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MLK Weekend Featured Tributes And Commitments To Race Equity

By Aaron Morrison

Annual tributes and commemorations of the life and legacy of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., which began nationwide Friday, typically include a mix of politics, faith and community service.

For this year's observance, the 38th since its federal recognition in 1986, a descendant of King hopes to spur progress by helping more Americans personalize the ongoing struggle for racial equity and harmony. Bernice King, daughter of the late civil rights icon, said people must move beyond platitudes and deepen their own commitments to the needed progress.

"We need to change our thinking," said King, who is CEO of The King Center in Atlanta.

Under the theme "It Starts With Me," the center launched its slate of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

events on Thursday with youth and adult summits to educate the public on ways to transform unjust systems in the U.S.

The summits were streamed online and are available for replay on the center's social media accounts.

"It seems like we're going through these cycles, because we're trying to approach everything with the same mindset that all of this (racial inequity) was created," King told The Associated Press.

"Change can be very small," she said, "but transformation means that now we changed the character, form, and nature of something. That's something we have not seen yet."

King holiday weekend events include a statue unveiling Friday in Boston, a symposium on police brutality in Akron, Ohio, and community service projects in many U.S. cities. The holiday kicks off

another year of advocacy on a racial justice agenda — from police reforms and strengthening voting rights to solutions on economic and educational disparities — that has been stymied by culture wars and partisan gridlock in Washington and nationwide.

Residents of Selma, Alabama, which played a central role in King's legacy, woke up to extensive damage Friday from a deadly storm system that spawned tornadoes across the South. The city became a flashpoint of the civil rights movement when state troopers viciously attacked Black people who marched nonviolently for voting rights across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965.

King wasn't present for the march known as "Bloody Sunday," but he joined a subsequent procession that successfully crossed the bridge toward the Capitol in Montgomery. The Pet-

tus Bridge was unscathed by Thursday's storm.

President Joe Biden spoke at a commemorative service at Ebenezer Baptist Church, the historic Atlanta house of worship where King preached from 1960 until his assassination in 1968. The church is pastored by the Rev. Sen. Raphael Warnock, who recently won election to a full term as Georgia's first Black U.S. senator.

And on Monday, the federal observance of the King holiday, commemorations continued in Atlanta, as well as in the nation's capital and beyond.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, who got his start as a civil rights organizer in his teens as youth director of an anti-poverty project of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, held his annual King holiday events in Washington, D.C., and New York on Monday.



A passer-by walks near the 20-foot-high bronze sculpture "The Embrace," a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, in the Boston Common, Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2023, in Boston. The sculpture, consisting of four intertwined arms, was inspired by a photo of the Kings embracing when MLK learned he had won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. The statue is to be unveiled during ceremonies Friday, Jan. 13, 2023. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Larger NC GOP Majorities Seek Impact

By Gary D. Robertson and Hannah Schoenbaum

Associated Press

The North Carolina General Assembly opened its two-year legislative session Wednesday with Republicans on the cusp of veto-proof control that will force Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper to thread parliamentary needles to block abortion restrictions and other culture war issues he's vowed to fight.

The House and Senate gavelled down a one-day organizational meeting required by law to seat all 170 lawmakers and elect lead-

ers, in particular again picking Rep. Tim Moore as speaker and Sen. Phil Berger as Senate leader. The session—and the legislating—will begin in earnest in two weeks.

Republicans managed to win in November the two additional Senate seats needed for a 30-seat veto-proof majority in the 50-member chamber. But House Republicans fell one seat short—winning 71 of the 120 seats—giving Cooper a narrow path to block measures if the chamber's Democrats are all present and united to sustain the second-term governor's vetoes.

"I can see some reasonable policy changes," Sen. Jim Perry, a Lenoir County Republican entering his third term, said in light of the political dynamics. "I don't think we'll see anything extreme in nature because you still have to have a Democrat in the House that's willing to cross over and vote for something."

Still, Moore, now in a record fifth term as speaker, reiterated on Wednesday the Republican seat advantage is a "governing supermajority," and said a number of Democrats have made clear they'll vote with Republicans on key issues.

Cooper has been extremely effective with vetoes over the past four years in which GOP margins weren't veto-proof—no overrides from the 47 he issued.

House Republicans further narrowed Cooper's recourse to uphold vetoes Wednesday when they pushed through temporary operating rules that omit a long-standing requirement that chamber leaders give at least two days' notice before conducting an override vote.

That rule has helped House Democrats marshal their forces

(See **LARGER NCGOP**, P. 2)



AFTER SURGERY AND HOLIDAYS, COOPER RETURNING TO PUBLIC STAGE

(AP)—North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper has been recovering from recent outpatient knee surgery, which was performed during what is commonly a low ebb for public events for the chief executive.

Cooper underwent a partial knee replacement surgery during the holidays, said Jordan Monaghan, a spokesperson for the governor. The governor's office didn't give a specific date for the procedure, but Monaghan said on Thursday the second-term governor is "feeling great."

Cooper, who is 65, has been conducting gubernatorial business largely outside of public view so far in 2023. He met privately last week with Duke Energy executives about the Christmas Eve power outage.

Cooper hosted legislators at the Executive Mansion on Wednesday's first day of the General Assembly session, Monaghan said. And he was scheduled to make his first official public appearance of the year on Friday when he attended the annual Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Day observance for state employees in Raleigh.

In 2019, Cooper had back surgery that required a brief hospitalization. And he tested positive for COVID-19 last June.

BLUE CROSS NC APPEALS LOSS OF STATE WORKER CONTRACT TO AETNA

(AP)—Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina on Thursday formally appealed the decision by the health insurance plan for public employees to choose a different company to administer the plan after more than 40 years.

Blue Cross, the state's dominant insurer, filed its request for a protest meeting with State Health Plan acting director Sam Watts. The plan's board of trustees voted last month to replace Blue Cross with Aetna starting in 2025. State Treasurer Dale Folwell announced the bid winner last week.

As the next third-party administrator, Aetna could oversee health care spending of more than \$17.5 billion over a five-year period, the plan has said. The job involves handling health care expenses for several hundred thousand state employees, teachers, their family members and retirees, ensuring claims are paid and building out a provider network.

In the protest letter, an attorney for Blue Cross said in part the bidding process assembled by the plan was simplistic and the scoring system arbitrary, and that it failed to take into account how a provider network change could harm plan members. Durham-based Blue Cross estimates its provider network is nearly 40 percent larger than Aetna's.

"State Health Plan members are more than customers, they are our neighbors, our friends and our family, and we have filed this protest to ensure the best outcome for them, for taxpayers, and for our state," Blue Cross CEO Dr. Tunde Sotunde said in a news release.

Folwell, whose office oversees the plan and who is trustee board chairman, said on Thursday that he welcomed the opportunity for the contract process review and that Blue Cross "has the right to point fingers at everyone else for losing the contract."

