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## Some States Could Tax Loan Forgiveness

By Steve Karnowski and  
Collin Binkley

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (AP)—President Joe Biden's student loan forgiveness plan could lift crushing debt burdens from millions of borrowers, but the tax man may demand a cut of the relief in some states.

That's because some states tax forgiven debt as income, which means borrowers who are still paying down student loans could owe taxes on as much as \$10,000 or even \$20,000 that was taken off their bill.

In Mississippi, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Arkansas and North Carolina, forgiven student loans will be subject to state income taxes unless they change their laws to conform with a federal tax exemption for student loans, according to a tally by the Tax Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

That dismays Cathy Newman, a Louisiana State University graduate who just took a job teaching freshman biology at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. She figures she could end up owing a few hundred dollars of money that she could have kept had she stayed in Louisiana.

Newman said she can come up with the cash because she has a good job, but she knows of a lot of other borrowers who will still be stuck in difficult financial positions even with their loans forgiven.

"If they stay in the state, they could end up with a pretty hefty tax burden if things don't change," Newman said. "I won't be happy if I have to do it. I can do it. But a lot of people can't."

More than 40 million Americans could see their student loan debt cut or eliminated under the forgiveness plan Biden announced late last month. The

president is erasing \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for individuals with incomes below \$125,000 a year, or households that earn less than \$250,000. He's canceling an additional \$10,000 for those who also used federal Pell Grants to pay for college. But it only applies to those whose loans were paid out before July 1, which leaves out current high school seniors and students who will follow them.

Although having \$10,000 or \$20,000 in loan payments eliminated will be a boon over the long term to borrowers who qualify, those in the affected states might be required to declare that as income. Depending on a state's tax rates, the taxpayer's other income and the deductions and exemptions they're able to claim, that could add up to several hundred extra tax dollars that they'll owe.

(See **SOME STATES**, P. 2)



BIDEN PROTECTED THE FOGFIVENESS FROM THE IRS, BUT STATES ARE DIFFERENT

## Ft. Bragg Soldier Linked To Racist Groups

By Ben Finley

Associated Press

A soldier in the U.S. Army wrote on Instagram that he joined the military "for combat experience so I'm more proficient in killing" Black people, investigators say.

Killian Mackeithan Ryan also had five Instagram accounts that were in contact with others "as-

sociated with racially motivated extremism," according to court records.

Ryan's alleged social media activity is documented in a case filed late last month in U.S. District Court in North Carolina that accuses him of providing false information on a security clearance form to serve at Fort Bragg.

The case was first reported by *Rolling Stone* and comes at a time when the U.S. military is trying to purge its ranks of extremists and White supremacists.

For example, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin directed commanding officers last year to institute a one-day stand-down to address extremism. The military

also updated its social media policy where liking and reposting certain content could result in disciplinary action.

And just this week, the names of more than 100 current military members appeared on the leaked membership rolls of a far-right extremist group that's

(See **SOLDIER LINKED**, P. 2)



### EX-COMPANY EXECUTIVE GETS PRISON TERM IN BID-RIGGING PLOT

NEW BERN (AP)—A former engineering company executive has been sentenced to one year and six months in prison for his role in a bid-rigging scheme to defraud the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Brent Brewbaker, who worked for Contech Engineered Solutions, also was sentenced on Thursday to two years of supervised release after his prison term, court records show. U.S. District Judge Louise Wood Flanagan in New Bern ordered Brewbaker to pay a \$111,000 fine and report to prison in approximately three months.

A federal jury convicted Brewbaker of conspiracy and fraud charges in January after a weeklong trial. Brewbaker conspired to rig bids for aluminum structure projects funded by the state of North Carolina between 2009 and 2018, according to prosecutors.

Contech agreed to pay a \$7 million fine plus more than \$1.5 million in restitution to the state transportation department after the company pleaded guilty to charges of bid rigging and conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud, a Justice Department news release says.

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

## School Gun Case Sparks Safety Debate

By Martha Irvine

AP National Writer

OAK PARK, Ill. (AP)—Keyon Robinson was just a month away from graduating from high school when he took a loaded gun, placed it in his backpack and headed to campus.

He'd fought with a relative that morning. He was angry, and scared someone would come after him. The firearm, a ghost gun with no serial number that he'd bought via social media, was his security blanket.

"I felt like I just needed it for safety because of the stuff I got myself into," said Robinson, now 19.

He insists he never intended to

hurt anyone at his school in Oak Park, a suburb that borders Chicago's West Side. "Realistically, I didn't need a gun at all."

And he never fired it. On May 3—three weeks before a gunman massacred 19 children and two teachers in Uvalde, Texas—police arrested Robinson near the school's main entrance as he returned from lunch. He told the officers he hadn't even taken the gun out of his backpack until they asked him to do so.

Still, in an instant, that one decision changed the trajectory of his young life. It also shook the school community, prompting intense discussions about how its young people might be protected. Most gun incidents in and

around campuses are more like Oak Park than Uvalde. They're not planned large-scale shootings, or active-shooter situations. More often, they're smaller altercations that escalate when someone has a gun at or near a school, a game or other event, according to the K-12 School Shooting Database, which tracks incidents from the last five decades.

These cases expose a hard truth: Keeping students from bringing guns to school is difficult.

Security staff and metal detectors miss things, experts say. Doors that are supposed to be locked get propped open. Items can be hidden even when schools require clear backpacks.

This fall, leaders at Oak Park and River Forest High, Robinson's school, began training more staff, adding security to the day shift, and moving more experienced team members to hot spots such as cafeterias.

The school, known as OPRF, is trying to walk a fine line—to keep students and staff safe without making them feel unwelcome or anxious. In 2020, the School Board ended the school resource officer program.

Now some officials are rethinking the decision to cut ties with police. But they're also holding fast to a widely held belief among educators—that connect-

(See **SCHOOL GUN CASE**, P. 2)



## 9/11 Two Decades Later

NEW YORK (AP) — Hours before dawn on March 1, 2003, the U.S. scored its most thrilling victory yet against the Sept. 11 attacks — the capture of a disheveled Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, hauled away by intelligence agents from a hideout in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

The global manhunt for al-Qaida's No. 3 leader had taken 18 months. But America's attempt to bring him to justice, in a legal sense, has taken much, much longer. Critics say it has become one of the war on terror's greatest failures.

As today's 21st anniversary of the terror attacks arrived, Mohammed and four other men accused of 9/11-related crimes still sit in a U.S. detention center in Guantanamo Bay, their planned trials before a military tribunal endlessly postponed.

The latest setback came last month when pretrial hearings scheduled for early fall were canceled. The delay was one more in a string of disappointments for relatives of the nearly 3,000 victims of the attack. They've long hoped that a trial would bring closure and perhaps resolve unanswered questions.

"Now, I'm not sure what's going to happen," said Gordon Haberman, whose 25-year-old daughter Andrea died after a hijacked plane crashed into the World Trade Center, a floor above her office.

He's traveled to Guantanamo four times from his home in West Bend, Wisconsin, to watch the legal proceedings in person, only to leave frustrated.

