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August 27, 2021



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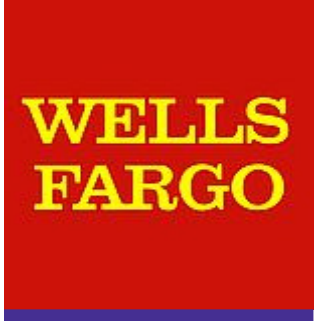
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**SATURDAY**  
August 28, 2021  
11 AM

**GRAVESIDE**  
**COOK-WALDEN**  
**MEMORIAL HILL**

**SATURDAY**  
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1 PM  
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The time has come. This weekend, I will be saying goodbye to my baby as I send her to her final resting place.

I want to thank you, **babygirl**, for bringing your **daddy** much **love**, **joy**, and **happiness** for the last three decades. I have, and forever will, **miss you** until the end of my days. Fear not; my love. As I move on to my next chapter, I am not alone. For **HE**, who comforts me, is with me. **HalleluYAH!**

## TRAVIS COUNTY REIGNS VICTORIOUS OVER SCHOOL DISTRICT MASK MANDATES

by **PAUL FLAHIVE**, TPR and **DAN KATZ**, TEXAS PUBLIC RADIO

(TRAVIS COUNTY) - Legal battles over precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are rolling on across Texas.

The Texas Supreme Court Thursday denied a request from Attorney General Ken Paxton to undo a Travis County judge's temporary restraining orders that allow some counties and school districts to have mask mandates. In its ruling, the court said Paxton did not have a compelling reason to bypass the appeals process and go straight to the high court.

"That may be only a temporary reprieve for Austin; the state can now ask the Austin-based court of appeals for the same relief and go back to the Supreme Court if they lose," UT law professor Steven Vladeck told KUT. "But it's a reprieve nonetheless."

In a statement, Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee — who filed one of the cases that prompted Paxton's unsuccessful high court challenge — called the ruling "an important decision."

"Our lawsuit against the Governor will continue, and we'll keep giving all we've got to ensure local officials and school districts can protect our students and immunocompromised," Menefee said. "I'm hopeful today's decision also means the Texas Supreme Court is taking a hard look at whether Governor Abbott is misusing the Disaster Act and needs to be reined in."

At around the same time, the Texas 4th Court of Appeals upheld a temporary order that allows mask mandates in schools in Bexar County.

The appeals decision bars the state from enforcing an executive order by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott banning mandates.

The rulings are a blow for Abbott, who issued the executive order in July forbidding schools, cities, or counties from issuing mask or vaccine mandates.

"The path forward relies on personal responsibility — not government mandates," The Republican said in a statement at the time.

As cases began to surge in recent weeks, local governments fought back. They filed for temporary restraining orders to allow them to issue mandates. The state Attorney General's office said more than 50 local school districts are now requiring masks in Texas.

Abbott — who tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this week — continues to try to stop them.

On Thursday, the state Attorney General's office filed a lawsuit against the San Antonio Independent School district over its mandatory vaccination policy for staff and faculty.

### Federal Challenges

The first federal lawsuit against Abbott's executive order was also filed this week.

On Tuesday, Disability Rights Texas sued Abbott, arguing his ban on mask mandates violates protections for people with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The nonprofit said the students are at particular risk of COVID-19 because they are too young to get vaccinated.

The mask mandate battle is being fought in multiple states with Republican governors, including Florida, Arizona, and Tennessee.

On Wednesday, President Biden said his administration will not sit by as governors try to block schools from implementing measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Democrat said Wednesday he's directing the U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona to take steps to protect students.

"This includes using all of his oversight authorities and legal action if appropriate against governors who are trying to block and intimidate local school officials and educators," Biden said.

Cardona sent Abbott a letter saying his mask mandate ban conflicts with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations and may violate federal guidelines.

## Texas Lt. Gov. Falsely Blames Black People For State's Low Vaccination Rates



By David Moye  
HUFFPOST



**Texas Lt Governor Dan Patrick Has Blamed The Black Community and Democrats For COVID 19 Surge In The US. Ain't that a bitch?**

(HUFFPOST) - Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick should be trying to find ways to get more Texans vaccinated against COVID-19, but he seems more interested in finding scapegoats.

During an interview with Fox News host Laura Ingraham, Patrick blamed Texas' low vaccination rates on the Lone Star state's Black population - oh, and on Democrats.

"Democrats like to blame Republicans" for low vaccination rates, Patrick complained before falsely saying that "the biggest group in most states are African-Americans who have not been vaccinated."

"The last time I checked, over 90% of them vote for Democrats in their major cities and major counties," he added.

Black people are not, as Patrick claimed, the biggest group of unvaccinated people in most states. Texas has 5.6 million unvaccinated white people, versus 1.9 million unvaccinated Black people, according to the Texas Tribune. A Kaiser Family Foundation report published this week found that white adults account for the largest share of unvaccinated adults in the U.S.



**As of Aug. 13, Black Texans, who make up 11.8% of Texas' population, accounted for 16.4% of the state's coronavirus cases and 10.2% of coronavirus-related deaths.**

And while Patrick said that Republicans aren't going to force the vaccine on people who don't want it, he also blasted Democrats for "doing nothing for the African-American community that has a significant high number of unvaccinated."

As of Aug. 13, Black Texans, who make up 11.8% of Texas' population, accounted for 16.4% of the state's coronavirus cases and 10.2% of coronavirus-related deaths, according to The Washington Post.

