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BREAKING NEWS: TSA discovers bags of guns inside carry-on bag

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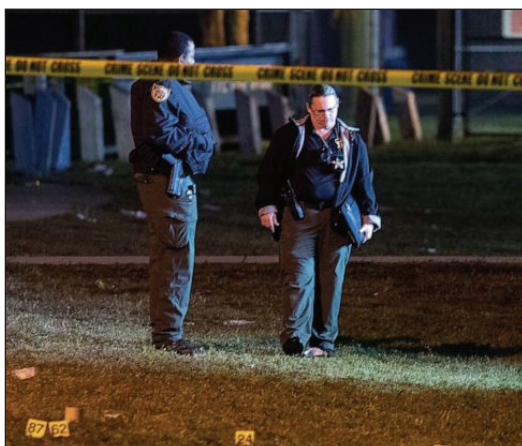
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MLK Day shooting victim in Florida was mother celebrating with her child



Contributed photo

By Darryl Coote & Joe Fisher
UPI

One victim of the shooting at Monday's Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration in Florida died, authorities confirmed on Tuesday.

Seven others were injured in the shooting, which St. Lucie County Chief Deputy Brian Hester said stemmed from a dispute between two rival gangs.

The deceased is a 30-year-old mother who was attending the celebration with her 6-year-old daughter. The woman died at Longwood Hospital in Fort Pierce.

"Now what was a shooting investigation has

turned into a murder investigation," said Sheriff Ken Mascara during a press briefing on Tuesday morning.

"We want our community to play a role in solving this horrendous event that happened yesterday."

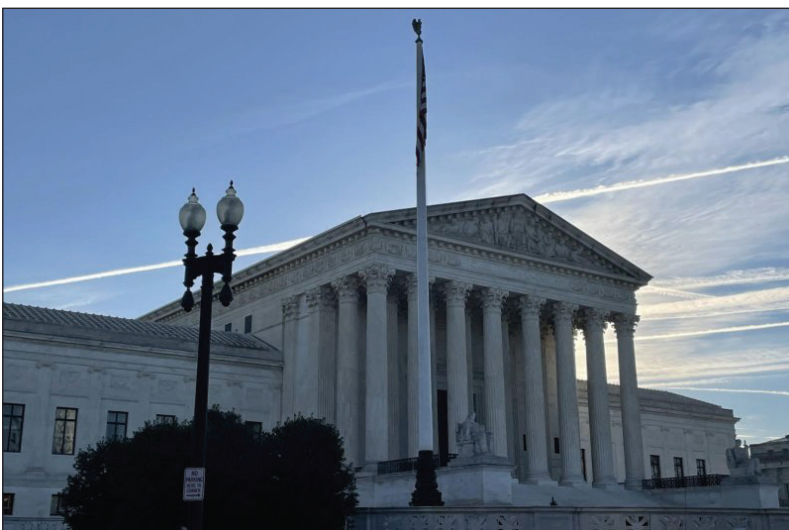
More than 50 shell casings of three different calibers were recovered from the scene. Local, state and federal agencies are involved in the investigation.

The shooting happened at about 5:20 p.m. Monday following a disagreement between two parties at Ilous Ellis Park in Fort Pierce, located

See SHOOTING, page 3

Supreme Court mulls questions about students' accessibility rights

By Monica Sager and Susanti Sankar
Medill News Service



The case heard by the Supreme Court on Wednesday brings to light how students with disabilities could be harmed by possibly negligent school systems for the lack of disability support. Photo by Monica Sager/Medill News Service

Miguel Perez, a 23-year-old deaf student from Michigan, petitioned the Supreme Court today to decide if he was entitled to financial compensation for Perez's lack of proper accessibility support in his public school.

The case brings to light how students with disabilities could be harmed by possibly negligent school systems for the lack of disability support. And the ruling could influence the way education navigates civil pursuits in the future.

"In the real world, the way these cases tend to be litigated, parents do not typically have a lot of resources. Their lawyers are busy. They are busy," said Perez's attorney, Roman Martinez. "Miguel's parents and Miguel, they did everything right."

Perez attended Sturgis Public Schools from age 9 to 20. He was assigned a classroom aide, who was not trained properly and did not know sign language, according to filings. Despite this, Perez made the Honor Roll each semester.

However, just months before

graduation, the school informed Perez's family that he did not qualify for a diploma and that he was only eligible for a "certification of completion."

Perez and his family filed a complaint with the Michigan Department of Education in 2017, alleging that he was denied an adequate education, and that Sturgis Public Schools violated federal and state disability laws.

The judge dismissed some claims, but held a hearing on whether Perez was denied assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Martinez said that what happened goes against what Congress intended with the act.

"For 12 years, Sturgis neglected Miguel, denied him an education and lied to his parents about the progress he was allegedly making

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Celebrating One Man's Dream for Liberty & Justice For All

Martin Luther King, Jr., a pioneer of the civil rights movement, dedicated his life to turning his dream of equal justice and civil rights for all mankind into a reality. Through his famous words of peace and hope, he inspired the people of this nation to stand up for their rights and demand them in a nonviolent way. Dr. King helped bring about dramatic social change, and we shall forever remember his heroic acts and be thankful for all he taught our nation and the world.

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OPINION

Russian life going on as normal amid Ukraine war

By Alexander Titov
Queen's University Belfast

It's been a year since I last visited Russia. Back then, most people I met thought the prospects of a war with Ukraine were very remote, despite the massive troops buildup on the border. So I was curious to see how attitudes had changed since then. Equally important was to see for myself how the war has changed life in Russia.

The first surprise was how normal life was. Despite all the media reports of doom and gloom as a result of Western sanctions, everything works just as before. Domestic banking is working, salaries and pensions are paid on time, ubiquitous e-commerce is bustling with activity, the shops are stuffed with food and consumer goods. In St. Petersburg, at least, I've struggled to notice any change in daily life compared to January 2022.

Yet, digging deeper and the impact of sanctions is there. One issue that kept popping up was spare car parts, which have become noticeably more expensive. But even there new supplies are being shipped now. This goes pretty much for everything else consumer orientated. There's no shortages, even of Western goods such as whisky -- the supermarket shelves are fully stocked.

