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## Tyre Nichols Case Renews Calls For Change

By Aaron Morrison

AP

An unarmed Black man dies after a videotaped beating by police. The officers involved are fired. After a thorough review of the evidence, criminal charges are swiftly filed against the offending officers.

Investigation, accountability and charges.

This is often the most Black citizens can hope for as the deaths continue. Nationwide, police have killed roughly three people per day consistently since 2020, according to academics and advocates for police reform who track such deaths.

Tyre Nichols' fatal encounter with police officers in Memphis, Tennessee, recorded in video made public Friday night, is a glaring reminder that efforts to reform policing have failed to prevent more flashpoints in an intractable epidemic of brutality.

Nearly 32 years ago, Rodney King's savage beating by police in Los Angeles prompted heart-felt calls for change. They've

been repeated in a ceaseless rhythm ever since, punctuated by the deaths of Amadou Diallo in New York, Oscar Grant in Oakland, California, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and so many others.

George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis in 2020 was so agonizing to watch, it summoned a national reckoning that featured infederal legislation proposed in his name and shows of solidarity by corporations and sports leagues. All fell short of the shift in law enforcement culture Black people in America have called for — a culture that promotes freedom from fear, trust in police and mutual respect.

"We need public safety, right? We need law enforcement to combat pervasive crime," said Jason Turner, senior pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis. "Also, we don't want the people who are sworn to protect and serve us brutalizing us for a simple traffic stop, or any offense."

The five Black officers are now fired and charged with murder

and other crimes in the Jan. 10 death of Nichols, a 29-year-old skateboarder, FedEx worker and father to a 4-year-old boy.

From police brass and the district attorney's office to the White House, officials said Nichols' killing points to a need for bolder reforms that go beyond simply diversifying the ranks, changing use-of-force rules and encouraging citizens to file complaints.

"The world is watching us," Shelby County District Attorney Steve Mulroy said. "If there is any silver lining to be drawn from this very dark cloud, it's that perhaps this incident can open a broader conversation about the need for police reform."

President Joe Biden joined national civil rights leaders in similar calls to action.

"To deliver real change, we must have accountability when law enforcement officers violate their oaths, and we need to build lasting trust between law en-

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



## Roc Nation Lawsuit Dropped In Miss.

By Stacy M. Brown

WI Senior Writer

Conditions at the notorious Parchman Prison in Mississippi have "substantially improved" since Jay-Z, a hip-hop star and business mogul, filed a lawsuit demanding better conditions for the thousands of people who are locked up there.

The superstar's management company, Roc Nation, said that it would drop its lawsuit against the state Department of Corrections now that the maximum-

security prison for men has been greatly improved.

In a statement, attorney Jordan Siev, a partner at Reed Smith LLP in New York who works with Roc Nation, said, "We are happy with the changes that have been made so far and the improvements in the day-to-day lives of the guys inside."

"But we're also aware that Parchman has a long history of lawsuits, improvements, and then conditions that get worse again," Siev added.

The Jackson, Miss., newspa-

per *Clarion Ledger* says that the Justice Department started looking into Parchman in 2020 after watchdog groups said there was more violent crime, less control over gangs, and living conditions that were less than human.

Built on an old slave plantation, Parchman is said to have broken numerous constitutional statutes.

Leaked cell phone footage from inside the prison at the start of the coronavirus pandemic showed that inmates were living in places that were flooded,

full of bugs, and full of rats.

Mold was everywhere in the building, and the food was often rotten or, at the very least, unhealthy.

In 2020, Daniele Selby wrote for The Innocence Project that slavery, racist Jim Crow laws, and hateful lynchings have left a legacy of mass incarceration and a disproportionate number of Black people in jail.

"Nowhere is that more clear than in prisons like the Missis-

(See **ROC NATION SUIT**, P. 2)



### STATE SUSPENDS AUDITOR WOOD'S VEHICLE ASSIGNMENT AFTER CRASH

(AP)—North Carolina officials temporarily suspended the state auditor's vehicle assignment this week after she was cited for a misdemeanor hit-and-run for leaving the scene of a December crash where she drove her state-issued vehicle into a parked car.

The state's motor fleet management director notified State Auditor Beth Wood on Tuesday that her vehicle assignment for a 2021 Toyota Camry was temporarily on hold amid the ongoing investigation, Julia Hegele, a Department of Administration spokesperson, said in an email Friday. There is no indication of how long the suspension will last.

After the charges against her became public last week, Wood released an apology statement Monday, explaining that the collision occurred shortly after she left a holiday gathering in Raleigh on the evening of Dec. 8.

Calling the crash a "serious mistake," Wood, 68, said she left the scene without informing police or the car's owner when she was unable to move her vehicle. Photos and 911 calls reported on by other media outlets show that part of her car was on top of the parked vehicle. No one was injured in the crash.

She was cited by Raleigh police four days later for the misdemeanor hit-and-run and another traffic-related charge. Towing and repairing Wood's vehicle cost the state nearly \$8,000, Hegele said.

An attorney appeared on her behalf Thursday in Wake County court. The judge set her next court date for March 23.

Someone without a previous criminal record would face no active jail time for a hit-and-run misdemeanor but could face probation. An unsafe movement count can be punishable by a fine. Wood said Monday that she was continuing to cooperate with law enforcement.

As one of 10 members of the North Carolina Council of State, a panel of elected executive officials, the state auditor performs financial reviews of state agencies, performance audits and other studies sought by the General Assembly.

Wood, a Democrat who was first elected to her position in 2008, said she would continue at her job despite the state GOP's call for her resignation. Her position will next appear on the ballot in 2024.

### POLICE: 1 DIES AFTER SEVERAL PEOPLE FOUND WOUNDED AT CLUB

GREENSBORO (AP)—One person died on Sunday after police found several people wounded at a central North Carolina nightclub overnight, police said.

Greensboro police said officers came to Southside Johnny's about 3 a.m. and located several gunshot victims. They were taken to a local hospital and initially were in stable and life threatening conditions, a police news release said.

Police said later Sunday that one of the victims had died, identified as 36-year-old Cedric Cantrell Monroe. Police were now investigating what happened at the adult entertainment establishment as a homicide.

The death was one of three shooting-related deaths in Greensboro disclosed this weekend by city police. The two others were announced on Saturday. In one case, one person was shot and later died. Police identified the victim as 26-year-old Kalup Maynard. In the other case, one person died and another was seriously injured. The name of the person who died wasn't immediately released. No arrests in the three shootings had been announced as of Sunday afternoon.

