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Was Biden Set Up To Fail By His Own Political Party?

By Caroline Graham

TheMail

President Joe Biden was set up in a 'soft coup' to oust him, a top Democratic insider claimed last night.

The 81-year-old US President is facing mounting calls to step aside after his disastrous debate performance on Thursday, with sources telling The Mail on Sunday that many believe he was purposely set up to fail.

A former aide to Hillary Clinton said: 'There has never been a debate this early before. Traditionally the debates are held after the Republican and Democratic conventions, which are in July and August.'

'Most years the first debate is early September ahead of the November election.'

'Biden's inner circle demanded this early debate. There is a growing belief this was a 'soft coup' because they know he isn't fit to govern and have known for some time.'

'They wanted to test him against Trump early, while there was still time to replace him if he failed to rise to the occasion. Which, of course, he did spectacularly.'

Another source said: 'The whole thing doesn't pass the smell test. Publicly the Democratic leadership has been backing Biden because they can't appear to be disloyal to the President, but privately there have been discussions going on for a long time that he's too old to beat Trump.'

'There were whispers for weeks



that 'Joe's going down at the debate.'

One of the favorites to replace Biden – Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, 52 – secretly sent an advance team to Washington DC 'weeks ago' to prepare for her possible presidential run.

The team has been 'on manoeuvres', meeting with Democratic offi-

cials. The source said: 'Gretchen was the first to act. Now the floodgates have been opened.'

While Biden has insisted the debate – seen by 48 million people – was 'one bad night', his leadership is in crisis as he faces pressure to quit.

Jill Biden has admitted her husband knows he performed badly, telling reporters on Friday: 'After

last night's debate, he said, 'You know Jill, I don't know what happened. I didn't feel that great.'

Former President Barack Obama has now been called on to 'stage an intervention' to persuade his close friend and former Vice President to withdraw from the race.

The source said: 'Obama is probably the only person aside from his

wife and sister who Biden will listen to.'

'I know of at least one major donor who has appealed directly to former President Obama to stage an intervention and put an end to this misery so we can move on.'

The liberal New York Times – which Biden says he 'reads first every morning' – published a scathing editorial calling him 'reckless'.

It said: 'Mr Biden is not the man he was four years ago. The greatest public service Mr Biden can now perform is to announce he will not continue to run for re-election.'

Chuck Schumer, the Senate Majority leader, who has been a friend of the President for 40 years, is also 'open' to replacing him, according to multiple reports in the US.

The Clinton aide said: 'The next few days will be critical as new polling figures come in and the party deals with the fallout. There is a lot of behind-the-scenes deal-making going on.'

'No one will go public until Joe decides to stand aside. He was a stubborn young man and he's a stubborn old man.'

Jen O'Malley Dillon, Biden's campaign chairwoman, scheduled a hasty meeting with staff and donors on Friday.

'She was trying to calm people down,' a source said. 'She said this was one bad night. The mood wasn't good. There is no fixing this.'

It comes as Biden is facing a 'financial catastrophe' as major donors freeze funds and celebrity supporters threaten to abandon his beleaguered campaign.

Hollywood supporters like George Clooney, Julia Roberts and Steven Spielberg – who have already raised millions – are said to have 'grave doubts' about his future.

A Hollywood donor said: 'Whether Biden stays or goes will come down to one thing; cold, hard cash. Fundraisers are being cancelled because there is no confidence in Biden.'

'He is trailing Donald Trump financially for the first time and there is a sense of panic that the big money and star power is on the brink of abandoning him.'

'Celebrities are fickle and no one wants to be associated with a loser.'

However, Elton John appeared to back Biden on Friday as the pair unveiled the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center in New York, a museum celebrating the birth of the LGBTQ+ movement in America.

The singer praised the US President for backing the museum, which stands on the site of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar which was the site of protests in 1969 after a police raid.

Eight weeks ago, Biden held a \$100 million advantage over his political rival. Then Trump was con-

(See **BIDEN SET UP**, P. 2)

An Activists Demanding Funding For Childcare Is Arrested At Legislature

NC Newsline—Eight activists demanding lawmakers allocate \$300 million in emergency childcare funding were arrested Wednesday inside the state Legislative Building after North Carolina General Assembly Police warned them to stop singing and chanting. Police told protesters that they'd received a noise complaint.

The activists were given three warnings before police arrested them, bound their hands with zip ties and led them away. The protesters were charged with second-degree trespassing and a related charge.

'We asked them three times to lower their voices or they would be subject to being arrested,' said General Assembly Police Chief Martin Brock. 'After the third warning, those who kept singing, we warned them a final time.'

Brock told reporters he did not know who made the noise complaint.

Later, the state House unanimously approved an amendment to Senate Bill 357 authorizing \$67 million in emergency funding to keep stabilization payments coming until lawmakers can end their budget impasse.

'Basically, what this amendment does is reallocates funds from the



State Fiscal Recovery Fund and helps us get through the first quarter,' said Rep. Donny Lambeth, R-Forsyth. 'We've all heard about the childcare cliff. July 1 is an important date because funding does stop and what this amendment does is add in to allow funds to be allocated at least through the first quarter.'

