopting California's rules under legislation that passed last year when Democrats were in full control of Virginia's government. But Republicans who control the House of Delegates and GOP Gov. Glenn Youngkin say they'll push to unlink their state.

Minnesota's auto dealers are

trying to make their state's current rules—and the possibility that they could tighten to incorporate California's new restrictions—an issue for the fall elections. Control of the Legislature and governor's office are up for grabs, and the dealers hope to persuade the 2023 Legislature to roll back the regulations unless they win in court first, Lambert said.

The MPCA, with Walz's support, adopted California's existing standards through administrative rulemaking last year amid a bitter fight with Republican lawmakers who were upset that the Legislature was cut out of the decision. Legislators even tried unsuccessfully to withhold funding from Minnesota's environmental agencies. One casualty was Laura Bishop, who resigned as MPCA commissioner after it became apparent that she lacked the votes in the GOP-controlled Senate to win confirmation.

Walz and his administration have framed Minnesota's Clean Cars rule as a fairly painless way to increase the availability of electric vehicles and help the state meet its greenhouse gas reduction goals. The rule seeks to increase the offerings of battery-powered and hybrid vehicles starting with the 2025 model year by requiring manufacturers to comply with California standards currently in force for low- and zero-emission vehicles.

Lambert said the state's auto dealers don't oppose electric vehicles. They currently make up 2.3 percent of new vehicle sales in Minnesota and he expects consumer interest to continue to grow. But the reduced range of battery-powered vehicles in cold weather makes them less attrac-

tive in northern tier states, he said. Minnesota's rules already threaten to saddle dealers with more electric vehicles than their customers will buy, he said, and adopting the California ban would make things worse.

Under federal law, by Lambert's reading, states have to either adopt California's rules in full or follow less stringent federal emission standards. He said they can't pick and choose from parts of each. And that effectively means there's a "ban on the books" in Minnesota for sales of new conventionally fueled vehicles starting with the 2035 model year, he said.

Lambert's association was already fighting Minnesota's existing Clean Car rules in the Minnesota Court of Appeals, and its petition foresaw that California would make the changes it announced late last month. A key issue in whether "any future amendments to the incorporated California regulations automatically become part of Minnesota rules," as the dealers argue.

The MPCA's attorneys assert that they don't, and have asked the court to dismiss the challenge. MPCA Commissioner Katrina Kessler has made similar arguments for months, including before a skeptical state Senate committee last March.

Aaron Klemz, chief strategy officer for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, which will be filing its own arguments against the dealers in court, acknowledged that the legal landscape is confusing. And he said it's not clear whether his group will eventually call for Minnesota to follow California's new ban.



**SOME ARE LIABLE TO GO WITH CALIFORNIA, BUT NORTHERN ONES AREN'T SO SURE**

# Opinion



## Joe Biden's Battle For "The Soul Of This Nation" Is A Fascist Versus Fascist Cage Match

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

"What we're seeing now is either the beginning or the death knell of an extreme MAGA philosophy," U.S. president Joe Biden warned on August 25. "It's not just Trump, it's the entire philosophy that underpins the—I'm going to say something—it's like semi-fascism."

A week later, in Philadelphia, he expanded on his criticisms: "They promote authoritarian leaders and they fanned the flames of political violence that are a threat to our personal rights, to the pursuit of justice, the rule of law, the very soul of this country."

He's not wrong, but his emphasis on a single aspect—Donald Trump's cult of personality—obscures the real nature of "semi-fascism" and comes a century too late.

To put it bluntly, the United States has been more than "semi-fascist" since long before Biden was born.

Fascism rose from the social tumult following World War One as armed groups of military veterans clashed violently with the socialist left around the world. In Germany, they took the form of various "freikorps." In the United States, they flocked to a single organization, the American Legion.

The Legion brawled with leftists in the streets of American cities, conducted military-style raids on labor union offices and, in the words of its national commander, Alvin Owsley, stood "ready to protect our country's institutions and ideals as the Fascisti dealt with the destructionists who menaced Italy... Do not forget that the Fascisti are to Italy what the American Legion is to the United States." The Legion even invited Mussolini, the first self-declared fascist head of state in the world, to address its national convention.