"It's important to me that America finally gets to the truth about what happened, how it was done," said Haberman. "I personally want to see this go to trial."

If convicted at trial, Mohammed could face the death penalty.

When asked about the case, James Connell, an attorney for one of Mohammed's co-defendants — one accused of transferring money to 9/11 attackers — confirmed reports both sides are still "attempting to reach a pretrial agreement" that could still avoid a trial and result in lesser but still lengthy sentences.

David Kelley, a former U.S. attorney in New York who co-chaired the Justice Department's nationwide investigation into the attacks, called the delays and failure to prosecute "an awful tragedy for the families of the victims."

He called the effort to put Mohammed on trial before a military tribunal, rather than in the regular U.S. court system, "a tremendous failure" that was "as offensive to our Constitution as to our rule of law."

## Ruby Bridges Writes A Children's Book

By Jay Reeves

Associated Press

Ruby Bridges was a 6-year-old first-grader when she walked past jeering crowds of White people to become one of the first Black students at racially segregated schools in New Orleans more than six decades ago. Now, with teaching about race in America more complicated than it's ever been, she's authored a picture book about her experi-

ence for the youngest of readers. Bridges, along with three other Black students at a different school, were the first to integrate what had been all-White schools in New Orleans in 1960.

*I Am Ruby Bridges*, featuring illustrations by Nikkolas Smith, goes on sale Tuesday. Published by Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., it's aimed at readers as young as 4.

Complete with a glossary that

includes the words "Supreme Court" and "law," the book is an uplifting story about opportunities and kids being able to make a difference, Bridges said in an interview with *The Associated Press*.

"It's a true reflection of what happened through my own eyes," she said.

But books by or about Bridges have been challenged by conservatives in several school districts amid complaints over race-

related teaching. Bridges said she hopes the new book winds up in elementary school libraries.

"I've been very, very fortunate because of the way I tell my story that my babies come in all shapes and colors, and my books are bestsellers, and maybe banned in schools," she said. "But I think parents really want to get past our racial differences. They're going to seek out those books."

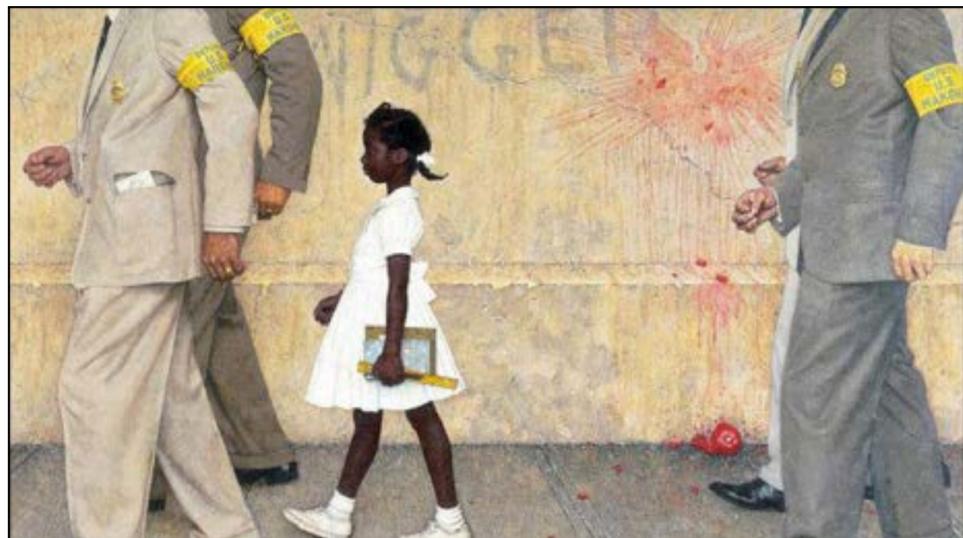
Bridges was born in 1954, the same year the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation of public schools was unconstitutional. Southern school districts, including New Orleans, continued resisting integration for years.

But on Nov. 14, 1960, Bridges—carrying a plaid book satchel and wearing a white sweater—was escorted by four federal marshals past a taunting White crowd into segregated William Frantz Elementary School. The scene was made famous in the Norman Rockwell painting "The Problem We All Live With," which hung in the White House near the Oval Office during the tenure of former President Barack Obama.

The book's theme plays off the author's name: "Ruby" is a precious stone, and "Bridges" are meant to bring people together. Told with a touch of humor from the vantage point of a first-grader, the book captures the wonder of Bridges' experience—rather than just the scariness of that raucous first day at the school.

"It really looks like Mardi Gras

(See **RUBY BRIDGES**, P. 2)



RUBY CONTINUES TO TEACH—Ruby Bridges, depicted above in the famous Norman Rockwell painting, has written a children's book about her experiences when, at age 6, she became one of the first African-American children to integrate a White school in the South. She hopes to have her book carried in school libraries, but it remains to be seen if conservative officials and parents will allow it. After all, it references an America that they don't want taught.

# States Could Tax Student Loan Forgiveness—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Spokespeople for tax agencies in several states—including Virginia, Idaho, New York, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Kentucky—told The Associated Press that their states definitely won't tax student loans forgiven under Biden's program. Revenue officials in a few other states said they needed to do more research to know.

Newman, 38, went into debt to pay for graduate school. She had already set herself up for relief under the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, though that requires five more years of teaching on top of the five she already taught at the University of Louisiana Monroe. Biden's program would cut \$10,000 off her debt load when it takes effect, but under existing

Mississippi tax law, the relief won't come free.

"It's not a huge burden for me, but it could be for a lot of other people, which is what I'm worried about, especially if it's unexpected, and I think a lot of people don't realize that," Newman said.

Any relief in states that would tax the forgiven debt would have to come from their legislatures. Leaders of the Minnesota Legislature and Democratic Gov. Tim Walz have indicated in recent media interviews that there's broad support for a fix, which could come during the 2023 session, or even earlier on the remote chance of a special session.

In Wisconsin, Democratic Gov. Tony Evers' administration

plans to propose a fix in the state budget next year, but that would have to be approved by the Republican-controlled Legislature. And Evers needs to get reelected in November before he can formally make that request. Republican legislative leaders and Evers' GOP challenger, Tim Michels, did not reply to messages

seeking comment on the student loan tax issue.

However, in Mississippi, the chairman of the state Senate committee in charge of taxes said he's willing to take a look when the Legislature convenes next year. Republican state Sen. Josh Harkins, of Brandon, said he needs to learn more about

what his state's tax laws say on debt forgiveness.

"I'm sure people will want to look at adjusting that or making some changes in the law, but a lot of factors have to be considered," Harkins said, noting that Mississippi enacted its biggest-ever tax cut earlier this year and adding that he wants to

gauge the impact of inflation before making big tax policy decisions. "This all just hit in the last week."

