

United Furniture Industries Laid Off All 2,700 Workers While They Were Sleeping

A big US furniture company last week fired all of its 2,700 employees while they were sleeping, telling them in texts and emails not to come to work the next day, according to reports.

The mass firing on Tuesday by United Furniture Industries, which makes budget-friendly sofas and recliners for Simmons Upholstery, left thousands of employees including truck drivers and factory workers in North Carolina, Mississippi and California unemployed just two days before Thanksgiving.

"At the instruction of the board of directors ... we regret to inform you that due to unforeseen business circumstances, the company has been forced to make the difficult decision to terminate the employment of all its employees, effective immediately, on Nov. 21," the company said in messages to employees.

"With the exception of over-

the-road drivers that are out on delivery. Your layoff from the company is expected to be permanent and all benefits will be terminated immediately without provision of COBRA."

The privately held, Okolona, Miss.-based company could not be reached for comment.

Drivers were told they'd be paid for the remainder of the week and that they should immediately "return equipment, inventory and delivery documents," according to the memo.

A UFI truck driver was arrested in Monroe County, Miss., on suspicion of taking furniture off of a truck after he was laid off by the company, according to the Daily Press.

It's not clear why the two-decade-old company dissolved its operations so suddenly, but over the summer it had fired its chief executive, chief financial officer and executive vice president of sales, according to FurnitureToday.com. Several weeks

later, some 500 employees lost their jobs at multiple facilities in Winston-Salem, NC, and Verona, Miss., and Victorville, Calif.

On Tuesday, workers were later told they could come to their work spaces to "gather their belongings," a UFI spokesperson told Freightwaves.com.

A laid-off worker told the publication, "It's not fair to the laborers who seriously worked so hard to be blindsided like this. It's not fair to the mom who just had a baby to wonder if she even has health insurance to cover it. It's not fair to the cancer patein in the midst of chemo about how to pay for her treatments."

On Wednesday a former employee in Mississippi, Toria Neal, filed a lawsuit against UFI, alleging that the company violated federal law by failing to give 60 days' notice before dissolving the operations.



United Furniture Industry employees were given no explanation for why they were terminated so abruptly. Photograph: United Furniture Industries

Study Reveals 'Crisis' In New Recruit Police Training Across America

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

A comprehensive new report asserted that American authorities have traditionally trained police officers on the cheap, noting that more than 71% of agencies devote less than 5% of their total budget to recruit training.

Issued by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the report found that nearly half of the agencies responding to the survey agreed that spending on recruit training had increased over the past five years.

However, that was before police budgets faced the dual challenges of cuts related to the COVID-19 pandemic and calls to "defund" the police.

The 84-page exposition noted that investments in training could be stalled or reduced at the very time they need to increase to bring about changes required in American policing.

Researchers found that in many jurisdictions, "the goal seems to be moving as many recruits as possible through academy training as fast as possible and at the lowest possible cost."

They argued that this approach had been driven partly by the desire to quickly get more officers on the street - a challenge that became particularly acute as officer hirings declined and retirements and resignations increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic and as homicides and other violent crimes surged.



"Besides recruiting and hiring, there is perhaps no activity that is more crucial to the success of police departments and sheriffs' offices than how they train recruits," researchers wrote.

"Recruit training is where new officers acquire the basic knowledge and skills to do their jobs. It's where they learn the right way to do things and have an opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them, without the serious consequences of making those mistakes in the field."

They continued: "It is where new officers acquire the foundation of technical know-how that will stay with them throughout their careers. But recruit training is about more than just technical instruction."

"Recruit training is where prospective officers are introduced to the concept of public safety and public service. The

training academy is where police agencies can articulate their philosophy and vision and begin to instill their core values.

"Finally, recruit training is where agencies build and reinforce their culture through the next group of frontline employees."

While policing has changed in many respects throughout the years, officers struggle with challenges on several fronts, including dealing with individuals in crisis.

The report contended that, far too often, police recruits are trained as warriors, not as guardians and partners intended for civil communities.

To effect change, new officers should receive new and adequate instruction sensitive to the communities they serve, researchers wrote.

"The current state of recruit training demands that we re-

think - and remake - the system for how new police officers is trained," the researchers argued.

"We need national consensus and national standards on what the training contains, how it is delivered, and by whom."

"This report may present a grim picture of the current state of recruit training, but it also puts forth a series of principles that can help guide the transformation of training to meet the challenges of policing for today and tomorrow."

Chuck Wexler, the executive director of the PERF, said one could ascertain much about a police training academy from the moment an individual walks in the door and encounter a group of recruits.

"If the recruits immediately back up against the nearest wall, look straight ahead, and bark out in unison, 'Good morning, ma'am!' or 'Good afternoon, sir!' you pretty much know the culture and operating philosophy of that academy," Wexler stated.

"If, on the other hand, the recruits pause, look you in the eye, and offer a more conversational, 'Good morning, sir' or 'How are you today, ma'am,' that tells you something else.

"Academies have traditionally followed a paramilitary, boot camp-like model that emphasizes discipline, deportment, following orders, and a strict hierarchy where recruits are often on the

(See **CRISIS**, P. 2)



CONNECT HUMANITY INVESTS \$350,000 IN WAVE 7 COMMUNICATIONS, LLC TO EXPAND BROADBAND IN ENFIELD, NORTH CAROLINA

Wave 7 Communications today announced a \$350,000 investment from Connect Humanity to expand its internet service to 400+ additional homes in Enfield, North Carolina.

Internet service for most families and businesses in Enfield is painfully slow, running on dated DSL or cable technology that is not adequate for everyday tasks like streaming content and holding stable video calls.

Offering speeds up to 3x faster than existing internet services, the expansion of Wave 7's footprint will mean many more residents are able to work from home, learn online, and stay connected with family.

"Reliable internet is not a luxury. It's something that every family should have," said LaShawn Williamson, Wave 7 CEO. "We founded this company to make sure that everyone in Enfield can connect to fast, affordable internet. With this investment from Connect Humanity, we will be able to serve 400 more households."

The high price of internet service in Enfield is currently a barrier preventing many families from getting online. With a 'pay as you go' pricing model and 'always on' tier for those struggling with bills, Wave 7 removes cost barriers for subscribers. Families eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) can also receive \$30 of free internet each month from Wave 7.