European Union travel restrictions have had their effect -- but nothing like the measures introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. People can still travel to many countries, including Turkey, Egypt or the Gulf states.

Business people complain of facing difficulties, particularly those in the import/export sector. But, after a few months of chaos, business has been finding new shipping routes via third countries such as Turkey or Kazakhstan.

An acquaintance who works in a defense-related sector laughed at the suggestion that Russia could run out of missiles. He told me the defense industry had been stockpiling essential parts for years and is also using more locally sourced alternatives (although this is a claim I was unable to verify). The rest can still be bought -- albeit at inflated prices. Their real problem is not a lack of parts, but the capacity to scale up production to meet growing military orders.

The general impression from conversations with people in different businesses is that their main focus is on adapting to the new normal. Many things will be less efficient and more expensive, but the Russian economy will not collapse.

If this is a crisis for Russia -- which it is -- it's nothing like the turmoil of the early 1990s when the state, society and economy were all collapsing at the same time.

DON'T MENTION WAR

Another surprising thing I've found is the extent to which the war is avoided on a day-to-day basis. You see reports about it on TV news and chat shows (which steadfastly follow the government line), but I felt much better informed about the war using the Telegram app in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where I live and work, than when talking to actual people in St. Petersburg. I found you could have whole conversations without Ukraine ever coming up, unless I deliberately mentioned it.

My overall impression was that the invasion has reinforced people's pre-existing views. Those who were always opposed to Russian President Vladimir Putin hate it, while those who are supportive of the government remain largely in favor. But the vast majority tries to ignore it as much as they can.

No one I spoke to was happy that the war started -- but there's an important caveat: Regretting it doesn't mean they want to end it at all costs. Some said that one thing worse than a war is losing a war.

Nor did I see much evidence of popular protests. Obviously, many people who oppose Putin had fled the country, especially since mobilization began in September. Many others opposing the war have been imprisoned. A couple of my friends (longtime critics of the regime) were planning to leave to avoid future mobilization.

Damar Hamlin Reminds Us to Keep Faith in God



ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS

If you are like me and a fan of Monday Night Football, then you watched in horrified disbelief as 24-year-old Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin collapsed on the turf in cardiac arrest after being struck in the chest by another player's helmet.

The game against the Cincinnati Bengals halted abruptly as medical personnel frantically tried to restart Hamlin's heart as he lay on the field surrounded by weeping players taking a knee. The horror show played out live on TV before millions of sports fans. Immediately following his transport to the hospital, Hamlin remained sedated and hospitalized in intensive care while those who loved him prayed.

Days later, the media reported that the young football player is awake and holding hands with relatives. It is a joyful miracle and a somber reminder to all of us of the fragility of life and the need to always place our trust in God.

All too often, our day-to-day lives are frantic with minutiae as we scurry from task to task without ever considering how quickly it could all change or be lost. We obsess over slights from neighbors, disagreements with friends and

squandered opportunities at work without ever really considering the big picture and what really counts.

Sometimes God intervenes. Sports fans got an otherworldly message when God told us on the shoulder to remind every one of us that faith still matters. We witnessed football players on the field bowing their heads in prayer as their teammate departed in an ambulance for a battle to stay alive. And now Hamlin is conscious and fighting his way back to health.

Faith matters, and what we do for our fellow man is important, however it is that we lend them a hand. Being there for our families and those we love is not something to be taken lightly. And in a nation that so often seems on the brink of disaster, we must always be there to catch others when they fall.

In a world plagued by wars, famines, public shaming, disagreements, conflicts and chaos, it is more important than ever to put God first and live our lives

in a loving manner.

A person with faith is truly blessed. He or she greets each day with the comfort and knowledge that their life is in God's hands. Faith makes it possible to draw upon a unique kind of strength that is far greater than anything we can muster by ourselves alone. Faith in God provides clarity of purpose. It strengthens character. It strengthens our will. It builds confidence and fosters calm. Faith makes it possible to brave even the most brutal of storms and come out safely on the other side.

It would do us all good to remember just how quickly everything we have can be taken from us in the blink of an eye.

A man returning from work in the evening is involved in a terrible car crash and never makes it home. His family receives a shocking phone call that forever ends the dream of the future they thought that their family had together.

Married couples divorce and families that have been together for decades are torn apart. Intertwined lives are split and people are forced to go their separate ways. Life can be unkind.

On Jan. 2, when Hamlin laced up his cleats, he was

probably looking forward to playing a great game that night. He was likely focused on the plays that he would make, the tackles he would deliver, and thinking about how to be the best player he could be, focused on the pursuit of victory.

Then, just minutes into the game, Hamlin was barely clinging to life. Thankfully, we don't have to go through what this young man is experiencing. Most of us will never be forced to suddenly stare death in the face and then struggle to maintain our grip on life.

But we can all learn from him. The Damar Hamlin story, courtesy of the NFL, is a wakeup call and a reminder that life is precious, and we need to live the best lives we can while we are here on Earth.

We should turn away from the things that don't matter and refocus our mindset on God and living spiritual lives. We must rededicate ourselves to becoming the best versions of ourselves that we can become.

I have faith in God, and I believe that others should also seek to make him a priority. Having faith in God is the best hope and assurance. It provides that everything will be OK, as he is there for us even in the most difficult times.

Plans for deep seabed mining pit renewable energy demand against ocean life

By Scott Shackelford & Christiana Ochoa & David Bosco & Kerry Krutilla

As companies race to expand renewable energy and the batteries to store it, finding sufficient amounts of rare earth metals to build the technology is no easy feat. That's leading mining companies to take a closer look at a largely unexplored frontier -- the deep ocean seabed.

A wealth of these metals can be found in manganese nodules that look like cobblestones scattered across wide areas of deep ocean seabed. But the fragile ecosystems deep in the oceans are little understood, and the mining codes to sustainably mine these areas are in their infancy.

A fierce debate is playing out as a Canadian company makes plans to launch the first commercial deep sea mining operation in the Pacific Ocean.

