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### Dual Enrollment Can Save College Students Time, Money

By Mary L. Churchill

**Boston Univ** 

In a recent talk about new ways to do college admissions, Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona spoke about his own experience taking a college course while still in high school. He was referring to dual enrollment - an increasingly common practice in which high school students take college courses, simultaneously earning high school and college credit.

A 2019 report showed that approximately 88% of U.S. high schools offered dual enrollment and approximately 34% of high school students in the U.S. are taking college courses. That represents an increase from 2010, when 82% of high schools offered dual enrollment and approximately 10% of high school students took college courses.

At the state level, there is evidence of dramatic growth. In Indiana, for example, 60% of high school students graduated with college credit in 2018, up from 39% in

As a higher education administrator who has been involved with dual enrollment in Boston's public schools, I know there is strong evidence that dual enrollment programs make it more likely that students graduate from high school and earn a college degree.

How dual enrollment works

Dual enrollment programs may be known by different names, such as early college, concurrent enrollment, joint enrollment or dual credit programs. One study found the use of 97 different terms nation-

The courses are different from Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. While



Students usually take these courses at their high schools, but they can also take them on a college campus, online or at another nearby high school. Some programs provide transportation to college campuses. The courses are offered in partnership with a college or university and taught by faculty from that college. Ideally, courses are offered during the standard high school day.

Academic and financial benefits

AP and IB courses cover college-lev- College Promise dual enrollment terials and transportation. During

program were 2% more likely to graduate from high school and 9% more likely to enroll in college compared with similar students who did not take dual enrollment courses.

Dual enrollment programs also provide a practical way for students and their families to save time and money. Students are able to take college courses for free or at a discounted rate while still in high school instead of paying tuition for the classes during college. The The North Carolina Career and programs often include books, ma-

el material, dual enrollment courses program found that students in the the 2017-18 school year, 78% of dual enrollment programs at public schools received full or partial funding from the school, district or state. Additional funding came from families, students or some other entity such as foundations

> However, equity gaps exist within dual enrollment programs. Recruitment efforts that do not target equity, a lack of qualified faculty. and certain eligibility requirements - such as minimum GPAs and standardized test scores - create

when dual enrollment programs are available at their high school, Black and Hispanic students participate at lower rates than their white and Asian classmates. In addition, students whose parents had earned at least a bachelor's degree were much more likely to take these courses than students whose parents had not earned a high school diploma.

Recruitment tool for colleges

Many colleges have experienced declining enrollments as of late, and some experts predict a looming "enrollment cliff" that some schools barriers for some students. Even won't survive. Dual enrollment pro-

ing more students to their campuses, where they often re-enroll after high school.

A recent study found that 60% of 18- and 19-year-old college students took dual enrollment courses at their college while in high school.

For community colleges, high school students in dual enrollment programs now make up close to 20% of their enrollments.

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers found in 2016 that 75% of colleges offering dual enrollment programs viewed them as an important form of recruitment.

However, the increased likelihood that a student will enroll in the college where they took dual enrollment courses in high school has raised concerns about "undermatching." Undermatching is a phenomenon in which high school students don't apply to a more selective college or university even though they have the ability. One study found that when dual enrollment students stay at a two-year college where they are undermatched instead of transferring to a more selective school - they are 33% less likely to complete a bachelor's de-

Still, dual enrollment programs have proven to be both successful and popular in states across the country. If current trends continue, and states such as Massachusetts continue to push for increased funding for dual enrollment, programs will continue to grow in high schools, on college campuses and

The hope is that growth in dual enrollment will lead to more students graduating from college and being able to get better jobs and live longer, healthier lives.

## Rising Interest Rates, Prices Keep Homeownership As A Distant Goal

NNPA—In the wake of escalating mortgage rates and soaring housing prices, the dream of homeownership in the United States is slipping further from the grasp of many Americans, particularly African Americans. Recent reports from financial and real estate authorities reveal that prospective homebuyers, burdened by the growing costs of homes and borrowing at higher interest rates. face an increasingly challenging landscape. Meanwhile, disparities in homeownership persist, disproportionately affecting minority communities, and access to mortgages remains an uphill battle.

current average 30-year fixed mortincrease over the past week. Mortgage refinance rates are also rising,



According to Bankrate.com, the with the average 30-year fixed refinance interest rate reaching 8.09%, gage interest rate stands at a stagger- up by 4 basis points in the same ing 8.01%, marking a 12-basis-point period. The rising interest rates compound the difficulties those in search of a home loan face.

The surging home prices and escalating mortgage rates put immense financial strain on buyers, especially African Americans.

The National Association of Realtors (NAR) reported that, even as

millions aim to purchase homes, the reality is starkly different from just a few years ago. In December 2020, 30-year fixed mortgage rates hit an all-time low of 2.68%, down significantly from 3.78% a year earlier. In tandem with the lower rates, housing prices skyrocketed. The median sale price of a single-family home has now risen above \$416,000 in the second quarter of 2023, up from less than \$360,000 in late 2020. U.S. home price indexes have reached historic highs, surpassing the reach of many median-income households. Lawrence Yun, the chief econo-

mist for the National Association of Realtors, noted that in late 2020, the monthly mortgage payment on a typical newly sold home was approximately \$1,100 in principal and

(See HOMEOWNERSHIP P. 2)



#### FIRST VICTORY OF SEASON OVER TEXANS 15-13 CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Bryce Young has heard the criticism, the sug-

gestion that Carolina made the wrong choice by taking him No. 1 overall instead of C.J. Stroud, who has put up big numbers for Houston.

It hasn't bothered the even-keeled Young. He has been preoccupied with scenarios like the one he faced on Sunday:

having a chance to lead his team to a victory in the fourth quarter.

The No. 1 overall pick did just that, moving the Panthers 86 yards in 15 plays to set up Eddy Pineiro's winning 23-yard field goal as time expired, iving Carolina its first victory of the season over the Stroud's Texans, 15-

"You love opportunities like that," Young said. "You go in and have a chance to end the game on your terms and just try to take the game. Down by one, what else would hope for? That's what we play for."

