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N. Carolina Group Asks UN To Probe Chemical Company's PFAS Pollution

By Kenny Stancil
Common Dreams

A citizen-led organization in North Carolina on Thursday asked the United Nations to investigate several alleged human rights violations related to the release of "forever chemicals" from Fayetteville Works, a manufacturing plant previously owned by DuPont and now owned by a spin-off company called Chemours.

Roughly half a million people live in the Cape Fear River basin between Wilmington and Fayetteville, where the Chemours-owned facility has produced per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) for more than four decades, poisoning the region's air, soil, and water and undermining public health in the process.

In a letter to U.N. Special Rapporteur Marcos Orellana, Clean Cape Fear and the University of California at Berkeley Environmental Law Clinic wrote that due to chronic exposure to "dangerous quantities" of PFAS, area residents are facing an "environmental human rights crisis."

PFAS are a class of hazardous synthetic compounds widely called "forever chemicals" because they persist in humans, animals, and ecosystems for years on end. Scientists have linked long-term human expo-



sure to PFAS—used in dozens of everyday household products, including ostensibly "green" and "nontoxic" children's items, as well as firefighting foam—to numerous adverse health outcomes, including cancer, reproductive and developmental harms, immune system damage, and other negative effects.

"Incredibly—and without meaningfully redressing past and ongoing harm from its toxic air emissions and discharges into the Cape Fear River, and the resulting widespread contamina-

tion of local drinking water—facility owner Chemours now proposes to expand its production of PFAS," says the letter. "Pursuant to your mandate under Human Rights Council Resolution 36/6, we seek your urgent intervention to actualize local residents' human rights to safe drinking water, bodily integrity, health, a life with dignity, and an environment free from toxic contamination."

As The Guardian reported Friday, Clean Cape Fear and the Berkeley Environmental Law Clinic are asking Orellana to

"pressure regulators to stop the Fayetteville Works expansion, ensure clean water in the region, conduct an epidemiological study, hold Chemours financially responsible for cleanup and ban the entire PFAS for non-essential uses, among other measures."

According to the newspaper: *If the U.N. human rights commission chooses to investigate, a special rapporteur would fact-check the allegations in the communication, then issue "pointed" allegation letters to regulators, Chemours, and other culpable parties detailing problems and posing questions, said Claudia Polsky, director of UC Berkeley Law Clinic.*

Businesses and governments would have a chance to respond, and usually do, Polsky said. International law is not legally binding, but the process would "put recipients on the defensive" and provide a platform on which the region's compelling human rights violation narrative is told "to the world at large," Polsky said. That would put tremendous pressure on the government to act, she added.

"It's not just words in the wind," Polsky said, adding that it can also "provide cover and give backbone to agencies to do

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Spain Is 1st Black Woman To Lead S.C. Democrats

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Christale Spain, a longtime party operative, was elected Saturday as chair of South Carolina's Democratic Party, becoming the first Black woman to lead the organization in what will be the Democrats' leadoff presidential voting state in 2024.

Spain was elected during the party's convention Saturday in Columbia. She takes over in a wave of changes across state Democratic parties for 2024. With her election, and thanks to the party's recent revamp of its primary schedule, four of the five states in which Democrats will vote first next year — Georgia, Michigan, Nevada and South Carolina — now have Black women chairing their state parties.

Putting states with more diversity at the top of the voting calendar was a priority for President Joe Biden, who recently moved on his own reelection bid and pushed to move South Carolina — a state where he won big in 2020 — to the top of the nominating calendar.

Calling her victory "a historic moment for our party, for women," Spain pledged to implement "year-round voter engagement" and mobilization efforts, in hopes of garnering more statewide wins for the party, as the nation's attention hones in on South Carolina for the 2024 cycle.

"I now know from all the experience, all of the volunteering, all of the jobs that I've held, the importance of this role, who is setting the stage, who is implementing the strategy, so that we can win," Spain told reporters after.

Black women are major drivers of the Democratic electorate, particularly in South Carolina. Spain takes over from Trav Robertson, who has led the party since 2017 and announced earlier this year he wouldn't seek another term.

Spain had backing from a slew of party leaders, including Rep. Jim Clyburn, for whom Spain previously worked doing constituency service and outreach in his district office. She was also endorsed by former party leaders such as Robertson and Jaime Harrison, who preceded Robertson as state chair and currently leads the Democratic National Committee.

In a statement, Harrison said Spain "has the experience, judgment, and strategic vision to get South Carolina Democrats back on the winning track, and I know she will be an excellent chair."

