The Carolinian

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'Poor Men South Of Richmond' Shone Spotlight On South's Economic Crisis

THE CONVERSATION—For a brief moment in the summer of 2023, the surprise No. 1 song "Rich Men North of Richmond" focused the country's attention on a region that often gets overlooked in discussions of the U.S. economy. Although the U.S. media sometimes pays attention to the rural South — often concentrating on guns, religion and opioid overdoses — it has too often neglected the broad scope and root causes of the region's current problems.

As economic historians based in North Carolina and Tennessee, we want a fuller version of the story to be told. Various parts of the rural South are struggling, but here we want to focus on the forlorn areas that the U.S. Department of Agriculture refers to as "rural manufacturing counties" — places where manufacturing is, or traditionally was, the main economic activity.

You can find such counties in every Southern state, although they were historically clustered in Alabama, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee. And they are suffering terribly.

YES, THE SOUTH IS ACTUALLY IN CRISIS

First, let's back up. One might be tempted to ask: Are things really that bad? Hasn't the Sun Belt been booming? But in fact, by a range of economic indicators — personal income per capita and the proportion of the population living in poverty, for starters – large parts of the South, and particularly the rural South, are struggling.

Gross domestic product per capita in the region has been stuck at about 90% of the national average for decades, with average income even lower in rural areas. About 1 in 5 counties in the South is marked by "persistent poverty" — a poverty rate that has stayed above 20% for three decades running. Indeed, fully 80% of all persistently poor counties in the U.S. are in the South.

Persistent poverty is, of course, linked to a host of other problems. The South's rural counties are marked by low levels of educational attainment, measured both by high school and college graduation rates. Meanwhile, labor-force participation rates in the South are far lower than in the nation as a whole.

UNSURPRISINGLY, THESE ISSUES STIFLE ECONOMIC GROWTH.

Meanwhile, financial institutions have fled the region: The South as a whole lost 62% of its banks between 1980 and 2020, with the decline sharpest in rural areas. At the same time, local hospitals and medical facilities have been shuttering, while funding for everything from emergency services to wellness programs has been cut.

LESS WEALTH, LESS HEALTH

Relatedly, the rural South is ground zero for poor health in the U.S., with life expectancy far lower than the national average. So-called "deaths of despair" such as suicides and accidental overdoses are common, and rates of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and stroke are high – much higher than in rural areas in other parts of the U.S. and in the U.S. as a whole.

Manufacturing counties in the rural South are particularly unhealthy. Residents there die about two and a half years younger than the average American, which to demographers is a staggeringly high differential.

These things, of course, didn't happen in a vacuum. The Obama-era Affordable Care Act encouraged states to expand Medicaid coverage, but Southern states largely refused to do so. That left large portions of the low- and lower-middle-income population in the rural South uninsured. This has pushed many medical facilities in the region into a death spiral, as their business models — predicated on governmental insurance of one kind or another — became untenable.

Given all this, is it any wonder that rates of upward mobility in the rural South are among the lowest in the country? Alas, probably not — certainly not to residents of rural North Carolina, a state where more than half of its counties lost population between 2010 and 2020.

IT WASN'T ALWAYS THIS WAY

Although some people think that these areas have forever been in crisis, this isn't the case. While the South's agricultural sector had fallen into long-term decline in the decades following the Civil War — essentially collapsing by the Great Depression — the onset of World War II led to an impressive economic growth spurt.

War-related jobs opening up in urban areas pulled labor out of rural areas, leading to a long-delayed push to mechanize agriculture. Workers rendered redundant by such technology came to constitute a large pool of cheap labor that industrialists seized upon to deploy in low-wage processing and assembly operations, generally in rural areas and small towns.

Such operations surged between 1945 and the early 1980s, playing a

(See ***POOR MEN,*** P. 2)

Commissioner West Passed Away Friday

RALEIGH, N.C. (WNCN) — Wake County Commissioner James West, who represented District 5, has died, a Wake County spokesperson confirmed.

"Wake County leaders and staff are incredibly saddened by the sudden loss of Commissioner Dr. James West, who passed away Friday night. Dr. West's commitment to public service and dedication to our community have left an indelible mark on Wake County. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and the many residents whose lives he's touched."

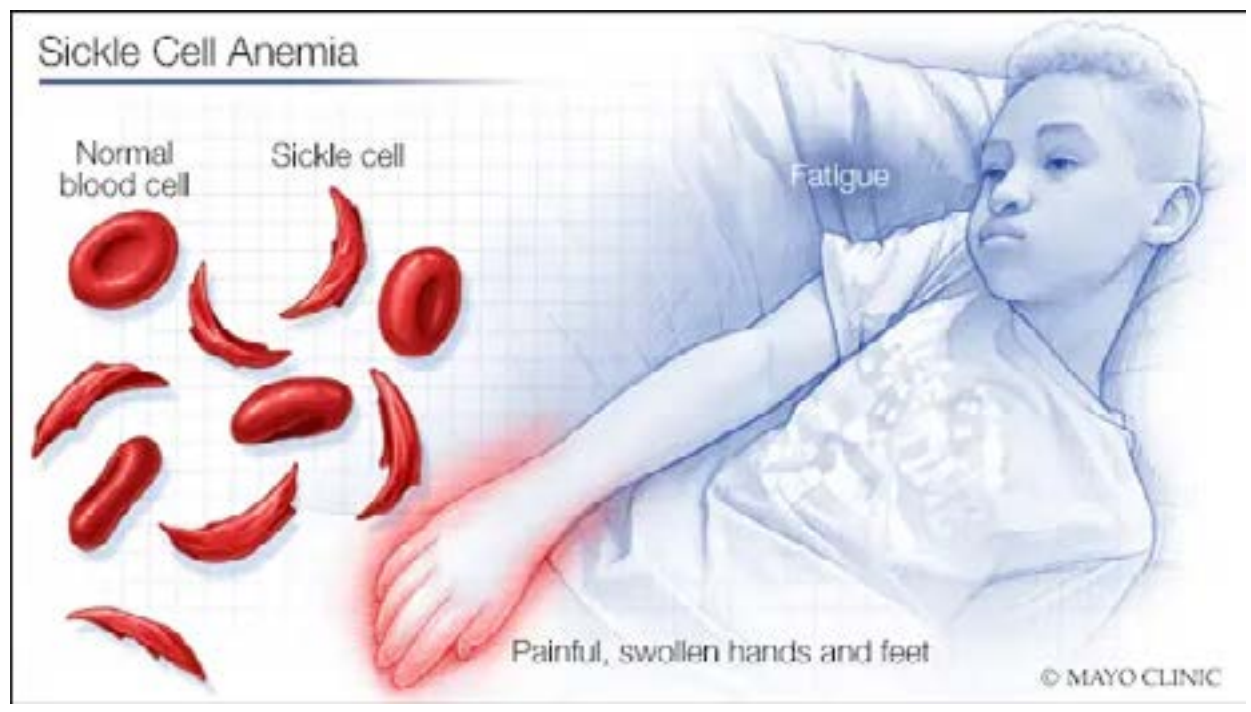
The county said no services have been confirmed yet, and his family is asking for privacy at this time.