Black and Hispanic people are still less likely than white people to have received a vaccine, leaving them disproportionately at risk during the pandemic. There are various systemic reasons for this. But the Kaiser Family Foundation says that unvaccinated adults in those communities are also far more open to receiving a vaccine than unvaccinated white adults: Only 26% of unvaccinated Black and Hispanic adults said they will "definitely not" get a shot, versus 65% of unvaccinated white adults.

## INSIDE



**NAACP has response to Patrick's "Dem Black Folks Fault" theory See **NUMBERS** Page 4**



**SPIKE LEE SAYS HE HAS "QUESTIONS" REGARDING 9/11 See **THEORIES** Page 5**



**What's China really hiding? Experts want to know. See **STALLED** Page 6**

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College Isn't  
Always The  
Answer

By **John Harris Jr.** | VILLAGER Sports Columnist

(VILLAGER) - LaMelo Ball has a point, even though it goes against generations of Black parents stressing the importance of a college education to their offspring.

Ball, the third overall selection by the Charlotte Hornets in the 2020 NBA Draft who was voted rookie of the year, left high school early at age 16 and skipped college to play professionally in Lithuania and Australia. His performance overseas led to his high selection in last year's draft.

Profiled in GQ Magazine, Ball said talented young basketball players like himself don't need to attend college to become high draft picks.

"You wanna go to the league, so school's not your priority," Ball said. "We not trippin' off school. We not dumb. We know how to learn. We don't need school."

Jalen Green, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2021 draft, mimicked Ball's gameplan and also skipped college. Green spent a year in the NBA-sanctioned G League.

Ball's comments undoubtedly struck a nerve. Black parents historically have encouraged their children to pursue a college degree to give them their best opportunity to land a job. But the landscape is now vastly different.

Unlike their parents, Black college graduates can no longer expect to secure a job they can count on for the next 20 or 30 years. The term "entrepreneur" has become commonplace while the term "employee" is becoming less common as an increasing number of young adults seek to create business opportunities for themselves instead of combing the want ads.

Another reason for the switch in philosophy is unavoidable: college loan debt.

Black college graduates have an average of \$52,000 in student loan debt, according to data from the National Center for Educational Studies. Four years after graduation, almost half of Black student borrowers owe 12.5 percent more than what they borrowed due to interest. Sadly, more than half of those Black students say their student debt exceeds their net worth.

Personally, I believe high schools need to return to the olden days and prepare their students to think outside the box regarding money-earning opportunities.

The stigma that not attending college equates to failure is wrong, not to mention antiquated. College isn't for everyone.

High school administrators should consider a return to giving students the option of pursuing a college-bound curriculum, leaning a trade, or both. Have you seen what electricians, plumbers and some auto mechanics earn per hour?

We need to listen to young folks like LaMelo Ball more often. They may say it differently than we do, but we owe it to them to at least listen - even if it's not what some of us want to hear.



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By Naomi Richard  
VILLAGER  
Entertainment  
Reporter

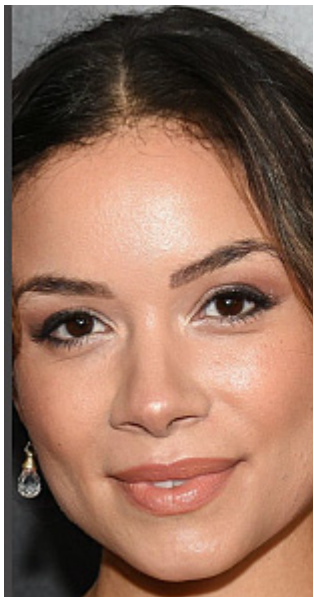
(VILLAGER) - *Harry & Meghan: Escaping the Palace* explores what really happened inside the palace that drove Harry and Meghan to leave everything behind, so they could build a future for themselves and their son Archie, according to Lifetime TV. The movie will detail Meghan's growing isolation and sadness, and their disappointment that "The Firm" was not defending them against the press's attacks. It will show

# "Harry & Meghan: Escaping the Palace"

Premieres on Lifetime TV September 6 at 7pm CT



"Escaping the Palace" movie poster. Photo courtesy of The CR8Agency.



Actors Sydney Morton (l) and Jordan Dean (r).  
Photos courtesy of The CR8Agency.

Harry's fear that history would repeat itself and he would not be able to protect his wife and son from the same forces that may have contributed to his mother's untimely death. *Harry & Meghan: Escaping the Palace* will examine the dynamics between Will and Harry, Kate and Meghan, and Harry with Will and Charles, which led to the ultimate break from the royal ties.

Actors **Jordan Dean** and **Sydney Morton** were chosen to play Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex; and Meghan Markle, the Duchess of Sussex, respectively.

**Jordan Dean** recurred as "Jake Campbell" in the second and final season of Marvel's *The Punisher*



on Netflix and recurred as "Ludlow Fowler" in Amazon's period drama series *Z: The Beginning of Everything*. His additional television work includes HBO's *High Maintenance*, USA's Golden Globe-nominated series *The Sinner*, CBS's *Bull*, and USA's *Royal Pains*. His recent Broadway stage work includes *Macbeth*, directed by Rob Ashford and Kenneth Branagh, *American Psycho* (with his 'Harry & Meghan' co-star Sydney Morton) directed by Rupert Goold, and *Shows for Days* where he worked opposite Patti Lupone and Michael Urie.

