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N.C.'s Twice-Weekly African-American Newspaper

RALEIGH, N.C.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2022

After COVID Aid, Homelessness Surges

By Kathleen Ronayne,
Michael Casey and
Geoff Mulvihill

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—In California's capital, massive tent encampments have risen along the American River and highway overpasses have become havens for homeless people, whose numbers have jumped a staggering nearly 70 percent over two years.

Among the 9,300 without a home is Eric Santos, who lost his job at a brewery and was evicted from his apartment in July. Now he carries a list of places where free meals are available and a bucket to mix soap and water to wash his hands, and to sit on.

"The bucket is part of my life now," the 42-year-old said, calling it his version of Wilson, the volleyball that becomes Tom Hanks' companion in the film *Castaway*.

Cities big and small around the country are facing a similar experience to Sacramento.

Fueled by a long-running housing shortage, rising rent prices and the economic hangover from

the pandemic, the overall number of homeless in a federal government report to be released in coming months is expected to be higher than the 580,000 unsheltered before the coronavirus outbreak, the National Alliance to End Homelessness said.

The Associated Press tallied results from city-by-city surveys conducted earlier this year and found the number of people without homes is up overall compared with 2020 in areas reporting results so far.

Some of the biggest increases are in West Coast cities such as Sacramento and Portland, Ore., where growing homelessness has become a humanitarian crisis and political football over the past decade. Numbers are also up about 30 percent in South Dakota and Prince George's County, Maryland, and 15 percent in Asheville, N.C.

The data comes from the Point in Time counts the federal government requires communities to conduct to reflect how many people are without homes on a given winter night. The counts

usually rely on volunteer census-takers and are always imprecise. This year's tallies were conducted amid the pandemic and advocates caution changed counting methods could have thrown off results.

Research has shown places seeing spikes in homelessness often lack affordable housing. Making matters worse, pandemic government relief programs—including anti-eviction measures, emergency rental assistance and a child tax credit that kept people housed who may have been on the streets otherwise—are ending.

Donald Whitehead Jr., executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, said the counts are generally rising more where housing costs are jumping the fastest—but the government's response makes a difference, too.

Some communities where numbers are down, he said, "are really looking at housing people versus criminalizing people and putting them in encampments."

In Sacramento, where rents are soaring and officials disagree on

(See **AFTER COVID AID**, P. 2)



THE PROBLEM HAS GOTTEN MUCH WORSE AFTER COVID AID ENDED

Tiana, 8, Hopes Book Will Inspire Others

By Danielle Desouza

Freelancer

An eight-year-old girl who wrote a book about her natural hair hopes others will be inspired to love who they are, amid calls for better black representation and more "identity-affirming" characters in children's literature.

Tiana Akoh-Arrey, from southeast London, wrote her first book at the age of seven, called *My Afro: Twin Best Friends*, which was published in December 2021 and is about her and her best friend who had the same type of hair as her, "while everyone else has straight, silky or curly hair".

Speaking during Black History Month, which runs in October in the UK, Tiana told the PA news agency: "I wanted to show that people who have my type of hair have challenges and sometimes find it hard to love their hair texture plus all the struggle of making it look beautiful."

While in year one, Tiana took part in a writing programme called *Mrs Wordsmith* which gave her the confidence to start writing her own "little books".

She gave her work to her mother Dorothy, 39, who contacted Conscious Dreams Publishing.

With help from the publishing



company, the book sold more than 700 copies, which Tiana said "meant a lot to me", and she has plans to publish more.

"I've had a lot of comments on social media and also little girls all around the world have been showing pictures of my book saying that they love it and feel empowered to wear their afro hair to school, so that makes me really happy," she added.

Despite being "surprised at first" that her book was published, because of her age, Tiana said she wanted other young girls to find the courage to "fol-

low their passion".

"Follow your passion and just use your imagination as something that can help you in life because you never know where you can get in life, even if you are a child," she said.

"More importantly... love yourself and be accepting of others—we're all unique."

Enomwoyi Damali, an educational psychologist and author who lives in Lewisham, south London, spoke to PA about the importance of having diverse characters in children's books.

"A book should be like a mir-

ror," the 59-year-old said.

"When you hold up a book, you should see something positive about yourself.

"Now, if day by day, week after week and year after year what you're doing is picking up books and seeing characters that don't look like you, that will consciously or unconsciously affect your sense of wellbeing, your sense of identity and sense of what you believe you can aspire to achieve.

"And so it's really important that we have positive representation in books ... so when you, as a young black girl, pick up a book and you see that mirror reflected back to you as a young, black, positive character, it's affirming of you and your identity."

The author has published three children's books so far, which she was inspired to write after the death of her father, Cornelius Yearwood, aged 78.

The books feature a central young black female character called Nzingha and her diverse group of friends and explore themes including friendship, kindness, identity and loss, with the author adding she wanted to have a central character that "looked like me in terms of their skin colour and shared my culture heritage".



NC SENATE CANDIDATES TO MEET IN LIKELY ONLY TELEVISED DEBATE

(AP)—The two major-party candidates seeking to succeed retiring North Carolina Republican Sen. Richard Burr are meeting for what is likely their only televised debate.

Democrat Cheri Beasley and Republican Ted Budd agreed to a one-hour debate being held Friday night at a cable television studio in Raleigh.