At the same time, what James Burnham later described as the "managerial state"—which answers to the Mussolini's definition of fascism, "everything in the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State"—began to coalesce in various countries.

In the U.S., that culminated in the New Deal and a cult of personality around Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was elected to an unprecedented four terms as president and would likely have continued as leader (the German word is "Führer") had he lived longer.

Pre-existing strong democratic norms blunted and limited the scope of American fascism (particularly quasi-worship of the designated leader), but victory in World War Two allowed it to continue within that limited scope.

American fascism's key aspects—nationalism, militarism, subordination of rights to "national security" claims, obsession with internal policing, and, yes, increasingly rigged/constrained elections to preserve the rule of "approved" parties (versus no elections at all)—survive and thrive to this day.

Joe Biden has been a cog in the American fascist machine, a willing participant in its depredations, for more than 50 years, promoting everything from mass incarceration to state control of enterprise through "industrial policy."

His sole valid complaint about "the MAGA philosophy" is that it re-introduces the "cult of personality" aspect of fascism's Spanish and pre-World-War-2 Italian, German, Japanese, and Soviet variants.

He's right about that, but he's advocating for one form of fascism over another, not against fascism itself.

**Thomas L. Knapp (Twitter: @thomasknapp) 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.**



## Biden Student Debt Forgiveness Begins

By Charlene Crowell

Center for Responsible Lending

President Joe Biden's recent student debt cancellation announcement elicited a diverse range of reactions—some congratulatory, others critical, and still others that seem unsure what to make of the unprecedented multi-billion-dollar effort.

Predictably, long-time education and civil rights advocates spoke to the need for additional reforms, while others wondered about cancellation's impact on an already troubled economy. Families struggling with the rising cost of living and deepening student debt have only a few months to make household budget adjustments before loan payments resume in January.

The good news is that of the 43 million people affected by the executive action, 20 million borrowers will have all of their debt cancelled. Many of these borrowers incurred student loans but dropped out of school, left with thousands in debt and lower earnings due to the lack of a degree.

Another 27 million people from working class backgrounds who received Pell grants are assured of up to \$20,000 in debt relief.

But these actions do not resolve the structural mismatch between the still-rising costs of college, limited family financial means to contribute to that cost, and the availability of financial aid other than interest-bearing loans.

"We've all heard of those schools luring students with a promise

of big paychecks when they graduate only to watch these students be ripped off and left with mountains of debt," stated President Biden on August 24. "Well, last week, the Department of Education fired a college accreditor that allowed colleges like ITT and Corinthian to defraud borrowers... Our goal is to shine a light on the worst actors so students can avoid these debt traps."

"It seems like a perfect time for the Department of Education to clean house of all the bad higher education actors—especially costly for-profit institutions that promise a lot but deliver little, and accreditors that fail to do their jobs."

On August 30, following President Biden's announcement, the Department of Education took action against another defunct for-profit: Westwood College. This trade school lured unsuspecting students into costly debt from January 1, 2002 through November 17, 2015 when it stopped enrolling new borrowers in advance of its 2016 closure. The Department found widespread misrepresentations about the value of its credentials for attendees' and graduates' employment prospects.

"Westwood College's exploitation of students and abuse of federal financial aid place it in the same circle of infamy occupied by Corinthian Colleges and ITT Technical Institute," said Under Secretary James Kvaal. "Westwood operated on a culture of false promises, lies, and manipulation in order to profit off student debt that burdened borrowers long after Westwood closed."

Now, 79,000 Westwood borrowers will benefit from \$1.5 billion in debt cancellation, thanks to the Department.

Changes to Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program rules will allow borrowers that would not otherwise qualify, to receive credit for past periods of repayment. Interested borrowers and their families can get more information on the program's information page, but they must act by October 31. Details on the time-limited offer are available at: <https://studentaid.gov/announcements-events/pslf-limited-waiver>.

