

# Biden's Selma Visit Puts Spotlight Back On Voting Rights

SELMA, Ala. (AP) — President Joe Biden arrived in Alabama to pay tribute to the heroes of "Bloody Sunday," joining thousands for the annual commemoration of the seminal moment in the civil rights movement that led to passage of landmark voting rights legislation nearly 60 years ago.

The visit to Selma also is an opportunity for Biden to speak directly to the current generation of civil rights activists. Many feel dejected because Biden has been unable to make good on a campaign pledge to bolster voting rights and are eager to see his administration keep the issue in the spotlight.

Biden intends to use his remarks to emphasize the importance of commemorating "Bloody Sunday" so that history cannot be erased, while trying to make the case that the fight for voting rights remains integral to economic justice and civil rights for Black Americans, White House officials said.

This year's commemoration comes as the historic city of roughly 18,000 is still digging out from the aftermath of a January EF-2 tornado that destroyed or damaged thousands of properties in and around Selma. The scars of that storm are still evident. Blocks from the stage where Biden was to speak were houses that sat crumpled or without roofs. Orange spray paint marked buildings beyond salvage with instructions to "tear down."

Before Biden's visit, the Rev. William Barber II, a co-chair of Poor People's Campaign, and six other activists wrote Biden and members of Congress to express their frustration with the lack of progress on voting rights legislation. They urged Washington politicians visiting Selma not to sully the memories of the late civil rights activists John Lewis,



Hosea Williams and others with empty platitudes.

"We're saying to President Biden, let's frame this to America as a moral issue, and let's show how it affects everybody," Barber said in an interview. "When voting rights passed after Selma, it didn't just help Black people. It helped America itself.

We need the president to reframe this: When you block voting rights, you're not just hurting Black people. You're hurting America itself."

Few moments have had as lasting importance to the civil rights movement as what happened on March 7, 1965, in Selma and in the weeks that followed.

Some 600 peaceful demonstrators led by Lewis and Williams had gathered that day, just weeks after the fatal shooting of a young Black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, by an Alabama trooper.

Lewis, who would later serve in the U.S. House representing Georgia, and the others were brutally beaten by Alabama

troopers and sheriff's deputies as they tried to cross Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge at the start of what was supposed to be a 54-mile walk to the state capital in Montgomery as part of a larger effort to register Black voters in the South

The images of the police violence sparked outrage across the country. Days later, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. led what became known as the "Turnaround Tuesday" march, in which marchers approached a wall of police at the bridge and prayed before turning back.

President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced the Voting Rights Act of 1965 eight days after "Bloody Sunday," calling Selma one those rare moments in American history where "history and fate meet at a single time." On March 21, King began a third march, under federal protection, that grew by thousands by the time they arrived at the state capital. Five months later, Johnson signed the bill into law.

As a candidate in 2020, Biden promised to pursue sweeping legislation to bolster protection of voting rights. His 2021 legislation, named the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, included provisions to restrict partisan gerrymandering of congressional districts, strike down hurdles to voting and bring transparency to a campaign finance system that allows wealthy donors to bankroll political causes anonymously.

It passed the then-Democratic-controlled House, but failed to draw the 60 votes needed to win passage in the Senate. With Republicans now in control of the House, passage of such legislation is highly unlikely.

Several hundred lined up in downtown Selma well before Biden's appearance, including Delores Gresham, 65, a retired health care worker from Birmingham. She was there four hours early, grabbing a front-row spot so her grandchildren could hear the president and see the

(See **SELMA VISIT**, P. 2)

# Former Fire Chief Says Slavery Was God's Plan

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

In a videotaped lecture that many called out as teeming with self-hate, a former Atlanta fire chief ridiculously opined that it was God's divine plan that permitted Americans to enslave Africans.

NBC News reported that Kelvin J. Cochran, who is Black, lectured at a Georgia Department of Labor event honoring Black History Month.

The outlet noted that Cochran explained how his religious beliefs were consistent with the nation's founding.

The network reported that Cochran began "his patriotic speech" by claiming that the United States "has been a part of God's divine plan from the beginning of time."

Later, he mentions slavery, im-

plying that the entirety of American history is "His story."

God was not taken aback by slavery in the United States, Cochran argued.

The enslavement of Africans in the Americas was sanctioned by God, who "in his sovereignty" allowed it to happen, he asserted.

A social, spiritual, and economic famine was imminent in Africa, and it has persisted to this day, Cochran claimed without providing any evidence to support his rhetoric.

Hence, God was responsible for the Middle Passage slave trade that delivered six million Africans to the Americas, he said.

It also was God's divine design to enslave the nation of Israel, as Cochran put it, and God's sovereignty "enabled Africans to be brought to America in bondage."

Cochran referred to the Bible, namely Genesis, where God fore-

told that Abraham's offspring would be imprisoned and tormented for four hundred years.

He said slave owners were committed to educating their slaves about religion, and that slaves would often congregate outside of churches in order to listen in on the worship services.

Cochran sent copies of his self-published Bible study book, "Who Told You That You Were Naked?" to his employees in 2013.

The book reportedly contains statements like "naked," "wicked," and "ungodly" as it described sinners as gay and those who have sex outside of marriage.

Homosexuality, he added, was a "sexual perversion on par with bestiality."

The fire department suspended Cochran without pay for 30 days in November 2014 for failing to obtain approval or provide sufficient notice prior to the publish-

ing of the book, which had been flagged as a concern by an assistant fire chief in October 2014.

Cochran was let go in January 2015 after a campaign he launched following his suspension. He claimed he was terminated because of his religious views.

The Atlanta City Council voted in October 2018 to settle Cochran's claim, paying him \$1.2 million.

Cochran currently works as a senior fellow and vice president of the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative and religious group that represented him in the lawsuit against the city.

"Here's the bottom line," Cochran asserted.

"We all got here on different boats, but now we're in the same boat. I thank God for America and I thank God for American history," he said.

# Vietnam Vet Finally Awarded Medal Of Honor

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly 60 years after he was recommended for the nation's highest military award, retired Col. Paris Davis, one of the first Black officers to lead a Special Forces team in combat, received the Medal of Honor on Friday for his bravery in the Vietnam War.

After a crowded White House ceremony, a grateful Davis emphasized the positive of the honor rather than negative of the delay, saying, "It is in the best interests of America that we do things like this."

Thanking President Joe Biden, who draped a ribbon with the medal around his neck, he said, "God bless you, God bless all, God bless America."

The belated recognition for the 83-year-old Virginia resident came after the recommendation for his medal was lost, resubmitted — and then lost again.

It wasn't until 2016 — half a century after Davis risked his life to save some of his men under fire — that advocates painstakingly recreated and resubmitted the paperwork.

Biden described Davis as a "true hero" for risking his life amid heavy enemy fire to haul



Retired Army Col. Paris Davis listens as President Joe Biden speaks before awarding the Medal of Honor to Davis for his heroism during the Vietnam War, in the East Room of the White House, Friday

injured soldiers under his command to safety. When a superior ordered him to safety, according to Biden, Davis replied, "Sir, I'm just not going to leave. I still have an American out there." He went back into the firefight to retrieve an injured medic.