Spain held off efforts by two other candidates, both of whom withdrew after early voting showed massive support for Spain. Brandon Upson, a progressive Democrat who chairs the state party's Black Caucus and advised Tom Steyer's 2020 presidential campaign in South Carolina, said he was pulling out "for the sake of unity" in the party, as it prepares for 2024.

(See **SPAIN** P. 2)



CAROLYN BRYANT DONHAM, EMMETT TILL'S FALSE ACCUSER, DIES AT 88

The white woman who testified that a Black teenager named Emmett Till had made inappropriate approaches toward her, which led to his lynching and murder in Mississippi in 1955, has died.

According to a coroner's report, Carolyn Bryant Donham, 88, died while receiving hospice care in Louisiana.

A death record issued on Thursday, April 27, in the Calcasieu Parish Coroner's Office noted that Donham died in Westlake, Louisiana, two nights earlier.

Donham's false claims against Emmett Till set off a chain of events that sparked the modern civil rights movement.

After the teen's mother insisted his casket remain open during the funeral and photos of Till's battered and mutilated body appeared in Jet Magazine, the world received a birds-eye view of the brutality of America's rampant racism.

In August 1955, Till traveled from Chicago to Mississippi to spend time with relatives.

Donham, then 21 years old and going by the name Carolyn Bryant, accused Till of making inappropriate approaches toward her while she worked at a grocery shop in the small town of Money.

According to the Reverend Wheeler Parker, a cousin of Till who was present at the time, the 14-year-old Till whistled at the woman, which was an act that violated the racist social standards that were prevalent in Mississippi.

Evidence suggested a lady identified Emmett Till to Donham's then-husband Roy Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam, who were responsible for Till's murder.

An all-white jury acquitted the two white suspects, but the men later confessed their guilt in an interview with Look magazine.

In 2022, the Associated Press secured a copy of Donham's unpublished memoir, in which she claimed that she had no idea what would become of Till.

The outlet noted that the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting was the first organization to reveal the contents of the 99-page book titled "I am More Than A Wolf Whistle."

Author and historian Timothy Tyson of Durham, North Carolina, gave reporters a copy of the book.

Tyson claimed he received a copy from Donham in 2008 while interviewing her, the Associated Press reported.

Though Tyson claimed to have provided the FBI with the text, the agency ended its lengthy investigation into Donham in 2021.

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

To Understand American Politics, You Need To Move Beyond Left And Right

Are Americans really as politically polarized as they seem — and everybody says?

It's definitely true that Democrats and Republicans increasingly hate and fear one another. But this animosity seems to have more to do with tribal loyalty than liberal-versus-conservative disagreements about policy. Our research into what Americans actually want in terms of policy shows that many have strong political views that can't really be characterized in terms of "right" or "left."

The media often talks about the American political landscape as if it were a line. Liberal Democrats are on the left, conservative Republicans on the right, and a small sliver of moderate independents are in the middle. But political scientists like us have long argued that a line is a bad metaphor for how Americans think about politics.

Sometimes scholars and pundits will argue that views on economic issues like taxes and income redistribution, and views on so-called social or cultural issues like abortion and gay marriage, actually represent two distinct dimensions in American political attitudes. Americans, they say, can have liberal views on one dimension but conservative views on the other. So you could have a pro-choice voter who wants lower taxes, or a pro-



life voter who wants the government to do more to help the poor.

But even this more sophisticated, two-dimensional picture doesn't reveal what Americans actually want the government to do — or not do — when it comes to policy.

First, it ignores some of the most contentious topics in American politics today, like affirmative action, the Black Lives Mat-

ter movement and attempts to stamp out "wokeness" on college campuses.

Since 2016, when Donald Trump won the presidency while simultaneously stoking racial anxieties and bucking Republican orthodoxy on taxes and same-sex marriage, it has become clear that what Americans think about politics can't really be understood without knowing

what they think about racism, and what — if anything — they want done about it.

Recently, some political scientists have argued that views on racial issues represent a third "dimension" in American politics. But there are other problems with treating political attitudes as a set of "dimensions" in the first place. For example, even a "3D" picture doesn't allow for the possibility that Americans with conservative economic views tend to also hold conservative racial views, while Americans with liberal economic views are deeply divided on issues related to race.

A new picture of American politics

In our new article in Sociological Inquiry, we analyzed public opinion data from 2004 to 2020 to develop a more nuanced picture of American political attitudes. Our aim was to do a better job of figuring out what Americans actually think about politics, including policies related to race and racism.

Using a new analytic method that doesn't force us to think in terms of dimensions at all, we found that, over the past two decades, Americans can be broadly divided into five different groups.