The initial contract is three years. Folwell's office has said the Aetna contract could result in \$140 million in cost savings should it extend to the maximum of five years.

"We submitted an aggressive proposal affirming the State Health Plan's commitment to high-quality and affordable health benefits," Jim Bostian, Aetna's North Carolina president, said in a written statement Thursday.

UMR Inc., a subsidiary of United Healthcare, also bid for the administrator's contract. Watts' final decision could end up being challenged in court.

The State Health Plan anticipated paying \$79 million in administrative expenses to Blue Cross during 2022 as part of the current third-party contract.

Folwell's office said the contract will affect the plan's 740,000 members. But Blue Cross said the contract covers 580,000 people—that leaves out those who participate in Medicare Advantage plans.

Folwell has been unhappy with Blue Cross over the years because of obstacles to accessing company documents that he said would show whether the plan gets the best prices for member health expenses from insurers. Legislation that advanced at the General Assembly in 2022 but failed to become law could have addressed that.

A published report last week highlighted recent unhappiness by plan officials about a software system used by Blue Cross.

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

Woman Accusing Cops of Trafficking

By Matthew Barakat

Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP)—The woman known to jurors only as Jane Doe shook her head Thursday when her lawyer asked her a question she knew was coming but clearly dreaded—could she describe the injuries she suffered during five years in a Virginia-based sex trafficking ring?

Her voice trembled as she described indignities suffered at the hands of clients of the prostitution ring. Eventually she broke down and sobbed uncontrollably—the words "I'm so ashamed" barely audible between the

cries—forcing a temporary halt to the trial of Doe's civil lawsuit against a former police chief and three other officers.

It was the most dramatic moment thus far in a trial focused on blockbuster allegations that the former police chief in Fairfax County and the three officers were clients of the prostitution ring and that they served as its protectors by tipping off the head of the enterprise, Hazel Sanchez, when stings and undercover police would be in the area.

The former chief, Ed Roessler, and the other three officers all deny the allegations, though two

former officers, Michael Barbazette and Jason Mardocco, admitted they were clients of Sanchez and resigned from the force after their phone numbers were found on Sanchez's phone.

So far, the jury has heard testimony from Doe and another woman who says she was trafficked. Both identified all four officers as men they had seen in the various hotels and apartments in northern Virginia where Sanchez would set up shop.

The jury also heard from a decorated former officer, William Woolf, who was assigned to investigate sex trafficking as

part of a multi-jurisdictional task force. Woolf testified that Barbazette, his supervisor, interfered in his investigations and that another senior officer who is the fourth defendant, James Baumstark, was indifferent when Woolf expressed concerns about how he was being managed.

Baumstark is now a deputy police chief in Asheville.

While there is strong evidence that Doe and the women in Sanchez's operation suffered horribly, jurors in the civil trial in U.S. District Court in Alexandria face the much tougher question

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

Family Whose Property Was Seized Sells It Back To California County For \$20M

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Senior National Correspondent

The great-grandchildren of the African-American couple Willa and Charles Bruce, whose land in Southern California was taken in 1924 and returned to the family last year, have opted to sell it back to the local government for \$20 million.

In the 1920s, the beach resort was extremely popular with African-American tourists. At that time, Black people were not permitted on White beaches.

The site became famously known as "Bruce's Beach."

The children and grandchildren of Charles and Willa Bruce fought for decades to get back the land.

Chief Duane Yellow Feather

Shepard, a family historian and spokesman for the Bruce family, stated in a 2021 interview, "It was a very significant location because there was nowhere else along the California coast where African-Americans could go to enjoy the water."

The Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacists often threatened the Bruce family, but they

kept the resort open and took care of the land.

In 1924, the municipal council used eminent domain to take the land to build a park.

But, according to a TV show called "The Insider," the area wasn't used for many years.

Willa and Charles Bruce fought back in court, but their compensation was only \$14,000. In recent years, local officials have estimated the property's value to be as high as \$75 million.

The area contains two coastal properties and is currently used for lifeguard training.

Janice Hahn, chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, revealed that the family would sell the property back to the local government.

Hahn stated that the price was set through an appraisal.

Hahn stated, "This is what reparations look like, and it is a model I hope governments around the country would adopt."

The statement made by Hahn may or may not be exactly what the Bruce family desired in addition to the restitution of their land.

In 2021, Anthony Bruce, the great-great-grandson of Willa and Charles Bruce, told *The New York Times*, "An apology would be the least they could do."



FINALLY A LITTLE ECONOMIC JUSTICE—Prime beachfront property in Los Angeles County that was taken from the Bruce family in 1924 was returned to their descendants last year. Now, they're selling it back to the county—for \$20 million.

CBC Begins "Busy" 2023 With Meetings—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

While House Republicans spent a week publicly bickering and 15 rounds voting to elect Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California as speaker, the Congressional Black

Caucus was already hard at work on behalf of its millions of constituents.

In the 118th Congress, the CBC will have 58 members, nine of whom are new to the chamber.

Steven Horsford, a Democrat from Nevada, was chosen as chair.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

SHERIFF: REMAINS FOUND OF WOMAN MISSING SINCE HURRICANE IAN

FORT MYERS, Fla. (AP)—The remains of a Florida woman missing since Hurricane Ian destroyed her home in September have been identified, a sheriff said Thursday.

Workers removing debris on hard-hit Fort Myers Beach discovered the remains of 82-year-old Ilonka Knes last week in a thicket of mangroves, Lee County Sheriff Carmine Marceno said at a news conference.

Knes was positively identified by dental records and authorities say she drowned. The remains of her husband, 81-year-old Robert Knes, were found shortly after the storm struck.

"She was one of two people still missing from Hurricane Ian," Marceno said. "I hope this discovery can bring the family some closure."

The other person missing in Lee County since the hurricane blasted ashore Sept. 28 is James Hurst, 72, the sheriff said. Hurst told family he would ride out the storm on his sailboat off Fort Myers Beach but was not heard from again.

Before the discovery of Knes' remains, the Florida Medical Examiners Commission on Tuesday reported 145 confirmed deaths in the state from Hurricane Ian. This would add to that total.

There were also five people killed in North Carolina, one in Virginia and three in Cuba, authorities have said.

EPA CHIEF REGAN SPEAKS AT NORTH CAROLINA KING DAY OBSERVANCE

(AP)—The drive for clean water and air for minority and low-income residents is inexorably linked to the march toward racial equality that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. championed, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan told North Carolina state employees Friday.

Regan, a Goldsboro native and Gov. Roy Cooper's former environment secretary, delivered the keynote address to hundreds attending the annual King Day state workers' observance at a downtown Raleigh church. The slain civil rights leader was born 94 years ago on Sunday.

Regan became President Joe Biden's head of EPA in early 2021. Regan mentioned his travels while administrator to communities to speak with people fearful about the threat of toxic waste, unclean water and lead poisoning to themselves or their children.

