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JUNE 26, 2020

**HEALTH OFFICERS LEAVE IN
DROVES AFTER THREATS,
FRESNO'S TOP DOC RESPONDS »**

**NEWSOM THREATENS TO
WITHHOLD COUNTY FUNDS OVER
COVID COMPLIANCE »**

**POLL SHOWS NEARLY ALL IN US
BACK CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM »**



LOCAL HEALTH OFFICERS LEAVE IN DROVES AFTER THREATS, FRESNO'S TOP DOC RESPONDS

June 23, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

As the pressure and scrutiny rise, many more health officials have chosen to leave or been pushed out of their jobs. A review by Kaiser Health News and The Associated Press finds at least 27 state and local

"Working together, and just serving the better angels of our nature is really the way forward." — Dr. Rais Vohra

health leaders have resigned, retired, or been fired since April across 13 states. According to CalMatters, four health officers in California have resigned or retired in the last two months, in Nevada, San Benito, Yolo, and Butte counties. In addition, public health department directors in San Bernardino and Orange counties have left their posts. And, the health officer for Orange County quit after weeks of criticism and personal threats from residents and other public officials over an order requiring face coverings in public.

Related Story: California Health Official Resigns After Receiving Threats

The Washington Post reports Ohio's state health director, who had armed protesters come to her house, resigned.

Fresno County Health Officer

Interim Fresno County health officer Dr. Rais Vohra said Tuesday that he feels very fortunate. "Working together, and just serving the better angels of our nature is really the way forward," said Vohra on a Zoom call. "That's what I hope that I can help inspire because that's what inspires me." Vohra didn't mention any specific threats to himself like other health officers have experienced. "I know that not everyone's on the same page," Vohra said. "I think we'd be naive to think that that we had complete consensus about every single decision that we're making. But I think we're doing the best that we can." Vohra said the citizens of Fresno County desperately need a strong public health department to continue guiding them

through the pandemic. "So far as we can promote civil dialogue, and really just a culture of learning from each other and learning about everyone's needs — I really think that that's going to be the most constructive way forward," said Vohra.

Health Officers Association of California

Kat DeBurgh is the executive director of the Health Officers Association of California. She recently told CalMatters, "Health officers are always there working in the background to protect communities from communicable disease. This is the first time I've seen this level of animosity. DeBurgh also said that one health officer in California has a sheriff's security detail posted outside her home. "Health officers all over the state are feeling tremendous pressure, not just the expected pressures of working really hard to stop this virus," DeBurgh said. "We've never seen this level of public comment becoming threatening, a personal attack, a questioning of a health officer's motivation."

National Association of County and City Health Officials

The National Association of County and City Health Officials released a statement addressing the issues confronting health of-

ficers. "In the midst of a worldwide pandemic, public health is under attack. And that should scare us all," the statement begins. "Across the country, in red states and blue

states, large metropolitan areas and rural communities, public health department officials and staff have been physically threatened and politically scapegoated. Too many have lost their jobs for trying to protect and defend the health of their community in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many others have stepped down, interrupting their careers, to protect themselves and...

"We've never seen this level of public comment becoming threatening, a personal attack, a questioning of a health officer's motivation." — Kat DeBurgh, executive director of the Health Officers Association of California

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CAN VALLEY RESEARCHERS WIPE OUT COVID-19 ON MASS TRANSIT?

June 25, 2020 | Jim Jakobs

Using smoke candles and viruses that infect bacteria (not humans), an experiment to stop COVID-19 with worldwide implications was staged on buses in Selma this week.

A team of researchers is using different approaches to stop and eliminate coronavirus on mass transit — and eventually of- fice buildings with large HVAC systems. The study is primarily funded by the California State University Transportation Consortium. Fresno County Rural Transit and Clovis City Transit are providing the buses for the experiments.