The Metals Co. completed an exploratory project in the Pacific Ocean in the fall. Under a treaty governing the deep sea floor, the international agency overseeing these areas could be forced to approve provisional mining there as soon as this spring, but several countries and companies are urging a delay until more research can be done. France and New Zealand have called for a ban on deep sea mining.

As scholars who have long focused on the economic, political and legal challenges posed by deep

seabed mining, we have each studied and written on this economic frontier with concern for the regulatory and ecological challenges it poses.

WHAT'S DOWN THERE?

A curious journey began in the summer of 1974. Sailing from Long Beach, Calif., a revolutionary ship funded by eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes set course for the Pacific to open a new frontier -- deep seabed mining.

Widespread media coverage of the expedition helped to focus the attention of businesses and policymakers on the promise of deep seabed mining, which is notable given that the expedition was actually an elaborate cover for a CIA operation.

The real target was a Soviet ballistic missile submarine that had sunk in 1968 with all hands and what was believed to be a treasure trove of Soviet state secrets and tech onboard.

The expedition, called Project Azorian by the CIA, recovered at least part of the submarine -- and it also brought up several manganese nodules from the seafloor.

Manganese nodules are roughly the size of potatoes and can be found across vast areas of seafloor in parts of the Pacific and Indian oceans and deep abyssal plains in the Atlantic. They are valuable because they are exceptionally rich in 37 metals,

including nickel, cobalt and copper, which are essential for most large batteries and several renewable energy technologies.

These nodules form over millennia as metals nucleate around shells or broken nodules. The Clarion-Clipperton Zone, between Mexico and Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean, where the mining test took place, has been estimated to have over 21 billion metric tons of nodules that could provide twice as much nickel and three times more cobalt than all the reserves on land.

Mining in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone could be some 10 times richer than comparable mineral deposits on land. All told, estimates place the value of this new industry at some \$30 billion annually by 2030. It could be instrumental in feeding the surging global demand for cobalt that lies at the heart of lithium-ion batteries.

Yet, as several scientists have noted, we still know more about the surface of the moon than what lies at the bottom of the deep seabed.

DEEP SEABED ECOLOGY

Less than 10% of the deep seabed has been mapped thoroughly enough to understand even the basic features of the structure and contents of the ocean floor, let alone the life and ecosystems therein.

Even the most thoroughly studied region, the

Clarion-Clipperton Zone, is still best characterized by the persistent novelty of what is found there.

Between 70% and 90% of living things collected in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone have never been seen before, leaving scientists to speculate about what percentage of all living species in the region has never been seen or collected. Exploratory expeditions regularly return with images or samples of creatures that would richly animate science fiction stories, like a 6-foot-long bioluminescent shark.

Also unknown is the impact that deep sea mining would have on these creatures.

An experiment in 2021 in water about 3 miles deep off Mexico found that seabed mining equipment created sediment plumes of up to about 6.5 feet high. But the project authors stressed that they didn't study the ecological impact. A similar earlier experiment was conducted off Peru in 1989. When scientists returned to that site in 2015, they found some species still hadn't fully recovered.

Environmentalists have questioned whether seafloor creatures could be smothered by sediment plumes and whether the sediment in the water column could effect island communities that rely on healthy oceanic ecosystems. The Metals Co. has argued that its impact is less than terrestrial mining.



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Shooting

continued from page 1

about 120 miles southeast of Orlando, the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office said in a statement.

Authorities reported four others were injured amid a crowd that was attempting to flee the scene.

Hester told reporters during a press conference Monday that more than a thousand people had gath-

ered at Avenue M and 13th Street for a block party following a car show that was part of the city's Martin Luther King Jr. Day festivities when the shooting occurred.

He described the scene as

“mass chaos.”

“As the shots rang out, people were just running in all directions,” he said. “There were people laying behind cars, laying behind anything they could lay behind. It was kind of hard

to tell who was a victim and who was just hiding at that point.”

Deputies and people in the crowd administered aid to those injured, including loading them into vehicles to transport them to hospi-

tals, he said.

Asked if there were any suspects, Hester said between 30 and 40 officers were following up on leads as well tips from the public.

“We are following up on several leads as we speak,” he said.

He added investigators suspect there were multiple shooters based on evidence found at the scene, while asking on members of the public to come forward with any information they may have about the shooting.

Concerning those injured, all were adults aside from one juvenile who was injured in the chaos following the shooting, he said.

“It's really unfortunate and it's sad that during a celebration of someone who represented peace and equality that a disagreement results in a use of guns and violence to solve that disagreement,” he said.

According to non-profit, non-advocacy organization the Gun Violence Archive, there has been at least 29 mass shootings so far this year. During the first 16 days of 2023, there have been 787 gun deaths, it said.



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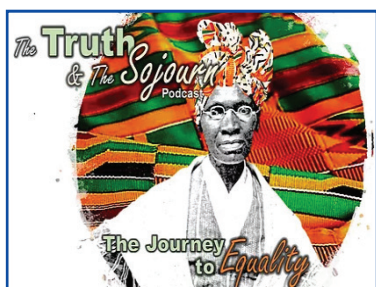
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WILMINGTON, N.C. – On Jan. 17, 2023, New Hanover County and The Healing Place held a dedication to announce the opening of the new peer-led recovery facility. Providing 200 beds (100 for men/100 for women), it will officially open for residential and shelter clients in February 2023. Withdrawal management services will start in Spring 2023.

Located on Medical Center Drive, The Healing Place of New Hanover County will be the only long-term substance use residential program in southeastern North Carolina. Individuals will be able to receive treatment at no cost to them, regardless of insurance. Trillium will work with providers across our 28-county region to send members to the facility.

“Since 2015, Trillium has worked to bring this much-needed program to southeastern North Carolina,” stated Joy Futrell, CEO of Trillium. “There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach when it comes to recovery. We must offer person-centered care and a variety of evidence-based treatments based on the individual.”

The Healing Place will provide an overnight emergency shelter, withdrawal management, and a long-term, 12-step based residential peer-run recovery program. National rates of recovery

vary from 40-60%, but graduates from The Healing Place maintain a recovery rate of 70% one year after completion – making it more effective than the national average at helping people to recovery. This unique model encourages accountability and involvement; residents want to be at The Healing Place and become active members of their community.