With fewer than 1 in 3 families in Enfield currently subscribed to home internet service, the expansion of Wave 7's affordable package will enable most of the town's currently unconnected families and businesses to get online, which will carry benefits to the local economy, healthcare, and education.

Connect Humanity Chief Executive Jochai Ben-Avie said: "Wave 7 is connecting the unconnected residents of Enfield and showing it's possible to build a successful, sustainable connectivity provider even in a low-income, rural community. Community-minded operators like Wave 7 are the key to providing high-speed, affordable access in communities that other providers have neglected."

As an investor, not only were we impressed that Wave 7 is providing better internet than existing operators, we were drawn to LaShawn's real commitment to the community. Programs like Wave 7's digital skills training for senior citizens, scholarships for free devices for students, and free WiFi in the library will be critical to the long-term success of the company and the community. Connect Humanity is thrilled to invest in Wave 7 and the Town of Enfield."

Today Wave 7 currently provides service to 75 customers, including local businesses and public facilities. It also offers free WiFi hotspots at the public library.

NORTH CAROLINA BUSINESS OWNER GIVES THANKS FOR THE GIFT OF MUSIC WITH DONATIONS TO LOCAL STUDENTS

National Pawn has a longstanding tradition of supporting youth music programs in every county where a store is located. For the first time in three years, they are back - inspiring the next generation of musicians.

National Pawn gathered with students and faculty at East Millbrook Magnet Middle School in Raleigh and Neal Magnet Middle School in Durham to present over 100 instruments, computers, and a \$2000 cash donation to each school's band program. CEO Bob Moulton has always sought to give back to the communities his stores serve and, notably, to support music education due to his own experiences growing up.

"I think music and band give children something positive to do. There are a lot of kids who can't afford to be in the band, and this will hopefully allow anyone who wants to participate the opportunity to do so," Moulton said.

With a passion for music since he was a child, Moulton found it challenging to join the school band due to the financial strains on his family. When his mother found a used trumpet in a yard sale, Moulton was able to live out his musical dreams by joining the band at Neal Middle School in Durham. Now a successful business owner, Moulton wants to ensure that every child interested in joining a school music program can pursue those opportunities.

It came full circle as Moulton spoke on Friday to the students at Neal. "My memories are of the fun that I had in the band. Later in life, I realize you learn much more than how to read music or play an instrument. You develop a sense of self and collaboration," said Moulton.

Preparing For The Drone Era Of Warfare

By Sunny Peter

International Business Times

While the use of off-the-shelf, cheap commercial drones ushers in a new era of modern warfare, the U.S. military has tested its newest ground-based drone killer - the Light Marine Air-Defense Integrated System (LMADIS).

The LMADIS gives the force the ability to deter and neutralize unmanned aircraft systems, according to a news release from Marine Corps. The tests were done by the U.S. Marines assigned under the 2nd Low Altitude Air Defense (LAAD) Battalion.

"Due to the current drone threat, we need an expeditionary system that will combat it. The LMADIS serves as a system that can be deployed at a moment's notice and attach to units that need counter-UAS capabilities," U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Dustin Yonkings, a LAAD gunner with 2nd LAAD, said, as per the news release.

"With the constant evolving



U.S. Marine Corps Pfc. Clayton Hilemon and Sgt. Alexander Loconielsen, a low-altitude air-defense gunners with 2nd Low Altitude Air Defense Battalion, transmits an electronic signal to an incoming drone with the Light Marine Air Defense Integrated System, or L-MADIS, at Marine Corps Outlying Landing Field Atlantic, North Carolina, Oct. 18, 2022.

of commercial drones, the one thing that won't change is the required frequencies used to pilot any drone," Yonkings added.

The LMADIS mitigates drone

threats by disrupting the electronic signals between the UAS and its controller.

The LMADIS reportedly uses electronic weapons set-up on a

light and compact frame, the Polaris MRZR - an ultra-light combat vehicle. The system components include the CM262U optic acting as the "eyes" of the system, while the RPS-42 radar and Skyview MP offer 360-degree air surveillance and long-range drone detection. The parts also include the Modi II, a dismountable electronic-warfare system used to disrupt enemy drones and communications alongside the AN/PRC-158 multi-channel manpack radio system, allowing the LMADIS to communicate with troops and commanders.

Apart from the rise in the use of commercial drones, the proliferation of the technology has meant that there is also a growing risk of more and more countries and non-state actors using cheap drones for military purposes and carrying out terror attacks. Counter-drone systems that use cost-effective mechanisms thus become the key weapon for all current and future conflicts.

(See **DRONE ERA**, P. 2)

Study Reveals 'Crisis' In New Recruits —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

lowest rung. Wexler continued: "Discipline and following the chain of command are certainly important and necessary aspects of police training and operations. But when those elements become so pervasive that they over-

shadow almost everything else, it can undermine the academy's mission, which is to prepare new police officers to serve and protect their communities with compassion and humanity."

Researchers concluded the report by noting that American

policing needs to re-imagine and retool recruit training.

They recommended that officials rethink how academies are operated and staffed, what the recruit curriculum contains, and how the training is delivered and by whom.

They also suggested authorities rethink how to use reality-based scenario training more broadly and effectively and how recruit training integrates with field training once recruits leave the academy.

"Re-imagining policing begins

with tackling how police officers are taught. This report is a blueprint for fundamentally rethinking the current way we train new police officers — for dismantling the existing model and building a new approach," Wexler asserted.

"The goals are ambitious and

far-reaching. But we hope that if police agencies can attract those who possess the 'right stuff,' we can provide them with the kind of training that will take us into the future guided by a new way of thinking."

Drone Era Of Warfare —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

With the rise in the use of drones, security agencies have been using a range of counter-drone technology for detection, tracking and interdiction that include radar, frequency, acoustic, jamming, spoofing, laser and sev-

eral others using ground-based, hand-held or airborne systems.

While the U.S. anti-drone systems are considered more advanced, China has been racing to develop its counter-drone systems to bolster its own intel-

ligence and attack capabilities.

China unveiled its new laser-based air defense system on Nov. 11. Called the LW-30 laser defense weapon system, it is capable of taking down small, low-altitude drones. The weapon can

launch effective strikes on low, slow and small targets that have a radar cross-section smaller than 1 square meter using high-energy laser beams, according to a report from Chinese state media Global Times.