In most years, slightly less

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

Black History Class To Undergo Changes

The College Board says changes will be made to its new AP African American studies course, after critics said the agency bowed to political pressure and removed several topics from the framework, including Black Lives Matter, slavery reparations and queer life.

In a statement on Monday, the College Board said the development committee and experts charged with authoring the Advanced Placement course "will determine the details of those changes over the next few months."

"We are committed to providing an unflinching encounter with the facts and evidence of African American history and culture," the company said.

It remains unclear what the changes are or when they will be made public.

The course gained national attention this winter when Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a possible Republican presidential candi-



date in 2024, said he would ban the course in his state because it pushed a political agenda.

"In the state of Florida, our education standards not only don't prevent, but they require teaching Black history, all the important things. That's part of

our core curriculum," DeSantis previously said. "We want education and not indoctrination."

But the official curriculum for the course, released after DeSantis' administration rejected it, downplayed some components that had drawn objections from

the governor and other conservatives. The College Board faced an onslaught of criticism from activists and African American scholars outraged at the notion the course changed because of political controversy.

The course was launched in 60 schools in the U.S. and will be expanded to 800 schools and 16,000 students this upcoming school year.

The nonprofit testing company previously said revisions to the course were substantially complete and not shaped by political influence before DeSantis shared his objections. College Board officials said developers consulted with professors from more than 200 colleges, including several historically Black institutions, and took input from teachers piloting the class.

The company said Monday the creation of the course had prioritized access to a discipline that

(See **BLACK HISTORY**, P. 2)

Business & Finance

Blue Cross Reorganization Bill Approved By N.C. House

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina's leading health insurer would be able to reorganize through a method the nonprofit company's leaders said would keep it nimble and competitive with for-profit rivals, under legislation approved Thursday by the state House.

The measure, which would allow Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina and a dental insurance provider to complete a restructuring through creating parent holding companies, passed with bipartisan support despite strong criticism from state Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey.

"The intent of the bill is to create a more level playing field for those two" entities, said Rep. John Bradford, a Mecklenburg County Republican who shepherded the legislation in the House. "The health care industry is fiercely competitive and rapidly changing."

After an 86-26 House vote for passage, the bill now heads to the Senate.

The measure would permit Blue Cross, the state's dominant insurance provider, and Delta Dental to transfer money and other investments from its current hospital service companies into new shell companies run by the same executive leadership. Blue Cross could use those assets to purchase other companies to expand services, for example. The proposed holding companies would remain fully



taxed nonprofits. But Causey, a Republican, said shifting assets could allow Blue Cross to circumvent a state law that limits its reserves and would eventually require the company to refund some of that money to its policyholders, which number over 4 million, or lower its rates. Other bill opponents also said they're worried that the change could contribute to higher premiums, especially for many lower-income people who rely on Blue

Cross products. "It's a lot of North Carolinians that are impacted by this bill," said Rep. Deb Butler, a New Hanover County Democrat, who urged more work on the measure. "And if we get this wrong, it's going to be a disastrous situation."

Blue Cross trustee board Chair Ned Curran told House members in a letter dated Wednesday that there was nothing in the measure that would increase premiums, and that Causey still has the au-

thority to approve or deny premium rates.

Curran and Bradford also pointed to changes made to the original bill that could address concerns by Causey's Insurance Department, the North Carolina Medical Society and others.

The bill "will improve the health and well-being of North Carolina and its communities," Blue Cross said in a news release thanking House members for the vote.

A change this week caps the

amount of the company's "admitted assets" to be transferred at the reorganization to the new holding company at 25%. The holding company also would have to file annual audited financial statements with Causey, disclose compensation for its highest paid executives and reveal the company's "strategic investment activities."

The reorganization option "is something that is needed by a North Carolina company," said Rep. Jason Saine, a Lincoln County Republican and a senior budget-writer. "And we've worked hard to reduce regulations and make it easier for companies in our state to do business. This is the same process."

Majority Leader John Bell of Wayne County and Minority Leader Robert Reives of Chatham County also are among the chief bill sponsors. Senate leader Phil Berger expressed support for a reorganization proposal this week.

For decades, Blue Cross was able to accumulate assets tax-free until a federal law ended its long tax exemption in 1986. The insurer is subject to more regulations than for-profit companies operating in the state, including a mandate of higher reserves.

A law passed in the late 1990s would require Blue Cross to transfer its total worth in stock to a charitable foundation should it ever convert to a for-profit company, with the proceeds designed to improve health care for state residents. The bill says the value of the holding company envisioned would be part of that value calculation.