Lambeth said the expectation is

that lawmakers will return to Raleigh before those funds are depleted to adopt a budget. The bill was sent to the Senate.

Two weeks ago, a coalition of childcare operators, faith leaders, parents and others asked state lawmakers to make a \$300 million emergency appropriation to help keep childcare centers open and

teachers in classrooms.

The Republican-led House and Senate have proposed allocating roughly \$135 million for childcare center grants that will no longer be provided by the federal government starting next month.

Advocates have said that \$135 million is not enough to keep centers open and teachers in classrooms long-term. They reminded lawmakers of their position during a rally outside of the Legislative Building.

Emma Biggs, a Charlotte childcare provider, said \$300 million is needed just to maintain the state childcare system.

Biggs, who was among the eight protesters arrested, said lawmakers have refused to meet with advocates to discuss the childcare crisis.

'They keep ignoring us and proposing what they think is going to support childcare in this state – less than half of the care minimum that we need to stay open,' Biggs said.

Rev. Rob Stephens, NC Repairers of the Breach Organizing Committee coordinator, said some centers will be forced to close in four days without adequate funding.

'This isn't just a guess, this isn't

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



BERTIE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR WINS CONGRESSIONAL ART COMPETITION

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Congressman Don Davis (NC-01) announced Kayla Lassiter, a Bertie High School senior, won first place in the North Carolina First Congressional District Artistic Discovery Contest. Lassiter won first place with her piece "Rainbow-Hued."

'Kayla is a shining example of the remarkable artistic talent in eastern North Carolina. I commend all of our participants and was pleased to host this year's congressional art competition,' said Congressman Don Davis. 'It was an opportunity for our artists to display their artwork and network with others from across the First Congressional District.'

The judges chose "Rainbow-Hued" for its digital graphic design and subject matter. The piece reflects the black experience and how it is represented today.

'Art is a reflection of life, reality, perceptions, emotions, and ideas. Art has the power to inspire and provoke thoughts from perspectives of any kind,' said Kayla Lassiter.

The Artistic Discovery Contest recognizes and encourages artistic talent nationwide. Thirty-one students from 19 counties in North Carolina's First Congressional District entered the high school art competition.

A committee of art professionals volunteered their time to judge the competition. The judges included Jacinda Aytch, a professional artist from Farmville, Robin Haller, a professor of textile design at East Carolina University, and Clarence Goss, a professor of graphic design at Elizabeth City State University.

NC LEGISLATURE PASSES LAWS ON MASKS, PROTESTS, AND CAMPAIGN MONEY OVER THE GOVERNOR'S OBJECTIONS

The Republican-dominated legislature passed three new laws that Gov. Roy Cooper does not want, with the Senate voting Thursday to tear holes in campaign finance rules, allow billboard owners to cut more trees along roadsides, and have more 16- and 17-year-olds to face trial in adult court.

The Senate voted along party lines to override the Democratic governor's vetoes. The House took its override votes on Wednesday.

The campaign finance law changes rules to allow wealthy donors to anonymously funnel money into candidate campaign accounts. That same law includes new rules on wearing masks in public.

The surprise addition of new campaign finance changes to a bill on masks prompted Democrats in the Senate to walk out of the chamber earlier this month.

The rules for wearing masks to prevent the spread of disease are tighter. Masks worn for health reasons must be medical or surgical grade. The law creates tougher penalties for people convicted of crimes while wearing masks. And, it increases penalties for obstructing traffic during a protest.

Protesters sitting or lying down on roads and highways were a familiar form of protest over the war in Gaza and over George Floyd's murder in 2020.

The law raises constitutional concerns, "threatens North Carolinians' right to protest and allows police officers to stop anyone wearing a mask to ask them to remove it," Reighlah Collins, policy counsel for the ACLU of North Carolina, said in a statement.

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

Battle For Ballot Access: New Parties Face Setback In North Carolina

By: Jordan Meadows

Staff Writer

The North Carolina State Board of Elections recently voted against granting ballot access to new parties that endorse presidential candidates Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and Cornel West. This decision, made on Wednesday, is preliminary and subject to review before the November election in this pivotal swing state.

Two parties, the We The People party and the Justice for All Party of North Carolina, had launched petition drives to secure official party status. This required a lesser number of valid signatures from registered and eligible voters compared to what Kennedy, an environmental lawyer and author, and West, a progressive activist and professor, would have needed if they were running independently statewide.

The board's decision revealed a split along party lines: the three-member Democratic majority opted to defer West and Kennedy's ballot access "for now," while the two Republican commissioners expressed disappointment with the process.

Chairman Alan Hirsch said more



investigation is needed to "look at petition-gathers who have been problematic" and to examine other concerns before making a final decision.

According to an NBC News report, operatives from a GOP firm based out-of-state were covertly gathering signatures for Cornel West. Their actions appeared aimed at "taking away votes from Joe Biden," as one of the petition collectors disclosed outside a planned rally for former President Donald Trump.