Airbnb Has A Plan To Fix Cleaning Fees

Pretty much everyone hates Airbnb cleaning fees — those pesky charges tacked on to your vacation rental bill that supposedly cover the costs to get the place ready for the next visitors. Travelers don't like the expense, and hosts don't like charging them, either.

Dennis Shirshikov, an Airbnb host who owns a rental property in upstate New York, says cleaning fees are the most common complaint he gets from customers.

"We are strongly considering cutting them off," he says.

And Shirshikov might get his way. Airbnb is set to roll out big changes that won't end cleaning fees but could make them more transparent for customers and incentivize hosts to reduce or forgo them altogether.

WHAT AIRBNB CLEANING FEES ARE AND WHAT THEY COST

Airbnb cleaning fees are a one-time charge pocketed by hosts to cover costs such as doing laundry or scrubbing toilets between guest stays. They're separate from the base price and are in addition to service fees or charges for optional add-ons.

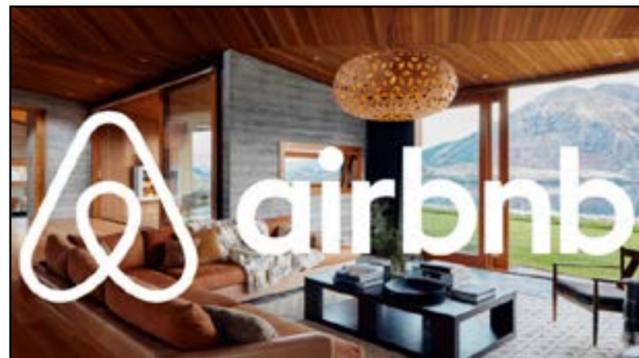
A June 2022 NerdWallet analysis of 1,000 U.S. Airbnb reservations with check-in dates in 2022 or 2023 found that the median cleaning fee per listing for a one-night stay was \$75.

But cleaning fees vary widely. An Airbnb spokesperson told NerdWallet that cleaning fees are on average less than 10% of the total reservation cost at properties that charge them. Meanwhile, NerdWallet's analysis found that cleaning fees amounted to about 25% of the total price paid. In fact, almost 40% of listings had cleaning fees from 20% to 29.9% of list price.

And on a few listings, cleaning fees were higher than the nightly rate.

WHY AIRBNB CLEANING FEES ARE SO IRRITATING — AND AIRBNB'S PLAN TO FIX IT

Besides the cost, Airbnb cleaning fees can feel especially brutal simply given their presentation. Airbnb's search page displays the nightly rate on most



interfaces in big, bold lettering, masking the total price. So the total price, presented in lightly colored lettering, can be easy to overlook.

To add to the confusion, nightly rates often don't correlate with total price anyway. One listing with a \$40 nightly rate could total \$90 because of a \$40 cleaning fee and \$10 service fee. Another listing with a \$60 nightly rate could turn out cheaper — \$73 total — if it has a \$13 service fee and no cleaning fee. A traveler with a \$50 budget might be seduced by the \$40 listing, only to owe more than if they had booked the \$60 listing.

But that's set to change in December when Airbnb plans to roll out a toggle so travelers can opt for search results to display total price, including all fees. Users who don't toggle the total price display will still see nightly rates only.

The company in November 2022 also adjusted its search algorithm to rank listings by the best total price rather than simply accounting for the nightly rate, which may sway hosts to lower or remove cleaning fees.

WHAT IF THERE WERE NO CLEANING FEES?

A minority of listings don't charge cleaning fees. Airbnb says 45% of listings worldwide don't charge those fees. Yet only 15% of the available listings in NerdWallet's analysis didn't have a cleaning fee. The disparity is partly because NerdWallet looked at only U.S. listings, while Airbnb's number is based on listings worldwide, where the fees

are less common.

Shirshikov says he'd prefer to list a final price that includes the cleaning fee for two reasons. First, he suspects guest satisfaction would increase, and second, he thinks guests would leave the place cleaner.

Airbnb has warned hosts that cleaning fees can backfire by creating unrealistic expectations of how much guests will offer to help at checkout.

"With a higher (cleaning) fee, guests may expect to just walk away from your space at checkout as they would a hotel room," according to a memo posted to Airbnb's website before the cleaning changes kicked in.

That's exactly what Shirshikov has experienced.

"If they pay a cleaning fee, they sometimes leave the place looking like it's been lived in and uncleaned for months," he says, adding that he has returned to find food all over the floor and drinks spilled on the beds.

IF EVERYONE HATES AIRBNB CLEANING FEES, WHY STILL CHARGE THEM?

For hosts who clean the rentals themselves, the money might cover the cost of cleaning supplies. Often, that money is simply passed on to professional housekeeping services who handle the cleaning.

Sébastien Long, the founder and CEO of Texas-based short-term rental company Lodgeur, says he believes the average cleaning fee of \$75 is quite low.

Considering staff wages, supplies and replacement items, Long says he estimates it costs

roughly \$22 to turn over a hotel room. If Airbnb hosts outsource the work, Long estimates, it could cost \$175 to clean a two-bedroom apartment, including \$100 for the cleaning company, \$50 for laundry services and \$25 for supplies, such as coffee or mini toiletry bottles.

The cleaning costs for Airbnb hosts are often higher than those for hotels because they likely can't take advantage of economies of scale. For example, hotels have commercial-size laundry machines. Plus, listings are typically spread out geographically, so there's the inefficiency of traveling miles between properties. And short-term rentals typically are much larger and have more space to clean (such as kitchens) than hotel rooms.

But other hosts use the fees simply as a way to squeeze more money out of travelers, clearly overcharging for cleaning fees, which is a practice Airbnb warns against.

"Aim to use the cleaning fee to cover the expense of cleaning — not to make additional money," according to a 2021 memo from Airbnb to hosts.

And then there are the hosts who charge cleaning fees and still ask guests to clean up after themselves. That, too, will likely end soon. Along with more transparent cleaning fees, Airbnb said it also plans to require hosts to post the cleaning requirements on the listing before guests book. Guests will also be able to leave feedback on the checkout process.

Airbnb also clarified that checkout requests should be reasonable. At your next Airbnb stay, if the host is amenable to the changes, you might not have to vacuum or strip the beds. The only things you'll have to do are turn off the lights, throw away the trash and lock the door.