Blue Cross is a major policy player at the General Assembly, where it has more than a dozen registered lobbyists. Its employee PAC gave over \$250,000 to legislative campaign committees in 2022, according to reports filed with the State Board of Elections.

Classifieds

CHW TEAM COORDINATOR

SEHCNC seeks CHW Team Coordinator (Raleigh): Supervise, coordinate daily work of team of CHWs serving Spanish-speaking communities. Ensure team provides strategic outreach, advocacy to their communities. Responsible for monitoring work and progress of their team, completing timesheets, leave time, scheduling, mileage and activity reports, disciplinary actions, other tasks. Develop relationships with stakeholders, host events to inform migrant community of available health and social services. Spanish req'd. Daytime travel req'd. 40h/wk, M-F. Send resume to or contact Robert Farmer at rfarmer@sehncnc.com to apply.

D/M/WBE

SUBCONTRACTORS/SUPPLIERS WANTED

Pipeline Utilities, Inc. (NC General Contractor License No. 325) is seeking certified DBE, MBE, and WBE subcontractors and suppliers for the Water Treatment Plant Insertion Valve Installation project for South Granville Water And Sewer Authority (SGWASA) which bids May 10, 2023, at 2:00 PM. Plans and specifications for this project are available at the following locations: Pipeline Utilities, Inc.; 2204-F Associate Drive; Raleigh, NC 27603.

Potential subcontracting opportunities include but are not limited to hauling, asphalt paving, and seeding. Please contact Tim Hogan (thogan@pui-nc.com) if you are interested in submitting a proposal on any portion(s) of this project. Contact via phone 919-772-4310, ext.:107; fax: 919-772-3261; or email. All quotations will be accepted up to bid closing time of the bid date. Pipeline Utilities, Inc. is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

Please advise if assistance is needed with obtaining necessary equipment, supplies, materials, or insurance/bonding to satisfy the work requirements. We are willing to accept quotations for all or partial quantities and items of work. We can offer 2-party check payments and quick payment agreements, but the agreements need to be negotiated prior to the bid date.

Zimbabwe To Launch Digital Currency

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Zimbabwe will launch a digital currency next month by introducing "tokens" that are backed by gold reserves and can be transferred between people and businesses as a form of payment, the country's central bank said Friday.

The move is aimed at shoring up Zimbabwe's faltering national currency, the Zimbabwe dollar, which is fast depreciating amid yearslong economic woes in the southern African nation.

The Bahamas, Jamaica and Nigeria have already launched digital currencies backed by their central banks, with several other countries, including China, running trial projects. The United Kingdom is moving closer to it by asking for public input on the idea. The U.S. and European Union are considering similar moves.

In Zimbabwe, the new tokens "will be fully backed by physical gold held by the bank" and will go into circulation on May 8, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Gov. John Mangudya said. People can buy the tokens and use them as a way to save their money or conduct "person-to-person and person-to-business transactions and settlements," Mangudya said.

People will be able to buy the



tokens through banks and make transactions using "e-gold wallets or e-gold cards" held by banks, he said.

Trust in Zimbabwe's currency is desperately low after people in 2008 had their savings wiped out by hyperinflation, which reached 5 billion percent, according to the International Monetary Fund, nearly a world record.

The hyperinflation resulted in the country at one point issuing a 100 trillion Zimbabwe dollars banknote before the government was forced to temporarily scrap its currency and allow the U.S.

dollar to be used as legal tender.

In 2019, the government reintroduced a Zimbabwean currency and banned foreign currencies for local transactions. But few took heed and the black market thrived, while the local currency quickly devalued. The government relented and unbanned the U.S. dollar.

With memories of that disastrous inflation, many people today prefer to seek scarce U.S. dollars on the illegal market to keep at home as savings or for daily transactions, where U.S. currency is still used. Faith in

the Zimbabwe dollar is so low that many retailers and even some government institutions don't accept it.

On the official market, the exchange rate is just over 1,000 Zimbabwe dollars to the U.S. dollar. However, it's about double that amount of local currency on the illegal — but flourishing — street market, where greenbacks are readily available.

Zimbabwe has tried to stave off the depreciation of its currency with unusual ideas before. In July 2022, it launched gold coins as legal tender to stabilize the local currency. But many people struggling to buy everyday basics such as bread found them too pricey.

The introduction of the digital currency will ensure that "those with low amounts" of money can trade them "so that we leave no one and no place behind," Mangudya told Zimbabwe's The Sunday Mail newspaper last weekend.

