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NATIONAL PUSH TO MAKE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AFFORDABLE

Civil right organizations escalate their focus on the high cost of prescription drugs. Even with state assistance, many people forgo necessities such as food and fuel but still cannot afford their prescription

The issue is no doubt headed for increased debate in Washington as the civil rights community applies pressure, p3

Cedric Richmond leaves House to go to a bigger house, the White House

TheNorthStarNewsToday.com(TriceEdneyWire.com) –

Cedric Richmond resigned from Congress after being selected to work for President-elect Joe Biden.

Richmond will work for the White House Office of Public Engagement, making him one of the highest-ranking Blacks in the incoming administration, other than Kamala Harris, the Vice President-elect.

He announced that he was leaving office Tuesday. His district Baton Rouge and River Road areas. The majority of this district is New Orleans, where he lives.

Richmond has held a number of leadership positions including Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, The House Democratic Assistant to the Majority Whip.

He has represented his district since 2011. He is a graduate of Morehouse College and Tulane Law School.



20 years of student loan repayments still leave Black borrowers owing 95 percent

By Charlene Crowell(TriceEdneyWire.com) –

Although the year 2020 has been dominated by continuing news coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic's rising death toll that has now claimed the lives of nearly 300,000 Americans, it is not the only challenge facing the nation. Amid rising unemployment and food insecurity, an estimated 45 million Americans struggle at the same time with the crushing weight of more than \$1.7 trillion in student debt.

A disproportionate amount of this financial burden is carried by Blacks and other borrowers of color. These racial disparities in student debt cannot be ignored: massive debts delay, if not deny, wealth-building opportunities for Blacks and others who believe that higher education remains the bridge to a financially secure future.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting recession one of every four student loan

borrowers was in either default or serious delinquency. Black student experience default at a much higher rate (37.5%) than their peers who are Latino (20%), or White (12.4%), according to an independent report by the Brookings Institution. Even after 20 years of loan repayments, the typical Black borrower still owes 95% of the original cumulative balance.

A new research report, jointly released by the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) and the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL), outlines the financial toll taken by this unsustainable debt and pinpoints remedies to systematically address the crisis.

In part, the report states: "Pursuit of education in America should not be such a high stakes gamble...Borrowers who took out loans to access an education should not have those debts follow them to the grave."

Entitled, Road to Relief: Supporting Federal Student Loan Borrowers During the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond, the report

encourages President-Elect Biden to keep his campaign promise to cancel significant amounts of student debt among his first executive actions taken on his first day of office, and specifically recommends:

Across-the-board debt cancellation. All federal student loan borrowers (including PLUS loan borrowers and those with commercially- or institutionally held loans) should have their balances reduced. This ensures that the benefits of cancellation reach the most vulnerable borrowers and spurs economic recovery;

Clearing the books of bad debts. After cancellation, the federal government should clear the books of debts currently held by borrowers that have been in repayment for longer than 15 years, debts that have been in default for 3 or more years, and debts held by borrowers who have been receiving federal means-tested benefits for 3 or more years;

Continued on page 6

Biden selects Rep. Marcia Fudge to head housing agency

(Via Politico) –

President-elect Joe Biden has selected Rep. Marcia Fudge to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development, according to two people with knowledge of the decision.

The offer to lead the roughly \$50 billion housing agency comes after weeks in which Fudge

launched a bid to become the first Black female Agriculture secretary.

Fudge, a member of the House Agriculture Committee, and her allies in the Congressional Black Caucus had lobbied openly for the USDA job. Biden is now leaning toward choosing former Obama agriculture secretary Tom Vilsack, however.



President-elect selects retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin. If confirmed, he would be the first Black man to lead the Department of Defense.

(CNN)

President-elect Joe Biden has selected retired Army Gen. Lloyd Austin, the former commander of US Central Command, to be his secretary of defense, a source familiar with the decision told CNN on Monday.

If confirmed by the Senate, Austin would be the first Black man to lead the Department of Defense.

Biden reached out to Austin over the weekend to offer the job, according to the source, and he accepted. Austin emerged as the leading candidate last week, the source said. Politico was first to report on Biden's selection of Austin.

The selection to one of the most prominent Cabinet positions would make Austin one of the most prominent members of Biden's incoming administration. The secretary of defense is in control of the nation's largest government agency, commanding troops around the world and the complicated internal workings of the Pentagon that make it one of the world's most formidable bureaucracies.

Austin has a long history of working within the Pentagon, and has worked with Biden closely in the past.

When he was vice president, Biden worked with Austin in a variety of positions, most promi-



nently when he was commander of CENTCOM from 2013 to 2016, during which they had discussions on a range of issues including the Middle East and Central and South Asia. Before that, but still during Biden's time as vice president, Austin was vice chief of staff of the Army and commanding general of US forces in Iraq.

"They've known each other for a long time," the source said. "There's a comfort level." The source said that "the historic nature of the pick is something Biden is excited about. Especially given the history of the US military being barrier breakers in a lot of areas."

Bill Cosby's attorney appears to score points in Supreme Court argument

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire

Comedian Bill Cosby and his supporters expressed confidence after his lawyer presented oral arguments to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court on Tuesday,

December 1. Attorney Jennifer Bonjean appeared to score multiple points with the seven justices.

She skillfully pointed out that Cosby had agreed to waive his Fifth Amendment rights to sit for a civil deposition that former Montgomery County District Attorney Bruce Castor promised would never be used against the entertainer.

However, Castor's successor Kevin Steele ignored the agreement and prosecuted Cosby using the deposition.

"If the prosecutor's word is not his bond, what is the lesson that emerges beyond this case?" Justice Max Baer asked, seemingly concurring with Bonjean's argument.

The high court also wanted prosecutors to answer the implications for thousands of other deals made by prosecutors if the justices ruled against Cosby.

The justices appeared frustrated with prosecutor Adrian Jappe, who rambled for more than 25 minutes about how the trial court

was correct in allowing the testimony of five women who said Cosby drugged and, or sexually assaulted them decades ago.

Several of the justices pointed out that at least one of the women never claimed to have been sexually assaulted.

None appeared to have enjoyed the same kind of relationship Cosby had with Andrea Constand, the victim in the trial court case.

"Why did you need prior bad acts testimony at all?" Justice Saylor asked prosecutors during the hearing, questioning the strength of the District Attorney's case against Cosby.

"It was a good day," Cosby spokesman Andrew Wyatt told Black Press USA, during a livestream interview that took place at the same time as the court hearing. The Black Press streamed the court proceedings as Wyatt participated in the exclusive interview.

"I thought Attorney Bonjean did a phenomenal job. This is what Mr. Cosby had been hoping for," noted Wyatt, who shared a text message from Cosby's wife, Camille Cosby, during the broadcast.

"Mrs. Cosby said finally, finally, finally, at last, now we must move onward to vindication."

A spokesperson for the court said the justices usually average about 150 days before issuing

a decision, but one could come sooner.

"I do feel that this is vindication for Bill Cosby," Wyatt said.

Following the proceedings, Bill Cosby released a statement through Wyatt.

"This morning, people around the world witnessed a beautiful presentation by Attorney Jennifer Bonjean regarding two important issues — Immunity and the misuse of a law called, 404 (b) or PBAs (Prior Bad Acts Witnesses)," Cosby offered.

"This was not just a historic day for me, but it became a beacon of hope for those countless American Citizens of the Keystone State in Pennsylvania Correctional Facilities, whose constitutional rights might have been grossly abused because they lacked resources and means to fight prosecutorial corruption. I'm so happy because I hope and truly believe that justice will prevail.

"Thank you to the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court for agreeing to hear and review my appeal; my wonderful wife, Camille; my family & friends; my millions of loyal supporters (social media & beyond); my legal team (Atty. Jennifer Bonjean, Atty. Barbara Zemlock, & Atty. Brian Perry); Debbie Meister & Kia Soto; and my publicist & crisis manager, Andrew Wyatt."