“We are grateful to be working with numerous partners in our community with similar goals and a passion to help people struggling with addiction lead meaningful and productive lives,” said Brian Mingia, Executive Director of The Healing Place of New Hanover County. “With our nationally recognized social model recovery program for drug and alcohol addiction, The Healing Place of New Hanover County will fill a need in this region and be a beacon of hope for so many who are struggling. We are eager to begin helping our neighbors on their recovery journey.”

Now that construction is complete and the facility has received its certificate of occupancy, The Healing Place is able to begin the credentialing process to fully open. Trillium will start processing referrals to The Healing Place soon. Please call Trillium at 877-685-2415 or visit https://www.thpnc.org/ for more information.

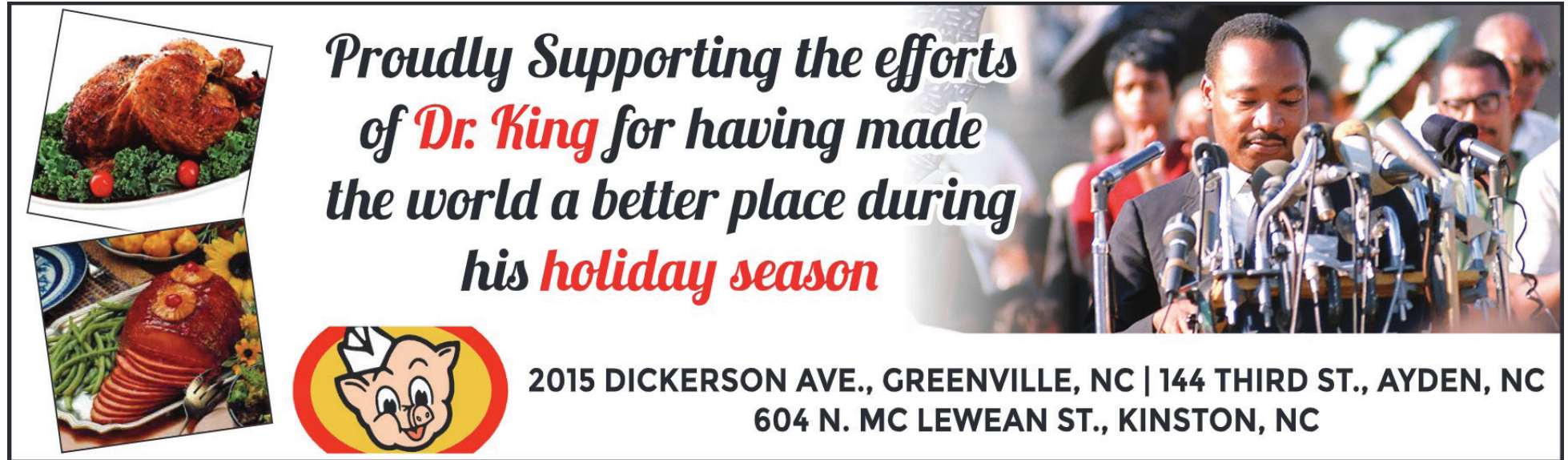


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Police officers to pay less than \$4,000 in pepper-spraying of Army officer in 2020

By Joe Fisher
UPI

Army Lt. Caron Nazario was awarded less than \$4,000 by a federal jury in a case stemming from a 2020 incident in which Nazario was pepper-sprayed by police during a traffic stop while in uniform.

The lieutenant, who is a Black and Hispanic medic in the U.S. Army, was seeking \$1 million in the case, alleging Windsor, Va., Police Department officers Joe Gutierrez and Daniel Crocker threatened his life and assaulted him. The officers were seen on video pointing their firearms at Nazario after pulling him over for a missing license plate.

Nazario asked the officers to explain why he was being pulled over. The officers responded by yelling at him to exit the vehicle, which he was hesitant to do. Gutierrez pepper-sprayed Nazario and forced him out of the vehicle after telling

him he was going to “ride the lightning,” in a reference to being executed in the electric chair.

The jury ordered the officers to pay a sum of \$3,685. Crocker was ordered to pay \$1,000 for committing an unlawful search of Nazario’s vehicle, which his attorney said he admitted did not follow proper procedure, according to ABC 8 News in Richmond. Gutierrez must pay \$2,685 for assaulting Nazario.

Nazario’s attorney Jonathan Arthur said he is pleased to see that the jury decided there were limits to what it would tolerate from police officers, but he said he is disappointed the jury did not punish the officers on some of the charges against them.

Richard Matthews, a defense attorney for Crocker, said the jury was “courageous” in its ruling “given the political climate,” NBC 12 Richmond reports.

In 2021, Virginia’s Attorney General Mark Her-

ring launched a civil rights investigation into whether Nazario was the victim of systemic misconduct by the Windsor Police Department.

“People of color continue to experience brutality and being pepper-sprayed and even killed at the hands of law enforcement, and it has got to stop,” he said.

At the conclusion of the investigation in December 2021, Herring filed a lawsuit against the department.

The Virginian-Pilot reported that Herring’s investigation found Black drivers were pulled over 200% to 500% more often than expected over the course of 14 months based on the population in the surrounding area.

The town of Windsor argued that Herring’s lawsuit was politically motivated in a statement released the same day the lawsuit was filed. Current Attorney General Jason Miyares has since taken up the lawsuit, which is yet to be resolved.



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Herschel Walker campaign staffer accuses Matt Schlapp of sexual battery

By Darryl Coote
UPI

A staffer on Herschel Walker’s failed Senate campaign has filed a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against Matt Schlapp, accusing the American Conservative Union chairman of sexually assaulting him.

The lawsuit was filed Tuesday in the Virginia Circuit Court in Alexandria, naming Schlapp and his wife, Mercedes Schlapp -- who is also a prominent conservative -- as defendants.

The anonymous plaintiff, referred to in the lawsuit as John Doe, accuses Matt Schlapp of “aggressively fondling” his genitals during a car ride in October and the Schlapps of conspiring with others to defame him after his allegations first became known earlier this month in an article published by The Daily Beast.

The civil lawsuit seeks some \$9 million in damages.

