

# China's Loans Are Pushing The World's Poorest Countries To Brink Of Collapse

A dozen poor countries are facing economic instability and even collapse under the weight of hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign loans, much of them from the world's biggest and most unforgiving government lender, China.

An Associated Press analysis of a dozen countries most indebted to China — including Pakistan, Kenya, Zambia, Laos and Mongolia — found paying back that debt is consuming an ever-greater amount of the tax revenue needed to keep schools open, provide electricity and pay for food and fuel. And it's draining foreign currency reserves these countries use to pay interest on those loans, leaving some with just months before that money is gone.

Behind the scenes is China's reluctance to forgive debt and its extreme secrecy about how much money it has loaned and on what terms, which has kept other major lenders from stepping in to help. On top of that is the recent discovery that borrowers have been required to put cash in hidden escrow accounts that push China to the front of the line of creditors to be paid.

Countries in AP's analysis had as much as 50% of their foreign loans from China and most were devoting more than a third of government revenue to paying off foreign debt. Two of them,

Zambia and Sri Lanka, have already gone into default, unable to make even interest payments on loans financing the construction of ports, mines and power plants.

In Pakistan, millions of textile workers have been laid off because the country has too much foreign debt and can't afford to keep the electricity on and machines running.

In Kenya, the government has held back paychecks to thousands of civil service workers to save cash to pay foreign loans. The president's chief economic adviser tweeted last month, "Salaries or default? Take your pick."

Since Sri Lanka defaulted a year ago, a half-million industrial jobs have vanished, inflation has pierced 50% and more than half the population in many parts of the country has fallen into poverty.

Experts predict that unless China begins to soften its stance on its loans to poor countries, there could be a wave of more defaults and political upheavals.

"In a lot of the world, the clock has hit midnight," said Harvard economist Ken Rogoff. "China has moved in and left this geopolitical instability that could have long-lasting effects."

A case study of how it has played out is in Zambia, a landlocked country of 20 million people in southern Africa that

over the past two decades has borrowed billions of dollars from Chinese state-owned banks to build dams, railways and roads.

The loans boosted Zambia's economy but also raised foreign interest payments so high there was little left for the government, forcing it to cut spending on healthcare, social services and subsidies to farmers for seed and fertilizer.

In the past under such circumstances, big government lenders such as the U.S., Japan and France would work out deals to forgive some debt, with each lender disclosing clearly what they were owed and on what terms so no one would feel cheated.

But China didn't play by those rules. It refused at first to even join in multinational talks, negotiating separately with Zambia and insisting on confidentiality that barred the country from telling non-Chinese lenders the terms of the loans and whether China had devised a way of muscling to the front of the repayment line.

Amid this confusion in 2020, a group of non-Chinese lenders refused desperate pleas from Zambia to suspend interest payments, even for a few months. That refusal added to the drain on Zambia's foreign cash reserves, the stash of mostly U.S. dollars that it used to pay inter-

est on loans and to buy major commodities like oil. By November 2020, with little reserves left, Zambia stopped paying the interest and defaulted, locking it out of future borrowing and setting off a vicious cycle of spending cuts and deepening poverty.

Inflation in Zambia has since soared 50%, unemployment has hit a 17-year high and the nation's currency, the kwacha, has lost 30% of its value in just seven months. A United Nations estimate of Zambians not getting enough food has nearly tripled so far this year, to 3.5 million.

"I just sit in the house thinking what I will eat because I have no money to buy food," said Marvis Kunda, a blind 70-year-old widow in Zambia's Luapula province whose welfare payments were recently slashed. "Sometimes I eat once a day and if no one remembers to help me with food from the neighborhood, then I just starve."

A few months after Zambia defaulted, researchers found that it owed \$6.6 billion to Chinese state-owned banks, double what many thought at the time and about a third of the country's total debt.

"We're flying blind," said Brad Parks, executive director of Aid-Data, a research lab at William & Mary that has uncovered thou-

(See **CHINA'S LOANS**, P. 2)



# Legendary NFL, Movie Star And Activist Jim Brown Dies At 87

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

Jim Brown, the superstar Cleveland Browns running back who quit football at the very height of his hall-of-fame career, has died at 87.

Perhaps the greatest running back ever, Brown quit football to pursue an acting career at 30.

From 1957 to 1965, the perennial all-pro helped lead a Cleveland Browns ground game that won an NFL championship in 1964.

Voted pro football's greatest player of the 20th century, Brown earned induction into the Hall of Fame in 1971. But football wasn't the only sport in which he excelled.

He played basketball, track, and lacrosse at high levels. He was inducted into the Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 1984.

But football is where he chiefly left his mark.

Notably, in 1965, Cleveland Browns' owner, Art Modell, issued an ultimatum to the superstar, telling him that if he continued filming the hit movie, "The Dirty Dozen," which was delayed because of technical problems, Brown would face fines for reporting late to training camp.

Ever independent, Brown defied Modell and called a press conference to announce his retirement from football.

Brown also didn't hesitate to speak out on issues affecting African Americans and openly supported the civil rights movement.

He started and helmed the Negro Industrial and Economic Union to create jobs for Black people in Ohio.

The organization also helped secure loans for Black businesses.

