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Jesse Jackson To Step Down As Head Of Rainbow PUSH

CHICAGO (AP) - The Rev. Jesse Jackson plans to step down from leading the Chicago civil rights organization Rainbow PUSH Coalition he founded in 1971, the organization announced Friday.

"Reverend Jesse Jackson is officially pivoting from his role as president of Rainbow PUSH Coalition. His commitment is unwavering, and he will elevate his life's work by teaching ministers how to fight for social justice and continue the freedom movement," the organization said in a statement. "Rev. Jackson's global impact and civil rights career will be celebrated this weekend at the 57th annual Rainbow PUSH Coalition convention, where his successor will be introduced.'

The Rev. Janette Wilson, a senior adviser to Jackson and longtime staff member of the organization, told The Associated Press that the civil rights leader and two-time presidential candidate will address members Saturday about his decision.

Jackson, who will turn 82 in October, has remained active in civil rights in recent years despite health setbacks.

He announced in 2017 that he had begun outpatient care for Parkinson's disease two years earlier. In 2021 for a fall that caused a head inearly 2021, he had gallbladder surgery and later that year was treated for COVID-19 including a stint at a Martin Luther King Jr., broke with based on Chicago's South Side.



was hospitalized again in November Conference in 1971 to form Opjury.

Jackson, a protégé of the Rev. physical therapy-focused facility. He the Southern Christian Leadership

eration PUSH - originally named with a mission ranging from encour-People United to Save Humanity – a aging corporations to hire more misweeping civil rights organization

named the Rainbow PUSH Coalition norities to voter registration drives in communities of color. Its annual The organization was later re- convention is set for this weekend in

e Carolinian

Chicago.

Jackson has long been a powerful voice in American politics.

Until Barack Obama's election in 2008, Jackson was the most successful Black candidate for the U.S. presidency, winning 13 primaries and caucuses for the Democratic nomination in 1988.

Jackson has helped guide the modern civil rights movement on a wide variety of issues, including voting rights and education.

He stood with the family of George Floyd at a memorial for the Black man murdered in 2020 by a white police officer, whose death forced a national reckoning with police brutality and racism. Jackson also participated in COVID-19 vaccination drives to battle hesitancy in Black communities.

Santita Jackson, one of his daughters, said in an interview that her father would not be vanishing. "While the flesh may not be willing, the spirit is," she said, adding that she hoped her father would provide a living history. "Dr. King gave him his assignment and he's been faithful to it in every iteration of his life. Many people have said Dr. King was the architect and Rev. Jackson was the builder.'

One of his sons, U.S. Rep. Jonathan Jackson, told the Chicago

Sun-Times that his father "has forever been on the scene of justice and has never stopped fighting for civil rights" and that will be "his mark upon history."

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson called Jackson "an architect of the soul of Chicago" in a statement Friday.

'Through decades of service, he has led the Rainbow PUSH Coalition at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights and social justice. His faith, his perseverance, his love, and his relentless dedication to people inspire all of us to keep pushing for a better tomorrow," said Johnson, who was endorsed by Jackson when he ran for mayor earlier this year.

Al Sharpton, president and founder of the National Action Network, said in a statement that he had spoken to Jackson on Friday morning and "told him that we will continue to glean from him and learn from him and duplicate him in whatever our organizations and media platforms are. Because he has been an anchor for me and many others."

Sharpton called Jackson his mentor, adding: "The resignation of Rev. Jesse Jackson is the pivoting of one of the most productive, prophetic, and dominant figures in the struggle for social justice in American history.



The Shooting Of Ralph Yarl Demonstrates The Fiction Of Our Colorblind Society

By Barbara Harris Combs

Kennesaw State University

Given the gunshot wounds to his head and arm, the fact that Ralph Yarl was able to celebrate his 17th birthday on May 7, 2023, is a modern-day miracle.

Less than a month earlier, on April 13, Yarl had gone to pick up his twin younger brothers from a play date in the Northland section of Kansas City, Kansas.

Instead of going to NE 115 Terrace, Yarl went a block away to NE 115 Street Place, where he rang the doorbell.

Within a few seconds after seeing felonies. He was released after post-Yarl at his door, the homeowner, ing US\$200,000 bail. On the assault



In that case, Susan Lorincz, 58, a white woman, has pleaded not guilty to charges of assault and manslaughter with a firearm after reportedly shooting Owens after Owens rang her doorbell.

It is reported that Owens wanted to discuss the woman's attacks on Owens' children. Lorincz has claimed that she, too, feared for her life.

A long way from a colorblind soci-

In my book, Bodies out of Place: Theorizing Anti-blackness in U.S. Society, I describe how racist attitudes persist in society.

One way this happens is through fixed social ideas about where Blacks belong, when, with whom and in what position.

The shootings of Yarl and Owens are important to our national conversation about race and sense of place.

It hints at a reality that is both unpleasant and often ignored: Most Black people in American society are forced to navigate increasingly segregated spaces.

I argue that as Black people travel to, through and in spaces, the presumption of criminality shrouds their bodies. It follows them to work, school and play. To survive, Black people operate with a knowledge of beauty and precarity. For Black women, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins calls this consciousness an awareness of our status as "the A NORTH CAROLINA DEPUTY HAS BEEN SHOT AND A SUSPECT IS IN CUSTODY

PEMBROKE, N.C. (AP) - A North Carolina deputy was shot and wounded Thursday afternoon and a suspect has been taken into custody, authorities said.