Additionally, the report detailed

that three operatives associated with a Republican canvassing firm from Colorado were gathering signatures on behalf of the Justice for All Party, which supports West.

Democrats on the board also expressed concerns about whether volunteers misrepresented Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as an independent candidate rather than positioning him as a potential nominee of the newly formed party.

The board has tentatively scheduled a meeting for July 9 to revisit the requests of these groups.

STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

IN RALEIGH, A FIERY BIDEN BLASTS TRUMP AS A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY, SEEKS TO QUELL AGE CONCERNS

In his first major public appearance after Thursday night's presidential debate in Atlanta, a fiery and animated President Joe Biden addressed a loud and enthusiastic crowd on Friday at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

In a speech interrupted repeatedly by applause and chants of "four more years!" and "yes you can!" from an audience that seemed almost as if it was trying to provide him with an infusion of energy, the 81-year-old chief executive ticked off a long list of his administration's accomplishments, blasted what he said were Donald Trump's repeated lies and policy failures, and directly addressed the issue of his age and his much-criticized debate performance.

At one point in his remarks, during which he paused several times to cough and clear his throat, Biden acknowledged his age and that it has become an issue.

"I know I'm not a young man," he said. "I don't walk as easily as I used to. I don't speak as smoothly as I used to," he said. And, he added, in an obvious allusion to Thursday's widely panned performance in Atlanta — "I don't debate as well as I used to."

But he immediately followed the admission with a spirited denunciation of Trump in which he said, "I know what I do know — I know how to tell the truth! I know right from wrong! And I know how to do this job. I know how to get things done. And I know like millions of Americans know, when you get knocked down, you get back up!"

Shortly thereafter, he told the audience "I believe with all my heart and soul I can do this job."

Listing accomplishments, attacking Trump

Most of the president's speech was devoted to two things: a recitation of what Biden said were the accomplishments of his administration and a series of damning attacks on Trump.

In the former category, Biden took credit for, among other things, the nation's rapid recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, a strong economy, low unemployment, a large expansion healthcare access, and a reduction in the cost of prescription drugs.

If reelected, he said, he would work to restore Roe v. Wade abortion protections as "the law of the land," expand access to childcare and affordable housing, defend Medicare and Social Security, attack corporate profiteering that he said has been a chief cause of inflation, promote education for all children and, "unlike the other guy, stand up to Putin."

As for Trump, the president decried his predecessor's actions and around the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection and his more recent statements about the possibility of "bloodshed" if he is not elected this fall, as grave threats to democracy. "America itself, is at stake," Biden said.

He also blasted what he described as Trump's lack of respect for women and his criminal conviction for falsifying business records, calling him a "one man crime wave."

Trump, Biden said, has "the morals of an alley cat," and had set a new record for the most lies ever uttered in a presidential debate.

Concerned but hopeful supporters

While the audience was boisterous and supportive throughout Biden's 22-minute speech, the impact of Thursday's uneven debate performance was still on the minds of many in attendance — even if did not seem to lessen their support for the president.

Karla Houston, a former teacher told Newsline, "It [the debate] was unfortunately maybe not all that surprising for me, but I wouldn't say it's going to change a decision. I'm gonna vote (for) whoever the Democrats choose.

"So, my biggest concerns are things that I'm focused on are getting somebody who's going to protect the Supreme Court, keep voting rights, keeping them pushed forward, not taking anything away.

"His age is obviously an issue, but I think he is able to do his job as he's shown in the last four years and that's what I'm looking for."

ACTIVISTS

Continued from page 1

fantasy, this is already happening," said Stephens, who was also arrested.

Rev. Wayne Wilhelm, tri-chair of the North Carolina Poor People's Campaign, said lawmakers have a "selective-life stance."

"It's a shame we have to continue to come out here and demand and proclaim to the people behind us [lawmakers in the Legislative Building] that claim that life is so precious, that life is so important, that we [have to] demand that they fund early childhood education," Wilhelm said.

Newsline has previously reported that the state will soon spend the last of \$1.3 billion in federal grant money that helped childcare providers make it through the pandemic. Some of the money was used to increase worker pay.

NC Newsline reported in April that a North Carolina Child Care Resource and Referral Council survey found that 88% of childcare providers will need to increase parent fees when the federal money runs out. Forty percent said they would have to raise parent fees immediately. About half said they would lose administrative and teaching staff and about two-thirds said they would have trouble hiring new employees with comparable experience and education.

Nearly one-third of the programs surveyed said they would have to close within a year. That's equivalent to more than 1,500 programs and close to 92,000 childcare and early education slots.

Biden Set Up—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

victed of paying off porn star Stormy Daniels and saw \$53 million pour in within 24 hours. The Republican presumptive nominee now has \$240 million in his war chest compared with Biden's \$212 million.

'It's a disaster for Biden,' the former aide added. 'His campaign is making a big deal of the fact that \$14 million has come in from small donors since the debate. That's chicken feed.'

