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## President Biden Bows Out And Now The Games Begin

ATLANTA (AP) — With President Joe Biden ending his reelection bid and endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris, Democrats now must navigate a shift that is unprecedented this late in an election year.

Democrats are set to hold their convention in Chicago on Aug. 19-22. What was supposed to be a coronation for Biden now becomes an open contest in which nearly 4,700 delegates will be responsible for picking a new standard-bearer to challenge Republican Donald Trump in the fall.

The path ahead is neither easy nor obvious, even with Biden endorsing Harris. There are unanswered questions about logistics, money and political fallout.

Biden won every state primary and caucus earlier this year and only lost the territory of American Samoa. At least 3,896 delegates had been pledged to support him.

Current party rules do not permit Biden to pass them to another candidate. Politically, though, his endorsement is likely to be influential.

With Biden stepping aside, Democrats technically start with an open convention. But realistically, his endorsement pushes Democrats into murky territory.



The immediate burden is on Harris to solidify support across almost 4,000 delegates from the states, territories and District of Columbia, plus more than 700 so-called super-delegates that include party leaders,

certain elected officials and former presidents and vice presidents.

Even before Biden announced his decision, Democrats floated California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer as

potential contenders in addition to Harris. Yet some Democrats argued publicly, and many privately, that it would be a no-brainer to elevate the first woman, first Black woman and first person of south Asian descent to

hold national office.

Given how important Black voters — and Black women especially — were to Biden's nomination and his choice of Harris as running mate, it would be risky, to say the least, for Democrats to pass her over for a white nominee. Democrats already faced historical headwinds before Biden's withdrawal. Newsom and Whitmer, both of whom are white, and any other Democrat would also have to weigh the short-term and long-term benefits of challenging Harris now versus preserving goodwill for a future presidential primary.

Yet, fair or not, Harris also has not been viewed as an especially beloved or empowered vice president. The best scenario for her and Democrats is to quickly shore up support and project a united front. Democrats could even go forward with their plans for an early virtual vote — a move they'd planned to make sure Biden was selected ahead of Ohio's general election ballot deadline.

Biden's campaign recently reported \$91 million cash on hand. Allied Democratic campaign committees brought the total at his disposal to more than \$240 million. Campaign finance experts agree generally that Harris could control all those funds since the campaign was set up in her

name as well as Biden's. If Democrats do nominate someone other than Harris, party accounts could still benefit the nominee, but the Biden-Harris account would have more restrictions. For example, legal experts say it could become an independent expenditure political action committee but not simply transfer its balance to a different nominee.

The vice presidential nomination is always a separate convention vote. In routine years, the convention ratifies the choice of the nominee. If Harris closes ranks quickly, she could name her choice and have the delegates ratify it. In an extended fight, though, the vice presidency could become part of horse-trading — again, a return to conventions of an earlier era.

Any curveball during a U.S. presidential campaign is certain to produce a flurry of state and federal lawsuits in this hyper-partisan era, and some conservatives have threatened just that.

State laws, though, typically do not prescribe how parties choose their nominees for president. And some GOP figures — Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey — have worked already this year to ensure their party did not deny Democrats' routine ballot access.

## US Navy Exonerates Black WWII Sailors Convicted After Port Chicago Explosion

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA

The U.S. Navy has exonerated 256 Black sailors wrongfully convicted after the catastrophic 1944 Port Chicago explosion, a massive detonation of a munition's pier in Port Chicago, California, that killed 320 people, predominantly Black sailors, and injured around 400 others. According to the Naval History and Heritage Command, the explosion caused widespread damage, with shockwaves felt as far as Nevada.

On July 17, 1944, during World War II, a massive explosion at a munition's pier in Port Chicago, California, detonated over 4,600 tons of ammunition on a cargo ship. The blast killed 320 people, predominantly Black sailors, and injured around 400 others. According to the Naval History and Heritage Command, the explosion caused widespread damage, with shockwaves felt as far as Nevada.

Following the explosion, white officers were given hardship leave, while Black sailors were ordered back to work, tasked with cleaning the devastated base and handling the remains of their comrades. Despite the lack of additional safety measures or clarity on the blast's cause, 258 Black sailors refused to handle munitions. Under threat of disciplinary action, 208 returned



to work but were still convicted of disobeying orders. The remaining sailors, known as the "Port Chicago 50," were charged with mutiny and sentenced to dishonorable discharge, 15 years of confinement, demotion to the rank of E-1, and forfeiture of pay.