The winning drive included a clutch 3-yard completion in tight coverage to Adam Thielen on a fourth-and-2 to keep the chains moving.

"It was a man look 1-on-1 and Adam did a great job of creating separation and making a tough catch there," Young said. "That was a tough, contested catch with the game on the line. But it's not surprising at all with

The Panthers (1-6) snapped a 56-game losing streak in games they trailed at any point in the fourth quarter, the longest in NFL since at least 1991. Carolina's last fourth-quarter comeback win was Oct. 21, 2018, against the Philadelphia Eagles.

# Supreme Court To Hear Arguments In Key Case About Gerrymandering

By Claire Wofford and Gibbs Knotts

College of Charleston

A South Carolina case about gerrymandering - the drawing of legislative district lines to maximize political power - that could affect voting rights around the country will be one of the cases decided by the U.S. Supreme Court during its upcoming 2023-2024

The case, Alexander v. South Carolina State Conference of the NAACP, concerns the way state legislatures consider race and party when they are redrawing state voting maps.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1993 in Shaw v. Reno that racial gerrymandering - when legislatures draw district lines primarily based on race - is unconstitutional, regardless of legislators' intent, except in rare circumstances. Voters' party identification, however, is fair game.

At issue in the case before the Supreme Court is how the South Carolina Legislature redrew its 1st Congressional District after the 2020 census. The majority Republican lawmakers moved over 140,000 residents from the 1st Congressional District into the

6th Congressional District. The NAACP argues the Legislature

moved over 30,000 of those residents because they were Black, in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In past cases, the Supreme Court has interpreted the equal protection clause to prohibit racial gerrymandering. But the South Carolina maintains the Legislature moved the residents to ensure the district was majority-Republican and that residents' race was not a major consider-

In October 2021, the NAACP and a South Carolina voter challenged several of South Carolina's new state and congressional districts in federal court. A three-judge panel ruled in January 2023 that the Legislature, despite its protestations to the contrary, had moved residents primarily based on their race. The panel gave the Legislature until March 31, 2023, to submit a new map, but extended the deadline after the state appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which announced on May 15, 2023, that it would hear

As political scientists who research legislative and judicial politics, we study gerrymandering and how legislatures use the practice to ensure political and partisan control. We believe that the court's decision in the Alexander case will affect how legislatures handle redistricting in the future.

No clear precedent

The issue of redistricting is not an area of settled law. In the spring of 2023, the Supreme Court issued two rulings on voting rights that surprised many court observers. In Allen v. Milligan, the court required Alabama to draw an additional district with a maiority Black population to ensure Black voters could elect representatives of

In Moore v. Harper, the court reaffirmed that state legislatures do not have total control over redistricting - state courts can decide redistricting cases. Had the Supreme Court ruled the other way, there would have been no court that could hear claims of partisan gerrymandering in federal elec-

The Alexander case is like Milligan and Moore in that it involves challenges to state redistricting plans. But because the precise legal questions differ, the Milligan and Moore decisions tell us little about how the Supreme Court may rule in Alexander.

Because Alexander is about the equal protection clause, rather than, as in Milligan, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, different legal doctrines apply.

Under the Voting Rights Act, it

doesn't matter whether a legislature intended to discriminate against racial minorities. If the new districts significantly limited their voting power, it is

In equal protection clause cases, it's not just the impact on minority voters that matters; it's how the legislature thought about and used race when it drew districts. If the legislature used the race of voters as the predominant factor in drawing the district, then its redistricting plan, absent a compelling reason, is unconstitutional.

Many organizations celebrated the decisions by the conservative-leaning court to limit the ability of legislatures to shape elections. But state lawmakers in Alabama initially refused to comply with the Mulligan ruling. On Sept. 26, 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that Alabama must redraw the map to create a second majority Black voting district.

Supreme Court has heard gerrymandering cases before

Drawing legislative district lines to maximize political power has been around since the early days of the republic. But despite the long history of gerrymandering in the United States, there is growing evidence that Ameri-

(See GERRYMANDERING P. 2)

#### TEACHERS' ADVOCATES CHALLENGE PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAM IN SOUTH CAROLINA

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — A group of South Carolina parents and teachers' advocates filed a challenge Thursday to a new Republican-backed law allowing taxpayer dollars to help families pay for private schools.

As it stands, up to 15,000 students will eventually access \$6,000 annually in publicly funded savings accounts that can be used toward private K-12 tuition. The South Carolina Education Association and state chapter of the NAACP want the state's highest court to toss out the program that they said runs afoul of a prohibition on the use of government funds to directly benefit private educational institutions.

Plaintiffs say the voucher program violates several other sections of the South Carolina Constitution. They argue the state is failing its duty to provide a "system of free public schools open to all children" by covering costs at private schools that are neither free nor open to all.

The challengers expressed concern that state money would make its way to private schools that could discriminate against their disabled or LGBTQ children, while also undermining support for rural districts and exacerbat-

The law also "impermissibly" expands the authority of the state Superintendent of Education beyond her role overseeing public education by tasking her office with administering the program, according to the plaintiffs.

Republican Gov. Henry McMaster told reporters on Thursday that the money goes to parents, not schools — a move that makes him confident the law will stand. Plaintiffs noted that parents would only select the school where funds get sent from accounts controlled by the state Department of

A conservative think tank called the Palmetto Promise Institute compared the accounts to existing state programs like tuition grants that colege students can use for private higher education.

One lawmaker central to the effort also expressed certainty in the constitutionality of the program.

On behalf of the parents and children of our state, I'm looking forward to a quick victory in favor of disadvantaged students who deserve better.'

(See STATE BRIEFS P. 2)

### GERRYMANDERING

Continued from page 1

can voters have become disdainful of the process.

Aside from its ruling on racial gerrymandering in the 1993 Shaw case, the Supreme Court has ruled on partisan gerrymandering as well. That's when legislators draw district lines based on citizens' political party affiliation. In Rucho v. Common Cause in 2019, the court ruled that partisan gerrymandering claims

The Alexander case is significant because it turns largely on whether race or party drove the South Carolina Legislature's map-making process, and it offers the Supreme Court the chance to clarify how a judge can make the distinction.