*Binkley reported from Washington, D.C. Associated Press writers Emily Wagster Pettus in Jackson, Mississippi, and Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, contributed to this story.*

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

### CATAWBA NATION OPENS SPORTS BOOK INSIDE NEW NC CASINO

**KINGS MOUNTAIN (AP)**—Another sports-gambling venue opened on Tuesday in North Carolina, this time at the temporary casino opened by the Catawba Nation last year along Interstate 85 near the South Carolina border.

The sports book inside the Catawba Two Kings Casino in Kings Mountain will be open 24 hours a day—just like the rest of the gambling facility. Thirty betting kiosks and betting voucher redemption services also will be available.

The state's other two sports books opened in March 2021 at casinos operated by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in Cherokee and Murphy.

The Catawba sports book opens two days before the National Football League begins its regular season. Betting also will be offered for auto racing, baseball, basketball, boxing and soccer among other spots.

Catawba Two Kings hopes "that a new audience in the Charlotte region and beyond will discover the casino as they come to wager on their favorite teams," Trent Troxel, vice president of the Catawba Nation Gaming Authority, said in a news release.

The Catawba Nation is based in Rock Hill, S.C. The U.S. Interior Department agreed in 2020 to put 17 acres in Cleveland County, N.C., into trust on which to build the casino, which opened in July 2021. The casino now has 1,000 gambling machines, including electronic table games.

The General Assembly passed a law in 2019 that gave federally recognized American Indian tribes the ability to offer sports wagering in North Carolina.

Legislation to authorize sports betting across all of North Carolina—using phone, computers and in-person venues—fell apart in the state House in June.

### FACEBOOK PARENT SETTLES SUIT IN CAMBRIDGE ANALYTICA SCANDAL

**SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (AP)**—Facebook's corporate parent has reached a tentative settlement in a lawsuit alleging the world's largest social network service allowed millions of its users' personal information to be fed to Cambridge Analytica, a firm that supported Donald Trump's victorious presidential campaign in 2016.

Terms of the settlement reached by Meta Platforms, the holding company for Facebook and Instagram, weren't disclosed in court documents filed late Friday. The filing in San Francisco federal court requested a 60-day stay of the action while lawyers finalize the settlement. That timeline suggested further details could be disclosed by late October.

The accord was reached just a few weeks before a Sept. 20 deadline for Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and his long-time chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, to submit to depositions during the final phases of pre-trial evidence gathering, according to court documents.

Zuckerberg, who founded Facebook in 2004 as a Harvard University student, could have been deposed for up to six hours. Sandberg, who is stepping down as chief operating officer after a 14-year stint, could have been questioned for up to five hours.

The case sprang from 2018 revelations that Cambridge Analytica, a firm with ties to Trump political strategist Stephen Bannon, had paid a Facebook app developer for access to the personal information of about 87 million Facebook users. That data was then used to target U.S. voters during the 2016 campaign that culminated in Trump's election as the 45th president.

The ensuing uproar led to a contrite Zuckerberg being grilled by lawmakers during a high-profile congressional hearing and spurred calls for people to delete their Facebook accounts. Even though Facebook's growth has stalled as more people connect and entertain themselves on rival services such as TikTok, the social network still boasts about 2 billion users worldwide, including nearly 200 million in the U.S. and Canada.

The lawsuit, which had been seeking to be certified as a class action representing Facebook users, had asserted the privacy breach proved Facebook is a "data broker and surveillance firm," as well as a social network.

# Ft. Bragg Soldier Linked... —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

accused of playing a key role in last year's insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Ryan is accused of claiming on the security clearance form that he wasn't in contact with his biological father for more than 10 years, according to court records. He also said that his biological father wasn't listed on his birth certificate.

Ryan's biological father is a convicted felon with a criminal history in Washington state and California for drug violations and auto theft, according to court records.

Ryan was investigated by a police officer in Fayetteville who works as part of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

Ryan served in the regular Army at Fort Bragg until his arrest by the FBI on Aug. 26 and "was separated for serious misconduct," U.S. Army officials

said in a statement.

The statement did not elaborate on what the misconduct was. Ryan was also charged with driving under the influence at Fort Bragg in July, according to court documents.

The Army said the FBI informed it earlier this year that Ryan was under investigation.

"The U.S. Army does not tolerate racism, extremism or hatred in our ranks," its statement said.

Ryan served as a fire support specialist, which is someone who gathers intelligence on enemy targets for artillery forces. The Army said he had no deployments.

For one of his Instagram accounts, Ryan used an email that contained the name "nazi-ace1488," according to court records.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, 1488 is a combina-

tion of numeric symbols that are popular among White supremacists.

The first is the number 14, which is shorthand for a 14-word slogan about the "future for White children," the ADL said. The second is 88, which stands for "Heil Hitler" because H is the 8th letter of the alphabet, the ADL said.

Ryan was in touch with his biological father through Instagram, court records stated. His father also posted a photo of the two at Ryan's high school graduation in 2019.

Legal experts say that Ryan could have jeopardized his security clearance if he listed recent contact with his biological father.

"They're looking at the potential for you to be compromised in any way because of your personal situation," said Colby Vokey, a

military criminal defense lawyer.

Ryan would have needed clearance to work with intelligence on enemy positions as well as information about U.S. weapons systems, Vokey added.

Phillip Stackhouse, another military criminal defense lawyer, said prosecuting someone for providing false information on a security clearance form is not routine in his experience. Many people often just have their clearance revoked without being charged.

"Maybe they're going to make an example of him," Stackhouse said of Ryan. "Maybe it's to apply pressure on him to cooperate in some other investigation."

Ryan's federal public defender, James E. Todd, Jr., did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment.

# School Gun Case Sparks... —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ing with students is the best way to build trust and identify threats.

By his own account, and according to school records provided by his attorney, Robinson bonded with teachers. He owned his mistakes, staff said, but struggled with depression, drugs and impulsivity.

After his arrest, Robinson said he was expelled. The district offered him the chance to complete his studies, away from campus, where he can no longer set foot. A judge agreed that school in some form was "the best thing for him," though she gave a stern reminder to avoid school grounds and weapons.

She allowed him to be released on bond after a few weeks in jail. As he awaits his fate in court, he's been granted permission to work at a fast-food restaurant. Ultimately, he'd like to go to community college or trade school. He and his family hope felony charges will be deferred because this is a first-time offense.

Meanwhile, students have returned for a new year at OPRF

as officials and the community process what happened.

"It pains me to the core of my being that you have to do this on your jobs," School Board member Ralph Martire told staff after a security update at a recent meeting. "It shouldn't be that we should be this worried about violence at this level in educational setting."

The K-12 database shows that active shooter incidents accounted for 11 of 430 shootings in and around schools from the start of 2021 through August 2022. Fights that escalate when someone has a gun accounted for 123 of those shootings.

No one at the School Board meeting spoke Robinson's name, though the incident was on many minds. He's aware that his actions have affected people's sense of safety.

"Because of the mistake that I made, and other mistakes, then I think that it is reasonable to have more tighter security—and have an officer in the school now," he said.

Superintendent Greg Johnson still sees a chance to rethink the role police could have at the

school. Johnson, who is White, told the school board he understands the "very real challenge" people of color face with law enforcement.