**Sydney Morton's** appeared on television including two seasons of Spike Lee's *She's Gotta*

*Have It*, she also co-starred opposite Octavia Spencer in *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* both on Netflix and recently began recurring as "Alex" on NBC's *Manifest*. On Broadway she appeared in the original companies of *Memphis*, *Evita*, *Motown the Musical*, *The Secret of My Success* (pre-Broadway), as well as the National Tour of *Flashdance*.

In an open and candid conversation about the upcoming film, Morton and Dean were very transparent. "Racism is touched on in the film, as it shaped Harry and Meghan's experiences and contributed to their decision to leave the palace. They encountered serious obstacles and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, had faced tragedies and loss openly. All these emotions helped mold the persons we now portray," according to Dean.

"It's really hard to play someone so famous and still alive. There was trauma involved in their decisions, and we approached it carefully. We had to be careful. We studied them for quite some time, and particularly their recent interview with Oprah. It gave

us even more insight into their emotions and their decision process in leaving the palace," commented Morton.

Interestingly, the chemistry and romance between the two came organically. They had known each other prior to accepting the Lifetime TV roles because of their prior experience working together working on Broadway. Against that backdrop, they become very respectful of each other and recognized the talent and level of excellence exemplified in each other's work. "We were able to show affection, tenderness and protection with ease," explained Jordan.

When asked about their wardrobe selections, they described the process as somewhat stressful. The Royals have such good taste in clothes and they helped to form the story being told. They had some latitude in their choices, but strove to remain true to the style of Harry and Meghan.

What a delightful experience to spend time with both actors, who portray a couple that's perceived almost as larger than life. Tune in and watch the magic on Lifetime, airing September 6 at 7pm CT.

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## MASKS UP!

COVID-19 Variants,  
Vaccinations and the  
Black Community

# 54%

of African Americans  
CONTINUE TO  
WEAR MASKS  
in public and  
private settings



! African Americans remain most concerned about new variants

(NAACP) - As the spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus continues to rise, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new guidance on face masks.

The CDC recommends that people, regardless of their vaccination status, wear a face mask in certain indoor situations where there is a risk of "substantial and high transmission" of COVID-19. This includes schools, retail stores, and some businesses.

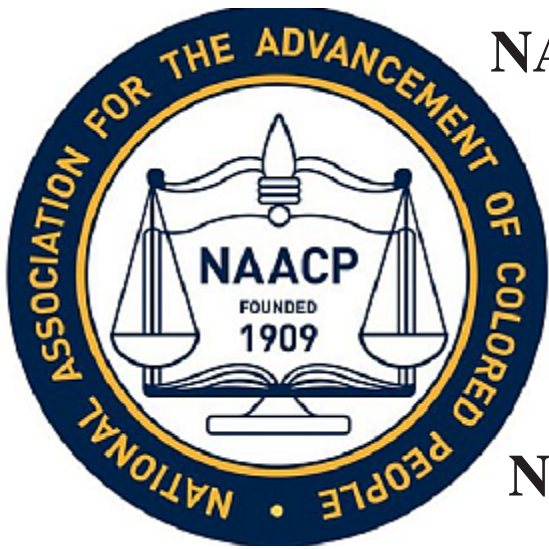
This comes as California becomes the first U.S. state to mandate regular COVID-19 testing for unvaccinated teachers as their state data shows a rising 22% new cases per week.

While health disparities leave African Americans vulnerable to COVID-19 at higher rates, our research shows that 51% of African Americans say they are fully vaccinated, and 54% continue to wear masks in public and private settings.

While we continue to learn more about the coronavirus and its delta and lambda variants, the NAACP's COVID. Know More portal has information and resources you need to protect yourself, your family, and your community. Visit the website today, and fight back with facts.

Remember, if one of us is vulnerable, all of us are vulnerable.





# NAACP RESPONSE TO LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR DAN PATRICK’S COMMENTS THAT AFRICAN-AMERICANS ARE THE REASON WHY TEXAS HAS INCREASING NUMBERS OF COVID-19 POSITIVES



Texas State Representative  
Ron Reynolds

**(NAACP)** - The Texas NAACP and State Representative Ron Reynolds are greatly concerned about the comments of Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. Gary Bledsoe, Texas NAACP President says that “this is a harmful distraction, intending to divert from the fact that it is the anti-mask anti-science based political decisions by Texas’ Republican Leadership that have led to the uncontrolled spread of the coronavirus in our State.

The CDC and the Texas Medical community have been clear but the extreme Republican policies allow you to go without a mask, even in our public schools, and this is what is causing the spread. This kind of rhetoric is dangerous and will lead to the kind of outrageous action that we saw yesterday in Washington, D.C.

This is mindful of lynchings, when all people had to do was find the nearest Black person and say he did it and the white community would follow in line, according to the State’s own data, African-Americans are only 16 percent of the current infected group and only 10.2 percent of our total fatalities in this State.

Further, the Texas Tribune says that experts estimate that 5.6 million whites compared to 1.9 million blacks are not vaccinated in Texas. The facts

just don’t support his extreme comments. As I heard an outstanding scholar say the other day, in God we trust, all others need data.”

TLBC Vice-Chair Ron Reynolds said that “it is comments like these that let us know the real motivation behind proposed election protection. We call upon Texans of all races to repudiate this kind of race baiting. We care about all Texans, but it is clear that this wave is being moved forward by white conservatives who live in urban areas.

A recent Texas Tribune analysis found that 28 percent of African-Americans in urban areas are vaccinated while 33 percent of the mostly white rural and non-metropolitan areas is vaccinated, and the whites in Texas still outnumber African-Americans 4 to 1.”

