

Remembering Breonna Taylor, Virginia law bans no-knock warrants



By Chauncey K. Robinson

History was made this week as members of Breonna Taylor’s family joined Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam for a ceremonial signing of the state’s new law banning no-knock search warrants.

The bill, called Breonna’s Law, was made in honor of Taylor who was shot and killed by police officers who entered her home during a questionable late-night raid in Louisville, Kentucky earlier this year.

Although Virginia is the third state to enact a ban on no-knock warrants, it is the first to do so since Taylor’s death in March, and with her namesake. The warrant ban is included in a detailed police reform package that Northam signed into law.

Northam referred to the community in Virginia and across the country who came out and demanded justice and change in the wake of Taylor’s death. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets calling for the arrest of the three officers who raided Taylor’s home and shot her to death.

Taylor, a 26-year-old emergency medical technician (EMT), worked at two hospitals with plans on becoming a nurse. She was an essential worker in a time when so many working people were risking their health to help others during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

“The pandemic shined a spotlight on long standing inequalities,” Northam stated. “When we act, change

laws, and do the work, we honor all of those who lost their lives. Virginia continues to struggle with the burden of a complicated [racial] past,” the governor pointed out when explaining why criminal justice reform in the state is a necessity.

Delegate Lashreese Aird and Sen. Mamie Locke, who sponsored “Breonna’s Law,” also spoke at the event highlighting the need to address other issues plaguing communities of color. Locke echoed the words of Civil Rights icon Fannie Lou Hammer as

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she exclaimed she was, “sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

Locke noted that Taylor’s death could have easily happened in Virginia. “Breonna is me [a Black woman],” the senator explained. “We need to address criminal justice reform comprehensively.

“Let’s get on the right side of justice. Make the world a better place to live.”

We can’t look at it individually. It’s connected to healthcare, affordable housing, and food access.”

Aird stated that no-knock warrants, when issued, disproportionately affect Black communities. Under the new law, search warrants can only be served during daylight hours unless law enforcement can prove good cause against daytime service.

Aird was the first to address the fact that the police who killed Taylor have yet to be arrested for her death. “Since March we have been in pursuit of justice for Breonna Taylor and it is still yet to come.”

Civil Rights attorney Ben Crump championed the bill noting that “far too often Black women don’t get the attention and recognition that others get when they are killed [due to police brutality]. Why should we have to wait until we have a Breonna Taylor in Virginia before we pass responsible legislation?”

Crump took the opportunity to mention Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron, who has recently come under fire for his handling of Taylor’s grand jury case. “Breonna Taylor’s legacy will not be

defined by Kentucky A.G. Cameron. Her legacy will be defined by her family.

By people who believe in due process of the law. This legacy will be built on a foundation brick by brick, state by state, and policy will be cast vote by vote,” the attorney exclaimed. “Breonna Taylor’s name will be remembered in history of the U.S.”

Taylor’s aunts, Bianca Austin and Tahasha Holloway, took to the podium wearing shirts with “#NoMoreNoKnocks” emblazoned on them, to remind the world that they are still demanding justice for their niece. “Justice for Breonna is making sure those officers [who shot her] are fired, arrested, charged, and convicted for their unlawful entry into her home,” Austin stated.

Noting that although Breonna’s law has only been passed in Louisville, Kentucky and not statewide, Austin said, “Hopefully Kentucky can step up to the plate and follow what Virginia is doing. Let’s get on the right side of justice. Make the world a better place to live.”

Home of Florida virus truth teller raided by law enforcement

By John Wojcik

The home of Rebekah Jones, a Florida state official who was fired for refusing to manipulate coronavirus data to justify premature re-opening of the economy, was raided yesterday by the Florida Department of Law enforcement.

The department alleged in its filing for a search warrant that “a person” in her home used an email to break into a Florida communications platform and send out a text on Nov. 10 telling people it was “time to speak up before another 17,000 people died,” according to a report today by NBC News.

“You know this is wrong,” the text said, according to the warrant. “You don’t have to be part of this. Be a hero. Speak out before it’s too late.”

Jones denied sending out the text and has been saying to the press and on social media that had she sent out such a text it would have been with the correct numbers which were higher than those Florida law enforcement is claiming were in the alleged text.

Florida law enforcement is also saying they raided the Jones home because they were looking for computer hardware and electronics.

When she was still employed Jones set up a public information portal to publish on a regular basis, for public consumption, the numbers of COVID infections and deaths.

Last Spring Jones told local television stations that she was forced out of her job after refusing to change the figures on that portal to build support for the governor’s plan to reopen.

Jones posted video of the raid Monday and said state police “pointed a gun in my face.” “They pointed guns at my kids,” she said.

Jones blames the raid on Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis who has been widely criticized for his disastrous handling of the coronavirus crisis in his state. He has slavishly hued to the Trump approach of doing as little as possible to alleviate the situation and as much as possible to ignore the pandemic altogether.

“This is what happens to scientists who do their job honestly,” Jones told NBC. “This is what happens to people who speak truth to power.”

She was fired for refusing to falsify Florida’s COVID data to justify the state’s plan to prematurely re-open after only a very limited and partial shutdown.

Mass incarceration is declining – but not for women



By Robert P. Alvarez

Election after election, voters are turning against mass incarceration and the war on drugs that sustains it. In 2020, the people of Arizona, Montana, New Jersey, and South Dakota voted to legalize marijuana, joining 11 other states and the District of Columbia.