"Our belief as a school district, though, is that the way through that is education and relationships," he said. "We need a partnership" with police.

But at least two board members balked at praise for efforts to "harden" security.

"We want to keep the buildings safe," member Gina Harris said. "But that language is challenging, as well as confronting for me as a Black woman and for families and students."

At a recent status hearing for his case, Robinson sat silently with his mom, Nicole Bryant, who works in child care and drives for Uber to make ends meet. His felony charges could lead to substantial time in prison.

Because Robinson had no criminal record, other than a traffic violation, attorney Thomas Benno is seeking the deferred sentence, which means probation and other requirements detailed by the court. It's a strict program

with no room for more mistakes, Benno said. He believes that's better than incarceration and that his young client will share his cautionary tale.

"He can go and tell kids, 'Hey, don't carry the gun,'" Benno said. "He's going to tell the story."

Some in the community quietly wonder if a lighter sentence would send the wrong message.

Last spring, Robinson's mom had been ready to celebrate her son, the third of four children. He had fought so hard to graduate, she told the school—he wanted to show everyone he could do it, despite his struggles. She, too, graduated from OPRF. Now she's just grateful her son was allowed to get his diploma.

Leon Watson, a family friend, frowned when asked about Robinson and the gun. "I was disappointed and surprised and confused," he said. "That's not him. It's not... but he's kicking himself every day."

Robinson nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Every day."

His hopes for a second chance are now in the hands of the court.

# Ruby Bridges Writes... —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to me, but they aren't throwing any beads. What's Mardi Gras without beads?" Bridges writes.

The only parade that day was out of the school. White parents immediately began withdrawing their children, so Bridges spent the entire year by herself with White teacher Barbara Henry, who is still alive and a "very best

friend," Bridges said. Henry's acceptance and kindness during a fraught time taught her an important lesson, she said.

"That shaped me into a person that is not prejudiced at all. And I feel like that little girl is still inside of me, and that's it's my calling to make sure kids understand that you can't look at some-

one and judge them," Bridges said.

Elsewhere in New Orleans on the same day Bridges went to school, Gail Etienne, Leona Tate and Tessie Prevost entered the previously all-White McDonogh No. 19 elementary school. Last year, New Orleans held a week-end of events to remember

Bridges and other women.

Bridges, a Mississippi native, still lives in metro New Orleans and has authored or co-authored five books. Two years ago she published *This Is Your Time, which is intended for older children than her new book.*

*Reeves is a member of AP's Race and Ethnicity Team.*

# Experts Urge GA To Replace Voting Machines

By Kate Brumback

Associated Press

**ATLANTA, Ga. (AP)**—A group of computer and election security experts is urging Georgia election officials to replace the state's touchscreen voting machines with hand-marked paper ballots ahead of the November midterm elections, citing what they say are "serious threats" posed by an apparent breach of voting equipment in one county.

The 13 experts on Thursday sent a letter to the members of the State Election Board and to Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, who's a non-voting member of the board. It urges them to immediately stop using the state's Dominion Voting Systems touchscreen voting machines. It also suggests they mandate a particular type of post-election audit on the outcome of all races on the ballot.

The experts who sent the letter include academics and former state election officials and are not associated with efforts by former President Donald Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

The midterm elections are just two months away. A switch to hand-marked paper ballots could easily be made by then because state law already provides for them to be used as an emergency backup, the letter says.

State Election Board Chair William Duffey responded in an

email to The Associated Press that the "security of our election equipment is of paramount interest to the State Election Board as is the integrity of the election process in Georgia." He noted that the alleged breach in Coffee County is being investigated by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and secretary of state's office investigators and said the FBI has been asked to assist.

"The investigation is active and ongoing," Duffey wrote. "Information developed will be considered to evaluate the impact of the Coffee County conduct."

Raffensperger's office has repeatedly said that Georgia's elections remain secure because of varied security mechanisms in place. Spokesperson Mike Hassinger said in an email that the office will respond "in due time with due care" and that the response will be "addressed directly to the authors, rather than leaked to the media to obtain some sort of rhetorical advantage."

The apparent unauthorized copying of election equipment in Coffee County happened in January 2021. It is documented

in emails, security camera footage and other records produced in response to subpoenas in a long-running lawsuit that argues Georgia's voting machines are vulnerable and should be replaced by hand-marked paper ballots.

Those records show that a computer forensics team traveled to the rural county about 200 miles southeast of Atlanta on Jan. 7, 2021, to forensically copy voting equipment. Emails show that Sidney Powell and other Trump-allied attorneys were involved in arranging for the visit.

The security video also shows that Doug Logan and Jeff Linberg, who were involved in broader efforts to cast doubt on the 2020 election results, visited the office later that month.

The experts who sent the letter Thursday have long criticized Georgia's voting machines, which print a paper ballot that includes a human-readable summary of the voter's selections and a barcode that is read by a scanner to tally the votes. They argue the machines already made elections more vulnerable to tampering because voters cannot read the barcode to verify that it accurately reflects their selections.

But the copying and sharing of election data and software from Coffee County "increases both the risk of undetected cyberattacks on Georgia, and the risk of accusations of fraud and election manipulation," the letter says.



**BREAKING IN**—A sympathetic elections worker in Coffee County, Ga. holds the door open for Doug Logan and Jeff Linberg, who were involved in trying to overturn the 2020 elections. A machine inside had its hard drive copied illegally.

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# Business & Finance

## Chatham Co. Wins Wolfspeed Semiconductor Materials Plant

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

A North Carolina-based semiconductor company announced Friday it will build a \$5 billion manufacturing plant in its home state to produce silicon carbide wafers, which is emerging as a favored part for renewable energy products.

WolfSpeed Inc. said it plans to create 1,800 new jobs by the end of 2030 at a location in Chatham County, about 45 miles southwest of its Durham headquarters.

WolfSpeed could benefit from \$775 million in cash incentives, infrastructure improvements and other sweeteners from North Carolina and local governments and the state legislature to build on the outskirts of Siler City, according to a state document. The lion's share would be in the form of local property tax rebates.

A state committee voted earlier Friday to award WolfSpeed up to \$76 million over 20 years if it met investment and job-creation goals. The company is also likely to benefit financially from legislation signed by President Joe Biden last month that encourages semiconductor research and production.

The company, formerly known as Cree, already employs over 3,000 jobs in the state. The former LED light pioneer has turned to the production of silicon carbide chips, which are known to be more efficient and solid than traditional silicon chips.

"It's a game-changing technology for electric vehicles, renewable energy, storage, rail systems, appliances ... and countless other electric applications," WolfSpeed CEO Gregg Lowe said

at the announcement outside the Executive Mansion in Raleigh.

Lowe said the company already operates the world's largest silicon carbide materials factory in Durham. Output at the new plant, which Lowe said could begin production in about two years, would be more than 10 times what the Durham plant produces.

The materials produced at the new plant will help supply the company's new chip fabrication facility in upstate New York, Lowe said.