Charlie Spies, counsel for the Schlapps, rejected the lawsuit as an attempt to harm his clients.

“The complaint is false, and the Schlapp family is suffering unbearable pain and stress due to the false allegation from an anonymous individual,” Spies said in a statement published to Matt Schlapp’s Twitter account. “No family should ever go through this, and the Schlapps and their legal team are assessing counter-lawsuit options.”

The lawsuit describes the plaintiff as having been involved in conservative and Republican Party politics in various roles since 2012, and states his anonymity is required, citing an unusual risk of physical and mental retaliatory harm as the Schlapps are well known among “a portion of the population that has demonstrated a proclivity for threatening violence against those with whom they disagree.”

The plaintiff accuses Matt Schlapp of committing sexual battery against him on Oct. 19 in the state of Georgia after the Conservative Political Action Conference organizer spoke at a campaign event for



Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union, has been accused of groping a Herschel Walker campaign staffer in October. **File Photo by Chris Kleponis/UPI**


Walker in the city of Perry.

The complaint states that following Matt Schlapp’s speaking engagement, Doe drove him to a hotel. That afternoon, Matt Schlapp invited Doe via text message, a copy of which is included in the court document, for drinks later that night, which the plaintiff accepted “because Mr. Schlapp is a very prominent and well-connected person in conservative politics” and Doe was “eager to make connections” in the conservative movement.

At a bar that night, the lawsuit states “Mr. Schlapp sat unusually close to Mr. Doe” causing their legs to repeatedly touch and for Matt Schlapp to bump into Doe’s torso. “Mr. Schlapp also encouraged Mr. Doe to have more drinks, despite the fact that Mr. Doe was driving,” the lawsuit states.

To escape the situation, the plaintiff reminded Matt Schlapp that he had another speaking engagement the following day, and offered to drive him to his hotel.

During the drive, Matt Schlapp is accused of placing his hand on the plaintiff’s leg, which caused Doe to become “frozen with shock, mortification and fear.”



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Military contractor pleads guilty to rigging bids for \$17 million

By Joe Fisher
UPI

A military contractor in Texas pleaded guilty to violating federal antitrust laws by rigging the bidding process on projects over the course of five years.

Aaron Stephens is accused of rigging bids to secure about \$17.2 million in funds from the government while maintaining the illusion of fair competition in the market, the Justice Department said.

The 53-year-old pleaded guilty to doing so on six particular contracts. The projects included heavy military equipment work such as fixing military vehicles and turrets.

On July 14, 62-year-old John "Mark" Leveritt, a co-conspirator to Stephens, also pleaded guilty to rigging bids across the same time period, taking in \$17.5 million in government payments.

Stephens faces 10 years in prison and a \$1 million fine for violating the Sherman Act. His fine can be increased to twice the amount

he gained from committing the crime or twice the amount lost by victims of the crime.

Leveritt faces the same punishment. "Rigging bids undermines the benefits of competition and takes money out of the pockets of taxpayers," said Assistant Director Luis Quesada of the FBI's Criminal Investigative Division in a press release on Leveritt's plea.

"The public deserves a level playing field when doing business with the government. The FBI, hand in hand with our

law enforcement partners, will continue to investigate those who corrupt the systems established to protect American citizens from this type of fraud."

In 2019, the Justice Department established the Procurement Collusion Strike Force to address schemes meant to defraud the government by illegally securing government funding. The strike force is composed of officials from the Justice Department, FBI and several other federal agencies.

North Carolina AG Josh Stein announces 2024 gubernatorial bid

By Patrick Hillsman
UPI

North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein announced Wednesday he will run for governor in 2024.

Stein, who has served as the state's attorney general since 2017, invoked the 1971 firebombing of the office where his father worked as a civil rights attorney in his announcement.

"Today, there's a different set of bomb throwers who threaten our

freedoms and our future while some politicians spark division," Stein said as footage from the Jan. 6, 2021 riots at the U.S. Capitol played.

North Carolina's incumbent Governor, Democrat Roy Cooper, won't be able to run again due to term limits.

Stein's campaign video took aim at Republican Mark Robinson, the state's first Black lieutenant governor, who has not yet launched a bid for governor but is expected to join the race in 2024.

The video featured clips of Rob-

inson referring to homosexuality as "filth" and abortion as a "scourge that needs to be run out of this land."

"Robinson wants to tell you who you can marry, when you'll be pregnant and who you should hate, I'm running for governor because I believe in a very different North Carolina, one rooted in our shared values of freedom justice and opportunity for everyone, and I believe the fights we choose show who we are and determine what kind of state we will become," Stein said.



North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein has announced his candidacy for the 2024 gubernatorial election. Photo by North Carolina Department of Justice/Website

U.S. mortgage demand is up as interest rates decline slightly

By Doug Cunningham
UPI

U.S. mortgage demand is up by 27.9% for the week ending Jan. 13 as interest rates dropped to the lowest level since September, according to the Mortgage Banker's Association.

The MBA's Market Composite Index Weekly Mortgage Applications Survey reflected the increased demand through a rise in mortgage applications.

"Mortgage application activity rebounded strongly in the first full week of January, with both refinance and purchase activ-

ity increasing by double-digit percentages compared to last week, which included the New Year's holiday observance," said the MBA's Mike Fratantoni in a statement. "Despite these gains, refinance activity remains more than 80% below last year's pace and purchase volume remains 35% below year-ago levels."

Average interest rates for 30-year fixed-rate mortgages dropped to 6.23% from 6.42%, according to the MBA. Average 15-year fixed-rate mortgages were at 5.31%, down from 5.37% for the week ending Jan. 13.

Fratantoni said homebuyers

and sellers will likely face a more affordable housing market in the spring.

"Mortgage rates are now at their lowest level since September 2022, and about a percentage point below the peak mortgage rate last fall. As we enter the beginning of the spring buying season, lower mortgage rates and more homes on the market will help affordability for first-time homebuyers," Fratantoni said.

Mortgage refinancing was up to 31.2% of total applications compared to 30.7% for the previous week.