"You are everything this medal means," Biden told Davis. "You're everything our nation is at our best. Brave and big hearted, determined and devoted, selfless and steadfast."

Biden said Davis should have received the honor years ago,

describing segregation in the U.S. when he returned home and questioning the delay in awarding him the medal.

"Somehow the paperwork was never processed," Biden said. "Not just once. But twice."

Davis doesn't dwell on the delayed honor and says he doesn't know why decades had to pass before it finally arrived.

"Right now I'm overwhelmed," he told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday, the eve of the medal ceremony.

"When you're fighting, you're not thinking about this moment," Davis said. "You're just trying to get through that moment."

"That moment" stretched over nearly 19 hours and two days in mid-June 1965.

Davis, then a captain and commander with the 5th Special Forces Group, engaged in nearly continuous combat during a pre-dawn raid on a North Vietnamese army camp in the village of Bong Son in Binh Dinh province.

He engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the North Vietnamese, called for precision artillery fire and thwarted the capture of

(See **VIETNAM VET**, P. 2)



## NO. 10 NOTRE DAME TOPS NC STATE TO REACH ACC SEMIFINALS

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP) — Niele Ivey is asking for her 10th-ranked Notre Dame team for more with star guard Olivia Miles out with a knee injury. It's hard to imagine Sonia Citron answering that call any better.

Citron had 28 points for a season-high scoring output for the second straight game, helping the Fighting Irish beat three-time reigning champion North Carolina State 66-60 in Friday's quarterfinals at the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament.

Citron, a 6-foot-1 sophomore, has moved over to point guard to run the offense in addition to upping her own production. It's a big reason why the Irish (25-4) won the regular-season title to begin with, and have now advanced to the semifinals to face Louisville.

"I'm definitely still learning, but I'm getting a lot of help from my teammates and my coaches," Citron said, adding: "Yeah, I think I can do it. I'm going to continue to just try to do the best for my team."

## NORTH CAROLINA MAGNATE REMAINS FREE AFTER NEW CHARGES

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — A North Carolina business magnate remains free after he was indicted on charges he conspired to conduct a massive scheme to deceive insurance regulators and policyholders related to insurance companies that he controlled.

Greg E. Lindberg of Durham was ordered released on \$100,000 unsecured bond following his initial appearance and arraignment on Thursday before U.S. Magistrate Judge David Keesler in Charlotte, court filings show.

A grand jury indicted Lindberg on Feb. 23 on 13 counts, with wire fraud, money-laundering conspiracy and false entries about insurance business finances among them. Lindberg pleaded not guilty on Thursday, according to the hearing's summary.

A meeting between attorneys in the case is set for April 24 before U.S. District Judge Max Cogburn.

Lindberg, once a large political donor in the state, already awaits a retrial on separate charges he attempted to bribe North Carolina's insurance commissioner to secure preferential regulatory treatment for his insurance business.

A federal appeals court overturned his 2020 corruption-related convictions in that case, leading to his release from an Alabama prison, where he had been serving a seven-year sentence.

Kessler agreed with attorneys Thursday that Lindberg be released on conditions similar to those set in his corruption case.

Lindberg denies wrongdoing in both cases.

## N. CAROLINA LEGISLATORS REACH MEDICAID EXPANSION DEAL

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina legislative leaders announced Thursday an agreement to expand Medicaid to hundreds of thousands of additional low-income adults through the Affordable Care Act.

The deal, which likely won't be voted on until later this month at the earliest, marks a milestone for Republican lawmakers, most of whom opposed expansion for a decade until recently, and for hospitals and patient advocates who sought it all that time.

North Carolina has been one of 11 states that has not adopted Medicaid expansion. If the deal goes through, the state would start provid-

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## SELMA VISIT

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commemoration.

"I want them to know what happened here," she said.

Two years ago on the anniversary, Biden issued an executive order directing federal agencies to expand access to voter registration, called on the heads of agencies to come up with plans to give federal employees time off to vote or volunteer as nonpartisan poll workers, and more.

But many federal agencies are lagging in meeting the voting registration provision of Biden's order, according to a report published Thursday by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. The group says fully implementing registration efforts laid out in the order would mean an additional 3.5 million voter registration applications annually.

Selma officials hope Biden will also address the January tornado that devastated the city and laid bare issues of poverty that have persisted in Selma for decades.

Biden approved a disaster declaration and agreed to provide extra help for debris cleanup and removal, a cost that Mayor James Perkins said the small city could not afford on its own.

"I understand other communities our size and our demographics have similar challenges ... but I don't think anyone can claim what Selma has done for this nation and the contributions that we made to this nation," he said.

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

ing expansion coverage to people starting next January.

"This is something that we can all be very proud of," House Speaker Tim Moore said at a Legislative Building news conference with Senate leader Phil Berger. "What a huge announcement this is for North Carolina. What a huge policy direction this is that will provide help for so many in this state, but it's going to do it in a way that's fiscally responsible."

Expansion gained momentum last year when the GOP-controlled state House and Senate approved, with strong bipartisan support, competing legislation addressing it, but they failed to reach a deal. The key differences stemmed around other initiatives Senate Republicans insisted were needed to increase the number of medical providers to cover the additional enrollees.

Under the new agreement, senators obtained the loosening or elimination of "certificate of need" laws that require health regulators to sign off on plans to offer hospital beds for mental health and substance abuse patients, build ambulatory surgery centers or purchase MRI machines. But their demand that advanced-practice nurses be able to treat patients without a doctor's supervision was left out.

## PANTHERS FOUNDER, FORMER OWNER JERRY RICHARDSON DIES AT 86

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Jerry Richardson, the Carolina Panthers founder and for years one of the NFL's most influential owners until a scandal forced him to sell the team, has died. He was 86.

Richardson died peacefully Wednesday night at his Charlotte home, the team said in a statement.

Richardson became the first former NFL player to own a team since Chicago's George Halas when he landed the expansion Panthers in 1993.

A former teammate of Johnny Unitas who caught a touchdown pass in the Baltimore Colts' victory over the New York Giants in the 1959 NFL championship game, Richardson only spent two years in the NFL before venturing into the restaurant business. He used his championship bonus money to open the first Hardee's in Spartanburg, South Carolina — close to where he had attended Wofford College.

He went on to make his fortune in the restaurant business, becoming chief executive officer of Flagstar, the sixth-largest food service company in the country at the time.

The Spring Hope, North Carolina, native spent years trying to persuade the NFL to put a team in the Carolinas, ultimately succeeding through a relatively original concept of funding a new stadium through the sales of permanent seat licenses.

"Jerry Richardson's contributions to professional football in the Carolinas are historic," current Panthers owner David Tepper and his wife Nicole said in a statement. "With the arrival of the Panthers in 1995, he changed the landscape of sports in the region and gave the NFL fans here a team to call their own."

Richardson said in 2018 his greatest mission in life was bringing the NFL to the Carolinas.