In Oregon, voters opted to decriminalize possession of all drugs. And even during the deeply divisive Trump administration, bipartisan criminal justice reform managed to pass a Republican Senate and Democratic House to get signed into law.

Slowly but surely, the absurdly large incarcerated population in the U.S. is declining. One noteworthy exception, though, is women.

Since U.S. incarceration peaked in 2008, the number of people in our jails and prisons is down 8 percent. The population of incarcerated women, has increased about 5% during that span. The bulk of this growth is concentrated in jails, where the number of women behind bars is up 15 percent.

Because women make up a relatively small percentage of the incarcerated population, trends in their data can go unnoticed. Most people don't know the total number of incarcerated women is up 700% compared to 40 years ago. Halting this dangerous ascent should be right at the top of the incoming Biden-Harris administration's agenda.

Both Joe Biden and Kamala Harris have checked histories when it comes to criminal justice. Biden authored the 1994 crime bill, which was a boon to

mass incarceration. And Harris's self-proclaimed status as the original "progressive prosecutor" during her presidential campaign was forcefully debunked by those familiar with her record. But have they turned over a new leaf?

Both have recently expressed support for reforming the justice system and are under immense pressure to deliver on that front. They'll take office at a time when the country appears ready to move past the era of mass incarceration and the war on drugs, and especially the criminalization of marijuana.

About 60% of women in jail have not been convicted of a crime and are awaiting a trial. Being unable to afford bail means they're locked up solely because they're poor or low income.

This is an urgent problem, particularly for poor families already hard hit by the pandemic and recession. About 62% of women in prison are mothers of minor children. For women in jail, that figure rises to 80 percent. Most of them are the primary caretakers of their children.

Biden and Harris must use their bully pulpit to guide policymakers away from the mistakes of the drug war era. Both of them played a role in mass incarceration, and both owe it to the American people to lead us out of it.

Our country has a chance to chart a new path. Let's prioritize community-based alternatives to incarceration like rehabilitation programs and reentry services. And let's stop punishing low-level drug offenses and locking up mothers who can't make bail.

The next administration needs to address this crisis and the war on drugs driving it.

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Greek Communists emphasize continuity between Trump and Biden

By Emile Schepers

Dimitris Koutsoumbas, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Greece, warned against raising false hopes that the new Biden administration would break with the overall imperialist policies of its predecessors. Koutsoumbas recalled wars and invasions carried out by Democratic Party presidents in the recent past.

“The reactionary Trump administration may have lost the U.S. election, but what is certain is that the policy that serves the interests of the U.S. ruling class and the bloodthirsty U.S. imperialism has not been completely defeated.” Koutsoumbas warned, especially, against speculation in Greek political circles that a Biden administration might play a positive role in Greek-Turkish relations.

Científicos crean una ‘superenzima’ que come botellas de plástico

Fabián Capecchi

Los científicos han creado una nueva “superenzima” que puede descomponer el plástico hasta seis veces más rápido.

Un equipo de investigadores que previamente diseñó una enzima que se alimenta de plástico llamada PETase ahora la ha combinado con una segunda enzima para acelerar el proceso, según un comunicado de prensa de la Universidad de Portsmouth.

La superenzima podría tener implicaciones importantes para el reciclaje de tereftalato de polietileno (PET), que es el termoplástico más común utilizado en botellas de bebidas de un solo uso, alfombras y ropa.

El PETase puede descomponerlo en sus componentes básicos en unos pocos días. John McGeehan, coautor principal y director del Centro de Innovación de Enzimas de la Universidad de Portsmouth, le dijo a CNN que este último desarrollo representa un gran adelanto hacia el uso de enzimas para reciclar plástico y reducir la contaminación plástica.

“De hecho, nos sorprendió bastante que funcionara tan bien”, dijo McGeehan.

Le dijo a CNN que los investigadores han recibido fondos para continuar los experimentos y que los desarrollos exitosos podrían significar que el PET existente podría reciclarse en lugar de usar combustibles fósiles para crear nuevo plástico. “Estamos buscando grandes ahorros de energía”, dijo McGeehan.

La superenzima combina PETasa y MHETase.

Una mezcla de los dos descompone el PET dos veces más rápido que la PETasa por sí sola, mientras que la conexión de las dos enzimas aumentó la velocidad tres veces más.

McGeehan utilizó un dispositivo que genera rayos X 10 mil millones de veces más brillantes que el Sol para poder ver átomos individuales, y mapear la estructura molecular de MHETase. Luego, los investigadores pudieron diseñar la nueva superenzima conectando MHETase y PETase, uniéndolos efectivamente el ADN de las enzimas para crear una cadena larga, dijo McGeehan a CNN.

La técnica se usa comúnmente en la industria de los biocombustibles, que usa enzimas para descomponer las células, pero McGeehan dijo que esta es la primera vez que se da cuenta de que las enzimas se combinan para descomponer el plástico.

El estudio completo fue publicado en la revista Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences de los Estados Unidos de América.

Un informe reciente de The Pew Charitable Trusts proyectó que el volumen de plástico que ingresa al océano podría casi triplicarse a 29 millones de toneladas métricas por año para el 2040, el equivalente a 50 kilogramos por cada metro de la costa del planeta.

En abril, la firma francesa Carbios anunció la publicación de un estudio sobre su propia enzima que come plástico PET, que se probará en una planta de demostración cerca de la ciudad de Lyon en 2021, según un comunicado de prensa de la compañía.

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