

DEOMI NEWS LINKS 14 MAY 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

[Justices consider hearing a case on “most offensive word”](#) [Jessica Gresko, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

Robert Collier says that during the seven years he worked as an operating room aide at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, White nurses called him and other Black employees “boy.” Management ignored two large swastikas painted on a storage room wall. And for six months, he regularly rode an elevator with the N-word carved into a wall. Collier ultimately sued the hospital, but lower courts dismissed his case. Now, however, at a private conference Thursday, the Supreme Court will consider for the first time whether to hear his case. Focusing on the elevator graffiti, Collier is asking the justices to decide whether a single use of the N-word in the workplace can create a hostile work environment, giving an employee the ability to pursue a case under Title VII of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

[Officials: Tiny uptick in 2020 military sex assault reports](#) [Lolita C. Baldor, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

Reports of sexual assaults across the U.S. military increased by a very small amount in 2020, a year when troops were largely locked down for months as bases around the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, according to U.S. officials. Officials familiar with the data said sexual assault reports went up by about 1%, compared with the 2019 totals. They said the Army and Marine Corps saw slight increases in the number of reports, while the Navy and Air Force saw small decreases. Formal reports of sexual assaults have steadily gone up since 2006, including a 13% jump in 2018 and a 3% increase in 2019 that included a much larger 9% increase for the Air Force, according to Pentagon data. The Pentagon releases a report every year on the number of sexual assaults in the military. Because sexual assault is a highly under-reported crime, the department also sends out an anonymous survey every two years to get a clearer picture of the problem. That survey was last done in 2018, and was scheduled for last year, but those plans were scrapped due to the pandemic.

[\[REPRINT\]](#) [\[SEE ALSO\]](#)

[Transgender airmen, guardians guaranteed equal opportunity under new policy](#) [Rachel S. Cohen, *Air Force Times*, 13 May 2021]

The Department of the Air Force has rolled out a new set of policies for transgender airmen and guardians that aim to treat troops undergoing a gender change more equitably. “Service in the Air Force and Space Force should be open to all persons who can meet the high standards for military service and readiness,” said the [policy document](#), dated April 30. “All service members and applicants for accession must be treated with dignity and respect and afforded equal opportunity in an environment free from prohibited discrimination.” “This policy, particularly for the Air Force, is a huge step forward for all of our service members,” said Lt. Col. Bree Fram, a transgender airman currently studying at the Naval War College. She serves as president of SPARTA, an advocacy group for transgender, nonbinary and gender-nonconforming troops that suggested changes to the Air Force.

CULTURE

[Appeals court overturns conviction in racial slur case](#) [Denise Lavoie, *The Associated Press*, 12 May 2021]

The conviction of a retired U.S. Air Force officer who used a racial slur while speaking to a Black store clerk and Black customer was overturned Tuesday by a federal appeals court that found his speech was protected by the First Amendment under the circumstances. Retired Air Force Lt. Col. Jules Bartow, who is White, was arrested after he used the slur while shopping for boots at the Quantico Marine Corps Exchange in November 2018. Prosecutors and witnesses at his trial said he posed several bizarre rhetorical questions, including asking the customer, while referring to the store clerk, “If I called her a (slur), would she still say good morning?” Bartow was convicted of violating Virginia’s abusive language law. Bartow’s conviction was overturned by a three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The court found that the First Amendment permits criminalization of abusive language, but only if the government proves the language had a direct tendency to cause immediate acts of violence by the person to whom it was addressed.

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

[Barry Jenkins on his unflinching epic “Underground Railroad”](#) [Amanda Lee Myers, *The Associated Press*, 12 May 2021]

When Oscar-winning director Barry Jenkins was considering adapting Colson Whitehead’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about the Underground Railroad into a limited series, he kept hearing the same thing: Impossible. It would be emotionally and mentally draining, Jenkins knew. And he questioned the ethics of such a production: Do people really need to be reminded about the horrors of slavery? Ultimately, Jenkins worked through the doubts. The result is [“The Underground Railroad,”](#) an unflinching portrayal of Cora, an enslaved woman who escapes a Georgia plantation and its horrors only to be pursued by an unrelenting bounty hunter. Along the way she must confront the anger she feels for her mother, who left her at the plantation when she was 10. The 10-hour limited series, which premieres Thursday on Amazon, is at times unbearably painful to watch and at others achingly beautiful. Early reviews have declared the series a triumph and something only Jenkins could have pulled off.

[Get rid of Confederate rock or risk custody of multiracial daughter, court tells woman](#) [Timothy Bella, *The Washington Post*, 7 May 2021]

A rock near a woman’s driveway in Upstate New York could affect the custody case of her multiracial daughter. But it is not the rock itself that is potentially risking a mother’s custody of her child. It is what’s decorated on the rock: The Confederate flag. Appellate justices with the New York Supreme Court on Thursday ordered a Tompkins County woman to remove the Confederate flag-painted rock or risk a “change in circumstances” to the child custody case of her young daughter. Justice Stanley Pritzker [wrote](#) in the unanimous 5-0 decision that while the woman, identified only as Christie BB, was protected under the First Amendment to display the Confederate flag, the rock’s presence through June 1 would force the court to reconsider the joint custody she has with the girl’s father.

[\[SEE ALSO\]](#)

[How South Asian-owned threading salons in the U.S. became a space for community](#) [Fareeha Molvi, CNN, 8 May 2021]

South Asian-owned beauty parlors like Etman’s LA favorite, can be found across America. In some, Bollywood music videos will play on a television in the background. In others, a religious symbol near the cash register might hint at the owner’s beliefs: a small Hindu altar, a Buddha miniature or a plaque with Islamic calligraphy. Stations will often be abuzz with soft chatter punctuated by loud goodbyes from customers waving at the door. The bustle of comings and goings is usually constant. This vision of an archetypical salon may not be familiar to everyone in America who has undergone threading, which in recent decades, has become a popular way for people of all backgrounds to shape their brows and remove facial hair. But for women in the South Asian American diaspora, these kinds of spaces have become especially important sources of connection, familiarity and a complicated sense of belonging. “(A salon is) a space ... where South Asians see themselves in their fullness,” said Hareem Khan, an assistant professor of anthropology and ethnic studies at California State University, San Bernardino.