Bledsoe said “you can’t blame a state epidemic on 12 percent of the population who mostly live amongst themselves in segregated areas. The data defies the comments made by the Lieutenant Governor. We need to change our policies in this state to be consistent with science.

The NAACP calls upon the Lieutenant Governor to admit this is not accurate and then pledge to work with Texas’ diverse communities so we can come together for the good of us all.” Reynolds

added that Representative Garnet Coleman passed a health disparities bill, HB 4139, out of the House but the Lieutenant Governor’s Senate did not even give it a hearing, so his comments are even more dubious. We are hopeful that the recognition of the error in his comments might lead to him wanting to work with us and not always against us”.

The Texas NAACP sought the advice of a medical expert, Dr. Dona Murphey, on the truth of the Governor’s comments. Dr. Murphey said “It is particularly harmful and dangerous to say African-Americans are the cause of the spread. They have suffered the greatest harm from the spread and we should be directing our attention towards addressing this and not targeting this community.

The Governor’s stand on mask mandates, the failure to vaccinate sufficient numbers of Texans and the campaign of disinformation are all much greater causes to the increased spread.”

Bledsoe and Reynolds say they intend to reach out to the Lieutenant Governor in an attempt to discuss ways of coming together in order to address the problem of the growing numbers of Texans infected by the coronavirus, particularly as a result of the new delta strain.

## The Austin (TX) Chapter of the Links Supports Dental Care through Colgate Bright Smiles at Bertha Sadler Means Young Women Leadership Academy



Colgate Bright Smiles and Bright Futures (BSBF) staff provided a virtual presentation on dental care for twenty incoming sixth grade students at Bertha Sadler Means YWLA. The mission of BSBF is to connect and provide communities with oral health education, dental treatment and referrals for promoting lifelong learning opportunities and creating a world of bright smiles and even brighter future for students. Link Monica Woods coordinated the event with Dr. Rosalind Oliphant, Community

Partnerships. Students were actively engaged in the discussion of oral health education with Colgate Bright Smiles and members of the Austin (TX) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated.

Following a 30-minute virtual learning session, students received an oral dental care kit from Colgate for supporting health care needs. The Colgate Bright Smiles presentation was a successful event led by Dr. Trinh, a dentist from the Dallas-Fort Worth Area.



Links Mischa Scales, Monica Woods and Angela Henderson, President of the Austin (TX) Chapter of the Links, Incorporated

## Central Texas Interfaith Statement on City of Austin Budget Allocation for Homelessness

**(AUSTIN, TX)** - Central Texas Interfaith commends Austin City Council for allocating \$65.2 million in the 2021-22 budget to be used to provide services and housing for our homeless neighbors. This is a big step forward to address the needs of those who are experiencing homelessness in our communities.

Over the summer, CTI clergy and leaders have called on both Austin City Council and Travis County to dedicate federal American Rescue Plan (stimulus) funds to end homelessness. We continue to ask city leaders to release the \$84 million in ARP funds held in a contingency fund to address homelessness, and Travis County to allocate \$100 Million in ARP funds for the same purpose.

## Only \$71M given to criminal justice reform orgs out of billions pledged by companies

by Ny Magee | THE GRIO

**(THE GRIO)** - The police killing of George Floyd ignited global protests and prompted corporate America to pledge billions to racial justice. But more than a year after his death, much of the funds have yet to be distributed and more questions about the funds have been raised.

America’s 50 biggest public companies from Silicon Valley to Wall Street proclaimed Black Lives Matter amid the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. These companies and their foundations collectively pledged nearly \$50 billion toward racial equity.

The Washington Post analyzed public statements and company reports of 44 of the companies to determine how the funds were distributed. One key finding is that many of the organizations stand to profit from the \$49.5 billion that was pledged.

“Looking deeper, more than 90 percent of that amount — \$45.2 billion — is allocated as loans or investments they could stand to profit from, more than half in the form of mortgages. Two banks —

JPMorgan Chase and Bank of America — accounted for nearly all of those commitments. Meanwhile, \$4.2 billion of the total pledged is in the form of outright grants. Of that, companies reported just a tiny fraction — about \$71 million — went to organizations focused specifically on criminal justice reform,” the report read.

“Corporations are not set up to wield their power for the greater good as much as we give them credit for, a lot of times,” said Phillip Atiba Goff, a professor at Yale University who co-founded the Center for Policing Equity. “They are constrained by things they feel they need to do to manage their brand in a world where Black liberation does not have consensus.”

The Post noted that corporations are not required to report on where all the pledges are going, nor are they required to track the impact the funds have on the communities they are allegedly benefitting.

See DONATIONS, page 7



# Spike Lee entertains 9/11 conspiracy theories in new documentary: ‘I got questions’

by Christi Carras | LOS ANGELES TIMES



© Provided by The LA Times Spike Lee has directed a documentary series about 9/11 and COVID-19 for HBO. (Kirk McKoy / Los Angeles Times)

(L.A. TIMES) - Reintroducing Spike Lee: legendary filmmaker, veteran actor, powerful producer, Oscar-winning screenwriter and — Sept. 11 conspiracy theorist?

While discussing his HBO documentary series “NYC Epicenters 9/11-2021½” — about the 2001 terrorist attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic — in a recent interview with the New York Times, Lee said he still harbors “questions” about the national tragedy after speaking with so-called Sept. 11 truthers for the project.

The acclaimed director opted to include commentary in the four-part saga from the Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth, a collective of conspiracy theorists who maintain that the collapses of the World Trade Center buildings were controlled demolitions orchestrated by an inside group rather than a result of the impacts and fires caused by terrorist plane crashes.