The challenge for the Supreme Court is that race and party significantly overlap, particularly in South Carolina. According to national exit polls, 87% of Black voters supported Democrat Joe Biden and 58% of white voters backed Republican Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election. In fact, scholars have argued that Black voters are the most politically unified group in American politics. The race and party connection is even more pronounced in South Carolina. There, 90% of Black voters supported Biden and 73% of white voters opted for

Scholars refer to this phenomenon as conjoined polarization. The Supreme Court wrestled with this issue in 2001 in Easley v. Cromartie and again in 2016 in Cooper v. Harris. But the results in those cases only muddied the waters because they failed to specify how plaintiffs could demonstrate that legislators were motivated by racial, rather than partisan, considerations.

The Alexander case also raises the question of whether legislators can take advantage of conjoined polarization and move voters based on race to create a partisan-dominated district. In 2017, the Supreme Court said this is likely unconstitutional, but the suggestion was relegated to footnotes and rejected by conservative Justices Samuel Alito and John Roberts. Conservative Justice Clarence Thomas wrote his own opinion and newly appointed Justice Neil Gorsuch, also a conservative, did not participate. Since then, two other conservatives justices – Amy Coney Barrett and Brett Kavanaugh – have joined the court.

Conjoined polarization among American voters is likely to continue, as are attempts to maximize political advantage through redistricting. But the Alexander decision could provide a clearer path for voters to prove whether racial, rather than partisan, motivations guided legislative redistricting.

If the Supreme Court decides Alexander in line with its recent support for minority voting rights, there will be ramifications for voting rights across the nation that could reshape American democracy for decades.

#### **HOMEOWNERSHIP**

Continued from page 1

interest. Today, it has more than doubled, further exacerbating buyers' chal-

The NAR's calculations indicate that a buyer now needs to earn \$107,232 annually to afford a median-priced home, based on recent rates and a 20% down payment, allocating 25% of their gross monthly income to housing expenses. This figure surpasses the real median household income of \$74,580 in 2022, as the U.S. Census Bureau reported. Yun emphasizes that those who don't earn six figures will face significant hurdles in affording a home in

The NAR's monthly housing affordability index, which reflects the ability of a median-income individual to purchase a home above the median price, has plummeted from nearly 170 before the COVID-19 pandemic to a preliminary total of 91.7 in August, the lowest reading since October 1985.

These challenges in homeownership are hitting minority communities hard, with African Americans at the forefront of the struggle. The homeownership gap between Black Americans and other racial groups is widening, particularly compared to white households. While the overall homeownership rate in the U.S. has increased over the last decade, the Black homeownership rate has grown less than 1 percentage point, reaching 44% in 2021. This falls significantly behind Hispanic Americans at 50.6%, Asian Americans at 62.8%, and White Americans at 72.7%.

NAR's deputy chief economist and vice president of research, Jessica Lautz, underscores the disproportionate impact on Black buyers. Black homeowners allocate a more significant portion of their income to housing expenses, with 30% being cost-burdened. This is followed by Hispanic Americans at 28%, Asian Americans at 26%, and White Americans at 21%. Over half of Black renters spend over 30% of their income on rent, with nearly 30% classified as severely cost-burdened, spending over 50% of their income on rent. In contrast, 22% of White renters are severely cost-bur-

These affordability challenges extend beyond the cost of homeownership. Black and Hispanic homebuyers also face higher denial rates for mortgage loans. According to Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data, 20% of Black and 15% of Hispanic loan applicants were denied mortgages, compared to 11% of White and 10% of Asian applicants. Black Americans were denied applications for nearly 17% of home purchase loans, 17% of refinancing loans, and a staggering 51% of home improvement loans.

"The data paints a stark picture of the American housing market, where the dream of homeownership has become increasingly unattainable, particularly for African Americans," said Nathaniel Ogilvie, a District of Columbia real estate broker. "We already have so many disparities that keep African providing the funding, while the data Americans from affording homes, so addressing the housing affordability crisis and ensuring equitable access to mortgages is still a pressing issue that ed by Meharry, called the Diaspora must be addressed nationally and must be addressed with Black Americans

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### Most Voters Will Have No Choice About Who Represents Them In The Legislature

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — After being in office for over a decade, Mississippi state Sen. Dean Kirby got challenged in the Republican primary. He won with 70% of the vote.

That was in 2003 — and it remains the last time Kirby faced an opponent. The longtime Jackson-area senator is on the ballot again this year without either a Democratic or Re-

While the length of Kirby's uncontested streak is unusual, his situation is not. More than four-fifths of Mississippi's legislative candidates will have no major-party opposition in the Nov. 7 general election. And more than half of this year's winners will have faced no other Republicans or Democrats in either the primary or the general election.

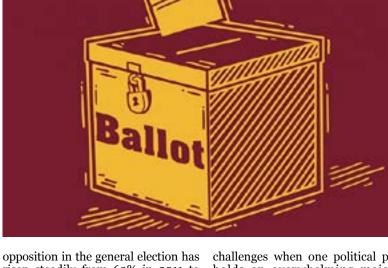
"I think people are happy with the state and the way things are going," Kirby, Mississippi's Senate president pro tem, said in explaining the lack of

Though Mississippi represents an extreme example, it highlights a national decline in competition for state legislative seats. New research suggests the reasons are more complex than mere voter satisfaction with incumbents. It also raises questions about the ability of American voters to hold their elected representatives accountable.

In some states, "there's so many uncontested seats that one party wins the chamber before an election takes place," said Steven Rogers, a political scientist at Saint Louis University who focuses on state legislatures.

A democracy "relies on this notion that the people will have some sort of choice," Rogers added. But "without someone running for office, there isn't really a choice.'

In Mississippi, the percentage of legislative seats with no major-party



risen steadily from 63% in 2011 to 85% this year. The percentage with no Republican or Democratic challengers in either the primary or the general election has grown from 45% to 57% over that same time, according to data compiled for The Associated Press by Ballotpedia, a nonprofit organization that tracks elections.