DHS updates website to indicate DACA program has been restored

(CNN)

The Department of Homeland Security will begin to accept new applications for the Obama-era program shielding undocumented immigrants who came to the US as children from deportation to comply with a recent court order, the department announced Monday.

A federal judge ordered the Trump administration to restore the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program Friday, marking a significant step for the program's beneficiaries and for undocumented immigrants who are eligible for the program but had been blocked from applying.

Effective Monday, US Citizenship and Immigration Services will accept new applications, as well as renewal requests, and extend the one-year grants of deferred action and employment authorization documents to two years. But DHS left the door open for an appeal.

"DHS will comply with Judge Garaufis' order while it remains

in effect, but DHS may seek relief from the order," the department said on its website.

Judge Nicholas Garaufis' order Friday backed up his November ruling that Chad Wolf had not been legally serving as acting Homeland Security secretary when he had signed rules limiting applications and renewals for the program.

The Trump administration tried ending DACA in 2017, but the US Supreme Court blocked its attempt in June. In light of the Supreme Court ruling, Wolf issued a memo in July that said new applications for DACA would not be accepted and renewals would be limited to one year instead of two amid an ongoing review. The memo had sought to buy time while the administration decided its next steps.

Garaufis' order Friday appeared to nod to the administration's handling of the Supreme Court ruling, calling for DHS to publicly — and prominently — provide notice that it will accept new applications and return to two-year renewals.

Civil rights groups escalate fight against high prescription drug costs

By Hazel Trice Edney

D. B. Wright, former head of a non-profit religious organization in Washington, D.C., was well taken care of by his leadership board. He enjoyed an employment package that included full health care among other benefits.

"Being gainfully employed and having one of the best health insurances, I never thought about what medicines cost," he said in a recent interview. But then crisis hit. Following a divorce he moved back to his hometown of Albany, Ga., where he took a job with no benefits, which he eventually lost due to severe illnesses over the past five years. That's when reality set in.

"I had to borrow money from my family and friends in order to get the medication that I needed to treat various issues." Those issues included surgery to remove a baseball size tumor on his liver, a gall bladder removal and ultimately chronic pancreatitis.

In excruciating pain, Wright was prescribed a medicine called Creon to help with his digestion and relieve the pain. It worked wonders in the hospital. But upon discharge, he learned that Creon would cost him \$850 a month, well beyond his income of zero except what he could borrow from friends and family. Even with a coupon or pharmacy discount, he said, the price "was still beyond my financial ability."

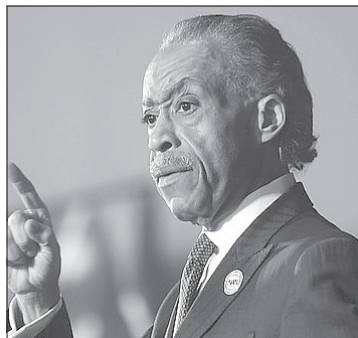
Also dealing with high blood pressure and suffering through a spinal disorder that rendered him temporarily unable to walk, Wright



Hilary Shelton, NAACP: "The bottom line is that we believe that health care is a civil right."

has resolved what he believed to be the bottom line in America when it comes to prescription drugs. The doctors and pharmacists may be sympathetic, but the medication simply "costs what it costs," he said. "It was a horrendous experience. And it's so interesting that you need these medications to survive. It was horrible to go through. You kind of feel like if you don't have the money, you don't matter."

The experience of D.B. Wright, who asked to only use his initials to protect his privacy, is among the reasons that civil rights leaders and lawmakers across the nation are now pressing increasingly hard to establish public policies to monitor and help make prescription drug prices affordable. Best known for their efforts to address police misconduct, voting rights protections, racial inequality, and economic injustices, civil right organizations are now escalating their focus on issues in the area of health care—particularly the high cost of prescription drugs.



Rev. Al Sharpton, NAN: "Let us make 2021 the year of Black health equity."

"While there has been much partisan back and forth on these issues in Washington, there has not been enough conversation about reining in the profits and excesses of health insurance companies, which refuse to cover critical procedures, medicines and services in order to preserve their billions of dollars in profits," said the Rev. Al Sharpton in an Oct. 30, 2020 letter to Congressional Black Caucus Chairwoman Karen Bass (D-Calif.) "Let us make 2021 the year of Black health equity."

Sharpton's letter is part of a growing focus on racial disparities and inequities in health care, partially ignited by findings that people living in predominately Black counties are nearly "three times more likely to die of the COVID-19 than predominately white counties," he said in his letter. The letter culminates more than a year of efforts by his National Action Network (NAN) and other civil rights and health organiza-

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National police training group distributes document referring to Black Lives Matter as a 'Terrorist Group'

Philadelphiaobserver.com

A national police training association is facing backlash after distributing a research-style paper to its members that referred to Black Lives Matter as a "terrorist group," and depicted protesters as wanting to "overthrow the U.S. government," according to the Associated Press.

A member of the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association gave the troubling document to the news outlet, noting that the 176-page paper was full of lies and misleading statements about Black people who protest.

The association, which goes by ILEETA, said it is "committed to

the reduction of law enforcement risk through the enhancement of training for criminal justice practitioners." It holds an annual conference that the Associated Press said was the largest gathering of law enforcement trainers in the world, and also distributes guides as well as research papers among its thousands of members.

But in October, members were sent an email with a paper called "Understanding Antifa and Urban Guerrilla Warfare." The Associated Press gave the paper to experts for review, including Sherice Nelson, assistant professor of political science at Southern University and A&M

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Aurora, Colorado officials, police officers and medics file Motions to Dismiss Elijah McClain lawsuit

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Attorneys for Aurora, Colo., police officers and medics involved in the death of Elijah McClain filed several motions with the U.S. District Court of Colorado last week to dismiss a lawsuit brought by McClain's family in August. The lawsuit alleges that discriminatory practices are what caused officers to put a Black man in a chokehold and paramedics to "recklessly" administer medication that contributed to the 23-year-old's death.

The Associated Press reports that one of the motions filed late last Monday by attorneys for the three officers who confronted McClain last year, claimed the plaintiffs in the lawsuit failed to prove that officers handled McClain any differently than they would have if he were white.

It often seems like no matter how many studies show that officers are far more likely to use force against Black suspects—and, in this case, a Black man who reportedly was just walking home from the store—than they are against our white counterparts, authorities will still pivot to saying, "race had nothing to do with it."

"The death of Elijah McClain is a tragedy," the motion said, Channel 9 News reports. "However, this tragedy was not caused by deliberate and discriminatory acts or omissions of the APD (Aurora Police Department) Defendants."

The department said the same thing in a statement last month adding that "APD Defendants deny that they used excessive force on Mr. McClain in violation of the Fourth Amendment, that they denied him equal protection of the law under the Fourteenth Amendment and that they caused his death by battery or neglect."

According to the Denver Post, the city of Aurora also filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit. In that motion, attorneys argued against the suit's claim that the city's policies led to officers with the police department—as well as Aurora Fire Rescue paramedics—violating McClain's constitutional rights and causing his death. The city's motion argues that the suit "makes only conclusory allegations regarding the alleged failure to train," but doesn't specify issues with "overall training." Instead, the defendants claim the suit alleges facts that merely suggest "shortcomings in individual officers' training and supervision."

Mother of Black teen killed by Florida deputy is shot during son's burial

Philadelphiaobserver.com

Today meant for people to come out and pay their respects to a Florida teen who was fatally shot by a Brevard County sheriff's deputy this month turned into yet another horrific event.

The burial service for Sincere Pierce ended abruptly Saturday afternoon when the teenager's mother, Quasheda Pierce was struck by a bullet. The gunfire came as the pastor finished his prayers at Riverview Memorial Gardens and Pierce's friends and loved ones placed flowers on his casket and suddenly a loud pop was heard.