For now, though, Shirshikov says he's sticking with charging cleaning fees because he's uncertain whether users will turn on the toggle.

"I'd want to see how many people actively turn on the full price display," he says. "Unless guests use it, it won't mean much for how we do pricing."



Biden Eases Sanctions, Opposition Talks Resume

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Saturday eased some oil sanctions on Venezuela in an effort to support newly restarted negotiations between President Nicolás Maduro's government and its opposition.

The Treasury Department is allowing Chevron to resume "limited" energy production in Venezuela after years of sanctions that have dramatically curtailed oil and gas profits that have flowed to Maduro's government. Earlier this year the Treasury Department again allowed the California-based Chevron and other U.S. companies to perform basic upkeep of wells it operates jointly with state-run oil giant PDVSA.

Under the new policy, profits from the sale of energy would be directed to paying down debt owed to Chevron, rather than providing profits to PDVSA.

Talks between the Maduro government and the "Unitary Platform" resumed in Mexico City on Saturday after more than a yearlong pause. It remained to be seen whether they would take a different course from previous rounds of negotiations that have not brought relief to the political stalemate in the country.

A senior U.S. administration official, briefing reporters about the U.S. action under the condition of anonymity, said that easing the sanctions was not connected to the administration's efforts to boost global energy production in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and that the decision was not expected to impact global energy prices.

The official said the U.S. would closely monitor Maduro's commitment to the talks and reserved the right to reimpose stricter sanctions or to continue to ease them depending on how the negotiations proceed.

"If Maduro again tries to use these negotiations to buy time to further consolidate his criminal dictatorship, the United States and our international partners must snap back the full force of our sanctions that brought his regime to the negotiating table in the first place," said Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in a statement.

Chevron said the license granted by the U.S. means the company "can now commercialize the oil that is currently being produced" through the joint venture. "We are determined to remain a constructive presence in the country and to continue supporting social investment programs aimed at providing humanitarian relief."

Governor Wants Sales Mandate For Trucks

CARY, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina state government will develop a rule requiring van, bus and commercial truck manufacturers to sell more zero-emission vehicles in the state over the next decade, Gov. Roy Cooper said on Tuesday.

Signing an executive order at the North American headquarters of electrical equipment company ABB, Cooper said the proposed rule and other activities he directed would help cut pollution from medium- and heavy-duty vehicles and promote charging and fueling infrastructure needed.

"North Carolina is already a national hub for truck and bus manufacturing and supply chain development, and we should not miss the opportunity to lead the market-driven transition already underway to cleaner and increasingly cheaper zero-emission technologies that benefit our economy and our communities," Cooper said in a news release.

The anchor of the order tells the Department of Environmental Quality to propose the Advanced Clean Trucks Program to the Environmental Management Commission by next May. The commission then would have to sign off on any proposal to make it enforceable.

Six other states have adopted such a program including California, New York and Massachusetts, Cooper's office said.

Cooper's office said the program would apply to what's called medium- and heavy-duty vehicles, whose gross vehicle weight rating is at least 8,500 pounds (3,856 kilograms), such as delivery vans, garbage trucks, school buses and semi-tractors. It said zero-emission vehicles can include hybrid plug-in vehicles that do have internal combustion engines.

The required sales shares of zero-emission vehicles by manufacturers under the program would increase over time from 10-13% in 2026 to 40-75% in 2035, depending on vehicle sizes, the governor's office said.

The vehicles targeted for replacement in the program compose just over 3% of registered vehicles in North Carolina, but they emit 26% of smog-forming nitrous oxide emissions, according to Cooper's office.

The order comes several months after the Democratic governor unveiled another series of clean-vehicle initiatives, such as directing his Department of Transportation to create a "Clean Transportation Plan" to reduce carbon emissions.

There are now more than 125 medium- and heavy-duty zero-emission models available in North America, Cooper's office said. Federal laws in 2021 and 2022 include grants and loan programs to support manufacturing as well as some tax credits to replace commercial gas or diesel vehicles that offer up to \$40,000 per vehicle.

Environmental groups praised Cooper's action, which also tells his Cabinet agencies to develop strategies to improve health outcomes for communities disproportionately affected by air pollution caused by vehicles.

Low-income neighborhoods and communities of color are more likely to be near transportation corridors and freight hubs, according to Cooper's office.

"Implementing this executive order will protect our children's health as well as the climate," North Carolina Conservation Network Executive Director Brian Buzby said in a separate release. "Replacing diesel with electric trucks over time will massively reduce air pollution exposures for both urban and rural North Carolinians living near roads." Several other groups wrote Cooper in August urging the clean trucks program be adopted.

Georgia Senate Runoff Has Bitter Closing

WARNER ROBINS, Ga. (AP) — Ads with the candidates' ex-wives. Cries of "liar" flying in both directions. Stories of a squalid apartment building and abortions under pressure. Questioning an opponent's independence. His intellect. His mental stability. His

religious faith.

The extended Senate campaign in Georgia between the Democratic incumbent, Raphael Warnock, and his Republican challenger, football legend Herschel Walker, has grown increasingly bitter as their Dec. 6 runoff

nears. With Democrats already assured a Senate majority, it's a striking contrast from two years ago, when the state's twin runoffs were mostly about which party would control the chamber in Washington.

"Herschel Walker ain't serious," Warnock told supporters recently in central Georgia, saying that Walker "majors in lying" and fumbles the basics of public policy. "But the election is very serious. Don't get those two things confused."

Walker casts Warnock, the senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, as a "hypocrite" and servile to President Joe Biden. Underscoring the insult, Walker calls the incumbent "Scooby-Doo," complete with an impression of the cartoon hound's gibberish.

The broadsides reflect the candidates' furious push in the four weeks between the Nov. 8 general election and runoff to persuade their core supporters to cast another ballot. For Walker, it also means drawing more independents and moderates to his campaign after he underperformed a fellow Republican on the ticket, Gov. Brian Kemp, by 200,000 votes.

Warnock led Walker by 37,000 votes out of almost 4 million cast in the first round, but the senator fell short of the 50% threshold needed to avoid a runoff.