### NC DEMOCRATS PITCH ABORTION SAFEGUARDS DESPITE GOP MAJORITY

(AP)—North Carolina Democrats, who narrowly held off a Republican supermajority in the General Assembly, have introduced legislation to codify abortion protections into state law as Republicans are discussing early prospects for further restrictions.

Their legislation, filed last Wednesday in both chambers, would prohibit the state from imposing barriers that might restrict a patient's ability to choose whether to terminate a pregnancy before fetal viability, which typically falls between 24 and 28 weeks.

Current state law bans nearly all abortions after 20 weeks, with narrow exceptions for urgent medical emergencies that do not include rape or incest.

Prospects for a hearing on the House or Senate version seem remote in a legislature where the Republican leaders are looking to further restrict abortion access in light of their midterm election gains and the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that eliminated federal abortion protections last June.

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

## Is "Conscience Of The Congress" Out?

By Dr. Wilmer Leon

NEWS ANALYSIS

TriceEdneyWire.com—"Even though we think first of those we were directly elected to serve, we cannot, in good conscience, think only of them—for what affects one Black community, one poor community, one urban community, affects all..."

—Letter from Congressional Black Caucus to President Nixon in 1971.

In the 1960s, Rep. Charles Diggs (D-Mich.) established the Democracy Select Committee (DSC) to bring the nine elected African-American House members together. They were organized in order to help them

strategize around their common issues and develop policy initiatives that would address the problems facing their African-American constituents.

"The sooner we get organized for group action, the more effective we can become," Diggs said. The operative words in Diggs' statement are "group," "action" and "effective." Is the current iteration of the CBC as a group taking effective action?

By the beginning of the 92nd Congress, (1971-1973) the number of African-American Representatives had risen from nine to 13. Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) said, "In addition to representing our individual districts, we had to assume the onerous burden of

acting as congressman-at-large for unrepresented people around America." Those 13 African-American members founded The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) in 1971. It was from that above referenced 1971 letter to Nixon that the CBC became known as The Conscience of the Congress.

Ossie Davis was the keynote speaker at the first CBC fundraising dinner in 1971. The title of his address was, "It's Not The Man, It's The Plan." In this address he challenged the members of the CBC by stating, "...the time has... come when rhetoric will begin to take a back seat... Give to us a "Ten Black Commandments," simple and

strong..." He closed by saying, "Let us stop making history by ad hoc methods and impromptu improvisations. Let us plan the whole thing out..." He directed the CBC members to give people their assignments and hold them strictly responsible if they don't carry them out.

Now is the time for the African-American community to take stock, not of the original 13 members of the CBC, but of the current 58. Are they in fact addressing the problems facing the African-American community? Are they taking effective "group action"? Has the "conscience of the Congress" become un-

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

## Mass Shootings Lead To Widening Divide

By David A. Lieb

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP)—Mass shootings have commanded public attention on a disturbingly frequent basis across the U.S.,

from a supermarket slaying in Buffalo, New York, to an elementary school tragedy in Uvalde, Texas, to a recent shooting at a California dance hall.

Rather than provoking a unified response from elected officials,

each additional shooting seems to be widening the political divide among states on who should be allowed to have guns and what types are okay.

"It's wash, rinse and repeat with these mass shootings," said

Michael Anderson, a bartender who survived a mass shooting at a Colorado nightclub. "They happen, and then they happen, and then they happen—and then nothing gets done."

At least nothing that has put a halt to the violence.

In Democratic-led states with already restrictive gun laws, elected officials have responded to home-state tragedies by enacting and proposing even more limits on guns—doubling down on a belief that future shootings can be thwarted by controlling access to lethal weapons.

In many states with Republican-led legislatures, recent high-profile shootings appear unlikely to prompt any new firearm restrictions this year—reflecting a belief that violent people, not their weapons, are the problem.

"Obviously, no one wants to see these tragedies occur—this loss of life—but how the problem is viewed, and therefore what the response is to that problem, is night and day difference," said Daniel Webster, an American health professor affiliated with the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

For the third straight year, the U.S. in 2022 recorded more than 600 mass shootings in which at least four people were killed or

(See **MASS SHOOTINGS**, P. 2)



ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN UVALDE, TEXAS WAS ONE OF THE MORE HORRIFIC MASS SHOOTINGS LAST YEAR

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

House Speaker Tim Moore told reporters on Wednesday that he didn't expect the Democrats' bill to get considered. Republicans hold majorities in his chamber's policy committees.

Lawmakers "certainly have a right to file the bill," Moore said. "It'll be assigned to a committee. And if a majority of that committee wants to take it up, they will. But I don't anticipate a majority would want to take that bill up."

Senate Minority Leader Dan Blue, a Wake County Democrat, told reporters Thursday that the bill makes clear his party's position, and its unlikelihood was not a deterrent.

"It's not unlike a lot of bills around this place to not (be) considered—it's the idea that's important," said Blue, one of the bill's primary sponsors. "This is an important idea whose time has come, and it's not going to go crawl under a rock or bury its head because the speaker says the bill won't be considered."

Moore suggested earlier this month that some support was emerging in his chamber for a proposal backed by Senate leader Phil Berger to ban abortions after the first trimester—12 or 13 weeks of pregnancy—with new exceptions for rape and incest.

Republicans are one seat shy of a veto-proof supermajority and would need some Democratic support to override Gov. Roy Cooper's likely veto on further restrictions.

House Minority Leader Robert Reives, of Chatham County, told reporters he is not concerned that Democrats would side with Republicans in an abortion-related override vote.

Sen. Sydney Batch, a Wake County Democrat, said Democrats are not willing to compromise on restrictions beyond the current 20 weeks.

"This is our baseline," Batch said Thursday. "If Republicans want to negotiate with us, they can come to our doors—they're always open. We can talk about this being the floor and then us improving it. But going down is not what we're here for."

## WOMAN GETS OVER 6 YEARS IN PRISON FOR ROLE IN ROMANCE SCAMS

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP)—A Texas woman who played a role in internet romance scams that cheated victims out of a total of about \$2.6 million was sentenced to over six years in prison on federal fraud and conspiracy charges Wednesday.

Dominique Golden, 31, of Houston, personally collected nearly \$1.3 million in cash, checks, money orders and wire transfers from people across the U.S. in 2018 that was deposited into bank accounts opened under the names of fake people and businesses that she controlled, prosecutors in Rhode Island said. She pleaded guilty in September to wire fraud and conspiracy to commit mail fraud.