[“If Hate Is A Virus, There Is No Vaccine”](#): Asian Photographers Speak Out [Xueying Chang, NPR, 12 May 2021]

The arrival of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month has come at a particularly difficult moment. It has been nearly two months since shootings at three Atlanta-area spas left eight people dead—including six women of Asian descent—and in AAPI communities across the country, pain, tears, frustration and loss continues to reverberate. For many, the grief has been compounded by a growing sense of fear over facing violence or harassment in their own lives. Indeed, many already have. On the same day as the Georgia shootings, the group Stop AAPI Hate released a report documenting 3,795 “hate incidents” against Asian Americans between March 2020 and February 2021—a figure the group said was likely a vast undercount. To help understand these challenges, we invited a group of AAPI photographers to share their reflections on the violence and on what Asian community, culture and life really looks like. Here is what they had to say.

[“It got stupid” and the many other reasons troops chose to leave the military](#) [Haley Britzky, Task & Purpose, 13 May 2021]

There are a million reasons why someone might choose to leave the military. That was made clear after Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston opened the floodgates on social media earlier this month when he asked to hear “some of the most preventable reasons” soldiers have left the Army. Hundreds of responses hit a variety of issues: racism, sexual harassment, work-life balance, height and weight requirements, an overabundance of red tape, and the lack of control some soldiers feel that they have over their lives. We wanted to hear more, so we asked you, our readers, why you left the military. And you delivered. While some responses pointed out things like bad leaders—“A senior NCO made the decision real easy for me,” said one man—for others it was much simpler; as one person on Facebook put it, “it got stupid.” All in all, the responses lay out a road map that can show leaders exactly why their troops might not be eager to reenlist for a few more years, and instead consider their next chapter in the civilian world. One deciding factor that came up frequently was family: one woman said abuse of family care plans “is a real thing.”

[“It’s derogatory”: one man’s four-decade fight against his town’s Native “mascot”](#) [Hallie Golden, *The Guardian*, 9 May 2021]

On a recent Friday evening, the teenage daughter of the then mayor-elect of Morris, Illinois, about 60 miles south-west of Chicago, led her high school’s marching band on to the football field wearing a headdress, face paint and clothes resembling Native regalia. It was a familiar scene for Morris Community high school, a school of about 850 students, none of whom are Native, according to a 2019 Illinois report card. Its mascot has long been “the Redskins”, a term widely considered a racial slur against Native Americans. Current and former students told the Guardian most home football games involve a White student who has been named “chief” dressed in an outfit meant to resemble Native regalia. But it is this practice, along with the school’s mascot, that Ted Trujillo—considered the only enrolled tribal member of a federally recognized tribe living in the small city and an alumnus of the school—has been fighting against for nearly four decades. “It’s racist. It’s derogatory. It stereotypes a whole race of people,” Trujillo, 51, told the Guardian. “It appropriates our sacred culture and traditions. A headdress has meaning in the Native world; the regalia, everything has meaning.”

[Le, La But Not “They”: An Explainer On France’s Language Problem](#) [Alex Ledsom, *Forbes*, 10 May 2021]

It’s spoken by almost 300 million people worldwide and whilst its Latin origins make the masculine le and feminine la essential requirements, the French language has a reputation for not being very gender neutral—there is no legally defined pronoun for “they”—and an emphasis is often placed on the masculine. A certain branch of the government is trying to turn French into a more gender inclusive language—the idea being that a more gender inclusive language heralds a more inclusive society. However, more than 60 MPs recently signed a letter protesting against bringing gender inclusive words into use in the civil service. The politicians argue that it makes learning French harder and “endangers the language.” So what’s going on?

[SEE ALSO [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

[NBC will not air the next Golden Globes after diversity controversy](#) [Frank Pallotta and Brian Lowry, *CNN*, 11 May 2021]

The network announced that it would not carry the show in 2022 after controversy surrounding the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's lack of diversity and ethical questions related to financial benefits given to some members, such as a hotel stay in connection with an “Emily in Paris” junket. Those revelations, first reported by the Los Angeles Times, have prompted several major outlets, including Netflix (NFLX) and WarnerMedia, CNN’s parent company, to announce that they would not participate in any Globes-related events until the issues had been adequately addressed. The Times reporting found that the group has no Black members, and raised questions about benefits received by some members stemming from the millions that NBC pays for the right to televise the event, which has traditionally been one of the highest rated in the awards calendar. The HFPA sought to quell the criticism by promising to bring in Black journalists, increasing its ranks from 87 members to 100. But that solution—and subsequent reporting based on internal conversations—only exacerbated the problem. Former HFPA president Philip Berk was ousted from the organization after forwarding an email that described Black Lives Matter as a “hate group.”

[Restored Richard Wright novel hits bestseller lists](#) [Hillel Italie, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

More than 60 years after his death, Richard Wright is again a bestselling author and very much in line with the present. “The Man Who Lived Underground,” a short novel written in the 1940s and never published in full until this spring, is the surreal but credible story of a Black man who is tortured by police into confessing to a double murder he didn’t commit. He escapes into the city’s sewer system. Like an inversion of the American road novel or a tale of space travel, Fred Daniels inhabits a world outside the world, making up the rules as he goes along and seeing his old life in a new way. Released by the Library of America, an unofficial canon of the country’s literature, “The Man Who Lived Underground” also includes the Wright essay “Memories of My Grandmother” and an afterword from his grandson, the writer-filmmaker Malcolm Wright.

[San Francisco Makes Home of Lesbian Couple a Landmark](#) [Allyson Waller, *The New York Times*, 7 May 2021]

The home of the first same-sex couple to legally marry in California will become a historical landmark, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors ruled this week. On Tuesday, the city’s supervisors voted unanimously to grant landmark designation for the home owned by the couple, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, who are both lesbian activists and co-founders of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian rights organization in the United States. Ms. Lyon and Ms. Martin purchased the home, along with the vacant lot next to it, in 1955 and moved in together at the one-bedroom house nestled on a hilltop in the Noe Valley neighborhood. The approximately 800-square-foot home was an integral meeting place for the Daughters of Bilitis and for social events within the lesbian community, according to Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, two historians who wrote a city-planning document in 2015 for San Francisco on its LGBTQ history.