In many ways, the shift from his first runoff campaign is exactly what Warnock wanted: a straightforward choice between two candidates. Two years ago, then-President Donald Trump, fresh off his defeat, and Biden, then president-elect, made multiple Georgia trips to illuminate the national stakes of the races between Warnock and Republican Sen. Kelly Loeffler and between

Democrat Jon Ossoff and Republican Sen. David Perdue as control of the Senate hung in the balance.

Trump ended up alienating his own supporters and many moderates with his false claims of a rigged 2020 presidential election. Victories by Warnock and Ossoff put the Senate at a 50-50 split, with Democrats gaining control by virtue of Vice President Kamala Harris' tiebreaking vote. Warnock also became Georgia's first Black senator.

This year, with Warnock vying for a full six-year term after winning the 2021 special election, Democrats have already guaranteed control of the Senate by flipping a seat in Pennsylvania. A Warnock win would give Democrats an outright majority at 51-49, meaning that the parties would not have to negotiate a power-sharing agreement.

Warnock's preferred emphasis for most of his reelection bid has been his deal-making in Washington and the personal values he brings to the job. It took until the campaign's final stages — only after two women accused Walker, an opponent of abortion rights, of encouraging and paying for their abortions — for the senator to ratchet up his attacks, arguing Walker is "unprepared" and "unfit" for the job.

"My opponent lies about everything," Warnock said in a recent campaign stop, ticking off a litany of Walker's repeated falsehoods and exaggerations. "He said he was a police officer. He's not. He said he worked for the FBI. He did not. Said he graduated from the University of Georgia. He did not. Said he was valedictorian of his class. He was not. ... He said he had another business with 800 employees. It has eight."

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Business & Finance

Retailers May See More Red After Black Friday

Retailers are gearing up for another blockbuster holiday shopping season, but consumers burned by the highest inflation in a generation may have other ideas.

Industry groups are predicting another record year of retail sales, with the National Retail Federation forecasting a jump of 6% to 8% over the US\$890 billion consumers spent online and in stores in November and December of 2021.

But Jeff Bezos, founder and chairman of the biggest retailer of them all, seems to be anticipating a much less festive holiday for businesses. In November 2022, Amazon said it is laying off 10,000 workers, one of several big companies announcing job cuts recently. Bezos even cautioned consumers to hold off on big purchases like cars, televisions and appliances to save in case of a recession in 2023.

Results from our new survey suggest consumers appear to be already taking Bezos' advice, as a combination of soaring consumer prices, rising borrowing costs and growing odds of a recession weighs on their wallets. And if our survey results do pan out, it may mean the recession everyone's worried about happens sooner than expected.

Crisis behaviors
We conducted our survey in mid-November, about a week before Black Friday, the historical start of the holiday shopping season. The day after Thanksgiving is known as Black Friday because it signals the period when retailers hope to sell enough goods so that their income statement shows "black," or profit, for the year rather than "red," which



refers to losses.

We asked over 500 consumers a series of questions about their spending plans, concerns and priorities during this year's holiday season. Participants were split evenly between men and women, and almost two-thirds had a household income of \$70,000 or less.

Overall, the most alarming conclusion from our research is that consumers are reporting consumption behaviors typically exhibited during an economic crisis, similar to those observed in 2009 by consultancy McKinsey during the Great Recession.

One data point stands out: An overwhelming 62% said they were concerned about their job security, while almost 35% indicated they were "very" or "extremely" worried about their financial situation.

Here are three behaviors we found in our survey that suggest consumers are behaving as if the U.S. economy is already in a recession.

1. Spending less

Not surprisingly, cutting spending is the first thing consumers do during economic turmoil.

A study by McKinsey in early

2009 found that 90% of U.S. households cut spending due to the Great Recession, with 33% of consumers indicating a significant cut.

Similarly, respondents to our survey said they plan to spend, on average, around \$700 this holiday season, substantially lower than the roughly \$880 consumers spent during each of the past three seasons – including early in the pandemic in 2020.

About a third of our sample intended to spend "slightly" or "much" less than in 2021, while 35% said they would spend "about the same" – which from

a retailer's perspective means spending less because last year's dollars don't go as far today. The rest said they planned to spend a little or much more.

Inflation is one of the key reasons consumers say they are spending less. Almost 80% of respondents said they are either moderately, very or extremely concerned about the surge in prices, and 87% said those concerns would affect their holiday spending behavior, such as by buying gifts for fewer people or purchasing less expensive items.

Some of our respondents even said they were planning to make their own gifts or buy used goods, rather than shop for new items. The secondhand market has boomed in the last few years, and many shoppers view this option as a way to combat inflationary pressures.

2. Planning ahead

Another thing consumers do when they sense a troubled economy is they plan their purchases more carefully and maintain self-control over spending.

Common strategies include spending more time searching for the best deals, adhering to strict shopping lists, prioritizing necessities and making purchases earlier to spread out their spending – all of which were mentioned by our survey respondents.

We may already be seeing signs of this last strategy. Retail sales for October were up 1.3% from the previous month and up 8.3% from October 2021, which may reflect consumers' early holiday shopping. If that is the case, this early shopping may result in slumping sales in December.

Also, purchasing early, aided by the plethora of steep discounts offered well in advance of Black Friday, allows consumers to control their shopping behavior better and reduces the risk of impulse buying. Reduction of impulse buying is a strong indicator that consumers are shopping like the economy is in recession.

In our survey, we found that over 50% of participants said

that they would be using savings to cover the cost of holiday spending, with many stressing that they would pay with cash. Using cash as a primary form of payment is the main tool consumers have to control spending.

Only 15% of our respondents said that they would use buy-now-pay-later options, which to us is another sign that consumers are preferring cash over forms of credit that creates a new debt.

3. Hypersensitivity to price
During economic crises, consumers become hypersensitive to prices, which trump most other considerations in the minds of consumers.

A whopping 90% of our respondents confirmed that price is their major consideration when shopping during the holidays this year. Other elements of price sensitivity are free shipping, product value and the level of discount, if any.

The singular focus of consumers on price gives retailers a wide range of potential responses, including promoting house brands and private labels that are perceived as having greater value for money. In fact, according to the 2009 McKinsey report, one of the biggest shifts in consumer behavior during and after the 2008 recession was the switch in preference from high-priced premium brands to value brands that tend to have lower prices but still decent quality.