This "East Coast silicon carbide corridor will dramatically improve the way the world consumes energy," Lowe said.

Average annual salaries for the new jobs, which would be generated starting in 2026, are projected at \$77,753, well above the county average of \$41,638, according to state officials.

Gov. Roy Cooper said WolfSpeed's news was an "historic capital investment" in the state and called Friday "another step in our drive toward a clean energy economy" as well as "an amazing day for high-paying jobs."

Lowe likened an electric vehicle with silicon chips to a car with a combustion engine whose gas tank is poked full of holes. Meanwhile, he said, a silicon carbide chip within an inverter that converts electricity to turn the vehicle's motor results in super-fast recharging, he said—20 minutes to add another 300 miles to his vehicle's range, for example.

The jobs announcement marked another big economic win for central North Carolina during the past 17 months.

Apple announced plans in April 2021 to build its first East Coast campus in Research Triangle Park between Raleigh and Durham. Toyota revealed in December it would build a battery plant in Randolph County, followed the next month by Boom Supersonic picking Greensboro for its first full-scale manufacturing facility for next-generation supersonic passenger jets.

Chatham County also got the brass ring in March when Vietnamese automaker VinFast said it would build its first North American plant there to make electric vehicles. The investment, which could generate 7,500 jobs, would follow several near-misses by the state to attract a carmaker.

WolfSpeed had considered the expansion in Marcy, New York, where its new production facility is located and where it had additional space for expansion, according to a state Commerce Department document.

Lowe said after the announcement that the company looked at several states, and New York "put together a really strong package."

But the winning site's proximity to WolfSpeed's current operations in Durham, along with the company's relationship with North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, a historically Black college, "gave it a little bit of a tipping edge," he said. WolfSpeed on Friday also announced expanded initiatives to attract the school's engineering students to the semiconductor field.

Graduate students at North Carolina State University in Raleigh helped start what is now WolfSpeed in 1987.



**STAYING CLOSE TO HOME**—North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, right, presents WolfSpeed CEO Gregg Lowe with a piece of pottery as a gift during an economic development announcement ceremony at the Executive Mansion Friday, Sept. 9, 2022, in Raleigh, N.C. WolfSpeed, a Durham silicon chip manufacturer, will build a new factory in Chatham County promising 1,800 new jobs. [Travis Long/Associated Press]

## Biden Visits Future Intel Plant

By Aamer Madhani, Josh Boak and Andrew Welsh-Huggins

Associated Press

NEW ALBANY, Ohio (AP)—President Joe Biden steered clear of partisan politics at Friday's groundbreaking celebration for a huge new computer chip facility in Ohio—as a tough Senate contest in that state and a Democratic candidate seeking to distance himself from Biden reflected the challenge of translating White House policy wins into political gains.

Biden, a major force behind the legislation that helped lure Intel, went to suburban Columbus to take a victory lap just as voters in the state are starting to tune in to the Senate race between Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan and Republican author and venture capital executive J.D. Vance. They're competing in a former swing state that has trended Republican over the past decade.

Ryan attended the event but raised questions in interviews about whether he thinks Biden should pursue re-election in 2024. Vance did not attend.

The president, in his speech, thanked Ryan for his leadership without mentioning his Senate candidacy, choosing instead to em-

phasize that the Intel plant serves as a model for a U.S. economy that revolves around technology, factories and the middle class.

"Folks, we need to make these chips right here in America to bring down everyday costs and create good jobs," Biden said. "Industry leaders are choosing us, the United States, because they see America's back and America's leading the way."

Touring the construction site, the president chatted with unionized workers in hard hats and noted his own blue collar credentials, saying, "These are my people, where I come from."

Intel had delayed groundbreaking on the \$20 billion plant until Congress passed the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act. The plant speaks to how the president is trying to revive American manufacturing nationwide, including in states that are solidly Republican or political toss-ups. Investments for manufacturing facilities in Idaho, Arizona and North Carolina have also been announced in recent weeks.

Factory work is one of the few issues going into November's midterm elections that has crossover appeal at a time when issues such as abortion, inflation and even the nature of democracy have

dominated the contest to control Congress. Biden shared the stage on Friday with Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and Sen. Rob Portman, two Republicans who stressed in their remarks the value the plant holds in a state with a working class identity.

Ryan, the Democrat vying to succeed Portman, did not take to the lectern even though he championed the computer chip plant. He had largely been hesitant to share a stage with Biden, as appearing with the country's top Democrat could hurt his chances in a state that backed Republican Donald Trump by eight points in both 2016 and 2020.

Ryan skipped the president's July 6 visit to Cleveland where Biden plugged his administration's efforts to shore up troubled pension programs for blue-collar workers. Biden nonetheless referred to him as the "future Senator Tim Ryan" and thanked him for his "incredible work" on the legislation.

In a Thursday TV interview with Youngstown's WFMJ on the eve of Biden's visit, Ryan said he was "campaigning as an independent." When asked if Biden should seek a second term, he said, "My hunch is that we need new leadership across the board."

## Cheaper Electric Vehicles Coming

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

WARREN, Mich. (AP)—Even though battery costs are rising, auto companies are rolling out more affordable electric vehicles that should widen their appeal to a larger group of buyers.

The latest came Thursday from General Motors, a Chevrolet Equinox small SUV with a starting price somewhere around \$30,000 and a range-per-charge of 250 miles. You can get a range of 300 miles if you pay more.

GM won't release the exact price of the Equinox EV until closer to the date it goes on sale, about this time next year. But the SUV is at the low end of Edmunds.com's list of prices for electric vehicles sold in the U.S., where the average cost of an EV

is around \$65,000.

Hitting a price around \$30,000 and a range per charge close to 300 miles is key to getting mainstream buyers to switch away from gasoline vehicles, industry analysts say.

"You're kind of at that sweet spot," said Ivan Drury, director of insights for Edmunds.com. "You're basically at the price point that everyone is clamoring for."

Auto industry analysts say that if the Equinox makes efficient use of interior space with plenty of cargo and passenger room, and if it is styled similar to current gas-powered small SUVs, it should be a hit in the most popular segment of the U.S. auto market. About 20 percent of all new vehicles sold in the U.S. are compact SUVs.

"It's a perfect vehicle for a lot of different users, whether it's a small family, maybe an empty nester," said Jeff Schuster, president of global forecasting for LMC Automotive, a Detroit-area consulting firm. "You've got space to haul things, but it's easy to drive."

A \$30,000 EV that checks all of the boxes is just a little above the price of a comparable small gas-powered SUV. The Toyota RAV4, the top seller in the segment and the top-selling vehicle in the U.S. that isn't a pickup, starts at just over \$28,000.

Until the past few years, electric vehicles were either expensive and aimed at affluent luxury buyers, or cheaper but with limited travel ranges. For example, a base version of Tesla's Model 3, the lowest-price model from the

## Small Nuclear Reactors Emerge As Energy Options, But Risks Loom

By Menelaos Hadjicostis

Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP)—A global search for alternative sources to Russian energy during the war in Ukraine has refocused attention on smaller, easier-to-build nuclear power stations, which proponents say could provide a cheaper, more efficient alternative to older model mega-plants.