Budd is a three-term congressman from Davie County who received the endorsement of former President Donald Trump over a year ago. Trump again campaigned on his behalf two weeks ago in Wilmington.

Beasley is a former chief justice of the state Supreme Court and would be the first Black senator for North Carolina if elected. The election outcome could decide which party takes a majority in the current 50-50 Senate.

Budd has said Beasley would push President Joe Biden's agenda that's led to inflation and unchecked immigration. Beasley says Budd would seek extreme abortion restrictions and has voted against efforts to rein in health care costs.

While Beasley's campaign has outraised Budd's, national Republicans have already spent over \$20 million on advertising opposing Beasley. Democrats in Washington haven't been as generous in fighting Budd.

DUKE ENERGY PROGRESS FILES NC RATE INCREASE PROPOSAL

CHARLOTTE (AP)—Duke Energy Progress formally asked North Carolina utilities regulators on Thursday to let it raise electric customer rates starting next year, with revenues generated used in part to toughen the electric grid and make it more flexible for renewable power.

The general rate increase request, if approved by the state Utilities Commission, would begin in October 2023. Smaller additional rate increases also are proposed for October 2024 and October 2025.

Under the proposal, Duke Energy Progress would seek a cumulative rate increase of 16 percent, with an 18.7 percent increase for residential customers, the company said.

Duke Energy Progress is one of Charlotte-based Duke Energy's two electric subsidiaries in the state. It serves 1.5 million customers in eastern and central North Carolina—including those in Raleigh, Fayetteville and Wilmington—as well as in and near Asheville.

A typical Duke Energy Progress residential customer would see their monthly bill rise from \$126.43 per month to \$141.15 in late 2023, with smaller increases in 2024 and 2025 to \$151.98, according to a news release.

Retail sales net revenues would grow by \$615 million through the proposal. Seventy-five percent of spending over the next three years consists of grid infrastructure improvements, according to the utility. Regulated utilities are permitted to earn a return on their business activity. The commission's Public Staff and customers can challenge the proposal.

Both Duke Energy Progress and Duke Energy Carolinas—which serves a swath of customers that includes those in Charlotte, the Triad and Durham, filed rate cases in 2019. The commission approved partial increases in 2021, with settlements to address costs to clean up coal ash pits.

Duke Energy Carolinas likely will propose its own new rate case in early 2023, spokesperson Bill Norton said.

Duke Energy Progress said the proposal would create a new program for low-income customers that could reduce their bills by \$42 per month. And new energy efficiency programs offered to all customers can help generate savings that "significantly offset" rate increases, the release said.

The Utilities Commission is currently weighing how it will permit the two subsidiaries to retool electric-generating capacity to comply with a law that demands carbon dioxide emission reductions by 2030 and 2050. Any approved plan will result in rate increases over time, too.

COURT: UNC STUDENTS CAN SEEK COVID SEMESTER REIMBURSEMENT

(AP)—Students at the University of North Carolina can continue their lawsuit seeking monetary damages for fees they paid before in-person fall 2020 classes were canceled due to COVID-19, a state appeals court ruled.

A three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals decided on Tuesday

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

Cooper Pushes To Legalize Pot Possession

By Hannah Schoenbaum

Associated Press/Report for America

North Carolina's two top Democratic state officials are urging the Republican-led legislature to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana

in light of President Joe Biden's pardon Thursday of thousands of Americans convicted of "simple possession" under federal law.

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper and Attorney General Josh Stein, the state's top lawyer who is considering a run for governor

in 2024, shared their support for the president's decision at a Friday task force meeting on racial equity and criminal justice.

Established by Cooper in June 2020 after George Floyd's murder, the 24-member panel of law enforcement officers, attorneys,

civil rights advocates and state officials had recommended in a 2020 report that state lawmakers replace the misdemeanor charge for possessing up to 1.5 ounces of marijuana with a civil offense on par with a traffic infraction.

The General Assembly did not act on this recommendation.

"Conviction of simple possession can mar people's records for life and maybe even prevent them from getting a job," Cooper told the task force Friday. "The General Assembly didn't pass your recommendations on this last session, but I believe they should. North Carolina should take steps to end this stigma."

Acknowledging that drug charging practices disproportionately impact people of color, Biden called on governors Thursday to issue similar pardons for those convicted of state marijuana offenses, which reflect the vast majority of possession cases. Although no one is currently in federal prison solely for "simple possession" of the drug, according to the White House, Biden said the pardon could help thousands overcome obstacles to renting a home or finding work. His pardon excludes those convicted of possessing marijuana with intent to distribute.

Cooper, who is term-limited and cannot seek reelection in 2024, said he has asked lawyers to examine state law and determine whether North Carolina

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(See **LEGALIZE POT**, P. 2)

NC Proud Boy Pleads Guilty

By Michael Kunzelman and
Alanna Durkin Richer

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—A North Carolina man pleaded guilty Thursday to plotting with other members of the far-right Proud Boys to violently stop the transfer of presidential power after the 2020 election, making him the first member of the extremist group to plead guilty to a seditious conspiracy charge.

Jeremy Joseph Bertino, 43, has agreed to cooperate with the Justice Department's investigation of the role that Proud Boys leaders played in the mob's attack on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, a federal prosecutor said.