## N. CAROLINA LT. GOV. ROBINSON TO GIVE GOP RESPONSE TO COOPER

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson will give the Republican response to Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's State of the State address next week, Robinson announced on Thursday.

The choice of Robinson is unusual, since legislators from the major party opposite the governor's ordinarily deliver the response to the governor's address, which happens in odd-numbered years. Robinson's prerecorded speech will follow Cooper's address at the Legislative Building on Monday night.

Tradition placed the response this time with the Senate. Chamber leader Phil Berger said Wednesday he wouldn't be giving the response. It's also been rare in recent history when the governor and lieutenant governor were from different parties.

The response gives Robinson — who has all but announced a bid for governor next year — a major opportunity to address a statewide audience. Term limits prevent Cooper from seeking another term.

Robinson, who in 2020 was elected the state's first Black lieutenant governor, has been denounced for his comments about sex education in schools that critics say disparaged LGBTQ people. Robinson also has criticized what he calls the "indoctrination" of children in the public schools and backed legislation that limited how teachers can discuss certain racial concepts in the classroom.

## Vietnam Vet Finally —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

three American soldiers — all while suffering wounds from gunshots and grenade fragments. He used his pinkie finger to fire his rifle after his hand was shattered by an enemy grenade, according to reports.

Davis repeatedly sprinted into an open rice paddy to rescue members of his team, according to the ArmyTimes. His entire team survived.

"That word 'gallantry' is not much used these days," Biden said. "But I can think of no better word to describe Paris."

Davis, from Cleveland, retired in 1985 at the rank of colonel and now lives in Alexandria, Virginia, just outside Washington. Biden called him several weeks ago to deliver the news.

He says the wait in no way lessens the honor.

"It heightens the thing, if you've got to wait that long," he said. "It's like someone promised

you an ice cream cone. You know what it looks like, what it smells like. You just haven't licked it."

Davis' commanding officer recommended him for the military's top honor, but the paperwork disappeared. He eventually was awarded a Silver Star, the military's third-highest combat medal, but members of Davis' team have argued that his skin color was a factor in the disappearance of his Medal of Honor recommendation.

"I believe that someone purposely lost the paperwork," Ron Deis, a junior member of Davis' team in Bong Son, told the AP in a separate interview.

Deis, now 79, helped compile the recommendation that was submitted in 2016. He said he knew Davis had been recommended for the Medal of Honor shortly after the battle in 1965, and he spent years wondering why it hadn't been awarded. Nine

years ago he learned that a second nomination had been submitted "and that also was somehow, quote, lost."

"But I don't believe they were lost," Deis said. "I believe they were intentionally discarded. They were discarded because he was Black, and that's the only conclusion that I can come to."

Army officials say there is no evidence of racism in Davis' case.

"We're here to celebrate the fact that he got the award, long time coming," Maj. Gen. Patrick Roberson, deputy commanding general, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, told the AP. "We, the Army, you know, we haven't been able to see anything that would say, 'Hey, this is racism.'"

"We can't know that," Roberson said.

In early 2021, Christopher Miller, then the acting defense

secretary, ordered an expedited review of Davis' case. He argued in an opinion column later that year that awarding Davis the Medal of Honor would address an injustice.

"Some issues in our nation rise above partisanship," Miller wrote. "The Davis case meets that standard."

Davis' daughter, Regan Davis Hopper, a mom of two teenage sons, told the AP that she only learned of her dad's heroism in 2019. Like him, she said she tries not to dwell on her disappointment over how the situation was handled.

"I try not to think about that. I try not to let that weigh me down and make me lose the thrill and excitement of the moment," Hopper said. "I think that's most important, to just look ahead and think about how exciting it is for America to meet my dad for the first time. I'm just proud of him."

## The Source Of "Scientific Racism" In America Revealed In BHM Presentation

WASHINGTON, DC—The little-known driving force behind the racism still so prevalent in the U.S. was revealed to members of the African and the African American communities in the District of Columbia in a recent Black History Month presentation by the National Affairs Office of the Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR).

The talk centered on the prime role of psychiatrists and psychologists in promoting and sustaining so-called "scientific racism" in America. The term "scientific racism" refers to the use of false or quack science to supposedly prove racial inferiority and so to supposedly "justify" racial inequality and discrimination.

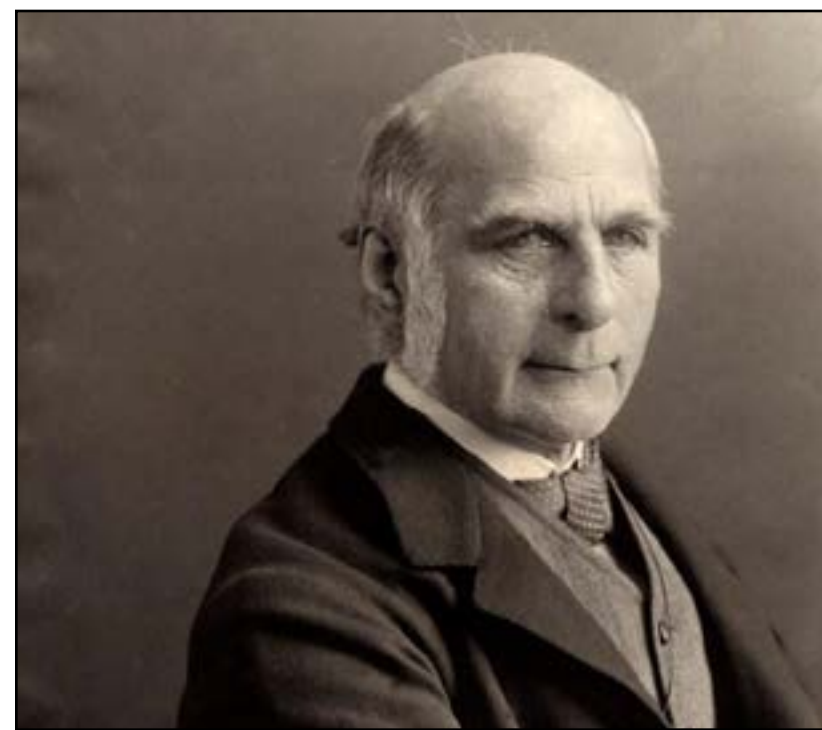
"The legacy of 'scientific racism,' heavily promoted for more than 200 years by American psychiatrists and psychologists, is still pervasive and entrenched in the U.S. mental health system and throughout our society today," said Anne Goedeke, president of the CCHR National Affairs Office. "African Americans should be aware of who instigated and perpetuated this form of racism."

In January 2021, the American Psychiatric Association detailed its long history of promoting scientific racism, admitting that "these appalling past actions, as well as their harmful effects, are ingrained in the structure of psychiatric practice and continue to harm...psychological well-being even today."

Later that year, the American Psychological Association laid out the details of "the role of psychology...in promoting, perpetuating, and failing to challenge racism, and the harms that have been inflicted on communities of color as a result."

The harm that these organizations have detailed started with Dr. Benjamin Rush, the slave-owning "father of American psychiatry," who claimed in 1792 that black skin was caused by a disease that he called "negritude" and that Blacks needed to be segregated to prevent them from infecting others. In so doing, he created the first false-science justification for racism.