[She was tired of seeing Black stereotypes on TV. So she started her own streaming service](#) [John General, *CNN Business*, 11 May 2021]

*When DeShuna Spencer sat in front of her TV to scroll through her options, she noticed a glaring problem: Nobody looked like or was representative of the people she knew. Specifically, there were no Black characters or directors with whom she felt a connection. “I didn’t see my father, my brother, my husband represented,” Spencer told *CNN Business*. “The media was really inundated with these false stereotypes.” “I really started to see the disparity for people of color—and especially women of color—when it came to getting distribution,” Spencer said. “And so when I couldn’t find what I was looking for, a light bulb went off. I’ll start a streaming service.” Launching a streaming service in an already crowded market is difficult enough. What Spencer didn’t know at the time was just how hard it is for Black women to secure funding from venture capital firms—a struggle that highlights the gap marginalized founders face when it comes to access.*

DISCRIMINATION

[Blind people, advocates slam company claiming to make websites ADA compliant](#) [April Glaser, *NBC News*, 9 May 2021]

In recent months, blind people and disability advocates have been speaking out on social media and suing companies that use AccessiBe. Blind people say AccessiBe, which is supposed to automatically make websites more compatible with the screen readers blind people rely on to access the internet, has prevented them from all sorts of normal activities online, like paying rent, teaching a class or buying Christmas gifts. AccessiBe is the largest automated accessibility company on the market, according to Lucy Greco, who is blind and the head of web accessibility at the University of California, Berkeley. The situation has gotten so bad that in the past two months more than 400 blind people, accessibility advocates and software developers signed an [open letter](#) calling on companies that use automated services, like AccessiBe and other companies with similar products, to stop. “We will refuse to stay silent when overlay vendors use deception to market their products,” the letter said.

[Court Reverses Ruling Critics Said Left Feds Vulnerable to Retaliation, Citing “Magnitude” of Errors](#) [Eric Katz, GovExec, 10 May 2021]

A federal court has overruled an administrative judge on a case with significant implications for federal employee protections, saying the judge’s errors in his initial ruling were so severe he should be removed from the case entirely. The case, Tao v. Merit Systems Protection Board, positioned the Office of Special Counsel—the agency tasked with enforcing federal whistleblower protection laws—against the MSPB ruling, and eventually led the board to argue its own judge had erred. OSC had filed a brief before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit saying the judge’s ruling risked leaving federal workers uncertain about their rights and “vulnerable to retaliation explicitly prohibited by the statute.” The case involved a pharmacist at the Veterans Affairs Department, Debra Tao, who alleged she was demoted as a result of having made whistleblower disclosures, testifying on behalf of a colleague and reporting labor violations to the Federal Labor Relations Authority. The court also requested a new administrative judge take over the case.

[Ex-prosecutor settles for \\$87K in discrimination lawsuit](#) [The Associated Press, 7 May 2021]

A former Deschutes County deputy district attorney who sued the county, alleging race and sexual discrimination has reached an \$87,500 settlement with the county, District Attorney John Hummel announced Thursday. A Portland attorney representing Jasmyn Troncoso, who was hired in 2019, filed the tort claim notice a year ago, alleging the discrimination began in the summer of 2019. She resigned in 2020 before the notice of intent to sue was filed. Troncoso alleged her co-workers bullied her, told her she was unqualified and a drama queen, accused her of having affairs and ridiculed her for speaking Spanish. The office hired an investigator who found one allegation was substantiated. The substantiated claim was that a mug with offensive language on it was on the desk of an employee. That employee was suspended for five days without pay as a result, according to a news release from Hummel’s office.

[Gender Stereotypes Creep Into Performance Reviews](#) [Stanford University, Futurity, 13 May 2021]

A take-charge attitude at work typically earns men positive performance reviews, but for women, assertiveness only gets them so far. Although workplace evaluations are supposed to be merit-based, the study finds that gender bias too often influences how supervisors rate employees,

resulting in women having to meet a higher bar than their male colleagues to advance professionally. Published in the [American Sociological Review](#), the paper pinpoints how and when managers' beliefs about gender enter their evaluations of workers. "Where we find the bigger biases are in evaluations of people's personalities, their future potential, and on the mentions of exceptionalism," says study coauthor Shelley J. Correll, professor of organizational behavior (by courtesy) at Stanford University Graduate School of Business. "So if we want to get rid of biases, we need to look at the areas where biases are more likely—personality, potential, and who's truly exceptional."

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

[Paying With Cash? Retailers Must Take Your Dollars in These States.](#) [Sophie Quinton, *Stateline*, 11 May 2021]

After a constituent called Colorado state Rep. Alex Valdez last spring and complained that some local businesses weren't accepting cash, the *Denver Democrat* started noticing cashless businesses everywhere, from restaurants to his local coffee shop. Valdez thought refusing cash due to the COVID-19 pandemic made no sense, as merchants were still willing to touch debit and credit cards. And he feared such policies could shut out people without bank accounts, a group that's disproportionately low-income, Black and Hispanic. About 7.1 million U.S. households don't have a bank account, according to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's [latest survey](#) in 2019. Rates are highest among low-income, Black, Hispanic and Native American households, as well as households headed by a person with disabilities, the FDIC survey shows. Nearly half of the unbanked people surveyed told the agency they can't afford to maintain a minimum balance in an account.

[Reversing Trump, U.S. restores transgender health protections](#) [Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar, *The Associated Press*, 10 May 2021]

The U.S. will protect gay and transgender people against sex discrimination in health care, the Biden administration announced Monday, reversing a Trump-era policy that sought to narrow the scope of legal rights in sensitive situations involving medical care. The [action by the Department of Health and Human Services](#) affirms that federal laws forbidding sex discrimination in health care also protect gay and transgender people. The Trump administration had defined "sex" to mean gender assigned at birth, thereby excluding transgender people from the law's umbrella of protection. "Fear of discrimination can lead individuals to forgo care, which can have serious negative health consequences," said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra. "Everyone—including LGBTQ people—should be able to access health care, free from discrimination or interference, period."

[Suit challenges restaurant aid priority to women, minorities](#) [Jonathan Mattise, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

A conservative legal outfit filed a lawsuit Wednesday against President Joe Biden's administration for its prioritization of restaurants and bars owned by women and certain minorities in its COVID-19 relief package, arguing White men are being "pushed to the back of the line" for aid for their eateries. The lawsuit led by the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty targets the period from May 3 until May 24 during which the \$28.6 billion Restaurant

Revitalization Fund will only process and fund requests from businesses owned by women; veterans; or socially and economically disadvantaged individuals. Eligibility opens broadly after that period. Biden has previously said that female-owned and minority-owned businesses have been disproportionately hurt by the COVID-19 economic crisis. The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in East Tennessee names U.S. Small Business Association Administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman as the defendant.