U.K.-based Rolls-Royce SMR says its small modular reactors, or SMRs, are much cheaper and quicker to get running than standard plants, delivering the kind of energy security that many nations are seeking. France already relies on nuclear power

for a majority of its electricity, and Germany kept the option of reactivating two nuclear plants it will shut down at the end of the year as Russia cuts natural gas supplies.

While Rolls-Royce SMR and its competitors have signed deals with countries from Britain to Poland to start building the stations, they are many years away from operating and cannot solve the energy crisis now hitting Europe. Nuclear power also poses risks, including disposing of highly radioactive waste and keeping that technology out of the hands of rogue countries or nefarious groups that may pursue a nuclear weapons program.

Those risks have been accentuated following the shelling around Europe's largest nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, which has raised fears of potential nuclear disaster.

In the wake of the war, however, "the reliance on gas imports and Russian energy sources has focused people's minds on energy security," Rolls-Royce SMR spokesman Dan Gould said.

An SMR's components can be built in a factory, moved to a site in tractor trailers and assembled there, making the technology more attractive to frugal buyers, he said.

"It's like building Lego," Gould said. "Building on a smaller scale reduces risks and makes it a

more investible project."

Some SMRs are essentially pressurized water reactors identical to some 400 reactors worldwide, while other designs use sodium, lead, gas or salt as a coolant instead of water. The key advantages are their size—about one-tenth as big as a standard reactor—the ease of construction and the price tag.

The estimated cost of a Rolls-Royce SMR is £2.2 billion to £2.8 billion (\$2.5 billion to \$3.2 billion), with an estimated construction time of 5 1/2 years. That's two years faster than it took to build a standard nuclear plant between 2016 and 2021, according to International Atomic Energy Agency statistics. Some estimates put the cost of building a 1,100-megawatt nuclear plant at between \$6 billion and \$9 billion.

Rolls-Royce aims to build its first stations in the U.K. within 5 1/2 years, Gould said.

Similarly, Oregon-based NuScale Power signed agreements last year with two Polish companies—copper and silver producer KGHM and energy producer UNIMOT—to explore the possibility of building SMRs to power heavy industry. Poland wants to switch from polluting, coal-powered electricity generation.

Rolls-Royce SMR said last month that it signed a deal with Dutch development company ULC-Energy to look into setting up SMRs in the Netherlands.

Another partner is Turkey, where Russia is building the Akkuyu nuclear power plant on the southern coast. Environmentalists say the region is seismically active and could be a target for terrorists.

The introduction of "unproven" nuclear power technology in the form of SMRs doesn't sit well with environmentalists, who argue that proliferation of small reactors will exacerbate the problem of how to dispose of highly radioactive nuclear waste.

"Unfortunately, Turkey is governed by an incompetent administration that has turned it into a 'test bed' for corporations," said Koray Dogan Urbarli, a spokesman for Turkey's Green Party.

"It is giving up the sovereignty of a certain region for at least 100 years for Russia to build a nuclear power plant. This incompetence and lobbying power make Turkey an easy target for SMRs," said Koray, adding that his party eschews technology with an "uncertain future."

Gould said one Rolls-Royce SMR would generate nuclear waste the size of a "tennis court piled 1-meter high" throughout the plant's 60-year lifetime. He said initially, waste would be stored on site at the U.K. plants and would eventually be transferred to a long-term disposal site selected by the British government.

M.V. Ramana, professor of public policy and global affairs at the University of British Columbia, cites research suggesting there's "no demonstrated way" to ensure nuclear waste stored in what authorities consider to be secure sites won't escape in the future.

The constant heat generated by the waste could alter rock formations where it's stored and allow water seepage, while future mining activities could compromise a nuclear waste site's

integrity, said Ramana, who specializes in international security and nuclear energy.

Skeptics also raise the risks of possibly exporting such technology in politically tumultuous regions. Gould said Rolls-Royce is "completely compliant" with U.K. and international requirements in exporting its SMR technology "only in territories that are signatories to the necessary international treaties for the peaceful use of nuclear power for energy generation."

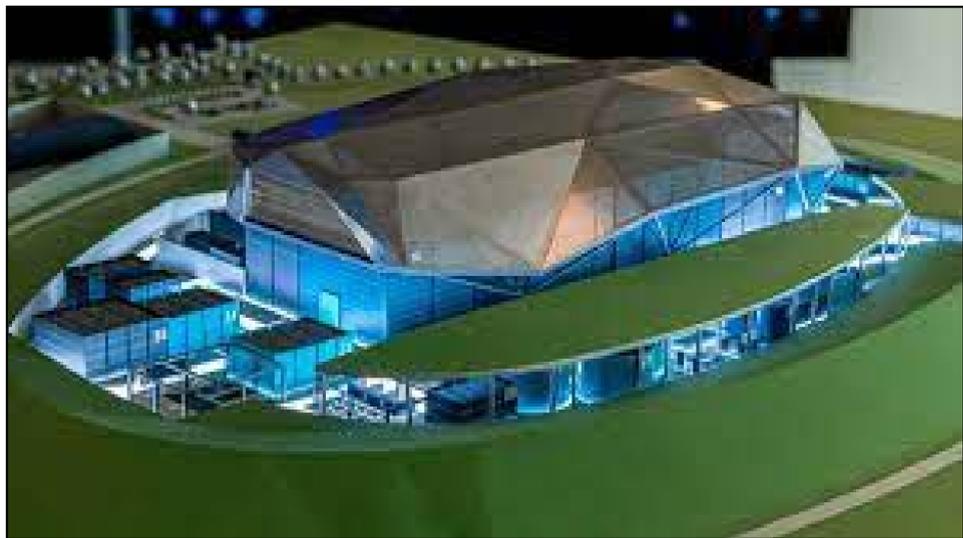
Ramana said, however, there's no guarantee nations will follow the rules.

"Any country acquiring nuclear reactors automatically enhances its capacity to make nuclear weapons," he said, adding that every SMR could produce "around 10 bombs worth of plutonium each year."

Rolls-Royce SMR could opt to stop supplying fuel and other services to anyone flouting the rules, but "should any country choose to do so, it can simply tell the International Atomic Energy Agency to stop inspections, as Iran has done, for example," Ramana said.

Although spent fuel normally undergoes chemical reprocessing to generate the kind of plutonium used in nuclear weapons, Ramana said such reprocessing technology is widely known and that a very sophisticated reprocessing plant isn't required to produce the amount of plutonium needed for weapons.

Associated Press writers Andrew Wilks in Ankara, Turkey, and Jennifer McDermott in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed.



THE NEW REACTORS WILL LOOK VERY DIFFERENT THAN ONES WE'RE USED TO

# Opinion



## Accountability: An Insurrectionist Removed From Office

By Ben Jealous

People for the American Way

A New Mexico judge has done the country a big favor. Judge Francis Mathew upheld a little-known provision of the U.S. Constitution and removed a public official for participating in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. I hope other judges have the courage to follow his lead.