West was first appointed to the board in 2010 and elected in 2012. He was then reelected in 2016, 2018 and 2020. His current term expires in 2024.

Prior to his tenure on the Wake County Board of Commissioners, West served on the Raleigh City Council. He was the District C representative from 1999-2010 and also served as mayor pro tem from 2003-2010.

He was a founder or founding co-chair of a few community organizations, including the Wake County Collaborative Partnership in Excellence in Youth Development and the Raleigh South Citizen Advisory Council. His many leadership roles in civic groups also included being a charter member of the Wake County Voter Education Coalition and chair of the Garner Schools Area Advisory Council.

World's First Gene Therapy For Sickle Cell Disease Is Approved In Britain



LONDON (AP) — Britain's medicines regulator has authorized the world's first gene therapy treatment for sickle cell disease, in a move that could offer relief to thousands of people with the crippling disease in the U.K.

In a statement Thursday, the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency said it approved Casgevy, the first medicine licensed using the gene editing tool CRISPR, which won its makers a Nobel prize in 2020.

The agency approved the treatment for patients with sickle cell disease and thalassemia who are 12 years old and over. Casgevy is made by Vertex Pharmaceuticals (Europe) Ltd. and CRISPR Therapeutics. To date, bone marrow transplants, extremely arduous procedures that come with very unpleasant side effects, have been the only long-lasting treatment.

"The future of life-changing cures resides in CRISPR based (gene-editing) technology," said Dr. Helen O'Neill of University College London.

"The use of the word 'cure' in relation to sickle cell disease or thalassemia has, up until now, been incompatible," she said in a statement, calling the MHRA's approval of gene therapy "a positive moment in history."

Both sickle cell disease and thalassemia are caused by mistakes in the genes that carry hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carry oxygen.

In people with sickle cell — which is particularly common in people with African or Caribbean backgrounds — a genetic mutation causes the cells to become crescent-shaped, which can block blood flow and cause excruciating pain, organ damage, stroke and other problems.

In people with thalassemia, the genetic mutation can cause severe anemia. Patients typically require blood transfusions every few weeks, and injections and medicines for their entire life. Thalassemia predominantly affects people of South Asian, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern heritage.

The new medicine, Casgevy, works by targeting the problematic gene in a patient's bone marrow stem cells so that the body can make properly functioning hemoglobin.

Patients first receive a course of chemotherapy, before doctors take

(See ***SICKLE CELL DISEASE,*** P. 2)

NORTH CAROLINA STATE LEGISLATOR WHO SWITCHED PARTIES LAUNCHES REELECTION BID

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina state Rep. Tricia Cotham, whose party switch earlier this year blindsided state Democrats and gave Republicans veto-proof majorities in both legislative chambers, announced Saturday she will run for reelection.

Cotham's announcement ends speculation over her political future after Republicans last month redrew maps for the state's congressional and legislative districts that seemed to reward her with options if she chose to run for office in 2024.

The redrawn state House map places Cotham's Mint Hill residence in a new district where Republicans appear to have a slight advantage, according to statewide election data. Had her district gone unchanged, she would have faced an extremely tough path for reelection.

She alternatively could have run for U.S. Congress in a redrawn district without an incumbent along the state's southern border.

"After our prayers and talks, I've decided that I will seek re-election to keep representing Mecklenburg County and I look forward to meeting the voters of HD-105," Cotham wrote Saturday on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Cotham had won her current state House seat in a Democratic district near Charlotte in 2022 and has since been lambasted by constituents who say they felt betrayed when she changed her affiliation to Republican in April. Her switch gave Republicans the last seat they needed to secure supermajorities and repeatedly override Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's vetoes.

COIN FLIP DECIDES MAYOR OF NORTH CAROLINA CITY AFTER TIE BETWEEN TWO CANDIDATES

MONROE, N.C. (AP) — A coin flip on Friday decided who would become mayor of a south-central North Carolina city when the two leading candidates were tied after all the ballots were tallied.

Robert Burns and Bob Yanacsek each received 970 votes in the race to become mayor of Monroe. There had been five names on the Nov. 7 ballot. Burns won the coin toss.

At Friday's Union County elections board meeting, Yanacsek and Burns waived their right to seek a recount. State law says the outcomes of tied races are determined by lot.

At the coin toss, Yanacsek called heads but the coin flipped by an election official came up tails, leading to celebration from Burns' supporters. The two men shook hands and hugged briefly. The board then voted to declare Burns the winner.

Burns will succeed Marion Holloway, who did not seek reelection in Monroe, a city of 35,000 roughly 25 miles (40 kilometers) southeast of Charlotte. Burns highlighted his family, faith and business background on his campaign website.

"It's been an awesome run so far, and now it's all in God's hands," Burns said in a social media video minutes Friday before the coin flip.

Yanacsek, a former Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer, posted a video after the vote asking supporters not to be discouraged by the outcome.

"We didn't lose the election. We lost a coin toss," he said.

NORTH CAROLINA LOTTERY EXPANDS ONLINE GAME OFFERINGS THROUGH 'DIGITAL INSTANTS'

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina's lottery has expanded its offering of online games, which officials project could bring in hundreds of millions of

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

Hip Hop Icons T.I. And Tiny Open An Affordable Housing Complex in Atlanta

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

Hip-hop power couple T.I. and Tiny celebrated the grand opening of their long-awaited affordable housing complex, The Intrada Westside, during a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Atlanta. The complex is in the northwest of the city. According to HipHopDX.com, it shows how committed the couple is to community development, and it has personal meaning for T.I. because it was once a grocery store where her grandmother shopped.

The Intrada Westside boasts 143 apartments and 25 unique units to house homeless youth. T.I., known for hits like "Whatever You Like," expressed gratitude for the support from the arts and entertainment industry, citing its profitability to offer much-needed resources to the community.

In a nod to the project's roots, T.I. shared, "The arts and entertainment industry in this city has been able to collaborate and be, I guess, profitable enough to offer the community so many things that are much needed."

This venture is reportedly not the first time T.I. has invested in revitalizing his Atlanta community. In 2020, he urged his social media followers to shift their focus from luxury items to real estate. The rapper highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer behavior and encouraged responsible spending.

HipHopDx.com said T.I. had been actively involved in community initiatives through his Buy Back the Block initiative, investing over $2.7 million since 2017 to acquire six properties and plots of land in his Center Hill neighborhood. The website said his philosophy emphasizes the potential for individuals to thrive financially while positively contributing to their communities.