The deputy was taken to a hospital and is expected to recover, Robeson County Sheriff Burnis Wilkins told reporters. The shooting happened near Pembroke as deputies executed a search warrant, he said.

"The team followed all protocols based on the body camera that I have watched, so far," Wilkins said. "When they made entry, they took on shots, fired by the suspect.

DESANTIS TO BECOME 1ST GOP CANDIDATE TO FILE FOR SOUTH CAROLINA PRIMARY

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) - Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis plans to file his 2024 candidacy for South Carolina's Republican presidential primary when he's in

Andrew Lester, an 84-year-old white man, fired his .32-caliber Smith & Wesson revolver and struck Yarl twice, once in his forehead and once in his arm.

No hesitation. No conversation. Yarl remembers Lester saying these five words before he shot him: "Don't ever come here again."

Eventually, Lester was charged with first-degree assault and armed criminal action, both of which are

charge alone, Lester faces a penalty of up to life in prison.

Local prosecutors have said there was "a racial component" to Yarl's shooting. No hate crime charges have been filed against Lester.

Weeks after Yarl's shooting, another incident involving neighbors occurred in Ocala, Florida, on June 3. But this one ended in the death of a 35-year-old Black woman, A.J. Owens.

Any Black person outside of what someone else determines is his or her socially designated physical or social location is presumed to be out of place. In my book, I argue that the repercussions for being deemed "out of place" range from what some might call benign amusement to death. Make no mistake: Harm results in either case.

outsider within. "Scared to death"

Like Owens' shooter, Lester said he feared for his life and was only protecting himself when Yarl rang the doorbell. Through his attorney,

glar. Because most would-be burglars

Lester further said he was scared to

death and thought Yarl was a bur-

(See RALPH YARL, P. 2)

US Forest Service And HBCUs Unite For Diversity In Wildland Firefighting

HAZEL GREEN, Ala. (AP) - Before starting college, Taylor Mohead had never been outside her hometown of Houston, Texas. Now, the recent Tuskegee University graduate is trekking around trees in Hazel Green, Alabama, in fire gear and sweltering heat.

The U.S. Forest Service intern is among 20 students from historically Black colleges or universities who are participating in a prescribed burn demonstration under instructors' supervision. They clear paths, light fires and make sure the embers are out when they're done. It's part of an apprenticeship program that will give them the credentials to hit the ground running toward a fire line

It's a grueling way to spend summer break, but Mohead is relishing it. She never pictured herself fighting forest fires.

"Look at me. I'm really small. I'm really short. And then being a woman of color, that's something, too. I feel like that's more inspiring,' Mohead said, grinning. "I got goosebumps right now."

The on-site fire academy is part of the 1890 Land Grant Institution Wildland Fire Consortium, a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and a cluster of HBCUs comprised of Florida A&M University, Southern University in Louisiana, Tuskegee University and Alabama CUs in the nation. So, it just makes



A&M University.

The recruitment effort comes as wildfire season around the U.S. grows due to climate change and minorities remain underrepresented in forestry and firefighting. The number of wildfires this year is below the 10-year average, but hot and dry conditions are raising the risk, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

The idea for a consortium came during the pandemic to address a 'mission critical area of the Forest Service," said Stephanie Love, the USDA Forest Service's national diversity student programs manager and an Alabama A&M alum. The initiative became official in 2021.

"These four HBCUs have some of the top agricultural programs at HB-

sense to align our efforts and move together in the same direction," Love said. "We're trying to create a pipeline of students who are pursuing this natural resources education and forestry and fire.'

The hope is every student comes away with a foundation to chart one of many possible paths in forestry, ecology, agriculture or firefighting.

The consortium is building on top of a decadeslong relationship between Alabama A&M and the Forest Service. A USDA Forest Service Center of Excellence in Forestry was created at the school in 1993 to prepare students for jobs with the agency.

The Bulldogs established a nationally accredited firefighting team in 2009 made of students, called the FireDawgs. When class isn't in session, the FireDawgs are dis-

patched to wildfires or burn operations around the country.

The development programs that have come out of the Alabama-Forest Service collaboration are responsible for training two-thirds of Black foresters in the federal agency, said Love, who was in the first FireDawgs squad.

Diversity among the Forest Service's wildland firefighters has increased by 20% in the last decade, according to data collected by the agency. It has approximately 13,000 employees including firefighters and other staff who respond to wildfires. Between July 2010 and July 2022, white staffers fell from 86% to 66%.

Black fire personnel have remained mostly around 1.3%. Black women make up around 0.5%. Hispanics make up 12%, and Native Americans/Alaska Natives and Asians linger around 3% and 1%, respectively. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make up less than

The dearth of applicants of color may partly be due to a lack of awareness. They are not often encouraged to consider firefighting by guidance counselors or recruiters, said Terry Baker, CEO of the Society of American Foresters and its first Black leader. There also is a misconception that working outdoors isn't highly technical or doesn't require skill, he said

the first-in-the-South voting state next week, becoming the first GOP hopeful to do so.