But individual states must do their part as well. Across the nation, state revenues are flush with surpluses.

"I don't think there's been a time in history where states are better equipped to ride out a potential recession," said Timothy Vermeer, senior state tax policy analyst at the Tax Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. "A majority, if not all, of the rainy-day funds are in a really healthy position."

Additionally, and according to the 2021 edition of the annual State Higher Education Finance (SHEF) report, short-changing higher education funding at the state level will likely lead to worse, not better results. The report tracks enrollment trends, funding levels and distributions of state institutions.

"Generous federal stimulus funding protected state revenues and directly supported higher education, reducing states' need to cut funding during the pandemic and short economic recession," states the report's news release. "However, sharp declines in student enrollment and net tuition and fee revenue signal continued upheaval for public higher education revenues."

Federal stimulus funding during the pandemic boosted state education appropriations, but only 8.9 percent of state aid to public institutions in 2021 went toward providing student financial aid, according to SHEF. And without federal stimulus funds, state education appropriations would have declined by one percent in 2021 if full-time enrollment had held constant, according to the report.

"States vary in their relative allocations to higher education," states the report. "Public institutions in some states remain primarily publicly funded, but a growing proportion have become primarily reliant on student tuition and fee revenue over the last two decades."

The report notes that while federal stimulus and relief funds are helpful, they cannot be a replacement for long-term state investments, because stimulus funds are time-limited and often restricted in their use.

If we want to end the student debt trap, now is the time for citizens to challenge states to use their tax revenue to do more for their own constituents.

**Charlene Crowell is a senior fellow with the Center for Responsible Lending. She can be reached at [Charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org](mailto:Charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org).**



## Student Loan Forgiveness—A Drop in the Bucket

By Julianne Malveaux

TriceEdneyWire.com

President Joe Biden made a campaign promise to alleviate some student loan debt, and on August 24, he honored his commitment. Some say it is too little. Obstructionists say it is too much. Some economists say it may be inflationary, and loan defaulters like Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Green, who defaulted on a federal loan of her own, say it is "not fair" that some taxpayers should subsidize others. I say that student loan forgiveness is a step in the right direction. It is a drop in the bucket, to be sure, but it is a critical drop that makes way for a more insightful analysis of the cost of attendance and how people pay for higher education.

The headlines have focused that everyone with federal student loan debt will get \$10,000 of forgiveness for that debt. Those with Pell grants and student loans will get \$20,000 in debt forgiveness. Any amount of loan forgiveness is a good thing, but for those who carry six figures worth of debt, it's just a drop in the bucket. When I was President of Bennett College, I'd often look at the debt that some of my graduates were carrying, sometimes as much as \$50,000 or \$60,000. Why? They may have had some grants but had to take out loans to cover their cost of attendance. Most colleges use the interest on their endowment to provide scholarships. Many HBCUs with small endowments have less grant money to offer than richly endowed colleges.

Before the pandemic, student loan repayments began six months after graduation. After six months, interest began accruing. Students who did not find jobs still had hundreds of dollars of loans to repay, regardless of their employment status. Because interest continued to accrue, some students owed more three years after graduation than they did when they graduated. Nearly half of all Black college graduates owe 12.5 percent more than they did when they graduated, mainly because of accrued interest. In contrast, 83 percent of White students owe less. What's the difference? Family assistance. Black families have just a tenth of the wealth of White families.

While the loan forgiveness amounts are being trumpeted, I think the more significant part of President Biden's announcement is the change in repayment terms and structure. Currently, loan repayments are capped at 10 percent of gross income, with forgiveness happening after 10 years. The new terms cap repayments at 5 percent with forgiveness after 10 years. These new terms

provide income flexibility for millions of borrowers who postpone adult decisions because of the heavy burden of student loan debt. Some defer marriage and childbearing, new home and furniture purchases, and even aspects of career advancement because of their student loans.