Bertino's cooperation could ratchet up the pressure on other Proud Boys charged in the siege, including former national chairman Henry "Enrique" Tarrío.

The guilty plea comes as the founder of the another extremist group, the Oath Keepers, and

four associates charged separately in the Jan. 6 attack stand trial on seditious conspiracy—a rarely used Civil War era offense that calls for up to 20 years behind bars.

Bertino traveled to Washington with other Proud Boys in December 2020 and was stabbed during a fight, according to court documents. He was not in Washington for the Jan. 6 riot because he was still recovering from his injuries, court papers say.

Bertino participated in planning sessions in the days leading up to Jan. 6 and received encrypted messages as early as Jan. 4 indicating that Proud Boys were discussing possibly storming the Capitol, according to authorities.

A statement of offense filed in court says that Bertino understood the Proud Boys' goal in traveling to Washington was to stop the certification of Joe Biden's victory and that the group was prepared to use force

and violence if necessary to do so.

On Jan. 6, Bertino applauded the insurrection from afar and sent messages encouraging other Proud Boys to keep pushing toward the Capitol.

"DO NOT GO HOME. WE ARE ON THE CUSP OF SAVING THE CONSTITUTION," he wrote on a social media account. That night, he messaged Tarrío, "You know we made this happen."

Bertino also pleaded guilty to a charge of unlawfully possessing firearms in March 2022 in Belmont, N.C. U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly agreed to release Bertino pending a sentencing hearing, which wasn't immediately scheduled.

Justice Department prosecutor Erik Kenerson said sentencing guidelines for Bertino's case recommend a prison sentence ranging from four years and three months to five years and three

After COVID Aid, Homelessness Surges—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

how best to deal with the problem, homelessness has jumped 68 percent from 2020 to 2022—the most among larger cities reporting results so far.

The surge has been driven in part by the city's legacy of being more affordable than other California cities, which has attracted new residents, overwhelming the housing market. People moving out of the San Francisco Bay Area, 90 miles to the southwest, have flooded Sacramento with more potential homeowners and renters,

driving up prices.

A Zillow analysis found the average rent in July was \$2,300—a 28 percent increase since July 2019, before the pandemic began. Sacramento County's median income was about \$70,000 in 2020, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The crisis has deepened even as things have improved in other California cities that have contended for years with homelessness. Sacramento's efforts to address the problem have been marred by

years of squabbles between the city and county governments.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg has made reducing homelessness a priority since taking office in 2017. The city now has more than 900 beds in shelters and motels, compared to about 100 five years ago and has moved to ban single-family zoning, a move that could make it easier to build more housing.

But so far, it hasn't been enough. "People are becoming homeless much faster than we are getting them off the street," Steinberg told the AP.

Santos is among them. He's been able to sign up for food assistance but is still on a waiting list to access other benefits, he said. Each night he hunts for a park bench that feels safe to sleep on. When he lost a suitcase to broken wheels, he got rid of some of his warmer clothing, a decision he regrets as the fall evenings get colder.

"Luckily I've been able to keep afloat with what I have," he said.

Steinberg has advocated for adopting a legal right to shelter and a legal obligation for people to accept it when offered. The approach has drawn some criticism from advocates who say it's just a means of taking the problem out of the public eye without providing meaningful help for those who need it.

County officials voted in August to ban camping along Sacramento's American River Parkway, with a misdemeanor charge for people who don't comply. City voters will decide in November on a

ballot measure requiring the city to open hundreds more shelter beds. But it would only take effect if the county agrees to pony up money for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Still, the rise in homelessness is not uniform across the country.

In Boston, the number of people sleeping on the streets and in shelters has dropped 25 percent over two years as advocates focused on finding permanent housing for those on the streets the longest.

In some cities, "housing first" policies intended to move the homeless into permanent homes have paid off. And while the pandemic brought economic chaos, an eviction moratorium, boosted unemployment payments and family tax credits prevented some people from becoming homeless at all.

Along with Boston, numbers have fallen by about 20 percent or more in Houston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. Even in California, homeless counts are down in San Francisco, and growth has slowed significantly in Los Angeles.

The numbers have also dropped in California's Orange County, where there have been extensive efforts to remove encampments—though some advocates there question the accuracy of the count.

In Boston, Steven Hamilton moved into a new apartment in September after decades staying on a friend or relative's couch or in a homeless shelter.

With the help of a program run by the Boston Medical Center, he

was able to get a subsidized apartment in a public housing development. His portion of monthly rent is \$281—or about 30 percent of his Social Security payments.

"I'm grateful," he said. "I am not looking to move nowhere else. I am going to stay here until eternity. I lost a lot of stuff. I'm not going through that again."

After what he called a "horrible nightmare" in a shelter with residents injecting drugs in the bathroom, the studio apartment has changed his outlook. He's planning to get furniture, save money for a car and hopes to invite his family for Thanksgiving.

"I have a place I can call my own," he said.

Hamilton's studio apartment is the result of a Boston strategy whereby the city and area nonprofits use extensive outreach to get people who've been on the streets for over a year into apartments and then provide services such as drug treatment and life-skills training like budgeting with the help of case managers.

Since 2019, annual funding in Boston for homeless programs has jumped from \$31 million to over \$51 million.