Investigators said they think Pierce, 39, was shot when a gun that a 16-year-old had with him



accidentally went off. The mother was taken to a hospital, but the severity of her injury was not immediately known.

As WESH2 notes, the sheriff's office says the teen is not facing charges, though, they are still investigating and said they will let the state attorney decide if charges should be filed.

Georgia voters will decide fate of senate and a new south

By Jesse Jackson
Opinion

On Jan. 5, Georgia voters will decide the runoff for their two U.S. Senate seats. Their votes will determine whether Republicans retain control of the Senate or whether Democrats gain a 50-50 tie, with Vice President Kamala Harris the tiebreaking vote.

The race is a microcosm of America's struggle to find a way forward and of Georgia and the South's struggle to build a new South. The two Democratic challengers reflect the new age still waiting to be born. Rev. Raphael Warnock, senior pastor at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, the congregation led by the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., is a distinguished heir to the King tradition.

Thirty-three-year-old Jon Ossoff, educated at Georgetown and the London School of Economics, was born and raised in Atlanta, interned for the late Rep. John Lewis and served as a national security staffer to Rep. Hank Johnson. He has been CEO of Insight TWI, a London based documentary maker that focuses on detailing corruption in foreign countries.

Both Rev. Warnock and Ossoff have put forth a moderate platform for change. Both support immediate action to forestall an economic collapse as the pandemic spikes. With Republicans blocking action in the Senate, millions now face an end to unemployment insurance, an end to the eviction moratorium — with one-third of households behind on their rent or mortgages — and an end to the student debt moratorium, with millions of young people still struggling to find jobs. Without assistance, states and localities will be forced to cut services and lay off employees like teachers and firefighters.

Both Warnock and Ossoff support strengthening the Affordable Care Act by adding a public option and reducing prescription drug prices but oppose Medicare for All. Both call for bold action to deal with the reality of catastrophic climate change but oppose the Green New Deal. Both are for lifting the minimum wage, and for assistance to small businesses. Their Republican opponents are the sitting senators — Kelly Loeffler and David Perdue. Both Loeffler and Perdue are multimillionaires. Both were charged with insider trading, selling stocks after receiving private briefings on the threat posed by the pandemic. Both dubiously claimed that their



Jon Ossoff and Rev. Raphael Warnock

advisers made the trades without their knowledge.

Both tout themselves as Donald Trump supporters. They oppose the Affordable Care Act, and support alternatives that would leave hundreds of thousands of Georgians without health care. Both, lavishly supported by oil and gas interests, refuse to consider climate change a major threat. Loeffler, the co-owner of the Atlanta Dream, a women's professional basketball team, loudly denounced support given to the Black Lives Matter movement, leading her players to wear T-shirts saying Vote Warnock. Neither Perdue nor Loeffler bother to offer a serious agenda to address the problems that Georgians face. They joined Republican leader Mitch McConnell in blocking the rescue act in the midst of the pandemic.

Neither Loeffler nor Perdue have a clue or a care for working for poor people in Georgia. So how do they hope to get elected? Both have adopted the same strategy: echo Donald Trump's divisive race-based populism and benefit from systematic suppression of the vote. They've booked nearly \$200 million in vicious attack ads against their opponents, painting them as a threat to all things American.

Perdue falsely paints Ossoff as a "radical socialist." In a classic anti-Semitic trope, Perdue's campaign released an ad that lengthened Ossoff's nose. Loeffler paints Warnock as a "radical" who will "change this country forever," nonsensically promoting herself as the "firewall in stopping socialism in America." In her stump speech, in less than 45 seconds, she wildly links the distinguished minister to Obama's minister Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Fidel Castro, George Soros, and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Loeffler and Perdue won't admit that Joe Biden won the presidential election, nor that he won Georgia. Adopting Donald Trump's baseless claims of fraud, they wrote a joint

letter calling for the resignation of the Georgia secretary of state, a conservative Republican supporter of Donald Trump.

He scorned the demand as "laughable." What isn't laughable is the long lines that black voters had to suffer in order to cast a vote in the primaries and November election. For years, Georgia — controlled by Republicans — has passed various measures to suppress the votes of minorities and the young, including gerrymandering districts, requiring photo ID, aggressive purging of voter rolls, and more. Notably, as the electorate has grown by over 2 million in the last seven years, Georgia has reduced the number of voting places by 10 percent. This has had a disproportionate effect on young and nonwhite voters whose registrations have surged. The contrasting campaigns make it clear that a vote for Loeffler or Perdue is a vote for continued dysfunction and obstruction.

A victory by either would further commit Republicans to Donald Trump's toxic use of race-based division, lies and calumnies to divide working people, gaining victories for those who serve the rich and corporations. Two of the wealthiest senators, Loeffler and Perdue personify the con. Neither America nor Georgia can move forward until the growing majority that is desperate for change overcomes the systematic efforts to divide and suppress.

This country cannot begin to address the threats it faces—the pandemic, the economic collapse, corrosive and extreme inequality, catastrophic climate change, racial inequity, growing insecurity and a declining middle class—until those standing in the way are defeated. Loeffler says the "future of the country is at stake on January 5." Of her many delusions, that one may be the closest to the truth.

National police training group distributes document referring to Black Lives Matter as a 'Terrorist Group'

From page 3

College, and Yale racial bias professor Phillip Atiba Goff.

"This document is below the belt because of how much misinformation there is, how many conspiracy theories there are, how much violence it promotes and how many reasons it gives to justify dehumanizing people," Nelson said.

Goff told the news outlet that he and other police executives were horrified by the claims made in the paper and believe it should not have been sent out.

Both Nelson and Goff said the paper was dangerous, because it falsely conflated Black Lives Matter protesters and others with terrorist groups, while also making unfounded claims that the movements are funded by

China and Russia.

The paper states that there are Black Lives Matter members working as "trained, dedicated snipers" in certain cities, and bashes the FBI as well as the media for focusing on white supremacist terrorism.

According to the ILEETA paper, protests over police shootings are simply cover for "hard-core, terrorist trained troops."

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Editorial - Opinion



By Ben Jealous

Demand that Mitch McConnell, senate republicans stop blocking COVID-19 relief

ten. We have been hit harder by the economic fallout, too. And Senate Republicans' refusal to give Americans what is needed to protect our families and get the economy going again just extends the inequitable burden that we are bearing.

There is no mystery about the source of the problem. It is Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who has refused to even consider a meaningful COVID relief bill, including the HEROES Act passed by the House of Representatives more than six months ago.

Even the Trump administration was willing to negotiate with Democrats, but McConnell has acted in bad faith. McConnell held relief hostage because he has insisted that any legislation must exempt companies from legal accountability for outbreaks or deaths within workplaces. Before the election, he told Trump

not to make a deal with Democrats. And since then, he has cut his already weak counteroffer in half.

Does the wealthy McConnell not understand how many Americans are going hungry? Twenty-two percent of Black households reported going hungry in one recent week, which the Washington Post noted was more than double the rate for white Americans.

As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and State Minority Leader Chuck Schumer wrote in a letter to McConnell before Thanksgiving, economists agree that the country needs a much bigger aid package than he has been willing to consider to keep people and the economy from sinking further.

If the Senate doesn't act now, more Americans will be hurt. Unemployment benefits run out the day after Christmas. A

freeze on student loan payments, protections against evictions, and expanded paid family medical leave will all run out at the end of the month.

The threat to families is devastating. Almost one-third of Black renters have fallen behind on their rent. Meanwhile, in spite of the moratorium on evictions during the pandemic, the real estate management company owned in part by Trump's son-in-law and White House aide Jared Kushner is suing to evict hundreds of tenants who have fallen behind on their rent.

The need for action is urgent. But McConnell has used the Senate's time this fall to push right-wing Trump judges into lifetime positions on the federal courts. He adjourned the Senate for Thanksgiving without bringing up relief legislation.