The principle that no person is above the law—that powerful people have to obey the laws like everyone else—is essential to a democratic society. If this principle is not enforced, corrupt leaders will undermine the rule of law and democracy itself.

Judge Mathew ruled that a county commissioner who participated in the attack on the U.S. Capitol can no longer hold public office. The ruling was based on a section of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, which was passed after the Civil War. It forbids anyone from holding public office if they had taken an oath to support the Constitution of the United States and then “engaged in insurrection or rebellion” against the country.

The judge found that Otero County Commissioner Couy Griffin helped lead the mob that used violence to try to prevent Congress from affirming Joe Biden’s win in the presidential election. Griffin later bragged about his role and suggested that there might be another insurrection coming.

Judge Mathew’s ruling is a milestone in the effort to hold public officials accountable for trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election. It should provide a road map—and some moral courage—to other judges considering legal efforts to hold state legislators and others accountable for trying to undermine democracy.

Another important effort to hold powerful people accountable for the insurrection is being conducted by the House Select Committee that is investigating the insurrection and the schemes that led up to it.

The committee’s public hearings this summer gave the American people a powerful dose of truth-telling about the lies and deceptions of President Trump, members of his legal team, and his political allies. The committee’s investigation is continuing, and we can look forward to more public hearings this fall.

Members and staff of the committee have spent countless hours digging through emails and other public records and interviewing former Trump administration officials and lawyers, members of Congress, and far-right activists who promoted Trump’s lies about election fraud. They are still at it. Among the people they hope to interview this fall are former Vice President Mike Pence, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, and far-right activist Ginni Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas.

Truth is a first step toward accountability. But it cannot be the only step.

The committee’s efforts to get a full picture of the illegal scheming to overturn the election is essential. So is punishing wrongdoers and preventing future attempts to subvert our elections.

There are plenty of wrongdoers who need to be held accountable, punished, and prevented from using powerful government positions to undermine democracy and the rule of law. And that includes former President Trump, whose lies about a “stolen” election fueled the insurrectionists’ anger.

In our system of government, there are many people with roles to play in defending our democracy. Congress can use its oversight power to reveal the corruption within the White House. The Justice Department can prosecute criminals like those who attacked the Capitol Police—and those who broke other laws as they tried desperately to keep the defeated Trump in power. Judges can hold public officials accountable for violating the Constitution.

And we the voters can defend democracy by electing local, state, and national officials who are committed to the democratic process—and rejecting those who seek power for the purpose of interfering with our elections and our ability to hold powerful people accountable.

*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.*



## Does Spraying the Rod Really Spoil the Child?

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

“When police found a kindergarten boy who had walked off from school after attacking his teacher and classmates,” Elizabeth K. Anthony writes at The Conversation, “it didn’t take them long to start guessing about the cause of his behavior.”

Long story short: The cops concluded the boy wasn’t getting enough of That Good Old Corporal Punishment at home, and told his mother exactly that.

“He’s bad because no one’s correcting it.”

“This is why people need to beat their kids.”

“As law enforcement officers... we applaud the fact that you will please beat your kid.”

There are no happy endings to such incidents, but this case did result in a hefty settlement after a judge ruled that the police behavior involved was “assaultive in nature.”

For much of my own life, I assumed that “spare the rod, spoil the child” was not only how things were, but the only way they could be.

My wife and I debated that belief in a spirited manner and she largely prevailed in banning corporal punishment for our kids. I learned to keep my opinion (or at least my hands) to myself. But I never questioned it.

Then I inherited the razor strop.

It was my great-grandfather’s, then my grandfather’s, then my father’s, and when he passed away it—and memories of it that I’d tried to bury—came to me.

I assume my grandfather and his father used the strop for its intended purpose, sharpening the straight razor which I also inherited. And, yes, maybe for other things.

My dad didn’t need the razor or strop for shaving—disposable razors were fine with him. But he used that strop liberally, on me, when my behavior didn’t measure up to his standards.

It’s just a strip of leather, backed by a strip of thick cloth, maybe two feet long and four inches wide. But in memory, it’s a giant serpent of fire and pain that I lived in abject terror of throughout my childhood.

Was my father an evil man? I don’t think so.

On the other hand, 40 years or more after my final disciplinary encounter with the strop, I’m no longer convinced that his decision to inflict pain on me is the reason I’m not dead, in prison, or an alcoholic.

If the strop taught me anything, it was the false lesson that instant resort to violence “works.” I suspect I’m not dead, in prison, or an alcoholic in spite of, not because of, the strop.

I also suspect that violent punishment of children makes those children, and their parents, more inclined to non-defensive violence in general.

Corporal punishment becomes a shortcut that superficially “solves” problems without the time and effort required to understand and work through those problems for real. It’s the crack cocaine of dispute resolution—an instant high followed by the constant need for more.

If you’re a good person with good kids—and I bet you are—don’t make it harder on them, or on yourself. Parent peacefully.

*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.*



## One Black School Superintendent Failed to Meet Expectations

By S.E. Williams

Keeping It Real

During his eight-year tenure as superintendent of the Victor Valley Unified High School District Dr. Ron Williams was singled out for several individual honors. He was named superintendent of the year in 2019 by the California Association of African-American Superintendents and Administrators (CAAASA) in 2019. In 2017 he was recognized by the Association of California School Administrators in San Bernardino and the national School Superintendents Association also identified Williams as a finalist for a national superintendent of the year award.

Under Williams’ leadership the district reported an increase in student enrollment, new school facilities were built and it boasted of receiving several awards including a National Blue Ribbon Award, three California Distinguished School Awards, three California Pivotal Practice Awards and three California School Boards Association Golden Bell Awards.

But beneath the shadow of the highly accomplished superintendent and the district’s shiny veneer something was rotten in the classrooms and hallways of schools in the Victor Valley Union High School District (VVUHSD).

In late August the Office for Civil Rights determined VVUHSD practiced discrimination based on race in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act by disciplining Black students more frequently and more harshly than White students.

“The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a school district is the school superintendent...They are most responsible for the successes of a district and most assuredly responsible when there are failures.”

—Derrick Meador

The question is whether Williams was duped by his predecessor and the VVUHSD into being the last one responsible when the district’s structural and institutional foundation of discrimination cracked causing the edifice of disparate treatment to crumble? Was he a willing participant in blatant discrimination against students of his own race? Or, was there a problem with his olfactory system that impeded his ability to smell the pervasive stench of discrimination across the school district he shepherded?

In April 2019, when *Black Voice News* reported on Williams’ recognition by CAAASA, Williams was one of only 25 Black superintendents in the entire state of California. There was pride in his accomplishments.

Was it too much for members of the Black community, for his peers in CAAASA, for residents of Victor Valley and San Bernardino County, for residents of the inland region, the state of California, those who fought for him and others to have opportunities to hold such a prestigious position, or for the ancestors to have expected him to be righteous? To lead with honor, integrity and justice? To, at a minimum, honor and uphold the law.