Vice President Kamala Harris, whose own poll numbers are low, jetted into LA last night to host a

fundraiser alongside Frozen star Idina Menzel. Sex And The City star Sarah Jessica Parker and husband Matthew Broderick were due to attend, along with Gwyneth Paltrow and Michael J. Fox. A source said: 'No one knows who will turn up. Tickets are still available.'

Laurene Powell Jobs, the billionaire founder of Emerson Collective, and billionaire Hollywood producer Haim Saban, have been identified among other megadonors trading concerned messages about a situation many Democratic operatives

consider so dire that Biden might have to withdraw before the convention in Chicago.

Democratic party leaders and potential replacements for Biden will hold a series of in-person and Zoom meetings over the next few days as America prepares to celebrate the Independence Day holiday on Thursday.

'Washington has closed down which makes it easier for people to have private conversations,' a campaign insider said. 'If Joe goes, that will be decided in the next week. He

has a week to prove himself.

'If he can be persuaded to step aside, that announcement will come in two-and-a-half to three weeks' time. That's the timeline.'

New poll figures also show that voters have lost confidence in the President.

A Morning Consult poll showed 60 per cent believe he should 'definitely' or 'probably' be replaced, while an Ipsos poll reveals 73 per cent of those who watched the debate think his performance was 'poor or terrible'.

Gazans' Extreme Hunger Could Leave Its Mark On Subsequent Generations

By Hasan Khatib

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Food insecurity refers to the lack of regular access to safe and nutritious food necessary for normal growth and development and maintaining an active, healthy life. Severe food insecurity is characterized by running out of food and going a day or more without eating, leading to the experience of hunger.

An initiative called the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, managed by United Nations bodies and major relief agencies, was established in 2004 to enhance analysis and decision-making on food security and nutrition.

The IPC classification system identifies five distinct phases of food security: 1. Minimal/none; 2. Stressed; 3. Crisis; 4. Emergency; 5. Catastrophe/famine.

The IPC estimates that 96% of the population in Gaza — 2.15 million people — are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, classified as IPC Phase 3 or higher.

Approximately 50% to 60% of buildings throughout Gaza, and over 70% of those in northern Gaza, have been damaged or destroyed, including more than 90% of schools and 84% of health facilities.

Due to the destruction of food production and distribution infrastructure, all households skip meals daily, with adults reducing their portions. The IPC projects that by July 2024, half of the population will be classified as being in a famine, experiencing acute malnutrition or death.

As of June 6, 2024, the World Health Organization reported that 32 patients had died from malnutri-



tion and 73 had been admitted because of severe acute malnutrition in Gaza. Malnutrition can weaken the immune system, increasing the risk of serious illness and death, primarily due to infectious diseases.

And as of the same date, the WHO reported 865,157 cases of acute respiratory infections, 485,315 cases of diarrhea, 57,887 cases of skin rashes and 8,538 cases of chickenpox, all of which can be exacerbated by malnutrition.

Strikes by the Israeli forces across the Gaza Strip have resulted in civilian casualties, the destruction of homes and the displacement of over 1.7 million people since October 2023, including many families who had already been displaced multiple times.

The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that at least 17,000 children have been separated from

their parents as of February 2024, and nearly all children in Gaza need mental health and psychological support. Symptoms observed among these children include heightened anxiety levels, loss of appetite, sleep disturbances and panic attacks.

Since Oct. 7, 2023, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency has provided critical psychological support, including psychological first aid, fatigue management sessions and individual and group counseling, to over 650,000 displaced persons, including 400,000 children.

UN Women, an organization focused on gender equality and the empowerment of women, reported that from October 2023 to April 2024, 10,000 Palestinian women in Gaza were killed, resulting in 19,000 children being orphaned. Approximately 50,000 pregnant Palestinian women and 20,000 newborn babies

face limited access to health care facilities due to the bombardment of hospitals and health clinics.

In addition, more than 180 women per day are giving birth without pain relief, leading to a 300% increase in miscarriages due to the severe conditions. These dire conditions are causing severe stress and trauma among Palestinian children and women. This combination of stress, trauma and hunger can leave a lasting impact on both the women and their offspring.

Over the past two decades, extensive research has investigated whether environmental factors such as hunger, stress and trauma can affect future generations that are not directly exposed to them. Pioneering studies of the Dutch famine, which occurred in the Netherlands from 1944 to 1945, found that these types of intergenerational effects were indeed happening.

During the Nazi occupation, food supplies were cut off from the western part of the Netherlands between November 1944 and May 1945, leading to widespread starvation. Decades later, researchers discovered that children and grandchildren of pregnant women exposed to the famine had a higher risk of health problems later in life, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other metabolic disorders.

Similarly, the Great Chinese Famine from 1959 to 1961, which resulted in an estimated 15 million to 40 million deaths, is one of the deadliest famines in history. It profoundly affected the physical and mental health, cognition and overall well-being of those exposed to it and their offspring.