President-elect Joe Biden and

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris have put the new administration's coronavirus task force in place. Biden has called on Congress to pass legislation like the HEROES Act the House passed back in May. It is long past time for Senate Republicans to deal with their Democratic colleagues in good faith, and to give American families the relief they need and deserve.

Ben Jealous serves as president of People For the American Way and People For the American Way Foundation. Jealous has decades of experience as a leader, coalition builder, campaigner for social justice and seasoned nonprofit executive. In 2008, he was chosen as the youngest-ever president and CEO of the NAACP. He is a graduate of Columbia University and Oxford, where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and he has taught at Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania.

It's going to be a hard Christmas for many Americans. The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 is soaring. The virus is spreading faster than ever. Families and small business owners whose incomes have been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic are being hurt by the U.S. Senate's refusal to provide any relief since April.

This suffering is not shared equally. Black and brown people have been hit harder than other Americans by the pandemic in many ways. We get sicker and die more of-

20 years of student loan repayments still leave Black borrowers owing 95 percent

From page 2

Restoring limitations on collections. Federal student loans should have common-sense consumer protection standards. Guardrails should include a statute of limitations, preventing the seizure of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Social Security benefits, limitations on the amount that can be seized, and limits on how long creditors can involuntarily collect. Student loans should also be dischargeable in bankruptcy; and

Making repayment truly affordable and budget-conscious. All borrowers on an income-driven repayment (IDR) plan or more than 30 days delinquent at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic should be auto-enrolled in a new IDR plan, the Affordable Budget-Conscious (ABC) repayment plan, that sets monthly payments based on no more than 8% of discretionary income above 250% of the poverty line.

"Taken together, these steps will ensure that all federal borrowers, accounting for over 90% of

the outstanding student loan balances, receive substantial relief... Public investment, not reliance on loans, should once again be the foundation of how we pay for higher education," states the report.

"The federal government must stop borrowers from continuing to drown in student debt by a system that has been inequitable and broken for decades," continued Yu. "Abusive debt collection practices seize critical funds, such as Social Security and the Earned Income Tax Credit, and with no time limit on collection these practices can follow borrowers to the grave."

Ashley Harrington, CRL's Federal Advocacy Director and Senior Counsel spoke directly to the racial equity implications.

"For many, especially Black and Latino borrowers, repayment has been too onerous and too long, preventing them from achieving financial security even under normal circumstances," noted Harrington. "Short-term payment suspension alone will not help struggling borrowers who have lost their jobs or who

were already in default or serious delinquency before the public health crisis started."

"To address our current recession and stimulate economic recovery, we urge President-Elect Biden to immediately follow these simple steps and prevent further financial devastation for vulnerable borrowers and communities," added Harrington. "The time to cancel student debt and provide student borrowers with significant relief is now."

While student loan debt cancellation and the other proposed reforms would provide much-needed relief to borrowers, it would also bring the opportunity to redirect these dollars to better participate in the nation's economy. Starting a business or transitioning from renters to homeowners are but two examples of ways to build wealth and financial security.

Other major research reports have also connected lengthy student debt and its restrictions to economic mobility and lifetime wealth-building. Research has established that student debt can

prevent borrowers from buying homes, starting businesses, going to graduate school, and even starting families.

For example, a 2019 research report by Brandeis University's Institute on Assets and Social Policy found that after 20 years of student loan repayments, the median debt of White borrowing students has been reduced by 94 percent— with almost half holding no student debt—whereas Black borrowers at the median still owe 95 percent of their cumulative borrowing total.

"It is clear that in the context of existing inequalities in wealth and assets by race/ethnicity, the privatized system of higher education financing serves to further exacerbate the racial wealth gap among young people," states the Brandeis report. "It has saddled young borrowers of color, particularly Black borrowers, with debt that creates economic insecurity for decades and limits new wealth-generating opportunities such as homeownership."

Despite noble contributions and achievements, there

is no doubt that as a people we continue to be financially short-changed. Now as we approach a New Year and a new White House, systemic changes are both needed and possible.

Cancelling student debt and reforming the repayment system are vital for Black borrowers and communities.

But targeted actions in other areas of concern are also necessary before this and future Black Americans can secure financial stability or build wealth. An even longer road map to relief – beyond student debt – must address other root causes of the racial wealth gap. Access to affordable credit—including safe and responsible mortgage loans—and an end to all forms of predatory lending are representative of these 'other' reforms.

Lifting the trillion-dollar debt of student loans is an important first step to financial equality.

Charlene Crowell is a Senior Fellow with the Center for Responsible Lending. She can be reached at charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org.

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A NY school district knowingly spent \$2.7M on racially biased facial recognition software

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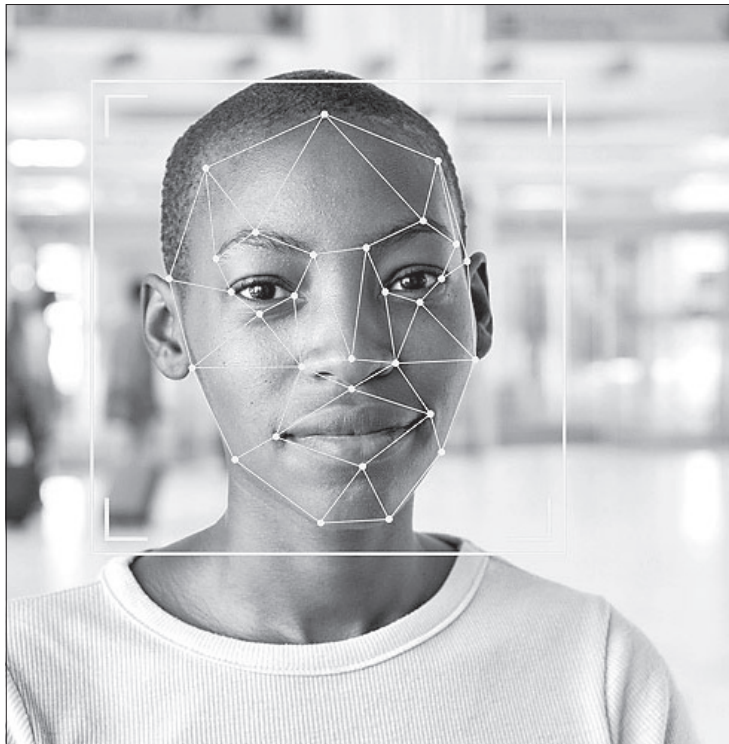
A New York public school is under fire after internal emails showed administrators knew their facial recognition system could not identify Black faces and had other significant problems.

Through the Freedom of Information Law, Motherboard obtained hundreds of emails from experts expressing concerns about the Lockport City School District's decision to spend \$2.7 million on SN Technologies' AEGIS face and weapons detection system. Lockport is 11% Black and about an hour away from Niagara Falls.

The school district was told by auditors and scientists who had tested the system that it misidentified Black men four times more often and Black women 16 times more often than white men. The emails also show SN Technologies has outright lied about how they performed on racial bias tests.

Despite these concerns and an ACLU-backed lawsuit filed by parents, Lockport City School District turned on the system in January. It has largely been rendered useless because of pandemic regulations forcing everyone to wear a mask inside.

But parents in the district, particularly Black families, have been incensed about the school's decision to spend millions on a system that routinely misidentifies Black people and was found to have a persistent problem of



misidentifying broom handles as guns.

Parents in the district told Motherboard that the danger caused by this inaccurate system is incalculable. According to Motherboard, the AEGIS system "begins a process to automatically alert police when it detects weapons or certain people on the district's 'hot list.'"

In an interview with Motherboard, Lockport parent Jim Shultz said he was at a loss in understanding how the bene-

fits of the system outweigh the potential consequences.