During an economic slowdown, consumers typically stop buying brands they are not strongly connected with or loyal to.

Consumers in our survey said buying brand names will be one of the least important influences on their purchases this season.

While economists debate whether a recession is coming, or even whether the U.S. is already in one, our data suggests consumers are beginning to behave like one is already here. That risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy as consumers tighten their belts.

Researchers Eye Embroidery As Low-Cost Solution For Making Wearable Electronics

By Laura Oleniacz

NCSU

Embroidering power-generating yarns onto fabric has allowed researchers to embed a self-powered, numerical touch-pad and movement sensors into clothing. The technique offers a low-cost, scalable potential method for making wearable devices.

"Our technique uses embroidery, which is pretty simple—you can stitch our yarns directly on the fabric," said the study's lead author Rong Yin, assistant professor of textile engineering, chemistry and science at North Carolina State University. "During fabric production, you don't need to consider anything about the wearable devices. You can integrate the power-generating yarns after the clothing item has been made."

In the study published in Nano Energy, researchers tested multiple designs for power-generating yarns. To make them durable enough to withstand the tension and bending of the embroidery stitching process, they ultimately used a grouping of five commercially available copper wires, which had a thin polyurethane coating. Then, they stitched them onto cotton fabric with another material called PTFE.

"This is a low-cost method for making wearable electronics using commercially available products," Yin said. "The electrical properties of our proto-



types were comparable to other designs that relied on the same power generation mechanism."

The researchers relied on a method of generating electricity called the "triboelectric effect," which involves harnessing electrons exchanged by two different materials, like static electricity. They found the PTFE fabric had the best performance in terms of voltage and current when in contact with the polyurethane-coated copper wires, as compared to other types of fabric that they tested, including cotton and silk. They also tested coating the embroidery samples in plasma to increase the effect.

"In our design, you have two layers—one is your conductive, polyurethane-coated copper

wires, and the other is PTFE, and they have a gap between them," Yin said. "When the two non-conductive materials come into contact with each other, one material will lose some electrons, and some will get some electrons. When you link them together, there will be a current."

Researchers tested their yarns as motion sensors by embroidering them with the PTFE fabric on denim. They placed the embroidery patches on the palm, under the arm, at the elbow and at the knee to track electrical signals generated as a person moves. They also attached fabric with their embroidery on the insole of a shoe to test its use as a pedometer, finding their electrical signals varied depending on

whether the person was walking, running or jumping.

Lastly, they tested their yarns in a textile-based numeric keypad on the arm, which they made by embroidering numbers on a piece of cotton fabric, and attaching them to a piece of PTFE fabric. Depending on the number that the person pushed on the keypad, they saw different electrical signals generated for each number.

"You can embroider our yarns onto clothes, and when you move, it generates an electrical signal, and those signals can be used as a sensor," Yin said. "When we put the embroidery in a shoe, if you are running, it generates a higher voltage than if you were just walking. When we stitched numbers onto fabric, and press them, it generates a different voltage for each number. It could be used as an interface."

Since textile products will inevitably be washed, they tested the durability of their embroidery design in a series of washing and rubbing tests. After hand washing and rinsing the embroidery with detergent, and drying it in an oven, they found no difference or a slight increase in voltage. For the prototype coated in plasma, they found weakened but still superior performance compared with the original sample. After an abrasion test, they found that there was no significant change in electrical output performance of their designs after 10,000 rubbing cycles.

Frontier Airlines Shut Down Its Customer Service Phone Line



By Emma Roth

The Verge

Frontier, the budget-friendly airline that charges for everything from in-flight snacks to carry-ons, is looking to cut costs even more by doing away with its customer service phone line (via CNBC). Customers with questions about their reservations can now only contact Frontier's agents through the live chat on its website, via WhatsApp, or on social media.

In an emailed statement to The Verge, company spokesperson Jennifer De La Cruz confirmed that Frontier's customer service has "transitioned to fully digital communications," which is supposed to help "ensure customers get the information they need as expeditiously and efficiently as possible." When customers try to call the phone number that Frontier removed from its website (but still surfaces on Google), they're greeted with this message before getting the option to chat online instead:

At Frontier, we offer the lowest fares in the industry by operating our airlines as efficiently as possible. We want our customers to be able to operate efficiently as well, which is why we make it easy to find what you need at FlyFrontier.com or on our mobile app. We also have a chat service available 24/7.

If you agree to chat online, Frontier will text you a link to the company's live chat on its website, where you're required to deal with a chatbot before you can get in touch with an actual human. According to De La Cruz, the transition was rolled out gradually and came into force last weekend. "We have found that most customers prefer communicating via digital channels," De La Cruz adds.

This follows the company's November 15th investor presentation, which states that one-to-one voice calls are "unscalable, inefficient, and expensive" and suggests implementing a three-to-one live chat that would have one agent servicing three customers at a time. "Think about the most sort of obscure question a customer might ask that would take a call center agent many, many minutes to research and find an answer to," Jack Filene, Frontier's senior vice president of customers said during the presentation, CNBC reports. "The chatbot can answer that very quickly."

Earlier this month, the Department of Transportation ordered Frontier Airlines to pay \$222 million in customer refunds and a \$2.2 million penalty to compensate customers for canceled or significantly changed flights. In 2020, Frontier Airlines was accused of providing vouchers instead of refunds to customers whose flights were changed or canceled due to the covid-19 pandemic, a practice the DOT considers "unlawful."

Frontier is one of the largest airlines to cut customers off from its phone lines. Even the budget airline Spirit, which attempted to acquire Frontier over the summer, still lets customers talk to agents over the phone. While dealing with long hold times when calling customer service is a pain, a phone line still seems necessary to have as an option, especially for folks who aren't so technologically savvy.

Saudi Sets Up EV Joint Venture With Foxconn

Nov 3 (Reuters) - Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth said on Thursday it will make electric cars in the kingdom under a joint venture with Apple supplier Foxconn (2317.TW) as part of a push to build new industries and lessen dependence on oil.

Ceer "is the first Saudi automotive brand to produce electric vehicles in Saudi Arabia, and will design, manufacture and sell a range of vehicles for consumers in Saudi Arabia and the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, including sedans and sports utility vehicles," PIF said in a statement.