DHS IDs 400 Migrants Smuggled Into US By Network, Connected To ISIS

CNN — The Department of Homeland Security has identified more than 400 migrants who came to the US via a human smuggling network that may have some connection with ISIS, prompting an additional review of those individuals, according to two US officials.

The purpose of the network was to smuggle people, not bring in terrorists, one of the officials said. But it has ties to the same network that brought a group of Uzbek nationals last summer across the southern border by a facilitator who had ties to ISIS, the official said. CNN was first to report on that incident in 2023.

In the latest case, the 400 migrants under scrutiny — mostly from Central Asian nations — are being screened purely because of their connection to the human smuggling network.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told reporters Wednesday that the department hasn't identified "400 people with potential ISIS ties."

Of those 400 people, a number of them have been detained by immigration authorities, according to the official. But there haven't been cases

identified of anyone threatening the US at this point, the official said. Vetting is ongoing.

NBC News was first to report the figure of 400 migrants.

The review comes as US officials have grown increasingly concerned about migrants from Central Asian nations such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Earlier this month, officials arrest eight Tajik nationals across the country after officials discovered that they had some specific and troubling connections to the terror group.

The leadership of ISIS-K is mainly made up of Tajik nationals and the group has recruited from both countries. Tajik nationals have carried out a series of recent attacks in Europe on behalf of the group, including the Crocus Hall attack in Moscow in March that killed more than 100 people.

US officials have been paying particular attention since last summer, when a group of Uzbek nationals who had crossed the southern border were later found to have been assisted in traveling to the United States by a facilitator who had ties to ISIS.

The episode sparked a scramble

across the US government to locate and investigate those people.

Two US officials also said that it spurred national security officials to ensure that immigration and intelligence authorities were appropriately monitoring anyone traveling from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

"I think what (the incident with the Uzbek nationals) did last summer was suggest Central Asians are potentially a population of concern, given what we know about the global ISIS network right now," a senior US official previously told CNN.

The more recent episode played out in a similar fashion: The eight men from Tajikistan initially entered the US at the southern border and requested asylum under US immigration law. By the time intelligence that was collected on overseas ISIS targets connected the men to the terror group, they had already been vetted by immigration authorities and allowed into the country, officials said.

Though there is no hard evidence indicating that they were sent to the US as part of a terror plot, at least some of the Tajik nationals had expressed extremist rhetoric in their

communications, either on social media or in direct private communications that US intelligence was able to monitor, three officials said.

National security officials feared that at least some of the eight Tajiks were ripe for radicalization by ISIS-K while they were inside the United States, potentially struggling with isolation, financial stress or discrimination — all things that could make a person susceptible to ISIS propaganda glorifying violence.

Senior officials now see a so-called lone-wolf attacker who emerges seemingly from nowhere as perhaps the more likely — and potentially equally dangerous — threat rather than the more traditional coordinated plot carried out by trained operatives.

Earlier Wednesday, Mayorkas told MSNBC that "we have no evidence that (the 400) are individuals plotting to harm the United States."

"We screen and vet individuals at the time of encounter. If we learn of derogatory information, we take enforcement action, we are proceeding with extreme caution here in the service of the security and safety of the American people, number one," he said.

Trial Judges Dismiss NC Redistricting Lawsuit Over Right To 'Fair Elections'

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina trial judges have dismissed a lawsuit challenging redrawn legislative and congressional district lines on the argument that they run afoul of an indirect constitutional right to "fair elections." The judges said a recent affirmation still applies — that redistricting policy decisions are left to the General Assembly, not the courts.

In an order released Friday, the panel of three Superior Court judges threw out the complaint filed in January by several voters who attempt to block enforcement of redistricting that they said creates outsized preferences that favor one side — in this case benefiting Republicans.

In a 2023 ruling by the state Supreme Court, the GOP majority said the judiciary lacked authority

to declare redistricting maps as illegal partisan gerrymanders. They also said that redistricting was a political matter the judicial branch must stay out of, save for challenges on specific limitations.

A voters' lawyer argued in a court hearing earlier this month that the 2023 decision didn't apply to his lawsuit, which described an implicit though unspecified right within the state constitution to fair elections. The lawsuit cites specific language in the constitution that "elections shall be often held" and that "all elections shall be free."

But the order signed Superior Court Judges Jeffery Foster, Angela Puckett and Ashley Gore reads that the 2023 opinion by the Supreme Court still controls the outcome in this case. That's the argument also made by Republican legislative leaders who were

among the lawsuit defendants.

"The issues raised by Plaintiffs are clearly of a political nature," the order dated Thursday said. "There is not a judicially discoverable or manageable standard by which to decide them, and resolution by the Panel would require us to make policy determinations that are better suited for the policymaking branch of government, namely, the General Assembly."

Attorneys for the plaintiffs said Saturday they anticipate filing an appeal. In a written statement, the lawyers added the ruling that "the legislative manipulation of voters to create essentially preordained election results" is beyond the authority of courts to address in part creates a result that "if correct, is a devastating blow to the democratic process of elections in North Carolina." Spokespeople for

state House Speaker Tim Moore and Senate leader Phil Berger did not respond Friday to a request for comment.