DeSantis will file his paperwork at the state GOP headquarters in Columbia on Tuesday, his campaign told The Associated Press on Friday

DeSantis will make his candidacy official during his third campaign swing through South Carolina, where Republican hopefuls have been stumping for more than a year already. On Monday, he makes a stop in Tega Cay, an affluent community on Lake Wylie along the state line with North Carolina.

After he signs his candidacy paperwork, DeSantis plans to make a policy rollout in Columbia, the details of which the campaign did not immediately release. It will be DeSantis' second policy announcement, following his immigration proposals - which call for ending birthright citizenship and finishing construction of the southern border wall – outlined during a June visit to a Texas border city.

The South Carolina trip comes on the heels of a Friday GOP gathering in Iowa, where DeSantis and other hopefuls - but not former President Donald Trump, the field's current frontrunner - were set to appear at the Family Leadership Summit.

It's one of many events that will be held in Iowa in the coming weeks as voters begin to more seriously consider their options in the remaining six months until the leadoff caucuses, and the sprawling field of Republican presidential candidates works to build bases of support to challenge Trump's early lead in the field.

South Carolina is set to hold its GOP presidential primary Feb. 24. The state, which also boasts two homegrown 2024 candidates of its own - former Gov. Nikki Haley and Sen. Tim Scott - is critical for Republican presidential hopefuls and has been a strong base of support for Trump in his previous campaigns.

GOP STATE LEGISLATURES SEEK GREATER CONTROL **OVER STATE AND LOCAL ELECTION OFFICES**

ATLANTA (AP) - Lawmakers in several Republican-led states have been looking to exert more authority over state and local election offices, claiming new powers that Democrats warn could be used to target left-leaning counties in future elections.

The moves range from requiring legislative approval of court settlements in election-related lawsuits to creating paths for taking over local election offices.

In North Carolina, a Republican proposal working its way through the General Assembly would change the composition of state and county election boards and give lawmakers sole authority to appoint board members.

Republican lawmakers in Texas recently approved legislation that not only eliminates the top election official in the Democratic stronghold of Harris County, which includes Houston, but also permits the state's chief election official - the secretary of state - to take over the county's election office. The secretary is appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate, both now in Republican hands.

Election observers say it's imperative for public trust that elections remain free of partisan manipulation and they say they worry about lawmakers decidng to assert their new powers for political gain.

There are ways that states can intervene and help local election officials,' said David Levine, a former local election official in Idaho who is now a senior fellow with the German Marshall Fund's Alliance for Securing Democracy. "Instead, we are seeing states that are enacting laws that could introduce new challenges to the conduct of U.S. elections."

Attempts by Republican legislatures to expand their power over how elections are run have soared since the 2020 presidential election, spurred by former President Donald Trump's false claims of widespread fraud. Republican lawmakers characterize the moves as necessary oversight aimed at improving elections, while Democrats criticize them as power grabs that could be used to interfere in voting or ballot counting.



PAGE 2

Lawmaker Switches From **Democrat To Republican**

CNN - A Georgia lawmaker who represents part of Atlanta in the state House of Representatives switched her party affiliation to Republican this week after repeatedly breaking with her former party on several key votes

State Rep. Mesha Mainor announced that she was leaving the Democratic Party for the Republican Party at a news conference on Tuesday.

District 56 is a Democratic stronghold that covers a swath of Fulton County stretching from parts of Atlanta's westside up to midtown. Mainor won her last primary against two other Democrats with 65% of the vote and she ran unopposed in the 2020 and 2022 general elections. President Joe Biden won Fulton County with more than 70% of the vote in 2020.

Shortly after her news conference, she tweeted, "I represent a blue district in the city of Atlanta so this wasn't a political decision for me. It was a a MORAL one. I will NEVER apologize for being a black woman with a mind of my own.^{*}

Democrats called the flip a betrayal, pointing to the deep-blue district Mainor was elected to represent.

Republicans, including Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, sent tweets welcoming her to the GOP, with several posting interviews she did on Fox News shortly after the announcement. Mainor was also welcomed to the GOP on social media by Tricia Cotham, a North Carolina state representative from a blue district who switched from Democrat to Republican earlier this year.

A two-term member, Mainor had come under fire by members of the Democratic Party this session after voting with Republicans on a number of issues, including on police budgets and an oversight commission for prosecutors.

She was the lone Democrat to vote for a failed bill on private school vouchers, which prompted a then-fellow Atlanta Democrat – State Senator Josh McLaurin – to tweet, "All I need is a name," with a photo of a blank check for \$1,000 for a primary challenger in Mainor's district.

"The harassment and intimidation is much bigger than three votes, said Mainor, surrounded by a handful of supporters and the state GOP chairman, at her announcement. "It's about fear, fear of an outsider coming to the capitol working for the people she came up here to serve.'

"Rep. Mesha Mainor's switch to the GOP is a stinging betrayal of her constituents, who elected a Democrat to represent them in the state legislature," said US Rep. Nikema Williams, who chairs the state's Democratic Party, in a statement. "House District 56 deserves a representative who will do the job they were elected to do, including fight for high-quality public education. Georgia Democrats look forward to electing a strong Democrat next year in H.D. 56 who will serve the people, not personal political ambitions.

The switch gives Republicans a 102 to 78 majority in the Georgia House. It also makes Mainor the only Black Republican currently serving in Georgia's legislature and the first Black woman Republican ever to serve in the state House, according to the House GOP caucus.