"The police have said if they get a notification they're going to treat it as a live shooter system, and you have a system that's predisposed to make mistakes and misidentify people. The risk of an accident, the risk of something horrible happening because the system is structured the way it is, to me, is 1 million times higher than [the chance] that the cameras are going to prevent a real situation," Shultz said.

Somewhere, Snoop Dogg, Mike Tyson and JR Smith are celebrating federal bill to legalize marijuana

By Stacy M. Brown, NNPA Newswire

Somewhere in the world — California, Nevada, or beyond — Snoop Dogg, Mike Tyson, J.R. Smith, and millions of other Americans are smiling.

On Friday, December 4, 2020, in Washington, DC, the U.S. House of Representatives approved legislation that would decriminalize both the smoking and possession of marijuana.

House Members maintain that the bill aims to correct some of the devastating injustices caused by the War on Drugs.

While every state has already decriminalized at least some aspect of the drug's usage at the local level, this marks the first time either chamber has voted to decriminalize marijuana at the federal level. However, most Capitol Hill pundits and watchers note that the legislation has little chance of passing the Republican-led Senate. The bill would then have to be signed by the current president in order to become law during the current session of Congress.

If it passes both chambers and is signed into law, the legislation will legalize the drug's distribution and authorize a 5 percent sales tax on marijuana products. Proceeds from the tax will be invested in job training, legal aid, and substance abuse treatment for individuals adversely impacted by the war on drugs.



According to the bill, which passed mostly along party lines, the tax revenue would also provide funds for small business loans and allow access to marijuana licensing and employment for economically disadvantaged individuals.

Five Republicans and 222 Democrats supported the measure, while 158 members of the GOP and six Democrats opposed the bill.

Hip-Hop superstar and Long Beach, Calif. Native, Snoop Dogg, has long championed the legalization of marijuana. On Twitter, NBA star J.R. Smith, whose passion for the full legalization of marijuana is well-documented, found his name and Twitter handle trending with the news of the legislation.

As for boxing legend, Mike Tyson, smiling emojis on his Twitter feed directly conveyed his sentiments on the subject. "I smoked every day, during and while training for the fight," Tyson said following his comeback bout against Roy Jones Jr. earlier this month in Las Vegas. "I never stopped smoking."

Civil rights groups escalate fight against high prescription drug costs

From page 3

tions to deal with the suffering of people who must sometimes risk their lives by choosing to take care of other crucial bills instead of paying for prescription drugs.

Similarly focused, the NAACP national board of directors last year passed a resolution calling for Prescription Drug Affordability Boards (PDAB) in every state, which would "act as a watchdog for the public. It will carefully review drug costs and establish fair and affordable costs for state and local government."

The resolution continues, the "NAACP supports the creation of a Prescription Drug Affordability Board in each state to determine how best to make prescription drugs more affordable for their residents, including by examining the entire drug supply chain, including the role of drug manufacturers and Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs), and establishing maximum affordability payment rates for expensive drugs that create significant affordability problems for residents, building upon the tradition of health care cost scrutiny."

The state of Maryland last year became the first state in the nation to successfully create a PDAB with the national and state NAACP chapters "playing a critical role," as well as dozens of Black

faith groups, labor, business and other non-profits, said Vincent DeMarco. DeMarco is president of the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative (MCHI), which led the PDAB initiative in the state. The Maryland board has won accolades from DeMarco.

"They are doing a very good job right now of examining what drugs are really high cost and what would make prescription drugs more affordable for people," he says. "So, it's really an exciting new way at the state level to address this problem."

Meanwhile, the national NAACP has continued to press for national solutions. Following up with another resolution in September 2020, the organization continued to press for equity and affordability in prescription drug access. The resolution outlined the harsh realities that people like D.B. Wright have faced.

Quoting the 2019 AARP Prescription Drug Survey of likely voters aged 50 and older, the resolution said that of the 463 African American respondents, "40% believed they might have to limit necessities such as food, electricity and fuel in the future to afford their prescription medication," the resolution states.

Even with state assistance through programs like PDABs, advocates recognize that prescription drug prices are so out of

control that some are still far too expensive.

"Maryland has made considerable gains in ensuring that quality healthcare is more affordable and accessible for residents of our state," said a statement on the MCHI website.

"However, expensive life-saving drugs—some of which are close to six figures for treatment—threaten to derail the progress made in expanding health coverage. To contain rising healthcare costs, we must contain skyrocketing prescription drug costs."

The struggle to rein in high prescription drug prices has reached the U. S. Congress, but to no avail. U. S. Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) last year introduced the Prescription Drug Affordability and Access Act, which would have created "an independent agency—the Bureau of Prescription Drug Affordability and Access—tasked with conducting reviews of drug prices and determining an appropriate list price."

However, the bill, S.3166, was sent to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on Jan. 8, 2020, but went no further during the 116th Congress. Technically, with only a few weeks before Congress goes to Christmas break, this means the bill will likely die in committee, but can be reintroduced in the 117th Congress when it recon-

venes Jan. 3.

"In a country as wealthy as ours, it's downright shameful that people have to choose between taking their medicine or paying for other basic necessities," Booker lamented in a statement. "Every day, millions of Americans struggle to afford their lifesaving medication while the manufacturers of these drugs profit hand over fist with limited to no oversight. On top of that, many of these drugs were developed through research funding from the federal government. We need systemic change that will meaningfully address the exorbitant, rising cost of prescription drugs and put the focus back on patients, not profits."

Health advocates such as Sen. Bernie Sanders and former senator, now Vice-President Elect Kamala Harris—who co-sponsored the bill with Booker — will likely not give up the fight. And given the incoming new Congress and White House administration the NAACP has said it will support the efforts that Sharpton and Booker, a CBC member, have expended.

"Sen. Booker's bill was an excellent first step," said Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and vice president for advocacy and policy. "The bottom line is that we believe that health care is a civil right. And that means that the full gamut of what is quality health

care is very important. This is one of many issues that still needs to be addressed and improved upon. It's not the only issue and it's not stand alone. It's crucially important in the categories of health care and economics. It's an important component of a comprehensive health care system that provides high quality health care for all Americans."

The issue is no doubt headed for increased debate in Washington as the civil rights community applies the pressure. But outside of the growing political battle, there are real people waiting and fighting alone, says Wright, who recently received a court ruling allowing him 100 percent disability benefits; plus, Medicaid which now covers the cost of his medicines.

"It took four years to get disability insurance or Medicaid," he said. "I would hope that the government grows a heart and recognize that the least that they can do is care for those who cannot care for themselves. I'm not talking about people who are trying to milk the system. I'm talking about real people who are having real challenges in life."

This article is part of a series on the impact of high prescription drug costs on consumers made possible through the 2020 West Health and Families USA Media Fellowship.

On the scene

Netflix debuts Debbie Allen's dreamy 'Hot Chocolate Nutcracker'

By Audrey J. Bernard

Netflix is streaming a traditional holiday classic reimagined by Hollywood icon Debbie Allen which is her Black version of "The Nutcracker" called "Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker," executive produced by Shonda Rhimes and Betsy Beers of Shondaland, and performed by the gifted students of Debbie Allen Dance Academy (DADA). Simply dee-licious!

Although "The Nutcracker" is performed by some 700 companies in cities all over the world, with 600 of them taking place in the United States alone, there is only one Hot Chocolate Nutcracker, which is created and executive produced by Allen with her husband Norman Nixon.

"The Nutcracker brand is just so familiar to people," says Nixon, a Hot Chocolate Nutcracker executive producer and Allen's husband of 36 years. "Our twist is the Hot Chocolate Nutcracker. If you go to see the New York City Ballet, they have adults performing all the principal parts, with kids that would just get up and run across the stage. But in our Nutcracker, although we have professionals and teachers playing some of the roles, the kids are the stars."