Those efforts were bolstered last year by a city program that pulled together a list of homeless individuals to target for housing and other services. The city also moved to shut down one of its biggest homeless encampments, going tent-to-tent to assess the needs of those living there and referring more than 150 to shelters and other housing.

The efforts have not been

seamless. There have been reports of a cleared-out tent city re-emerging. And family homelessness numbers, though down from 2020, have ticked up in the past year.

Still, the city has been able to reduce the numbers of homeless people to about 6,000, down 25 percent since 2020.

Boston's shelters have become less crowded even as Zillow found the city's average rent rose to \$2,800 this summer—up 13 percent from three years earlier.

Housing advocates say prioritizing chronically homeless people ensures funds have the greatest impact, since the long-term homeless spend so much time in shelters. It also costs less to provide permanent housing than temporary shelter.

Lewis Lopez is among the success stories.

After cycling in and out of Boston shelters for several years, Lopez finally secured keys to his own apartment. No longer fearing his possessions would be stolen or he would get into fights over food, the 61-year-old felt he had finally gotten his life back.

"I felt so free, like a ton of bricks were lifted off my shoulders," Lopez said of the studio apartment he has lived in for five years, paid for partly with federal funds.

"I felt like part of society again," he said.

Casey reported from Boston. Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, N.J. Kavish Harjai in Los Angeles contributed.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

that a trial judge correctly last year refused to dismiss litigation filed by two students against the UNC Board of Governors. The students—Landry Kuehn at UNC-Chapel Hill and the Joseph Lannan at North Carolina State University—also sued on behalf of other students at the two schools who paid similar fees.

The lawsuit alleged a breach of contract occurred when the students who registered for the fall 2020 semester paid health service, campus security and parking fees among others with an understanding that services and benefits would be provided, but they weren't. The students alleged they failed to receive proper refunds when campuses like N.C. State and UNC-Chapel Hill moved in-person classes online, "evicted all students from on-campus housing" and curtailed health services.

Lannan is due about \$1,500 and Kuehn about \$1,125, the lawsuit alleges, while other students at their schools at that time should be recompensed, too. The board's lawyers have written previously that students had been informed that the instruction format during the semester could change and that fee refunds would not be forthcoming if that occurred.

The Board of Governors argued on the appeal in part that the lawsuit should be dismissed on grounds of sovereign immunity, which blocks such litigation against state government unless an agency consents.

Writing for the panel, Court of Appeals Chief Judge Chris Donna Stroud said the plaintiffs adequately alleged the existence of an implied contract, which can waive such immunity. Judges Chris Dillon and Darren Jackson joined in Stroud's opinion. The UNC board could ask the state Supreme Court to take up the case, but the justices aren't obligated to do so given that the opinion was unanimous.

North Carolina campuses similarly eliminated online classes and closed dormitories during the spring 2020 semester, but the General Assembly passed a law that year giving public and private colleges immunity from pandemic-related legal claims for tuition and fees. But it didn't apply to claims in future semesters.

JUDGE: ITG IS LIABLE FOR FLORIDA TOBACCO SETTLEMENT PAYMENTS

DOVER, Del. (AP)—Cigarette manufacturer ITG Brands assumed liability for tobacco settlement payments to the state of Florida when it acquired four brands from Reynolds American in 2015, a Delaware judge has ruled.

Vice Chancellor Lori Will ruled Friday that, as a result, ITG must compensate Reynolds American for losses due, granting summary judgment in favor of Reynolds.

Reynolds sold the Kool, Winston, Salem and Maverick brands to ITG in 2014 to gain federal regulators' approval of its acquisition of Lorillard Inc.

Before the sale closed, Reynolds American affiliate R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. was making payments under a preexisting settlement agreement with Florida for reimbursement of smoking-related health care costs. After closing, Reynolds stopped making payments for the four brands it no longer owned.

The asset purchase agreement required ITG to use reasonable best efforts to join the Florida settlement and make annual payments to Florida for sales of the brands it acquired from Reynolds. ITG has yet to join the settlement agreement with Florida or make any payments.

Florida sued Reynolds and ITG and obtained a judgment requiring Reynolds to continue making payments based on ITG's brands, unless and until ITG joined the Florida settlement agreement.

"That judgment on Reynolds amounts to over \$170 million to date and tens of millions of dollars more each year into perpetuity," Will noted. The "unambiguous terms" of the asset purchase agreement support Reynolds' arguments that ITG agreed to assume the liability imposed by the Florida judgment and must indemnify Reynolds, she concluded.

The ruling comes in a long-running legal battle between Reynolds and ITG, both based in North Carolina. In 2017, a different Court of Chancery judge concluded that ITG's obligation to use its best efforts to try to reach a tobacco settlement agreement with Florida did not end when the sale closed.

Last year, Reynolds asked ITG to compensate Reynolds Tobacco for what it had paid and will pay due to the Florida judgment, but ITG refused. In subsequent litigation, ITG argued unsuccessfully that it had fulfilled its reasonable best efforts obligation and was not required to indemnify Reynolds for the payment liability to Florida.

Last year, in the settlement of a lawsuit brought by the state of Minnesota, ITG agreed that it had assumed obligations under that state's tobacco settlement agreement to make payments for sales of the four brands it acquired from Reynolds. ITG agreed to make payments to Minnesota for 2021 and all future years, while payment liabilities for the period from 2015 to 2020 were split between ITG and Reynolds.