"It's never been more clear that the fight for civil rights is inseparable from the fight for environmental, economic, health and racial justice," Regan said. "We simply cannot be for one without the other."

Cooper introduced Regan at the service, praising him for helping "position our state as a leader in environmental justice" while Department of Environmental Quality secretary.

The observance was held in person for the first time since 2020. Coronavirus concerns prompted virtual ceremonies in 2021 and 2022.

APPALACHIAN REGIONAL COMMISSION FUND ASSISTS RURAL BROADBAND

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP)—The Appalachian Regional Commission is offering \$6.3 million in grant money to boost broadband access in dozens of communities.

The commission said it will be the first-ever grant funded through its Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies. It's designed to provide support to 50 underserved communities in 12 Appalachian states, the commission said in a media release.

The ARC said the focus of the project will be to help selected communities compete for billions in federal broadband funding that will become available later this year.

"Broadband access is essential for Appalachia to thrive and compete in a global economy. Without this support, our most rural communities may be left further behind," said Gayle Manchin, federal co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Appalachian communities can learn more and apply at connecthunity.fund/raise.

NEW NC CONGRESSMAN SAYS CAWTHORN DIDN'T FORWARD CASEWORK

ASHEVILLE (AP)—New U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards of North Carolina says the office of his predecessor, Madison Cawthorn, left Edwards' staff unaware of pending constituent requests and government casework before Cawthorn formally left the seat.

Edwards was officially sworn-in over the weekend as a House member representing the 11th Congressional District. Edwards defeated Cawthorn, a pro-Donald Trump firebrand, in the Republican primary last May.

In a news release on Monday, Edwards asked anyone with outstanding or unfinished casework to contact his office because it lacks such information. According to Edwards, Cawthorn's office didn't transfer official constituent casework—standard practice for a seat transition—by a Dec. 23 deadline.

"Repeated attempts to reach Congressman Cawthorn and his staff were made over the past month, but no response or action was provided," the news release said.

The rest of the executive committee is made up of Democrats from New York, Louisiana, Georgia, and Washington: Yvette Clarke, Troy Carter, Lucy McBath, and Marilyn Strickland.

Due to the lengthy speakership vote, Congress could not do business during the first week of the new legislative year.

Despite this, Horsford and other CBC members still managed to talk about one of their 2023 goals.

Members were worried about the Biden administration's plan to stop people from Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Haiti from crossing the border.

Horsford stated, "America is a nation of immigrants."

He argued that the right to access could save lives in many situations.

Horsford and Clarke said that the government's policy, which is very similar to that of the Trump administration, should be looked at again immediately.

Even though Biden's new program intends to speed up the asylum process, "the reality is that the administration's actions have the potential to threaten the safety and humanity of migrants," as Horsford put it.

Horsford's parents are native

Trinidadians, while Clarke's ancestors came to the United States from Jamaica.

During a meeting with DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, which Horsford led, the topic of Haitian migrants was central.

Horsford says, "Members talked about the real-life experiences

of their constituents with migration and their worries about the continuation of Title 42. They also stressed the importance of giving everyone fair and equal access to asylum and other ways to move."

Trump's pandemic-era Title 42 law allowed the United States to deport hundreds of thousands of

asylum seekers on public health grounds.

Horsford praised the CBC and Mayorkas for "taking the right step in the right direction" by collaborating on a government-wide strategy to address migration at entry points.

The caucus' chair said the CBC is eager to collaborate with Biden on finding "humanitarian-focused solutions."

The CBC has not yet released all its priorities for 2023 due to the delay in electing a speaker, but it expects a busy session.

Maxwell Frost (D-Fla.), the youngest new member at age 25, is the first person from Generation Z to serve in Congress.

Summer Lee, 35, is the first Black woman to represent Pennsylvania in the United States House of Representatives.

After being sworn in for the first time on January 3, 1991, D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, now 85, is beginning her 16th term this month.

"I do not know if we have ever needed you more than we do now," said Marcia Fudge, the former chair of the CBC and the current secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS LEADERS

Larger NCGOP Majorities—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

before an override attempt. The change, which likely will be debated heavily when permanent rules surface, could allow Republicans to complete an override simply because one Democrat is absent or must leave to take a phone call.

"It's a shame that House Republican leaders believe they can only override a veto through deception, surprise and trickery," Cooper said in a written statement late Wednesday. He urged requiring at least 24 hours' notice for an override, in keeping with Senate rules.

Moore downplayed the rules omission, telling reporters that veto overrides would simply now be treated like action on other bills and that an "ambush kind of vote" is "not something we're looking at."

Such undertakings could be tested on topics such as abortion, which, in light of last June's U.S. Supreme Court ruling striking down Roe v. Wade, gives Republicans the opportunity to tighten North Carolina's 20-week ban.

Moore suggested later Wednesday that some support was emerging in his chamber for a proposal backed by Berger to

advance legislation prohibiting abortion after the first trimester—12 or 13 weeks of pregnancy—with new exceptions for rape and incest. But Moore cautioned that discussions on the topic remained in "early stages."

"Twenty weeks is in essence five months into a pregnancy. I think if you look at where the people of the state of North Carolina are, they think that that's too long," Berger said.

Cooper, who campaigned in the fall for legislative candidates largely on blocking additional abortion restrictions, has said further lowering the 20-week limit would be extreme legislation.

The influence of women at the Legislative Building on the topic may be more keenly felt in their sheer numbers. There are now 50 female members, a seven-seat increase compared to the past session. Thirty-eight are Democrats.

First-term Rep. Kanika Brown, a Forsyth County Democrat, said she plans to advocate for abortion safeguards among other initiatives, while elevating women's voices from her district.

"I'm just glad to see the diver-

sity of women that have stepped forward, you know, to take claim, to take charge and pave the way for the rest of the young ladies that's coming behind us," Brown said. "It's on us to make sure they understand what's going on and not leave them in the dark."

Neither Berger nor Moore mentioned abortion in their acceptance speeches, focusing instead on efforts they'd like to see toward improving education and health care access and supporting law enforcement in a rapidly-growing state.

The legislature and Cooper could find common ground within a two-year state government budget bill—this year's chief task. Medicaid expansion—a recurring plea for Cooper since he became governor in 2017—could finally happen after the chambers passed competing expansion legislation in 2022.

The Legislative Building contained more pomp compared to the 2021 opening, when COVID-19 health concerns prevented family members from joining new legislators on the House and Senate floors for the swearings-in.

This time, they sat with law-

makers as they recited the Pledge of Allegiance, took their oaths of office and reelected Moore as speaker and Berger as Senate president pro tempore. Former four-term Gov. Jim Hunt—now 85—sat on the Senate floor with his daughter, Rachel, who joined the Senate after two terms in the House.

The House swearings-in were delayed briefly when Rep. Bill Brisson, a Bladen County Republican, needed the attention of emergency medical technicians. He returned to the chamber 20 minutes later to take the oath of office.