Just before the Civil War, psychologist Samuel Cartwright, who had apprenticed with Benjamin Rush, invented a racist mental illness he called "drapetomania," from the Greek words drapetes, a runaway slave, and mania, meaning crazy. He claimed "drapetomania" was a mental illness that caused slaves to have an "uncontrollable urge" to escape. The



Psychologist Francis Galton came up with the false science of "eugenics," which psychiatrists and psychologists in the American mental health movement promoted, actively spreading racist ideas of Black inferiority and the need for segregation.

treatment was "whipping the devil out of them." This racist use of false science is "scientific racism."

In the years following the Civil War, English psychologist Francis Galton, who was a cousin of Charles Darwin, applied Darwin's theory of "survival of the fittest" to humans and came up with the idea of racial purification, which he called "eugenics." Galton defined eugenics as "the science of improvement of the human race... through better breeding." This pseudoscience led people to believe that for the good of the country, those with "undesirable" traits could be subjected to forced birth control and sterilization to prevent them from having children.

In the U.S., psychiatrists and psychologists in the American mental health movement from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s adopted and heavily promoted the false science of eugenics, actively spreading racist ideas of Black inferiority and the need for segregation. More than half of the American Psychological Association presidents between 1892 and 1947 also had leadership positions in eugenics organizations. Courses on eugenics were offered by psychiatrists and psychologists at America's leading universities, leading the public to believe that laws mandating racial segregation were supported by science.

Psychologists assumed a particularly central role in the eugenics movement throughout the 1900s with their use of culturally biased intelligence testing that "proved" African Americans possessed lower IQs. As the apology from the American Psychological Association stated: "Psychologists created and promoted the widespread application of psychological tests and instruments that have been used to disadvantage many communities of color..."

In one of the best-known examples of the use of intelligence testing for "scientific racism," Harvard University psychologist Richard Herrnstein claimed in his book, *The Bell Curve*, published in 1994, that Blacks have lower IQs and are "genetically disabled." He advocated selective breeding to limit the Black population.

From the 1950s on, African Americans were used in unethical psychosurgery and drug experiments. Psychiatrist Robert Heath experimented on Blacks with electrodes implanted into their brains and in secret drug experiments funded by the CIA. Psychiatrist Walter Freeman experimented with lobotomy, an operation that cuts into the brain to try to alter behavior, using hospitalized Black patients in Tuskegee, Alabama. At the National Institute of Mental Health, the country's top psychiatric research facility, African

Americans were used in hallucinogenic drug experiments.

In the 1960s, psychiatrists invented a new mental illness, "protest psychosis," another example of "scientific racism," to portray Blacks participating in the Civil Rights movement as aggressive and mentally ill. In psychiatric journals, images of angry Black men or African tribal symbols were used in ads to sell powerful antipsychotic drugs. Today, African Americans are still disproportionately diagnosed with psychosis and disproportionately prescribed antipsychotic drugs.

In the second half of the 20th century, psychologists continued to promote racist, false-science theories. As the American Psychological Association stated: "From the 1960s on, psychologists gave explicit assistance to, and participated in racial extremist, white nationalist, and neo-Nazi groups..."

The legacy of "scientific racism" still prevalent today in the mental health system, as admitted by the American Psychiatric and American Psychological associations, is evidenced in recently released government data. The report revealed that African Americans receive disproportionately more diagnoses of mental disorders related to disruptive, defiant, and psychotic behavior, such as attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), schizophrenia, and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).

African Americans comprise 13.5% of the U.S. population, but were found to account for 33.6% of the individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia or other psychotic disorders, and 21.4% of those diagnosed with ADHD — significantly higher than their proportion of the U.S. population.

More evidence of the consequences of "scientific racism" is found in the reports' finding that African American children aged 0 to 17 years of age are disproportionately diagnosed with ADHD, with the label given to four of every 10 Black children receiving services from programs operated or funded by the state mental health agencies. African American children are also disproportionately diagnosed with conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder.

In response to the CCHR program's data, one audience member commented, "I take away from this the true depth and impact of 'scientific racism' and its ongoing effects on [psychiatric] diagnosis."

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## Duke Energy Seeks Big Rate Increases

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — A Duke Energy Corp. subsidiary for North Carolina electric customers has asked state regulators to let it raise residential rates by 16.6% in the coming months largely to recover their fuel costs, which it said soared mainly from natural gas prices last year.

Duke Energy Carolinas serves about 2 million households and businesses in western and central North Carolina. It said Wednesday that if the request is approved by the state Utilities Commission, the typical residential customer's monthly bill would increase from \$115.01 to \$134.11.

The Charlotte-based utility emphasized such approved requests don't widen anticipated profits, but rather cover its expenses to obtain the fuel that generates electricity, such as natural gas, coal and nuclear rods. Its customers paid \$1 billion less than their actual cost of fuel during 2022, the company said in a news release. Higher natural gas demand and tight supplies drove most of the rate request, the

company said.

"Fuel costs to generate electricity have more than tripled over the last year, which is a challenge faced by energy providers across the country," said Kendal Bowman, Duke Energy's North Carolina president. "Our rates in North Carolina are far below the national average, and we're doing everything we can to keep customer bills as low as possible."

Tuesday's application with the commission, which marks the largest ever fuel filing increase in the history of either of Duke Energy's North Carolina electric subsidiaries, seeks a 16.2% residential rate increase by Sept.

1, with a 0.4% increase by Jan. 1. Duke Energy Carolinas also said it would seek a 15.2% rate increase for commercial customers and 12.1% increase for industrial customers. The subsidiary's coverage area includes Charlotte, Durham and the Triad.

The other North Carolina electric-producing subsidiary, Duke Energy Progress, will make its annual fuel filing in June, the news release said. It has 1.5 million customers in eastern and central North Carolina — including those in Raleigh, Fayetteville and Wilmington — as well as in and near Asheville.

These filings are separate from the broader multiyear rate fil-

ings at the commission in recent months by Duke Energy Carolinas and Duke Energy Progress. The additional revenues sought there would go in part to make electric grid reliability and security improvements and help it collect more power from renewable sources.

The seven-member Utilities Commission generally has the final say on rate filings, barring appeals. Companies and customer advocates — the commission's Public Staff among them — can push back on Duke Energy's requests.

Annual fuel rate filings reflect changing commodity prices and supply and demand. Before a 9.6% fuel filing increase for residential customers last year by Duke Energy Carolinas, the fuel rates had dropped for these customers in eight of the past 10 years in North Carolina, Duke Energy said. While natural gas prices have fallen recently, North Carolina law prevented the utility from seeking a rate adjustment for the higher prices right away.

# Business & Finance

## Nonprofit's Supporting Black Community Vital To Economy

COLUMBUS, OH— The Union Bank Company has made it their mission to build relationships throughout all of Ohio with the continued support of nonprofits that impact the communities they serve. In celebration of Black History Month, the bank team has chosen to support two organizations that focus their efforts on the Black community.