The lawsuit is among four filed in North Carolina to challenge congressional and legislative boundaries drawn by the GOP-dominated General Assembly last fall for use in elections through 2030 that favor Republicans electorally. The other three, still pending, were filed in federal court and focus on claims of illegal racial gerrymandering.

The "fair elections" lawsuit focuses on a handful of districts. Each of the three judges who heard the lawsuit are registered Republicans. Chief Justice Paul Newby, a Republican who wrote the prevailing opinion in the 2023 redistricting ruling, chooses three-judge panels to hear such cases.

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Business & Finance

SCOTUS Overturns Chevron: Major Blow to Consumer Protections, Power

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

In a ruling that should make all Americans stop saying what the Supreme Court, those in power, or individuals seeking office and the presidency can't do, the high court issued what could be a devastating ruling on the so-called Chevron decision. The decision could lead to skyrocketing phone bills, soaring healthcare costs, and dismantling regulations on safe food and consumer protections that have been in place for decades. The Supreme Court has consigned to history the 1984 ruling known as *Chevron v. Natural Resources Defense Council*, potentially jeopardizing the safety and rights of consumers and the environment.

In a 6-3 decision, the conservative majority of the court dealt another blow to the power of federal agencies. In writing for the majority, Chief Justice John Roberts declared, "Chevron is overruled. Courts must exercise their independent judgment in deciding whether an agency has acted within its statutory authority." Liberal Justice Elena Kagan, in her dissent, warned that a "longstanding precedent at the crux of administrative governance thus falls victim to a bald assertion of judicial authority."

At the time of its decision, Chevron was a victory for the Reagan administration's deregulatory agenda, granting judges the ability to defer to federal agencies in interpreting ambiguous statutes. The flexibility allowed Democratic and Repub-



lican presidents to implement new regulations across various issues. However, many Republicans have increasingly criticized Chevron, arguing it gives too much power to agency bureaucrats. Environmental activists and other groups on the left have defended Chevron for its ability to address issues like climate change.

The case that led to this ruling involved a challenge to a federal regulation requiring fishing vessel operators to fund data collection for fishery conservation and management. The National Marine Fisheries Service, which oversees ocean resources, issued a rule in 2020 mandating vessel operators pay up to \$710 a day for independent observers to monitor operations. Small

owner-operators argued this cost was burdensome, challenging the service's authority under the 1976 Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The lower courts had ruled in favor of the federal government.

The Trump administration has supported a campaign by the conservative justices to limit the power of federal agencies, and this decision is the most recent in that series. The court's conservative majority, including three Trump appointees—Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett—has repeatedly struck down agency actions lacking explicit congressional authorization, following the "major questions doctrine."

Former acting Solicitor General

Neal Katyal sounded the alarm in a NBC News interview, stating, "The Supreme Court has done an extraordinary thing, an extraordinarily dangerous thing. Most government regulation in this country is not done by Congress. It's done by administrative agencies... What the Supreme Court did today by a 6-3 vote is overturned Chevron. That is going to make it much more difficult to regulate businesses, to protect consumers, to protect the environment, and to protect our healthcare."

Katyal emphasized the sweeping impact of the ruling, noting that regulations by agencies like the EPA, FDA, and FCC, which influence everything from environmental standards to food safety and phone bill costs, will now face greater challenges. He warned, "This decision... is going to change government as we know it."

The political dynamic behind the ruling reflects the decreasing productivity of Congress due to partisan divides, leading to a greater reliance on agency rules to achieve regulatory goals, particularly by Democratic presidents. The 1984 Chevron precedent, which called for judicial deference to federal agency interpretations of ambiguous laws, has been a target of conservatives and business interests for years. With the ruling, the Supreme Court has dramatically shifted the landscape of American governance, with opponents arguing that it potentially jeopardizes decades of consumer and environmental protections and ushered in a new era of regulatory challenges.



Tractor Supply Is Ending DEI And Climate Efforts

NEW YORK (AP) — Tractor Supply is ending an array of corporate diversity and climate efforts, a move coming after weeks of online conservative backlash against the rural retailer.

Tractor Supply said it would be eliminating all of its diversity, equity and inclusion roles while retiring current DEI goals. It did not elaborate on what was entailed in eliminating DEI roles.

The company added that it would "stop sponsoring nonbusiness activities" such as Pride festivals or voting campaigns — and no longer submit data to the Human Rights Campaign, the largest advocacy group for LGBTQ+ rights in the U.S.

The Brentwood, Tennessee-based retailer, which sells products ranging from farming equipment to pet supplies, also said in a statement Thursday that it would withdraw from its carbon emission goals to instead "focus on our land and water conservation efforts."

These changes mark a stunning shift in policy and messaging from Tractor Supply, which once touted its diversity and inclusion efforts. Just earlier this month, Tractor Supply President and CEO Hal Lawton maintained that the company remained "very consistent" in how it approaches its own DEI and ESG — environmental, social and governance — programs for a number of years.