Brown also formed a coalition to denounce the federal government's role in stripping boxing legend Muhammad Ali of his title because Ali refused to fight in the Vietnam War.

Brown's popularity grew, and he cemented himself into film lore, becoming the first Black man to have onscreen sexual relations with a white woman, Raquel Welch, in the film "100 Rifles."

Brown was born on St. Simons Island, off the southern coast of Georgia, where he had a difficult childhood, according to biography.com.

Brown was only two weeks old when his father abandoned the family; Brown's mother left him alone after she took a job in New York as a maid.

While living with his grandmother, Brown's mother sent for him when he was 8.

During his senior year at New York's Manhasset High School, Brown played running back and recorded a mind-boggling 14.9 yards per carry, more than good enough to earn him a spot at Syracuse University.

In college, Brown dominated the competition on the football field and the basketball court.

He also ran track and was a talented lacrosse player, according to biography.com.

Brown earned national attention as a running back for his strong, explosive play. In the final regular-season game of his senior year, Brown capped off his college career by rushing for 197 yards, scoring six touchdowns, and kicking seven extra points.

In 1957, the Cleveland Browns selected Brown as the sixth overall pick in the National Football League draft.

"Brown wasted little time adjusting to the new competition, leading the league in rushing yards with 942 on his way to capturing the league's Rookie of the Year honors," his biographers wrote.

"Over the next seven seasons, Brown became the standard-bearer for all NFL running backs," Brown's biographers continued.

At a time when defenses were geared toward stopping the ground game, Brown bulldozed his way past the opposition, posting remarkable season totals: 1,527 yards (1958), 1,329 (1959), 1,257 (1960), 1,408 (1961), 1,863 (1963), 1,446 (1964), and 1,544 (1965).



## NORTH CAROLINA SUPREME COURT JUSTICE MORGAN WON'T SEEK REELECTION NEXT YEAR

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — One of the remaining registered Democrats on a North Carolina Supreme Court whose new Republican majority recently overturned previous decisions on gerrymandering and voter identification announced Thursday that he won't seek reelection next year.

Associate Justice Mike Morgan's election in 2016 to an eight-year term gave Democrats a majority on the court for the first time in nearly 20 years. The court returned to a 5-2 majority favoring registered Republicans in January after two GOP election victories.

Morgan announced his decision not to run in a tweet citing 34 years of judicial service, which includes serving as a Wake County trial judge and state administrative law judge.

Looking ahead, Morgan told The Associated Press he was now considering "other options that have been afforded" him.

"I feel as though as my public service speaks for itself, and I am in a position now to make an even greater difference in North Carolina in another capacity," Morgan said in an interview.

Morgan didn't provide details, but when asked whether that could include a run at another elected position, he said "at this stage I am keeping all of my options open."

# 2024 Republican Hopefuls Rush To Defend Marine In Fatal Subway Chokehold Case

WASHINGTON (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis urged the nation to show Daniel Penny that "America's got his back." Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley called for New York's governor to pardon Penny, and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy donated \$10,000 to his legal defense fund.

Republican presidential hopefuls have lined up to support Penny, a 24-year-old U.S. Marine veteran who was caught on video pinning an agitated fellow subway passenger in New York City to the floor in a chokehold. The passenger, 30-year-old Jordan Neely, later died from compression of the neck, according to the medical examiner.

Penny has been charged with manslaughter. His attorneys say he acted in self-defense.

He's already become a hero to many Republicans, who have trumpeted Penny as a Good Samaritan moving to protect others in a Democrat-led city that they

say is unsafe — even though criminal justice experts say current crime levels are more comparable to where New York was a decade ago, when people frequently lauded it as America's safest big city.

The GOP support for Penny has been unwavering, despite the fact that Neely, who was Black, never got physical with anyone on the train before he was placed in the chokehold for several minutes by Penny, who is white.

The rush to back Penny recalls how then-President Donald Trump and other top Republicans fiercely supported Kyle Rittenhouse during the 2020 presidential election. Rittenhouse, a white teenager who killed two men and wounded a third during a tumultuous night of protests in Wisconsin over a Black man's death, was acquitted.

More recently, Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott vowed to pardon Daniel Perry, a white Army sergeant who was sen-

tenced to 25 years in prison for fatally shooting an armed man during a 2020 Black Lives Matter protest in the state's capital of Austin.

Top Republicans have tried to make rising crime rates a political liability for Democrats. The Republican-controlled House Judiciary Committee traveled to New York City last month — before Neely was killed — for a hearing examining "victims of violent crime in Manhattan."

Democrats and racial justice advocates counter that GOP messaging around restoring "law and order" plays on deep-seated racism.

"They have a playbook of winning elections that is based on really tapping into the worst parts of human nature and really driving it home with division and fear," said Jumaane Williams, a Democrat who is New York City's public advocate. "And, if there's race and class played into it, then it's like Christmastime for them."