Rogers' research found that legislative competition around the U.S. has been dwindling for decades. Though contested elections were common in the 1960s and 1970s, about 35% of incumbent state lawmakers did not face either a primary or general election challenger from 1991 to 2020, according to Rogers' new book, "Accountability in State Legislatures.'

One reason is political gerrymandering — a process by which those in power draw voting districts to give their party's candidates an advantage.

Lawmakers are less likely to face races they think they're going to lose,"

challenges when one political party holds an overwhelming majority in the legislature and when district boundaries are drawn to include voters predominately favoring one party, Rogers found. Competition also is lower when lawmakers' salaries are lower. And fewer challengers are likely to step forward when they are of the same party as an unpopular

All those factors are in play this year in Mississippi. Republicans currently hold lopsided legislative majorities. The vast majority of districts are packed with voters favoring one party. The legislative salary is \$23,500, plus a daily expense allowance when lawmakers are at work. And President Joe Biden is underwater in public opinion polls, adding to the challenge for fellow Democrats in Mississippi.

"Candidates don't want to run

said Abhi Rahman, communications director for the national Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee.

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The DLCC is spending a few thousand dollars this year on several legislative races in the largely uncompetitive Republican-leaning states of Mississippi and Louisiana. It said it has spent \$50,000 in Democraticcontrolled New Jersey, one of just four states with legislative elections this year. But it has spent \$2.2 million so far on legislative races in Vir-

Other Democratic- and Republican-aligned groups also are pouring millions of dollars into Virginia's legislative races.

The stakes are high in Virginia narrow majority in the Senate while Republicans hold a slim majority in the House of Delegates and control the governor's office. Both parties see a pathway to a legislative majority. The races also are being watched as a test of the two major parties' messaging ahead of the national 2024 elec-

In contrast to Mississippi, the percentage of Republican or Democratic candidates in Virginia facing no major-party opposition in either the primary or general election has declined from 61% in 2011 to 28% this year, according to Ballotpedia data. The districts in place for this year's election were crafted by court-appointed experts after a bipartisan commission responsible for redrawing boundaries based on 2020 census data failed to reach a consensus.

"In Virginia, there's a sense that no matter what the district is, you at least have a puncher's chance," Rahman said. "Whereas in states like Mississippi and Louisiana, a lot of people feel like they're just running to

# People Of African Ancestry Have Been Poorly Represented In Genetic Studies

lect genetic material from 500,000 people of African ancestry to create what they believe will be the world's largest database of genomic information from the population.

The hope is to build a new "reference genome" - a template to compare to full sets of DNA from individuals — and better understand genetic variants that affect Black people. It could eventually translate into new medicines and diagnostic tests and help reduce health disparities.

The initiative was launched Wednesday by Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, as well as Regeneron Genetics Center, AstraZeneca, Novo Nordisk and Roche. The pharmaceutical companies are will be managed by a nonprofit start-Human Genomics Institute.

Organizers said there's a clear need for the project, pointing to research showing that less than 2% of genetic information being studied today comes from people of African

We are going to bridge that gap, and this is just the beginning," said Anil Shanker, senior vice president for research and innovation at Me-

Scientists have long known that

because it mostly relies on genetic cluded the genetic material of 24 material from one man and doesn't reflect the spectrum of human diver-

Although any two people's genomes — that is, a set of instructions to build and sustain a human being - are more than 99% identical, scientists say they want to understand the differences.

The project is not connected with related research already underway. In May, scientists published four reference genome that they call a also recruit volunteers. Project or-

people of African ancestry, 16 from the Americas and the Caribbean, six from Asia and one from Europe.

In the new project, Meharry, a historically Black academic health sciences center, will recruit patients from the Nashville area to donate blood, then send it to the Regeneron Genetics Center, which will do the genetic sequencing for free.

Other historically Black colleges and universities in the U.S., and the studies about building a diverse University of Zambia in Africa, will

working with other universities in Africa, as well as medical centers and health departments there. Organizers expect enrollment to take about five years. All information will be

After the genetic sequencing, the data will go into a repository at the Diaspora Human Genomics Institute, and the database will be provided exclusively to HBCUs and the institutions involved in Africa. Outside researchers can access the information through those institu-

"You can imagine if these schools have such a resource, other academic institutions are going to want to collaborate with them," said Lyndon Mitnaul, executive director for Genetics Center.

Corporate partners will be able to use the data for research and to develop medicines and diagnostic tests.

The 10-year initiative also involves establishing a grant program to support research and education in genomics and related fields at Meharry, plus broader STEM programs for grade-school children in diverse communities. Each of the pharmaceutical companies involved intends to contribute \$20 million toward the genetic and educational parts of the

### G-7 Nations Back Strong Supply Chains For Energy And Food Despite Global Tensions

officials from the Group of Seven wealthy democracies strengthened their pledge Sunday to work together to ensure smooth supply chains for essentials like energy and food despite global uncertainties.

The nations promised to maintain "a free and fair trading system based on the rule of law and enhancing economic resilience and economic security," officials said in a joint statement.

Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa,

the western city of Osaka, pointed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war as the latest threats to stable energy and food supplies.

We nations that share important values have a position of responsibility amid growing uncertainties," she said in closing the meeting, stressing democracy, inclusiveness and human rights.

Worries are growing among developed nations about maintaining

well as essential minerals, like lithium, which are critical these days amid the demand for electric vehicles and other green energy. The G-7 includes the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and

Britain. The European Union, Australia, Chile, India, Indonesia and Kenya were invited to take part in the two-day meeting, as were economic organizations such as the World Trade Organization.