"(We've) just been very consistent in our emphasis there," Lawton said in a June 5th interview with The Associated Press, pointing to company web pages that he said reinforced and reported on those efforts. "We haven't walked away from anything."

Thursday's move appeared to reverse much of that — and arrives amid a wider backdrop of conservative backlash and litigation that has targeted companies across industries, as well as a wide array of diversity initiatives, including fellowships, hiring goals, anti-bias training and contract programs for minority or women-owned businesses.

Legal attacks against companies' diversity and inclusion efforts have particularly been on the rise since June of last year, when the Supreme Court ruled to end affirmative action in college admissions. Many conservative and anti-DEI activists have been seeking to set a similar precedent in the working world.

Beyond the courtroom, some companies and brands — from Bud Light to Target — have been hit with online campaigns calling for boycotts.

Meanwhile, some other corporations and law firms have quietly altered their diversity programs, a stark contrast to the very public announcement on Thursday by Tractor Supply. In its statement, the company said "heard from customers that we have disappointed them" and "taken this feedback to heart."

"We will continue to listen to our customers and Team Members," Tractor Supply added. "Your trust and confidence in us are of the utmost importance, and we don't take that lightly."

A Tractor Supply spokesperson declined to provide further comment Friday.

NC's Restrictions On Public Mask-Wearing Are Now Law After Some Key Revisions

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina's contentious restrictions on public mask-wearing became law on Thursday after GOP lawmakers successfully overrode a veto by the state's Democratic governor.

The Senate gave its final stamp of approval in a 30-14 override vote along party lines. The state House initiated the process Wednesday when it voted to override Gov. Roy Cooper's veto during a lengthy session that lasted well into the night.

The ban joins a list of more than 20 gubernatorial vetoes the GOP-dominated North Carolina General Assembly has overridden in the past year. Republicans hold narrow supermajorities in both chambers.

The law, most of which goes into effect immediately, contains different language from the bill that lawmakers first introduced this session. The original proposal had removed a 2020 bipartisan regulation put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic that allowed masking for health reasons, prompting pushback from the public and some Democratic legislators. The lawmakers restored a medical exemption.

The law allows people to wear medical or surgical-grade masks in

public to prevent the spread of illness. Law enforcement and property owners can ask people to temporarily remove those masks to verify their identity.

The measure also increases the severity of punishment for crimes committed while wearing a mask, and raises penalties for protesters who purposefully block traffic. The latter provision is scheduled to go into effect Dec. 1.

An unrelated provision on campaign finance was tacked on to the bill during negotiations. The law allows federally registered committees to donate money to state political parties by tapping pots of money that include unlimited contributions from individuals.

Multiple times during the bill's pathway through the legislature, GOP lawmakers said it was, in part, a response to widespread protests on college campuses against the war in Gaza.

"It's about time that the craziness is ... at least slowed down, if not put to a stop," one of the bill's supporters, Wilson County Republican Sen. Buck Newton, said last month.

More than 30 people were detained at an encampment set up at the University of North Carolina

at Chapel Hill to protest the war in Gaza. Many of the demonstrators wore masks.

Earlier this year, pro-Palestinian protesters blocked roads in Raleigh and Durham.

Opposition to the measure initially centered on the removal of the health exemption, which Democratic lawmakers and other opponents said could harm immunocompromised people.

"You're making careful people into criminals with this bill," Mecklenburg County Democrat Sen. Natasha Marcus said in May.

Those concerns were largely ignored, however, until Rep. Erin Pare, Wake County's only Republican General Assembly member, announced on X that she wouldn't vote for the bill if a health exemption wasn't included. The legislation's passage skidded to a halt, prompting GOP legislators to add a health exemption.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other groups said the bill stifles protesters' free speech.

Now, most Democratic lawmakers are concerned about the election finance provision, which they said would lead to a lack of transparency in elections. Cooper cited the same

provision as his main reason for vetoing the legislation.

General statutes on masking date back to 1953, and were largely aimed at curbing Ku Klux Klan activity in North Carolina, according to David Cunningham, a Washington University at St. Louis sociology professor who wrote a book on the subject. The section of state laws that includes masking restrictions is titled "Prohibited Secret Societies and Activities."

In addition to the health exception, the law also exempts masks worn with holiday costumes, in theatrical productions or on jobs where they are used to keep workers safe.

New York is considering a ban that Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul said would be a way to combat antisemitic acts by masked individuals. The measure would include exemptions for health and religious reasons. As in North Carolina, civil liberties groups in the state have expressed concerns about how the ban would affect free speech.

In Ohio last month, Attorney General Dave Yost cited the state's existing mask restrictions when warning student protesters that he could charge them with felonies for wearing them.

Future Of Mission Health Could Hinge On What Happens Over The Next Month

By Jane Winik Sartwell

Carolina Public Press

July could serve as an important turning point in the saga of HCA and Mission Health.