“HVAC systems are likely to just redistribute the air and air- borne virus throughout the entire cabin, risking the health of both drivers and passengers,” said Dr. Juris Grasis, assistant professor in molecular and cell biology at University of Cali-

fornia, Merced. He’s one of the lead researchers trying to find a way to stop COVID-19 spread on mass transit. Researchers flipped the switch on a water vapor generator to simulate the normal airflow from people breathing inside the bus Wednesday. In a few minutes, the bus was filled.

Moe Salem, chief technology officer for Air2O Cooling, tells GV WireSM the person most impacted is the bus driver. Just above the driver are several air vents that recirculate the cabin air next to the driver’s face the entire drive. Researchers used colored smoke pushed out of non-toxic candles to simulate the movement of the airflow and airborne contamination. The colored smoke demonstrated what happens when a passenger sneezes or coughs. In about six minutes, smoke blanketed the interior of the bus. The research team hopes to stop COVID...

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SMOKE HANGS IN THE AIR AS VALLEY FIRES TRIGGER HEALTH WARNINGS

June 25, 2020 | Randy Reed

Smoke drifting across the Fresno area from a large pallet fire in Reedley and nearby wildland grass fires is prompting health warnings from local air quality officials. The fire at fruit pack- aging manufacturer Maxco Supply broke out early Thursday and continued to burn throughout the morning. That led to a “health caution” from the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control Dis- trict.

Smoke Carries Dangerous Particulate Matter

Smoke from fires produces fine-particulate matter (PM2.5), which can cause serious health problems including lung disease, asthma attacks, and increased risk of heart attacks and stroke,” the district warned. “People with existing respiratory conditions, young children and elderly people are especially susceptible to health effects from these pollutants.” The previous day, the air district said smoke from the Sycamore Fire, burning south- east of Tollhouse, and the now-contained Frontier Fire south of Prather were also creating health risks. “Anyone experiencing...

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ARE THESE MAILBOX FLYERS IN SOUTH FRESNO RACIST?

June 23, 2020 | David Taub

Ebony Hailey will not let her 11-year old daughter, Rebekah, collect the mail anymore. Even though the box is across the street from Hailey’s south Fresno home, after what she found there Monday, the daily mail is off-limits. Rebekah told her mom, an education administrator with Fresno Unified, that someone posted disturbing flyers on the community box, a car- icature of a boy of color, along with flyers that said “Coronavi- rus.”

Hailey checked out the mailbox herself and snapped a photo. What she saw concerned her. “What in the world is this? What message are we sending? Why is this up here?” Hailey said. No one saw who posted the flyers. They were later removed, al- though Hailey and her neighbors did not know who did that ei- ther. Hailey wasn’t sure if the flyers were racially motivated, but it made her wonder. “I’m the only one that I’m aware of with a little black boy in this neighborhood and a little black girl,” Hai- ley said. “It didn’t feel right. It didn’t sit right with me. The...

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STATE

NEWSOM THREATENS TO WITHHOLD COUNTY FUNDS OVER COVID COMPLIANCE

June 24, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — As California sees a worrisome rise in the number of coronavirus cases and hospitalizations, Gov. Gavin Newsom threatened Wednesday to withhold up to \$2.5 billion in the upcoming state budget from local governments that fail to comply with state mandates on wearing masks, testing and other measures meant to slow the spread of the virus. “There are some that have made rhetorical comments about not giving a damn,” Newsom said in some of his most

“There are some that have made rhetorical comments about not giving a damn. That’s exactly why I look forward to signing this budget that will afford me a little bit of leverage in that conversation.” — Gov. Gavin Newsom

strident comments to date. “That’s exactly why I look forward to signing this budget that will afford me a little bit of leverage in that conversation.”

The money is intended to help local governments pay for services needed because of the pandemic. But it is contingent upon counties following emergency orders to enforce the safety measures as they gradually reopen the economy.

Newsom’s warning came as the state recorded a 69% increase in new cases this week, and set several daily records for new cases. Officials reported corresponding increases in the rate of people testing positive and hospitalizations. Still, Newsom said the state is prepared to handle the trends. The Democratic governor said he views the \$2.5 billion fund in the budget that lawmakers are expected to approve this week as a reward, not a punishment for local government. He implored individuals to practice safety measures — at one point even demonstrating proper hand-washing techniques.