The last party switch in the Georgia state legislature happened in 2021, when Vernon Jones - a major supporter of former President Donald Trump – flipped from Democrat to Republican near the end of his state House term.

Shooting Of Ralph Yarl-**-**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

do not ring doorbells, it's fair to question on what he based his fear. By all accounts, Yarl was a gifted

voung man before the shooting. Meara Mitchell, a teacher of Yarl's for several years, described him as a "stellar human being" with a "quiet fortitude.

Yarl still has dreams of continued academic achievement, despite experiencing frequent headaches and other mental illnesses as a result of the gunshot wound.

During an interview on "Good Morning America," Yarl told host Robin Roberts: "I'm just going to keep doing all the stuff that makes me happy. And just living my life the best I can, and not let this bother

It boggles the imagination that the shooting would not bother Yarl. What is clear is that he is resolved at least publicly - to not let it steal his joy.

As Elaine Nichols wrote for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Black Joy is and has been an essential act of survival and development."

And as is often the case, the ability to feel great joy is only possible for those who have also known great pain.

Racism operates on a continuum

In its guideook Race and Racism in the United States, the American Sociological Association describes how racism operates on the structural and individual level.

There are often expectations about who belongs in certain spaces. As the work of sociologist Nirmal Puwar demonstrates, physical spaces are gendered, raced and classed.

In Space Invaders: Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place, Puwar aptly describes the way women and ethnic minorities are perceived as 'space invaders" in comparison to white men who are perceived to be-

long Some have called Yarl's shooting

the "wrong door" case. In my view, that characterization

trivializes what happened. As Yarl's aunt, Faith Spoonmore,

explained, he was "shot in the neighborhood where he lived."

Kansas City resident Michele L.

Watley called her city a place where "this veil of nicety and smiles .. overlays microaggressions and all kinds of crazy stuff."

Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva notes that colorblindness has been "the dominant racial ideology of the post-Civil Rights era."

That ideology maintains that race no longer matters for people's life chances.

But as Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson cogently wrote in her dissent in the Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina, "Deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so

in life. Just ask the families of A.J. Ow-

ens and Ralph Yarl.

Biden Administration Launches \$2.2B Initiative To Support Black Farmers

By Stacy M. Brown

The Biden-Harris Administration has unveiled a \$2.2 billion relief initiative aimed at providing support to Black farmers and other individuals who have faced discrimination within federal government lending programs.

NNPA

The Inflation Reduction Act, part of Biden's commitment to addressing historical injustices, includes a total of \$5.3 billion dedicated to offering relief to tens of thousands of farmers across the country.

Of the allocated funds, \$3.1 billion reportedly will be used to assist distressed borrowers in paying off their farm debts without losing their land or becoming ineligible for future assistance.

An additional \$2.2 billion will be allocated specifically to farmers who have suffered discrimination through USDA farm programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that applications are now being accepted for the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program, which aims to provide financial aid to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners who have experienced discrimination in USDA farm lending prior to 2021.

"The opening of the application process is an important step in delivering on our commitment to providing financial assistance to those who faced discrimination in USDA farm lending, as swiftly and efficiently as possible," Agriculture Secretary Tom



Vilsack emphasized.

The initiative comes after decades of Black farmers accusing the USDA of discrimination and being denied loans crucial for their livelihoods and land preservation.

A study conducted in May 2022 revealed that Black farmers had lost over \$326 billion in land value

ported in 2022 that researchers considered that figure to be a conservative estimate of the actual financial impact racist practices have had on Black American farmers since 1920. Biden issued an executive order

ter plan, the Biden administration said it wanted to allocate significant funds to support Black farmers.

However, the plan was scuttled after white farmers filed lawsuits claiming that the earmarking of funds specifically for Black farmers amounted to discrimination.

The legal action has resulted in the tying up of \$4 billion as the administration continues to defend the action in court.

Further, a 2021 report from Pro-Publica also shed light on the systematic discrimination faced by Black farmers at the hands of various federal agencies, including the USDA.

The report detailed how the USDA impeded Black farmers' access to critical federal funds through discriminatory loan denials and deliberate delays in financial aid.

south of the Mason-Dixon Line and vou tried to farm, you've been discriminated against," Lloyd Wright, the director of the USDA Office of Civil Rights under Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, and a Black Virginia farmer, stated in the report. In an earlier interview with the

Informer, John Wesley Boyd Jr., founder, and president of the National Black Farmers Association in Bakersville, Virginia, added, "The oldest occupation in this country for Black people is farming. But from slavery through Jim Crow, the USDA, and the banks – all these things put together means we are facing extinction."

Boyd added:

"What's troubling is when the brown bear, the black bear, and the bald eagle were facing extinction, Congress put harsh laws in place until their numbers came back up. So why can't they do the same thing for the oldest occupation in history for Black people, which is farming?'

The White House said the launch of the \$2.2 billion relief initiative represents a significant step towards rectifying the historical injustices faced by Black farmers and marks the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to addressing systemic discrimination in federal lending programs.

With the Discrimination Financial Assistance Program now accepting applications, eligible farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners should now have access to needed financial assistance.

"If you are Black and you're born

The Electoral College Is The Big Factor In A Third-Party

the prospect of credible third-party candidates this cycle.

get the most traction when there's favorable ratings, according to Realgreater-than-usual dissatisfaction ClearPolitics' average. candidates — like in 2016, when Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump group No Labels is set to host Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and former those in less competitive states. According to a POLITICO at had favorability ratings of just 43 Republican Utah Republican Gov. percent and 38 percent, respectively.