PIF (Public Investment Fund) said its cars would be available in 2025, adding Ceer would draw more than \$150 million in foreign direct investment, create up to 30,000 direct and indirect jobs and is projected to contribute \$8 billion to the kingdom's GDP by 2034.

The joint venture "will li-



cense component technology from BMW for use in the vehicle development process," PIF said in a statement.

"Foxconn will develop the electrical architecture of the vehicles, resulting in a portfolio of products that will lead in the areas of infotainment, connectivity and autonomous driving technologies," it added.

An investment strategy announced last year aims for more than \$100 billion in FDI

annually and Saudi Arabia still lags behind those targets, with just over \$4 billion in inflows in the first half of this year.

Chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, PIF is his chosen vehicle to drive efforts to diversify the economy and wean it off oil.

Lucid Group Inc, which is more than 60% owned by PIF, is building an electric vehicle assembly plant in Jeddah with an eventual capacity to manufacture 150,000 vehicles a year. The Saudi government signed a deal with Lucid to buy up to 100,000 of its cars over the next 10 years.

A Lucid spokesman could not be immediately reached for comment.

The kingdom is also making a push into mining and said in May that it would build an electric vehicle battery metals plant.

"We will leverage Foxconn's technological expertise to sup-

port Ceer's vision of creating a range of iconic electric vehicles that are built around the themes of connectivity, infotainment and autonomy," Foxconn Chairman Young Liu said, according to PIF's statement.

"We want to make electric vehicles mainstream, and that is what Ceer is going to achieve in Saudi Arabia and the wider region," he added.

PIF did not disclose funding details and did not say how much a Ceer plant would cost or where in the kingdom it would be built. A PIF spokesman could not be reached for further comment.

The Wall Street Journal reported in March that Saudi Arabia and Foxconn were in talks to jointly build a \$9 billion facility that could make microchips, electric-vehicle components and other electronics in NEOM, a futuristic \$500 billion city being built in Saudi Arabia's desert.

Opinion

A Post-Election Caution

By Mel Gurtov

Portland State University

What a difference a day makes, as the old song goes. The day before Election Day, liberals and progressives feared the worst: a solidly MAGA takeover of the House and Senate. Consider these expectations that proved unwarranted:

- MAGA election deniers would get control of key election posts, and the machinery, in the battleground states.
- Voting would be marked by violence and intimidation in many places around the country.
- Every Republican defeat would be followed by charges of fraud, unwillingness of losing candidates to concede, and threats directed at federal attempts to intercede.
- Young, Black, and Latino voters would not come out for Democrats in high numbers.
- Kevin McCarthy and Mitch McConnell would be riding high.
- Trump would hold a victory parade and announce his 2024 campaign.

Democracy would be on the ropes, with many predictions of end times.

On that last point, democracy's survival, we need a qualification along with a celebration. Fact is, not a single one of the defeated far-right candidates, nor any Republican office holder, has accepted the idea that democracy—our constitutional system—was on the ballot and successfully defended. All their attention is focused on blaming others for the failure to win big-time—Trump, the Republican National Committee, McCarthy or McConnell.

Even then, sentiment on Trump is equivocal, with some Republicans saying the party needs other candidates, or needs less “drama,” or needs to consider his good policies besides the recent election results.

Now that Trump is officially running, let's watch the backtracking on criticism of him—along with forgiveness of McCarthy's and McConnell's sins.

I think it is premature to say, as the *Washington Post's* Jennifer Rubin writes (November 13), that “while threats to democracy remain, 2022 might be seen as the point at which the erosion of democratic values and critical institutions were halted.”

The threats are just as real today as they were on Election Day. The MAGA-ites are surely plotting a comeback.

Trump, who cannot tolerate losing, will be rallying his troops; he's far from dead. After all, he will say, he didn't lose; “losers” lost because they didn't listen to him.

McCarthy will be working on how to undermine Biden's agenda, the election deniers at every level of government will lick their wounds and return with a vengeance. As one writer puts it: “The combination of resentment, rule-bending, and shamelessness that gave rise to Mr. Trump's presidency is still the reigning attitude of the party... Distrust of and disdain for democratic outcomes shape the party's agenda, both internally and externally.”

DeSantis, anyone?

We can't rest assured that, two years from now, the same people who voted to save democracy—or save women's rights, or health-care, or labor rights, or the environment—will come out for Democrats again, or in the same numbers. Nor can we assume that all those Democrats who won by thin margins will be reelected.

Look again at those numbers and see how brittle these victories were, especially in Senate races: 4- and 5-percent wins in Pennsylvania and Arizona; a 0.8-percent win in Nevada; a 1-percent loss in Wisconsin; and a runoff in Georgia. Republicans in state legislatures they control will continue to gerrymander and employ other devices designed to thwart democratic processes, most of all the law.

Moral of the story? What the far right has done before, it will do again.

Finally, we can't assume that today's key political issues will be the same in 2024. The economy might take a nosedive, the U.S.-China or U.S.-Russia confrontation might be even more perilous, a crisis over immigration might be the central domestic concern.

And there's the Trump factor. Will the Department of Justice move to indict him, and how will the MAGA-ites react if it does? We cannot exclude the possibility of electoral violence just because it didn't happen this time around.

In short, Democrats should assume they'll be back in the trenches fairly soon.

Mel Gurtov is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Portland State University and blogs at *In the Human Interest*.



Has Black Friday Lost its Luster? Depends on Whom You Ask

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

According to a survey conducted in October, nearly 70 percent of consumers plan to skip Black Friday and holiday shopping altogether this year.

While some believed retailers manipulated shoppers, a relatively large amount (18 percent) said they won't shop because of large crowds.

Despite the relatively small sample size in the survey, a growing number of shoppers said Black Friday had lost its appeal.

“While Black Friday sales provide a great opportunity for brands to keep customers coming back for more, it also presents noteworthy risks for shoppers around buying too much,” said Michael Podolsky, CEO, and co-founder of PissedConsumer.com, which conducted the survey.

“Consumers are now savvier with their purchases and how much they spend. That is not just inflation causing the shift in consumer behavior,” Podolsky stated.

“The survey revealed that 85 percent of shoppers now rely on online reviews when buying as they intend to avoid general unhappiness with shopping.”

Small business growth expert Stephanie Scheller of Grow Disrupt said there's little question that the days of getting excited about the day after Thanksgiving shopping sprees have ended.