One impactful organization supporting central Ohio is the Black Heritage Council of Marion County. Their objectives are to promote an awareness of African American history and provide an environment for sharing cultural values and appreciation of diversity.

They provide scholarships and work extensively with The Ohio State University. The Black Heritage Council has awarded over \$150,000 in scholarships to students. No matter what school the students attend, they can apply for a scholarship.

"The Union Bank has been a financial blessing for The Black Heritage Council. We have several different accounts and the trust that we have in them, words cannot express. Even though our business is not a million-dollar asset, they certainly make us feel like that," said Tara Dyer of The Black Heritage Council.

"I'm thrilled to support this organization again this year,"

said Pam Workman, Marion Branch Manager of The Union Bank Company. "Our donation helps Black students attain a college degree without the financial burden due to all The Black Heritage Council of Marion County does for our community," she added.

The bank has a long list of nonprofits they will partner with throughout the coming months, including Marion Matters. This organization provides leadership in developing and sustaining pathways out of poverty through education and support. They offer numerous classes for supporting local business owners, including education for minority entrepre-

neurs and the challenges they face.

Another nonprofit The Union Bank Co. is supporting this month is Family Promise of Lima-Allen County. This organization helps homeless families achieve and sustain independence by providing life-saving services, including prevention, education, shelter, and stabilization as these families seek suitable employment and housing. Families with children are the fastest growing percentage of the homeless population. Family Promise serves families of all types including single mothers, single fathers, and two-parent families.

"Providing educational re-

sources for homeownership is important to healthy families," stated Dian Franks, Marketing Manager at The Union Bank Company. "Beyond just home ownership resources, we offer a variety of financial tools

through our Financial University. We feel that financial literacy is vital to our economy, which is why we provide all of these resources that are free for everyone right on our website."

## Scout Motors Picks South Carolina For New \$2B EV Plant

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A Volkswagen Group-backed automotive company announced plans this week to open a \$2 billion electric truck and SUV manufacturing plant just outside of Columbia, South Carolina.

Scout Motors Inc. and South Carolina officials said Friday that the company would be establishing its first manufacturing plant in Blythewood at an industrial site. At full capacity, more than 200,000 vehicles may be produced annually at the facility, which is expected to create 4,000 or more permanent jobs, Gov. Henry McMaster's office said in a news release.

Scout Motors, an independent company headquartered in Virginia and backed by Volkswagen, plans to produce all-electric trucks and SUVs in the style of the Scout vehicles produced by International Harvester between 1960 and 1980.

"Scout Motors will provide thousands of South Carolinians with previously unimagined opportunities and prosperity for generations to come," McMaster said in a statement. "The Palmetto State, with its rich history, superior people, and sterling automotive manufacturing reputation, is the perfect place to re-start this iconic American brand."

Vehicle production is targeted to begin by the end of 2026, according to the news release.

The Scout deal is expected to receive county-level tax incentives that have already received initial approval, The State reported. It wasn't immediately clear what state-level incentives the project may have been offered, according to the newspaper.

## California Residents Await Decisions On Reparations



REGGIE ROMAN

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Nearly two years into the California reparations task force's work, the group still has yet to make key decisions that will be at the heart of its final report recommending how the state should apologize and compensate Black residents for the harms caused by slavery and discrimination.

A vote possibly slated for this weekend on requirements for who would be eligible for payments and other remedies was delayed because of the absence of one of the committee's nine members.

After two hours of intense debate, the task force voted unanimously Saturday in favor of an agency that would provide certain services to descendants of Black enslaved people while overseeing groups that provide other services. The vote followed one proposed by task force member Cheryl Grills at a prior meeting to recommend that this entity mainly serve as an oversight body.

Task force Chair Kamillah Moore said Saturday's vote was necessary to take into account input from residents who gave public comments in favor of an agency with the power to provide services.

"It's not enough for us as nine esteemed colleagues to determine what repair looks like," Moore said. "We have to listen to the descended community."

Lawmakers passed legislation in 2020 creating the task force to assess how the legacy of slavery harmed African Americans long after its abolition through education, criminal justice and other disparities. The legislation directs the task force to study reparations proposals "with a special consideration for" the descendants of enslaved Black people living in California and is not meant to create a program in lieu of one from the federal government.

The work of the task force has captured widespread attention, a result of being the first of its kind in the country. But some used the group's latest two-day meeting in Sacramento to warn that not enough Black Californians are sufficiently informed about its work.

One resident said the task force's groundbreaking interim 500-page report, released last year, should be made available in libraries and schools, a topic the group discussed Saturday. But others said it's not just up to the task force and its communications team to get the word out on their work.

"This room should be filled with media, and it's not because Black people are a pariah," Los Angeles lawyer Cheryce Cryer said Saturday. "We are at the bottom of the totem pole."

The two-day gathering in Sacramento, the state's capital, comes as the group approaches its July 1 deadline to release a report for lawmakers. The document will represent a milestone in a growing push for reparations efforts in different parts of the country. It is a movement that has garnered support from a large share of African Americans, but also advocates that include Japanese Americans who fought for families to receive payments from the federal government after residents were placed in internment camps during World War II.

Sacramento resident Tariq Alami, who has been following along with the task force's work since its early stages, said it is clear the government should have passed reparations for Black Americans a long time ago.

"It doesn't take a genius to see that there are differences in the society as a result of what we have encountered as Black people," Alami said.

Dozens of advocates and residents came from across the state to the California Environmental Protection Agency building to give public comments Friday and Saturday that ranged from detailing family histories of having property seized from ancestors to calling on federal lawmakers to follow California's lead.

After the task force releases its final report, the fate of its recommendations would then lie with state legislators, two of whom are members of the task force — Assemblymember Reggie Jones-Sawyer and state Sen. Steven Bradford, both Democrats representing parts of Los Angeles County. Lawmakers would also decide where funding for any reparations legislation may come from.

The task force has spent multiple meetings discussing what time frames reparations could hinge on for five harms economists pursued estimates for to help quantify the extent of discriminatory policies against Black Californians.

## NC Supreme Court To Revisit School Funding

RALEIGH (AP) — A ruling by the North Carolina Supreme Court on Friday siding with the state controller means the court will revisit a school funding case in which an earlier lineup of justices issued a landmark opinion just four months ago.

In a 5-2 decision, the Supreme Court restored enforcement of a 2021 order by the Court of Appeals that stopped the controller from transferring money from state coffers to agencies for education purposes without the General Assembly's express approval. A trial judge had directed the controller's predecessor to transfer the funds — an action the Supreme Court upheld in November. Two new justices joined the bench in January, altering the court's partisan makeup.

A lawyer for current Controller Nels Roseland told the Supreme Court last month that Roseland remained worried that he or his staff could face criminal and civil penalties for making the transfer with several issues unaddressed. The controller keeps the state's books and manages cash flow.

Roseland "has made a sufficient showing of substantial and irreparable harm should the stay remain in effect," the court's prevailing order on Friday reads. It lifted the stay on the Court of

Appeals ruling until the Supreme Court "has an opportunity to address the remaining issues in this case."