This Black version of this classic dance tale features an Afrocentric Queen of Egypt (often played by Eartha Rob-



"Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker" is Debbie's reimagining of the classic ballet performance



Dancers Kalyrn Flowers and Ryan Phuong in "Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker"



Eartha Robinson as the Queen of Egypt in a scene from "Hot Chocolate Nutcracker"



Debbie Allen with dancers Destiny Wimpye and Jalyn Flowers in "Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker"

inson, who co-starred alongside Allen in Fame, the TV series) as well as disparate dance styles like ballet, Bollywood, and hip-hop. The production, which is also more of a narrative than the original, and is a must-see around the holiday season each year.

"I wanted to redefine what that looked like," Allen tells Shondaland in response to her African Egyptian Queen and other unapologetically Black touches. "It's not Elizabeth Taylor — that's the truth. Egypt is in Africa and people get crazy when they don't understand where things are and they haven't traveled the world. And they need to be told. I'll never forget Beyoncé coming to the show and

she was just blown away. She and her husband came and they didn't know it was going to be all that it is."

"Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker" aims to give young people a chance to see self-images that propels them to go further while illuminating the work of dance influencer Allen and her reimagining of the classic ballet performed annually by the unapologetically gifted students of DADA.

Synopsis: From Shondaland, the Netflix documentary film "Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker" shines a light on the work of trailblazing icon Debbie Allen and her reimagining of the classic ballet performed annually

by the gifted students of the Debbie Allen Dance Academy (DADA). Over the last 50 years, Allen's incredible career has spanned the spectrum of the arts—from acting in, choreographing, and directing the iconic series Fame, to her prolific work directing, producing, choreographing, dancing, and writing for film, television, and theatre—garnering her Emmy Awards, a Golden Globe, and multiple Tony nominations in the process. "Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker" features intimate interviews with Allen, her family, DADA's world class dance instructors, and her inspirational students, and provides fascinating insights into Allen's own personal

journey pursuing an art form where she did not always see herself reflected in its imagery. The film also offers front row access to the grueling rehearsals, the passion and leadership of Allen and DADA's dance instructors, and the huge commitment and undertaking by the dancers of all ages and backgrounds who come to train at the academy each year regardless of their socio-economic circumstances or traditional expectations of the dance community. Rehearsed for just over three months, The Hot Chocolate Nutcracker has become a staple holiday performance in Los Angeles and the largest fundraising event on the school's calendar.



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The Community Energy Center, a cooperative with the National Newspaper Publishers Association and National Association of Hispanic Publications Media, will provide information and perspectives on the integral role of the energy sector in daily life for American families in a wide range of communities.

On the tube

By Audrey J. Bernard

Enchanting 'Emily In Paris' will leave you spellbound!

"Emily In Paris" — the 10 episode romantic comedy series created, written and executive produced by **Darren Star** (*Younger, Sex & The City*) and starring **Lily Collins** (*Rules Don't Apply, To the Bone*) — made its luminous debut on Netflix on October 2, 2020. The wildly captivating love story was met with huge success and has been renewed for a second season.

Synopsis: Collins stars as Emily, an ambitious twenty-something marketing executive from Chicago, unexpectedly lands her dream job in Paris when her company acquires a French luxury marketing company — and she is tasked with revamping their social media strategy. Emily's new life in Paris is filled with intoxicating adventures and surprising challenges



as she juggles winning over her work colleagues, making friends, and navigating new romances.

Receipts: The series co-stars **Ashley Park** (*Mean Girls* on Broadway, *Tales of the City*) along with **Philippine Leroy Beaulieu** (*Call My Agent!*), **Lucas Bravo** (*Smart Ass*), **Samuel Arnold** (*Antony & Cleopatra*), **Camille Razat** (*The*



15:17 to Paris) and **Bruno Guouery** (*Doc Martin*). Recurring cast includes **Kate Walsh** (*The Umbrella Academy*), **William Abadie** (*Resident Evil: Extinction*) and **Arnaud Viard** (*Clara et Moi*).

Credits: "Emily In Paris" is

produced by **Darren Star Productions**, **Jax Media** and **MTV Studios**. In addition to Star, **Tony Hernandez** and **Lilly Burns** of Jax Media, and **Andrew Fleming** serve as executive producers with Lily Collins also serving as produc-

er on the series. **Zoe Cassavetes**, **Andrew Fleming** and **Peter Lauer** direct with Star's longtime collaborator **Patricia Field** consulting on costume design with **Marilyn Fitoussi**. (Photos courtesy Netflix)



An Important Message from Medicare

Getting your flu shot is more important than ever.

Flu shots are covered by Medicare.

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Health

COVID-19: A real different holiday season

By Glenn
Ellis(TriceEdneyWire.com)

As if losing the ability to gather for each of our traditional forms and places of worship, as well as mourning and burying our dead according to our customs wasn't all we thought we could bear, COVID-19 continues to take its toll in unexpected ways. For most, this is the first time that we have to make a decision to forgo the annual holiday trip or skip the family gathering. No seeing the joyful faces of families and friends, as we have all come to expect and enjoy.

For some of us, this is the time to make amends for yearlong petty disputes; for others it's a season to introduce new babies or significant others to the family; and then there are those for whom it is the therapeutic intervention we need to return us to our "roots," and be infused with the familial and ancestral spirit that enables us to cope with the challenges of our daily lives.

It's time for us to start to pay attention to the emotional and mental toll that the pandemic is causing in all of our lives; and whether we like it or not, we're going to have to cope not just with our own emotions, but our family's emotions, too.

Let me acknowledge that I am under no illusion that everyone doesn't share this degree of caution or concern. We've seen a wide range of reactions to the pandemic, from those who take it very seriously to those who treat

it like it's not such a big deal. We have seen every day for the past six or seven months, that there are millions of people in this country who could care less about allowing this virus to interfere with their lives, especially during this holiday season. Even though the TSA screen over 2 million people at airports over a 48 hour period last week, I'd like to believe that most of us are like me, being cautious and following all of the CDC's guidelines for preventive measures...like not traveling for the holidays. However, like me, many of you also have family and friends who are dismissive of the danger; and if so, you need to deal with the conflict if you have decided to skip the festivities. If your family and friends don't think like you about the threat that this virus brings, then they absolutely won't understand your decision not to celebrate your holiday season in a totally distant, but safe, way.

A couple of facts pointed out in research from the Kaiser Family Foundation makes clear why this concern is of particular importance for Black folks. We are "at an increased risk for serious illness if they contract COVID-19 due to higher rates of underlying health conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, hypertension, and obesity compared to whites; more likely to work in the service industries such as restaurants, retail, and hospitality that are particularly at risk for loss of income during the pandemic; more likely to live in housing situations, such as mul-



tigenerational families or low-income and public housing that make it difficult to social distance or self-isolate; and often working in jobs that are not amenable to teleworking and use public transportation that puts them at risk for exposure to COVID-19.

I don't know about you, but every Black person I know either fits this profile or have a friend or relative who is a part of their normal holiday celebrations that they would contact if things go on as they have in holidays past. If you've made a decision to do things differently this year, remember that these people won't understand, and you could find yourself in the throes of some deep resentment.

Are you ready for that from the people you love and care about the most? How are you planning to approach these conversations? You might want to put some thought into it so that you will be prepared for the inevitable. The last thing any of us want is to cause damage in our most meaningful relationships.

Always remember your responsibility to your friends and family, always make the goal to set a boundary and stick up for yourself and your family. Of course, food is a meaningful part of our cultural and history for our holiday experiences. If you live in close proximity to your family, consider a socially-distanced food exchange. So if you are not

comfortable going to a family member's house for a long sit-down meal, you can cook various dishes and drop them off.

It's okay to admit that you're sad and disappointed and that you'll miss these events. But, it's entirely possible to still turn the holidays into a positive experience with alternative plans, even if they're not the plans you'd hoped for.

When you're thinking about holiday rituals and adapting to new or different circumstances, ask yourself, again, if it's something meaningful to you or something that feels like an obligation.

If it's meaningful, think about how you can do the things to be safe, so that you can still recreate the experiences in the holidays to come.