Leaving It up to Local Governments

“This is not a closed fist, this is an open hand,” he said of the money. “When people simply thumb their nose and do not come with a collaborative spirit ... then by

all means the state of California has a responsibility, an obligation — legally and otherwise — to enforce those laws and to utilize the tools that are afforded us,” he said. Newsom said he plans to hand out the money monthly, based on counties’ compliance. The bulk of the funding is expected to come from the federal government.

However, the budget bill before lawmakers leaves it up to local governments to certify to the state that they are complying. It includes \$550 million for local governments to house people who are homeless or at risk of losing their homes due to the coronavirus pandemic. Another \$500 million is earmarked for cities and \$1.3 billion for counties to be used toward homelessness, public health, public safety, and other services related to the pandemic. Organizations representing cities and counties did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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SCHOOL BOARD PRESIDENT WHO POSTED CONFEDERATE FLAG, 'PROUD TO BE WHITE,' RESIGNS

June 25, 2020 | Nancy Price

Sara Wilkins, the Madera County Board of Education president whose Facebook post of the Confederate flag and the phrase “I’m proud to be white” prompted community outrage, has resigned, Madera County Superintendent of Schools Cecilia Massetti announced Thursday morning.

Wilkins’ resignation came in a single sentence: “After 47 years of service to the children of my community, I have decided to retire and resign my position on the Madera County Board of Education.” Wilkins has not been available for comment and has not provided a public explanation or apology for her Facebook post.

The Confederate flag is considered by many people to be a symbol of white supremacy, and since the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis there has been a rising tide of calls to ban it, including in stadiums and at race tracks. Wilkins’ post sparked outrage in the community and was roundly criticized by other educators in the county, including Massetti and the Madera Unified School District.

Madera Unified took the unusual step on Wednesday of issuing a news release to clarify that the school district is separate from the county agency and emphasizing that the district officials does not condone racism. Wilkins, who served...