Although military officials later reduced their sentences, their names

were not cleared until now, on the 80th anniversary of the explosion. "The Port Chicago 50, and the hundreds who stood with them, may not be with us today, but their story lives on as a testament to the enduring power of courage and the unwavering pursuit of justice," said U.S. Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro. "They stand as a beacon of hope, forever

reminding us that even in the face of overwhelming odds, the fight for what's right can and will prevail," Del Toro stated.

President Joe Biden lauded the exonerations, stating, "[The] announcement marks the end of a long and arduous journey for these Black sailors and their families, who fought for a nation that denied them equal justice under law. May we all remember their courage, sacrifice, and service to our nation."

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III also emphasized acknowledging and rectifying past injustices. "The NAACP, Thurgood Marshall, Eleanor Roosevelt, and others recognized the case as a travesty at the time," Austin wrote in a memo. "The Department of Defense must continue to learn from our past, and today's decision reflects our commitment to reckoning with our history, even when it is painful."

Officials said the exonerations signify a profound milestone in the ongoing struggle for justice and equality. "We owe it to these men and their families to remember their bravery and to learn from our past," said Del Toro. "Their courage is a beacon for future generations."



### NORTH CAROLINA GOVERNOR'S CHIEF OF STAFF IS LEAVING, AND WILL BE REPLACED BY ANOTHER LONGTIME AIDE

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — North Carolina Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's only chief of staff during his two terms is leaving her post in the final months of the administration for a move to the private sector. She'll be replaced by another longtime aide.

Kristi Jones will step down from the job overseeing Cooper's office in mid-August, the governor's office said in a Friday news release. Julia White, who has worked closely with Cooper since his time as attorney general, will succeed Jones.

Like White, Jones' tenure with Cooper dates back to him being attorney general, when she was chief of staff at the Department of Justice for over a decade.

Jones was a co-chair of Cooper's winning 2016 gubernatorial campaign and was the first African-American woman to become a North Carolina governor's chief of staff. Jones, a Wilson County native, began working for state government in Gov. Jim Hunt's administration in the late 1990s.

Ms. Lassiter and her mother attended a reception sponsored by the Congressional Institute for the winners in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., on June 27.

Her artwork, along with the winning artwork from all participating districts nationwide, is displayed in the Cannon Tunnel at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., for one year.

"For almost three decades, Kristi Jones has served our state with distinction and extraordinary skill," Cooper said in the release. "Julia has significant experience in state government as well as being one of my closest advisors for more than 25 years and I'm confident we will continue our progress under her leadership."

### AETNA SET TO RUN NORTH CAROLINA WORKER HEALTH CARE AS BLUE CROSS WILL NOT APPEAL JUDGE'S RULING

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Aetna is poised to manage health coverage plan benefits for North Carolina state workers and teachers starting early next year because Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina said Monday it won't appeal a judge's decision that upheld Aetna as the next contract winner.

An administrative law judge last week determined evidence showed that the State Health Plan conducted properly the procurement process for a third-party administrator, which has been Blue Cross for over 40 years. The plan's trustee board in late 2022 chose Aetna over Blue Cross and a unit of United Healthcare, which also competed. The initial three-year contract with Aetna is to begin in January 2025.

In announcing its decision not to appeal to Superior Court, Blue Cross said that it "will continue to provide the highest level of service throughout the current agreement" it still holds with the State Health Plan.

The administrator handles health care expenses for several hundred thousand state employees, teachers, their family members and retirees, ensuring claims are paid and building out a provider network. Contract costs — with health care claims included — exceed \$3 billion annually.

State Treasurer Dale Folwell, the trustee board chairman and head of the agency under which the State Health Plan is housed, was pleased with the Blue Cross decision not to appeal. "The members of the State Health Plan and taxpayers like them deserve to have this uncertainty ended," Folwell said.

## Tech Disruptions Highlight The Fragility Of Globally Connected Technologies

(AP)—Airlines, banks, hospitals and other risk-averse organizations around the world chose cybersecurity company CrowdStrike to protect their computer systems from hackers and data breaches.

But all it took was one faulty CrowdStrike software update to cause global disruptions Friday that grounded flights, knocked banks and media outlets offline, and disrupted hospitals, retailers and other services.

"This is a function of the very homogenous technology that goes into the backbone of all of our IT infrastructure," said Gregory Falco, an assistant professor of engineering at Cornell University. "What really causes this mess is that we rely on very few companies, and everybody uses the same folks, so everyone goes down at the same time."