Remember I'm not a doctor. I just sound like one! Take good care of yourself and live the best life possible!

The information included in this column is for educational purposes only. I do not dispense medical advice or prescribe the use of any technique as a replacement form of treatment for physical, mental or medical problems by your doctor either directly or indirectly. Glenn Ellis, MPH is a Visiting Scholar at The National Bioethics Center at Tuskegee University and a Harvard Medical School Fellow in Research Bioethics and Writing. He is author of Which Doctor? and Information is the Best Medicine. Ellis is an active media contributor on Health Equity and Medical Ethics. For more good health information visit: www.glennellis.com

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U.K. becomes first country to approve Pfizer vaccine

Philadelphiaobserver.com

LONDON — Britain gave emergency authorization on Wednesday to Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine, leaping ahead of the United States to become the first Western country to allow mass inoculations against a disease that has killed more than 1.4 million people worldwide.

The decision kicked off a vaccination campaign with little precedent in modern medicine, encompassing not only ultracold dry ice and trays of glass vials but also a crusade against anti-vaccine misinformation.

Britain beating the United States to authorization — on a vaccine codeveloped by the American pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, no less — may intensify pressure on U.S. regulators, who are already under fire from the White House for not moving

faster to get doses to people. And it has stirred up a global debate about how to weigh the desperate need for a vaccine with the imperative of assuring people that it is safe.

"Help is on its way with this vaccine — and we can now say that with certainty, rather than with all the caveats," the British health secretary, Matt Hancock, said on Wednesday, as the government exulted in the authorization.

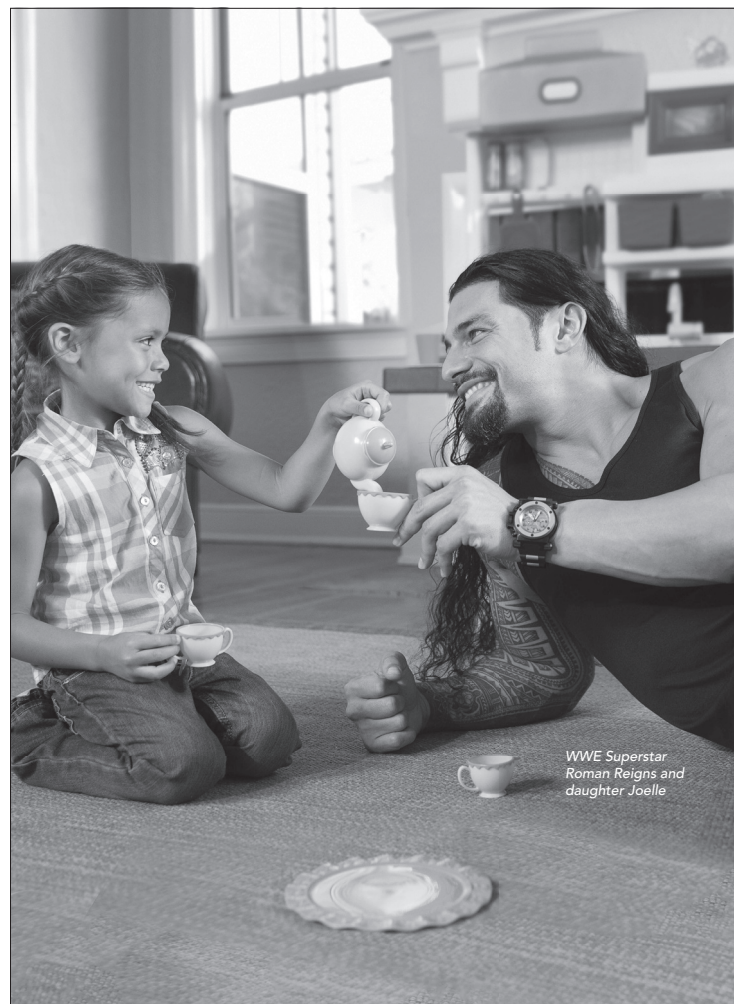
While the go-ahead bodes well for Britain, which broke from the European Union's regulatory orbit to approve the shot early, it will have no effect on the distribution of the hundreds of millions of doses that other wealthy countries have procured in prepaid contracts.

It also offers little relief to poorer countries that could not afford to buy supplies in advance and may struggle to pay for both the vaccines and the exceptional

demands of distributing them.

The Pfizer vaccine, developed with BioNTech, a smaller German firm, must be transported at South Pole-like temperatures, a requirement that could dictate who will be vaccinated first in Britain: Nursing-home residents were supposed to be the top priority under an advisory committee's plans, but efforts to limit transportation of the vaccine and ensure it remains cold may mean that National Health Service staff will receive the shots first.

The government said on Wednesday that 800,000 doses would be available by next week for health workers to begin administering. For Britain, which has suffered one of Europe's highest per capita death tolls from the virus, the decision by its drug regulator testified to a vaccination strategy that has been the most aggressive in the West.



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Egypt under fire for arrests of prominent rights defenders

(GIN) —

"Meeting with foreign diplomats is not a crime. Nor is peacefully advocating for human rights."

Those were the first words of Antony Blinken as he steps up to the plate and assumes the position of foreign policy adviser to President-elect Joe Biden. Blinken joins prominent leaders in the human rights community coming to the defense of three domestic rights activists who met with Western diplomats for a briefing on Nov. 3.

On Thursday, Egyptian Security Forces arrested Gasser Abdel-Razek, executive director of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) from his home in Maadi, a suburb of Cairo. Egyptian security forces detained two other EIPR employees on Wednesday.

Karim Ennarah, the head of the group's criminal justice department, was arrested Wednesday. His whereabouts and the charges he faces are unknown.

The activists were ordered detained for 15 days on charges of joining a terrorist group and spreading fake news, in what



critics see as the latest escalation of an unprecedented clampdown on civil society and political dissent.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's clampdown on free

speech and political dissent was largely ignored by the outgoing administration of Donald Trump. But as a new broom sweeps clean, the Biden administration appears likely to end the impunity enjoyed

by authoritarians, dictators, and similar tyrants. In a tweet last July about al-Sisi he commented: "NO MORE blank checks for Trump's 'favorite dictator.'"

EIPR advocates for personal

and religious rights, against the death penalty and publishes investigations into violations in prisons and human rights abuses in general.

"These arrests, the smear campaign against the organization and the government's baseless claim that EIPR operates illegally, show that this is a well-planned and concerted attack," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Research and Advocacy Director.

"Accusing staff of 'joining a terrorist group' is an assault on the organization and the human rights values it represents."

Bärbel Kofler, human rights commissioner for Germany's foreign ministry, said she was "appalled" by the arrests.

In recent years the government has imprisoned and restricted the travel of thousands of dissidents, political activists, journalists, protesters and human rights defenders.

More information about the work of these rights activists can be found here: <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/violation/arrest-detention-imprisonment>

Culture



65 years ago Rosa Parks stood up for civil rights by sitting down

(CNN)

It was on this day in 1955 when a simple act of defiance elevated a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama, into a pivotal symbol in America's civil rights movement.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a city bus. Little did the 42-year-old know that her act would help end segregation laws in the South.

She was on her way home from work that evening and took a seat in the front of the

black section of a city bus in Montgomery.

The bus filled up, and the bus driver demanded she move so a white male passenger could have her seat.

But Parks refused to give up her seat, and police arrested her. Four days later, Parks was convicted of disorderly conduct.

The events triggered a 381-day boycott of the bus system by blacks that was organized by a 26-year-old Baptist minister, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

LeBron James named 2020 Sportsperson of the Year

James and four other athletes were featured in this activist-centered issue of Sports Illustrated

Sports Illustrated's 2020 Sportsperson of the Year goes to five men and women who were champions in every sense of the word.