The G-7 nations reiterated their criticism of what they called in their joint statement "Russia's brutal, unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. The participants discussed how

trade policy can contribute to tackling climate change, strengthening food security, promoting digital trade and working toward sustainable develop-Trade is one sector where growing

political tensions with China have been playing out, although China was not directly mentioned in the meet-

China, while absent at the meetings, loomed as a focal point. China has imposed export curbs on two metals used in computer chips and solar cells – gallium and germanium — that it said were intended to "safeguard national

At the G-7 summit in Hiroshima in southwestern Japan earlier this year, participants referred to "economic

TOKYO (AP) — Trade and economy who co-hosted the two-day event in a stable supply of computer chips as coercion" in an oblique reference to China's leveraging some nations' dependence for economic items. That phrase was again used at the Osaka

> As the host nation, Japan focused on how China has banned imports of Japanese seafood after the recent massive release of treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant, which experienced reactor meltdowns in

Yasutoshi Nishimura, the Japanese minister in charge of trade and the economy, said G-7 nations expressed support and understanding for Japan's position, stressing the safety of Japanese food based on scientific evidence, including that from Fukushima. Japan will continue to press for the food bans to end, he told reporters.

Nishimura also said the guest nations that took part in the G-7 meeting, including Australia and India. were potentially powerful allies in strengthening the supply chain in valuable materials.

Bilateral agreements on the sidelines included one between Britain and Japan to work together on mineral-supply chains that both sides said were essential to achieve clean energy and effective national defense.

Japan also reached a deal with the EU on digital data exchanges, affirming a commitment to work together on standards to facilitate digital-sector trade, including online exchanges.

#### STATE BRIEFS Continued from page 1

Republican state Sen. Larry Grooms wrote in a statement to AP.

The Republican-controlled state Legislature passed the decades-long priority this year amid a wave of GOP support for the "school choice" movement. Groups that study the programs report that as many as 16 states have some form of the vouchers. Families in South Carolina are slated to begin taking advantage of the program next fall, but other states are already seeing more people take the offer than officials anticipated.

Supporters expect the vouchers to expand opportunities for students in districts that aren't meeting their needs and increase guardians' control over their children's learning environments.

The measure's largely Democratic opponents argued the funds would be better spent improving under-resourced public schools, rather than subsidizing the high tuition costs at unaccountable private educational institu-

Officials may have another option in the event the program does get struck. The South Carolina House has already passed a bill to let voters decide if they should jettison a state constitutional amendment that could stand in Republicans' way. The question of whether to maintain a provision barring the use of public funds for the direct benefit of religious or private schools would make the ballot at the next general election if the measure gets two-thirds support in the state Senate.

### Business & Finance

## Magic Johnson Becomes Fourth Athlete Billionaire: Lakers Icon Joins Michael Jordan, LeBron James, & Tiger Woods

lionaire, according to Forbes. This means the Lakers legend will be just the fourth athlete to achieve this benchmark, joining Michael Jordan, LeBron James and Tiger

Forbes now estimates Johnson's net worth to be \$1.2 billion. After becoming the first overall pick in the 1979 NBA Draft out of to have one of the most iconic careers in NBA history.

Johnson was the NBA's assists include five NBA championships and 12 All-Star appearances.

However, Johnson earned most entering the NBA. of money after he was done playing. In fact, Forbes reports he made \$40 million from his NBA as 100,000 shares in stocks at ments to new heights.

being a savvy business man who Nike was still a new company invests in multiple different areas.

Johnson has ownership stakes in three Los Angeles-based sports teams, including the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks, MLB's Los Angeles Dodgers and MLS' LAFC. He also invested in the NFL's Commanders earlier this year. Johnson's non-sports investments Michigan State, Johnson went on include Starbucks, Burger King, 24 Hour Fitness and the life insurance company EquiTrust.

Interestingly enough, Johnson leader four times and steals leader actually had a chance to become twice. His many accomplishments a billionaire sooner as Converse, Adidas and Nike approached him day.' with shoe deal offers when he was

\$1 for each shoe they sold, as well

and Johnson didn't know much about investing. He took a deal with Converse, which offered him \$100,000 a year, instead.

"My family didn't come from money, that's one thing that hurt us [sometimes]. When you don't come from money, you don't know. I didn't even know what stocks [were] at that time," Johnson said on the "All The Smoke" podcast earlier this year. "So I passed on the stocks. Can you imagine? 45 years, \$5 billion that stock would have been worth to-

But even if he missed out on that deal, Johnson has still be-Nike allegedly offered Johnson come one of the elite athletes who have taken their financial achieve-



## UAW Escalates Strike Against Lone Holdout GM After Landing Tentative Pacts With Both Stellantis And Ford

Auto Workers union has widened its strike against General Motors, the lone holdout among the three Detroit automakers, after reaching a tentative contract agreement with Jeep maker Stellantis.

The escalated walkout began Saturday evening at a Spring Hill, Ten-America, just hours after the Stellantic deal was reached. Its nearly already striking at GM factories in Texas, Michigan and Missouri.

The UAW did not immediately explain what prompted the new action after 44 days of targeted strikes. The

vehicles assembled in a total of nine plants as far afield as Mexico, including Silverado and Sierra pickups. One plant already on strike it supplies with engines, in Arlington Texas, makes full-size SUVs including the Tahoe and Suburban. Vehicles assembled at Spring Hill include the nessee plant, GM's largest in North electric Cadillac Lyriq, GMC Acadia and Cadillac crossover SUVs.

"The Spring Hill walkout affects 4,000 workers join about 14,000 so much of GM's production that the company is likely to settle quickly or close down most production," said Erik Gordon, a University of Michigan business professor. The union wants to wrap negotiations with added pressure on GM is substantial all three automakers so "Ford and

DETROIT (AP) - The United as Spring Hill makes engines for Stellantis workers don't vote down (their) tentative agreements because they want to see what GM workers

> The Stellantis deal mirrors one reached last week with Ford, and saves jobs at a factory in Belvidere, Illinois, that Stellantis had planned to close, the UAW said.

> On Sunday, presidents of the union locals involved voted to endorse their tentative contract with Ford after UAW President Shawn Fain explained it, said a union official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to make the information public. The vote count was not immediately known.

> Fain was to address the full membership, which will now vote on the pact, on Facebook later Sunday.

GM said it was disappointed with the additional strike at the Spring Hill plant, which has 11 million square feet of building space, "in light of the progress we have made." It said in a statement that is has bargained in good faith and wants a deal as soon as possible.

In a statement, Fain lamented what he called "GM's unnecessary and irresponsible refusal to come to a fair agreement."