Moore's election made history by breaking a tie with two former speakers who had served four such terms. Berger also was elected by acclamation to a seventh term. He's second in longevity to predecessor Sen. Marc Basnight, a Dare County Democrat who served nine terms.

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 undercover issues.

Woman Accusing Cops—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

of whether the four officers abetted Doe's trafficking.

"They are with the force of the law. They're here to protect us. They have to not be clients," Doe said Thursday, after she regained her composure and the trial resumed.

On cross-examination, though, defense lawyers raised doubts about whether the women accurately identified the four officers as clients.

The allegations have evolved since the lawsuit was filed in 2021. The lawsuit initially did not identify any of the officers by name. Barbazette and Mardocco were added to the lawsuit after Doe's attorney, Victor Glasberg, learned that they had resigned after the FBI turned over the results of an investigation into San-

chez's prostitution ring, and that those findings prompted their resignations.

Roessler and Baumstark were added to the lawsuit initially on allegations that they were helping to cover up officers' misdeeds. It was not until the trial began on Tuesday that Roessler and Baumstark were publicly accused of being actual clients of Sanchez, who was convicted of running a prostitution ring in federal court and sentenced to prison.

Kim Baucom, the lawyer for Roessler and Baumstark, called the allegations against them "preposterous" and "made up out of whole cloth."

Roessler retired as chief of Fairfax County, a populous suburb of the nation's capital, in

January 2021—years after the collapse of Sanchez's ring and before Doe's lawsuit was filed. There is no indication that the allegations played any role in his decision to retire.

Defense lawyers have cited evidence they say demonstrates that Doe was not a trafficking victim but a willing prostitute.

Doe has acknowledged that when she was recruited to come to the U.S. from Costa Rica in 2010 that she was willing to have sex for money.

But Doe said Sanchez's recruiter told her that she would primarily be doing nanny work and housekeeping in the U.S. Work as an escort would be a side gig, and she would go on dates with wealthy clients and

could choose whether to have sex with any particular client, she said.

Both Doe and the other woman who testified were also questioned extensively on why they returned to work for Sanchez on multiple trips back and forth between Costa Rica and the U.S.

Both women testified that Sanchez threatened their families, showing them pictures of their children at home and at school, and implying that she had operatives in Costa Rica who could harm them. Both women also said they did not believe they could flee to police because they believed police were protecting Sanchez.

The trial is ongoing. Lawyers for the four officers have not yet presented their case.

NC Auditor, Medical Board Clash Over Review

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

North Carolina's state auditor and the panel that disciplines physicians clashed over a performance review released Thursday in which auditors said they were hamstringing scrutinizing how the state Medical Board handled provider complaints because the panel denied them information.

The board pushed back, saying that state and federal law prohibits it from giving access to details about over 4,400 investigations covering a two-year period ending in June 2021 sought by auditors because they contained confidential medical and investigative information. The auditors received heavily redacted documents instead. Board officials also said they disagreed with other findings in the review.

State Auditor Beth Wood's office said state law ensures that all information obtained and used in an audit remains confidential. The audit recommended that the legislature pass a law to affirm access to such documentation while conducting audits.

The auditors said they did receive slightly more information in their review about the roughly



NC AUDITOR BETH WOOD

200 additional investigations that resulted in public action against a licensee. In these documents, the review's authors declared that the board failed to complete investigations of medical providers within six months—what they called a state law requirement. And it failed to ensure that providers receive disciplinary actions for wrongdoing—such as license restrictions or agreements to not practice medicine for a period.

"As a result, there was an increased risk that medical provid-

ers whose actions posed a threat to patient safety could continue serving patients," the report read.

In a response attached to the final review, Medical Board CEO David Henderson wrote that Wood's office is mistaken that investigations must be completed in six months. And the board's program to monitor wayward providers wasn't designed to ensure that those who lose their medical license never practice again, saying that's a criminal matter left to prosecutors, Henderson wrote.

The auditor's office agreed that it "had received no complaints that prompted the audit and that there have been no allegations and there is no evidence that (the board) ever failed to review all complaints, administer discipline in an equitable manner or report all its public actions," Henderson said.

Still, the limited access to investigative documents prevented Wood's office from auditing four of the six objectives sought for review. Those were largely focused on whether the board followed the law, its policies and best practices when investigating complaints on allegations like

substandard medical care, sexual misconduct or overprescribing medication, the report said.

And auditors also accused the Medical Board of making "several inaccurate and potentially misleading statements" within their written response to the performance review.

The 13-member board—11 were appointed by the governor and the remainder picked by legislative leaders—licensed over 57,000 physicians, physician assistants and other medical professionals at the end of the 2021.

The board, which runs on licensing fees only, said its staff investigates almost 3,000 cases annually. It can decide that no violation of the state's Medical Practice Act occurred; find no violation occurred but still issue privately a warning or order remedial action; or determine a violation occurred and take public action against the provider, up to and including license revocation.

Henderson wrote that the board has taken steps to improve areas of concern cited by the state auditor and was willing to hire an outside firm to perform an outside audit to address the objectives.

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Business & Finance

School Lawsuits Over Social Media Harm Face Tough Road

By Gene Johnson

Associated Press

SEATTLE, Wash. (AP)—Like the tobacco, oil, gun, opioid and vaping industries before them, the big U.S. social media companies are now facing lawsuits brought by public entities that seek to hold them accountable for a huge societal problem—in their case, the mental health crisis among youth.

But the new lawsuits—one by the public school district in Seattle last week, with a second filed by a suburban district Monday and almost certainly more to come—face an uncertain legal road.

The U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments next month over the extent to which federal law protects the tech industry from such claims when social media algorithms push potentially harmful content.

Even if the high court were to clear the way for lawsuits like Seattle's, the district has a daunting challenge in proving the industry's liability.

And the tech industry insists there are many ways social media's effects on teen mental health differ from, say, big pharma's role in pushing opioid addiction.

"The underlying argument is that the tech industry is to blame for the emotional state of teenagers, because they made recommendations on content that has caused emotional harm," said Carl Szabo, vice president and general counsel of the tech industry trade association Net-Choice. "It would be absurd to sue Barnes & Noble because an employee recommended a book that caused emotional harm or made a teenager feel bad. But that's exactly what this lawsuit is doing."

Seattle Public Schools on Friday sued the tech giants behind TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat, alleging they have created a public nuisance by targeting their products to children. The Kent School District south of Seattle followed suit Monday.

The districts blame the companies for worsening mental health and behavioral disorders including anxiety, depression, disordered eating and cyberbullying; making

it more difficult to educate students; and forcing schools to take steps such as hiring additional mental health professionals, developing lesson plans about the effects of social media and providing additional training to teachers.