Third-party candidates tend to holding nearly identical 39-percent

But there is one point of solace for Democrats: Voters in battleground states have been less likely to vote with the major party presidential This comes just as the bipartisan third party in recent elections than

than Trump. But the Electoral College – which has otherwise favored Republicans

in the Trump era – could blunt those effects. Since the formation of the two-

lar vote: Libertarian Gary Johnson in 2016.

But third-party candidates don't need to have large magnitudes of support to swing an election. Ralph a long list of states that are considparty system in the 19th century, no Nader, the Green Party nominee in ered safely in one column or the othoutside candidate has ever won the 2000, may have tipped that elec- er: Alaska, Idaho, Vermont, Oregon, tion away from Al Gore and toward George W. Bush by earning 2.7 percent of the national vote. And while the Green Party's 2016 candidate, Jill Stein, only received a little over percent, her share of the vote in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin — the three decisive states Trump flipped that year — exceeded Trump's winning margin over Clinton.

than 3 percent of the national popu- of votes for non-major-party candidates than Utah, where a home-state candidate, Evan McMullin, won 22 percent of the vote in 2016. But after Utah, third-party strength comes in

The Washington Informer re-

throughout the 20th century.

last year, instructing the USDA to establish a 15-member independent equity commission aimed at rectify-

ing discrimination within its policies and practices concerning Black farmers. Under the initial Build Back Bet-

Democrats are rightly spooked by Trump and President Joe Biden, bels isn't the only one: Academic third-party candidates could get Cornel West is jockeying for the

even more traction - with both Green Party nomination.

Jon Huntsman at an event in New If 2024 is a rematch between Hampshire next week. And No La-



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According to a POLITICO analysis, none of the top 20 states for third-party voting in the past two presidential elections is broadly considered a swing state, and only three of the top 20 were states where the winning candidate's margin in 2020 was within single digits: Minnesota (No. 11, Biden +7), Maine (No. 13, Biden +9) and Iowa (No. 19, Trump +8).

That doesn't mean well-funded third-party candidates with significant or universal ballot access don't pose a major threat to Biden. Analysis of way-too-early polling by FiveThirtyEight suggests that those third-party candidates currently draw more voters away from Biden

presidency - or even come close. In the past 100 years, only three thirdparty candidates have even carried a single state in the Electoral College: progressive favorite son Robert La Follette won Wisconsin in 1924, then-South Carolina Gov. Strom Thurmond carried four Southern states as a segregationist "Dixiecrat" in 1948 and former Alabama Gov. George Wallace won five states in the same region on a similar platform in 1968.

In more recent years, Ross Perot set the high-water mark for independent candidates: 18.9 percent in 1992. Other than Perot's 1992 and 1996 performances, only one other third-party candidate has won more

In general, however, third-party candidates have performed worse in swing states, where voters feel less leeway in looking beyond the two major parties, than elsewhere in the country.

Over the 2016 and 2020 elections, no state has cast a greater average

New Mexico, Washington, Wyoming North Dakota and Colorado.

The traditional, core swing states rank much lower for thirdparty voting, according to this analysis. All but Nevada (No. 21) are in the bottom half: Wisconsin (No. 27), Arizona (No. 28), Michigan (No. 33), Pennsylvania (No. 43), North Carolina (No. 45) and Georgia (No. 48).

While a No Labels candidate is still a hypothetical – the group says it won't seek the ballot unless the two major-party candidates are unpopular and there's a path to victory for a moderate alternative – West's campaign for the Green Party nomination is already underway.

Black Artists Say AI Shows Bias, With Algorithms Erasing Their History

long been a pioneer in combining art and technology in her Brooklynbased practice. In May she was awarded \$100,000 by the Guggenheim Museum for her groundbreaking innovations, including an ongoing series of interviews with Bina48, a humanoid robot.

For the past seven years, she has experimented with artificial intelligence's ability to realistically depict Black women, smiling and crying, using a variety of word prompts. The first results were lackluster if not alarming: Her algorithm produced a pink-shaded humanoid shrouded by a black cloak.

"I expected something with a little more semblance of Black womanhood," she said. And although the technology has improved since her first experiments, Dinkins found herself using runaround terms in the text prompts to help the AI image generators achieve her desired image, "to give the machine a chance to give me what I wanted." But whether she uses the term "African American woman" or "Black woman," machine distortions that mangle facial features and hair textures occur at high rates.

"Improvements obscure some of the deeper questions we should

The artist Stephanie Dinkins has be asking about discrimination," Stability AI and Midjourney – have Dinkins said. The artist, who is Black, added, "The biases are embedded deep in these systems, so it becomes ingrained and automatic. If I'm working within a system that uses algorithmic ecosystems, then I want that system to know who Black people are in nuanced ways, so that we can feel better supported."

She is not alone in asking tough questions about the troubling relationship between AI and race. Many Black artists are finding evidence of racial bias in AI, both in the large data sets that teach machines how to generate images and in the underlying programs that run the algorithms. In some cases, AI technologies seem to ignore or distort artists' text prompts, affecting how Black people are depicted in images, and in others, they seem to stereotype or censor Black history and culture.