Cooper Pushes To Legalize—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

can and should take further action to pardon these convictions. The clemency provision of the state constitution grants the governor near-absolute pardoning power.

While federal law still classifies cannabis as a Schedule I drug, 19 states and the District of Columbia have legalized its recreational use, and 37 states and the District of Columbia have legalized its medical use, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. North Carolina, however, has been slow to follow suit.

The Republican-led state Senate passed a bill earlier this year with strong bipartisan support

that would have legalized marijuana for medical use with a physician's prescription, if purchased through dozens of tightly regulated dispensaries.

But the bill idled in the House, where many Republicans held reservations about legalizing cannabis in any form. Opponents of the bill warned the health benefits remain uncertain and may not outweigh the health risks.

House Speaker Tim Moore said in June that the chamber would wait until 2023 to reconsider legalizing medical marijuana.

Current state law makes possession of more than 0.5 ounces punishable by up to 45 days in

jail and up to \$1,000 in fines, without exemptions for medical use. Possession of more than 1.5 ounces is classified as a felony.

"People should not have a federal criminal record for something that is legal in an increasing number of states," Stein said Thursday. "Let's act, and let's get it right. That means decriminalizing adult use, expunging past convictions for simple possession, and including strong protections for kids, no advertising, state controlled sales and putting N.C. farmers first."

Although Black and White North Carolina residents use marijuana at approximately the same rate, the task force found

that people of color make up a disproportionate percentage of those convicted of simple possession, paralleling nationwide concerns of racial bias. Roughly 60 percent of North Carolinians convicted for possessing up to half an ounce of marijuana in 2019 were non-White, according to the most recent report.

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 at @H_Schoenbaum.

NC Proud Boy Pleads Guilty—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

months.

A trial is scheduled to start in December for Tarrío and four other members charged with seditious conspiracy: Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl and Dominic Pezzola. The charging document for Bertino's case names those five defendants and a sixth Proud Boys member as his co-conspirators.

Tarrío's case is among the most serious charged in the attack, which sent lawmakers running and left dozens of officers bloodied and bruised.

Nayib Hassan, one of Tarrío's attorneys, said Bertino's cooperation doesn't change the landscape for his client's case. He described Bertino as "just another individual who is going to be testifying." Tarrío is "still looking forward to his day at

trial," Hassan added.

The indictment in Tarrío's case alleges that the Proud Boys held meetings and communicated over encrypted messages to plan for the attack in the days leading up to Jan. 6. On the day of the riot, authorities say Proud Boys dismantled metal barricades set up to protect the Capitol and mobilized, directed and led members of the crowd into the building.

Video testimony by Bertino was featured in June at the first hearing by the House committee investigating Jan. 6. The committee showed a clip of Bertino saying that the group's membership "tripled, probably" after Trump's comment at a presidential debate that the Proud Boys should "stand back and stand by."

Tarrío wasn't in Washington

on Jan. 6, but authorities say he helped put into motion the violence that day. Police arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot and charged him with vandalizing a Black Lives Matter banner at a historic Black church during a protest in December 2020. Tarrío was released from jail on Jan. 14 of this year after serving his five-month sentence for that case.

More than three dozen people charged in the Capitol riot have been identified by federal authorities as leaders, members or associates of the Proud Boys. Two—Matthew Greene and Charles Donohoe—pleaded guilty to conspiring to obstruct an official proceeding, the Jan. 6 joint session of Congress for certifying the Electoral College vote.

Proud Boys members describe

the group as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists." They have brawled with antifascist activists at rallies and protests. Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, who founded the Proud Boys in 2016, sued the Southern Poverty Law Center for labeling it as a hate group.

Nordean, of Auburn, Wash., was a Proud Boys chapter president and a member of the group's national "Elders Council." Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Fla., is a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Rehl was president of the Proud Boys chapter in Philadelphia. Pezzola is a Proud Boys member from Rochester, New York.

For full coverage of the Capitol riot, go to <https://www.apnews.com/capitol-siege/>.

Planned Parenthood Pours \$5M Into Vital Race

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP)—Planned Parenthood's political arm announced a \$5 million investment Thursday in North Carolina's battleground races as Democrats fight to preserve the governor's veto power in one of the last abortion access points in the Southeast.

Just 32 days from Election Day, with absentee voting now underway, Planned Parenthood Votes and Planned Parenthood Action PAC North Carolina are targeting 14 legislative swing districts with ads, mailings, phone banks and canvassing. The investment is part of an existing \$50 million national campaign to protect reproductive rights in nine target states—the largest-ever electoral program in its history.

Abortions are legal in North Carolina until 20 weeks of pregnancy, as of an Aug. 17 federal court ruling. But with Republicans just five seats shy of a supermajority in the General Assembly—three seats shy in the House and two in the Senate—Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's power to veto more stringent abortion restrictions hinges on the November outcome.

As its neighboring states slash abortion access in the months following the June U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning Roe v. Wade, North Carolina has become one of the South's few safe havens for the procedure.

Emily Thompson, deputy director of Planned Parenthood Action



Hundreds of demonstrators rally and march in downtown Raleigh, N.C., June 24, 2022 in opposition to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision overturning Roe v. Wade. Travis Long Photo

PAC North Carolina, said several of the state's races play a critical role in cementing access to life-saving care for patients in the Tar Heel state and those traveling from other Southern states where abortion is already banned.