Here’s why: “Because I still don’t ... I mean, I got questions. And I hope that maybe the legacy of this documentary is that Congress holds a hearing, a congressional hearing about 9/11.”

When pressed to share his position on the widely researched and accepted explanations, the prolific director doubled down.

“The amount of heat that it takes to make steel melt, that temperature’s not reached,” he said. “And then the juxtaposition of the way Building 7 fell to the ground — when you put it next to other building collapses that were demolitions, it’s like you’re looking at the same thing.”

“But people going to make up their own mind,” he continued. “My approach is put the information in the movie and let people decide for themselves. I respect the intelligence of the audience.”

Lee, who appears in the documentary, conducted more than 200 interviews for the project, including firsthand accounts from residents, first responders, politicians and journalists alongside his own family and friends, according to HBO.

While speaking with New York-based survivors of both Sept. 11 and the ongoing public health crisis, Lee said he felt a responsibility to ask “tough questions” that triggered emotionally raw responses from interviewees on camera.

“The most moving thing to me, not including archival footage, are the interviews with the people who lost loved ones,” Lee said.

“People just bare their souls. It was very, very emotional. For me, I can’t comprehend what they’re going through. ... [It’s] hard to ask questions where you know people are going to break down. That’s not easy; it’s not fun. But I got to ask those questions.”

But not everyone was so willing to open up to Lee, who revealed that the New York Police Dept. refused to participate in the production. Speculating as to why the police force declined his invitation, Lee wryly suspected, “They saw ‘Do the Right Thing,’” his seminal 1989 film about racial inequality and police violence in New York City.

“They don’t look good in this,” he added. “And that footage [of police officers assaulting Black Lives Matter protesters in 2020] does not lie. They were cracking heads.”

Episode 2 of Lee’s “NYC Epicenters” series debuts Sunday on HBO Max.

# Former GOP congressional candidate Kimberly Klacik suing Candace Owens for defamation

by Aris Folley | THE HILL




Kimberly Klacik

(THE HILL) - Former Maryland GOP congressional candidate Kimberly Klacik has filed a defamation suit against conservative commentator Candace Owens, seeking \$20 million in damages after she said the pundit publicly made false allegations about her that cost her a book deal and other opportunities.

Klacik’s legal team alleged in the suit that Owens accused the former candidate of campaign fraud and of being a “madame” for a strip club, which led to Klacik losing a book deal and politicians pulling out of fundraising events with her, The Baltimore Sun reports.

Klacik has vehemently denied the claims in recent months and vowed to take the matter to court, saying Owens has “falsely” made the accusations.

“Baseless character assassination has no place in political dialogue,” Jacob Frenkel, an attorney representing Klacik, told the Sun of the suit. “The defendant chose to use her huge social media platform to attack a respected Baltimore political figure; we are using the proper forum - the power of the courts - to respond. The detail in Ms. Klacik’s lawsuit speaks for itself.”



Candace Owens

The suit reportedly stems from an Instagram video Owens posted in late June.

The newspaper reports that in the 44-minute clip, Owens accused the former candidate of running an illegitimate charity as well as “money laundering, tax fraud and campaign fraud.” Owens also reportedly alleged Klacik brings in strippers for a club she claimed her husband owns.

Owens acknowledged in the video that she is “not an investigative journalist” and couldn’t confirm the criminal allegations, the paper notes.

The suit reportedly said Klacik has made numerous efforts to get in touch with Owens to take down the video.

Klacik rose to prominence last year during her bid to fill the late Rep. Elijah Cummings’s (D-Md.) congressional seat. She went viral at the time for a digital ad bashing Democratic Party leadership in Baltimore, saying then, “Black people don’t have to vote Democrat.”

She was backed by a number of prominent conservatives, including former President Trump, and brought in millions in fundraising, much of it from out of state, according to the Sun. However, she ultimately lost the election by more than 40 percentage points to now-Democratic Rep. Kweisi Mfume.

# It’s governors vs. the White House this school year. And no one is winning.

By JUAN PEREZ JR., DANIEL PAYNE and MACKENZIE MAYS | POLITICO

(POLITICO) - A turf war between Republican governors and the White House over masking in schools is testing the limits of local control.

Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey is offering vouchers and federal money to schools and parents that reject face coverings. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is threatening the salaries of school officials who mandate masks. And Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is fighting both mask and vaccine mandates in court.

Now President Joe Biden has stepped into the fray.

The White House is facing two currents of public opinion as Biden prepares to address school reopening with Education Secretary Miguel Cardona in the coming days. Majorities of adults tend to favor mask and vaccine mandates for students and teachers, but polls show hard partisan divides continue to color how the public prefers to keep kids safe.

Governors’ varied approaches to Covid-19 safety protocols this school year reflect those same fractures over what it means to trust the science. Republican state executives increasingly see the fight against masking kids as one of their best chances to show off their political power — and beat Biden on the national stage.

The aggressive tactics and the promise of federal intervention have made for a rocky back-to-school season, as Covid-19 cases among children continue to surge.

The president, impatient with states that won’t comply with school masking recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has started to use federal power to goad them along. Biden’s administration has threatened federal scrutiny against states that ban mandatory masks for school staff and students, and it’s pledged to back-fill money governors cut from defiant local school officials. It’s too early to say if the president’s actions will be enough to get resistant governors on board.

After Biden targeted Republican governors this month by directing the Education Department to “use all available tools” for local governments that are trying to ban classroom face coverings, Cardona said local school districts have discretion to use American Rescue Plan funds to implement indoor masking policies and other tactics.