Superior Court Judge David Lee had also ruled in late 2021 that he had the authority to require a transfer of \$1.75 billion. He said that was because state officials repeatedly failed to spend enough so that all children have an "opportunity to receive a sound basic education." That's in keeping with Supreme Court rulings from 1997 and 2004, called "Leandro" after the name of an original lawsuit plaintiff. The money would have gone to carry out two years of a remedial education plan that Lee had approved.

The Supreme Court upheld Lee's ruling in a 4-3 decision in November, saying the state constitution's declaration addressing the people's "right to the privilege of education" gave Lee authority to order funds be spent. The dissenting opinion, backed by the court's three registered Republicans, said only the General Assembly can appropriate state funds.

The justices on the prevailing side — all registered Democrats — also suspended the order preventing the controller from acting "pending any further filings" pertaining to issues not already ad-

ressed in the November opinion.

No money has been transferred, and the case was moved to a new trial judge to ensure the transfer — potentially several hundred million dollars now — was carried out. Since the order, Republicans won two Supreme Court elections and now hold five of the seven seats.

The Feb. 8 motion by Roseland — who succeeded Linda Combs as controller last summer — said the justices, for example, haven't addressed whether the November order is expressly contrary to other state law, or whether the transferred funds must revert to state coffers if they are unspent.

Associate Justice Anita Earls wrote a scathing dissent to Friday's order, saying the majority took "extraordinary, unprincipled and unprecedented action" and Roseland's motion "merely seeks rehearing on issues this court has already decided." It could delay further carrying out of the Leandro decisions that led up to the November order, or worse, Earls added.

"If our court cannot or will not enforce state constitutional rights, those rights do not exist," Earls wrote. Justice Mike Morgan joined in her opinion.

Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper, whose administration helped de-

velop the remedial plan that Lee approved, appointed Roseland to a seven-year term as controller. Roseland was confirmed to fulfill the term in unanimous votes by the General Assembly. The last vote happened the same day that Roseland's motion was submitted.

Republican legislative leaders, who also say state funds can only be allocated with General Assembly approval, want to make additional arguments at the Supreme Court. The justices declined Friday to let them move ahead with legal briefs, citing a procedural omission that the lawmakers set about trying to fix later Friday.

Cooper spokesperson Ford Porter mentioned the confirmation timing in a statement late Friday that said the governor "is shocked and disappointed" that Roseland "joined with Republican legislative leaders to hold up funding for the public schools ordered by the Supreme Court in line with decades of bipartisan rulings in favor of schoolchildren."

The ruling comes a month after the same Republican majority on the court agreed to rehear cases involving partisan gerrymandering and photo voter identification that the previous Democratic-led court ruled upon in December. Those rehearings will be held in mid-March.

## Republicans May Be Trying To Build A Multiracial Right, But Will It Work?

Former Republican South Carolina Governor and United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley launched her bid for president recently in a video that began by describing the racial division that marked her small hometown of Bamberg, South Carolina.

Meanwhile, another presumptive GOP candidate, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, has continued his crusade against "woke ideology," most recently on a tour of Pennsylvania, New York and Illinois, presenting himself as a defender of law and order.

Taken together, these events present a fundamental question about the future of the Republican Party.

Does it continue to move rightward, exciting its base by stoking white racial grievance?

Or does it pursue a multiracial strategy that can expand the party's reach?

Recent trends in the GOP suggest that it wants to do both — and that indeed the two strategies are not so much at odds as it might appear.

In a striking development, Michigan Republicans selected in February 2023 a Christian nationalist and election denier as chair of the state party.

This rightward shift of the party is not itself surprising.

What's striking is that Kristina Karamo, a Black woman, was elected over a white male candidate who also had Trump's endorsement.

The same voters who elevated Karamo also cheered Trump's supercharged racist rhetoric against Black people, immigrants, Mexicans, Muslims and nonwhite countries more generally during his campaigns and presidency.

And yet Karamo is hardly an anomaly.

While the party has made no substantive changes or moderation to its politics or policies around long-standing racial justice issues, it is slowly but steadily growing more racially diverse in its grassroots base, elected officials and opinion leaders.

In the 2022 midterm elections, for instance, a new Republican majority in the House of Representatives was secured by a num-



ber of Black and Latino candidates who ran strong races while avoiding the extremist label.

Though the U.S. Senate race in Georgia saw Black GOP candidate Herschel Walker lose to Democratic incumbent Sen. Raphael Warnock, there were seven victorious Black or Latino Republican newcomers to the House, four of whom won seats previously held by Democrats.

Most notable among the growing number of Republican lawmakers of color is Byron Donalds, a two-term representative from Florida. He was nominated by a GOP colleague to serve as speaker of the House during the chaotic several days and 15 rounds of voting that preceded Kevin McCarthy's election to that role.

Relatively young and new to national politics, these GOP politicians are largely aligned with Trump on substantive issues.

What's more, none downplayed the issue of race, but rather are using their biographies and experiences of racial discrimination to legitimize their conservative bona fides.

In Haley's speech, she decried a national "self-loathing" that is "more dangerous than any pandemic" in regard to the country's racial history.

"Every day we're told America is flawed, rotten and full of hate," Haley said. "Joe and Kamala even say America's racist. Nothing could be further from the truth. Take it from me, the first female minority governor in history."

Meanwhile, African American Republican Sen. Tim Scott also appears close to entering the race for the GOP presidential nomination.

Like Haley, Scott uses his own biography to undercut Democratic claims to represent people of color.

"For those of you on the left," Scott said in a February 2023 speech in Iowa, "You can call me a prop, you can call me a token, you can call me the n-word. You can question my blackness. You can even call me 'Uncle Tim.' Just understand, your words are no match for my evidence. ... The truth of my life disproves your lies."

Neither Haley nor Scott is running as the colorblind conservatives of years past.

Both embrace their racial identities and talk openly about racial issues and politics, with little damage to their electoral prospects. Both have won large pluralities of conservative white voters in their states.

But the path ahead is mired with challenges and vexing contradictions.

Will a national GOP electorate that has cheered on a host of demeaning attacks on minority groups from its leadership support the candidacies of figures like Haley and Scott?

Colorblind conservative voters? Polls show that roughly 70% of Republicans believe the "great replacement theory," a baseless belief that the Democratic Party is attempting to replace the white electorate in the United States with nonwhite immigrants.

Those same conservative voters are consistently motivated by white racial grievance in issues concerning public education, law enforcement, voting rights and affirmative action.

Yet studies also suggest that

white conservatives will indeed support candidates of color, not out of a commitment to racial justice or even representation, but because they see it as a way to advance partisan and ideological interests.

A 2015 article in Public Opinion Quarterly presented data showing that these voters "are either more supportive of minority Republicans or just as likely to vote for a minority as they are a white Republican."

Similarly, a 2021 study showed that under the right conditions, "racially resentful [white] voters prefer to vote for a Black candidate over a white competitor."

These studies suggest that the Republican electorate is fertile ground for certain candidates of color who can effectively link their biographies to stock conservative accounts of individual uplift, opposition to social welfare — and the demonization of liberalism and liberals.