In reality members of the Black community expect no more from our Black leaders than we do any leader—to serve with integrity to push through barriers of structural and institutional racism so that everyone, regardless of race, creed or color is treated fairly.

The Black community only expects of Black leaders what we expect of other leaders. If Williams tried and failed in his efforts to prevent such racist treatment of Black students entrusted to his care, then kudos to him. But, if he was trying to do what was right and was being sabotaged, why didn’t he administer discipline, reach out for assistance, and blow the whistle?

Williams retired this summer after serving 10 years with the VVUHSD, including eight years as superintendent. Williams’ predecessor, Elvin Momon conveniently retired in 2014. Interestingly, the same year (2014) the Office for Civil Rights opened the investigation into VVUHSD.

After eight years and just previous to the release of the OCR report Williams announced his own plans to step down and conveniently, his predecessor, Elvin Momon, was solicited by the VVUHSD board in June to return and help guide the district through the transition.

Although a new superintendent, Carl J. Coles, was recently appointed to replace Williams and his tenure began September 1, for some reason, Momon will remain through the end of the year to purportedly continue helping with the transition.

So, Momon will be on board for an additional three months even though Coles is an experienced superintendent who, before his appointment to the VVUHSD, spent 15 years with the Bonita Unified School District in San Dimas where he was the assistant superintendent of human resources before serving four years as superintendent. I readily admit I am not an educator and have no idea what is required of administrators, however it seems a stretch that someone with as much experience as Coles

would need a three-month transition period with Momon.

Regarding the civil rights violations I think it important to recall Federal Education officials began the civil rights investigation in 2014 “after seeing higher rates of suspensions, expulsions and other punishments in Victor Valley compared to other districts in California” after noting Black students were punished more frequently and severely than White students. This occurred right around the time Momon retired.

Many of the violations occurred due to the VVUHSD participation in the county’s “CleanSweep” program facilitated by the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department. The disciplinary program impacting several schools across the county was suspended September 1 and is under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice. However, that was not the only issue. The district also over-disciplined Black students for minor infractions like being too loud, inappropriate behavior, dress code violations and truancy.

Stepping into his new role, Cole expressed, “every student has hopes, dreams, and aspirations. That gives us 11,000 reasons to fulfill a commitment, to prepare them for whatever they choose to do post-high school. I can’t wait to join my new colleagues in fulfilling that commitment each day.”

But will the VVUHSD ever deliver on this promise to all its students? The OCR also discovered even when White students were disciplined, their punishments were far less severe than those administered to Black students.

Meanwhile, Momon has acknowledged the district’s disciplinary practices were unfair to Black students and claimed there was a lack of oversight and a lack of accountability in the district “before the Office of Civil Rights completed its investigation.” What is he actually saying here? Is he washing his hands clean and saying in so many words the failures occurred on Williams’ watch? Perhaps his most galling quote is “You can’t treat our kids in a disparate way. It has to be equal.” Really, Momon? How much of this occurred on your watch? How many kids were mistreated on your watch?

Something appears seriously wrong in the Victory Valley High School Unified School District beyond the findings of the Office of Civil Rights.

Of course, this is just my opinion. I’m keep it real.



SYLVIE LÉGÈRE



DENISHA MERRIWEATHER

## A Movement to Support Children, Not Broken School Systems

By Sylvie Légère and Denisha Merriweather

Guest Commentary

Because of increased parent engagement, an education freedom movement is sweeping the nation that has the potential to have a significant positive impact on children and communities. The global pandemic forced parents to engage in local education policies more intentionally than we have seen in over half a century.

During the pandemic, the classroom collided with the family room. As moms and dads were front and center in the virtual classroom with their children, many were spurred to question the type of education system their tax dollars supported. To many parents, it was obvious that systems are being funded, not students.

The United States spends over \$750 billion each year on education. Per student, that averages out to \$15,000.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, the average cost of a private elementary school in the U.S. is \$7,630, while the average Catholic elementary school is \$4,840. Of course, some states are significantly more. For example, the average cost of a private school in Connecticut is around \$23,000 a year. But Connecticut’s public schools also rank number two in the nation. As a result, Connecticut parents are less likely to seek alternative solutions for their children.

For most families, the freedom to use the funds allocated for their child to choose a school setting that best suits their child’s needs is not financially feasible. What if instead of funding buildings, our government funded the child, i.e., the money would follow the children to the school that fits their needs best?

Governor Ducey of Arizona recently signed one of the most sweeping economic freedom bills in the nation’s history. Every family in Arizona can now use \$6,500 each year per child to choose a learning environment that amplifies learning and focuses on the child. This could be home school, private school or other learning environments that promote child success.

Black Minds Matter understands how important it is for children to find a learning environment that works best for them. The organization has created the first-ever online directory to promote schools founded by African-Americans.

Other states will be watching the results of what is happening in Arizona. Even though America outspends our global peers, our students consistently lag behind. American students rank 18th in science, 13th in reading, and 37th in math. Families do not need to track achievement with students in other countries to know that there are flaws in the system. We simply have to look to our own major cities.

According to a new report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also referred to as the “Nation’s Report Card,” students are displaying delays in both reading and math. “Average scores for age 9 students in 2022 declined 5 points in reading and 7 points in mathematics compared to 2020,” the report stated. “This is the largest average score decline in reading since 1990 and the first-ever score decline in mathematics.”

Less than 30 percent of students in large U.S. city public schools are reading at or above grade level. Child literacy leads to adult literacy. Adult literacy takes a devastating cultural and economic toll on a community. The Policy Circle produced a policy brief detailing the impact of low literacy rates on the ability to lead a self-sufficient life. In the United States, 54 percent of American adults read below the equivalent of a sixth-grade level, and nearly one in five adults reads below a third-grade level.

With low literacy rates, we see inequities continue to widen as low literacy correlates with:

- Higher unemployment;
- Reduced income;
- Higher incarceration rates; and
- Poorer health outcomes.

A Gallup study commissioned by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Literacy estimated that raising every American adult’s literacy rate to a 6th-grade reading level would generate an additional \$2.2 trillion a year for the U.S. economy.

Literacy rates in the U.S. have not improved since 2000. How can we begin to close the economic gap? How can we bring more diversity in STEM without a strong literate youth? Disrupting the status quo through educational choice could be the game changer for families. By refocusing on students’ basic academic achievements and not systems, we could create a positive economic and cultural ripple that could lift America’s most vulnerable communities for generations.

*Sylvie Légère is an internationally recognized social entrepreneur and impact investor committed to civic engagement. She is co-founder of The Policy Circle, a non-partisan organization that provides a framework to boost civil discourse and civic engagement. She is also the author and host of the Trust Your Voice book and podcast.*

*Denisha Merriweather is the Director of Public Relations and Content Marketing at the American Federation for Children and the Founder of Black Minds Matter. Denisha previously served as School Choice and Youth Liaison to Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos at the U.S. Department of Education. Denisha is a Florida tax-credit scholarship graduate and now sits on the Board of directors for Step Up for Students.*