But federal funding may not change the attitude of parents and local school officials who believe mask mandates infringe on each family’s choice for how to protect their kids.

Republicans governors in Florida, Tennessee and Texas have taken a more hardline approach.

DeSantis, the fiery Florida governor considered a top presidential contender in 2024, has offered parents vouchers to send their children to private schools or a different school district if they object to masks, while Sarasota, Miami-Dade and Broward counties, among others, openly defy his rules.

Ken Paxton, the attorney general in Texas, sued San Antonio’s school district to block a recently-enacted vaccine requirement for its employees. The Texas Legislature made Abbott — not county judges, city mayors or superintendents — the leader of the state’s response to statewide emergencies, Paxton argued.

Dallas, Bexar, Harris and Travis counties, home to some of Texas’ biggest cities, filed lawsuits this month to protect face covering requirements for students, faculty and staff at K-12 schools.

Abbot is likely thinking ahead to potential challengers in the 2022 gubernatorial primary, said Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff.

“I think he’s trying his best to get to the right of [primary challengers], but I don’t know that he can do that,” said Wolff, who challenged Abbott’s ban on mask mandates in court.

The disconnect leaves Biden to confront what’s become “a very heterogeneous and very disjointed approach to getting kids back to school,” said Yvonne Maldonado, a professor of epidemiology at Stanford University and the chair of the committee on infectious disease for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

“In the meantime, there’s really nothing that can be done at the federal level,” she said. “There are some things, but really only Band-Aid approaches.”

Lauraine Genota, Marissa Martinez and Andrew Atterbury contributed to this report.



# Experts on WHO team say search for COVID origins has stalled

By MARIA CHENG | AP

**LONDON (AP)** — The international scientists dispatched to China by the World Health Organization to find out where the coronavirus came from said Wednesday the search has stalled and warned that the window of opportunity for solving the mystery is “closing fast.”

Meanwhile, a U.S. intelligence review ordered up by President Joe Biden proved inconclusive about the virus’s origin, including whether it jumped from an animal to a human or escaped from a Chinese lab, The Washington Post reported Wednesday.

In a commentary published in the journal Nature, the WHO-recruited experts said the origins investigation is at “a critical juncture” requiring urgent collaboration but has instead come to a standstill. They noted among other things that Chinese officials are still reluctant to share some raw data, citing concerns over patient confidentiality.

Earlier this year, WHO sent a team of experts to Wuhan, where the first human COVID-19 cases were detected in December 2019, to probe what might have triggered the pandemic now blamed for nearly 4.5 million deaths worldwide, with more than 10,000 people a day succumbing despite more



**Fu Cong, a Foreign Ministry director general, speaks at a briefing for foreign journalists at the Foreign Ministry in Beijing, China, Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2021. China went on the offensive Wednesday ahead of the release of a U.S. intelligence report on the origins of the coronavirus, bringing out the senior official to accuse the United States of politicizing the issue by seeking to blame China. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)**

than 5 billion doses of vaccine administered.

In their analysis, published in March, the WHO team concluded the virus probably jumped to humans from animals, and they described the possibility of a laboratory leak as “extremely unlikely.”

But the WHO experts said their report was intended only as a first step and added, “The window of opportunity for conducting this crucial inquiry is closing fast: any delay will render some of the studies biologically impossible.”

For example, they said, “Antibodies wane, so collecting further samples

and testing people who might have been exposed before December 2019 will yield diminishing returns.”

China said Wednesday that officials should “concentrate on other possible avenues that may help trace the origin” of COVID-19 and suggested studies should be pursued in other countries.

Fu Cong, a director-general in China’s Foreign Ministry, agreed it was a “pity” the search for COVID-19’s origins had stalled but said it wasn’t China’s fault. “China has always supported and will continue to participate in the sci-

ence-based origin tracing efforts,” he said.

He accused the U.S. of “hyping the lab leak theory” and trying to shift the blame onto China, and implied the coronavirus might be linked to high-level American research labs, suggesting the United States invite WHO to investigate some of its installations.

Marion Koopmans and her WHO-recruited colleagues listed a number of priorities for further research, including conducting wider antibody surveys that might identify places where COVID-19 was spreading undetected, both in

China and beyond, testing wild bats and farm-raised animals as potential reservoirs of the virus, and investigating any credible new leads.

Some other scientists fear the best opportunities to collect samples might have been missed during the first few weeks after some of the earliest human cases appeared linked to a Wuhan seafood market.

Chinese researchers collected hundreds of environmental samples immediately after the coronavirus was found, but it is unclear how many people or animals were tested.

“Once you have wildlife traders shifting over to other kinds of employment because they’re worried about whether they’ll be able to do this anymore, that window starts to close,” said Maciej Boni, a Pennsylvania State University biology professor who has studied virus origins and was not part of the WHO team.

Still, Boni said scientists might be able to pinpoint COVID-19’s animal source by hunting for closely related viruses in species like raccoon dogs, mink or ground squirrels. But he said it could take about five years to do the kind of extensive studies necessary.

The search for COVID-19’s origins has become a bitter source of dispute between the U.S. and China, with increasing numbers of American experts calling for the two Wuhan laboratories close to the seafood market to be investigated, something China has flatly rejected and branded “scapegoating.”

Biden in May ordered a 90-day review by U.S. intelligence agencies of both the animal-to-human hypothesis and the lab-leak theory. In July, even WHO’s Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it was premature to have rejected the lab theory, adding that research accidents are common.