How about voters of color?

Will they continue to view the GOP as a racist party inhospitable to their interests?

Exit polls after the 2020 election showed that Trump increased his gains among all groups of minority voters in comparison to 2016, capturing 1 in 4 voters of color nationally.

He won the votes of nearly 1 in 5 Black men, and roughly one-third of the Asian American and Latino electorate.

While Republican strategists and candidates are attempting to creatively reframe the relationship of race to modern-day conservatism, none have articulated ideas or policies that directly confront the issues facing a majority of African Americans and other people of color.

Those issues include a predatory criminal justice system, the evisceration of funding for health care and education, the existential threats of climate change and attacks against multiracial democracy.

It's unclear whether those issues will find a way into conservative talking points.

What is clear is that political identities determine political interests — not the other way around.

# Sports

## Athlete Dead In Shipwreck Left Pakistan To Help Disabled Son

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — A Pakistani national soccer team player who died in a migrant shipwreck off Italy's southern coast embarked on the voyage to find medical treatment for her disabled 3-year-old son, her sister and a friend said Saturday. Hospitals had told her that help overseas could be her only option.

Shahida Raza, who also played for Pakistan's national field hockey team and was from Quetta in southwestern Baluchistan province, was one of at least 67 people who perished in the shipwreck. The overcrowded wooden boat they were traveling in broke apart in rough waters in the Ionian Sea off Calabria before dawn last Sunday.

The boat that set sail from the Turkish port of Izmir carried people from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and other countries who were seeking a better quality of life in Europe. According

to survivor accounts, the vessel had at least 170 passengers before the tragedy happened.

Raza's sister, Sadia, said Shahida's attempts to emigrate had one motive: "She only wanted her three-year-old disabled son to move, laugh and cry like other children," Sadia told The Associated Press. "Shahida's sole dream was the treatment of her disabled child. She risked her own life after hospitals in Pakistan told her that overseas medical aid could be the only option."

The boy, Hassan, was not on the boat and remained in Pakistan. He suffered brain damage as a baby and is also paralyzed on one side of his body, from head to toe. It was not clear how Shahida intended to help him by traveling overseas and leaving him behind.

"She was a brave woman, as strong as a man," said Sadia. "My sister got her son treated at the Aga Khan Hospital in Kara-

chi. She was told that if he was taken abroad, there could possibly be good treatment."

Aga Khan authorities were unable to comment on Shahida's case. Sadia said Shahida also approached Quetta's Combined Military Hospital, which also said it could do nothing for her son.

"What a mother does for her children, nobody else can. Shahida always wanted to handle things on her own," Sadia said. "We are proud of our sister."

Pakistanis have paid tribute to Shahida across the country.

Photographs of her donning the country's national colors and sporting accolades have appeared on television and social media, although it was reported that most people came to know of her after her death as women's sports are not widely televised in Pakistan. Local media also quoted her family as saying she had previously spoken about

the lack of acknowledgement and recognition for her achievements.

Pakistani President Arif Alvi on Friday said Raza's tragedy had "deeply moved" him as the country had failed to provide her son with medical facilities.

The president, who was speaking at an international conference on cerebral palsy, said the professional training of health experts and an inclusive approach from society was vital for accommodating people with disabilities.

Shahida's friend, Sumiya Mushtaq, said the 29-year-old athlete often expressed her concern about her child's health.

"The inability to get cured of the disease at local hospitals compelled her to find a better future for her son abroad," she said.

Her family in Pakistan on Saturday was still awaiting the repatriation of her body.



Women's field hockey player Shahida Raza, in Lahore, Pakistan. Raza was among other migrants who died in a shipwreck off Italy's southern coast. The migrants' wooden boat, crammed with passengers who paid smugglers for the voyage from Turkey, broke apart in rough water just off a beach in Calabria before dawn on Sunday. (Pakistan Hockey Federation via AP)

## US Tennis Sees Rise In Hispanic, Black And Asian Professionals

NEW YORK (AP) — A rise in tennis participation around the United States over the past three years has been boosted by increases among Hispanic, Black and Asian players, the U.S. Tennis Association said Thursday.

Citing information from the Physical Activity Council Study on Sports and Physical Activity

administered by Sports Marketing Surveys USA and the Tennis Industry Association Participation and Engagement Study, the USTA pointed to participation jumps since 2020 of 90% among Hispanic players, 46% among Black players and 37% among Asian players.

The 23.6 million people who played tennis in 2022 represents

an increase of 33% since the start of 2020, the USTA said.

"One of the goals of the USTA is to make tennis 'look like America' and to do that we need to help make tennis available to people from all walks of life, in all communities," USTA Chairman of the Board and President Brian Hainline said in the group's news release.

## FORE HIRE Launches "Women Who Want to Work in Golf"

FORE HIRE launches "Women Who Want to Work in Golf" program Presented in partnership with the PGA of America and hosted by PING FORE HIRE announced today that it has launched the "Women Who Want to Work in Golf" program, created for former and current college golfers who are interested in pursuing a career in the golf industry.

The program will provide a one-of-a-kind opportunity for education, professional development, career advancement and direct connection to potential employers.

It is also designed to increase awareness of the availability of talented women looking to enter the golf business.

"Women Who Want to Work in Golf" sessions are May 21-23, 2023, and the program will be in Scottsdale, Arizona, held in conjunction with the NCAA Division I Women's Golf Championship.

The program is presented in partnership with PGA Career Services and is hosted by PING.

Moon Golf continues to support FORE HIRE in its women's initiatives.

The program has been created in collaboration with the Women's Golf Coaches Association.

To be eligible, applicants must have played women's college golf at any level during their college career and must be seeking full-time employment.

Women of all ages are encouraged to apply.

"When [FORE HIRE founder] Courtney Trimble approached us to be the host of the first FORE HIRE event, it was an easy decision," said Stacey Solheim Pauwels, PING Executive Vice President.

"Besides being in our own backyard, PING has a long history of supporting women both on and off the golf course. Courtney's vision fits perfectly with our brand values, and we look forward to highlighting the many career paths and opportunities for women interested in working in the golf industry."

Objectives of the program are to raise awareness of the many opportunities available within the industry, increase understanding of skills necessary to secure specific positions and to provide an opportunity to network and connect to opportunities for employment.

"As Participation in golf continues to grow, the demand for industry companies to expand their workforce has also

grown, and with the ability of college golfers to play the game at a high level, it makes them even more marketable to potential employers," said PGA Career Services Senior Director Scott Kmiec.

"I have never seen a better time to consider a career in the game."

The program will consist of attending the NCAA Women's Division I Golf Championship, a behind-the-scenes look at PING headquarters, roundtable networking sessions with key industry professionals, a panel discussion from golf companies and organizations as well as updated headshots, resume updates and mock interview sessions.

Those selected will be awarded a stipend for travel, hotel, meals, and entertainment. Applications for the program open today. Click here to apply.

The deadline is Wednesday, March 22 at 5 p.m. ET. Up to 30 women will be accepted into the first program.