Affiliated Monitors' series of public meetings concerning HCA's hospitals across Western North Carolina wrapped up recently. The deadline for Dogwood Health Trust to deliver its opinion to the NC Attorney General's office about whether HCA breached its Asset Purchase Agreement is fast approaching.

Less than a week remains until the contract expiration date of Mission Health's nurses.

Mission Health is a group of six hospitals and related medical facilities in Western North Carolina, the biggest of which is in Asheville. The other five hospitals are in small towns in nearby mountain counties.

HCA, which stands for Hospital Corporation of America, bought Mission Health from its previous non-profit owner in 2019 for \$1.5 billion. The Tennessee-based for-profit corporation's operation of the hospitals has garnered much criticism.

HCA's acquisition of Mission Health resulted in the creation of the Dogwood Health Trust, to hold the \$1.5 billion HCA paid to the nonprofit, for use in philanthropic endeavors in Western North Carolina. Dogwood was also tasked with hiring an independent monitoring company



to assess whether HCA is abiding by the purchase terms it agreed to back in 2019.

A new monitoring company, Affiliated Monitors, came on board earlier this year. The previous monitoring company, Gibbins Advisers, deemed HCA compliant each year, even as tensions between HCA and its employees, as well as the communities which it serves, rose to a boiling point.

After their first rally in early June, the Asheville nurses' union went back to the bargaining table with HCA. This session resulted in agreements on updated uniforms and expanded health care benefits for

LGBTQ+ nurses, Elle Kruta, Mission Health nurse and member of the union's bargaining team, told Carolina Public Press.

However, this agreement did not fully satisfy union members.

"The hospital is still refusing to budge on really any of the demands that nurses have to make our hospital safer," Chris Letts, a Mission Health nurse who identifies as non-binary and uses they/them pronouns, told CPP.

The nurses' union in Asheville, which is part of the nationwide organization National Nurses' United, staged a second rally outside of Mission Health on June 19.

"We will keep working at the negotiating table even after the contract expires, but nurses are fired up and ready to use everything at our disposal, and that could include a strike if we need to," Letts said after the second rally.

"We want to keep our patients as safe as possible, and our patients are unsafe now. So if we need to strike to make our patients safer, that is what we will do."

If a plan to strike does materialize, the bargaining team will announce a strike authorization vote. If nurses vote in favor, the union must provide a 10-day notice to management before any work stoppage.

Letts works in the step-down floor of the hospital, where they provide intermediate intensive care for Asheville's sick.

The American Nurse Association's proposed federal nurse-to-patient ratio on step-down floors is 1:3. "The hospital acknowledges (safe staffing ratios), but routinely walks all over them," Letts said. "What we are demanding is for the hospital to face consequences when they short-staff units."

"HCA listens to money, so we're asking HCA to pay nurses extra when we are forced to take additional patients."

In addition to safe-staffing protocols, nurses are demanding the hospital network address workplace violence in the new contract.

Classifieds

INVITATION TO BID

M/WBE HUB SUBCONTRACTORS/VENDORS

Colmar Contracting, Inc. invites all qualified MWBE/ HUB SUBCONTRACTORS AND VENDORS to submit proposals for the following project: Dillard Street Apartments Parce A in Durham, NC – The new construction of 48units, 4 buildings, 1 club house & 1 picnic shelter.

Bids due Friday August 2 2024 @ 5:00 PM

For information on this project and for assistance with plans and specifications contact: email estimating@colmarcontracting.com or call 336-315-2129.

M/WBE MUST BE CERTIFIED OR ELIGIBLE FOR CERTIFICATION BY CITY OF DURHAM DUB OFFICE AND THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA.

ALL SUBCONTRACTORS/VENDORS WILL RECEIVE CONSIDERATION REGARDLESS OF RACE, CREED, COLOR OR NATIONAL ORIGIN.

Colmar Contracting Inc. offers assistance to MWBE/HUB businesses on a one-on-one basis that need quick pay options, joint pay agreements and reduced retainages.

There will be pre-bid meetings for this project, Thursday July 18th 2024 at the Hampton Inn & Suites, Durham/North I-85. 1542 Gregson Street Durham, NC 27701.

These are not mandatory. We will have a complete set of plans and specifications to review in case there are any questions. Please reference the following times for your specific trade(s).

8:30 am – 9:30 am (Site grading, site utilities, site concrete, site segmental walls, Building concrete, building masonry, metal fabrications, site fencing)

- 9:30 am-10:30 am (Framing, trusses, trim carpentry, Doors, windows, hardware, Div 10 accessories (mailboxes, bath accessories, shelving, fire extinguishers, etc)

- 10:30-11:30 am (Roofing, siding, insulation, joint sealants

- 1:00 pm-2:00 pm (Drywall, painting, flooring, pressure washing, final cleaning)

- 2:00 pm-3:00 pm (Fire sprinklers, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, Fire Alarm

- ZOOM call in (let Colmar know if you want a link) @ 11:30-12 noon

Estimated start date: 2024 Q4 for sitework/ 2025 Q1 for building trades