## New Texas voting laws, political maps could once again require federal approval under U.S. House bill named after John Lewis

BY ABBY LIVINGSTON  
THE TEXAS TRIBUNE



**(THE TEXAS TRIBUNE)** - The U.S. House on Tuesday passed a bill that could complicate both the coming round of redistricting in Texas and a voting restrictions bill currently under consideration in the state Legislature.

Known as the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, the bill would reinstate sections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that were written to protect people of color. Over the last decade, the U.S. Supreme Court rolled back some of that landmark law’s provisions.

The bill passed along party lines, meaning all Democratic Texans in the U.S. House supported it and all Republican delegation members opposed it.

Should the bill also pass the U.S. Senate, it could put states like Texas that have a history of voter discrimination back under a process called federal preclearance. That would require the state to once again obtain federal approval of its political maps and elections changes, like the controversial voting restrictions bill that is currently under consideration in the state Legislature. Preclearance is meant to ensure that any new election laws or rounds of redistricting do not harm people of color.

The federal legislation is one of two bills Texas House Democrats have been advocating for since they fled to Washington, D.C., in July to block the state voting bill poised for passage in the Republican-controlled Legislature. Democratic state lawmakers lobbied Congress to pass federal legislation that would supersede attempts in Texas to restrict voting access.

The federal bill’s author, Democratic U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell of Alabama, is a native of Selma, where law enforcement in 1965 brutally attacked the late civil rights icon U.S. Rep. John Lewis and other civil rights activists in what is often called “Bloody Sunday.”

Sewell told The Texas Tribune the voting bill moving through the Texas Legislature illustrated the need for her legislation.

Republicans have touted the Texas elections bill as an election integrity measure to protect the voting process from fraud, even though there is no evidence it occurs on a widespread basis.

But House Republicans characterized the federal bill as meddling in a jurisdiction that they argue should solely be in the hands of state governments.

## Gabonese Community of Central Texas Celebrate

by Tsoke (Chuch) Adjavon | THE VILLAGER

**(VILLAGER)** - On August 17, the Gabonese American community held their Independence Day celebration. Some of the dance involved Congolese dance that are famous throughout the African continent. According to an unofficial census, there are a least 250 and more people from Gabon. Some have resettled in Central Texas due to political unrest and civil war occurring in their native land. In Central Texas, the communities have grown due to a stable “economy”.

Moreover, the Gabonese American Diaspora continues to grow in the Central Texas area. According to Emma with the Gabonese Diaspora, “in the past years we have seen an increase of Gabonese in the Central Texas area. Moreover, they are bypassing immigrant cities like that of New York City; Washington DC; Los Angeles; Newark and coming directly to the greater Austin area due to educational systems and jobs.

Finally, it is important for the Gabonese American Diaspora to integrate itself in the greater Central Texas area. At time immigrant groups tend to stay to themselves which hampers a faster economic and social mobility in those communities. In the long run “the self-isolation hurt these immigrant communities.

## Democrats Gives The Texas Legislature a Quorum

by Tsoke (Chuch) Adjavon | THE VILLAGER



**(VILLAGER)** - After a regular and special session, the Texas Republican controlled Legislature finally have a quorum to push Senate Bill 1 into law. They managed to get a quorum after certain Democrats decided to come back to Texas Legislature to work on the bill.

Right before the end of the regular session, Democrats fled the State of Texas in order to break the quorum so that republican led Legislature couldn’t pass Senate Bill 1 which makes voting harder. As a result, the Texas Governor called two special sessions.

After the 2nd Special session, some Democrats from the Houston area, such as Texas House representative Garnet Fredrick Coleman decided to come back to Texas “in order to fight the bill.” However, some Democrats are disappointed that they have broken their fight to deny the Texas Legislature a quorum, which, would allow them to pass Senate Bill 1.



# Racial justice groups received millions in donations amid the 2020 civil unrest stemming from the murder of George Floyd

Continued from page 4

“Because these are pledges, there isn’t any one entity that will be holding these organizations accountable,” said Una Osili, associate dean at Indiana University. Osili is also head of the annual Giving USA report, which tracks American philanthropy. “I wonder about the follow-through — whether the will will be there in three to four years to continue to lift up these issues,” she added.

The Post analyzed pledges made after May 2020 and found that “37 companies have confirmed disbursing at least \$1.7 billion of the \$49.5 billion pledged,” the outlet wrote. Seven of the companies that made racial justice commitments refused to disclose how much had already been spent, per the report.

About 20 corporate organizations reportedly paid it forward to the National Urban League, 19 gave to HBCUs and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 18 were generous to the Equal Justice Initiative, and 13 made financial gifts to the NAACP, as reported by Yahoo Finance.

As theGrio previously reported, Color of



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Protesters march in downtown Brooklyn over the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis Police officer on June 05, 2020 in New York City. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

**AUSTIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (ACC) DISTRICT** is requesting sealed bids from qualified firms for the purposes of selecting a respondent to provide a Fast Protein Liquid Chromatography (FPLC) system for the following solicitation.

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All responses must be emailed to the buyer of record, by the date and time indicated above and annotated in the solicitation.

Notice: ACC Business Offices and campus locations are currently closed to the public due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. However, the Business Services Office Staff are working remotely facilitate the needs of its customers.