“While there are still ‘doorbusters’ at some places that are worth participating in, most places offer great deals online or are starting so early that it's not worth the fight for Black Friday beyond tradition,” Scheller offered.

“I think that the problem with this is that we'll end up diluting the power of the concept, and while overall shopping numbers might be okay, the one-powerful-day for generating sales for the holiday season concept is likely to fade.”

According to Adobe Analytics, Black Friday 2021 raked in \$14.04 billion in online sales, with \$8.9 billion spent on Black Friday and \$5.14 billion on Thanksgiving.

The spending represented a .63 percent decrease from 2020 when Black Friday sales raked in \$14.13 billion in online sales.

At the height of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, 100 million consumers shopped online, while in-person Black Friday shopping fell 37 percent from 2019.

“Digitalization has encouraged the growth of online stores, due to

which special deals and offers remain no more exclusive,” said Matt Gillman, founder of SMB Compass.

“People prefer online stores more than regular stores, which affects Black Fridays. And this is because of the perks online stores offer at the same costs. So, along with the low prices, we can focus on providing a better shopping environment.”

Despite declining sales and enthusiasm from many corners of the nation, some still enjoy the tradition of leaving the dinner table early to stand in the long lines that often accompany Black Friday sales.

“I usually think of shopping as therapy; therefore, I always look forward to Black Friday for the excellent prices,” said Sean Harris, managing editor at *Family Destinations Guide*, which provides information and reviews of resorts, hotels, and global destinations.

“Black Friday not only allows me to fill my closet with the newest styles at discount prices, but it also makes it possible for me to find some excellent offers on electronics and books,” Harris exclaimed.

“I primarily rely on gadgets to simplify my life as a tech-savvy individual. Therefore, I require everything, from an air purifier to a coffee foaming machine.

“As a result, Black Friday will never lose its appeal to me because I can obtain incredible electronics discounts online.

“The same is true for books, which are a staple of mine and are available in bulk in specially curated best-seller collections every Black Friday Sale.”

Emily Saunders, Chief Revenue Officer for eLuxury, noted that Black Friday always loses its luster during an economic downturn, but she said she's skeptical about whether those declines are permanent.

“Brick-and-mortar retail is fading, but Black Friday still has a strong heartbeat when economic times are good,” Saunders asserted.

“It recovered with a vengeance once the Great Recession was over, and online shopping had become an established alternative.

“I equate it to network television. Everything aired on major networks is being watched by far fewer people compared to the pre-streaming days, but you'd never know that on Super Bowl Sunday. It still elicits around 100 million viewers each year.”



Voters Make an Important Down Payment on Democracy's Future

By Ben Jealous

People for the American Way

A lot of good news came out of this month's elections—and enough bad news to remind us that we can never let our guard down when freedom and democracy are at stake. This year, democracy itself was on the ballot, and voters made an important down payment on its future.

In 2020, Americans voted not to give President Donald Trump a second term. He wasn't willing to accept his loss, and tried to overturn the election. The anger he fostered with lies about election fraud led to a violent attempt to stop Congress from affirming Joe Biden's victory.

What did that have to do with this year's elections? Trump tried to get his people in power as governors and secretaries of state so they could pull off in 2024 what they were not able to do in 2020.

Voters weren't having it. The “Red Wave” that Trump was counting on was blocked. Most of the secretary of state candidates running on Trump's election lies were defeated, which means that important guardrails against future assaults on our democracy remain in place.

To further resist the threat of authoritarianism, we must lift up young leaders who will be democracy's champions for this and future generations. People For the American Way's Young Elected Officials Network is celebrating the election of young leaders as new members of Congress from across the country: Greg Casar from Austin, Texas; Emilia Sykes from Akron, Ohio; Maxwell Frost from Orlando, Fla.; Summer Lee from Braddock, Pa.; Robert Garcia from Long Beach, Calif.; Sydney Kamlager from Los Angeles, Calif; and Jasmine Crockett from Dallas, Texas. Dozens more were elected to local and state offices, building a crucial leadership pipeline.

One bright spot was Pennsylvania, where voters elected state attorney general Josh Shapiro as governor, rejecting a far-right promoter of Trump's election lies, and voted to send Lt. Gov. John Fetterman to the U.S. Senate rather than Trump's hand-picked celebrity con man. What has gotten less attention is the exciting news about who will replace Fetterman as lieutenant governor: state Rep. Austin Davis, an impressive young Black man who has devoted his life to community and public service since he was a teenager.

There were other bright spots. Democrats will hold a majority in the Senate, so Republicans will not be able to stop President Biden from building on his excellent record of naming brilliant federal judges who are committed to justice for all. Voters in Los Angeles elected Karen Bass as mayor and dumped Sheriff Alex Villanueva, notorious for overseeing an abusive department. Voters in several states protected access to abortion. Far-right attempts to build a national “Red Wave” with racist fearmongering about crime and bigoted smears of transgender people didn't work, though they did enough damage to keep some good people out of office.

One bit of bad news came with the narrow victory of Kris Kobach as Kansas attorney general. Kobach made a name for himself with attacks on immigrants and relentless attempts to restrict voting. Voters previously rejected his bids for governor and Senate, but, sadly, he's back.

So is Trump, who officially launched his campaign to get back into the White House just a week after voters said “no thanks” to his most high-profile allies. It's a reminder that in politics, no victory is final. The struggle is never over. In fact, even this election isn't over, as Georgia voters must return to the polls for a crucial runoff between Sen. Raphael Warnock and Trump's candidate Herschel Walker.

Citizenship is a responsibility that requires constant recommitment. On that front, I'd like to share a bit of exciting personal news. Next year, I will continue my advocacy for a more just and sustainable world in a new role as executive director of the Sierra Club, the nation's most influential grassroots environmental group. I am delighted that my successor as president of People For the American Way will be Svante Myrick, who is just the kind of young leader our nation needs. He was elected to the city council of Ithaca, New York, while still a student, and at age 24, he became the city's first Black mayor and the youngest mayor in the state. He was reelected twice by huge margins, and now he's bringing his leadership and passion for defending democracy to the national level.

Much to be grateful for. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

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 January 2023.



Biden Student Debt Forgiveness Plan Begins, Not Ends

By Charlene Crowell

Center for Responsible Lending

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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