For more information contact Courtney Trimble: info@forehireus.com or visit forehireus.com. And if you are interested in a career in golf TODAY, please visit www.pga.org/workinggolf to book a free career consultation with a PGA consultant.



## Jon Jones Returns To Win UFC Heavyweight Title In 1st Round

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Jon Jones ended a three-year sabbatical from the UFC, moved up to its highest weight class and then left no doubt Saturday night about his place in the sport's history.

Already widely considered the greatest UFC fighter, the 35-year-old Jones took Cyril Gane to the mat just a little more than a minute into the first round and won with a guillotine choke at 2:04 in UFC 285.

"I'm so excited," Jones said. "I've been working for this for a long time. A people thought I wasn't coming back. I've been faithful to my goal, faithful to my mission."

As short as the fight was, Jones made sure to take his time entering the octagon, playing up to the sold-out crowd of 19,471. UFC President Dana White said the gate was \$12.5 million, the highest for a heavyweight match and the fourth-highest ever.

This was Jones' first fight in three years and his first in the heavyweight division. The former light heavyweight champion said

it was important to cement in his own mind that he deserved the honor as the greatest ever.

With another GOAT, Tom Brady, sitting nearby, Jones did just that. Brady flew in the day of the fight from Florida and spent time with Jones' brother, Las Vegas Raiders defensive end Chandler Jones.

"(Jones is) a total freak of nature," White said, "and he's the best ever."

There were questions whether so much time off would affect Jones' effectiveness, and he spent time at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to prepare for this night. His last fight was Feb. 8, 2020, a unanimous decision over Dominick Reyes.

Jones didn't look the same as did before taking the time off, and he acknowledged the extra weight he put on took away his muscle tone. All along, though, Jones insisted looks were deceiving.

He backed up his words. "Cyril Gane is a monster," White said. "Jon Jones showed up and treated him like a kid."

Jones believed the time away

preparing for this night would show the step up in weight was worth it. He hired a team in Albuquerque to get him into optimal shape.

"I had to show up and get (Gane) down to the ground," Jones said. "I been wrestling since I was 12 years old. I feel stronger than ever. Once I got him in my hands, I know I could take control."

The victory extended Jones' record unbeaten streak to 19 in a row, and he improved to 27-1 with one no-contest. He won a record 14 title fight at light heavyweight.

Jones said he next wants Stipe Miocic, who is the second-ranked contender and who Jones called the greatest heavyweight ever. White said that fight will take place, but didn't know when it would occur.

France's Gane, 32, was the top-ranked heavyweight contender. He dropped to 11-2.

"This one is so painful," Gane said. "This one is a win lost. So now this is past, and most of all for what I see is in the future. I'm going to go straight back to the gym."

## HBCU Players Seeking Ways To Increase Numbers At NFL

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Mark Evans II feels honored to be at this week's NFL's annual scouting combine.

The former Arkansas-Pine Bluff offensive lineman just believes more players from historically Black colleges and universities deserve to be in Indianapolis.

Nearly three years after the NFL announced its support for enhanced diversity policies and just weeks after the second Legacy Bowl and HBCU combine wrapped up, Evans and Isaiah Land are the only HBCU participants among the 319 invitees. That's half of last year's total of four.

"I feel like they're making progress, but I feel like it most definitely should be more than two," he said Saturday. "I feel like there are a lot of good players out there and I feel like we should be represented more."

Should combine officials ask, Evans has some suggestions: linebacker Jordan Lewis of Southern, Lewis' college teammate and 2023 Legacy Bowl defensive MVP Jason Dumas and North Carolina Central offensive lineman Robert Mitchell.

It's just a start — and he has more suggestions for next year's combine, too.

For now, though, Evans must acknowledge one undeniable fact: two years after no HBCU players were drafted, he and Land look like the best hope of avoiding a repeat.

The 6-foot-2 1/2, 303-pound Texan is scheduled to work out Sunday with the offensive linemen before closing down the combine with Monday's bench press.

But the edge rusher from Florida A&M certainly did his part this weekend. Land measured in at 6-foot-3 1/2, 236 pounds, was clocked in the 40-yard dash at 4.62 seconds, 13th in his position group and just .02 seconds behind former Alabama star Will Anderson Jr., one of the front-runners to be this year's No. 1 overall pick.

"I try to put my best foot forward every time because I just want to give hope to those guys at the HBCU level, like you know you could make it to this point," he said before Thursday's workout. "You've just got to stay consistent, and you've got to have that underdog mentality."

It's a lesson Land, who is from Buffalo, New York, seems to have taken from one of today's top HBCU ambassadors, Indianapolis Colts linebacker Shaquille Leonard. The three-time All-Pro beat



MARTIN MAYHEW

the odds by becoming a second-round pick, the 2018 AP Defensive Rookie of the Year and despite an injury-filled 2022 season is still regarded as one of the league's top playmakers.

Few gave him a chance when he started at South Carolina State. Today, he's not only the face and voice of what can be achieved with grit and work, he repeatedly advocates for teams and scouts to keep HBCU prospects on their radar.

He's not alone.

Washington Commanders general manager Martin Mayhew grew up in Tallahassee, Florida, and followed Land's Rattlers, partially because they were local but primarily because Florida A&M was his mother's alma mater. He's been a fan ever since.

"I want to give some shoutout to my old (college) teammate Deion Sanders for shining a light on black colleges and HBCUs,"

Mayhew said earlier this week. "Florida A&M was a school that I was very familiar with, I watched all their games when I was in high school. They (HBCUs) are getting more views on television. They're much more visible than they were four or five years ago."

So far, the numbers haven't moved much.

Even with help from Sanders, the former Jackson State coach, and Leonard coupled with the NFL's efforts, only four HBCU players were taken last year — the most in a single draft since 2019.

Fayetteville State cornerback Joshua Williams, the top HBCU selection last season at No. 135 overall (fourth round), made it pay off. He played in all 17 games, made 40 tackles, picked off one pass and earned a Super Bowl ring in his rookie season with the Kansas City Chiefs.

What else would help?

HBCUs have traditionally faced financial challenges with everything from athletic department budgets to educational support, and now face additional concerns in a college world with NIL deals and a transfer portal that makes it easier for Power Five schools to mine talent from smaller schools and conferences across the college

landscape.

But Evans thinks he benefited from some of the advantages Arkansas-Pine Bluff presented for him and another alum, four-time Pro Bowl left tackle Terron Armstead of the Miami Dolphins.

"I feel like I'm able to stand out," Evans said. "When scouts came through, I was able to sit down with them and talk to each and every one of them and I felt that was really important for me to get that experience."

Still, Evans believes more should be done and if he makes an NFL roster he has promised to help provide more exposure on HBCU schools and their players in hopes of restarting the pipeline to the NFL that was so productive in earlier decades.

Land hopes to be part of the solution, too, and he has a simple message for those still playing college football. Accept the challenge.

"I always had a chip on my shoulder when I went against bigger school guys because I just always feel like I've got something to prove," he said. "That's one of the main reasons why I stayed at FAMU was because I knew I could have gone to any other school, but I wanted to stick with them."