Her sentence will be served concurrently with a nearly 4 1/2-year sentence she began in 2020 in Georgia on an unrelated conspiracy conviction. Her attorney asked that she not serve additional time, saying that she has cooperated with authorities and is remorseful.

Golden's alleged accomplices contacted victims via online dating sites, Facebook and "Words with Friends," cultivated the relationships and convinced the victims that they needed money, prosecutors said. The victims were in Rhode Island, New York, Arkansas, Colorado, North Carolina, Missouri and Florida.

Golden was aware that other members of the conspiracy contacted the victims for the sole purpose of perpetrating the scam, prosecutors said.

Under her plea agreement that she return the money, Golden will forfeit assets derived from her criminal conduct, including two luxury cars, three handguns, three Rolex watches and a gold chain with a diamond coin pendant, prosecutors said.

## LAWSUITS IN NC PLANE CRASH THAT KILLED 8 SETTLED FOR \$15M

The families of five passengers killed in a 2022 plane crash off the North Carolina coast have settled wrongful death lawsuits against the companies that owned the plane and employed the pilot and the pilot's estate for \$15 million, family representatives announced Friday.

All eight people aboard the Pilatus PC-12/47 died when it descended into the Atlantic Ocean off the Outer Banks. Four teenagers and two adults on the plane were returning from a hunting trip. The two others were the pilot and his adult son, who was a student pilot, the suit said.

Attorneys for the families filed dismissals in Carteret County on Thursday, reflecting that the companies that employed the pilot and owned the plane have paid \$15 million, according to a news release.

The settling defendants are EDP Management Group and Green Assets, both of Wilmington, and the Estate of Ernest "Teen" Durwood Rawls, the pilot. The settlement was reached on behalf of the families of deceased passengers Noah Lee Styron, 16; Michael Daily Shepherd, 15; Jacob Nolan Taylor, 17; Jonathan Kole McInnis, 16; and Stephanie Fulcher, 42, the mother of McInnis. The four teenagers on board were all students at East Carteret High School.

Hunter Parks, 45, one of those killed in the crash, was the founder and chairman of Green Assets, according to the company's website. His family is not involved in the suits.

"The families filed these lawsuits to get answers and hold accountable the companies and individuals whose negligence led to this tragedy," Andrew C. Robb, a Kansas City-based aviation attorney who represented the families, said in a statement. "The families are grateful that this phase of their lawsuits has come to a close, and they will now continue the difficult process of trying to re-build their lives."

There was no immediate response to Associated Press emails seeking comment from attorneys representing EDP Management Group and Green Assets. The settlement does not affect claims against Dillon's Aviation of Greenville, which had performed maintenance on the plane, Robb said by telephone.

The plane took off Feb. 13 in the early afternoon from Hyde County Airport, which is on the mainland near the Pamlico Sound. The plane's destination was southwest across the sound to Beaufort, which is along the southern edge of the Outer Banks in Carteret County.

## Tyre Nichols Case Renews—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

forcement, the vast majority of whom wear the badge honorably, and the communities they are sworn to serve and protect," the president said.

But Memphis, whose 628,000 residents celebrate barbecue and blues music and lament being the place where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, has seen this before. The city took steps advocates called for in a "Reimagine Policing" initiative in 2021, and mirrored a set of policy changes reformers want all departments to implement immediately, known as "8 Can't Wait."

De-escalation training is now required. Officers are told to limit uses of force, exhaust all alternatives before resorting to deadly force and report all uses of force. Tennessee also took action: State law now requires officers to intervene to stop abuse and report excessive force by their colleagues.

Showing unusual transparency for a police department, the MPD now publishes accountability reports that include the race of people subjected to use of force each year. They show Black men and women were overwhelmingly targeted for rougher treatment in 2019, 2020 and 2021. They were subject to nearly 86% of the recorded uses of guns, batons, pepper spray, physical beatings and other force in 2021, the total nearly doubling that year to 1,700 cases.

Seven uses of force by Memphis police ended in death during

these three years.

"I don't know how much more cumulative Black death our community should have to pay to convince elected officials that the policing system isn't broken — it's working exactly as it was designed to, at the expense of Black life," said Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, co-executive director of the Highlander Research and Education Center, a Tennessee-based civil rights leadership training school.

The Nichols case — just one of the brutality cases to make national news this month — exposes an uncomfortable truth: More than two years since the deaths of Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Rayshard Brooks touched off protests, policing reforms have not significantly reduced such killings.

States approved nearly 300 police reform bills after Floyd's murder, creating civilian oversight of police, more anti-bias training, stricter use-of-force limits and alternatives to arrests in cases involving people with mental illnesses, according to a recent analysis by the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism at the University of Maryland.

Despite calls to "defund the police," an Associated Press review of police funding nationwide found only modest cuts, driven largely by shrinking revenue related to the coronavirus pandemic. Budgets increased and more officers were hired for some large departments, includ-

ing New York City's.

Still stuck in Congress is the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, which would prohibit racial profiling, ban chokeholds and no-knock warrants, limit the transfer of military equipment to police departments, and make it easier to bring charges against offending officers. Biden said he told Nichols' mother that he would be "making a case" to Congress to pass the Floyd Act "to get this under control."

The Rev. Al Sharpton said his eulogy at Nichols' funeral on Wednesday will include a call for new laws. NAACP President Derrick Johnson also took Congress to task.

"By failing to write a piece of legislation, you're writing another obituary," Johnson said. "Tell us what you're going to do to honor Tyre Nichols. ... We can name all the victims of police violence, but we can't name a single law you have passed to address it."

Advocates want state and federal legislation because local changes vary widely in scope and effect and can be undone by a single election after years of grassroots activism. But some say strict regulations are just the start — and the video of Nichols' agony proves it.

"Changing a rule doesn't change a behavior," said Katie Ryan, chief of staff for Campaign Zero, a group of academics, policing experts and activists working to end police violence. "The culture of a police depart-

ment has to shift into actually implementing the policies, not just saying there's a rule in place."

The five officers charged — Tadarrius Bean, Demetrius Halley, Desmond Mills Jr., Emmitt Martin III and Justin Smith — were part of the so-called Scorpion unit. Scorpion stands for Street Crimes Operations to Restore Peace in our Neighborhoods.

The Memphis police chief, Cerelyn "CJ" Davis, disbanded the unit on Saturday.