Discussion of racial bias within AI has surged in recent years, with studies showing that facial recognition technologies and digital assistants have trouble identifying the images and speech patterns of nonwhite people. The studies raised broader questions of fairness and bias

Major companies behind AI image generators — including OpenAI,

pledged to improve their tools. "Bias is an important, industrywide problem," Alex Beck, a spokeswoman for OpenAI, said in an email interview, adding that the company is continuously trying "to improve performance, reduce bias and mitigate harmful outputs." She declined to say how many employees were working on racial bias, or how much money the company had allocated toward the problem.

'Black people are accustomed to being unseen," the Senegalese artist Linda Dounia Rebeiz wrote in an introduction to her exhibition "In/Visible," for Feral File, an NFT marketplace. "When we are seen, we are accustomed to being misrepresented."

To prove her point during an interview with a reporter, Rebeiz, 28, asked OpenAI's image generator, DALL-E 2, to imagine buildings in her hometown, Dakar. The algorithm produced arid desert landscapes and ruined buildings that Rebeiz said were nothing like the coastal homes in the Senegalese capital.

"It's demoralizing," Rebeiz said. "The algorithm skews toward a cultural image of Africa that the West has created. It defaults to the worst stereotypes that already exist on the internet.

Last year, OpenAI said it was establishing new techniques to diversify the images produced by DALL-E 2, so that the tool "generates images of people that more accurately reflect the diversity of the world's population.'

An artist featured in Rebeiz's exhibition, Minne Atairu is a doctoral candidate at Columbia University's Teachers College who planned to use image generators with young students of color in the South Bronx. But she now worries "that might cause students to generate offensive images," Atairu explained.

Included in the Feral File exhibition are images from her "Blonde Braids Studies," which explore the limitations of Midjourney's algorithm to produce images of Black women with natural blond hair. When the artist asked for an image of Black identical twins with blond hair, the program instead produced a sibling with lighter skin.

"That tells us where the algorithm is pooling images from," Atairu said. "It's not necessarily pulling from a corpus of Black people, but one geared toward white people.'

She said she worried that young Black children might attempt to gen-

PAGE 3

Business & Finance Fed Procurement Training To Empower Veteran Small Biz

In a recent move to support veteran small business owners, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.), Chair of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, has introduced a bill to establish the Veteran Federal Procurement Entrepreneurship Training Program. This initiative seeks to improve veterans' chances of securing federal contracts, further solidifying the government's commitment to supporting veterans in their entrepreneurial journeys.

Under the proposed legislation, eligible non-profit organizations could be granted funding if they have a history of providing veterans with educational and job training services and can offer a diverse pool of professional and industry experts for instruction. The bill stipulates that these non-profits may be required to match any federal funds provided by the Small Business Administration (SBA).

Chair Cardin emphasized that the bill's introduction follows his conversations with veterans at a small business roundtable in Frederick, Maryland. The discussion highlighted veterans' challenges when seeking to efficiently and effectively conduct business with the federal government. Cardin sees the proposed legislation as an answer to these concerns, stating, "We are forever indebted to our veterans for their immeasurable sacrifices and believe this program will aid them in achieving their entrepreneurial goals.'

The proposed program seeks to add another support layer to the 2021. SBA's existing initiatives for vet- These VBOCs, strategically located supporting veteran entrepreneurs preneurs. If passed, Cardin's new



eran small business owners. The across the country, serve as one-SBA already operates several programs, including VetCert, Service- active-duty service members, vet-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small erans, National Guard or reserve Business, and Surplus Personal Property for Veteran-Owned Small Business programs. Furthermore, the SBA oversees 22 Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOCs) nationwide, including one launched at the University of Maryland in

stop shops for transitioning or members, and military spouses. They offer transition assistance programs like Boots to Business, business training and workshops, mentoring, government contract guidance, and resource referrals.

Senator Cardin's legislation underscores a continued commitment to at both federal and state levels. The proposed bill could become a significant step in creating more opportunities for veteran small business owners, ensuring their sacrifices are acknowledged and their entrepreneurial goals are facilitated.

In the 2022 fiscal year alone, the SBA provided counseling and training to more than 58,500 veteran small business owners and entre-

this number, ushering in a new era veteran small business owners to of support and resources for the stay updated on new developments, brave men and women who have served their country and are now leverage the support designed to poised to contribute to its econom- help them succeed in their business ic growth.

legislation could potentially bolster The proposed legislation reminds seek out available resources, and endeavors.

Have You Checked **Out The Black Guide To Law Schools?**

African Americans represent a mere 7.9% of all law school students in the United States, well below the percentage of African Americans in the general population, which hovers near 12%. Lawyers of Color (LOC), an organization dedicated to supporting African American law students, is focused on providing ample information to prospective African American law students and increasing their presence in law schools.

For nearly a decade, LOC has ranked the "best" law schools for prospective African American students. However, according to Yolanda Young, the organization's CEO, LOC now realizes that "such rankings undermine equity in the legal profession." As a result, LOC will no longer rank law schools. Instead, the organization will present the American Bar Association (ABA) 509 filing data in a way that makes it easy to compare to other law schools, allowing students to make informed choices based on their personal needs and desires.