[Two Oklahoma students pulled from class for wearing Black Lives Matter shirts, mother says](#) [N’dea Yancey-Bragg, USA TODAY, 10 May 2021]

An Oklahoma school district is facing backlash after two Black siblings were removed from their classrooms last week for wearing shirts that said “Black Lives Matter.” The controversy first began in late April when Jordan Herbert’s 8-year-old son wore a Black Lives Matter shirt to class at Charles Evans Elementary. Herbert said the principal, Denise Brunk, told him to turn the shirt inside out, in a detailed account on social media. Herbert said she asked Brunk what dress code policy her son had violated and was told Ardmore City Schools superintendent Kim Holland said politics were not allowed in school. “It’s our interpretation of not creating a disturbance in school. I don’t want my kids wearing MAGA hats or Trump shirts to school either because it just creates, in this emotionally charged environment, anxiety and issues that I don’t want our kids to deal with,” Holland said... On Friday, the ACLU of Oklahoma sent a letter to Holland, Brunk, and James Foreman Jr., president of the Ardmore City School Board of Education, calling the incident a violation of the students’ First Amendment rights, [The New York Times](#) reported.

DIVERSITY

[A Black Colonel Takes Command of a Key Marine Corps Brigade](#) [Helene Cooper, The New York Times, 11 May 2021]

The Marine Corps on Tuesday put a Black colonel in charge of one of its key fighting brigades, the latest in a series of steps that positions the Marine, Col. Anthony Henderson, for future elevation to senior leadership positions. Colonel Henderson, whose previously announced promotion to brigadier general will take effect in July, took command of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade during a ceremony at Camp Lejeune, N.C. “If anyone has a doubt about what the group is,” he said in accepting his new command, “it is intended to be ready. It is not here as a training tool or as an exercise tool. It is a fighting force.” And it comes as the Pentagon—and particularly the Marine Corps—is grappling with issues of race and the low number of African-American Marines in top leadership positions. As a Black man with combat command experience in a service that has never in its 245-year history had a four-star officer who was not a White man, Colonel Henderson is a rarity in the Corps: an African-American with a chance of making it to the top of the service.

[Former Birmingham police chief makes history as first Black U.S. Army Reserve lieutenant general](#) [Carol Robinson, Birmingham Real-Time News (Birmingham, Ala.), 10 May 2021]

Former Birmingham Police Chief A.C. Roper will become the first African American to achieve the rank of U.S Army Reserve lieutenant general. Maj. Gen. Roper’s upcoming promotion, announced last week, will put him as deputy commander of the United States Northern Command,

United States Element, North American Aerospace Defense Command at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado. In his new role, Roper will help lead U.S. Northern Command in anticipating, preparing and responding to threats against North America and within Northern Command's assigned area of responsibility; and provide oversight of U.S. Northern Command's Defense Support to Civil Authorities. Roper served simultaneously in the military and in civilian law enforcement for more than three decades.

[GovExec Daily: Using Data for Racial Equity](#) [Adam Butler and Ross Gianfortune, *GovExec*, 10 May 2021] [PODCAST]

President Joe Biden has promised to put diversity, equity and inclusion at the forefront of his agenda. In order to do that, good, usable data will need to be used to identify and analyze racial inequities, develop solutions, and track progress. Temilola Afolabi is a Research Associate who co-leads the Open Data for Racial Equity program at the Center for Open Data Enterprise (CODE). She joined the show to discuss how the Biden administration can use data in the pursuit of equity.

[Latin America's female scientists pack a big punch despite glass ceiling](#) [Lucila Sigal, *Reuters*, 14 May 2021]

Latin America's female scientists and researchers are packing a big punch despite a hard-to-break glass ceiling for top roles in academia and business, reflecting how women are on the march in a region often seen as a bastion of macho male culture. A [report](#) by UNESCO and UN Women shows they account for 45% of female researchers in Latin America and the Caribbean, compared with around 29% globally, the highest anywhere in the world, although there are still gaps in some specialties. "Women are advancing in careers that were previously very masculine or totally male-dominated," Gloria Bonder, director of the UNESCO Regional Chair for Women, Science and Technology in Latin America, told Reuters by telephone. Latin America's women are soaring in the social and medical sciences, though they are less represented in some of the so-called STEM subjects: science, technology, engineering and mathematics, considered key areas of future development.

[To Budget for Equity, Cities First Must Define Equity](#) [Anjali Chainani, *Route Fifty*, 11 May 2021] [COMMENTARY]

Without a clear and shared definition of equity, city leaders cannot understand the underlying conditions that create existing disparities in their community, let alone make informed budget decisions that foster equity. Systemic inequities are entrenched in local governments. And the sheer pervasiveness can make it hard for city leaders to know where to start when making structural changes to how services are delivered or programs are designed. Many local leaders are now looking at their budgets—a city's most important annual statement about its values and priorities—to address long-standing issues of racial injustice. Before cities can reshape their budgets to advance racial equity, they must start by defining what equity means in their community. Only after a city has established a shared understanding of equity can it develop equity initiatives, strategies and actions that reduce disparities.

[VA Seeks 125% Increase in Diversity and Inclusion Counselors](#) [Eric Katz, GovExec, 6 May 2021]

The Veterans Affairs Department is preparing to significantly boost efforts to diversify its workforce and promises to add staff and resources to improve oversight of equity initiatives across its vast network of facilities and programs. Lawmakers, outside stakeholders and department officials all suggested at a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on Thursday that VA has a long way to go to ensure fairness within its workforce, noting the available data show inequality is still prevalent and allegations of discrimination are not promptly handled. VA is fielding about 5,700 informal equal employment opportunity complaints annually and 2,500 formal ones, while addressing just above 50% of them. Harvey Johnson, VA's deputy assistant secretary for resolution management, diversity and inclusion, said he is capped at 38 counselors across the department who assist local facilities in addressing those claims. He is hoping to grow that number to 86, some of which Congress has already budgeted.

EXTREMISM

[DHS stands up domestic terror intelligence team](#) [Betsy Woodruff Swan, Politico, 11 May 2021]

When President Joe Biden addressed Congress last month, he said White supremacist terrorism is the greatest threat to the U.S. Now, as the White House prepares to release its report on domestic terrorism, the Department of Homeland Security is also continuing to shift its focus to domestic threats. The Department of Homeland Security's intelligence arm is setting up a dedicated team to focus on domestic terrorism, two DHS officials told POLITICO. The team will have several full-time personnel. DHS is also renaming and refocusing a separate office that has drawn criticism for its prior work fighting extremism. The moves come as the department is increasing its focus on domestic terrorism and violent threats. DHS is grappling with the growing threat of domestic terrorism, particularly attacks perpetrated by White supremacists. Earlier this year, DHS sent out its first-ever National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin about domestic terrorism. But addressing the threat presents complex challenges, and groups representing American Muslims and others focused on civil rights aren't yet convinced the department will get it right.