"It is in the best interest of all to permanently deactivate the Scorpion unit," she said in a statement.

Prior to the move by Davis, Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland said it was clear that the officers involved in the attack on Nichols violated the department's policies and training.

"I want to assure you we are doing everything we can to prevent this from happening again," Strickland said in a statement. "We are initiating an outside, independent review of the training, policies and operations of our specialized units."

The Memphis police union extended condolences to Nichols' family, saying it "is committed to the administration of justice and NEVER condones the mistreatment of ANY citizen nor ANY abuse of power." The statement also expressed faith that the justice system would reveal "the totality of circumstances" in the case.

## Conscience of the Congress—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

conscious? Have they devolved into a comprador class of relatively privileged, wealthy and educated natives of a colonized land that have been "bought" by the colonizers? More simply put by the late Glen Ford, have they become "the Black Misperception Class"?

According to the CBC website, "...the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has been committed to using the full Constitutional power, statutory authority, and financial resources of the federal government to ensure that African-Americans and other marginalized communities in the United States have the opportunity to achieve the American Dream." Ossie Davis said in his address, "...the name of the game is power—and if you ain't playing power, you're in the wrong place."

Is the CBC using its power as a 53-member potential voting bloc to demand substantive change, or are they a rubber stamp for the interests of the American elite? They appear to be less effective now than they were 51 years ago.

Before examining domestic policy, take a look at some foreign policy blunders. This past April the House passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act. Using pages from the Cold War playbook, the U.S. is once again invoking the threat of a Russian boogymen to justify American imperialism in Africa. The bill passed the House on a 415-9 vote. All of the so-called "progressive" members

of the House, the Squad, and the CBC supported this legislation.

The Act sanctions African nations that fail to follow the American lead and choose to exercise their sovereignty by ignoring American dictates not to do business with Russia. SADIC, the 16-member regional bloc of Southern African countries, said in a joint statement that the United States is "bullying" African nations and punishing them for not following the "failing U.S. sanctions regime" that has made the African continent "the target of unilateral and punitive measures."

The U.S. African Command (AFRICOM) is another unfortunate example of the U.S. using militarism as an offset to diplomacy and the basis of American interventionism in African countries. The CBC direct and tacit support of AFRICOM is a travesty. There has been a significant increase in coups over the past 18 months, with African military leadership, many of them AFRICOM trained, carrying out takeovers or attempted takeovers in Burkina Faso, Sudan, Guinea, Chad, Mali, Niger and Guinea-Bissau.

The Black Alliance for Peace calls for the CBC to support opposition to AFRICOM and demands the CBC's commitment to holding hearings about the military program's negative impact on the African continent. To date the CBC is conspicuously silent on these demands.

On another front, in response to the rapidly deteriorating secu-

arity and humanitarian situation in Haiti, the Biden administration is at the UN seeking support for "the immediate deployment of a multinational rapid action force" to go into Haiti. The problem is, most of the problems in Haiti are a result of U.S. interventionist and hegemonic imperial policies towards the island nation. President Biden is now hoping to use the Trump era Global Fragility Act (GFA) as its cover for U.S. military intervention.

The GFA is being heralded as an enlightened new approach to diplomacy when in fact it's old wine in new bottles. President Biden said the GFA "...provides a roadmap: a 10-year effort to strengthen the security and prosperity of people everywhere by helping to fortify the footing of parts of the world that continue to grapple with challenges that can lead to destabilizing conflict and violence."

The problem with this so-called logic is, when you look at the countries targeted; Haiti, Libya, Ghana, Guinea, and others; the U.S. and its Western allies have been largely responsible for their instability by assassinating their leaders and fomenting coups. Simply put, the U.S. is implementing a "new" strategy (of which military intervention is an important element) to "solve" the problems that U.S. intervention has caused. The CBC has gone right along with these imperialists, hegemonic and interventionist policies instead of standing up for the victims and

speaking up against these racist policies. If the CBC were in the *Black Panther* movies, they would be called "colonizers" by the Wakandans.

Here's how the U.S. Government uses domestic policy to aid foreign nations that are not occupied by peoples of color. President Biden signed the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) into law. As a part of this, the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative was extended through 2022 and its funding was increased from \$250 million to \$300 million per year. On March 16, 2022, President Biden announced an additional \$800 million in security assistance to Ukraine, bringing the total U.S. security assistance committed to Ukraine to \$1 billion in just the previous week, and a total of \$2 billion since the start of the Biden Administration.

On May 21, President Biden signed into law the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, a law that provides nearly \$40 billion in additional military, economic and humanitarian aid. These U.S. taxpayer dollars provide housing, education, medical, and other types of assistance for those in Ukraine. For those Ukrainians who have made it to the U.S., "refugees and parolees," they will receive support through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI); health insurance through Medicaid; and food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

## Mass Shootings Lead To—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

injured, according to the Gun Violence Archive. This year got off to another deadly start, including three California mass shootings in barely a week that killed two dozen people. A Saturday morning shooting in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood that killed at least three and wounded four added to the grim toll. That despite the fact California already has some of the nation's strictest gun laws.

As more communities grieve, legislative sessions are getting underway in many states. Numerous gun-related bills already have been filed, but they don't all stand an equal chance of passing, or of ultimately working.

So-called assault weapon bans

on certain semi-automatic weapons are among the most talked about gun-control measures. But they do not seem to be associated with reductions in deadly mass shootings, according to a study by Webster and others that analyzed more than 600 mass shootings in 45 states from 1984 through 2017. The study excluded shootings related to gangs and drugs.

A common solution from gun-rights advocates—allowing people to carry concealed guns without a permit as a means of fighting back against shooters—also seems to have little connection to the number of mass shootings, according to the study.

What did work, according to

the researchers, were state laws requiring permits with fingerprint background checks to own handguns. Also effective, at least to some extent, were laws limiting large-capacity magazines for ammunition.

"The research shows that you're much better off focusing on who has those guns rather than what the gun is," said Michael Siegel, a professor of public health and community medicine at Tufts University who researches violence committed with guns.

Webster's study didn't include so-called red-flag laws, which allow authorities to temporarily remove guns from people posing a danger to themselves or others. But an Associated Press analysis last year found that many of the 19 states with such laws rarely use them—a trend rooted in a lack of awareness about the laws and resistance by some authorities.

AP examined how policymakers are responding to mass shootings that occurred over the past eight months in eight politically diverse states—Democratic-led Colorado, Illinois and New York; Republican-led Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas; and politically divided North Carolina and Virginia.