# Belafonte Served As A Champion Of Youth Activism

By Jelani M. Favors

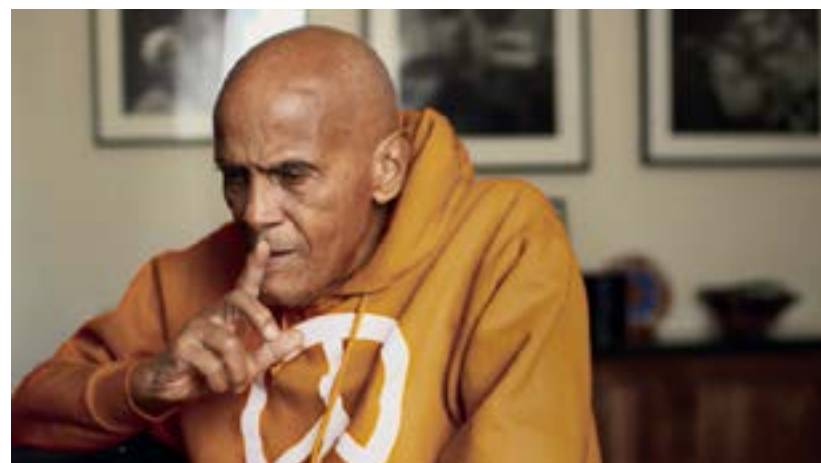
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Of all the contributions for which Harry Belafonte will be remembered, perhaps none is more enduring than the celebrated entertainer's lifelong support for youth activism.

This support can be traced back to Belafonte's early involvement in the Black student-led protests of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, but it didn't end there. Using his social stature and personal wealth from a career that once made him the "most highly paid Black performer in history," Belafonte also helped establish hip-hop as a dominant cultural force in the 1980s and spoke out in support of Black uprisings against police brutality in the 2010s in cities such as Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore.

As a historian who has examined Black student activism from the civil rights era to today, I see Belafonte, who passed away on April 25, 2023, as one of America's preeminent "race men," social justice warriors and elder statesmen for youth-led racial justice movements.

Born in Harlem in 1927, Belafonte was immersed in the politics and art of the New Negro Era, an era that gave birth to radically new interpretations of



the Black aesthetic and launched new efforts toward Black liberation.

As the modern Civil Rights Movement unfolded in post-World War II America, Belafonte joined the ranks of Black entertainers who sought to use their platforms to advance the cause. But it was the direct-action phase of the movement, pioneered by Black college students throughout the South at the start of the 1960s, that elevated the movement to a more intense confrontation with Jim Crow America.

Sit-ins, Freedom Rides and jail-ins orchestrated by organizations such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee — or SNCC — and the Congress

of Racial Equality brought Belafonte deeper into the orbit of the freedom struggle. Belafonte once said he admired the young activists for the "power of their independence."

One of the tensest moments for the young activists was the Freedom Rides that brought waves of young Black college students into the Deep South to challenge the legality of segregation in interstate busing. Many of them ended up as victims of police brutality in the infamous Parchman Farm Penitentiary in Sunflower County, Mississippi. Not only did Belafonte make a generous donation to their cause, but his willingness to support the activists strengthened their admiration of him.

"Folks were just overwhelmed," recalled civil rights organizer Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, "and I believe that marked the beginning of Bro. Belafonte's long relationship — as adviser, benefactor, and big brother — to the young freedom-fighting organization."

As students courageously languished in Mississippi's sweltering prison, they converted Belafonte's signature song into a freedom anthem. The calypso singer's hit single "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" echoed through Southern jails as students arrested for challenging Jim Crow laws repurposed the song with new lyrics:

Hey, I took a little trip on a Greyhound bus.

Yeah!

Freedom comin' and it won't be long.

Well, to fight segregation this we must.

Yeah, Freedom comin' and it won't be long.

The apex of Belafonte's involvement with the SNCC was his facilitation of a sojourn to the West African nation of Guinea in September of 1964.

Sensing the burnout and frustration that was brewing within the organization due to its grow-

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

# China's Loans Are Pushing The World's—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sands of secret Chinese loans and assisted the AP in its analysis. "When you look under the cushions of the couch, suddenly you realize, 'Oh, there's a lot of stuff we missed. And actually things are much worse.'"

China's unwillingness to take big losses on the hundreds of billions of dollars it is owed, as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have urged, has left many countries on a treadmill of paying back interest, which stifles the economic growth that would help them pay off the debt.

Foreign cash reserves have dropped in 10 of the dozen countries in AP's analysis, down an average 25% in just a year. They have plunged more than 50% in Pakistan and the Republic of Congo. Without a bailout, several countries have only months left of foreign cash to pay for food, fuel and other essential imports. Mongolia has eight months left. Pakistan and Ethiopia about two.

"As soon as the financing taps are turned off, the adjustment takes place right away," said Patrick Curran, senior economist at researcher Tellimer. "The economy contracts, inflation spikes up, food and fuel become unaffordable."

Mohammad Tahir, who was laid off six months ago from his job at a textile factory in the Pakistani city of Multan, says he has contemplated suicide because he can no longer bear to see his family of four go to bed night after night without dinner.

"I've been facing the worst kind of poverty," said Tahir, who was recently told Pakistan's foreign cash reserves have depleted so much that it was now unable to import raw materials for his factory. "I have no idea when we would get our jobs back."

Poor countries have been hit with foreign currency shortages, high inflation, spikes in unemployment and widespread hunger before, but rarely like in the past year.