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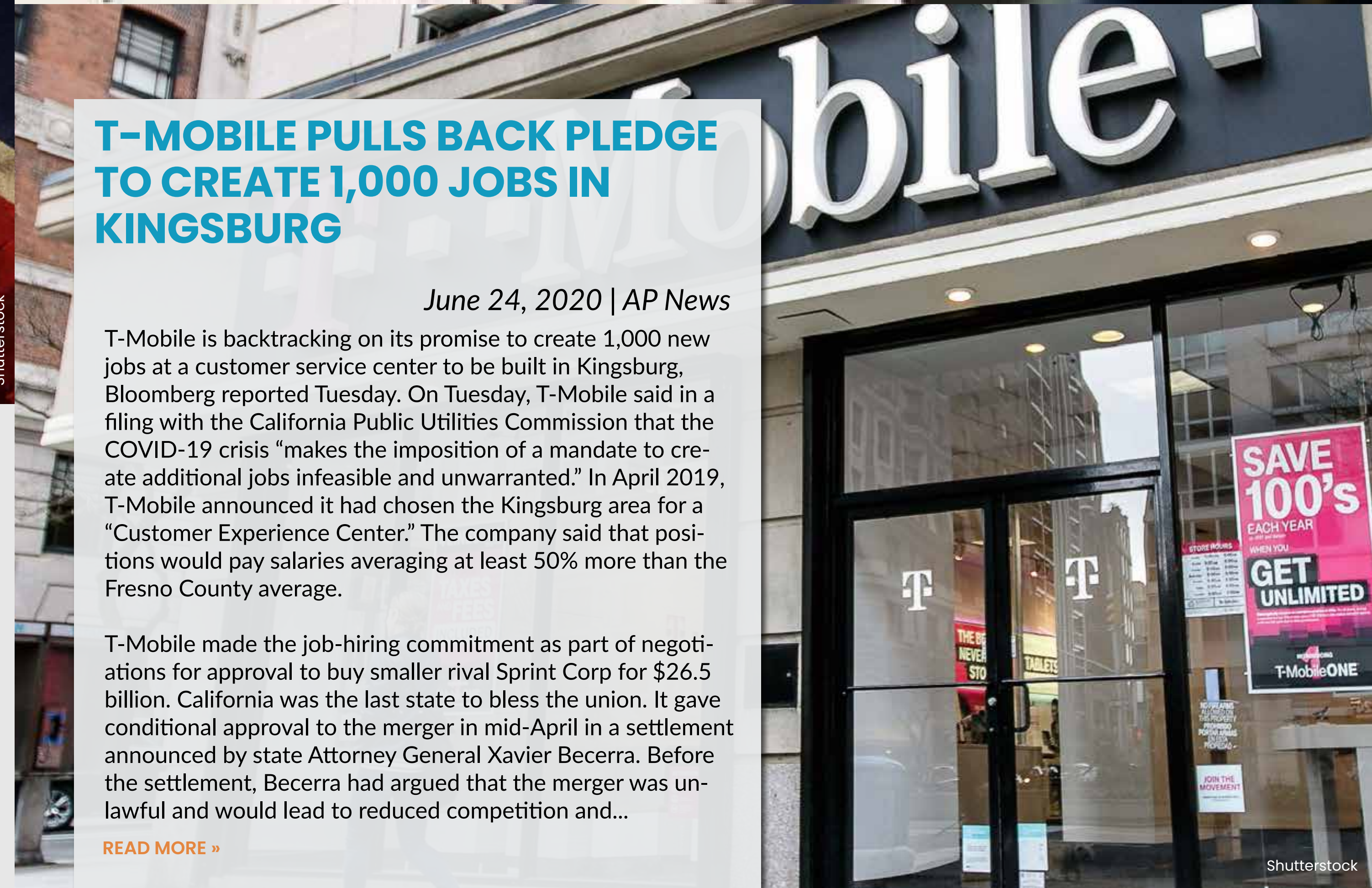
CALIFORNIA BILL UPS SCRUTINY OF HUNTING LICENSE IN GUN SALES

June 24, 2020 | AP News

SACRAMENTO — California’s state Senate has approved a measure prompted by last year’s fatal shooting at a San Diego-area synagogue. Investigators say the suspect, John T. Earnest, then 19, used a hunting license to buy the weapon he is accused of using in April 2019 at Chabad of Poway. Earnest is charged with killing a 60-year-old woman and injuring three others, including the rabbi and an 8-year-old girl. Earnest has pleaded not guilty to murder and attempted murder charges.

Having a valid hunting license is the only way someone under 21 who isn’t in the military or law enforcement could legally buy a weapon under state law, but his license wasn’t set to go into effect until about two months after the shooting, authorities said. SB914 by Democratic Sen. Anthony Portantino of La Cañada Flintridge would require gun stores and the state Department of Justice to each check the validity of hunting licenses during a 10-day waiting period after...

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T-MOBILE PULLS BACK PLEDGE TO CREATE 1,000 JOBS IN KINGSBURG

June 24, 2020 | AP News

T-Mobile is backtracking on its promise to create 1,000 new jobs at a customer service center to be built in Kingsburg, Bloomberg reported Tuesday. On Tuesday, T-Mobile said in a filing with the California Public Utilities Commission that the COVID-19 crisis “makes the imposition of a mandate to create additional jobs infeasible and unwarranted.” In April 2019, T-Mobile announced it had chosen the Kingsburg area for a “Customer Experience Center.” The company said that positions would pay salaries averaging at least 50% more than the Fresno County average.

T-Mobile made the job-hiring commitment as part of negotiations for approval to buy smaller rival Sprint Corp for \$26.5 billion. California was the last state to bless the union. It gave conditional approval to the merger in mid-April in a settlement announced by state Attorney General Xavier Becerra. Before the settlement, Becerra had argued that the merger was unlawful and would lead to reduced competition and...