Corey Holcomb

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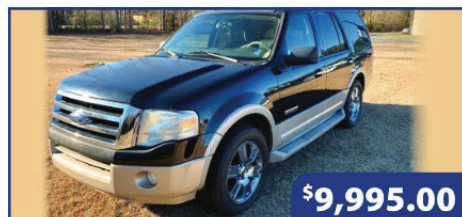
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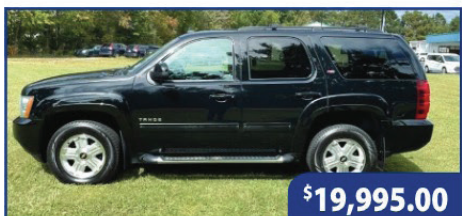
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continued from page 1

in school," said Martinez, a partner at Latham and Watkins. "Congress didn't punish kids for saying yes to favorable IDEA settlements."

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act offers federal funds to states in exchange for their commitments to accommodate children with disabilities to a Free Appropriate Public Education.

For example, deaf students should be provided with a trained sign language interpreter. A student with reading challenges may be provided a multi-sensory room, and a child who cannot take notes would be assisted by a scribe.

The act also establishes procedures for resolving disputes between parents and schools concerning the education of their students with disabilities.

Sturgis offered to settle the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act complaint, to which the Perez family agreed. The school district agreed to place Perez in the Michigan School for the Deaf and pay for his postsecondary compensatory education and sign-language services.

Perez then sued the district in federal court under the Americans with Disabilities Act for unspecified money damages. The school district argued that Perez could not bring the suit forward because he had already exhausted all administrative proceedings under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Sturgis Public Schools'

lawyer Shay Dvoretzky argued that since Perez accepted the settlement that Sturgis offered, as an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act plaintiff, he could not sue. He also said that school districts had "an interest in starting to provide the Free Appropriate Public Education as soon as they were aware."

Justices Amy Coney Barrett and Ketanji Brown Jackson pointed out the flaws in Dvoretzky's narrative. Brown Jackson raised a scenario about a hypothetical 18-year-old who was denied proper assistance but did not want to continue her education.


Along with Dvoretzky's argument, this student would not be able to sue on an ADA claim to support herself, but also would, no matter what, need to go through an Individuals with Disabilities Education Act hearing.

"You are envisioning a world, it seems maybe a very narrow world, in which an ADA claim could be pursued after your vision of exhaustion occurs," Coney Barrett said.

Justice Elena Kagan continued, explaining that rather than the school district, "it's the parents that have the greater incentive to get the education fixed for their child."

In previous rulings, a federal district court, as well as a panel from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit, agreed with the school district. U.S. Solicitor General Elizabeth B. Prelogar, however, told the Supreme Court that several other federal appeals courts ruled in the opposite manner in similar cases.

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 FTA-HARASSING PHONE CALL – MISDEMEANOR



REBECCA NICOLE BUCK

BREAK/ENTER TERRORIZE/INJURE – FELONY
 PROBATION VIOLATION-MALICIOUS CONDUCT – FELONY
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DESTINY MICHELLE SMITH

PROBATION VIOLATION – FELONY
 PAROLE VIOLATION – FELONY



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 ASLT FIREARM/DW COMP/CAMP POL – FELONY



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 FTA-POSSESSION OF FIREARM BY FELON – FELONY



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Damar Hamlin celebrates Bills' Wild Card win at home



Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin (3) celebrates a fumble recovery by teammate Tim Settle during the Bills 35-13 Christmas Eve win over the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field in Chicago on December 24. **File Photo by Mark Black/UPI**

By Joe Fisher
UPI

Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin celebrated his team's Wild Card win against the Miami Dolphins from his home in Orchard Park, N.Y., on Sunday.

Buffalo survived a furious effort from underdog Miami to hold on for a 34-31 win at Highmark Stadium in Orchard Park.

Hamlin tweeted a simple reaction following the team's win: "W"

Hamlin was transferred from the University of Cincinnati Medical Center to a Buffalo-area medical center more than a week after he suffered cardiac arrest on the field during Monday Night Football on Jan. 2.

On Monday, he was released from the hospital.

"My heart is with my guys as they compete today! Supporting from home as I focus on my recovery. Nothing I want more than to be out there with them! LFG #BillsMafia" he tweeted.

Following Hamlin's medical emergency during the game against the Cincinnati Bengals, the NFL held numerous league-wide tributes during its week 18 games. Players wore Hamlin's No. 3 on their uniforms, the no. 3 was highlighted on yardline markers on all NFL fields and games were preceded with various acknowledgements of the 24-year-old.

On Saturday, Hamlin attended Bills practice, ac-

ording to Brooke Kromer, daughter of offensive line coach Aaron Kromer.

"He was at practice & the guys were all in great spirits! Bills by a million! No word on tomorrow," she wrote on Twitter.

The Bills took a two-score lead early Sunday, but the Dolphins stormed back in the closing minutes of the first half to trail by 3 points at the break. The Bills had a 10-point lead at one point in the fourth quarter and again the Dolphins cut the lead to 3.

Ultimately the Dolphins' issues with managing the play clock would cost them late, pushing the offense from a short yardage situation to fourth-and-long which it was unable to convert.

Mets' Tommy Pham agree to \$6 million deal

By Alex Butler
UPI

Free agent outfielder Tommy Pham and the New York Mets agreed to a one-year, \$6 million contract for the 2023 MLB season.

Sources told ESPN, the New York Post and MLB.com about the agreement Wednesday afternoon. The deal is pending a physical.

Pham, 34, hit .238 with 11 home runs and 39 RBIs in 91 appearances last season for the Cincinnati Reds until he was traded in August to the Boston Red Sox. He went on to hit .234 with six homers and 24 RBIs over his final 53 appearances of the season.

The 9-year veteran hit .229 with 15 home runs, 14 stolen bases and 49 RBIs in 155 games in 2021 for the San Diego Padres.

Pham also spent time with the St. Louis Cardinals and Tampa Bay Rays. He entered the league as a 16th-round pick by the Cardinals in the 2006 MLB Draft.