Along with the usual mix of government mismanagement and corruption are two unexpected and devastating events: the war in Ukraine, which has sent prices of grain and oil soaring, and the U.S. Federal Reserve's decision to raise interest rates 10 times in a row, the latest this month. That has made variable rate loans to countries suddenly much more expensive.

All of it is roiling domestic politics and upending strategic

alliances.

In March, heavily indebted Honduras cited "financial pressures" in its decision to establish formal diplomatic ties to China and sever those with Taiwan.

Last month, Pakistan was so desperate to prevent more blackouts that it struck a deal to buy discounted oil from Russia, breaking ranks with the U.S.-led effort to shut off Vladimir Putin's funds.

In Sri Lanka, rioters poured into the streets last July, setting homes of government ministers aflame and storming the presidential palace, sending the leader tied to onerous deals with China fleeing the country.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement to the AP, disputed the notion that China is an unforgiving lender and echoed previous statements putting the blame on the Federal Reserve. It said that if it is to accede to IMF and World Bank demands to forgive a portion of its loans, so should those multilateral lenders, which it views as U.S. proxies.

"We call on these institutions to actively participate in relevant actions in accordance with the principle of 'joint action, fair burden' and make greater contributions to help developing countries tide over the difficulties," the ministry statement said.

China argues it has offered relief in the form of extended loan maturities and emergency loans, and as the biggest contributor to a program to temporarily suspend interest payments during the coronavirus pandemic. It also says it has forgiven 23 no-interest loans to African countries, though AidData's Parks said such loans are mostly from two decades ago and amount to less than 5% of the total it has lent.

In high-level talks in Washington last month, China was considering dropping its demand that the IMF and World Bank forgive loans if the two lenders would make commitments to offer grants and other help to troubled countries, according to various news reports. But in the weeks since there has been no announcement and both lenders have expressed frustration with Beijing.

"My view is that we have to drag them — maybe that's an impolite word — we need to walk together," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said earlier this month. "Because if we don't, there will be catastro-



"If you've already sent in your payment, kindly disregard this friendly reminder."

phe for many, many countries."

The IMF and World Bank say taking losses on their loans would rip up the traditional playbook of dealing with sovereign crises that accords them special treatment because, unlike Chinese banks, they already finance at low rates to help distressed countries get back on their feet.

The Chinese foreign ministry noted, however, that the two multilateral lenders have made an exception to the rules in the past. As time runs out, some officials are urging concessions. Ashfaq Hassan, a former debt official at Pakistan's Ministry of Finance, said his country's debt burden is too heavy and time too short for the IMF and World Bank to hold out. He also called for concessions from private investment funds that lent to his country by purchasing bonds.

"Every stakeholder will have to take a haircut," Hassan said.

One good sign: The IMF on Wednesday announced approval of a \$3 billion loan for Ghana, suggesting it is hopeful a debt restructuring deal can be struck among creditors.

China has also pushed back on the idea, popularized in the

Trump administration, that it has engaged in "debt trap diplomacy," leaving countries saddled with loans they cannot afford so that it can seize ports, mines and other strategic assets.

On this point, experts who have studied the issue in detail have sided with Beijing. Chinese lending has come from dozens of banks on the mainland and is far too haphazard and sloppy to be coordinated from the top. If anything, they say, Chinese banks are not taking losses because the timing is awful as they face big hits from reckless real estate lending in their own country and a dramatically slowing economy.

But the experts are quick to point out that a less sinister Chinese role is not a less scary one.

"There is no single person in charge," said Teal Emery, a former sovereign loan analyst who now runs consulting group Teal Insights.

Adds AidData's Parks about Beijing, "They're kind of making it up as they go along. There is no master plan."

Much of the credit for dragging China's hidden debt into the light goes to Parks, who over the past decade has had to contend

with all manner of roadblocks, obfuscations and falsehoods from the authoritarian government.

The hunt began in 2011 when a top World Bank economist asked Parks to take over the job of looking into Chinese loans. Within months, using online data-mining techniques, Parks and a few researchers began uncovering hundreds of loans the World Bank had not known about.

China at the time was ramping up lending that would soon become part of its \$1 trillion "Belt and Road Initiative" to secure supplies of key minerals, win allies abroad and make more money off its U.S. dollar holdings. Many developing countries were eager for U.S. dollars to build power plants, roads and ports and expand mining operations.

But after a few years of straightforward Chinese government loans, those countries found themselves heavily indebted, and the optics were awful. They feared that piling more loans atop old ones would make them seem reckless to credit rating agencies and make it more expensive to borrow in the future.

So China started setting up shell companies for some infrastructure projects and lent to them instead, which allowed heavily indebted countries to avoid putting that new debt on their books. Even if the loans were backed by the government, no one would be the wiser.

In Zambia, for example, a \$1.5 billion loan from two Chinese banks to a shell company to build a giant hydroelectric dam didn't appear on the country's books for years.

In Indonesia, Chinese loans of \$4 billion to help build a railway also never appeared on public government accounts. That all changed years later when, over-budget by \$1.5 billion, the Indonesian government was forced to bail out the railroad twice.

"When these projects go bad, what was advertised as a private debt becomes a public debt," Parks said. "There are projects all over the globe like this."