"Our students—and young people everywhere—face unprecedented learning and life struggles that are amplified by the negative impacts of increased screen time, unfiltered content, and potentially addictive properties of social media," Seattle Superintendent Brent Jones said in an emailed statement Tuesday. "We are confident and hopeful that this lawsuit is a significant step toward reversing this trend for our students."

Federal law—Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996—helps protect online companies from liability arising from what third-party users post on their platforms. But the lawsuits argue the provision, which predates all the social media platforms, does not protect the tech giants' behavior in this case, where their own algorithms promote harmful content.

That's also the issue in Gonzalez v. Google, the parent company of YouTube, set for argument at the Supreme Court on Feb. 21. In that case, the family of an American woman killed in an Islamic State group attack in Paris in 2015 alleges YouTube's algorithms aided the terror group's recruitment.

If the high court's decision makes clear that tech companies can be held liable in such cases, the school districts will still have to show that social media was in fact to blame. Seattle's lawsuit says that from 2009 to 2019, there was on average a 30 percent increase in the number of its students who reported feeling "so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row" that they stopped doing some typical activities.

But Szabo pointed out that Seattle's graduation rates have been on the rise since 2019, during a time when many kids relied on social media to keep in touch with their friends throughout the pandemic. If social media were truly so harmful to the district's educational ef-

forts, the graduation rate wouldn't be rising, he suggested.

"The complaint focuses on only how social media harms kids, and there might be evidence of that," said Eric Goldman, a professor at Santa Clara University School of Law in Silicon Valley. "But there's also a lot of evidence that social media benefits teenagers and other kids. What we don't know is what the distress rate would look like without social media. It's possible the distress rate would be higher, not lower."

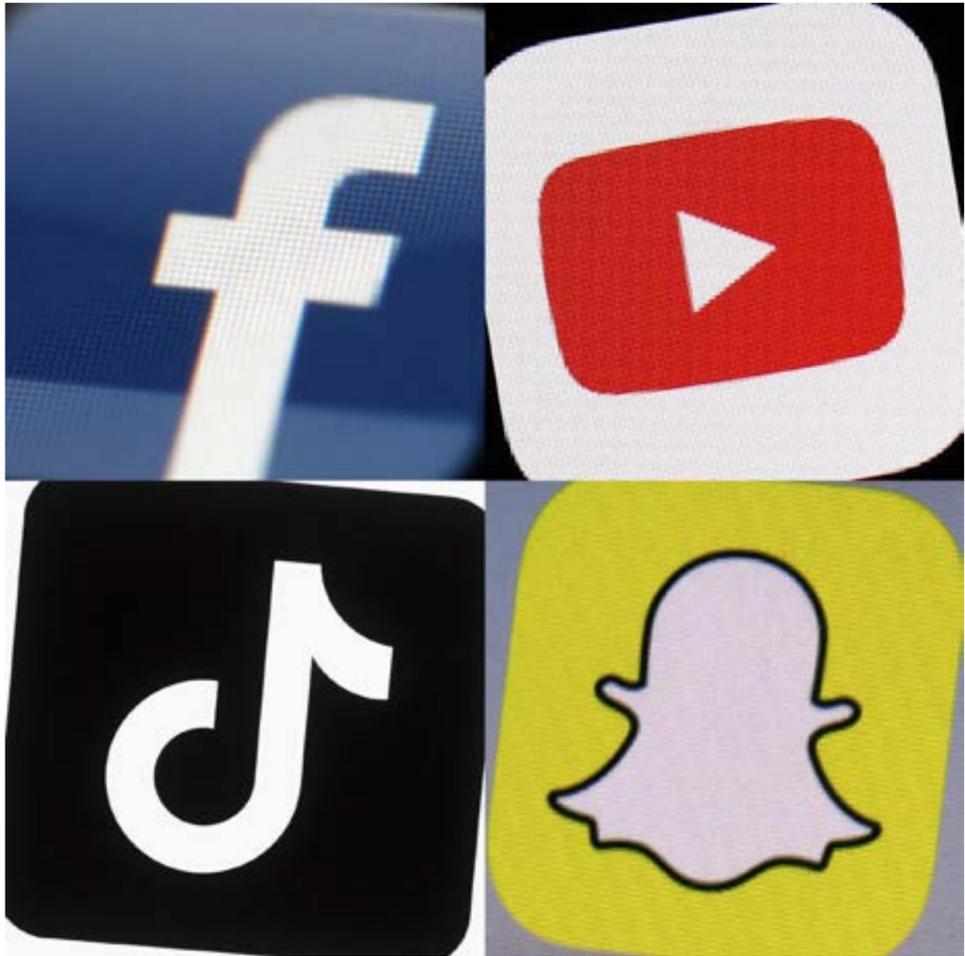
The companies have insisted that they take the safety of their users, especially kids, seriously, and they have introduced tools to make it easier for parents to know whom their children are contacting; made mental health resources, including the new 988 crisis hotline, more prominent; and improved age verification and screen time limits.

"We automatically set teens' accounts to private when they join Instagram, and we send notifications encouraging them to take regular breaks," Anitigone Davis, Meta's global head of safety, said in an emailed statement. "We don't allow content that promotes suicide, self-harm or eating disorders, and of the content we remove or take action on, we identify over 99 percent of it before it's reported to us."

Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen revealed internal studies in 2021 showing the company knew Instagram negatively affected teenagers by harming their body images and worsening eating disorders and suicidal thoughts. She alleged the platform prioritized profits over safety and hid its research from investors and the public.

Even if social media benefits some students, that doesn't erase the serious harm to many others, said Josh Golin, executive director of Fairplay, a nonprofit working to insulate children from commercialization and marketing.

"The mental health costs to students, the amount of time schools have to spend monitoring and responding to social media drama, is exorbitant," Golin said. "It is ridiculous that schools are responsible for the damages caused by these social media platforms to young people..."



IT WILL BE HARD TO PROVE EITHER HARM OR RESPONSIBILITY

Tesla Cuts Prices On Its Vehicles

By Tom Krisher

AP Auto Writer

DETROIT, Mich. (AP)—With its sales slowing and its stock price tumbling, Tesla Inc. slashed prices dramatically Friday on several versions of its electric vehicles, making some of its models eligible for a new federal tax credit that could help spur buyer interest.

The company dropped prices nearly 20 percent in the United States on some versions of the Model Y SUV, its top seller. That cut will make more versions of the Model Y eligible for a \$7,500 electric-vehicle tax credit, which will be available through March. Tesla also reduced the base price of the Model 3, its least expensive model, by about 6 percent.

Far from pleasing investors, the sharp price cuts sent Tesla shares down nearly 2 percent in late-afternoon trading Friday. Since the start of last year, the stock has plummeted more than 65 percent. Many investors fear that Tesla's sales slowdown will persist and have grown concerned about the erratic behavior of CEO Elon Musk and the distractions caused by his \$44 billion purchase of Twitter.