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AP File/Alex Brandon

POLL SHOWS NEARLY ALL IN US BACK CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

June 24, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — Americans overwhelmingly want clear standards on when police officers may use force and consequences for officers who do so excessively, according to a new poll that finds nearly all Americans favor at least some level of change to the nation's criminal justice system. The new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research also finds there is strong support for penalizing officers who engage in racially biased policing. Americans are more likely now than five years ago to say that police violence against the public is a very serious problem and that officers who cause injury or death on the job are treated too leniently. "For me, as a Black person, I'm like, this has been happening," said Kevin Richardson, 38, of Charlotte, North Carolina. "We should've been knowing it, we should've been seeing this and so now what's happened is, I'll be honest, white people are seeing it and saying, 'This is wrong.'"

The new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research also finds there is strong support for penalizing officers who engage in racially biased policing. Americans are more likely now than five years ago to say that police violence against the public is a very serious problem and that officers who cause injury or death on the job are treated too leniently.

Just 5% Say No Changes are Needed

The survey of American adults took place after weeks of mass demonstrations against police violence and calls from some politicians and activists to "defund" departments in response to the death of George Floyd, a Black man who died in custody after a white Minneapolis officer pressed his knee into Floyd's neck for nearly eight minutes. Americans

are largely united behind the idea that action is required: 29% think the criminal justice system needs "a complete overhaul," 40% say it needs "major changes" and 25% say it needs "minor changes." Just 5% believe

no changes are necessary. Megan Pecknold, 33, of Spokane, Washington, said the protests have forced her to think about these issues in a way she had the luxury, as a white person, of previously ignoring. "I had never really given much thought to police use of force. I'm white. I've never had a bad encounter with a police officer," she said. "The last few months have brought to light more of this for me, and now I am educating myself."

Nearly 6 in 10 Black Americans think the criminal justice system needs a complete overhaul, compared with about a quarter of white Americans who said the same. About 4 in 10 white Americans say major changes are needed; 3 in 10 prefer minor changes.

Support for Reform Crosses Party Lines

Nearly 6 in 10 Black Americans think the criminal justice system needs a complete overhaul, compared with about a quarter of white Americans who said the same. About 4 in 10 white Americans say major changes are needed; 3 in 10 prefer minor changes. While Democrats are more likely than Republicans to think the system needs an overhaul, 44% to 12%, Americans across party lines are nearly unanimous in thinking at least some change is necessary. Another 44% of Democrats think major changes are necessary. Among Republicans, 34% call for major changes and 47% for minor changes. The poll finds overwhelming support for changes in how police departments operate: requiring officers to wear body cameras, establishing clear standards for use of force, prosecuting officers who use excessive force and requiring officers to report misconduct by their peers. Despite their popularity, body cameras have not always proved to be the fix reformers hoped. But Kimberly Jones, 52, of New York City, said they are at the top of her list. "You need more seeing what's going on as they're pulling up on people," she said. "You need to know from the start so you can stop something..."

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WHITE HOUSE WINS RULING ON HEALTH CARE PRICE DISCLOSURE

June 24, 2020 | AP News

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration won a court ruling Tuesday upholding its plan to require hospitals and insurers to disclose the actual prices for common tests and procedures in a bid to promote competition and push down costs.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar called the decision in federal court in Washington, D.C., “a resounding victory” for President Donald Trump’s efforts to open up the convoluted world of health care pricing so patients and families can make better-informed decisions about their care. “This may very well be bigger than healthcare itself,” Trump

tweeted Tuesday, on the ruling. “Congratulations America!” But the American Hospital Association, which sued to block the Trump administration regulation and was on the losing side, announced it would appeal. Industry argues that forcing the disclosure of prices negotiated between hospitals and insurers amounts to coercion.

That means the decision by U.S. District Judge Carl J. Nichols may not be the final word. “American patients deserve to be in control of their healthcare,” Azar said in a statement. “Especially when patients are seeking needed care during...