"Everybody's really fired up and call. "We thought it was going to happen earlier.

UAW Local 1853 President John Rutherford in Spring Hill didn't immediately return a telephone mes-

Plumbing

\*BP 1-22A -



Fain said in a video appearance Saturday night that 43,000 members at Stelantis would have to vote on the deal — just as Ford workers must. About 14,000 UAW workers had been on strike at two Stellantis assembly plants in Michigan and Ohio, and several parts distribution centers across the country. The company makes Jeep and Ram vehicles.

The pact includes 25% in general wage increases over the next 4 1/2 years for top assembly plant workers, with 11% coming once the deal is ratified. Workers also will get costof-living pay that would bring the excited," Spring Hill assembly line raises to a compounded 33%, with worker Larry Montgomery said by top assembly plant workers making phone on Sunday. He said workers more than \$42 per hour. At Stelwere taken by surprise by the strike lantis, top-scale workers now make around \$31 per hour.

Like the Ford contract, the Stellantis deal would run through April 30,

Under the deal, the union said it saved jobs in Belvidere as well at an engine plant in Trenton, Michigan, and a machining factory in Toledo,

"We have reopened an assembly plant that was closed," Fain said. The deal includes a commitment by Stellantis to build a new midsize combustion-engine truck at the Belvidere factory that was slated to be closed. About 1,200 workers will be hired back, plus another 1,000 workers will be added for a new electric vehicle battery plant, the union said.

Vice President Rich Boyer, who led the Stellantis talks, said the workforce will be doubled at the Toledo, Ohio, machining plant. The union, he said, won \$19 billion worth of investment across the U.S.

Fain said Stellantis had proposed cutting 5,000 U.S. jobs, but the union's strike changed that to adding 5,000 jobs by the end of the con-

Gordon, the University of Michigan professor, said the Stellantis "shows that the car companies feel they are at the mercy of the UAW, that the UAW is not going to

will be co-governed by their boards and the UAW."

He said competing companies with non-unionized workforces, which include Toyota and Tesla, "couldn't have gotten a better year-

Under the Stellantis contract, a top-scale assembly plant worker's base wage will exceed all increases in the past 22 years. Starting wages for new hires will rise 67% including cost-of-living adjustments to over \$30 per hour, it said in a statement. Temporary workers will get raises of more than 165%, while workers at parts centers will get an immediate 76% increase if the contract is rati-

Like the Ford agreement, it will take just three years for new workers to get to the top of the assembly pay scale, the union said.

The union also won the right to strike over plant closures at Stellantis, and can strike if the company doesn't meet product and investment commitments, Fain said.





### ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has the following contract in Pasquotank County out for bid: C-C11635 Pasquotank CI Shower Repair . The bid opening is scheduled for: Thursday, 12/07/2023 . To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit:

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#### NOTICE TO SUBCONTRACTORS

NC STATE UNIVERSITY: DOAK FIELD ENHANCEMENTS - PHASE 1 PREQUALIFICATION ANNOUNCEMENT

Notice to Subcontractors: Romeo Guest - Right Build, A Joint Venture, on behalf of NC State University, is seeking to gain subcontractor and vendor interest for enhancements to Doak Field (Baseball) at NCSU - Phase 1. We will be hosting a Preproposal/Information session to introduce this project and discuss the scope of work, timeline, expectations, and current project approach and pregualification form.

#### **Project Description:**

\*BP 1-01A -

Fencing

The overall project includes two phases of stadium enhancements to the existing baseball program at NCSU. The enhancements are focused on player development as well as fan experience. Phase 1 (+/- \$1.2M) is primarily enabling work that consists of construction of a preengineered metal building (PEMB) to house temporary indoor batting and pitching facilities. The second phase (+/- \$15M) of construction includes demolition of the existing batting/pitching facility in right field in preparation of the construction of a new indoor batting and pitching facility accompanied by additional athlete and fan amenities. Also, as part of Phase 2, left field enhancements are intended to provide additional terraced seating and concessions to enhance the fan experience.

#### **Bid Packages for Phase 1 will include:**

**General Trades** 

BP 1-01B -Surveying & Staking \*BP 1-23A -**HVAC** BP 1-02A -Demolition \*BP 1-26A -**Electrical** Cast-in-Place Concrete (Turnkey) \*BP 1-03A -\*BP 1-32A -Sitework (Turnkey) BP 1-07A -Joint Sealants / Subgrade Waterproofing BP 1-32B -Segmental Retaining Wall BP 1-08A -**Overhead Coiling Doors** BP 1-32C -**Aluminum** 

\*BP 1-11A-**Sports Equipment & Netting** 

#### \*= Bid packages that will require prequalification **Important Items to Note:**

• A Pre-Proposal/Information Session will be held November 1st, 2023, @3:00 pm Location: Administrative Services III - 2601 Wolf Village Way Raleigh NC 27607: Room 124A & 124B

- To Access the Pregual Form: https://romeoguest.box.com/v/NCSU-Doak-Sub-Pregual-PH1 • For Inquiries contact: Scott Wolynec at 919-683-1701 Swolynec@romeoguest.com or
- Joshua Spells at 919-651-8383 Jspells@rightbuildint.com Please submit prequal forms to Joshua Spells at 2232 Page Road, Suite 102, Durham NC
- 27703 (Hard Copies) Or projectcompliance@rightbuildint.com (Electronic Copies) • To RSVP: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ncsu-prequal-announcement-preproposal-infor-
- mation-session-tickets-745556498557?aff=oddtdtcreator

\*\*\*\* Prequalification Deadline: Thursday, November 16th, 2023, by 3pm \*\*\*\*







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### Health & Fitness

# Syphilis, Other STDs Are On The Rise Across The US. States Lost Millions Of Dollars To Fight And Treat Them

partments across the U.S found out in June they'd be losing the final two years of a \$1 billion investment to strengthen the ranks of people who track and try to prevent sexually transmitted diseases — especially the rapid increase of syphilis

The fallout was quick: Nevada, which saw a 44 percentage-point jump in congenital syphilis from 2021 to 2022, was supposed to get more than \$10 million to bolster its STD program budget. Instead, the state's STD prevention budget went down by more than 75%, reducing its capacity to respond to syphilis, according to Dawn Cribb at the Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health.