"The Black Press of America salutes both the creative genius of T.I. and his concrete commitment to the economic development of Black communities," National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) President and CEO Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. proclaimed.

'Poor Men South Of Richmond' —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

huge role in the region's economic rise. However humble they may have been, in the South — as in China since the late 1970s — the shift out of a backward agricultural sector into low-wage, low-skill manufacturing was an opportunity for significant productivity and efficiency gains.

This helped the South steadily catch up to national norms in terms of per-capita income: to 75% by 1950, 80% by the mid-1960s, over 85% by 1970, and to almost 90% by the early 1980s.

Although today the rise of the Sun Belt is often associated with, if not attributed to, climate, low housing costs and the growth of the South's booming metropolitan areas, all those rural sweatshops and humble-looking processing sheds opening up in the early postwar era mattered a lot. They elevated the living standards of countless once-desperate and impoverished farmers.

THE ORIGINS OF THE RURAL CRISIS

By the early 1980s, however, the gains made possible by the shift out of agriculture began to play themselves out. The growth of the rural manufacturing sector slowed, and the South's convergence upon national per capita income norms stopped, remaining stuck at about 90% from then on.

Two factors were largely responsible: new technologies, which reduced the number of workers needed in manufacturing, and globalization, which greatly increased competition. This latter point became increasingly important, since the South, a low-cost manufacturing region in the U.S., is a high-cost manufacturing region when compared to, say, Mexico.

Like Mike Campbell's bankruptcy in Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises," the rural South's collapse came gradually, then suddenly: gradually during the 1980s and 1990s, and suddenly after China's entry into the World Trade Organization in December 2001.

Between 2000 and 2010, for example, manufacturing employment in North Carolina, one of the South's leading manufacturing states, fell by about 44%. Starting a bit earlier — in 1998, when the Asian currency crisis squeezed Southern manufacturers — we find that the Tar Heel State lost 70% of its manufacturing jobs in textiles and 60% in furniture between then and 2010.

Other states in the South's "manufacturing belt," such as South

Carolina and Tennessee, lost about 40% of their manufacturing jobs between 2000 and 2010. Although they have recouped some jobs since then, not one Southern state has as many manufacturing jobs as it did a generation ago. And most of the job growth in the southern manufacturing sector in recent decades has taken place in or near big cities.

The proportion of craftsmen and factory workers in the rural Southern labor force fell from 38% in 1980 to a little over 25% by 2020 — a trend that was particularly striking in rural manufacturing counties.

Factory jobs there increasingly gave way to low-level service-sector gigs, which generally paid less. As a result, median income per capita in rural manufacturing counties in the South has stagnated and is much lower than in rural manufacturing counties elsewhere in the U.S.

THE FIRST STEP IS RECOGNIZING THERE'S A PROBLEM

Those parts of the rural and small-town South that were once heavily involved in manufacturing are in economic crisis today.

One might argue that the current mess is a legacy effect of the South's historical dependence on a low-skill, low-cost growth "strategy" — beginning with slavery — that privileged short-term economic gains over patient investment in human capital and long-term development. That's a big claim about a larger, more complex story.

For now, our aim is simply to call attention to the problem. One must first acknowledge it before there can be any hope of a remedy. Until then, the inhabitants of such areas will remain feeling, as the Southern writer Linda Flowers vividly put it, "throwed away."

North Africans' Experiences Of World War II Often Go Unheard

By Sarah Stein & Aomar Boum
Univ of California

In November 1942, the Nazis occupied Tunisia. For the next six months, Tunisian Jews and Muslims were subjected to the Third Reich's reign of terror, as well as its anti-semitic and racist legislation. Residents lived in fear – "under the Nazi boot," as Tunisian Jewish lawyer Paul Ghez wrote in his diary during the occupation.

One of us is a historian; one of us is an anthropologist. Together, we have spent a decade gathering the voices of the diverse peoples who endured World War II in North Africa, across lines of race, class, language and region. Their letters, diaries, memoirs, poetry and oral histories are both defiant and broken. They express both faith and despair. All in all, they understood themselves to be trapped in a monstrous machine of fascism, occupation, violence and racism.

When most Americans think of the nightmares of the war or the Holocaust, they think strictly of Europe. Hate has a shifting color wheel, however – and we learn something new when we watch its spin in wartime North Africa.

Crossing the sea

The history of Jews settling in North Africa begins as early as the sixth century B.C., after the First Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. Another significant wave of immigrants followed the Spanish Inquisition. At the start of World War II, a diverse North African Jewish population of roughly 500,000 coexisted with Muslim neighbors.

North Africa's Jews spoke many languages, reflecting their many different cultures and ethnicities: Arabic, French, Tamazight – a Berber language – and Haketia, a form of Judeo-Spanish spoken in northern Morocco. While a large number of North African Jews, particularly in Algeria, enjoyed the privileges of French and other Western citizenship, the majority remained subjects of local leaders.

During the Second World War, however, those who held French citizenship had it stripped away. Three European powers ruled North Africa during the war, all brutally.

Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia were, for most of the conflict, in the hands of Vichy France. This authoritarian government, which collaborated with Nazi Germany, was formed in July 1940 by armistice, after Germany's successful invasion of France. It was ruled by Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain, a French hero of the First World War, out of the southern city of Vichy.

All antisemitic and racist laws and policies the Vichy regime imposed upon continental France were extended to its colonies in North and West Africa, pushing Jews out of professional sectors, stripping them of citizenship – if they had it to begin with – and seizing Jewish property, businesses and assets.

The Vichy regime also continued racist policies begun by France's Third Republic, which pushed young Black men from the empire into forced military service – and the most dangerous wartime posts. These forced recruits included soldiers from Senegal, French Guinea, Ivory Coast, Niger and Mauritania; French territories in present-day Benin, Gambia and Burkina Faso; and Muslim men from Morocco and Algeria.

In these ways, the French carried on a wartime campaign of anti-Blackness and Islamophobia, pairing these forms of racialized hatred from the colonial era with antisemitism. Antisemitism had deep roots in French and colonial history, but it found new force in the era of fascism.

Antisemitic and anti-Black policy was also a bedrock of Benito Mussolini's fascist Italian government,

which ruled over Libya during the war. Italy first tested its racist policies in its colony of Italian East Africa, segregating local Black populations from Italian settlers.

Camps on African soil

Nazi Germany occupied Tunisia from November 1942 to May 1943. During this period, the SS – the elite guard of the Nazi regime – imprisoned some 5,000 Jewish men in roughly 40 forced labor and detention camps on the front lines and in cities like Tunis. German troops also terrorized Muslim and Jewish girls and women who remained behind.

The Third Reich did not set out to deport Jews from North Africa to its death camps in Eastern Europe, but hundreds of Jews of North African heritage and some Muslims who were living in France did meet this fate. They were deported first to the internment camp of Drancy, on the outskirts of Paris, and sent from there to concentration and death camps. Many died in Auschwitz.