In Texas, Democratic state Sen. Roland Gutierrez convened a Capitol news conference this past week with relatives of some of the 19 children and two teachers killed last May at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde. They pleaded with lawmakers to enact stricter gun control laws and lift restraints

against lawsuits alleging negligence by law enforcement officers and public agencies for the slow response to the massacre.

Felicia Martinez, whose 10-year-old son Xavier Lopez was killed in the attack, described weeping with grief during the holidays and urged lawmakers to raise the legal age to purchase semi-automatic rifles from age 18 to 21. The Uvalde shooter, who was 18, used a semi-automatic gun.

"An 18-year-old should not be allowed to purchase an ugly weapon," Martinez said while wiping a tear from her eye. She added: "These laws need to be changed, and they need to be changed today—not tomorrow."

Yet that seems unlikely. Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan, a Republican, told reporters earlier this month he didn't foresee enough support in the House to pass bills limiting access to guns. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has said raising the purchasing age for semi-automatic rifles would be "unconstitutional," though several states already have similar restrictions.

Instead, Texas officials responded last summer with \$105.5 million for school safety and mental health initiatives. Texas took a similar approach after a 2018 shooting at Santa Fe High School near Houston, approving \$100 million for school safety measures such as metal detectors, vehicle barriers and shooter alarm systems. But Abbott and Republican lawmakers resisted calls for stricter gun ownership measures.

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# Business & Finance

## Major Funders Calling For Support For Black Feminists

By Glenn Gamboa

AP Business Writer

The need to increase funding for Black feminist organizations is urgent, according to an open letter released Thursday from some of philanthropy's most influential organizations including Melinda Gates' Pivotal Ventures, Rihanna's Clara Lionel Foundation, as well as the Ford Foundation and MacArthur Foundation.

"It's time to fund Black feminist movements like we want them to win," supporters of the nonprofit Black Feminist Fund write in the letter to other philanthropists. "Because across our most urgent global challenges—from Colombia to Sudan, Brazil and Nigeria, to the U.S. and France—Black feminists are dreaming and delivering the solutions we need."

The Black Feminist Fund is looking to raise \$100 million to support nonprofits led by Black women, who have been historically underfunded in philanthropy. The fund, which launched in 2021, has raised \$35 million of its goal so far.

According to a report from the Ms. Foundation for Women and the consulting group Strength in Numbers, less than 1 percent of the \$67 billion that foundations contributed in 2017 went to organizations that specifically support minority women and girls. The Black Feminist Fund's research says that dropped to less

than 0.5 percent in 2018. Black women and girls made up nearly 7 percent of the U.S. population, according to 2022 U.S. Census figures.

Tynesha McHarris, co-founder and co-executive director of Black Feminist Fund, said the fact that Black women and girls do not get a share of donations equal to their share of the American population is a sign of larger problems.

"There's a trust gap between some in philanthropy and the leadership of Black women and Black gender expansive folks," McHarris told The Associated Press. "There isn't that trust that means 'I trust your leadership. I trust you to be able to take the resources and do what needs to get done. I trust that you will use these resources with deep integrity.'"

The open letter released Thursday is a way to address that, McHarris said, calling it a "demonstration of their solidarity to our movement."

Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation and one of the signers of the open letter, said there is a need to provide more funding to those who are currently struggling.

"As mission-aligned funders, we have a responsibility to work with our colleagues across philanthropy to ensure we're addressing this disparity in resources to ultimately close the vast funding gaps for those

building a world of equality for all of us," Walker said in a statement.

Also signing the open letter were representatives from the Solidaire Network, Foundation for a Just Society, Libra Foundation, The Meadow Fund, Farberman Family Foundation, Satterberg Foundation, and Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

McHarris says the Black Feminist Fund is eager to achieve this initial \$100 million funding goal quickly so it can pass on the funding in eight-year grants to nonprofits working on some of the most pressing global issues like climate change, systemic violence and hunger, as well as working to end racial and gender inequity.

"Black feminist leaders on the front lines of movements today are splitting their time between figuring out how to end violence and figuring out how to write reports," she said. "Imagine a world where they get to spend 100 percent of their time to figure out how to build the world we deserve and need. That's what we're trying to do."

*Associated Press coverage of philanthropy and nonprofits receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content. For all of AP's philanthropy coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/philanthropy>.*



RIHANNA FENTY OF THE CLARA LIONEL FOUNDATION

## Trump To Be Back On Facebook

By Barbara Ortutay and Jill Colvin

The Associated Press

Facebook parent Meta said Wednesday it will restore former President Donald Trump's personal account in the coming weeks, ending a two-year suspension it imposed in the wake of the Jan. 6 insurrection.

The company said in a blog post it is adding "new guardrails" to ensure there are no "repeat offenders" who violate its rules, even if they are political candidates or world leaders.

"The public should be able to hear what their politicians are saying—the good, the bad and the ugly—so that they can make informed choices at the ballot box," wrote Nick Clegg, Meta's vice president of global affairs.

Clegg added that when there is a "clear risk" to real-world harm, Meta will intervene.

"In the event that Mr. Trump posts further violating content, the content will be removed and he will be suspended for between one month and two years, depending on the severity of the violation," he wrote. Facebook suspended Trump on Jan. 7, 2021, for praising people engaged in violent acts at the Capitol a day earlier. But the company had resisted earlier calls—including from its own employees—to remove Trump's account.

Meta said Trump's accounts will be restored "in the coming weeks" on both Facebook and Instagram. Banned from mainstream social media, Trump has been relying on Truth Social, which he launched after being blocked from Twitter.

Facebook is not only the world's largest social media site, but had been a crucial source of fundraising revenue for Trump's campaigns, which spent millions of dollars on the company's ads in 2016 and 2020. The move, which comes as Trump is ramping up his third run for the White House, will not only allow Trump to communicate directly with his 34 million followers—dramatically more than the 4.8 million who currently follow him on Truth Social—but will also allow him to resume direct fundraising.

Responding to the news, Trump blasted Facebook's original decision to suspend his account as he praised Truth Social.

"FACEBOOK, which has lost Billions of Dollars in value since 'deplatforming' your favorite President, me, has just announced that they are reinstating my account. Such a thing should never again happen to a sitting President, or anybody else who is not deserving of retribution!" he wrote.

Other social media companies, including Snapchat, where he remains suspended, also kicked him off their platforms following the insurrection. He was recently reinstated on Twitter after Elon Musk took over the company. He has not tweeted yet.