In 2021, a decade after Parks and his team began their hunt, they had gathered enough information for a blockbuster finding: At least \$385 billion of hidden and underreported Chinese debt in 88 countries, and many of those countries were in far worse shape than anyone knew.

Among the disclosures was

that China issued a \$3.5 billion loan to build a railway system in Laos, which would take nearly a quarter of the country's annual output to pay off.

Another AidData report around the same time suggested that many Chinese loans go to projects in areas of countries favored by powerful politicians and frequently right before key elections. Some of the things built made little economic sense and were riddled with problems.

In Sri Lanka, a Chinese-funded airport built in the president's hometown away from most of the country's population is so barely used that elephants have been spotted wandering on its tarmac.

Cracks are appearing in hydroelectric plants in Uganda and Ecuador, where in March the government got judicial approval for corruption charges tied to the project against a former president now in exile.

In Pakistan, a power plant had to be shut down for fear it could collapse. In Kenya, the last key miles of a railway were never built due to poor planning and a lack of funds.

As Parks dug into the details of the loans, he found something alarming: Clauses mandating that borrowing countries deposit U.S. dollars or other foreign currency in secret escrow accounts that Beijing could raid if those countries stopped paying interest on their loans.

In effect, China had jumped to the front of the line to get paid without other lenders knowing.

In Uganda, Parks revealed a loan to expand the main airport included an escrow account that could hold more than \$15 million. A legislative probe blasted the finance minister for agreeing to such terms, with the lead investigator saying he should be prosecuted and jailed.

Parks is not sure how many such accounts have been set up, but governments insisting on any kind of collateral, much less collateral in the form of hard cash, is rare in sovereign lending. And their very existence has rattled non-Chinese banks, bond investors and other lenders and made them unwilling to accept less than they're owed.

"The other creditors are saying, 'We're not going to offer anything if China is, in effect, at the head of the repayment line,'" Parks said. "It leads to paralysis. Everyone is sizing each other up and saying, 'Am I going to be a chump here?'"

## Rights Groups Warn Tourists About Florida In Wake Of 'Hostile' Laws

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — The NAACP over the weekend issued a travel advisory for Florida, joining two other civil rights groups in warning potential tourists that recent laws and policies championed by Gov. Ron DeSantis and Florida lawmakers are "openly hostile toward African Americans, people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals."

The NAACP, long an advocate for Black Americans, joined the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a Latino civil rights organization, and Equality Florida, a gay rights advocacy group, in issuing travel advisories for the Sunshine State, where tourism is one of the state's largest job sectors.

The warning approved Saturday by the NAACP's board of di-

rectors tells tourists that, before traveling to Florida, they should understand the state of Florida "devalues and marginalizes the contributions of, and the challenges faced by African Americans and other communities of color."

An email was sent Sunday morning to DeSantis' office seeking comment. The Republican governor is expected to announce a run for the GOP presidential nomination this week.

Florida is one of the most popular states in the U.S. for tourists, and tourism is one of its biggest industries. More than 137.5 million tourists visited Florida last year, marking a return to pre-pandemic levels, according to Visit Florida, the state's tourism promotion agency. Tourism supports 1.6 million

full-time and part-time jobs, and visitors spent \$98.8 billion in Florida in 2019, the last year figures are available.

Several of Florida's Democratic mayors were quick to say Sunday that their cities welcomed diversity and inclusion.

"EVERYONE is always welcome and will be treated with dignity and respect," tweeted Mayor Ken Welch of St. Petersburg in a message echoed by the mayor across the bay in Tampa.

"That will never change, regardless of what happens in Tallahassee," tweeted Mayor Jane Castor of Tampa.

The NAACP's decision comes

after the DeSantis' administration in January rejected the College Board's Advanced Placement African American Studies course. DeSantis and Republican lawmakers also have pressed forward with measures that ban state colleges from having programs on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as critical race theory, and also passed the Stop WOKE Act that restricts certain race-based conversations and analysis in schools and businesses.

In its warning for Hispanic travelers considering a visit to Florida, LULAC cited a new law that prohibits local govern-

ments from providing money to organizations that issue identification cards to people illegally in the country and invalidates out-of-state driver's licenses held by undocumented immigrants, among other things. The law also requires hospitals that accept Medicaid to include a citizenship question on intake forms, which critics have said is intended to dissuade immigrants living in the U.S. illegally from seeking medical care.

"The actions taken by Governor DeSantis have created a shadow of fear within communities across the state," said Lydia Medrano, a LULAC vice presi-

dent for the Southeast region.

Recent efforts to limit discussion on LGBTQ topics in schools, the removal of books with gay characters from school libraries, a recent ban on gender-affirming care for minors, new restrictions on abortion access and a law allowing Floridians to carry concealed guns without a permit contributed to Equality Florida's warning.

"Taken in their totality, Florida's slate of laws and policies targeting basic freedoms and rights pose a serious risk to the health and safety of those traveling to the state," Equality Florida's advisory said.

## Belafonte Served As A Champion—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ing dissatisfaction with moderation and stall tactics from both the liberal left and conservative right, Belafonte organized and paid for a three-week sabbatical. Eleven SNCC activists, including John Lewis, Fannie Lou Hamer and Stokely Carmichael, made the trip. Belafonte introduced them to Guinean's political dignitaries, including President Sekou Toure. The trip proved critical in sharpening the SNCC's focus on the potential for Black empowerment back in the States — a revelation that would greatly shape the coming Black Power Movement that unfolded in 1966.