There were camps in North Africa and West Africa, too. In addition to those the Italian fascists built in Libya, Vichy France and Nazi Germany ran penal camps, detention camps and labor camps.

The Vichy regime alone built nearly 70 such camps in the Sahara, breathing new life into a colonial ambition of building a trans-Saharan railway to connect the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts. The Vichy regime saw it as a conduit for supplying the front lines with forcibly recruited, Black Senegalese soldiers.

In these camps, as in the Nazi camps of Eastern Europe, the complex racist logic of Nazism and fascism took vivid form. Muslims arrested for anti-colonial activities were pressed into back-breaking labor alongside Jews and Christians who had fled war-torn Europe, only to find themselves arrested in North Africa.

These men broke bread with other forced workers from around the world, including fighters who had volunteered for Spain's Republican Army during its civil war. These Ukrainians, Americans, Germans, Russian Jews and others had been arrested, deported and imprisoned by the Vichy regime after fleeing Franco's Spain. There were political enemies of the Vichy and Nazi regimes, too, including socialists, communists, union members and North African nationalists. Children and women were imprisoned as well.

Among this hodgepodge of prisoners, many were refugees who fled Europe. Inmates were overseen by French Vichy soldiers as well as forcibly recruited indigenous Moroccan and Black Senegalese men, who were often little more than prisoners themselves. Sometimes the camp prisoners interacted with local populations: Saharan Muslims and Jews who provided them medical care, burial grounds, and food and sex for money.

Nazism in Europe was underlaid by an intricate matrix of racist, eugenicist and nationalist ideas. But the war appears even more complex if historians take into account the racist and violent color wheel that spun in North Africa.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

dollars in additional revenues to the state-run operation in the coming years.

The North Carolina Education Lottery launched a set of "digital instant" games Wednesday, news outlets reported. The state lottery commission approved offering the games, which are considered the electronic equivalent of scratch-off tickets on computers or mobile devices, in August.

Eight versions of the games are being promoted by the commission. They require players to create accounts, provide identifying information and deposit funds to purchase tickets that begin at 50 cents per play. The games play in part like slot machines, with various number and symbol matchings. The top prizes for some games are $150,000.

Lotteries in at least eight other states offer digital instants. North Carolina's commission joined them, saying it would provide an avenue for continued revenue growth.

The North Carolina lottery reported record sales of more than $4.3 billion during the year ending June 30 and for the first time exceeded $1 billion in annual net earnings, which go to state education initiatives. Scratch-off games generate the most sales. Digital instants could generate more than $416 million in cumulative revenue within five years, according to previous commission projections.

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Sickle Cell Disease —CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

stem cells from the patient's bone marrow and use genetic editing techniques in a laboratory to fix the gene. The cells are then infused back into the patient for a permanent treatment. Patients must be hospitalized at least twice — once for the collection of the stem cells and then to receive the altered cells.

"This is so exciting. It's a new wave of treatments that we can utilize for patients with sickle cell disease," said Dr. James LaBelle, director of the pediatric stem cell and cellular therapy program at the University of Chicago. He said Britain's approval suggested the U.S. authorization was likely "imminent."

Casgevy is currently being reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration; the agency is expected to make a decision early next month, before considering another sickle cell gene therapy.

LaBelle said officials at the University of Chicago are "already moving forward to build not only the clinical infrastructure but also the reimbursement infrastructure to get these patients this treatment."

Britain's regulator said its decision to authorize the gene therapy for sickle cell disease was based on a study done on 29 patients, of whom 28 reported having no severe pain problems for at least one year after being treated. In the study for thalassemia, 39 out of 42 patients who got the therapy did not need a red blood cell transfusion for at least a year afterwards.

Gene therapy treatments can cost millions of dollars and experts have previously raised concerns that they could remain out of reach for the people who would benefit most.

Last year, Britain approved a gene therapy for a fatal genetic disorder that had a list price of £2.8 million ($3.5 million). England's National Health Service negotiated a significant confidential discount to make it available to eligible patients.

Vertex Pharmaceuticals said it had not yet established a price for the treatment in Britain and was working with health authorities "to secure reimbursement and access for eligible patients as quickly as possible."

In the U.S., Vertex has not released a potential price for the therapy, but a report by the nonprofit Institute for Clinical and Economic Review said prices up to around $2 million would be cost-effective. By comparison, research earlier this year showed medical expenses for current sickle cell treatments, from birth to age 65, add up to about $1.6 million for women and $1.7 million for men.

Medicines and treatments in Britain must be recommended by a government watchdog before they are made freely available to patients in the national health care system.

Millions of people around the world, including about 100,000 in the U.S., have sickle cell disease. It occurs more often among people from places where malaria is or was common, like Africa and India, and is also more common in certain ethnic groups, such as people of African, Middle Eastern and Indian descent. Scientists believe being a carrier of the sickle cell trait helps protect against severe malaria.

Energy Dept Tries To Boost US Battery Industry With Another $3.5B In Funding

The Energy Department is making a push to strengthen the U.S. battery supply chain, announcing up to $3.5 billion for companies that produce batteries and the critical minerals that go into them.

Batteries are seen as an important climate solution because they can power cars, which are a major cause of climate change when they burn gasoline. They are also a solution when they store clean electricity made from solar panels or wind turbines, allowing gas or coal power plants that cause climate change to turn off.

Lithium ion is currently the dominant battery type both for electric vehicles and clean electricity storage. The DOE wants to strengthen the supply because even though there is plenty of work underway to develop alternatives, it estimates demand for lithium batteries will increase up to ten times by 2030.

The Biden-Harris administration has a goal of lowering the pollution that causes climate change to zero by 2050 and for half of all new cars sales to be electric in 2030.

Some officials, industry experts and others concerned about climate change uneasy supply of battery materials will not keep pace with demand. Others worry that too much of the industry is anchored in Asia.

Jodie Lutkenhaus, professor of chemical engineering at Texas A&M University, said she is closely watching U.S. battery production and manufacturing. "I'm worried that we may not catch up and end up in

(See ***BATTERY FUNDING,*** P. 4)

Business & Finance

Durham's Mystic Farm & Distillery Announces Public Stock Offering

Durham, NC – Mystic Farm and Distillery, the Durham based producer of award-winning Broken Oak bourbon (as well as the new Mystic Galactic bourbon to be aged in outer space), unseated Kentucky bourbon producers in a shocking upset when the elite judges at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition declared Mystic's Broken Oak 2023's "Best Small Batch Bourbon Up to 5 Years".

"We know our bourbons are world-class, and we were humbled by the double-gold this year after two consecutive golds in 2021 and 2022. For Broken Oak to beat out 400+ other bourbons is amazing since production only started in late 2016," said Jonathan Blitz, Founder.