Several states told The Associated Press that the biggest impact from having the program canceled in the national debt ceiling deal is that they're struggling to expand their disease intervention specialist workforce. These people do contact tracing and outreach, and are a key piece of trying to stop the spread of syphilis, which reached a low point in the U.S. in 2000 but has increased almost every year since. In 2021, there were 176,713 cases — up 31% from the prior year.

"It was devastating, really, because we had worked so hard to shore up our workforce and also Burgess, the STD/HIV program di-



Deneshun Graves, a disease intervention specialist with the Houston Health Department, walks to a client's residence for a visit in Houston on Thursday, Oct. 26, 2023. "When you have a mother who didn't know (she had syphilis), it can be very emotional trying to explain ... it could have been prevented if we could have caught it before," says Graves. (AP Photo/Michael Wyke)

receive more than \$14 million over- country also point to the increase in all, but instead got \$8.6 million that must be spent by January 2026. 'And we're still scrambling to try to figure out how we can plug some of those funding gaps.

While men who have sex with implement new activities," said Sam men are disproportionately im- lis per 100,000 live births. pacted by syphilis, the U.S. Centers rector for the Louisiana Department for Disease Control and Preven-

pregnant women who are passing syphilis to their babies. It can cause serious health issues for infants, including blindness and bone damage, or lead to stillbirths. In 2021, there were 77.9 cases of congenital syphi-

Disease intervention specialists often link infected mothers and of Health. His state was slated to tion and health officials across the their partners with care for syphi-

adults, like fever and sores. Doing to go in and get treatment. You have so in a timely manner can prevent congenital syphilis. The specialists also can help pregnant patients find prenatal care.

When you have a mother who didn't know (she had syphilis), it can be very emotional trying to explain ... it could have been prevented if we could have caught it combination of funding shortages before," said Deneshun Graves, a public health investigator with the Houston Health Department.

Lupita Thornton, a public health investigator manager in the health department, said she is worried about being able to treat pregnant syphilis patients "before 30 days of delivery, for the baby's sake."

The Houston Health Department is in the midst of what it calls a "rapid community outreach response" because of syphilis cases increased by 128% among women from 2019 to 2022, and congenital syphilis cases went from 16 in 2019 to 151 in 2021.

Its STD/HIV bureau was set to receive a total of \$10.7 million from the federal grant, but will end up with about 75% of that.

The department has used the money to hire disease intervention specialists and epidemiologists — including Graves. But Thornton said she could use "double of everything," and had planned to bring down the caseload for her investigators by hiring even more people.

It would help Graves, who deals

people that don't want to answer the phone, so you got to continue to call," Graves said.

Mississippi is also seeing an uptick in congenital syphilis cases, which a recently published study showed rose tenfold between 2016 and 2022. Health officials said a and poor access to prenatal care compounds their ability to stop the spread of syphilis.

The Mississippi State Department of Health was supposed to get more than \$9 million in federal grant money over five years to expand its disease intervention workforce. Agency head Dr. Dan Edney said one of his top priorities now is finding money from other parts of the state's health budget.

He said the state has been "challenged because of limited state funding" and will need to "cannibalize resources from every program we can so that we can increase our diagnostic rates or treatment rates, just because you get a funding cut.

vestigations."

Arizona has the highest rate of congenital syphilis in the nation: 232.3 cases per 100,000 live births. The federal money helped the state Department of Health Services clear out a backlog of several thousands of non-syphilis STD investigations that had been stalled for years, said Rebecca Scranton, the deputy bureau chief of infectious disease and services.

"We were finally at the point where we were able to breathe again," Scranton said, "and start really kind of tackling it."

Scranton acknowledges syphilis will take awhile to fully address, and will look to preserve some of the unspent grant money for what lies

"You don't know what challenges are going to come. You know they're going to come, and you just keep getting creative because our job is really to get services to the folks," she said. "And that doesn't change

### White Patients More Likely Than Blacks To Be Given Opioids



THE CONVERSATION-White people who visit hospital emergency departments with pain are 26% more likely than Black people to be given opioid pain medications such as morphine. This was a key finding from our recent study, published in the Journal of General Internal Medicine. We also found that Black patients were 25% more likely than white patients to be given only non-opioid painkillers such as ibuprofen, which are typically available over the counter.

We examined more than 200,000 visit records of patients treated for pain, taken from a representative sample of U.S. emergency departments from 1999 to 2020. Although white patients were far more likely to be prescribed opioid medication for their pain, we found no significant differences across race in either the type or severity of patients' pain. Furthermore, racial disparities in pain medication remained even after we adjusted for any differences in insurance status, patient age, census region or other potentially

Our analysis of prescribing trends spanning over two decades' worth of records found that opioid prescribing rates rose and fell, reflecting changing attitudes in clinical practice toward the use of opioid drugs. Notably, however, there appeared to be little change over time in the prescribing disparity across race.

Why it matters

These findings are important because they suggest that efforts to promote equitable health care in the U.S. over the past two decades, such as the Affordable Care Act, or "Obamacare," do not appear to have translated to clinical practice – at least with regards to pain management in hospital emergency departments.

There's no question that as the ongoing opioid crisis continues to escalate, a careful balance must be struck between the risks and benefits of prescribing opioids. But their appropriate use is an essential component of pain control in the emergency department, and they typically provide superior relief to non-opioids for short-term moderate to severe pain.

Undertreated pain produces unnecessary suffering and can result in a range of negative outcomes, even including a greater likelihood of developing long-term pain. There are over 40 million pain-related emergency department visits annually, so it is clear that equitable pain treatment is a fundamental component of a fair health care system.

What still isn't known

We do not know why such marked racial disparities exist. Some researchers have argued that prescribing fewer opioids may be beneficial for Black patients as it reduces the risk of addiction. But this argument doesn't square with the data, which show that overdose rates have traditionally been lower in Black populations compared with white people. However, this trend has started to change in recent years.