Ideological tensions concerning the direction of the Civil Rights Movement after 1965 pushed Belafonte closer to the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

However, the politically conscious showman never turned his back on the youth activists who helped to define the decade.

It should not surprise anyone that a man who had a deep affinity for folk music and songs of the people gravitated toward hip-hop as it emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. Belafonte saw hip-hop as a logical next step in the evolution of Black cultural expression and a vital space for Black militancy. In a 2006 interview, he declared, "When I hung out in the South Bronx with Afrika Bambaataa and Melle Mel, and



watched the dawning of the hip-hop culture, it brought to me a profound sense of a wonderful thing that was in our future."

Belafonte produced the 1984 film "Beat Street," a celebration of hip-hop that was critical in introducing the art form to wider audiences. One of the featured artists, Melle Mel of the pioneering hip-hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, recalled that he met with Belafonte prior to penning his verse on the soundtrack's title song, "Beat Street Breakdown." His lyrics reflected his exchange with the civil rights legend:

Peoples in terror, the leaders

made a error And now they can't even look in the mirror Cause we gotta suffer while things get rougher And that's the reason why we got to get tougher

Belafonte intensified his backing of hip-hop in later years, whether it was encouraging Fidel Castro to carve out support for Cuban rappers in the 1990s, or through various hip-hop summits that he hosted in an effort to prod and push hip-hop's most prominent entertainers to be more outspoken on issues related to social justice.

In his twilight years, Belafonte continued to mentor youth activists. In the aftermath of Trayvon

Martin's killing in 2013, Belafonte visited Tallahassee, Florida, to support the work of the Dream Defenders, an organization founded by former students from Florida A&M University to, among other things, draw attention to the injustice of the Stand Your Ground law that was used to justify Martin's fatal shooting.

Standing with the students in solidarity, Belafonte told them: "I'm here because I am a part of your history. You called, and I'm here to tell you that those of us who have been in this struggle for over a century are happy to be part of this moment."

Belafonte's tireless devotion to human rights perfectly dovetailed into support for the Black Lives Matter movement in the 2010s, as he continued to argue for disruption of political systems that upheld state-sanctioned violence.

Belafonte's defiance and support for the movement was unwavering. "Radical thought at its best is supposed to make people feel uncomfortable," Belafonte declared in 2015. "We talk about the uprisings in communities like in St. Louis and Baltimore, and it is what protests are supposed to do."

From the 1960s until Belafonte's passing, young people across several generations sought him out for wisdom and guidance. His enduring commitment to youth and idealism always made him easy to find.

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# Business & Finance

## Strippers Join Servers And Baristas In New Labor Movement

THE CONVERSATION—Dancers at the Star Garden Topless Dive Bar in Los Angeles have voted to become the only unionized strippers in the U.S. – joining a growing trend of young employees seeking workplace protection through labor mobilization.

On May 18, 2023, the National Labor Relations Board announced that balloted employees at the topless bar had voted 17-0 in favor of joining the Actors' Equity Association.

It makes Star Garden the first unionized strip club since the now-defunct Lusty Lady in San Francisco and Seattle. That 1996 union campaign was later the subject of the documentary "Live Nude Girls Unite."

Lusty Lady shut its doors in Seattle in 2010, and three years later in San Francisco, making Star Garden if not the first then at present the only unionized strip club. But given the high-profile nature of the campaign – and the impact of union drives among young staff elsewhere – I believe that there is a high chance that Star Garden won't be the last strip joint to unionize.

Star Garden is the latest in a string of organizing breakthroughs. In 2022, 2,510 petitions for union representation were filed with National Labor Relations Board elections – a 53% increase from 2021 and the highest



number since 2016. And petitions for union elections have continued to increase in 2023.

Just as at Star Garden, many of the recent union victories have occurred in workplaces that previously seemed resistant to labor drives. Starbucks, Amazon, Trader Joe's, Apple retail stores, REI, Ben & Jerry's, Chipotle and Barnes & Noble are among the big-name companies that have seen staff unionize for the first

time since workers voted to unionize at Starbucks in Buffalo in December 2021. And evidence suggests that a successful union drive leads to more. Workers at over 300 Starbucks stores have now voted to unionize, and their efforts have inspired young workers throughout the low-wage service sector.

But in other crucial ways their campaign chimes with that of the other new union drives than have

occurred recently in the United States. Star Garden employs the same kind of young, self-assured workers that have contributed to the dynamism of union campaigns at Starbucks, Trader Joe's and others. Most of the dancers are in their 20s and 30s, and they have proved assured spokespeople for the union during the campaign's extensive coverage in traditional and social media.

In contrast to past generations

of union drives, it is young employees that are spearheading the new push for unions. And they are doing so independently, with less outside mobilizing from established union leaders. The Star Garden workers self-organized and repeatedly pressured management to act on their concerns before deciding to petition for a union election with Actors' Equity Union.

Moreover, the issues cited by Star Garden workers as evidence of a need for union protection – sexual harassment by customers, unresponsive management and an unsafe working environment – are in many respects just more extreme versions of the problems that have driven many retail and food-service-sector workers to mobilize.