Like all of Mystic's bourbons, Broken Oak was handcrafted from grain that Mystic grows on leased acreage in Hillsborough, North Carolina, and mashed using water drawn directly from a well below the distillery. The 45% wheat mashbill and #4 charred barrels were selected to highlight the unique growing and aging conditions in North Carolina's Piedmont region.

"As soon as the award became public multiple firms and individuals offered us capital to grow the business. We have remained debt-free and profitable, and we've never sold equity, so taking a large check from a single investor or a big spirits company raised concerns about interference with our way of making spirits," said Blitz. What the Company needed was a way to tap into the enthusiasm of its fanbase who happily buy up Mystic's ultra-premium and luxury bourbons that average over $90/bottle. "We wanted to invite everyone who enjoys drinking and sharing our carefully crafted products to participate in our next phase of growth," added Blitz.

Mystic's equity raise was launched under SEC Regulation CF, which allows US companies to raise capital from the public. Having sold more than 20% of the offering in the first three weeks, it seems like Mystic's equity is as sought after as their bourbon. While SEC regulations prohibit the Company from discussing offering terms in public statements, full details about the offering including CPA reviewed financials are available on the StartEngine offering page.

Mystic Farm and Distillery began in 2013 when two friends began blending a unique liqueur from bourbon, wildflower honey, and a nine-spice tea. In 2015 they purchased a 22-acre farm in Durham County and began construction on the first bourbon distillery in the triangle since prohibition. All their spirits are hand-crafted from the grain they grow, water from our onsite aquifer, and produced with the utmost care and patience. They are proud to craft the Piedmont's superior grain, water, and aging climate into the world's finest spirits.

21 Options for Minority Business Loans

Minority entrepreneurs are driving economic growth and innovation across industries. With updated statistics showing that black-owned businesses employ almost 1.2 million people, the importance of minority business loans cannot be overstated. These loans empower minority communities to start and expand businesses, contributing significantly to our economy. In this context, it's essential to mention the growing interest in small business loans for minority women and small business loans for startups. Both these categories have seen an upsurge in demand and have become crucial for promoting entrepreneurship. In this article, we'll explore 21 options for minority business loans, equipping entrepreneurs with the tools they need to thrive.

What Defines a Minority-Owned Business?

A minority-owned business is basically one where more than half of the owners are folks from minority groups, like different ethnicities, races, or genders. This designation matters a lot because it opens doors to special resources, including loans and grants that are tailored for minority businesses. It's not just about diversity; it's about creating a fair and inclusive business world where everyone gets a shot at success.

Understanding Minority Business Loans

Minority business loans are like special financial boosts tailor-made for folks from minority communities. They're a lifeline for those who might face hurdles in getting regular loans. These loans aren't just about money; they're about building up the economy, creating jobs, and sparking fresh ideas in businesses owned by minorities. Knowing the ins and outs of these loans is key for minority entrepreneurs looking to turn their dreams into reality and make a real difference in their neighborhoods.

The Historical Context of Business Loans For Minorities

The history of minority business loans in the U.S. has seen progress amid challenges. Discrimination, notably "redlining," hindered early access. Government initiatives like the MBDA and SBA programs were established for support. However, disparities persist. A 2020 study highlighted loan discrepancies between white and Black neighborhoods. In 2021, only a small fraction of 7(a) loans aided minority-owned businesses. Recent efforts, like the Dodd-Frank Act, target fair lending. Yet, a 2023 ruling poses new hurdles for minority entrepreneurs seeking SBA loans. Progress continues, but disparities persist, reflecting broader concerns of racial and economic inequality.

Types of Lenders for Minority Small Business Loans

When it comes to snagging small business loans, minorities can tap into various lender options, each with its own perks and best-fit scenarios.

Traditional Banks

Good old traditional banks are your go-to if your business is well-established and boasts a solid credit record.

Community Development Financial Institutions

CDFIs serve underserved communities, making them a top pick for minority entrepreneurs who want personalized help and flexible loan terms.

Online Lenders

Online lenders are the speed demons of the lending world for quick cash infusion needs, perfect for startups and businesses that need money pronto.

Non-Profit Organizations

Non-profit groups often offer loans at friendly interest rates and offer mentorship to sweeten the deal, making them a good bet for businesses after affordable financial aid.

Government Programs

Uncle Sam's got your back with programs like those from the SBA, dishing out loans with tasty terms and competitive rates for minority-owned businesses. Special mention should be made of usda business loans which are designed to cater to businesses in rural areas, and small business loans for veterans which prioritize the entrepreneurial aspirations of those who've served in the military.

Credit Score Requirements for Minority Entrepreneurs

Credit scores are a big deal for minority entrepreneurs when it comes to loan eligibility. A good score opens doors, so paying bills on time and reducing debt can help boost it. Checking your credit report for errors is smart too. It's all about making your financial track record shine for those loan opportunities.

1. SBA 7(a) Loan Program

The SBA 7(a) Loan Program is a great option for minority small business owners. It offers flexible financing for various business needs, from working capital to equipment purchases. With favorable terms and government backing, it's accessible through a network of approved lenders.

2. SBA 8(a) Business Development Program

The SBA 8(a) Business Development Program provides mentorship, training, and government contract opportunities to minority-owned businesses. It's an excellent choice for those looking to grow their enterprises through federal contracts.

3. SBA Express Loan

The SBA Express Loan is a speedy solution for financing needs. It offers a streamlined application process and quick approval, making it suitable for small business owners, including minorities.

4. SBA Microloan Program

The SBA Microloan Program is designed for micro-enterprises, including minority-owned businesses. It provides smaller loan amounts, making it ideal for startups or those with modest capital requirements.

5. Amegy Bank Small Business Diversity Banking Program

Amegy Bank's Small Business Diversity Banking Program focuses on supporting minority-owned businesses. They offer tailored financial solutions and resources to help these businesses thrive.

6. Community Development Financial Institutions

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are specialized lenders that aim to support underserved communities, including minority-owned businesses. They offer a range of financing options with a focus on community development.

7. USDA Business Loans

The USDA provides business loans to rural entrepreneurs, which can include minority-owned businesses in eligible areas. These loans support business development and job creation in rural communities.

8. Fundbox

Fundbox is an online lender that offers lines of credit to small businesses, including minority-owned ones. They provide quick access to capital without extensive paperwork.

9. National Funding

National Funding specializes in small business financing and can be a good option for minority-owned businesses seeking working capital or equipment financing. They offer flexible solutions.

10. OnDeck

OnDeck is an online lender that provides various financing options to small businesses, including minority-owned enterprises. They offer fast funding solutions for diverse business needs.

11. Accion USA

Accion USA is a nonprofit lender that supports underserved entrepreneurs, including minority business owners. They offer small business loans and financial education to help these businesses succeed.