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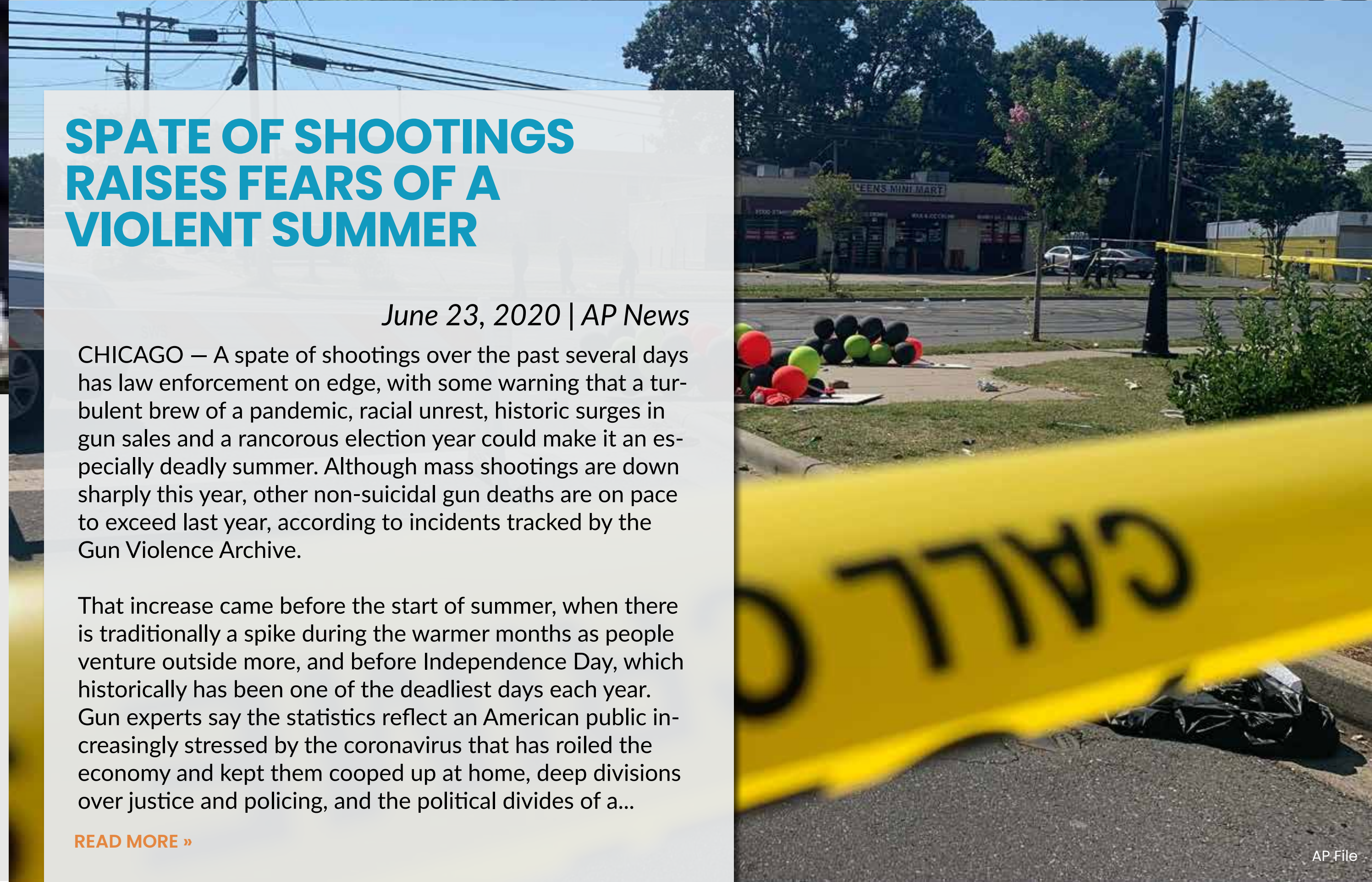
STARBUCKS ADDS PLANT-BASED MEAT TO US MENU

June 23, 2020 | AP News

Starbucks is adding plant-based meat to its U.S. menu for the first time. The Seattle coffee chain said Tuesday that a breakfast sandwich made with imitation sausage from Redwood City, California-based Impossible Foods is now available at a majority of its U.S. restaurants. The sandwich comes with egg and cheese and is served on a ciabatta bun.