"I think the real driver for all of this is falling demand for Tesla," said Guidehouse Research e-Mobility analyst Sam Abuelsamid.

Based on the current short delivery times for Tesla vehicles that once were months long, Tesla's once-sizable order backlog may have been depleted, said Scott Case, CEO of Recurrent, who analyzes the new and used EV markets.

Customers either were awaiting this year's federal tax credits, Case said, or switched to competitors.

"We think it's now more of a competition thing," he said.

Unlike many of its rivals, though, Tesla can still make money on EVs for one crucial reason, Case said: The company enjoys high profit margins, thanks to manufacturing and battery efficiencies.

Competitors generally lack Tesla's economies of scale and other efficiencies and may struggle to match the price cuts. If so, Tesla could manage to keep vehicle sales at sufficient levels.

"They can afford to make this cut and not be lighting money on fire," Case said.

Messages were left Friday seeking a comment from Tesla.

Tesla still faces the threat of intensifying competition from other automakers in the United States and globally for years to come. Last year in the United States, total EV sales soared nearly 65 percent from 2021. Automakers sold 47 electric vehicle models; only four were Teslas. S&P Global Mobility expects the number of EV models to surge to 159 by 2025.

And as overall EV sales are rising, Tesla's U.S. market share is falling. From 2018 through 2020, Tesla represented about 80 percent of the EV market. By 2021, that figure had sunk to 71 percent, and it's continued to

decline, according to registration data gathered by S&P.

Still, Tesla's U.S. sales rose 40 percent last year, and S&P expects them to continue to rise as overall electric vehicle sales steadily increase.

Even with U.S. tax credits, EVs remain pricey compared with gas-powered vehicles, largely because of the high cost of batteries. In addition, higher loan rates and more expensive raw materials are keeping costs high for buyers and could limit EV sales, for Tesla as well as its competitors.

Edward Jones analyst Jeff Windau said those factors are reducing demand for all vehicles, not just Teslas.

Musk's provocative behavior on Twitter may also be a factor in lower demand. Since taking over the social media platform in October, Musk has loosened restrictions on hate speech and other questionable conduct.

He has repeatedly engaged with figures on the right and far-right and has frequently attacked what he describes as the "woke mind virus"—a pejorative umbrella term for liberal views that Musk asserts are threatening civilization.

Musk's views are sharply at odds with those of many environmentally conscious Tesla customers who lean Democratic.

Survey data from Morning Consult Brand Intelligence shows that in the past year, the number of Americans who view Tesla favorably has dropped. In January of 2022, nearly 43 percent had a favorable opinion of Tesla, with nearly 15 percent negative. By this month, those with favorable opinions had dropped to 37 percent, while the negative views rose to 24 percent.

Case said he has heard longtime Tesla buyers say during the past six months that they aren't sure about being seen in a Tesla anymore and that they'd now consider buying an EV from a competitor.

Apple CEO Takes 40 Percent Pay Cut

By Michelle Chapman

AP Business Writer

Apple CEO Tim Cook will take a more than 40 percent pay cut this year from a year earlier as the company adjusts how it calculates his compensation partly based on a recommendation from Cook himself.

Apple Inc. said in a regulatory filing late Thursday that Cook's target total compensation is \$49 million for 2023, with a \$3 million salary, \$6 million cash incentive and \$40 million in equity awards.

Last March the Cupertino, Calif., company conducted an advisory shareholder vote on execu-

tive pay with 6.21 billion shares voting in favor of the executive pay package and 3.44 billion against. There were also abstentions and broker non-votes.

Apple said its compensation committee took into account shareholder feedback, the company's performance and a recommendation from Cook, who was promoted to CEO in 2011, to adjust his compensation in light of the feedback received.

Apple said last year it sought feedback from shareholders about compensation and it received "overwhelming support for Mr. Cook's exceptional leadership and the unprecedented

value he has delivered for shareholders... Those shareholders we spoke with that did not support our 2022 Say on Pay proposal consistently cited the size and structure of the 2021 and 2022 equity awards granted to Mr. Cook as the primary reason for their voting decision," the company said.

Cook has received a \$3 million base salary for the past three years, but his total compensation—which includes the restricted awards—jumped from \$14.8 million in 2020 to \$98.7 million in 2021 and \$99.4 million in 2022.

Apple said Cook supported the changes to his compensation.

Computer Breakdown Sows Chaos In The Air

By David Koenig and Michelle Chapman

AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP)—Thousands of flights across the U.S. were canceled or delayed last Wednesday after a system that offers safety information to pilots failed, and the government launched an investigation into the breakdown, which grounded some planes for hours.

The Federal Aviation Administration said preliminary indications "traced the outage to a damaged database file." The agency said it would take steps to avoid another similar disruption.

The breakdown showed how much American air travel depends on the computer system that generates alerts called NOTAMs—or Notice to Air Missions.

Before a plane takes off, pilots and airline dispatchers must review the notices, which include details about bad weather, runway closures or other temporary factors that could affect the flight. The system was once telephone-based but moved online years ago.

The system broke down late Tuesday and was not fixed until midmorning Wednesday. The FAA took the rare step of pre-

venting any planes from taking off for a time, and the cascading chaos led to more than 1,300 flight cancellations and 9,000 delays by early evening on the East Coast, according to flight-tracking website Flight-Aware.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told a news conference that the problems "led to a ground stop because of the way safety information was moving through the system."

After the failures were fixed, he warned that travelers could continue to see some effects "rippling through the system."

Buttigieg said his agency would now try to learn why the system went down.

Longtime aviation insiders could not recall an outage of such magnitude caused by a technology failure. Some compared it in scope to the nationwide shutdown of airspace after the 2001 terrorist attacks.

"Periodically there have been local issues here or there, but this is pretty significant historically," said Tim Campbell, a former senior vice president of air operations at American Airlines and now a consultant in Minneapolis.

Campbell said there has long been concern about the FAA's technology, and not just the NOTAM system.

Many of those systems "are old mainframe systems that are generally reliable, but they are out of date," he said.



SCREEN SHOWS DELAYS AND CANCELLATIONS LAST MONDAY

Classifieds



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The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Lenoir County out for bid: C-C11489 Lenoir YDC Retrocommissioning. The bid opening is scheduled for: Monday, 2/14/2023. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/1518020000.pdf>

Opinion



A Magic Made By Many

By Svante Myrick

People for the American Way

For many of us, the Martin Luther King holiday every year brings memories of Dr. King's great speeches and the incredible power of his words. Dr. King was a master orator who gave many inspiring speeches throughout his career. Lots of Black kids—myself included—grew up mesmerized by the majesty of the “I Have a Dream” speech, wishing we could one day speak that well.

As a youngster, especially one who struggled with a speech impediment, I thought great speeches were magic.

I still do. Except now I see that magic isn't made in a vacuum. Maybe you've heard a great speech given in an empty room; I know I have. No matter how wonderful the words, the impact will be small. In contrast, I look at the old photos of Dr. King's speeches and there is a sea of upturned faces, many Black, some White: older people, young folks, men and women.