12. US Bank Business Diversity Lending Program

US Bank's Business Diversity Lending Program is committed to supporting diverse businesses, including those owned by minorities. They provide customized financial solutions and resources to foster growth.

13. Fora Financial

Fora Financial is an alternative lender offering working capital solutions to small businesses, including minority-owned ones. They focus on quick and accessible funding options.

14. Bank of America

Bank of America provides a range of business financing options for small businesses, including minority-owned enterprises. They offer loans and credit lines to meet various financial needs.

15. Business Consortium Fund

The Business Consortium Fund (BCF) specializes in financing minority-owned businesses. They offer loans and support services designed to empower entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds. BCF is committed to fostering growth and success within underserved communities, making it an invaluable resource for minority business owners looking to access capital and expert guidance to thrive in the competitive market.

16. Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo provides banking and financing services to small businesses, including minority-owned ones. They offer a variety of loan and credit options to meet diverse business needs.

17. Navy Federal

Navy Federal offers business loans to its members, making it accessible for minority-owned enterprises. With competitive terms and a focus on supporting small businesses, they provide financing solutions that cater to your specific needs.

18. Kiva

Consider Kiva as a distinctive platform where entrepreneurs, including those from diverse backgrounds, connect with loans funded by people worldwide. It's a remarkable choice if you're seeking community support and a unique approach to financing your business aspirations.

19. Backstage Capital

Backstage Capital is a venture capital fund that focuses on underrepresented founders, including minorities. They invest in startups with diverse leadership teams.

20. LiftFund

LiftFund is a nonprofit lender that's all about helping out underserved communities, including minority-owned businesses. They offer small business loans and provide financial resources to give your business a boost. So, if you're looking for some financial support along with guidance, LiftFund is worth a look.

21. Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations are often there to lend a helping hand to minority-owned businesses. They offer grants, loans, and a bunch of resources to give these businesses a leg up. It's a good idea to check out local nonprofit organizations in your area, as they might have just what you need to grow your business.

Classifieds

NC Department of Adult Correction

ADVERTISEMENT FOR BIDS

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction has the following contract in Greene County out for bid: C-C11618 Security Netting - Greene Correctional Institution. The bid opening is scheduled for: Wednesday, 12/13/2023. To obtain the Notice to Bidders, any Pre-Bid Requirements, and any Addenda visit:https://evp.nc.gov/solicitations/details/?id=0b705357-f382-ee11-8179-001dd804e299

Richmond Pie Maker Picked Up By Kroger

After striking deals with Food Lion, Sam's Club and QVC, Richmond baking company Joyebells has now added Kroger to the list of retailers carrying its signature pies.

Joyebells pies can be found at 180 Kroger locations across the Mid-Atlantic region. The family-run business is now up to 2,100 stores nationwide where its desserts are being sold.

"It is extremely exciting and a blessing to be able to expand the client base," Joyebells founder and CEO Joye B. Moore said. "It's been a challenge scaling as a small, minority business that can't seem to secure funding. But it's what I pray for, what I ask for, so I've been here fighting and swinging until I can't swing anymore."

Inside the $1.5T Nuclear Weapons Program You've Never Heard Of

The point of the thing was to forever change our concept of power. When the U.S. military assembled a team of scientists, led by physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer, to build a nuclear bomb during World War II with the hope of beating the Nazis to such a terrible creation, many of those involved saw their efforts as a strange kind of civic destiny. The Manhattan Project, wrote Richard Rhodes, Pulitzer-winning author of The Making of the Atomic Bomb, was "compelled from the beginning not by malice or hatred but by hope for a better world." Oppenheimer himself once said, "The atomic bomb was the turn of the screw. It made the prospect of future war unendurable. It has led us up those last few steps to the mountain pass; and beyond there is a different country."

We live in that different country now, one in which it is assumed that the presence of nuclear weapons makes their use impossible. If one nation strikes, the thinking goes, we are all obliterated.

As recently as 15 years ago, the sentiment of nonproliferation seemed durable. Even American secretaries of state who held office during the cold war were advocating for the final drawdown of atomic weapons. Former president Barack Obama, when he took office in 2009, wanted a world without them and pushed a new treaty with Russia to limit the number of deployed warheads in each country's arsenal. But after decades of efforts to disarm global powers and reduce tensions, the screw is now tightening again. Russia has suspended its participation in the treaty, and it's believed that China is increasing the size of its arsenal.

And even while the U.S. was preparing to draw down its total number of nuclear warheads, it sought to replace its existing weapons and modernize its delivery mechanisms. The weapons, which had been designed decades ago, were aging, and their upkeep cost hundreds of millions of dollars a year. In 2010 Congress authorized an update to the U.S. nuclear triad, the weapons systems deployable by land, sea and air.

No leg of the triad is as controversial as the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) system, the arsenal of hundreds of weapons spread across 450 underground silos in Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska. Because the missiles sit in fixed locations—unlike submarines or aircraft—they are seen as potentially vulnerable to attack; because they are considered first-strike weapons, concerns linger that one could be inadvertently launched; because of their geographic sprawl, they have an outsize impact on land use and energy policy. In 2015, two years before General James Mattis was confirmed as U.S. secretary of defense, he suggested to the Senate Armed Services Committee that the military consider removing land-based missiles altogether.

But around the same time, the Air Force Nuclear Weapons Center requested the design and construc-

(See ***NUCLEAR WEAPONS,*** P. 2)

Health & Fitness

Mass Lawmakers Fail To Approve $250M In Shelter Aid

BOSTON (AP) — The Massachusetts Legislature wrapped up its formal session for the year without a deal on a $2.8 billion spending bill that included hundreds of millions of dollars to address the state's emergency shelters that are buckling under a crush of migrant and homeless families.

Both the House and Senate bills would steer $250 million toward the shelter system, but a conference committee was unable to resolve other differences early Thursday.

Lawmakers embarked for the holiday break with uncertainty clouding the state's response to shelter emergency.

Some groups heaped scorn on lawmakers for failing to act. The Massachusetts Teachers Association said in a statement that it was "shocked, and frankly, disgusted" by lawmakers' inaction on the supplemental budget.

"This is another stain on a Legislature that struggles to meet its obligation to serve the public good," the union that represents 117,000 members said in a statement.

Across the region, advocates relied on a patchwork of temporary shelters including churches, hospital waiting rooms and even airport lounges after Massachusetts' emergency shelter system hit a state-imposed limit of 7,500 families last week, forcing some homeless people to be put on a waiting list.

The spike in demand is being driven in part by migrant families entering the state. About half of the current shelter caseload are new arrivals to Massachusetts, according to Democratic Gov. Maura Healey's administration.

The administration is working with groups to find temporary housing but has been reluctant to release some details of its plan, including the location of a clinic it sponsored with the Department of Homeland Security to help migrants obtain work authorizations.