In common with workers at Starbucks, REI and Trader Joe's, the Star Garden dancers concluded that having a union and collective bargaining was the surest way to remedy such problems.

And like many of those other workforces, the Star Garden strippers faced a long battle against management to achieve that goal.

The organizing campaign lasted for 15 months as a result of company's efforts to fight worker organizing and then prevent a union vote.

Workers voted in a National Labor Relations Board election in November 2022, but management opposition prevented the labor board from counting the ballots until last week. Among other tactics, the owners of Star Garden are alleged to have retaliated against workers for protesting an unsafe working environment and claimed that the workers were independent contractors, not employees. Employers also filed for bankruptcy – an act that can void a union contract.

But the anti-union tactics failed. When the ballots were eventually counted, they showed that workers had voted unanimously for union recognition. In common with campaigns at Starbucks and elsewhere, the success at Star Garden suggests that traditional anti-union tactics may be less effective with today's younger workers.

There is another common theme in the rash of union breakthroughs in recent years: They have generated headlines.

Star Garden may not have the big-name appeal to media outlets of, say, Starbucks or Amazon. But the nature of the business involved lends itself to widespread media and social coverage. In short, "strippers' unionize" makes for great headlines.

## Biden, McCarthy Prepare To Meet To Resume Debt Ceiling Talks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Debt ceiling talks were set to resume Sunday evening as Washington races to strike a budget compromise along with a deal to raise the nation's borrowing limit and avert an economy-wrecking federal default.

President Joe Biden and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy spoke by phone Sunday while the president was returning home on Air Force One after the Group of Seven summit in Japan. Upbeat, McCarthy, R-Calif., told reporters at the Capitol that the call was "productive" and that the on-again, off-again negotiations between his staff and White House representatives are focused on spending cuts.

He's to meet Biden on Monday at the White House.

Negotiators for the Democratic president and Republican speaker appear to be narrowing on a bud-

get cap for the 2024 budget year that would be key to resolving the standoff. They face a deadline, as soon as June 1, when the government could run out of cash to pay its bills. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Sunday that June 1 is a "hard deadline."

McCarthy said after his call with Biden that "I think we can solve some of these problems if he understands what we're looking at." The speaker added, "But I've been very clear to him from the very beginning. We have to spend less money than we spent last year."

McCarthy emerged from that conversation sounding optimistic and was careful not to criticize Biden's trip, as he had before. He did caution, "There's no agreement on anything."

"We're looking at, how do we have a victory for this country?" McCarthy said. "How do we solve

problems? He said he did not think the final legislation would remake the federal budget and the country's debt, but at least "put us on a path to change the behavior of this runaway spending."

The White House confirmed the Monday meeting and late Sunday talks but did not elaborate on the leaders' call.

Earlier, Biden used his concluding news conference in Hiroshima, Japan, to warn House Republicans that they must move off their "extreme positions" over raising the debt limit and that there would be no agreement to avoid a catastrophic default only on their terms.

Biden said "it's time for Republicans to accept that there is no deal to be made solely, solely, on their partisan terms." He said he had done his part in attempting to raise the borrowing limit so the government can keep paying its

bills, by agreeing to significant cuts in spending. "Now it's time for the other side to move from their extreme position."

Biden had been scheduled to travel from Hiroshima to Papua New Guinea and Australia, but cut short his trip in light of the strained negotiations with Capitol Hill.

Even with a new wave of tax revenue expected soon, perhaps giving both sides more time to negotiate, Yellen said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that "the odds of reaching June 15, while being able to pay all of our bills, is quite low."

GOP lawmakers are holding tight to demands for sharp spending cuts with caps on future spending, rejecting the alternatives proposed by the White House for reducing deficits in part with revenue from taxes.

Republicans want to roll back

next year's spending to 2022 levels, but the White House has proposed keeping 2024 the same as it is now, in the 2023 budget year.

A compromise on those topline spending levels would enable McCarthy to deliver for conservatives, while not being so severe that it would chase off the Democratic votes that would be needed in the divided Congress to pass any bill.

Top Republican negotiator Rep. Garret Graves of Louisiana, speaking alongside McCarthy at the Capitol, said the numbers "are the foundation" of any agreement.

Republicans also want work requirements on the Medicaid health care program, though the Biden administration has countered that millions of people could lose coverage. The GOP additionally introduced new cuts to food

aid by restricting states' ability to waive work requirements in places with high joblessness. That idea, when floated under President Donald Trump, was estimated to cause 700,000 people to lose their food benefits.

GOP lawmakers are also seeking cuts in IRS money and, by sparing Defense and Veterans accounts from reductions, would shift the bulk of spending reductions to other federal programs.

The White House has countered by keeping defense and nondefense spending flat next year, which would save \$90 billion in the 2024 budget year and \$1 trillion over 10 years.

All sides have been eyeing the potential for the package to include a framework that would speed energy project developments.

## Low-Income Tenants Lack Options As Old Mobile Home Parks Are Razed

PHOENIX (AP) — Alondra Ruiz Vazquez and her husband were comfortable in Periwinkle Mobile Home Park for a decade, feeling lucky to own their mobile home and pay about \$450 a month for their lot in a city with spiraling rents.