[U.S. looking at how to weed out extremists in law enforcement](#) [Ben Fox, The Associated Press, 12 May 2021]

The Justice Department has begun an internal review to determine how to remove any extremists from within federal law enforcement following the arrest of current and former police officers for their involvement in the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, Attorney General Merrick Garland said Wednesday. Garland, in response to a question during a Senate hearing on domestic extremism, described a review that was in its early stages and is complicated by the need to avoid violating the First Amendment rights of Justice Department employees. The deputy attorney general, Lisa Monaco, "has met with the heads of all of our law enforcement agencies to determine how we can carefully vet our own employees," he told the Senate Appropriations Committee. It was a notable disclosure considering that the Justice Department is charged with enforcing federal civil rights laws and oversees the FBI, which is the lead agency in charge of investigating the growing threat posed by violent domestic extremists.

[U.S. Marine Major Christopher Warnagiris is arrested for participating in Capitol riot](#) [Dan Mangan and Amanda Macias, CNBC, 13 May 2021]

An active-duty U.S. Marine officer was arrested in Virginia on Thursday and charged with using violence against police during the Jan. 6 invasion of the U.S. Capitol by a mob of supporters of then-President Donald Trump. Major Christopher Warnagiris, who is the first active-duty member of the U.S. armed forces to be charged in connection with the riot, is accused of pushing his way past a line of police protecting the Capitol and forcing his way through a doorway in the East Rotunda of the Capitol. Warnagiris, whose 18-year tenure in the Marines includes deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, faces a maximum possible sentence of 20 years in prison if convicted of the charges, which will be prosecuted in federal court in Washington.

[SEE ALSO [1](#), [2](#)]

HUMAN RELATIONS

[DARPA Researchers Develop Sarcasm Detection Capability \(Yeah, Right\)](#) [Mila Jasper, NextGov, 10 May 2021]

If you've ever been fooled by an Onion headline on Twitter, you're not alone: Computational models aren't great at detecting sarcasm either. That's a problem in a world where the information ecosystem is becoming a contested space. But Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency researchers are getting closer to being able to understand the sentiment—including sarcasm—expressed in online messages, according to a [recent announcement](#). Sarcasm is hard for models to detect because it's usually a performance dependent on facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice. But as part of DARPA's Computational Simulation of Online Social Behavior, or [SocialSim, program](#), a University of Central Florida [team developed](#) an artificial intelligence-enabled, deep-learning model that looks at online messages like Twitter posts for words that may be signaling satire. The model then creates a classification score indicating whether the message is sarcastic.

[Mental health: Can you tell if someone is struggling?](#) [BBC News, 9 May 2021]

Lockdowns, social distancing, working from home, furloughs and job losses—the pandemic has put an extra strain on people's lives, relationships and mental wellbeing. According to a [study](#) by the Mental Health Foundation published in February, anxiety and worry because of the pandemic actually declined, as people became more hopeful about lockdowns lifting. But amongst vulnerable groups, there are still high levels of anxiety. As we emerge from restrictions and start interacting with colleagues, friends and family more than we have done over the last few months, looking out for someone's mental health is just as important as their physical health. Around one in five adults experienced some form of depression in the first few months of this year, more than twice as many as before the coronavirus pandemic struck.

[A Surprising Lesson from the Stoics](#) [Nancy Sherman, Defense One, 11 May 2021] [OPINION]

The military has long found inspiration in ancient Stoicism. George Washington, encamped at Valley Forge, allegedly staged a play about the Stoic quasi-sage Cato. Defense Secretary James Mattis told cadets at VMI that he always “kept a tattered copy” of Marcus Aurelius's Meditations in his rucksack in combat. What appeals to many in the military is the Stoic idea that you can

build grit and discipline by pushing hard against the limits of self-mastery and self-control: “The pain isn’t due to the thing itself,” says Marcus, “but to your estimate of it.” But the idea that with just the right training and athletic grit you can wage effective war against the anguish of the battlefield just doesn’t square with what we now know to be a pervasive fact of war and after war. And that is military moral injury.

[Why we gloss over great ideas—and invest in bad ones](#) [Dave Robson, *BBC News*, 4 May 2021]

In general, research shows people rarely assess the value of their own ideas accurately. This means that we often fail to see the potential in our best ideas, leading us to jettison them and waste time on less promising ventures. Fortunately, these studies also suggest some clever ways to avoid making this mistake. One of the [most insightful studies](#) comes from Professor Justin Berg at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. In a series of experiments, he asked participants to invent new products or services—such as novel forms of fitness equipment or exciting travel experiences. The participants first brainstormed a list of initial ideas, which they personally ranked in order of preference, after which they were given more time to develop their concepts. A team of independent judges then rated the quality of the final designs. Analysing the data across the group, Berg found that, on average, the participant’s first choice often failed to impress. Instead, it tended to be the participant’s second favourite idea that generated more excitement from others.

MISCELLANEOUS

[Cameroon jails transgender women for “attempted homosexuality”](#) [BBC News, 12 May 2021]

Two transgender women in Cameroon have been sentenced to five years in jail for contravening homosexuality laws. In 2016 Cameroon strengthened its anti-homosexuality laws, changing the penal code to explicitly outlaw same-sex sexual relations, our reporter says. Lawyers for Shakiro and Patricia have told me that the trans women continue to struggle in prison. Patricia says that she is threatened every day and she is scared for her life. In February alone, there were three brutal murders of LGBT Cameroonians, and at least 27 arrests. All human rights organisations associated with the arrests of Shakiro and Patricia believe that Cameroon’s laws have been abused. Especially because, they say, the charge of “attempted homosexuality” does not apply in this case, as the two trans women were not caught in any sexual situation—they were just having dinner.