Lawmakers don't formally convene again for votes until the new year, but they could resolve their differences in informal sessions. However, legislative rules make it easier to derail bills in informal sessions.

NY Woman Casey McIntyre Erases Millions In Medical Debt

A New York City woman who died from cancer has raised enough money to erase millions of dollars in medical debt with a posthumous plea for help.

Casey McIntyre told followers in a social media message posted by her husband she had arranged to buy the medical debt of others as a way of celebrating her life.

Ms McIntyre wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter: "If you're reading this I have passed away.

"I loved each and every one of you with my whole heart and I promise you, I knew how deeply I was loved," the 38-year-old wrote.

The posts included a link to a fundraising campaign started through the non-profit RIP Medical Debt.

The campaign quickly blew past its $US20,000 ($30,707) goal after the messages were posted by Ms McIntyre's husband, Andrew Rose Gregory.

It had raised about $US140,000 ($214,954) just three days later, enough to buy around $US14 million ($21.50 million) in medical debt.

Mr Gregory said his wife had good health insurance and received great care at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Even so, the couple saw some "terrifying" charges on paperwork for her care, he said.

"What resonated for me and Casey is, you know, there's good cancer treatment out there that people can't afford," he said.

Patients in the US healthcare system can quickly rack up big bills that push them into debt even if they have insurance.

This is especially true for people who wind up hospitalised or need regular care or prescriptions for chronic health problems.

A 2022 analysis of government data from the non-profit KFF estimates that nearly one in 10 US adults owe at least $US250 ($383.85) in medical debt.

That total of roughly 23 million people includes 11 million who owe more than $US2,000 ($3,070.78).

RIP Medical Debt erases debt purchased from hospitals, other health care providers and the secondary debt market.

It buys millions of dollars of debt in bundles for what it says is a fraction of the original value.

The non-profit says every dollar donated buys about $US100 ($153) in debt, and it aims to help people with lower incomes.

Spokesman Daniel Lempert said the organisation has never had a campaign where someone planned for it to start after their death.

Ms McIntyre, who was a book publisher, started treatment for ovarian cancer in 2019. She spent about three months in the hospital over the past year, her husband said.

The Brooklyn couple started planning for her memorial and the debt-buying campaign after she almost died in May.

They were inspired by a video they saw of North Carolina churchgoers burning about $US3 million ($4.61 million) in medical debt.

Ms McIntyre spent the last five months in home hospice care, giving her what Mr Gregory called a "bonus summer."

She went on beach trips and spent time with their family, including the couple's 18-month-old daughter, Grace.

"Casey was very, very sick at the end of her life, and she couldn't finish everything she wanted to finish," Mr Gregory said.

"But I knew she wanted to do this memorial and debt jubilee. So I set that up and ... did it the way I thought she would have wanted."

RSV Is Straining Some Hospitals, And US Officials Are Releasing More Shots

NEW YORK (AP) — RSV infections are rising sharply in some parts of the country, nearly filling hospital emergency departments in Georgia, Texas and some other states.

To help counter the surge, federal officials on Thursday announced they were releasing more doses of a new RSV shot for newborns that have been in short supply.

Reports of the seasonal virus are rising nationally, but experts said RSV is not expected to generate the kind of widespread patient traffic seen last fall, when hospitals were overwhelmed with sick, wheezing kids.

Nevertheless, cases will likely rise in more parts of the country and infections may be intense in some places, said Dr. Meredith McMorrow, an RSV expert at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth, Texas, Dr. Laura Romano said kids and parents are spending 10 or more hours in the emergency department's waiting room. Kids are presenting sicker than they have in previous years, with more in need of oxygen, Romano said.

"Last week, we had 25 kids who were waiting in the emergency room who had been admitted for a bed upstairs, including five who needed to go to our intensive care unit," she said. "We just do not have beds for them."

In Georgia, the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta hospital system is in "surge" mode because of RSV, with a high volume of patients straining staff, said Dr. Jim Fortenberry, the system's chief medical officer.

"Our emergency departments, our urgent cares are extremely busy. The pediatricians' offices are extremely busy too," Fortenberry said.

Not helping matters: The newly available shots to protect newborns against RSV have been difficult to get, meaning a new medical weapon is not being fully deployed.

"It was really going to help and unfortunately there is a shortage, and we at Children's are also seeing that shortage," Fortenberry said.

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a common cause of mild cold-like symptoms such as runny nose, cough and fever.

Still, it can be dangerous for infants and older people. The CDC estimates that RSV causes 100 to 300 deaths and 58,000 to 80,000 hospitalizations each year among kids aged 4 and under. It is the No. 1 cause of hospitalizations in U.S. infants, according to the CDC.

Its toll is even greater in adults 65 and older, causing 6,000 to 10,000 deaths and 60,000 to 160,000 hospitalizations, the CDC says.

RSV infections fell during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic — a time when many kids and adults stayed home and took precautions against respiratory viruses.

But it roared back last year. Hospitals were filled with wheezing children, many of them needing oxygen or even machines to help them breathe. The wave was bolstered by surges in other kinds of respiratory viruses, which often infected children at the same time and made their condition worse, said McMorrow, of the CDC.

Some of those other viruses are circulating now, too. Data on RSV is limited, but available information shows that diagnoses in some states — including Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia — are near the levels seen last year. Texas has also seen a sharp

There are signs, however, that the virus is already peaking in some of those states, McMorrow said. Nationally, detections of RSV are only about half as high as they were last November.

Based on the data so far, CDC officials think the current season will not be as bad as last year and will end up comparable to the kind of RSV seasons that occurred regularly before the COVID-19 pandemic, she said.

Vaccination Exemptions At Highest Level Ever In U.S.

(AP) — The proportion of U.S. kindergartners exempted from school vaccination requirements has hit its highest level ever, 3%, U.S. health officials said Thursday.

More parents are questioning routine childhood vaccinations that they used to automatically accept, an effect of the political schism that emerged during the pandemic around COVID-19 vaccines, experts say.

Even though more kids were given exemptions, the national vaccination rate held steady: 93% of kindergartners got their required shots for the 2022-2023 school year, the same as the year before, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a report Thursday. The rate was 95% in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The bad news is that it's gone down since the pandemic and still hasn't rebounded," said Dr. Sean O'Leary, a University of Colorado pediatric infectious diseases specialist. "The good news is that the vast majority of parents are still vaccinating their kids according to the recommended schedule."

BATTERY FUNDING

Continued from page 2

the same situation we're in now with the semiconductor industry," she said. When assembly lines stopped during the pandemic, it stalled manufacturing in Asia, resulting in a global microchip shortage that affected the availability of vehicles and electronics.

"The same thing can happen with batteries if we don't diversify where batteries are made and where materials are sourced," Lutkenhaus said. "It is essential that the U.S. participates in battery production and manufacturing so that we can avoid global shortages of batteries, should that ever happen."