Consider a graduate with a passion for education. She is agile in mathematics and would be a great math teacher. She could also go into some aspect of the finance industry as a bank, broker, or portfolio manager and earn twice what she'd make as a teacher. With student loans crushing her, she might pragmatically choose finance instead of teaching. With a little help, she might follow her first love and go to the classroom. She might be forced to choose a lucrative but unfulfilling career with student loan shackles.

Too many have raised a "fairness" and "equity" argument to oppose Biden's plan. It's a done deal, y'all, and President Biden needs to do more. Let's pause and applaud the Biden-Harris administration for this step in the right direction. And let's ask those attempting to incite class warfare about the roots of their objection. Few Republicans opposed the 45th President's tax cuts. Instead, they applauded them. The rest of us paid for them. I didn't hear the MAGA right lamenting that most of us were paying for tax breaks for just a few of us. When Black businesses had difficulty qualifying for PPP loans because of the paperwork load, I didn't hear Republicans suggesting that less-advantaged companies were subsidizing, through their taxes, better-advantaged businesses. Some multi-million dollar franchises seeking relief were shamed into turning their loan money back. The equity argument is nonsensical and deceptive, and for the record, most of the loan forgiveness goes to people who earn less than \$75,000 a year.

Thank you, President Biden, for this drop in the bucket. May you be inspired to do more, including examining higher education financing. What would it take to make undergraduate education free for everyone?

**Dr. Julianne Malveaux is an economist author and the Dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at Cal State LA. [JulianneMalveaux.com/](mailto:JulianneMalveaux.com/).**



## Student Debt Relief Means Freedom for Millions

By Ben Jealous

People for the American Way

Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." I love that sentiment. I also know that when student loan debt is tying you down, changing the world can feel out of reach.

That's why the White House's new plan for student loan debt relief is good news, especially for Black and brown students who make up a large percentage of borrowers.

Here are the basics: the government will cancel up to \$20,000 in debt for students who went to school on Pell Grants, and up to \$10,000 for other federal loan recipients. You can get the benefit if your personal income is under \$125,000. To find out how to sign up, you can go to [studentaid.gov/debt](https://studentaid.gov/debt) relief.

Up to 43 million borrowers will benefit. Black students, in particular, will benefit because we are more likely to borrow for school, more likely to take out bigger loans, and twice as likely to get Pell Grants.

You can qualify for the relief if you went to a vocational school, not just an academic institution—and whether or not you finished your degree. And in addition to past borrowers, current and future students will benefit, too. The new plan will put a cap on monthly payments for student loans, lowering payments by more than \$1,000 a year. This will allow more people to consider going on to higher education in the first place.

Civil rights advocates have been calling for and organizing for this kind of relief for years.

Which is not to say it's perfect; it isn't. Many civil rights leaders, along with Senate allies, Elizabeth Warren and Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, wanted debts wiped out up to \$50,000. And there are questions about whether the \$125,000 income cap is racially equitable. Brookings Institution analyst Andre Perry told *The Grid* that a \$125,000 income is not the same for Black graduates as it is for White grads. He points out that because systemic inequities allowed White families to build more wealth, Black graduates have fewer resources for paying back loans even if they make the same salaries as their White counterparts today.

I agree that we have a long way to go to repair wealth inequity in our country. We need to keep pushing for systemic solutions that go far beyond the scope of this relief program. At the same time, it's a good thing that 90 percent of debt reduction under the program will go to borrowers who earn under \$75,000.

And most Americans agree. Polls show that this is a highly popular program, with the majority of people polled supporting debt relief. Americans understand that most students enter higher education in a good faith effort to reach a firmer footing in the middle class and a chance at the American dream.

The bottom line is that millions of students—and their families—can breathe easier now because student loan relief went from a "fringe" idea to a reality. This is a lesson for all of us not to lose faith in the ideas that make this country stronger, even if they take time to be understood and implemented. Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts notes that one in four Black borrowers will see their balance canceled completely because of this plan. That gives millions of Black graduates the freedom to dream. It means they can finally think about buying a home or starting a family. They can start a business or pursue a passion. And yes, they can get moving on changing the world.

That benefits all of us, and I can't wait to see what this generation of graduates will accomplish.

**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.**