The committee's chief priority, she said, is preventing a Republican supermajority in the General Assembly by focusing attention and resources on five battleground state Senate races.

"If we don't elect reproductive rights champions in five key state Senate races, an anti-abortion su-

permajority will have the votes to ban abortion in North Carolina," Thompson said. "And if we don't defend two critical North Carolina Supreme Court seats, we will lose our last line of defense against restrictive state laws designed to rob us of our right to make our own health care decisions."

In an interview this week, GOP state Senate leader Phil Berger said Democrats' accusations that Republicans would fully ban abortion in North Carolina if they obtain veto-proof majorities are misguided.

Berger said he is not aware of a General Assembly GOP leader who has said they personally support legislation outlawing abortion outright, with no exceptions for rape, incest and the life of the patient.

"They've not been able to point to anybody because it doesn't exist," Berger said Wednesday. He recently said he preferred approving restrictions on abortions after roughly the first three months of pregnancy.

House Speaker Tim Moore has said he personally supports restricting abortions once an ultrasound first detects fetal cardiac activity—typically about six weeks after fertilization and before many patients know they're pregnant.

In addition to state legislative races, Planned Parenthood is funneling resources into North Carolina's high-profile U.S. Senate contest and two state Supreme Court races, which have become recent magnets for Democratic groups working to protect abortion rights nationwide.

Democrats currently hold a 4-3 majority on the panel, but with two Democratic seats up for grabs this November, Republicans need to win just one to retake control of the high court for the first time in six years. The candidates have largely avoided the topic of abortion, instead pitching themselves as the neutral solution to an increasingly politicized judiciary.

The Carolinian

(ISSN 00455873)

1504 New Bern Avenue, Raleigh, North Carolina 27610

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 25308

Raleigh, North Carolina 27611

Periodical Postage Paid at Raleigh North Carolina 27611

Warrenton Address: P.O. Box 536

Warrenton, NC 27589

Postmaster

Send all address changes to:

The Carolinian

1504 New Bern Avenue

Raleigh, NC 27610

PUBLISHED SIX TIMES MONTHLY

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

One Year\$45.00

Payable in advance. Address all communications and make all checks and money orders payable to The Carolinian.

Founded by P.R. Jervay, Sr. in 1940

The Carolinian Newspaper, Inc. of Raleigh

Publisher Adria Jervay

Production Manager Howard Barnett

Sales Consultant Paul R. Jervay, Jr.

Circulation Manager Andrew Alston

Jervay Agency, National Advertising Representative

www.TheJervayAgency.com

Member:

North Carolina Black Publishers Association

National Newspaper Publishers Association

HUB Certified MWBE

The Publisher is not responsible for the return of unsolicited news, pictures or advertising copy unless necessary postage accompanies the copy.

Opinions expressed by columnists in this newspaper do not necessarily represent the policy of the newspaper.

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Business & Finance

Can Biden Save Our Democracy One Factory At A Time?

By Josh Boak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—President Joe Biden is working to create a manufacturing revival—even helping to put factory jobs in Republican territory under the belief it can restore faith in U.S. democracy.

The latest development came Tuesday, when chipmaker Micron announced an investment of up to \$100 billion over the next 20-plus years to build a plant in upstate New York that could create 9,000 factory jobs. It's a commitment made in a GOP congressional district that Biden and the company credited to the recently enacted \$280 billion CHIPS and Science Act.

"Today is another win for America, and another massive new investment in America spurred by my economic plan," Biden said in a statement. "Together, we are building an economy from the bottom up and the middle out, where we lower costs for our families and make it right here in America."

Biden has staked his presidency on what he has called "a historic manufacturing boom," hoping to succeed where past presidents, governors and hordes of other politicians have struggled for a half-century. His goal is to keep opening new factories in states such as Ohio, Idaho, North Carolina and Georgia—where Democrats' footholds are shaky at best. Administration officials say they want to spread the prosperity across the entire country, rather than let it cluster in centers of ex-

treme wealth, in a bid to renew the middle class and a sense of pride in the country itself.

The push comes at a precarious moment for the global economy. High inflation in the U.S. has hurt Biden's popularity and prompted recession concerns. Much of Europe faces a possible downturn due to the jump in energy prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while the International Monetary Fund just downgraded growth in China. The world economy is defined by uncertainty just as Biden has called for investments in clean energy and technology that could take years to pay off.

The president is hopeful that whatever good manufacturing can do for the U.S. economy also turns out to yield political benefits for himself and other Democrats in 2022 and beyond. He told Democratic donors on Friday that the manufacturing and technology investments mean "we have an opportunity" to strengthen the U.S. if Democratic governors and lawmakers are elected this year.

Going into the midterm elections, Biden is telling voters that a factory renaissance has already started because of him. The administration sees its infrastructure spending, computer chip investments and clean-energy incentives as helping domestic manufacturing in unprecedented ways.

Recent academic studies suggest that decades of layoffs due to offshoring contributed to the rise of Republican Donald Trump, with his opposition to immigration and global trade.

But many of the authors of the studies doubt that Biden can make these demographic trends disappear through the promise of jobs for skilled workers.