Starbucks said earlier this year that it would add plant-based meat to its menus worldwide as part of an effort to reduce its environmental impact. The company has sold milk alternatives, such as soy milk and oat milk, in the U.S. and elsewhere. But the sausage is its first plant-based food item in the U.S. In April, it began selling lasagna, pasta and wraps made with Beyond Meat crumbles in China. It also introduced a Beyond Meat breakfast sandwich in Canada in February. Beyond Meat, which is based in El Segundo, California, is Impossible Foods’ chief competitor. Asked why went...

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SPATE OF SHOOTINGS RAISES FEARS OF A VIOLENT SUMMER

June 23, 2020 | AP News

CHICAGO — A spate of shootings over the past several days has law enforcement on edge, with some warning that a turbulent brew of a pandemic, racial unrest, historic surges in gun sales and a rancorous election year could make it an especially deadly summer. Although mass shootings are down sharply this year, other non-suicidal gun deaths are on pace to exceed last year, according to incidents tracked by the Gun Violence Archive.

That increase came before the start of summer, when there is traditionally a spike during the warmer months as people venture outside more, and before Independence Day, which historically has been one of the deadliest days each year. Gun experts say the statistics reflect an American public increasingly stressed by the coronavirus that has roiled the economy and kept them cooped up at home, deep divisions over justice and policing, and the political divides of a...

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WORLD

'COMING BACK AND BITING US': US SEES VIRUS RESURGENCE

June 24, 2020 | AP News

HOUSTON — A coronavirus resurgence is wiping out two months of progress in the U.S. and sending infections to dire new levels across the South and West, with administrators and health experts warning on Wednesday that politicians and a tired-of-being-cooped-up public are letting a disaster unfold. The U.S. recorded a one-day total of 34,700 new COVID-19 cases, the highest level since late April, when the number peaked at 36,400, according to the count kept by Johns

The U.S. recorded a one-day total of 34,700 new COVID-19 cases, the highest level since late April, when the number peaked at 36,400, according to the count kept by Johns Hopkins University.

Hopkins University. While newly confirmed infections have been declining steadily in early hot spots such as New York and New Jersey, several other states set single-day records this week, including Arizona, California, Mississippi, Nevada, Texas and Oklahoma. Some of them also broke hospitalization records, as did North Carolina and South Carolina.

"People got complacent," said Dr. Marc Boom, CEO of the Houston Methodist hospital system. "And it's coming back and biting us, quite frankly." Stocks slid on Wall Street as the news dampened hopes for a quick economic turnaround. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost over 700 points for a drop of 2.7%. The broader S&P 500 fell 2.6%. The virus has been blamed for over 120,000 U.S. deaths — the highest toll in the world — and more than 2.3 million confirmed infections nationwide. On Wednesday, the widely cited University of Washington computer model of the outbreak projected nearly 180,000 deaths by Oct. 1. California reported over 7,100 new cases, an all-time high. Florida's single-day count surged to 5,500, a 25% jump from the record set last week and triple the level from just two weeks ago. In Texas, which began lifting its shutdowns early on, on May 1, hospitalizations have doubled and

new cases have tripled in two weeks. Gov. Greg Abbott told KFDA-TV that the state is facing a "massive outbreak" and might need new local restrictions to preserve hospital space.

Worries That States Will Squander What Time They Have to Head off a Much Larger Crisis

The Houston area's intensive care units are nearly full, with coronavirus patients filling about 1 in 4 beds, and two local public hospitals are running at capacity, Mayor Sylvester Turner said. "We need everybody to behave perfectly and work together perfectly" to slow the infection rate, Houston Methodist's Boom said. "When I look at a restaurant or a business where people ... are not following the guidelines, where people are just throwing caution to the wind, it makes me angry." In Arizona, emergency rooms are seeing about 1,200 suspected COVID-19 patients a day, compared with around 500 a month ago. If the trends continue, the state will probably exceed its hospital bed capacity within the next several weeks, said Dr. Joseph Gerald, a University of Arizona public health policy professor.