International gold prices determined by the London Bullion Market Association will dictate the local pricing of the tokens, Mangudya said.

More than 80% of the world's central banks are considering issuing digital currencies or have already done so, the consultancy PwC said in a report last year.

What GOP's Plan For Medicaid Work Requirements Would Mean

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than a half million of the poorest Americans could be left without health insurance under legislation passed by House Republicans that would require people to work in exchange for health care coverage through Medicaid.

It's one of dozens of provisions tucked into a GOP bill that would allow for an increase in the debt limit but curb government spending over the next decade. The bill is unlikely to become law, though. It is being used by House Republicans to draw Democrats to the negotiating table and avoid a debt default.

Democrats have strongly opposed the Medicaid work requirement provision, saying it won't incentivize people to get a job and will drive up the number of uninsured in the country.

Here's a look at how the proposal might save taxpayers money but cost some Americans access to health care coverage.

WHO WOULD BE REQUIRED TO WORK?

The work requirements say able-bodied adults ages 19 to 55 who don't have children or other dependents would be required to work, train for a job or perform community service to stay on Medicaid. They would have to put in at least 80 hours a month to stay on the government-sponsored health care coverage.

About 84 million people are enrolled in Medicaid, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates 15 million would be subject to the requirement. The Health and Human Services Department, however, predicts millions more



— about a third of enrollees altogether — would be required to work.

WHY ARE WORK REQUIREMENTS CONTROVERSIAL?

Republicans say the move would help push Americans into jobs that eventually might put them in a position to move off of government aid.

The requirements would also be more equitable for those who are working to support their families, said House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La.

"That single mom that's working two or three jobs right now to make ends meet under this tough

economy, she doesn't want to have to pay for somebody who's sitting at home," Scalise said.

Democrats argue that work requirements could unfairly push people out of Medicaid, too.

Some people were wrongly kicked off Medicaid in Arkansas when the state briefly introduced work requirements, Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, told lawmakers. In some cases, people were not required to work but didn't fill out the required paperwork.

"It's not just people who are subject to the requirements that

often get caught up in red tape," she said. "It can often be people who are exempted."

About 1 in 4 people who were required to work lost coverage during Arkansas' experience with work requirements in 2018.

Work requirements can put Medicaid enrollees in a bind. While no one has been kicked off Medicaid over the last three years because of the pandemic, that changed in April when the federal government required states to review income eligibility for all enrollees to see who now makes too much money to qualify for the health care benefits.

People who picked up work, earned a small raise or switched jobs are finding that those new incomes could soon cost them coverage.

Amy Shaw, 39, of Rochester, New Hampshire, lost her family's Medicaid coverage in April because of her husband's 50-cent raise to \$17 per hour at an auto parts store. Shaw wouldn't be subject to the GOP's work requirement because she has two daughters, but the family's case illustrates how modest incomes can push people out of Medicaid coverage — and cost them big time.

Suddenly, instead of a \$3 copay, she was billed \$120 for a cancer screening ordered by her doctor. Meanwhile, their rent increased by 40% since the pandemic started, and the cost of food, utilities and other essential have gone up.

"It just seems like the system is set up so that you don't want to go back (to work) because you lose more than you gain," Shaw said. "It makes me not want to go and get my mammogram and my colonoscopy. I don't even want to go to these appointments because it's going to cost so much money."

HOW MUCH WOULD THE REPUBLICAN PROPOSAL SAVE?

That largely depends on how many people who would be required to work opt not to or don't fill out the proper paperwork to remain covered.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates the requirements would save \$109 billion over the next decade. Those savings would come in two ways: from about 600,000 people who would

be dropped from Medicaid, then 900,000 who would lose federal funding for their Medicaid, but remain enrolled in the program through their state.

That analysis also says the bill would do little to improve employment among Medicaid enrollees.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The House GOP bill won't pass a Democratic-controlled Senate or be signed into law by President Joe Biden in its current state.

But don't expect the issue of work requirements and trimming Medicaid benefits to go away anytime soon. The number of people enrolled in Medicaid has ballooned in recent years, growing by more than 20 million since 2020.

If you ask Democrats, that's a great thing — they've pointed to the record low uninsured rate that's given more people access to medical care. Democratic-led states have also pitched new ways to expand Medicaid under the Biden administration, granting more access to recently released convicts and new mothers, for example.

Republicans, however, want to scale back safety net programs to pre-pandemic levels. And, Republicans in some states are already trying to implement work requirements of their own. Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders asked the federal government to OK a proposal that would move anyone who doesn't comply with work requirements off Medicaid's private insurance to traditional fee-for-service Medicaid.