[How bad is DOD’s domestic abuse problem? Unclear, thanks to data gaps, auditors say](#) [Karen Jowers, *Military Times*, 8 May 2021]

Defense officials aren’t able to get a full picture of the level of domestic abuse in the military, because they’re not meeting all the requirements of the law in reporting the incidents, according to a [new report](#) from government auditors who conducted a sweeping, 21-month review. There were more than 40,000 incidents of domestic abuse involving service members, spouses or intimate partners in fiscal years 2015 through 2019, according to an analysis of the military services’ data conducted by the GAO. Of those incidents, 74 percent were physical abuse. But those incidents represented only those that met the DOD criteria for domestic abuse. DOD hasn’t collected accurate data for all domestic abuse allegations received, including those that don’t

meet the DOD criteria for domestic abuse, as is required by law, the auditors found. And this data give DOD better visibility over actions taken by commanders to address domestic violence.

[Man Who Is Paralyzed Communicates By Imagining Handwriting](#) [Jon Hamilton, NPR, 12 May 2021]

An experimental device that turns thoughts into text has allowed a man who was left paralyzed by an accident to construct sentences swiftly on a computer screen. The man was able to type with 95% accuracy just by imagining he was handwriting letters on a sheet of paper, a team [reported Wednesday in the journal Nature](#). “What we found, surprisingly, is that [he] can type at about 90 characters per minute,” says Krishna Shenoy of Stanford University and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. The device would be most useful to someone who could neither move nor speak, says Dr. Jaimie Henderson, a neurosurgeon at Stanford and co-director, with Shenoy, of the Stanford Neural Prosthetics Translational Laboratory. “We can also envision it being used by someone who might have had a spinal cord injury who wants to use email,” Henderson says, “or, say, a computer programmer who wants to go back to work.”

[\[SEE ALSO\]](#)

[Meet America’s Newest Chess Master, 10-Year-Old Tanitoluwa Adewumi](#) [Mary Louise Kelly and Karen Zamora, NPR, 11 May 2021]

*Tanitoluwa Adewumi, a 10-year-old in New York, just became the country’s newest national chess master. At the Fairfield County Chess Club Championship tournament in Connecticut on May 1, Adewumi won all four of his matches, bumping his chess rating up to 2223 and making him the 28th youngest person to become a chess master, according to U.S. Chess. “I was very happy that I won and that I got the title,” he says, “I really love that I finally got it.” “Finally” is after about three years—the amount of time that Adewumi has been playing chess. When he started, Adewumi and his family were living in a homeless shelter in Manhattan after fleeing religious persecution by the Islamist militant group Boko Haram in their home country of Nigeria. “I say to myself that I never lose, that I only learn,” he says. “Because when you lose, you have to make a mistake to lose that game. So you learn from that mistake, and so you learn [overall]. So losing is the way of winning for yourself.” Since the last time NPR spoke with Adewumi, his family moved out of the shelter and [he’s written a book](#) about his life called *My Name Is Tani . . . and I Believe in Miracles*.*

[\[France\] A pilot recruit was blindfolded and strapped to a target as fighter jets fired on him in a brutal hazing ritual, says legal complaint](#) [Will Martin, Insider, 8 May 2021]

*A French fighter pilot has filed a legal complaint after a brutal hazing ritual in which he alleges he was kidnapped, tied up, and left on a live firing range by his colleagues in the French air force. The incident, which happened in March 2019, was first reported by the French newspaper *La Provence* on Friday. According to a report from the Agence France Presse, the recruit—who has not been named publicly—had just been posted to a base on the island of Corsica and was subjected to a form of hazing by his new colleagues. During the hazing, airmen grabbed the recruit and tied him up with adhesive tape. He was then forced into the back of a pickup truck and had a hood placed over his head, reports from both the AFP and *La Provence* said.*

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

MISCONDUCT

[Army major fights punishment for anti-transgender social media posts](#) [Davis Winkie, *Army Times*, 12 May 2021]

A prominent right-wing legal advocacy group is assisting an Army chaplain at Fort Hood, Texas, as he appeals an official reprimand he received for a social media post denigrating transgender troops. Chaplain Maj. Andrew Calvert came under command investigation in January after he commented on a news article about Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's support for President Joe Biden ending a service ban on transgender people. An Army Regulation 15-6 investigation concluded that Calvert violated Army policy on discrimination and prohibitions against online misconduct, as well as a Defense Department directive regulating political speech by active-duty troops, according to an appeal written by attorney Michael Berry of First Liberty Institute, which is backing Calvert. The Army investigator recommended Calvert receive a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand for his social media conduct, which III Corps commander Lt. Gen. Robert White signed April 22.

[Display of "thin blue line" flag violated DOD policy, Ramstein Air Base says](#) [Jennifer H. Svan, *Stars and Stripes*, 12 May 2021]

The Air Force acknowledged that the display by security forces airmen at Ramstein Air Base of a "thin blue line" flag violated Defense Department policy on what types of flags can be flown on U.S. bases. The 86th Airlift Wing posted and later removed photos on its Facebook page of airmen in uniform carrying a black-and-white American flag with a blue horizontal stripe during a 24-hour rucksack march as part of National Police Week. The photos drew immediate condemnation by some in the community who questioned the display on a U.S. military base of a flag that has become a polarizing symbol in a nation grappling with police violence and racism. The "thin blue line" flag is used to show support for law enforcement, but it's also been used by White supremacist groups and flown at far-right rallies.

RACISM

[As States Push for Police Accountability, Advocates Focus on Black Trauma](#) [Aallyah Wright, *Stateline*, 7 May 2021]

*Black Americans are killed by police at [nearly two and a half times the rate](#) of White people. Widely publicized violent acts, such as police killings of Black people and decisions not to indict the officers involved in the incidents, may harm the mental health of Black Americans, a [recent study](#) in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* found. Nearly 2,000 police overhaul and accountability bills in all 50 states and the District of Columbia have been filed this session as federal and state lawmakers face mounting pressure to respond to continued police shootings and nationwide protests. Mental health advocates and professionals say passing such laws is necessary, but they argue strongly for additional measures to address the trauma Black people face because of policing issues. Years of [research](#) have shown that violent encounters with police officers have profound effects on Black Americans' health and life expectancy. Aggressive forms of policing—such as consistent patrolling of neighborhoods, racially profiling residents and*

arresting people on suspicion of low-level infractions—long have been concentrated in African American communities.