But now they and dozens of other families have until May 28 to leave the Phoenix park, which nearby Grand Canyon University purchased seven years ago to build student housing. Two other mobile home communities are also being cleared this spring for new developments in a city where no new parks have been built in more than 30 years.

"I'm here, well, because I have nowhere to go," said Isabel Ramos, who lives at Periwinkle with her 11-year-old daughter. "I don't know what's going to happen."

The razing of older mobile home parks across the United States worries advocates who say bulldozing them permanently eliminates some of the already

limited housing for the poorest of the poor. Residents may have to double up with relatives or live in their cars amid spiking evictions and homelessness, they warn.

"Mobile homes are a much bigger part of our affordable housing stock than people know," said Mark Stapp, who directs Arizona State University's master's degree program in real estate development. "Once it's gone, a lot of people will have no place to go."

A recent survey by the National Low Income Housing Coalition showed a U.S.-wide shortage of 7.3 million affordable rental homes for extremely low-income renters, defined in Arizona as a three-member household making \$28,850 or less.

Industry groups estimate that more than 20 million people live in some 43,000 mobile home parks across the United States.

"We are in the deepest affordable housing crisis we've ever experienced," said Joanna Carr, acting head of the Arizona Hous-

ing Coalition. "Housing for many people is getting completely out of reach. It's very dire."

Ken Anderson, president of the Manufactured Housing Industry of Arizona, said trying to bring an old park up to modern standards can be cost-prohibitive for owners, requiring replacement of electrical and sewage infrastructure for newer homes.

At least six such communities have been torn down in Arizona in the last 18 months, he said, adding that Grand Canyon University "bent over backwards" to help residents more than other park owners.

"A lot of these parks are 70 years old," said Anderson, noting an uptick in demolitions of older communities for redevelopment. "It's going to be a big problem down the line."

Efforts under way to revitalize old mobile homes have limits. Despite their name, most aren't truly mobile, and moving them can be very costly. The oldest homes are often too decrepit to

move at all.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development recently announced \$225 million in grants to governments, tribes and non-profits to preserve mobile homes, but the money can only be used to replace, not repair dwellings built before 1976, which are common at older parks.

Vermont earlier this year announced a mobile home improvement program to be funded by \$4 million in federal money. It aims to help park owners prepare vacant or abandoned lots for new mobile homes, and help mobile homeowners install new foundations and make their dwellings more habitable.

In Riverdale, Utah, the last of about 50 families at Lesley's Mobile Home Park must leave by the end of May for construction of new apartments and townhouses.

"The state laws don't protect us," said Jason Williams, who sold his mobile home for half what he asked for and will now live in a motorhome.

Some old parks weren't originally envisioned as permanent housing.

Florida City Campsite and RV Camp was built decades ago for vacationers headed to the Florida Keys or the Everglades.

But the dilapidated park eventually became home to retirees on fixed incomes and young families on government assistance. Florida City, the southernmost municipality in Miami-Dade County, sold it two years ago for a new townhouse project.

Cities often don't like older parks because unlike other housing they don't generate property taxes for municipal services. Rundown parks can also be eyesores, depressing the worth of nearby properties even as the value of the land the mobile homes sit on has increased exponentially.

## Classifieds

### NOTICE TO SUBCONTRACTOR

#### BIDDER PRE-QUALIFICATION REQUEST FOR THE RALEIGH-DURHAM AIRPORT AUTHORITY PARK ECONOMY 3 EXPANSION - EARLY PACKAGE

Balfour Beatty / Metcon is seeking to pre-qualify general trades, fencing, and sitework contractors to submit bids for the furnishing of labor, material, and equipment for the following project: Park Economy 3 Expansion. Balfour Beatty / Metcon has been selected as the Construction Manager at Risk (CMR) for the project and will receive bids from and contract with the principal contractors for the execution of the work. The preliminary budget for this project is approximately \$120,000,000 (all packages). Minority Owned Small Business (MSB) participation and Women Owned Small Business (WSB) participation goals will be set for each individual bid package. Refer to the bid manual documents once issued for information on your specific package.

Similar project experience will be considered during prequalification. Anticipated Bid Date will be July 12, 2023. This is not a request for bid, however, only subcontractors who have completed a prequalification package, and been deemed prequalified for this project, will be considered for a bid on this project. Submittals for prequalification forms may be hand delivered, mailed, or submitted electronically. Deadline for prequalification submission is 14 days prior to Bid Date. The CMR and Authority reserve the right to reject any and all Pre-qualifications. Contracting method will be through Competitive Public Bid in accordance with Chapter 143 of the NC General Statutes. For further information or questions, please contact Trent Johnson at 919-233-5001, or by email at: tjohnson@bbus.com.

Updated prequalification documents can be accessed through the Balfour Beatty plan room under "RDU Park Economy 3 - Early Package PREQUALIFICATION" at the below link:

<https://app.buildingconnected.com/public/5430e7a75cde2e0300dd757d>

Mailed or hand delivered submittals shall go to the following address:

Trent Johnson  
Balfour Beatty Construction  
406 S McDowell St Suite 20  
Raleigh, NC 27601