I think about these moments and I am struck not just by the power of Dr. King, but by the enormous commitment of the people behind the scenes: activists, organizers, and volunteers.

Those working behind the scenes enabled the people of Montgomery, Alabama to hear Dr. King promise that the arc of the moral universe does indeed bend toward justice. They enabled hundreds of thousands in Washington, and even more around the country, to hear his immortal “I Have a Dream” speech. And in Memphis, they enabled thousands of striking sanitation workers and their allies hear Dr. King the day before he was murdered, when he spoke of having been “to the mountaintop” and gave hope for a better future.

I feel deep gratitude for the hundreds, even thousands of people who played “supporting” roles throughout Dr. King's life, the people who passed out flyers, who offered rides, who brought friends and neighbors to listen when he spoke. And of course, there is gratitude beyond words for all those who marched, who faced police brutality and fought segregation. Because of them, Dr. King was able to change the world.

There's a lesson in that for all of us. If you say to yourself, “I could never give the kind of speech Dr. King could give, so there isn't much I can do to change hearts and minds,” then you are half right—and half wrong.

It's true that Dr. King's talents were rare. But he didn't move mountains alone; nobody can. The lesson we should learn when we commemorate the life of Dr. King is how vital each of us can be, together and separately, in changing the world.

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,” Dr. King wrote, “tied in a single garment of destiny.” To me, his characteristically beautiful words mean that history is not made by a parade of individual heroes, stretching single-file through the centuries; it is made collectively, by the many.

In everyday terms, it means that the person who sets up the chairs or plugs in the microphones for an event is as important to its success as the speaker onstage. Each of us has a part to play and a gift to give.

And each of us has a responsibility to act. Too often there is a temptation to wait for the next hero to come along to “save” us, which can lead to doing nothing. That's a downside of believing, falsely, that heroes can act alone.

So yes, we honor Dr. King for his incredible life. And we should also honor him by committing to serve our communities and work for change in any way we are able. That's how we make magic.

Svante Myrick is President of People for the American Way. Previously, he served as executive director of People For and led campaigns focused on transforming public safety, racial equity, voting rights, and empowering young elected officials. Myrick garnered national attention as the youngest-ever mayor in New York State history.



How Safe Can We Really Be?

By Robert C. Koehler

PeaceVoice

It was the guacamole's fault!

That's the guy's defense, anyway—that plus his right to carry four handguns, an AR-15 and a 12-gauge shotgun into a supermarket in Atlanta. Oh yeah, and he was wearing body armor. This was in March 2021, barely a week after an actual mass shooting at several massage parlors in Atlanta, in which eight people were killed. And it was only two days after a mass shooting at a grocery store in Boulder, Colo., where 10 people were killed.

When another customer saw the guy in the store's bathroom, with the AR-15 propped against a wall, and alerted store personnel to the presence of a possible mass murderer, the panic was certainly understandable. The store was evacuated, police came, the gun carrier was arrested. But, as the *New York Times* asked in a story about the incident nearly two years later: Did he break the law?

When I read this paradoxical story the other day—about how the arrestee hadn't actually committed a crime and was not convicted of any wrongdoing—the psychological stratosphere broke open for me. Who are we... as a nation, as a planet, as an evolving species? Here's the thing about paradox: You can't simply shoot it, blow it apart, then move on. You have to swallow it whole. You have to transcend it.

What is freedom—in this case, the freedom to be armed and, you know, able to defend yourself? Does one man's freedom force the rest of us to watch their country turn into a John Wayne movie?

The *Times* story informs us that the defense attorney told the court his client “had acquired the guns and the body armor... because he had felt threatened by someone in his neighborhood. On the day of his arrest, he had hoped to take his guns to a nearby shooting range but first had to run some errands, which included a stop at the grocery store.”

And, oh yeah, he didn't have a car, which is why he had lugged the guns—handguns in his jacket pockets, the rifle and shotgun in a guitar case—into the store. While he was in the men's room, he “had taken out some of the weapons, including the rifle, to clean them after discovering that some guacamole he had bought had caused a mess inside the bag.”

And there you have it. A normal American situation. Well, sure, as the *Times* points out: “All but three states allow for the open carry of handguns, long guns or both, and in many there is little the police can do.”

Hence, the paradox. Of course, there's one small detail the *Times* story omits. The police dilemma can suddenly disappear if the person legally carrying a gun happens to be Black, as the Philando Castile case demonstrated back in 2016.

Castile, a Black man who was licensed to carry a handgun, was driving with his girlfriend and her 4-year-old daughter in a suburb near Saint Paul, Minnesota, when his car was pulled over. Castile explained to the officer that he was legally carrying a handgun, but as he was trying to pull out his driver's license, the officer shot him seven times, killing him. The officer was later arrested and charged with manslaughter, but was acquitted.

So the paradox expands: weapons, force, fear, dehumanization and ... racism.

“This is the American paradox in full blossom.” So I wrote last year, pondering the endless question.

“The more people there are carrying guns, especially in public places, the more dangerous it is simply to be out and about; and the more dangerous it is to be out in public, the more credibility Second Amendment aficionados have when they claim they are only safe if they're carrying a weapon.”

Except they aren't safe at all—they're just swimming in the chaos, clinging to a belief that their guns make them safe. But such a belief is crucial. I understand the need to believe one is safe. When I moved to Chicago from rural Michigan—my God, almost half a century ago, in search of a career in journalism—I wasn't sure how I'd fare in the dangerous big city. But I was a peacenik, not a gun guy. Here's what I decided: I'll look everyone in the eye. I will not be afraid.

That is to say, I gave myself agency. And this is what worked—the fact that I felt empowered. And I didn't care what neighborhood I was in. The White-person mantra was: Stay out of such-and-such neighborhood... Cabrini-Green or whatever. You know, neighborhoods of color, a.k.a., ghettos. Don't go there! I paid no attention to that, and the whole city became mine.

I'm not saying life has been perfect—free of trouble. I was once mugged by three teens in hoodies, a few blocks from my house. Life is what it is. The world is full of thorns and potholes. No one is fully safe, forever and ever.

And the paradox doesn't go away. How much force is necessary to get what we want? Historian Timothy Snyder, in a recent interview with Rachel Maddow reflecting on the Jan. 8 attack on the Brazilian capital by supporters of defeated president Jair Bolsonaro (and its similarity to the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. capital by Trump supporters), said:

“When you trash the place, you're showing, symbolically, that institutions don't matter. What matters is force. What matters is will. You disrespect an institution... a strongman should be running the country. You humiliate the institution, then you get the strongman.”

And the strongman may kill his enemies, but he can't kill the paradox.