In addition, some evidence suggests that clinicians may hold unconscious biases, incorrectly believing Black patients to be less sensitive to pain or that certain racial groups are less willing to accept pain medication.

While there is preliminary evidence that these factors may be important,

there is not enough research that examines the degree to which they influence clinical practice. Researchers like us also know very little about whether promising remedial strategies based on these factors – such as educational training during medical school that challenges stereotypical beliefs – are effective, or indeed even implemented, in the real world.

What's next?

The need for tackling racial disparities in health was brought into focus once more in February 2023, when the Biden-Harris administration signed an executive order on further advancing racial equity. Given the long history of these issues, it is clear that more research is needed to help develop better strategies for tackling health inequalities.

The most effective strategies for addressing racial disparities in pain treatment are likely to be those that target the underlying causes. We are currently undertaking research to try to better understand these causes, how they contribute to disparities in real-world clinical practice and whether strategies designed to address them are actually effective.

### Affordable Care Act Premiums Rise, **But Subsidies Protect Most Consumers**

By Stacy M. Brown

Premiums on the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchange will increase in 2024, but the Biden-Harris Administration has pledged that generous subsidies will ensure that most consumers remain shielded from the rising costs. According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the average monthly premium for the benchmark silver plan in 2024 will see a 4% increase in the 32 states participating in the federal exchange, HealthCare.gov. The uptick mirrors the increase seen in the previous consecutive years of premium declines that preceded it.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra emphasized the administration's commitment to affordable healthcare coverage. "Millions of Americans have obtained affordable, high-quality health care coverage through the marketplaces," Becerra stated. He said everyone should visit HealthCare.gov to explore the available health insurance plans and learn more about the options that best suit their needs.

"The Biden-Harris Administration has made it a priority to continue to strengthen the ACA and build on its progress by reducing premiums for the millions of Americans enrolled in Marketplace coverage," Becerra

Brooks-LaSure also highlighted the



Marketplaces in recent years. She encouraged consumers to explore HealthCare.gov and their statebased marketplaces to preview plans and premiums before the Open Enrollment period.

Administration officials have credited the Inflation Reduction Act for continuing the qualification criteria for health insurance coverage assistance and premiums, which will remain stable for the third consecutive year. The law has allowed four out of five HealthCare.gov consumers to secure plans for \$10 or less per month, thanks to expanded financial assistance.

Also, because of the Inflation Reduction Act and other reforms made by the Biden-Harris Administration, more people who were not eligible for financial help before can now CMS Administrator Chiquita get lower premiums through tax credits. That includes families whose

year and marks a shift from the four growth and strengthening of ACA employer-based insurance was too expensive and people with low in-

> For the first time, the Marketplace application will include optional demographic questions related to sex assigned at birth, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Officials added those questions to analyze health disparities in access to coverage to improve the consumer experience by enabling individuals to attest in a way that reflects and affirms their identities

> Consumers have the choice to answer, skip, or indicate their preference not to answer any or all three optional questions. Importantly, individual responses or decisions to skip these questions will have no impact on their eligibility results, plan pricing, or plan costs. Federal officials said they would protect the privacy of all shared information.

In 2023, a significant 96% of en-

rollees who selected plans on the federal exchange during open enrollment were eligible for expanded subsidies. For current policyholders who remain within their coverage tier, approximately two-thirds can find plans for less than \$10 per month for the upcoming year.

Overall, four out of five consumers will have the option to select plans on the federal exchange for \$10 or less per month, providing cost-effective healthcare coverage options for most Americans.

Nearly all consumers will have access to at least three insurers, with an average of just under seven options available to choose from.

For those seeking assistance with the application process, the Health-Care.gov call center is available around the clock, providing support in 200 languages. Additionally, consumers can find local assisters, agents, or brokers in their area by visiting HealthCare.gov and selecting the "Find local help" option. The Marketplace Open Enroll-

ment Period on HealthCare.gov will run from November 1 to January 15. Those who enroll by midnight on December 15 (5 a.m. EST on December 16) will secure full-year coverage starting on January 1, 2024. Given that January 15, 2024, is a federal holiday, the enrollment deadline will be extended until midnight on January 16 (5 a.m. EST on January 17) to allow consumers to enroll in coverage. Consumers enrolling after December 15 but before the January deadline will have coverage starting

## CVS Health Pulls Some Cough-And-Cold Treatments With Ineffective Ingredients

CVS Health is pulling from its shelves some cough-and-cold treatments that contain an ingredient that has been deemed ineffective by doctors and researchers.

The drug store chain said it will remove a small number of oral decongestants that contain phenylephrine as the only active ingredient. CVS also said it will still sell "many other oral cough and cold products to meet consumer

A company spokeswoman declined to elaborate on how many products will be removed when contacted by The Associated Press Friday morning.

CVS Health runs more than 9,000 stores in the United States. Representatives of its national rival, Walgreens, has not pulled any products.

A Walgreens spokeswoman said situation and partnering with its clinical integrity office and suppliers "on appropriate next steps.

U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisers voted unanimously

the company is monitoring the last month against the effective- advisers to examine the longness of phenylephrine, which is found in popular versions of Sudafed, Davquil and other medica-

tions stocked on store shelves. The FDA had asked its outside

questioned drug ingredient. Studies conducted in the past few years by the drugmakers Merck and Johnson & Johnson have shown no difference between phenylephrine medications and placebos for relieving congestion.

The FDA, which has not acted on the recommendation of its advisers, said the drug appears more effective when applied directly to the nose, in sprays or drops. Those products are not under review.

Phenylephrine had become the main drug in over-the-counter decongestants when medicines with an older ingredient - pseudoephedrine - were moved behind pharmacy counters. A 2006 law had forced the move because pseudoephedrine can be illegally processed into methamphetamine.

Those original versions of Sudafed and other medicines remain available without a prescription.

The CVS Health announcement comes shortly before another coldand-flu season starts in the United States as winter sets in. Last year, an unusually fast start to the season led to shortages of Children's Tylenol and other medications customers can purchase over-thecounter, or without a prescription.