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law assigned $6 billion in total funding for battery material processing and manufacturing. An initial round went to 15 projects including companies that mine critical minerals like graphite and nickel, used in lithium batteries. This second round will fund similar companies but also those that rely on alternative chemistries, such as flow and sodium batteries.

Here's how it works: A company might want to build a factory to make cathode materials for electric cars. It determines the cost of building the facility, commits to covering half of the cost, and the government grant would cover the other half, if the company is selected.

Albemarle, a major lithium producer, received funding in the first round for a facility in Kings Mountain, North Carolina that processes lithium from ore collected around the world. The company said that in addition to EVs, demand for lithium also comes electronics like medical devices and smartphones. Without the DOE funding, the project "would have likely progressed along a different time scale," it said in an email.

While the funding may not have been make-or-break for them, Matthew McDowell, associate professor of engineering at Georgia Institute of Technology, said the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act have "dramatically" transformed the U.S. battery manufacturing sector in the past three years. He is excited, he said, about the next generation of batteries for clean energy storage, including solid state batteries, which could potentially hold more energy than lithium ion.

Some Democratic-Led Cities Pay For Migrants' Tickets To Other Places As Resources Dwindle

DENVER (AP) — As weary migrants arrive in Denver on buses from the U.S.-Mexico border city of El Paso, Texas, officials offer them two options: temporary shelter or a bus ticket out.

Nearly half of the 27,000 migrants who arrived in Denver since November 2022 have chosen the bus, plane or train tickets to other cities in the U.S., city data shows. In New York and Illinois, taxpayer dollars also are being spent on tickets, creating a shuffle of migrants in the interior U.S. who need shelter, food and medical assistance as they await rulings on asylum cases that can take years.

The transfer of migrants has gained momentum since Republican governors in Texas and Florida started chartering buses and planes to Democratic-led cities in what critics waved off as political stunts. More than a year later, some of those cities, their resources dwindling, are eager to help migrants move on to their final destinations.

The efforts show the increased pressures cities are facing as more migrants from around the globe are coming to the U.S. southern border, often fleeing economic turmoil. Illegal border crossings topped 2 million during the government's fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the second-highest number on record.

With many migrants in shelters or living on the street, the next phase of the challenge is getting them to their families, friends or court cases, said Mario Russell, director at the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

That "has been in a sense dropped into the laps of interior cities without much preparation, without much forethought really at any level," Russell added.

Denver alone has spent at least $4.3 million in city funds to send migrants to other U.S. cities, freeing up shelter beds for new arrivals while adding to the numbers in other Democratic-led cities such as Chicago and New York that are struggling to house asylum-seekers, mostly from Venezuela.

Data wasn't yet available from New York, though the city is offering one-way plane tickets to anywhere in the world. Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago has used state funds to help buy tickets for more than 2,500 migrants who have family, friends or sponsors elsewhere, according to Chief of Staff Mary Krinock.

The cities say they buy tickets only for migrants who want to travel and they do not coerce people to leave. Texas and Florida have chartered buses and planes to take migrants only to certain cities. They say people board them voluntarily.

"The people who are desperate, who are coming here for shelter and assistance, we're not going to turn those people away," Jon Ewing of Denver Human Service said. "But at the same time we have to make it very clear to them that's there's only so much we can do."

Advocates working with migrants say many come to Denver on their way to other cities because of its relative proximity to the border, reputation for being welcoming and the cheaper bus fare.

But charities are feeling the pressure as the weather turns colder and migrants end up sleeping in tent encampments.

"It breaks my heart. It is like we have so many children and little ones that we know we can't even help," said Yoli Casas, executive director of Vive Wellness, which works with new migrants to Denver.

"There's just no more room. There's no more funding. There's no nothing. We're not prepared," she said.

Denver has bought nearly 3,000 tickets to Chicago and 2,300 to New York, almost half of the more than 12,000 tickets the city has purchased for migrants since November 2022. The vast majority were bus tickets, but Denver also purchased about 340 tickets for flights and 200 for train rides.

Roughly 1,000 tickets were bound for Texas and Florida, whose governors have sent chartered buses and planes of migrants to Democratic-led "sanctuary cities" that limit their cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

Russell of the Center for Migration Studies said greater communication among cities is required to ensure "people go where it's most appropriate rather than potentially going in circles and circles, from one city to the next."

"That doesn't help anybody," he added.

Tensions flared between political leaders in January when Colorado Democratic Gov. Jared Polis chartered buses for migrants to Chicago. Then-Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot and New York City Mayor Eric Adams penned a letter urging Polis to stop and saying "overburdening other cities is not the solution."

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Continued from page 1

tion of a new missile. The contractor Northrop Grumman bid on it and won, and by 2021 Congress had authorized the first investments in an updated nationwide ICBM system, which is now called Sentinel. Like the Minuteman III missiles currently in the ground, the Sentinel missiles will be capable of making a graceful parabolic arc through the heavens to any place on Earth in order to destroy it. The $100 billion that will go to Sentinel represents only the first step of what is anticipated to be a $1.5-trillion investment in the triad, all of which is predicated on ramping up production of new plutonium pits, the deadly metallic hearts of nuclear warheads.

Whether the U.S. is turning the screw a little tighter to assure allies in the wake of Russia's newly aggressive stance and rising Chinese power or merely furthering a profitable, decades-old militarized political agenda depends on whom you ask. Either way, the upshot is clear. "I expect the coming decades are going to be a boom time for the nuclear weapons industry," says Jeffrey Lewis, a nonproliferation expert and professor at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, Calif.

Robert Webster, deputy director of weapons at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, told me that Americans have lost their fluency in nuclear weapons—that is, because of decades of relative stability, we've forgotten how to think about them. "You need everybody in the world to be on the same level of understanding so you can maintain this deterrence," he says. But global powers treat nuclear weapons as bargaining chips, and history shows that one country's escalation follows its rivals'. The worst-case scenario is apocalyptic. Even if an uneasy peace persists, we know from experience that a nuclear buildup—warhead production and the radioactive shadow it leaves behind—changes a place. "There's a cost of entry to being a nuclear country," Webster says.

It may be more accurate to say there are many costs to entry, both immediate and lasting. Since the advent of plutonium production, less than a century ago, some parts of the U.S. have borne more of those costs than others. This past summer I drove to the city that's still making the weapons it was supposed to eradicate the need for; to the plains where nuclear missiles control local economies; to a mine 2,000 feet underneath the desert floor where much of America's plutonium waste from weapons production goes to rest. My hope was to hear from people who live in those communities to better understand where that era has left them as we teeter on the edge of a new arms race. The tour started an hour away from my house, at the birthplace and spiritual home of America's nuclear weapons. "Los Alamos," says a sign at the edge of town, "where discoveries are made!"