Pham has a .259 average with 114 home runs in 876 career appearances. He registered at least 20 home runs and 20 RBIs in two separate seasons, with 23 homers and 25 steals in 2017 for the Cardinals and 21 homers and 25 steals in 2019 for the Rays.

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Pitt County Government Launches Anti-Litter Campaign

SOLID WASTE & RECYCLING PARTNERS WITH LOCAL AND STATE AGENCIES

PITT COUNTY, N.C. – The Pitt County Board of Commissioners approved County leadership’s recommendation to form a litter taskforce in May 2022 to address widespread littering and illegal trash dumping in Pitt County.

“For Pitt County’s economic growth, we must put litter and trash in its place,” says Mary Perkins-Williams, Chairwoman, Pitt County Board of Commissioners.

County Manager Janis Gallagher formed the Solid Waste Assets and Enforcement Committee in June 2022 with Pitt County Solid Waste & Recycling (SWR), Planning, Engineering, Public Information Office and Office of the Sheriff in collaboration with representatives from the Town of Ayden, City of Greenville, NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ).

“It was great to have key stakeholders at the table to share ideas and develop a recommended strategy to address litter in our community. How we treat our environment is a reflection of community values. How we treat our environment is a reflection of community values. I am optimistic that by working together, we can reduce litter and preserve the beauty all around us,” says Janis Gallagher, County Manager.

The Committee developed a strategic plan the Board of County Commissioners approved in September 2022 which served as the foundation for the three-part education-based multimedia campaign scheduled for January 16 through June 30, 2023.

Part one of the PSA, Litter Free for You and Me, addresses the effects of littering, unsecured loads and illegal trash dumping has on community pride, County development and natural resources. Calls to action are to secure trash loads, report illegal dumping and volunteer to clean up Pitt County.

“I look forward to our litter campaign as we strive to educate the public and provide solutions to reduce litter whether it is intentional or unintentional. If we all work together, we can make a difference,” says John Demary, Director, Solid Waste & Recycling.

The public is notified that unintentional littering through open, unsecured loads is still a littering offense with fines up to \$400. County businesses and residents are instructed to secure all trash loads with a tarp, cargo net or tie down. Free tarps will be available at flash giveaway events during the campaign.

County residents are educated on how to report illegal dumping to SWR Enforcement by phone, email, or online form/QR code. To report illegal dumping, call 252-902-3357 (office) or 252-414-0378 (cell), email nick.whaley@pittcountync.gov or online at www.PittCountyNC.gov/LitterFree.

Concerned individuals and civic groups are invited to join this community clean up movement to make Pitt County “litter free for you and me”. Interested volunteers may call SWR at 252-902-3350 for details on upcoming Litter Sweeps and other ways to get involved.

Litter Free for You and Me campaign collateral are available for download at <https://emattach.pittcountync.gov/message/OnNnoSaQRMgUZdHebpJJ5Q> County municipalities, businesses, residents, and media partners are encouraged to share the PSA across their platforms through June 30, 2023.

Part two of the Litter Free campaign will begin mid-March featuring banners at County buildings and convenience sites and a Fourth Grade Litter Challenge with Pitt County Schools. Part three, Tarp It or Ticket, will begin May 1, 2023 to educate the public on the enforcement of fines and penalties for littering, unsecured loads and illegal trash dumping. Illegal dumping can result in penalties up to \$2,000. Campaign details will be available in March.

For more information, visit www.PittCountyNC.gov/LitterFree or any of the County Facebook pages at facebook.com/PittCountyNC or [SolidWaste&Recycling](https://facebook.com/SolidWaste&Recycling), [PublicHealth](https://facebook.com/PublicHealth), [LJFarmersMarket](https://facebook.com/LJFarmersMarket), [EmergencyManagement](https://facebook.com/EmergencyManagement) or [AnimalServices](https://facebook.com/AnimalServices).

Visit www.NCdot.gov/littersweep and www.keepncbeautiful.org or www.kab.org for other litter resources.

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La Voz Latina

Chargers fire offensive coordinator Lombardi, quarterbacks coach Day



The Los Angeles Chargers fired two coaches Tuesday, just days after quarterback Justin Herbert and the offense collapsed in a playoff loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars. **Photo by Joe Marino/UPI**

By Alex Butler
UPI

The Los Angeles Chargers fired offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi and quarterbacks coach Shane Day less than a week after the team surrendered a 27-point lead and exited the playoffs, the team announced Tuesday.

Lombardi and Day took their jobs with the Chargers when the franchise hired coach Brandon Staley in 2021.

The Chargers ranked No. 5 in points and No. 4 in yards in 2021. They also had the No. 2 passing offense while led by quarterback Justin Herbert.

The Chargers ranked No. 9 in yards and No. 13 in points this season. They had the No. 3 passing offense. Herbert threw for 5,014 yards and 38 touchdowns in 17 games in 2021. He totaled 4,739 yards and 25 passing scores in 17 games this season.

Staley, who has a 19-15 record

in two seasons as Chargers' coach, led the team to the playoffs for just the second time since 2013-14. The Chargers have two playoff wins since 2008-09.

Day was a positional coach at Michigan and Connecticut, and was with the San Francisco 49ers, Washington Commanders and Chicago Bears before he joined the Chargers.

Lombardi had served as quarterbacks coach for the New Orleans Saints for 10 seasons. He also was the Detroit Lions offensive coordinator in 2014 and 2015.

He first joined the NFL sidelines in 2006 as a defensive assistant for the Atlanta Falcons.

The Chargers held a 27-0 lead on the Jacksonville Jaguars in the first-half of a wild-card round game Saturday in Jacksonville, Fla. They then totaled just three points in the second half and lost 31-30 in the third-largest collapse in NFL playoff history.

4.7M tune in for 'Last of Us' premiere on HBO

By Karen Butler
UPI

About 4.7 million viewers tuned in to the series premiere of *The Last of Us* on HBO and its streaming platforms Sunday.

HBO said it was its second-largest debut, behind only *House of the Dragon*, since *Boardwalk Empire* premiered on the network in 2010.

Dragon scored 10 million viewers when it debuted last year.

Starring Bella Ramsey and Pedro Pascal, the critically acclaimed video-game adaptation takes place 20 years after modern civilization has been destroyed by a mutated fungus that turns people into monstrous cannibals.