The trouble with the update issued by CrowdStrike and affecting computers running Microsoft's Windows operating system was not a hacking incident or cyberattack, according to CrowdStrike, which apologized and said a fix was on the way.

But it wasn't an easy fix. It required "boots on the ground" to remediate, said Gartner analyst Eric Grenier.

"The fix is working, it's just a very manual process and there's no magic key to unlock it," Grenier said. "I think that is probably what companies are struggling with the most here."

While not everyone is a client of



CrowdStrike and its platform known as Falcon, it is one of the leading cybersecurity providers, particularly in transportation, healthcare, banking and other sectors that have a lot at stake in keeping their computer systems working.

"They're usually risk-averse organizations that don't want something that's crazy innovative, but that can work and also cover their butts when something goes wrong. That's what CrowdStrike is," Falco said. "And they're looking around at their colleagues in other sectors and saying, 'Oh, you know, this company also uses that, so I'm gonna need them, too.'"

Worrying about the fragility of a globally connected technology

ecosystem is nothing new. It's what drove fears in the 1990s of a technical glitch that could cause chaos at the turn of the millennium.

"This is basically what we were all worried about with Y2K, except it's actually happened this time," wrote Australian cybersecurity consultant Troy Hunt on the social platform X.

Across the world Friday, affected computers were showing the "blue screen of death" — a sign that something went wrong with Microsoft's Windows operating system.

But what's different now is "that these companies are even more entrenched," Falco said. "We like to think that we have a lot of players available. But at the end of the day, the biggest companies use all the

same stuff."

Founded in 2011 and publicly traded since 2019, CrowdStrike describes itself in its annual report to financial regulators as having "re-invented cybersecurity for the cloud era and transformed the way cybersecurity is delivered and experienced by customers." It emphasizes its use of artificial intelligence in helping to keep pace with adversaries. It reported having 29,000 subscribing customers at the start of the year.

The Austin, Texas-based firm is one of the more visible cybersecurity companies in the world and spends heavily on marketing, including Super Bowl ads. At cybersecurity conferences, it's known for large booths displaying massive action-figure statues representing different state-sponsored hacking groups that CrowdStrike technology promises to defend against.

CrowdStrike CEO George Kurtz is among the most highly compensated in the world, recording more than \$230 million in total compensation in the last three years. Kurtz is also a driver for a CrowdStrike-sponsored car racing team.

After his initial statement about the problem was criticized for lack of contrition, Kurtz apologized in a later social media post Friday and on NBC's "Today Show."

"We understand the gravity of the situation and are deeply sorry for the inconvenience and disruption," he said on X.

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



# Business & Finance

## North Carolina Consumers Score Court Win Against One Of Nation's Largest Debt-Buyers

The North Carolina Justice Center has received final court approval for a \$5.75 million settlement of a class action lawsuit brought against one of the nation's largest debt buyers, Portfolio Recovery Associates (PRA).

The lawsuit, which was filed in 2016, alleged that PRA violated North Carolina debt collection law by obtaining default judgments against debtors without filing "sufficient evidence to substantiate the debts claimed to be owed."

Under the agreement, PRA must pay \$5.75 million into a fund to benefit the more than 18,000 members of the lawsuit and file cancellations of default judgments against class members amounting to \$35 million.

"Debt buyers purchase old debts for pennies on the dollar and then seek to collect the full amount of the debt," Jason Pikler, senior attorney at the Justice Center, said in a statement. "Debt buyers then bring lawsuits to collect on these worthless debts, which commonly result in a default judgment being entered against the debtor."

Pikler said such default judgments are harmful to consumers because they can result in the seizure of the debtor's bank account or vehicle and encumber the debtor's property.



The settlement marks a major vindication of North Carolina's consumer protections, Carlene McNulty, director of litigation at the Justice Center said in a news release.

"In 2009, our state legislature enacted first-in-the-nation laws that restrict the way that debt buyers can obtain default judgments and otherwise engage in collection activity in North Carolina," McNulty said. "We brought this lawsuit to enforce those statutes, and the resulting settlement

is a testament to the importance and impact of North Carolina's consumer protection laws."

Pikler and McNulty appeared in court to argue in favor of the settlement in Durham County Superior Court on June 12. Superior Court Judge Michael O'Foghudha approved the settlement, concluding that it was fair, adequate and reasonable.

Iris Pounds, a plaintiff in the case, said the outcome helped her and

others regain a sense of "hope and justice."

"This victory means so much to me and will significantly improve my life and the lives of countless others affected by PRA's predatory actions," Pounds said.