Young shared, "We are marking this as the end of the rankings era. Of course, "rankings" have their place, but it is alongside transparency and equity. Any data that is objective and verifiable is appropriate to report. Its significance should be left to the students to decide." She added, "rankings have rewarded the wealthiest law schools that use admissions criteria that reward wealthier law school candidates." Young is joined by many others across the nation calling for the end to college rankings of all types.

LOC wants to avoid the unfair and highly subjective process of using an opaque methodology to create a one-size fits all "ranking." Young stated, "We don't believe we are the ones to decide what should be the MOST important factors for any student." Instead, LOC has taken data that is publicly available to everyone and converted the raw data into percentages to allow for accurate comparisons.

Historic Home That Once Housed Freedom Fighters, Facing Foreclosure

By Stacy M. Brown

A piece of Maryland and Black history teetering on the edge of foreclosure is a home that holds significant significance.

NNPA

Once a refuge for the Freedom Riders, a group of activists who challenged segregation on buses and at bus terminals, the historical dwelling currently serves as the residence of prominent Civil Rights leader Janice Grant.

Grant, the former Harford County NAACP Chapter president, helped pave the way for African Americans ment, Grant recalled racial discrimito exercise their right to vote in the nation and voter suppression as sig-United States.

Now 90, Grant eagerly shared stories for them to meet at that time," Grant with the television station about the venerable home.

She said her family acquired the house in 1917, and it subsequently became a gathering place for civil rights activists.

"The Freedom Riders used to meet at that house," she exclaimed.

Grant herself is a celebrated Civil Rights icon, joining forces with Andrew Goodman and James Chaney in Mississippi to help register Black voters

Reflecting on the challenges faced during the 1960s civil rights movenificant obstacles.

said.

"The Freedom Riders knew this was a house they were welcomed."

According to the Harford Civil Rights Project at Harford Community College, Freedom Riders staged protests on Route 40 and the surrounding the area in 1961 to prevent racial segregation and exclusion in restaurants and hotels.

The Congress of Racial Equality and others negotiated, and many venues promised to abolish segregation in reaction to high-profile instances involving African diplomats, but not all establishments did so.

To end the region's companies' continued racism, young people racial discrimination in businesses, was passed in 1963 because of the occurrences involving African diplomats and the Freedom Riders protests.

Now, 60 years later, Grant's symbolic piece of history faces its own tribulations, standing on the precipice of foreclosure.

In the same televised interview, Grant's neighbor Patricia Cole expressed distress.

"I thought it was very tragic," she remarked. "Because it has such a rich history, it would be such a loss to be lost to foreclosure.

Grant emphasized that the house symbolizes hope for the future. "I want the young people to know

Famed Actor Hill Harper

Sadly, her historic and cherished abode, encapsulating decades of rich history, may soon slip away if she can't raise \$50,000 by the end of July.

"I want the young people to know their history," Grant asserted in an interview with WJZ TV in Aberdeen, emphasizing the importance of preserving this historical landmark.

During that tumultuous period, her house assumed a pivotal role in shaping history.

While churches in the area feared arson attacks for supporting the movement, Grant's home welcomed Freedom Riders like Mickey Schwerner.

"They would come from various

drove in and sat in whites-only restaurants and other establishments.

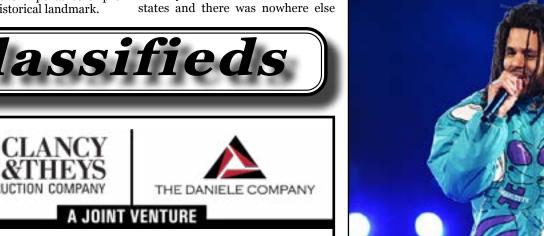
There were arrests made, and clashes between protesters and counter-protesters.

The Public Accommodations statute of Maryland, which forbade

their history," Grant asserted. don't care what color their skin is."

As of the latest update, a community-led Go Fund Me has raised just over \$4,000 of the needed \$50,000.

The deadline to gather the funds is fast approaching, on July 31.



PREQUALIFICATION NOTICE

Clancy & Theys Construction Co. - The Daniele Company - A Joint Venture - (421 N. Harrington Street Suite 200 Raleigh NC 27603, 919-834-3601) is soliciting subcontractors to submit Prequalifications for E-53 Pleasant Plains Elementary School with WCPSS for Bid Packages: Release 1 - 0500-Struct/Misc Steel, 1410-Elevators, 2200-Plumbing, 2300-HVAC, 2600-Electrical, 3100-Turnkey Site, 3110-Grading, 3210-Asphalt Paving, 3300-Site Utilities; Release 2 - 0210-Bldg. Cleaning, 0300-Turnkey Concrete, 0400-Masonry, 0710-Wtrproofing/Sealants, 0740-Wall Panels, 0750-Roofing, 0810-D/F/H, 0840-Alum/Glass, 0920-Drywall, 0930-Hard Tile, 0940-Terrazzo, 0950-ACT, 0960-Res.&Carpet, 0990-Painting, 1000-Specialties, 1010-Markerboards/Visual Displays, 1020-Signage, 1030-Operable Partitions, 1070-Prefab Canopies, 1140-Food Svc. Equip, 1220-Window Trtments, 1230-Educational Casework, 1280-Media Ctr Furnishings, 2100-Fire Prot., 2310-Bldg Automation/Controls, 3190-Offsite, 3240-Fencing, 3270-Site Concrete, 3290-Landscaping. Project includes new construction of an approximately 140,000 gsf elementary school building, parking lots, paved access drives, and site retaining walls. Prequalification forms for Release 1 are due by 9/11/2023 and Release 2 by 10/23/2023.