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

[A Black Scientist Was An Early Cicada Researcher. His Work Has Been Mostly Overlooked](#)

[Nina Kravinsky, *NPR*, 11 May 2021]

*Benjamin Banneker—a free Black man born in 1731—is best known for a land survey that established the original borders of Washington, D.C. But the naturalist also broke ground in another field: cicada research. Banneker first observed the cicadas at his Maryland home as a teenager in 1740s. He spent the next 50 years documenting their unique life cycles—the bugs come out of the ground for only a few weeks every 17 years. His observations were among the earliest known to be documented. Janet Barber and her husband, Asamoah Nkwanta, researched his handwritten notes from 1800 on the insects. Barber is an independent researcher and Nkwanta is with Morgan State University in Baltimore. “He had not really had a formal education in the sciences,” Barber told *NPR*. “Yet he was just very brilliant to understand that something very different and phenomenal is going on.” But his work documenting the cicadas has been largely overlooked because of his race, say Barber and Nkwanta.*

[Colleges pushed anew for reparations for slavery, racism](#) [Philip Marcelo, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

For Brown University students, the Ivy League college’s next step in its yearslong quest to atone for its legacy of slavery is clear: Pay up. Nearly two decades after the Providence, Rhode Island, institution launched its much-lauded reckoning, undergraduate students this spring [voted overwhelmingly](#) for the university to identify the descendants of slaves that worked on campus and begin paying them reparations. At the University of Georgia, community activists want the school to contribute to Athens’ efforts to atone for an urban renewal project that destroyed a Black community in the 1960s to make way for college dorms. And at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., there’s growing dissatisfaction among some slave descendants about the Catholic institution’s [pioneering reparations efforts](#).

[A guide to combating anti-Asian racism—from relationships to the workplace](#) [Kimmy Yam, Sakshi Venkatraman and Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil, *NBC News*, 7 May 2021]

*As anti-Asian violence and hate crimes rise, community, mental health and family experts say it’s incumbent on everyone to start talking about anti-Asian racism and the ways to combat it. Exclusion, racist jokes and subtle discrimination can be a difficult topic to tackle among friends, romantic partners, children and co-workers, but these can snowball into bigger issues if they go unchecked. *NBC Asian America* put together a guide of expert advice to navigate these conversations in several areas of life, for non-Asians looking for ways to be better allies and for Asian Americans looking to protect themselves and deconstruct stereotypes.*

[Maryland governor pardons 34 victims of racial lynching](#) [Brian White, *The Associated Press*, 8 May 2021]

Maryland’s governor on Saturday posthumously pardoned 34 victims of racial lynching in the state dating between 1854 and 1933, saying they were denied legal due process against the

allegations they faced. It was a first-of-its-kind pardon by a governor of a U.S. state. Gov. Larry Hogan signed the order at an event honoring Howard Cooper, a 15-year-old who was dragged from a jailhouse and hanged from a tree by a mob of White men in 1885 before his attorneys could file an appeal of a rape conviction that an all-White jury reached within minutes. House Speaker Adrienne Jones, the state's first Black and first female House speaker, described it as an important day when the governor, Attorney General Brian Frosh and Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski—all White men—came together to “say that this was wrong ... in order to move forward into the next chapter.” “Memorializing the site where Howard Cooper was lynched gives us the opportunity to courageously confront the injustices of our past,” Jones said.

[Pennsylvania voters to decide racial equity amendment](#) [Mark Scoloro, *The Associated Press*, 14 May 2021]

Protests over George Floyd's killing at the hands of Minneapolis police were raging across the country last June when a Democratic lawmaker took to the floor of the Pennsylvania Senate to argue for greater protections against racial discrimination. Next week, nearly a year after Floyd's death, voters will decide whether to make those protections explicit in the state constitution. It's believed to be the first time since last summer's protests that voters will decide a racial equity question on a statewide ballot. Its effects, if approved by voters, are uncertain, but civil rights groups say it potentially could lead to policy changes in housing, policing, education and other areas. State Sen. Vince Hughes said court cases and judicial decisions ultimately will determine the practical effect of the proposal he sponsored, but he sees the amendment as a step in the right direction. “Any extra protection that we can provide around the issue of race and ethnicity, I think we need to be in the business of providing,” said Hughes, a member of the Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus.

[Twin MDs battle entrenched racism in the medical world](#) [Lindsay Tanner, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

The inseparable sisters always stood out—identical twins from Twinsburg Ohio, whip-smart students from the side of town with unpaved streets and no sidewalks, excluded from the gifted track because they were Black. Their friends were White and a classmate's comment still stings: “I don't even think of you as Black.” I said, “Thank you.” “And I felt pride,” Brittani James recalls, shuddering. “I believed we were special. I believed other people in our neighborhood weren't as good as us,” she said. The twins were indeed special—they won free rides to the Ivy League, earned medical degrees at prestigious universities, and have thrived in a profession where they are vastly outnumbered by virtue of their skin color. But their mission now is to dismantle the entrenched bigotry behind that classmate's backhanded remark. At 33, James and her twin, Brandi Jackson, have taken on the medical establishment in pioneering work to eliminate racism in medicine.

[U.S. doctors group issues anti-racism plan for itself, field](#) [Lindsay Tanner, *The Associated Press*, 11 May 2021]

The nation's largest doctors group Tuesday released a comprehensive plan aimed at dismantling structural racism inside its own ranks and within the U.S. medical establishment. The [American Medical Association's plan](#) has been in the works for more than a year. The group's leaders said

health inequities highlighted by the pandemic, ongoing police brutality and recent race-based crimes have given the effort a sense of urgency. U.S. physicians are overwhelmingly White and AMA membership tends to reflect that. Most of the group's 21 trustees are White. With roughly 270,000 members, the group represents a little more than a quarter of U.S. doctors. The AMA plan calls for more than diversifying its staff and adding members who are from Black, Hispanic, Indigenous and LGBTQ communities. It aims to embed anti-racist activities and education at every level of the organization. "We're going to be holding ourselves accountable," said Dr. Aletha Maybank, AMA's chief health equity officer.

RELIGION

[German priests defy Vatican to bless gay couples](#) [BBC News, 10 May 2021]

Priests in around 100 Catholic churches in Germany are offering blessings to same-sex couples from Monday. The [Love Wins movement](#) emerged after the Catholic Church said in March that God "cannot bless sin". "Couples who take part should receive the blessing that God wants to give them—without any secrecy," the group wrote earlier. Pope Francis has previously said he believes same-sex couples should be allowed to have "civil unions". Last year, he told a documentary that these couples "have a right to be in a family". However, he has also approved the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's stance that the Catholic Church does not have the power to bless same-sex unions. In the Catholic Church, a blessing is given by a priest or other minister in the name of the Church. Thousands of German priests and church employees have also signed a petition calling on the Church to extend blessings to same-sex couples, while some parishes have also displayed rainbow flags outside churches.