**IntegralCare** is currently soliciting proposals through a Request for Proposals process for Property Management Services. RFPs may be sent electronically, by contacting Brody Ballard at [brody.ballard@integralcare.org](mailto:brody.ballard@integralcare.org) beginning August 18, 2021. The deadline to submit a proposal under the RFP is 5:00 p.m. CST on September 15, 2021. Historically Underutilized Businesses, including Minority-Owned Businesses and Women-Owned Businesses, are encouraged to apply.

Change, ActBlue, National Bail Fund Network, and the Minnesota Freedom Fund, were listed as receiving the highest donation amounts after the 2020 civil unrest. The Minnesota Freedom Fund alone received \$20 million.

“The answer to these massive problems is not in capitalism doing better or more. It’s not going to come from philanthropy. It’s not going to come from promises. It’s got to be a policy change,” said Mehra Baradaran, a law professor at the University of California at Irvine.

“We don’t want just benevolent billionaires and nicer, softer, more-woke monopolies. We want an economic structure that allows for more mobility, and we don’t have that.”

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# Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton Cleared By His Own Office Of Wrongdoing In Bribery Allegations

JAMES BARRAGÁN | THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

(TXT) - Nearly 11 months after Attorney General Ken Paxton's former top aides accused him of accepting bribes, Paxton's office on Tuesday published a 374-page internal report that concludes he's innocent of the allegations.

Last October, seven former employees told authorities that they believed Paxton was using his power as attorney general to aid Nate Paul, a campaign donor and Austin real estate developer, who whistleblowers have said helped Paxton remodel his home and gave a job to a woman with whom Paxton allegedly had an affair. All of those employees were either fired or left the office under pressure after their complaint. Four of the employees filed a whistleblower lawsuit saying Paxton used his position to help Paul's business interests, investigate his foes, and help settle a lawsuit.

But in Tuesday's report, Paxton's office said there was no basis for a criminal complaint against their boss, a second-term Republican.

"AG Paxton's actions were lawful, and consistent with his legal duties and prior actions taken by



Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, left, listens to Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick during a roundtable discussion in 2018. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

Attorneys General of Texas," the report said. "AG Paxton committed no crime."

The report also said it found "no evidence" that Paxton had taken a bribe or that there was a quid pro quo relationship between Paxton and Paul. And it accuses three of the Paxton aides who reported him of breaking the law.

In a statement, attorneys for the whistleblowers, said the "takeaway from this internal report is that, although Ken Paxton re-

mains under active federal investigation, the people who still work for Paxton say he did nothing wrong." The FBI is reportedly investigating the claims by Paxton's former employees.

"Notably, whoever in Paxton's office wrote this report was not willing to put their name on it. Of course, the one-sided internal report is full of half-truths, outright lies, and glaring omissions," the statement read. "It is a half-baked self-exoneration by Paxton, who continues to use taxpayer

dollars to delay and hide from simple document requests and depositions and pay private lawyers to keep the federal investigation quiet. The truth will come out, but you won't get it from Ken Paxton."

Alejandro Garcia, a Paxton spokesperson, did not respond to a question about who had worked on the report and what level of independence the person or persons had from the attorney general. The report states it is rooted in "documents, third-party interviews and the application of Texas law."

But it also states that the report is limited to events that occurred before Oct. 5, 2020, when the internal investigation began, and the office "reserves the right to update and modify" the report and its conclusions.

The report does not impact the whistleblower lawsuit, which is currently awaiting a hearing at the 3rd Court of Appeals after Paxton asked the court to throw out the case. The four whistleblowers — Ryan Vassar, Mark Penley, James Brickman and David Maxwell — have asked the court to reinstate them and compensate them for lost wages, future loss of earnings and damages for emotional pain and suffering.

Paxton has denied wrongdoing and said he fired the whistleblowers because they had gone "rogue" and made "unsubstantiated claims" against him.

The report claims that the former employees who reported their concerns to authorities ignored facts and sometimes "willfully obfuscated" them. It also pushes back against claims that Paxton accepted bribes and accuses some of the former employees of illegally sharing grand jury information with a private lawyer and getting rid of evidence.

The criminal complaint by former employees alleges that Paxton

records disputes multiple times. The report says the office also took a position in the lawsuit involving the Mitte Foundation that was "adverse to Nate Paul" who would have had to pay a higher settlement under its guidance.

The report states that the foreclosure opinion was in response to a request for guidance from state Sen. Bryan Hughes, R-Mineola, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. But it does not state that Hughes has publicly said he filed his request for an attorney general opinion at Paxton's behest, with the attorney general's office even providing the wording for it.

The report also said Cammack "legally and properly" exercised authority given to him by the attorney general's office and the Travis County District Attorney's office, even though some of the employees who filed a complaint against Paxton said they had no knowledge of the hiring of Cammack as an outside counsel for the office.


The report alleges that Penley, who the report says should have known about the hire because he had signed off on it, misinformed the district attorney's office that Cammack was not working for the attorney general and violated Texas law. It also alleges that Vassar committed a crime when he shared information about subpoenas Cammack had filed with a private lawyer who previously worked as a state and federal attorney. The report says Penley also shared subpoena information with the lawyer.

In an email included in the report, Penley asks the lawyer to forward the subpoenas to a law enforcement agency.

The attorney Penley asked previously served as a federal prosecutor, and the internal report says that because Cammack was investigating the raid of Paul's home by federal authorities, he could have had personal and professional relationships with possible defendants. The whistleblowers' statement Tuesday did not directly address the allegations made by Paxton's in the report.

Separately, Paxton has been indicted for felony securities fraud. He is seeking a third term in office in 2022 and has already drawn two Republican opponents in Land Commissioner George P. Bush and former Texas Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman.

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