Democratic Rep. Ro Khanna of California would like to see the president make a national tour of factory openings, so that his policies could stick better in voters' minds. Khanna recently attended the groundbreaking of a \$20 billion Intel plant in Ohio and laid out his belief that factory job losses helped cause today's political schisms.

The Silicon Valley congressman reasons that too many Americans have lost faith in a government that seemed indifferent to their own well-being, leading them to embrace hucksters and authoritarians who thrive by exploiting and widening divisions in society.

"How do you get rid of people's jobs and expect them to believe in democracy?" Khanna asks.

Factory jobs have risen during Biden's tenure to the most since 2008 at 12.85 million, yet the task of steadying the country's middle class and its democratic institutions is far from complete. The industrial Midwest has yet to recover the factory jobs shed in the pandemic, let alone decades of layoffs in which the economic challenges evolved into political tensions.

Labor Department data show that Ohio is still 10,000 factory jobs shy of its pre-pandemic level and 350,000 jobs below its total in 2000. The numbers are similarly bad in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin—three states that were key to



TOUTING NEW MANUFACTURING—President Biden speaks with IBM Chairman and CEO Arvind Krishna, second from right, and New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D), right, during a tour of an IBM facility in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. [AP Photo/Andrew Harnik]

Biden's 2020 victory and could help decide control of Congress in November's elections.

The White House says Biden eschews thinking about Americans solely as consumers interested only in the cheapest prices and thus promoting outsourcing. Instead, his speeches are

woven with talk about people as workers and the identity that working gives them.

What Biden can show with this year's factory groundbreakings is progress, even if the total number of manufacturing jobs is unlikely to return to the 1979 peak of 19.55

million. Intel's computer chip plant being built in New Albany, Ohio, would add 3,000 jobs. Hyundai would add 8,100 jobs with its electric vehicle plant in Georgia. Wolfspeed, with plans to produce silicon carbide wafers in North Carolina, would add 1,800 jobs.

Mich. OKs \$400 Mill For Batteries

By Joey Cappelletti

Associated Press/Report for America

LANSING, Mich. (AP)—A Michigan economic development board approved more than \$400 million in state incentives Wednesday for two battery factories estimated to cost \$4 billion and bring 4,500 jobs to the state.

Pending approval by state lawmakers, the incentive packages would draw from a fund created less than a year ago to help the automotive state land major business expansions in the wake of news that Dearborn-based Ford Motor Co. would begin building electric vehicle battery plants in other states.

"We are in global competition to make sure that Michigan stays on the cutting edge of auto manufacturing. Investments like the ones that we've announced today are game changers," Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said Wednesday in an interview with The Associated Press.

A Michigan energy-storage company, Our Next Energy, would be allocated \$236 million in the agreement for an up to \$1.6 billion project in Van Buren Township outside of Detroit. An allocation of \$175 million in incentives will go to a \$2.4 billion factory planned by Chinese manufacturer Gotion for Big Rapids in northern Michigan. The factories would produce components

used for electric vehicle batteries.

President Joe Biden showcased his administration's efforts to promote electric vehicles during an appearance at the Detroit auto show last month when he said Michigan is "building the future of the electric vehicle."

Under his Inflation Reduction Act, the batteries must be built in North America for electric vehicles to be eligible for a federal tax credit of up to \$7,500.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation board passed the incentives Wednesday but legislative approval will need to come through the House and Senate appropriations committees. A timeline for the committees' approval is unknown, according to a spokesman.

The \$2.4 billion Gotion project, which is planned on a 523-acre site in Big Rapids, would create 2,350 jobs with average wages of \$29.42 per hour, according to the company's proposal. The factory will produce cathodes and anodes, two components that are key to electric vehicle batteries. The board also approved a 30-year Renaissance Zone that was approved last week by county officials and will save the company an estimated \$540 million.

Our Next Energy says it's 59,000-square-foot factory planned in Van Buren Township will cost \$1.6 billion and create

2,112 new jobs making "battery packs for commercial and consumer Electric Vehicles."

Quentin L. Messer Jr., CEO of the state economic development corporation, said the \$400 million in incentives are performance-based, in case targets aren't met.

"If the company performs but then subsequently has nonperformance, and if that nonperformance isn't subsequently remedied, then those state tax dollars will be returned back to the taxpayers of Michigan," Messer said during an interview with the AP.

The Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve fund was passed by the Republican-controlled Legislature last year with a \$1.5 billion budget.

To date, \$794 million in incentives have been used from the SOAR funds, including a \$666 million allocation in March for General Motors projects and another \$101 million in July for Ford projects. Lawmakers approved an additional \$846 million last week to replenish the fund.

"Michigan has to compete for the jobs of tomorrow and the only way to do that is to be in the game," Curtis Hertel, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, told the AP last week.

Joey Cappelletti is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative.

Judge Delays Twitter Trial Start

By Matt O'Brien and Barbara Ortutay

AP Technology Writers

A judge has delayed a looming trial between Twitter and Elon Musk, giving the Tesla CEO more time to close his \$44 billion deal to buy the company after months spent fighting to get out of it.

Musk had asked to halt the upcoming Delaware court trial, where the Tesla billionaire was expected to fare poorly against Twitter's lawsuit to force him to complete his April merger agreement. Musk revived the takeover offer on Monday but said he needed time to get the financing in order.