Cases are also surging in some other parts of the world. India reported a record-breaking one-day increase of nearly 16,000 cases. Mexico and Iraq hit new highs as well.

"We are in deep trouble," said Gerald, urging the state to impose new restrictions on businesses, which Gov. Doug Ducey has refused to do. Infectious-disease expert Dr. Peter Hotez of the Baylor College of Medicine in Texas said he worries that states will squander what time they have to head off a much larger crisis. "We're still talking about subtlety, still arguing whether or not we should wear masks, and still not understanding that a vaccine is not going to rescue us," he said. The Texas governor initially barred local officials from fining or penalizing anyone for not wearing a mask as the state...

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FDA WARNS PUBLIC TO AVOID 9 DANGEROUS HAND SANITIZERS

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June 24, 2020 | AP News

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued a warning about hand sanitizer gels that it says are dangerous because they contain large amounts of poisonous methanol, or wood alcohol. The FDA said the methanol “can be toxic when absorbed through the skin or ingested,” and recommended consumers dispose of nine brands of gel sanitizers made by Mexico-based manufacturer Eskbiochem SA de CV.

The FDA said one of the brands contained 81% methanol and no ethyl alcohol, which is the drinkable kind. Late last week the FDA said it had contacted Eskbiochem “to recommend the company remove its hand sanitizer products from

the market due to the risks associated with methanol poisoning,” but the firm hadn’t done so. The company did not immediately respond to an email request for comment. The brands include All-Clean Hand Sanitizer, CleanCare NoGerm Advanced Hand Sanitizer, The Good Gel Antibacterial Gel Hand Sanitizer and CleanCare NoGerm Advanced Hand Sanitizer.

“Although all persons using these products on their hands are at risk,” the FDA said young children who accidentally ingest it or adult who drink it as an ethyl alcohol substitute are also at risk. Methanol is a poisonous cousin of the...

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AP File

BY RECOGNIZING PALESTINE, BRITAIN CAN HELP RIGHT THE WRONGS OF THE BALFOUR DECLARATION

June 22, 2020 | [The Guardian](#)

If ever there was a time to re-examine colonial legacies and responsibilities, this is it. The theft of Palestine from the Palestinians is one such legacy. On 2 November 1917, the foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour, issued his famous declaration in support of “a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. In 1917, Jews constituted 10% of the population, the rest were Arabs. Yet Britain recognised the national rights of a tiny minority and denied it to the majority.

In his 2014 biography of Winston Churchill, Boris Johnson described the Balfour declaration as “bizarre”, “tragically incoherent” and “an exquisite piece of Foreign Office fudgerama” — a rare example of sound judgment and historical accuracy from the pen of Johnson. The Balfour declaration enabled the Zionist movement to embark on the systematic takeover of Palestine, a process the Zionists themselves initially described as settler colonialism, a process which is...

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RISE OF IRAN HARDLINERS THREATENS NUCLEAR DIPLOMACY, EUROPE WARNED

June 24, 2020 | [The Guardian](#)

European diplomats are being urged to restart shuttle diplomacy with Iran after the US presidential election in November or risk Tehran hardliners gaining still wider control of Iran’s many layers of government and its economy. The European 3 (E3) – Germany, France and the UK – managed to maintain their unity at a meeting on Friday at which they agreed to keep the nuclear deal alive, oppose a US plan for the snapback of sanctions and possibly limit the lifting of the UN conventional arms embargo on Iran due to take place in the autumn.

But the deal limiting Iran’s nuclear programme, signed in 2015, is hanging by a thread after the UN nuclear watchdog the IAEA declared for the first time that Iran was not cooperating with its inspectors at two key nuclear sites. In a warning shot, the IAEA board, including the Europeans, voted to urge Iran to cooperate. There is a growing feeling that the...

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