"Our focus was simply to make the best possible adaptation of this beloved story for as big an audience as we could," executive producers Craig Mazin and Neil Druckmann said in a statement



Bella Ramsey

Tuesday. "We are overjoyed to see how many fans, both old and new, have welcomed *The Last of Us* into their homes and their hearts."

Casey Bloys, chairman and CEO of HBO & HBO Max Content, added, "We are thrilled to see fans of the series and game alike experience this iconic story in a new way, and we extend our gratitude to them for helping to make it a success."

Canadiens' Juraj Slafkovsky, top NHL Draft pick, to miss 3 months

By Alex Butler
UPI

Montreal Canadiens winger Juraj Slafkovsky, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2022 NHL Draft, will miss three months due to a lower-body injury, the team announced Wednesday.

Slafkovsky, 18, sustained the injury in the Canadiens' 2-1 win over the New York Rangers on Sunday at Madison Square Garden in New York.

"We believe his development will happen in stages," Canadiens general manager Kent Hughes told reporters Wednesday at a news conference. "It's not, 'Hey, we've got 10 things; go figure them out.' Because I think when you do that, [the player] is on the ice thinking and not reacting. And I think sometimes this year we've seen him think on the ice and other times we've seen him react."

"But we're not worried about



the production side of it. We're really worried about seeing the areas that we want him to improve on."

Slafkovsky scored four goals and registered four assists in 39 games this season for the Canadiens. He did not find the net in any of his last 21 appearances.

The Canadiens also announced Wednesday that goalie Jake Allen (upper-body), for-

wards Joel Armia (upper-body) and Jake Evans (lower-body) also are injured. Allen is expected to miss a week. Armia is likely to be out until next month's All-Star break. Evans is expected to miss at least two months.

The Canadiens (19-23-3) will host the Florida Panthers (21-20-5) at 7 p.m. EST Thursday at Bell Centre in Montreal.

Soccer: Inter Miami signs ex-Atlanta United star Josef Martinez

By Alex Butler
UPI

Former MLS MVP Josef Martinez signed with Inter Miami FC after Atlanta United released him, the clubs announced Wednesday.

"I'm excited for the opportunity to represent Inter Miami and give the best of myself," Martinez said in a news release. "This is a club with high aspirations and that aims to be amongst the best in the league. I hope to help the team achieve its objectives and leave my mark at the club."

Martinez, 29, joined Atlanta United in 2017. He scored 103 goals and 17 assists over 144 combined regular season and playoff appearances for the franchise. In 2018, he won MLS MVP, All-Star Game MVP, the Golden Boot and MLS Cup Final MVP honors.

The Venezuelan striker made his senior team debut in 2010 at Caracas of Venezuela's Primera Division. He also played in Switzerland at Young Boys and Thun and Torino of Italy's Serie A. Martinez scored 13 goals in 60 international appearances for the Venezuelan



Striker Josef Martinez signed a contract with Inter Miami FC on Wednesday in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. **Photo by Carlos Goldman/Inter Miami**

national team.

"Josef is a champion and

adding him to our group is exciting for us as we head

into the 2023 season," said Inter Miami sporting director Chris Henderson. "He's been one of the best players in the league since he first arrived and we believe he'll make a difference here at Inter Miami."

"We're adding a proven goalscorer with a track record of success in MLS. We're thrilled to have a player like Josef in our attack."

The 2023 MLS regular season will run Feb. 25 to Oct. 21. Inter Miami will host CF Montreal in their season opener at 7:30 p.m. EST Feb. 25 at DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

"Josef has played a pivotal role in Atlanta United's history, scoring memorable goals and hoisting multiple trophies for moments that will forever live with our supporters," Atlanta United vice president Carlos Bocanegra said.

"He was a foundational piece who was responsible for helping build our brand into what it is today. We cannot thank him enough for his contributions to the club and the community over the last six years."

"He will always be part of Atlanta United, and we wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors."

Raiders QB Derek Carr says goodbye to fans

By Alex Butler
UPI

Las Vegas Raiders quarterback Derek Carr said goodbye to fans, thanked teammates and coaches, and said he "looks forward" to joining a new team, in a letter he posted Thursday afternoon on social media.

Carr signed a three-year, \$121.5 million contract extension in April, but the franchise can release him next month while taking a salary cap hit of just \$5.6 million.

If the team doesn't move on from Carr, his 2023 salary will jump to more than \$30 million next season and to more than \$40 million in 2024 and 2025.

Sources told NFL Network and The Athletic that the Raiders are evaluating the trade market for the nine-year veteran.

"RaiderNation it breaks my heart I didn't get an opportunity to say goodbye in person," Carr wrote on Instagram and Twitter. "We certainly have been on a roller coaster in our nine years together. From the bottom

of my heart, I am so grateful and appreciative of the years of support you gave to my family and me.

"We had our share of both heart breaking moments and thrilling game winning drives, and it always felt like you were there next to me. It's especially hard to say goodbye because I can honestly say that I gave you everything I had, every single day, in season, and in the off-season."

"It certainly wasn't perfect, but I hope that I was able to leave you with more than a few great mem-

ories as Raider fans."

Carr, 31, joined the franchise as a second-round pick in the 2014 NFL Draft. The former Fresno State star made the Pro Bowl in three of his first four seasons.

He completed 60.8% of his throws for 3,522 yards, 25 touchdowns and 14 interceptions in 15 starts in 2022. The Raiders benched Carr for the final two games of the season.

Carr went 63-79 in 142 starts for the Raiders. He completed 64.8% of his throws for 35,222 yards, 217 touchdowns and 99 in-

terceptions over his nine seasons with the AFC West franchise.

Carr went 10-7 as a starter, with a career-high 4,804 yards, 23 scores and 14 interceptions in 17 starts in 2021. He also led the Raiders to the 2021-22 playoffs, where they lost in the first round to the Cincinnati Bengals.

"I once said that if I'm not a Raider, I would rather be at home and I meant that, but I never envisioned it ending this way," Carr wrote. "That fire burning inside of me to win a championship still rages. A fire no man can extinguish; only God."