Chancellor Kathaleen St. Jude McCormick, head of the Delaware Chancery Court, said Thursday that Musk and Twitter now have until Oct. 28 to close the deal. A trial originally set for Oct. 17 will happen in November if they don't, she said.

Twitter had asked McCormick earlier Thursday to proceed with the trial, saying the billionaire refuses to accept the "contractual obligations" of his April

agreement to buy the social media company and take it private.

Twitter disputed Musk's claim that the San Francisco-based company is refusing to accept his renewed bid. Musk told Twitter earlier this week he's ready to buy the company once again after trying to back out of the deal over the summer, accusing it of refusing to give him information about "spam bot" accounts on the service.

Twitter described Musk's move to delay the trial as "an invitation to further mischief and delay" after his arguments for terminating the agreement haven't had merit.

But after the judge's ruling, Twitter reiterated in a statement that it was ready to close the deal on the share price agreed upon in April: "We look forward to closing the transaction at \$54.20 by October 28th," referring to the price Musk originally offered for each Twitter share.

Brooklyn Law School professor Andrew Jennings said Twitter wants to be certain that the deal will get done and not allow "wiggle room for Musk to walk

away again."

Musk attorneys argued that Twitter was disagreeing with the trial delay "based on the theoretical possibility" of Musk not coming up with the financing, which they called "baseless speculation."

They said Musk's financial backers "have indicated that they are prepared to honor their commitments" and are working to close the deal by Oct. 28.

Musk attorney Alex Spiro said in a statement Thursday that "Twitter offered Mr. Musk billions off the transaction price" but Musk "refused because Twitter attempted to put certain self-serving conditions on the deal." He didn't elaborate on what those conditions were. Twitter hasn't described the talks beyond what its attorneys have said in court.

Twitter's shares fell \$1.91, or 3.7 percent, to close at \$49.39 on Thursday. It was the stock's second day of declines following a surge of more than 22 percent on Tuesday after Musk made his renewed offer to buy the company.

drones in the region and warned against interfering with their operations.

The drone drill—and the American pledge to keep sailing them—also comes as tensions between the U.S. and Iran on the seas remain high amid stalled negotiations over its tattered nuclear deal with world powers and as protests sweep the Islamic Republic.

Friday's drill involved two American and two British warships in the Persian Gulf, as well

as three Sailer Explorer, said Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for the Navy's Midwest-based 5th Fleet.

The drones searched for a target on the seas, then sent the still images its cameras captured back to both the warships and the 5th Fleet's command center in the island kingdom of Bahrain. There, an artificial intelligence system worked through the photos.

The 5th Fleet launched its unmanned Task Force 59 last year. Drones used by the Navy in-

clude ultra-endurance aerial surveillance drones, surface ships like the Sea Hawk and the Sea Hunter and smaller underwater drones that resemble torpedoes.

But of particular interest for the Navy has been the Sailer Explorer, a commercially available drone that can stay at sea for long periods of time. That's crucial for a region that has some 5,000 miles of coastline from the Suez Canal, down the Red Sea to the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz and into the Persian Gulf.

It's a vast territory that stretches the reach of the Navy and its allies and has seen a series of attacks amid the atomic accord's collapse. It also remains crucial to global shipping and energy supplies, as a fifth of all oil traded passes through the Strait of Hormuz.

"No matter what forces you have, you can't cover all that," Hawkins told The Associated Press. "You have to do that in a partnered way and an innovative way."

But Iran, which long has equated America's presence in the region to it patrolling the Gulf of Mexico, views the drones with suspicion. In August and September, Iranian regular and paramilitary forces seized Sailer Explorers in both the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, alleging without providing evidence that the drones posed a danger to nearby ships.

Iran ultimately released the drones after the U.S. Navy arrived to the sites. Cameras on the

Sailer Explorers involved in the Red Sea incident went missing.

Iranian state-run media did not acknowledge the drill Friday. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"Recent events notwithstanding, we have been operating these systems safely, responsibly and in accordance with international law and will continue to do so," Hawkins said.

The Navy underscored its plan to keep operating the drones in notices sent to shippers and sailors in the region beginning Thursday. It said that the drones would continue to broadcast their location via their Automatic Identification System trackers.

Ships are supposed to keep their AIS trackers on, but Iranian vessels routinely turn theirs off to mask their movements as Tehran faces international sanctions over its nuclear program and human rights abuses.

"U.S. Navy (drones) are U.S. government property and will lawfully operate in international waters and through straits in accordance with internationally recognized rights and freedoms," the Navy said in the notice. "Any interference with U.S. Navy (drones) will be considered a violation of the norms of international maritime law."

Follow Jon Gambrell on Twitter at www.twitter.com/jongambrellAP.



A SAILDRONE EXPLORER IN THE PERSIAN GULF. © AFP / US CENTRAL COMMAND

Classifieds

PUBLIC NOTICE REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

The City of Raleigh will accept sealed, written proposals for Property Demolition (as per specifications) of City of Raleigh owned property located at 2000-06 Hawkins St. on October 24, 2022 at 4:00 pm. A mandatory pre-proposal meeting will be held on-site on Thursday, October 13, 2022 at 1:00 pm. Information is also posted on the City's Housing and Neighborhood's website. The City of Raleigh reserves the right to reject all proposals.