Civil rights groups and others on the left were quick to denounce Meta's move. Letting Trump back on Facebook sends a signal to other figures with large online audiences that they may break the rules without lasting consequences, said Heidi Beirich, founder of the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism and a member of a group called the Real Facebook Oversight Board that has criticized the platform's efforts.

"I am not surprised but it is a disaster," Beirich said of Meta's decision. "Facebook created loopholes for Trump that he went right through. He incited an insurrection on Facebook. And now he's back."

NAACP President Derrick Johnson blasted the decision as "a

prime example of putting profits above people's safety" and a "grave mistake."

"It's quite astonishing that one can spew hatred, fuel conspiracies, and incite a violent insurrection at our nation's Capitol building, and Mark Zuckerberg still believes that is not enough to remove someone from his platforms," he said.

But Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University called the reinstatement "the right call—not because the former president has any right to be on the platform but because the public has an interest in hearing directly from candidates for political office."

The ACLU also called it the right move.

"Like it or not, President Trump is one of the country's leading political figures and the public has a strong interest in hearing his speech. Indeed, some of Trump's most offensive social media posts ended up being critical evidence in lawsuits filed against him and his administration," said Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. "The biggest social media companies are central actors when it comes to our collective ability to speak—and hear the speech of others—online. They should err on the side of allowing a wide range of political speech, even when it offends."

Clegg said that in light of his previous violations, Trump now faces heightened penalties for repeat offenses. Such penalties "will apply to other public figures whose accounts are reinstated from suspensions related to civil unrest under our updated protocol."

If Trump—or anyone else—posts material that doesn't violate Facebook's rules but is otherwise harmful and could lead to events such as the Jan. 6 insurrection, Meta says it will not remove it but it may limit its reach. This includes praising the QAnon conspiracy theory or trying to delegitimize an upcoming election.

## Fewer Jobless Claims Last Week

By Matt Ott

AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Fewer Americans filed for unemployment benefits last week as the labor market remains tight, even as the Federal Reserve has tried to cool the economy and inflation by raising interest rates.

Applications for jobless aid in the U.S. for the week ending Jan. 21 fell by 6,000 to 186,000, from 192,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday. It's the first time in nine months that number has been below 200,000 in back-to-back weeks.

The four-week moving average of claims, which flattens out some of the week-to-week volatility, declined by 9,250 to 197,500. It's the first time that number has been below 200,000 since May of last year.

The labor market is closely monitored by the Federal Reserve, which raised interest rates seven times last year in a bid to slow the economy, job growth and bring down stubbornly high inflation.

Earlier this month, the government reported that U.S. employers added a solid 223,000 jobs in December, evidence that the economy remains healthy even as the Fed is rapidly raising interest rates to try to slow economic growth and the

pace of hiring. The unemployment rate fell to 3.5 percent, matching a 53-year low.

Even though it was a solid report, December's jobs data suggested that the labor market may be cooling enough to aid the Fed's fight against high inflation. It was the smallest gain in two years, and it extended a hiring slowdown that began last year. Average hourly pay growth eased to its slowest pace in 16 months. That slowdown could reduce pressure on employers to raise prices to offset their higher labor costs.

In forecasts updated last month, the Fed's policymakers predicted slower growth and higher unemployment for next year and 2024. The unemployment rate is projected to jump to 4.6 percent by the end of 2023. That would mark a significant increase in joblessness and typically would reflect a recession, which many economists have predicted.

The Fed's rate hikes last year have made it more expensive for consumers to take out mortgage and auto loans, and raised borrowing rates for credit cards.

Also Thursday, the government reported that the U.S. economy expanded at a 2.9 percent annual pace from October through December, ending 2022 with momen-

tum despite the pressure of high interest rates and widespread fears of a looming recession.

Mortgage rates are above 6 percent, essentially double what they were before the Fed began tightening credit. Higher mortgage rates have put the brakes on the housing market, with sales of existing homes declining for 11 straight months.

Though the U.S. labor market remains robust, layoffs have been mounting in the technology sector, which is dealing with falling demand as inflation squeezes both businesses and families.

German software company SAP announced Thursday that it was cutting up to 3,000 jobs worldwide, or about 2.5 percent of its workforce, after a sharp drop in profits.

IBM announced late Wednesday that it was slashing 3,900 positions. Microsoft announced last week that it is cutting 10,000 workers, almost 5 percent of its workforce, joining other tech companies that have scaled back their pandemic-era expansions. That followed job cuts previously announced by Amazon, Salesforce, Facebook parent Meta, Twitter and DoorDash.

About 1.68 million people were receiving jobless aid the week that ended Jan. 14, an increase of 20,000 from the week before.

## U.S. Hacks International Ransomware Gang

By Eric Tucker and Frank Bajak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—The FBI and international partners have at least temporarily disrupted the network of a prolific ransomware gang they infiltrated last year, saving victims including hospitals and school districts a potential \$130 million in ransom payments, Attorney General Merrick Garland and other U.S. officials announced last Thursday.

"Simply put, using lawful means we hacked the hackers,"

Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said at a news conference.

Officials said the targeted syndicate, known as Hive, is among the world's top five ransomware networks and has heavily targeted health care. The FBI quietly accessed its control panel in July and was able to obtain software keys it used with German and other partners to decrypt networks of some 1,300 victims globally, said FBI Director Christopher Wray.

How the takedown will affect Hive's long-term operations is

unclear. Officials announced no arrests but said, to pursue prosecutions, they were building a map of the administrators who manage the software and the affiliates who infect targets and negotiate with victims.

"I think anyone involved with Hive should be concerned because this investigation is ongoing," Wray said.

On Wednesday night, FBI agents seized computer servers in Los Angeles used to support the network. Two Hive dark web sites were seized: one used for leaking data of non-paying vic-

tims, the other for negotiating extortion payments.

"Cybercrime is a constantly evolving threat, but as I have said before, the Justice Department will spare no resource to bring to justice anyone anywhere that targets the United States with a ransomware attack," Garland said.

He said the infiltration, led by the FBI's Tampa office, allowed agents in one instance to disrupt a Hive attack against a Texas school district, stopping it from making a \$5 million payment.

It's a big win for the Justice Department. Ransomware is the world's biggest cybercrime headache with everything from Britain's postal service and Ireland's national health network to Costa Rica's government crippled by Russian-speaking syndicates that enjoy Kremlin protection.