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

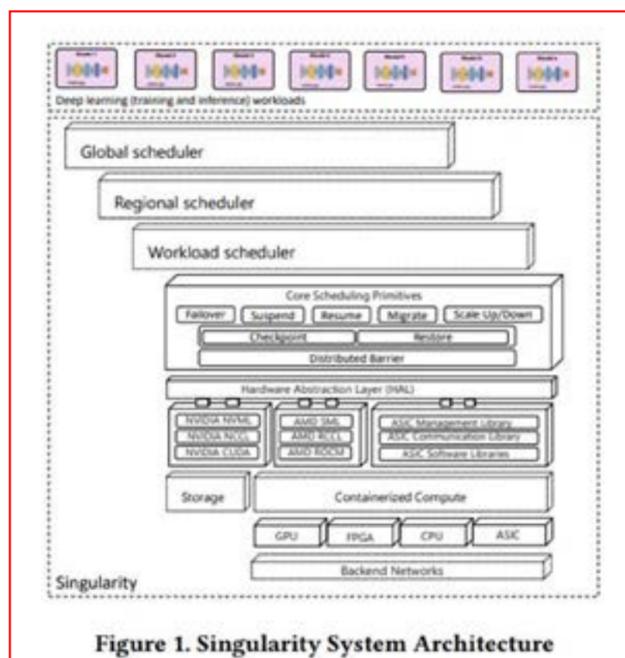


Figure 1. Singularity System Architecture

Text Singularity? Oh, The Humanity!

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

“By the end of this year,” Michael Munger writes at *Reason*, “GPT4 chatbots will be able to produce, in less time than it takes to read this sentence, millions of texts on all the topics that you can think of, as well as those no one has ever thought of.”

Which, coupled with a couple of “conceptually simple” steps, leads to a “text singularity” in which writing as a human activity essentially stops. Artificial intelligences automatically write... well, all the things. People are reduced to mere readers.

As a working writer, I can't help but shudder for the same reasons that inspired Ned Ludd and his disciples to rebellion against early factory automation in the 19th century. If machines can do what I do—better, faster, and cheaper—I guess I'm out of the writing racket.

On the other hand, as a working writer, I've pointed out numerous times that automation is, generally speaking, a good thing.

Automation results in products that are more available, less costly, and often of higher quality.

And since that results in more demand for such products, it often creates more jobs than it eliminates—more people to bring material to the machine, more people to haul away and sell the machine's output. In fact, England employed far more textile

workers after the automation of weaving than before, putting the lie to Luddism's complaints.

Maybe I can get a job dusting cooling fins or replacing defective cables at the Big Writing Machine's server farm.

Or maybe I won't have to.

Much as it grinds my Austrian economics devotee gears to think so, it finds me that the impending “text singularity” and similar developments are bellwethers leading us toward the post-scarcity of Aaron Bastani's “Fully Automated Luxury Communism”—an age in which few if any humans really need to “work” because automation makes EVERYTHING abundant and free or nearly so.

That sounds like the better side of the utopian science fiction milieu I immersed myself in as a young reader. Whether we can avoid the worse sides—which usually involve political schemes to subjugate us all—is a different question.

It also sounds unlikely, but perhaps my long-held prejudice toward the value of human creativity, ingenuity, and motivation as the way toward a better future are skewing my viewpoint.

Either way, history runs forward, not backward. And the future promises, if nothing else, constant fascination.

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



The Way To Nonviolence

By Susan Beaver Thompson

United Way of Southern Nevada

More than 60 years ago, as many are aware, civil rights activists began organizing to desegregate businesses in Birmingham, Alabama. By the spring of 1963, tensions were at a boiling point due to a series of sit-ins, boycotts, and demonstrations designed to draw attention to racial injustices in the city. On April 12, 1963, Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham for not having an official permit.

In his seminal *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, King, while incarcerated, laid out the principles of nonviolent protest and social change. His message was that each voice—and life—is worthy of respect, dignity, and equality. And, love is the answer, not war—or hate. Deep down, we are alike more than we are different. When I taught Freshman Writing at Northwest Florida University, Cape Fear Community College, and Shepherd University, this was my favorite essay to teach. Every semester, without fail, his impassioned plea for nonviolence garnered more discussion and reflection than any other piece we studied. Many of the resulting student essays made me cry.

In his letter, Dr. King differentiates between two kinds of peace. “Negative peace,” as King explains, is the absence of tension; it's an attempt not to rock the boat or cause conflict. Whereas “positive peace” is the active pursuit of justice. Rather than opposing people “on the other side,” as peacebuilder Ryan Wallace writes: “Positive peace challenges the status quo to make way for a more just world, expecting conflict to follow.” Instead of using violence to make change, peacebuilders use nonviolent direct action.

King writes: “Nonviolent direct action seeks to create a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored... We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

It is crystal clear that in the United States we are seeing the effects of a violent culture in our schools and on our streets. So too, violence and violent conflict, rather than natural disasters, are now the primary driver of forced displacement and refugee flight worldwide. While conflict is inevitable, violence is not. It is merely one way of dealing with our differences. It's time we move beyond violent conflict and toward nonviolence.

A wise friend once shared with me that as peacebuilders, we are not merely “anti.” While many of us are anti-racist, anti-discrimination, anti-oppression, we are also standing up for something. Rather than being just anti-war, we are for peace. By default, being merely “anti” can easily lead us into creating enemies, or creating a “us” versus “them” situation. Taking this type of warlike approach—in word or deed—ensures defeat. This is why Kingian Nonviolence Principles encourage people to “fight injustice, not people.” We must keep an open mind and heart—and embrace the principles of nonviolence—as we seek to dialogue with others and make change. As A.J. Muste said, “There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.” It may take longer to collaborate and negotiate, but the results are longer lasting, and everyone benefits.

Everyone is connected to everyone else, and all that must be achieved for universal change is for the momentum to build enough to create a tipping point for good. Each person makes this so every day from the inside out. Each person can challenge themselves to learn and grow, as each personal realization is literally a realization for the planet.

Rest assured, peace and nonviolence aren't just hearts and rainbows. There is growing proof that nonviolence is practical. It works. In 2011, social scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan demonstrated that nonviolent movements are twice as effective as violent movements in achieving their goals. In their book, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, they share the data they collected from 323 protest movements between 1900 and 2006. They found that 53 percent of the nonviolent movements “managed to achieve their goal, usually a change of regime, compared with 26 percent of the violent movements.”

In his *Letter*, Dr. King also touches on our interdependence. He writes:

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial ‘outside agitator’ idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.”

Let us each become a “vehicle” for this monumental shift toward a more evolved way to manage our conflicts. Though a challenging endeavor, Peace on Earth is possible... and it's coming. Since my first peace journalism trek in 2013, much has changed. People are waking up, becoming engaged and taking action for what they believe. The soil is ripe for pioneering peace activists and peace journalists to rock the world.

Susan Beaver Thompson is a peace journalist and grant writer for United Way of Southern Nevada.