Prequalification forms & bid package descriptions are available by emailing Jessica Bates @ jessicabates@clancytheys.com.

An Information Session is scheduled for August 10th, 2023 from 5:30-7pm at Dix Park Chapel in Raleigh. For more information regarding the Information Session & M/WBE opportunity please contact Lisa Horton @ Lisahorton@clancytheys.com.

For second tier and supplier opportunities please contact Lisa Horton at Clancy & Theys. WCPSS and Clancy & Theys have an affirmative policy of fostering, promoting, and conducting business with minority owned enterprises. Minority contractors are encouraged to participate in the subcontractor qualification process.



Cole Makes It Official

J. Cole, who is a part-owner of the Charlotte Hornets, was spotted at a game on the opening night of the NBA Summer League.

On Friday (July 7), the Dreamville boss pulled up to his team's matchup against the San Antonio Spurs in Las Vegas. He was seen sitting courtside for a game that ended with a loss for the Hornets.

Coinciding with the Summer League kickoff is comedian Kevin Hart's birthday celebration at Resorts World, Hartbeat Weekend. In addition to Ludacris, Jack Harlow and PARTYNEXTDOOR, Cole was recruited to perform at the event.

Following the basketball match, the Fayetteville MC took the stage at Zouk Nightclub for an explosive set that spanned hits such as "No Role Modelz' and "Power Trip," among many others.

Cole recently made things official with the Charlotte Hornets after Michael Jordan sold his majority stake in the team.

According to a statement released by the team, the 4 Your Eyez Only rapper is part of the Buyer Group led by Gabe Plotkin and Rick Schnall alongside country singer Eric Church.

The Buyer Group reportedly purchased the franchise from MJ for \$3 billion after the Chicago Bulls icon bought the team in 2010 for \$275million.

Cole, a North Carolina native, has been a courtside mainstay at Hornets games over the years while supporting his home state team. As a lover of hoops and ambassador for the game, J. Cole's involvement shouldn't come as too much of a surprise.

In recent years, he's suited up in professional leagues in Canada and Africa. The 38-year-old made history as the first rapper to grace the cover of NBA 2K and was credited with helping Caleb Martin sign with the Miami Heat, who played an integral role in their Finals run.

The Hornets are coming off a lowly 27-55 season as the new ownership group and J. Cole will look to turn the franchise around and inject a proound enthusiasm and energy into the team while remaking its image.

Seeks U.S. Senate Seat

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

Hill Harper, the well-known actor recognized for his roles in hit television shows such as "CSI: NY" and "The Good Doctor," has declared his candidacy for Michigan's vacant U.S. Senate seat.

Harper's bid for the Democratic nomination sets him on a direct collision course with U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin.

With Harper's entry into the race, he becomes the sixth Democratic contender vying for the seat left open by retiring Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

A four-term senator. Stabenow announced her decision not to seek reelection in 2024, adding to the significance of the battleground state's upcoming election.

Although born in Iowa, Harper has established strong ties to Michigan.

He owns a residence in Detroit and made a notable investment in the city's business landscape by purchasing Roasting Plant Coffee in 2017.

Before pursuing an acting career, Harper attended Brown University and Harvard Law School.

His extensive acting portfolio includes a nine-season run on the CBS show "CSI: NY" and a current role on ABC's "The Good Doctor."

Harper's involvement in public service extends beyond the entertainment industry.

In 2012, President Barack Obama appointed Harper to his cancer panel because of his personal experience as a cancer survivor.

Harper's background as a small-business owner, union member, and activist positions him as a unique candidate who emphasizes his status as a non-career politician.

He declared that his campaign would be "powered by the people, for the people," hoping that this trait would give him an advantage in Congress.

In an interview with The Associated Press leading up to his announcement, Harper stressed the importance of representing the people rather than focusing on party lines.

He said he believed Michigan residents desired an independent voice in the U.S. Senate.

Harper faces the daunting challenge of catching up to Slotkin's impressive fundraising efforts and established campaign.

Slotkin, who has garnered endorsements from fellow U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens, has raised \$5.8 million in just over four months, with \$3.6 million remaining unspent.

Initially, many prominent Democratic candidates considering a Senate run chose not to compete after Slotkin's announcement in February.

However, in recent months, the field of Democratic candidates has expanded.

State Board of Education member Pamela Pugh, former Detroit state Rep. Leslie Love, businessman Nasser Beydoun, and attorney Zack Burns have all thrown their hats into the ring.

Michigan holds significant importance for the Democratic Party, as the state represents a must-win for maintaining control of the Senate.

Democrats anticipate tough races in other battleground states like Ohio, West Virginia, Montana, Nevada, and Pennsylvania.

In the 2020 election, Republican John James narrowly lost to incumbent Democratic Sen. Gary Peters, who now serves as a U.S. representative.

While two GOP candidates, including state Board of Education member Nikki Snyder, have declared their intentions to run, Republicans have yet to field a high-profile contender for the seat.

Notable figures like former U.S. Rep. Peter Meijer are reportedly considering bids.

Republicans have been successful in only one of Michigan's last 15 Senate races, securing an open seat victory in 1994.