Breanna Stewart, LeBron James, Naomi Osaka, Patrick Mahomes, and Laurent Duvernay-Tardif all demonstrated athlete activism during the course of this tumultuous year. But Lakers star, LeBron James is the first athlete to win the award three times: 2012, 2016, and 2020.

Stewart, Osaka, Mahomes, and Duvernay-Tardiff are all under 30 and early in their activism journeys. But James, 35, found his social and political voice long ago. With his efforts for racial justice, education reform and Black community empowerment, he has set the

Mahomes, quarter back for the Kansas City Chiefs, was among a group of NFL stars who pushed NFL owners to acknowledge past wrongs, admit the league erred in its response to peaceful NFL protests of police brutality, and affirm that Black Lives Matter.



Osaka, a tennis star and U.S. Open champion used her fame and celebrity to confront police violence and racial injustice in eye-catching ways. She made a statement at the U.S. Open tournament, wearing seven different

masks, each one printed with the name of a Black American who was killed in a situation of police violence. At the end of the tournament, Osaka told reporters that the point of her masks was "to make people start talking."

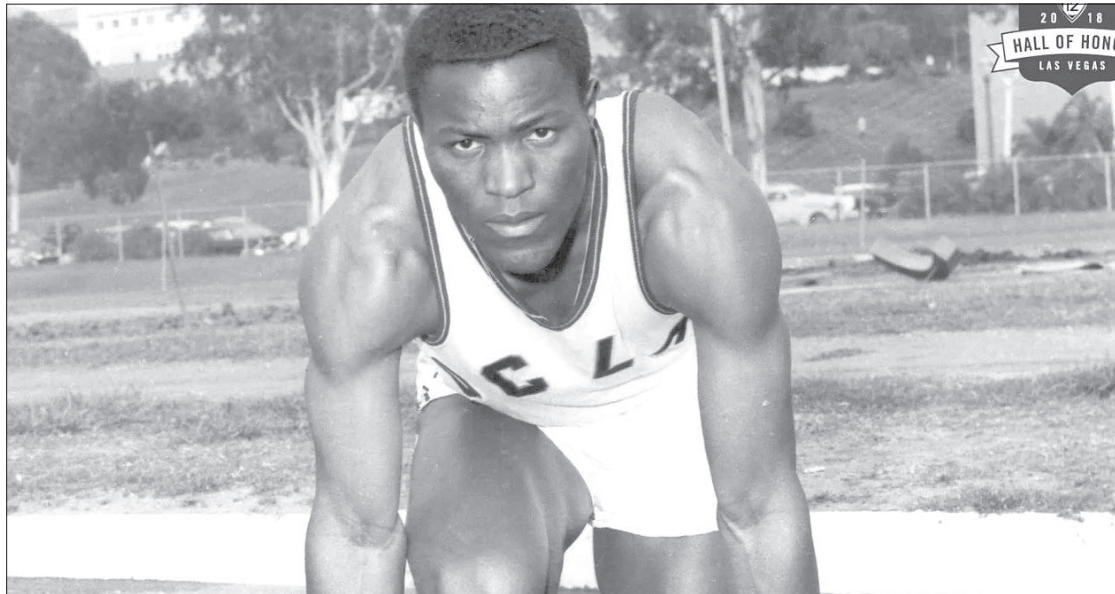
R.I.P. Rafer Johnson, 86, Gold Medalist in the 1960 Olympic Decathlon

Philadelphiaobserver.com

According to nytimes.com, American athlete Rafer Johnson, who carried the United States flag into Rome's Olympic Stadium in August 1960 as the first Black captain of a U.S. Olympic team and went on to win gold in the decathlon bringing him acclaim as the world's greatest all-around athlete, died today at his home in Los Angeles, CA. He was 86.

To quote from The New York Times:

Johnson never competed after that decathlon triumph. He became a good-will ambassador for the United States and a close associate of the Kennedy family, taking a leadership role in the Special Olympics, which were championed by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and joining Robert F. Kennedy's entourage during



Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1968.

He was remembered especially

for helping to wrestle the senator's assassin to the ground in Los Angeles in 1968.

Johnson's national profile was largely molded at the 1960 Olympics, one of the most celebrated

in the history of the Games, a moment when a host of African-American athletes burst triumphantly onto the world stage.

Muhammad Ali, known then as Cassius Clay, captured boxing gold in the light-heavyweight division.

Wilma Rudolph swept to victory in the women's 100- and 200-meter dashes and combined with her Tennessee State teammates for gold in the 4 x 100 relay.

Oscar Robertson helped take the United States basketball team to a gold medal.

Johnson is survived by his wife, Elizabeth Thorsen, brother Jimmy Johnson, a former San Francisco 49er and Pro Football Hall of Famer; two children, Jennifer Johnson Jordan, who was a member of the U.S. women's beach volleyball team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics and is now a volleyball coach at U.C.L.A., and Josh Johnson; and four grandchildren.

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By Victoria Horsford

What's going on

AMERICA, AMERICA

NATION TIME: For more than a week, African Americans and their leaders at the NAACP, the National Urban League, the National Action Network, listened in disbelief to president-elect Joe Biden's cabinet nominees. Hey, something was amiss. The original, coveted cabinet posts State, Treasury, Justice and Defense seemed elusive for African Americans. Secretaries of State and the Treasury were announced. They are white. Yes, Blacks were named to the Economic Council, US Ambassador to the UN and deputy secretary posts, some of which require Senate confirmation. Then we learn that the nominees for Secretaries of Homeland Security and Health And Human Services are Hispanics, Alejandra Mayorkas and Xavier Becerra, respectively. Something was not right with President-elect "who was going to have our (Black) backs." To add insult to injury Black leaders complained about Biden's inaccessibility. They were not reticent about their discontent and shared same with mainstream media. They got an appointment with Biden on 12/8. However, something miraculous happened on 12/7 when media started circulating info that African American Lloyd Austin, a retired Four-Star Army General would be the Biden nominee for the Pentagon.

Lloyd Austin, 67 was the Commander of the US Central Command from 2013-2016 responsible for the Middle East. A 40 year



Lloyd Austin

Army veteran, he attend West Point and Auburn University. When Austin is confirmed, he becomes the first African American to oversee the US Department of Defense. Defense Department.

The Biden/African American leaders summit was held after press time. Hope that Biden was pressured into considering an African American to head the Justice Department.

COVID 19 UPDATES

The U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had nothing but good news about the Pfizer and BioN-Tech COVID19 vaccine on Tuesday. Their double dose vaccine had an efficacy rate of 95% after doses were

administered three weeks apart. Protection seems to kick in early with comparable efficacy for all races and age demos. On 12/10 FDA will review its assessments in advance of a vote to recommend use of the

Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine. Now for the hard part, distribution of the vaccine to the states and convincing many Americans, especially Black Americans, of the drug's efficacy.

BUSINESS & MEDIA NEWS

The Black Virtual Career Fair hosts its General + Tech winter fair, December 10, 9 am to 1 pm PST. The Black Career Fair will match Black professionals with more than 25 national, forward-thinking, cutting-edge companies. Some of the Career Fair sponsors include Accenture Federal Services, Credit Suisse, Freedom Financial Network, Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Intuitive Surgical, Pocket Gems, Shutterfly and X-the Moonshot Factory. For free registration, visit www.virtual.blackvcf/en/

MSNBC TV has hired savvy GenXers political analyst/author Tiffany Cross and WAPO journalist and editorial board member Jonathan Capehart to host its Saturday/Sunday 10 am -12 pm time slot, beginning December 12/13. They replace Joy Reid's AM Joy, which has morphed into REIDOUT a show which



Jonathan Capehart

begins MSNBC weekday prime time lineup. Erstwhile regular AM JOY guests, Cross will host the Saturday show; and Capehart. will host the Sunday show. Shows title is to be determined.

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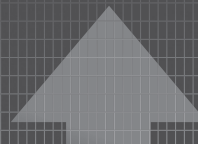
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