Portfolio Recovery Associates is one of the largest debt collectors in the United States. The company's principal headquarters is in Norfolk, Virginia. It reported net income of over \$183 million in 2021.

Last year, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) took action against PRA for violating a 2015 CFPB order and engaging in other violations of law. The CFPB filed a proposed order that would require PRA to pay more than \$12 million to consumers harmed by illegal debt collection practices, in addition to a \$12 million penalty that would be deposited into the CFPB's victims relief fund. PRA violated the 2015 order by collecting on unsubstantiated debt, collecting on debt without providing required documentation and disclosures to consumers, suing or threatening legal action against consumers without offering or possessing required documentation and suing to collect on debt outside the statute of limitations.



## No State Budget This Year Means Medicaid Shorted

By Grace Vitaglione

NC Health News

NC Medicaid costs fluctuate each year. The state Department of Health and Human Services forecasts how costs might change and asks the legislature for funding adjustments based on those predictions.

For the 2024-25 fiscal year, the department asked for almost half a billion dollars extra to meet higher costs — an adjustment known as the "rebase." About \$136 million of that is needed because the state will receive less money as federal reimbursement decreases for the program, according to DHHS.

But lawmakers left Raleigh last month without making a second-year budget adjustment. Without it, Medicaid funds could start running dry in the spring, Rep. Donny Lambeth (R-Winston-Salem) said.

Both the House and Senate's proposed budgets would have given DHHS about \$100 million less than they asked for, said Melanie Bush, deputy Medicaid director at DHHS.

The agency is counting on lawmakers to appropriate their proposed amount, likely in November, but that would still leave the department with that \$100 million shortfall by the end of this fiscal year, in early 2025, she said.

Higher prices everywhere

The federal government typically pays about two-thirds of every dollar that North Carolina spends on regular Medicaid patients. In the coming year, that number is 65.06 percent of each dollar. That's a slight tick down from prior years: Federal dollars accounted for 65.91 percent of the state's costs for Medicaid beneficiaries in 2024. During the pandemic, that number was even higher, with the federal government picking up more than 73 percent of the tab from 2020 to 2023.

The percentages might seem small, but in a program as large as Medicaid, even a tenth of a percent of change can amount to millions of dollars.

People enrolling in the program, costly drugs, increased payments to managed care companies and increased services are some other factors in the rebase number, Bush explained.

The department also requested money to plan for moving people who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid into managed care, Bush said. In addition, funding is also needed for the NC Healthy Opportunities Program and to update the Medicaid Enterprise System — IT support for Medicaid and associated public benefits — according to DHHS.

Because state lawmakers failed to agree on a budget revision this summer, those requests weren't met. The Medicaid program will be funded at the same level as last year's budget.

That's not enough, according to DHHS.

Bush noted that this doesn't affect Medicaid expansion.

To save money, DHHS could limit services or cut payments to managed care companies that administer the program, Bush said. But the department hopes to reduce administrative costs first, like large contracts with vendors and delaying IT infrastructure programs, she said.

## Delta Air Lines Says Cancellations Continue As It Tries To Restore Operations After Tech Outage

NEW YORK (AP) — Airlines, including Delta Air Lines, continued to struggle to restore operations two days after a faulty software update caused technological havoc worldwide and resulted in several carriers grounding flights.

Total cancellations within, into or out of the U.S. on Sunday clocked in at 1,461, according to the latest data from FlightAware. Delta and United Airlines topped the cancellations.

Delta Chief Executive Ed Bastian said in a message to customers Sunday that flight cancellations continued as the airline tried to recover its systems and restore operations. He noted that the pause



in Delta's operations resulted in more than 3,500 Delta and Delta Connection scrubbed flights. Delta has been offering waivers to affected customers.

Bastian noted that that one of their crew tracking-related tools was affected and unable to effectively process the unprecedented number of changes triggered by the system outage.

"The technology issue occurred on the busiest travel weekend of the summer, with our booked loads exceeding 90%, limiting our re-accommodation capabilities," Bastian wrote. "I want to apologize to every one of you who have been impacted by these events."

## Unexpected Severe Drought Plagues Parts Of NC

WHITEVILLE — After the driest June in recorded North Carolina history, farmers across the state are coping with the impacts of intense drought.

According to the US Drought Monitor, 22 North Carolina counties are experiencing severe drought, while one county — Columbus County, a rural, agriculturally driven county in the southeastern part of the state — is in an extreme drought.