The criminals lock up, or encrypt, victims' networks, steal sensitive data and demand large sums. Their extortion has evolved to where data is pilfered before ransomware is activated, then effectively held hostage. Pay up in cryptocurrency or it is released publicly.

As an example of a Hive sting, Garland said it kept one Midwestern hospital in 2021 from accepting new patients at the height of the COVID-19 epidemic.

The online takedown notice, alternating in English and Russian, mentions Europol and German law enforcement partners. The German news agency dpa quoted prosecutors in Stuttgart as saying cyber specialists in the southwestern town of Esslingen were decisive in penetrating Hive's criminal IT infrastructure.



## Classifieds



### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Franklin County out for bid: C-C11520 ACM Abatement and Demolition. The bid opening is scheduled for: Wednesday, 3/01/2023. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/15185200.pdf>



### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety has the following contract in Davidson County out for bid: C-C11521 ACM Abatement and Demolition. The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 3/02/2023. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit: <https://www.ips.state.nc.us/ips/AGENCY/PDF/15185000.pdf>

# Opinion



## And Now They Want to Arm Our Children?

By Rob Okun

VoiceMale Magazine

Days in January: 31. Number of mass shootings in the US as of January 24: 39. (I pray the number hasn't gone up by the time you read this.)

From cries of madness to tears of rage; from citizen fury to congressional prayers, we careen toward a future where a visit to a dance studio (Monterey Park), a farm (Half Moon Bay), or gas station (Oakland)—all in California—could be the location where you are murdered. Add those sites to this incomplete list: movie theaters, houses of worship, big box stores, and that old standby: schools.

Speaking of schools, let's pause for a moment to contemplate the dystopian story of a six-year-old boy shooting his teacher at a school in Virginia with a gun his mother had legally purchased. We have safety caps on Tylenol that adults struggle to open; we can't prevent a child from firing a gun?

In addition to schools being where, sadly, you might look for shooting victims, it's also where you could turn to find a new crop of shooters, cultivated by the gun lobby.

Get ready for the WEE-1 Tactical JR-15 Rifle, designed specifically for children. This "rifle for kids," the JR-15 rifle—get it, "junior"—sized—is sold by the Wee-1 Tactical firearm company. And, good news, kids: it only weighs two pounds.

In a press release, the company wrote, "Our goal was to develop a shooting platform that was not only sized correctly, and safe, but also looks, feels, and operates just like Mom and Dad's gun... The WEE-1 and Schmid Tool Team brought their collective experience in the firearms business... to launch the JR-15. We are so excited to start capturing the imagination of the next generation..."

While the JR-15 is a .22 caliber rifle—22s are commonly used for hunting small game or marksmanship, the JR-15 was manufactured with a distinctly military and tactical look similar to an AR-15, you know, the weapon most commonly used in countless mass shootings.

Enough is freakin' enough. Time's up, America. How about us adults—parents and grandparents, uncles and aunts—getting off the couch so the Parkland high school generation of antigun activists doesn't have to do all the heavy lifting. What is stopping us from showing up en masse at meetings of our city councils and school boards? When are we going to our state capitols and the halls of Congress, sitting in outside legislators' offices? If there was such a thing as a nonviolent insurrection to stop gun violence, we ought to wage it now.

Nothing has worked... yet. From Sandy Hook to Uvalde, the gun rights über alles crowd keeps on keeping on. Consider what extremist Republican Georgia Congressman Marjorie Taylor Greene said after the horrifying murder of 19 children and two teachers last May: "The kids at Uvalde needed JR-15s to defend themselves..."

This is madness. We must stop the (gun crowd) steal; we have to stop them from stealing our lives.

I remember someone saying a couple of years ago—in a completely different context—that, "we fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore."

Well, we can have a country, if we launch a sustained nationwide, nonviolent movement to end the scourge of gun violence.

Dammit! What are we waiting for?  
**Rob Okun (rob@voicemalemagazine.org) writes about politics and culture. He is editor-publisher of Voice Male magazine.**

## Black Author Calls On Advantaged Fellow Black Males To Step Up And Lead Us Out Of Our Problems

Going against the prevailing narrative, Joe L. Rempson lays the social problems that plague segments of the Black community squarely on the shoulder of Black males.

Rather than blaming racism, he traces those problems back to what he terms the African-American Garden of Eden. In it, W.E.B. Du Bois outlasted Booker T. Washington and fathered a tradition which Rempson, a Bookerite, argues has produced a victim identity and an emphasis on the system rather than the self.

Rempson declares that only Black males offer a way out because it is entirely "our Black males who are keeping us down and curtailing our progress," in contrast to Black females, who "are doing OK."

Black males are plagued by what Rempson calls the African-American Male School Adaptability Crisis (AMSAC). Their academic performance ranks at the bottom, alone, below Black female students and below White, Asian, and Hispanic male students. In large urban areas, their high school dropout rate is 59 percent and, nationally, they lag behind in college attendance and graduation rates. The outcome, Rempson argues, is dysfunctionality and the existence of hedonistic norms which hinder family and community stability.

But while Black males are the problem, Rempson contends, it is, nevertheless, only they who can solve it because it takes males to bring up males. However, he elaborates, their crisis is inseparable from the plight of the entire Black community, and while Black males must be in the vanguard, the entire Black community and nation must address it.

Rempson's position is based on an analysis of extensive data and perspectives from various disciplines and sources. That analysis yielded what he concludes are the real causes of the Black plight and, thus, made possible the formulation of real remedies. In his eight propositions, he synthesizes what they are, and he further lays out an overall blueprint.

In entirety, the book is a lengthy 20 chapters, but, from the first and last chapters, one can get his message, reading the rest selectively.

Of interest to some, for example, might be his proposed evidence-based African-American Male Career Pathway Program, his ideas for Art of Loving (AOL) schools and a Child Family Rights Movement, or his discussion of former President Barack Obama support of a Black victim identity.

Of interest to others, for example, might be his treatment of such topics as Black intelligent quotient (IQ), Black culture, "acting White," racism, police misconduct, Black Lives Matter, or critical race theory.

Throughout, Rempson's conviction is that unless Blacks confront their realities, "we will not solve our problems." "Nor," he continues, "can we solve them unless we cut the umbilical cord to White America. We have no right to expect it to be our savior; nor are we justified in perceiving it as our oppressor."

Rempson's forcefully and finely written book is a singular and courageous contribution. Alone, his eight propositions make it a worthy read.