From early June to mid-July, Whiteville, Columbus County's biggest population center, received 1.07 inches of rain, a 24-year low.

The suddenness of this drought is what surprises the state's drought experts the most.

"If you asked somebody on Memorial Day, 'Are we at any risk of drought?' they would have called you crazy," Corey Davis, drought expert at the North Carolina State Climate Office, told Carolina Public Press.

"It wasn't one of these typical droughts, where it just kind of creeps up month after month and gets slowly worse," Klaus Albertin, chair of the North Carolina Drought Management Advisory Council, told CPP. "This has been so sudden."

On July 2, 10 counties were classified as experiencing severe or extreme drought. By July 9, that number had jumped to 22.

These counties fall into three geographic clusters: the southeast, central Coastal Plains, and the north-west Piedmont.

Southeastern counties in severe and extreme drought: Columbus, Robeson, Bladen, Pender Central Coastal Plains counties in severe drought: Bertie, Martin, Pitt, Beaufort, Craven, Pamlico, Lenoir, Greene, Wayne Northwest Piedmont



counties in severe drought: Surry, Stokes, Forsyth, Yadkin, Wilkes, Alexander, Iredell, Davie, Catawba, Caldwell

This past week brought a few inches of rain to the state, but not enough to pull the counties like Columbus out of their deficit, and entirely too late for corn farmers.

Drought impact on farmers

"(The drought) hit at the worst possible time for corn," Davis said. "June is the month where corn is going through some of these development stages, where it's very sensitive to the amount of moisture that it has."

"The corn is basically decimated," Gary Lanier, Columbus County's economic development director, told CPP. "You look out in the field and see brown spokes. It's killing our farmers."

It's too late in the season to replant, and many farmers are looking to crop insurance to keep them from going bankrupt. Still, Lanier explained, "crop insurance only covers 70% of your average production for five years. Farmers are still going to lose something like \$200/acre."

About 100 miles north of Whiteville, in rural Greene County, the Farm Service Agency is currently discussing a disaster declaration.

According to Hannah Massengill, field crops extension agent for Greene County, farmers there expect anywhere from a 70% to 80% loss on the corn crop.

"(The emergency) declaration would initiate various support mechanisms for our farmers," Trey Cash, economic development director for Greene County, told CPP in an email. "While this assistance is greatly valued, it's important to acknowledge that our farmers prefer to sustain their livelihoods through their hard work and successful harvests."

"The full scope of the drought's impact will not be entirely clear until the harvest of various crops, but early indications show significant reductions in corn and tobacco yields," Cash wrote.

"Given that most of our farms are family-owned, a decrease in farm income directly impacts family income. As a result, families will adopt more stringent budgetary measures, and farms will limit their expenditures to essential needs."

"This conservative spending will inevitably affect local businesses, including truck and equipment deal-

ers, fertilizer suppliers, hardware stores and fuel providers, as they experience a decline in sales until the full extent of crop yield losses, particularly in tobacco, is better understood."

Tobacco is North Carolina's third largest agricultural export, after pork and broiler meat.

"On a local level, we expect to see a strategic diversification of crops to mitigate risk. Our farmers are exploring alternative crops, such as increased vegetable production, to broaden their agricultural portfolios," Cash wrote.

As of now, Massengill estimates that only about 3% of Greene County's farmers irrigate their fields, which can help mitigate against drought conditions.

The number is similarly low in Columbus County.

"We don't have many farmers in the county that irrigate," Lydia Miles, field crops extension agent for Columbus County, told CPP. "Most years, it just doesn't clear the cost versus benefit for them. In a year like this, though, it definitely would have helped."

According to Cash, more farmers are considering investments in advanced irrigation technology.

Farmers are also dealing with the drought's impact on hay growth and pastures, particularly in the western part of the state.

"We have a family farm, my son, myself and my father, a big cattle operation in Wilkes County," Brian Parker, a Wilkes County farmer and the mountain region representative of the state Department of Agriculture's Soil and Water Conservation Commission, told CPP.

"We've already had to move some cattle out of some pastures and put them in some other facilities. Because of the drought situation, they don't have anything to eat in some of the pastures we had them in. That does affect the gain on the animals. The gain will be significantly less on the calf crop this year."

Impact on drinking water  
Because of the drought's suddenness, crops have been hit much harder than drinking water supply. Reservoirs and aquifers are, for the most part, still full from the heavy rains in May.

Only five voluntary water conservation notices have been issued on account of the drought throughout the state, including one in Whiteville.

## 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](mailto: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