### Reviews

"Rempson, the former dean of students at the City University of New York's Bronx Community College, is a lucid writer... it's clear that the author has spent many years thinking about the particular problems of the community and formulating customized solutions to help solve them, as embodied here... A lengthy manifesto for AM-CAP that lays out a vision for an ascendant black America."

—Kirkus Review, original edition  
 "Rempson describes himself simply as an educator, and while some of his arguments are not revelations, others are. For example, he provides a unique angle on Dr. King's attitude on self-reliance, and draws an interesting connection between King and Washington that many would consider startling... Rempson writes from the heart, but with purpose and clarity... is a fresh voice that deserves to be heard... At more than 900 pages, this book is initially daunting. But the narrative is so tidily laid out that, in the end, none of the content seems superfluous."

—Blueink Review, original edition  
 "Rempson powerfully advocates for applying the energy of the civil rights movement to the black family... book is surprising, with prose that can get fiery, and some may find the candor with which he approaches his topics offensive. He outlines a program to help Black male children build a strong identity based on their personhood, rather than on the 'cool culture' of the street and the peer group, and calls black males to strong, responsible fatherhood."

—Foreword Clarion Review, original edition  
 This book is a minor revision of original book, *The African American Male School Adaptability Crisis (AMSAC): Its Source and Solution Planted in the African-American Garden of Eden*, and its complete title is *Eight Propositions: Guides to Understanding and Solving from Our African American Garden of Eden the Problem of Educating Black Males and Uplifting Black People*.

Contact/Purchase: <https://rempsonfoundation.org> AuthorHouse, Amazon, Barnes and Noble.



## Biden-Harris Announces New Actions To Protect Renters And Promote Affordability

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

The pressure on the government to do something about rising housing costs has resulted in the Biden administration announcing major new initiatives to safeguard tenants and make renting more affordable.

Now, several federal agencies announced they would collaborate to compile data on discriminatory housing practices.

A non-binding "Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights" is also included to provide clear instructions for tenants to continue living in moderately priced rentals.

In addition, the White House is issuing a rallying cry called the "Resident-Centered Housing Challenge," with the goal of encouraging housing providers and state and local governments to bolster policy in their respective markets.

"Since taking office, the president has taken substantial steps to promote fairness in the rental market and ease the burden of rental costs for millions of American renters," administration officials wrote in a Fact Sheet.

Officials said the administration kept the national eviction moratorium in place until August 2021, which helped to prevent over 1.5 million eviction filings nationwide.

Further, the administration has delivered over 8 million rental or utility assistance payments to reduce renters' risk of eviction or housing instability.

The White House said more than \$769 million has been provided for housing stability services by the Administration.

In 2022, the administration released a Housing Supply Action Plan, which set the goal of closing America's housing supply shortfall in five years.

The administration has been making progress advancing a long-term goal of providing housing vouchers to all eligible households: through the 2022 and 2023 president's Budgets, the administration has secured rental assistance to more than 100,000 households through the 2022 and 2023 appropriations bills and the American Rescue Plan.

And, recently, HUD published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on its efforts to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing.

As the housing market remains a major issue for renters, administration officials pointed out that inflation has reduced, but rental prices have continued to rise.

The actions are the latest by the Biden administration to curtail evictions and to help make housing more affordable.

Reportedly, tenant unions, community organizations, and legal advocacy groups have called for an all-out strategy, preparing an executive order for the Biden administration, advocating for a housing emergency declaration, and investigating rent control options.

Those plans, which involved several departments, were made to encourage federal authorities to look into alternative methods of lowering rental prices, the Washington Post reported.

Many ideas were dismissed as unrealistic by White House advisors and administration officials, and some questioned the legitimacy of such drastic measures, the newspaper stated.

The "Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights" emphasizes the importance of eviction prevention and diversion, the right to organize, and clear and fair contracts.

Over a third of the American population—44 million households—rent their homes.

Before the pandemic, well over 2 million eviction filings and roughly 900,000 evictions occurred annually—disproportionately affecting Black women and their children, administration officials stated.

Since then, rental housing has become less affordable with some landlords taking advantage of market conditions to pursue egregious rent increases.

"These announcements recognize there are responsible housing providers—large and small, national and local—willing to treat renters fairly, but it also holds accountable those who exploit market realities at the cost of renters' housing access and stability," officials stated.



## "Fair" Tax: A Terrible Idea That Just Won't Die

By Thomas L. Knapp

William Lloyd Garrison Center

Here we go again: The "Fair Tax Act" is out for its perennial limp around the dead legislation track.

The "Fair Tax" (or "FairTax" for those with defective space bars on their keyboards) proposes to replace the current federal tax regime with:

First, a 30 percent national sales tax, falsely advertised as 23 percent by calculating it "inclusively"—e.g. a 30 cent tax would be 23 percent of \$1.30, which is the total cost, including tax, of a \$1 purchase—on all services and "new" goods.

Second, a cradle-to-grave monthly welfare check for every man, woman, and child in the U.S., falsely advertised as an "advance rebate" or "prebate," even though it's not conditioned on payment of any tax at all.

Third, pretending to "eliminate" the IRS by re-naming it and/or parceling out its functions to other government bureaucracies.

In baseball, three strikes is an out. With legislation, three lies means extra innings until the bill passes or everyone dies.

It was a bad idea when Congress first considered it in 1999.

It was a bad idea when Neal Boortz and John Linder published *The Fairtax Book* (which should have been subtitled "Putting Lipstick on a Pig, Badly") in 2005.

It's continued to be a bad idea, and recognized by most as such, every time it's raised its hoary head.

But for some reason, many supposed advocates of "smaller government" seem to think it would be an improvement on that metric. It wouldn't.

"Fair Tax" advocates paint the proposal as "revenue neutral" (that is, the government would be taking just as much of our money as it did before). They also say that, with the monthly welfare checks, it would remain just as "progressive"—that is, redistributive—as the income tax.

What they don't like to mention is that everyone who'd already paid income tax all their lives would have their savings taxed AGAIN, by 30 percent, when they spent that savings.

Or that the prices of "used" goods would rapidly rise—when the price of all "new" goods instantly goes up by 30 percent, there's a lot of room to demand more for "used" while still remaining competitive.

Or that the "prebate" checks would instantly join Social Security as a political "third rail" that must not be touched, and a political football that could be kicked around to get anything politicians want by claiming a threat to the checks.

Does that sound like "smaller government" to you?

If so, check your hearing aid battery.  
**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.**