[New survey of U.S. Jews reveals worries, strengths, divisions](#) [David Crary, *The Associated Press*, 11 May 2021]

A comprehensive new survey of Jewish Americans finds them increasingly worried about antisemitism, proud of their cultural heritage and sharply divided about the importance of religious observance in their lives. The [survey](#), released Tuesday by the Pew Research Center, estimated the total Jewish population in the country at 7.5 million—about 2.3% of the national population. Compared with Americans overall, Jewish Americans, on average, are older, have higher levels of education and income and are more geographically concentrated in the Northeast, according to Pew. Yet even as the Jewish population is thriving in many ways, concerns about antisemitism rose amid the deadly attacks in 2018 and 2019 on the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh; the Chabad of Poway synagogue in Poway, California; and a kosher grocery store in Jersey City, New Jersey.

[Virus, Mideast turmoil stifle Eid al-Fitr celebrations](#) [Ninieq Karmini, *The Associated Press*, 13 May 2021]

Muslims celebrated Eid al-Fitr in a subdued mood for a second year Thursday as the COVID-19 pandemic again forced mosque closings and family separations on the holiday marking the end of Ramadan. In the embattled Gaza Strip, the call to prayer echoed over pulverized buildings and heaps of rubble as Israeli warplanes continued to pound the territory in the worst outbreak of violence since the 2014 war. Hamas, the Islamic militant group ruling Gaza, urged the faithful to

mark communal prayers inside their homes or the nearest mosques and avoid being out in the open. “It is all airstrikes, destruction and devastation,” said Hassan Abu Shaaban, who tried to lighten the mood by passing out chocolates to passersby.

[SEE ALSO [1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

SEXISM

[Apple parts ways with newly hired ex-Facebook employee after workers cite “misogynistic” writing](#) [Rachel Metz and Sara O’Brien, *CNN Business*, 13 May 2021]

*Apple parted ways with a new employee this week after thousands of workers petitioned the company to investigate how it hired the man, who had previously published an autobiography they said contains misogynistic statements. Antonio García Martínez, formerly a product manager for ad targeting at Facebook as well as the author of the 2016 autobiography “Chaos Monkeys: Obscene Fortune and Random Failure in Silicon Valley,” joined Apple’s ads team in April, according to his LinkedIn profile. To illustrate their point, the letter—which was first reported on by tech news site The Verge on Wednesday after it accumulated more than 2,000 employees’ signatures—included excerpts from his writing. “Most women in the Bay Area are soft and weak, cosseted and naive despite their claims of worldliness, and generally full of s**t,” read a sentence in one passage from “Chaos Monkeys.” It continued, “They have their self-regarding entitlement feminism, and ceaselessly vaunt their independence, but the reality is, come the epidemic plague or foreign invasion, they’d become precisely the sort of useless baggage you’d trade for a box of shotgun shells or a jerry can of diesel.”*

[Army Secretary Nominee Worries the ACFT Will Push Too Many Women Out](#) [Steve Beynon, *Military.com*, 13 May 2021]

President Joe Biden’s nominee to be the next secretary of the Army, Christine Wormuth, told senators at her confirmation hearing Thursday she is concerned about the force’s new fitness test and whether it will push a significant number of women out of the service. “I have concerns on the implications of the test for our ability to continue to retain women,” said Wormuth, who would be the first woman to serve in the role if confirmed. She said the Army needs a good measure of fitness, but strict fitness standards across the board could shrink the service’s talent pool for critical jobs that do not demand athletic ability, such as cyberwarfare roles. “I do think it’s important for the Army to have a fitness test that tests the kinds of combat skills soldiers will need to have and to prevent injuries,” she told lawmakers. “But we want to make sure we aren’t incorrectly penalizing anyone. The plank is a good example of adapting.” The service added the option of performing a plank in lieu of leg tucks, which has slightly increased the pass rate for women, according to preliminary Army data.

[An Army trailblazer set her sights on a new target. The reaction highlights a deep rift.](#) [Dan Lamothe, *The Washington Post*, 8 May 2021]

Capt. Kristen Griest, who made history in 2015 as one of the first two women to graduate the Army’s famously difficult Ranger School, had avoided the media spotlight for years. But she decided to take a public stand when Army officials floated a plan to consider the test scores of men and women separately amid complaints about a gender gap. Women were disproportionately

failing events requiring significant upper-body strength, causing an outcry among lawmakers. To Griest, who also became the Army's first female infantry officer in 2016, the adjustment is regrettable. "I'm here saying, 'Women can do more than we think.' I have learned this," she said in an interview, explaining her thinking. "Your gender is not as much of a limitation as you think it is." Griest, 32, has received a frosty response from some female service members and veterans, and was accused of "internalized misogyny." Others have taken her side, or said that they understand her motivation.

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

[Nearly Half of Female Soldiers Still Failing New Army Fitness Test, While Males Pass Easily](#)

[Steve Beynon, *Military.com*, 10 May 2021]

More than seven months after the official launch of the Army Combat Fitness Test, or ACFT, nearly half of female soldiers are still falling short, with enlisted women struggling the most, Military.com has learned. The data again raises questions about whether the Army's attempt to create a fitter force is creating more barriers to success for women. Internal Army figures from April show 44% of women failed the ACFT, compared to 7% of men since Oct. 1. "Female soldiers continue to lag male soldier scores in all events," according to a United States Army Forces Command briefing obtained by Military.com. The Army remains in a beta phase for the ACFT. Until March 2022, scores on the test will not affect soldiers' careers; officials have said they may implement additional changes before then, including gender-specific standards.

["Old school rant" bashing ponytails gets rejected by senior enlisted soldier's command](#) [Davis Winkie, *Army Times*, 11 May 2021]

Last week, the Army authorized ponytails and braids for female soldiers in all uniforms. While many troops celebrated the change, there has been backlash from some on social media. "How about females maintain the SAME standard as men instead of loosening the standards for one gender?" said one Army Times Facebook commenter. Hundreds more sounded off, wanting beards. But at least one soldier, a senior noncommissioned officer, is facing a commander's inquiry after implying in a Facebook post over the weekend that following the new regulation could be detrimental to female soldiers' career prospects. Master Sgt. Don Blackall prefaced his Facebook post as an "old school rant, subject: ponytails." "So yes, the regulation now allows females to wear ponytails in all uniforms. No one can stop a female from doing so," Blackall said. "However...females who have their hair in a bun will be viewed more favorable than those who choose the ponytail." Blackall then identified himself as a judge advocate general senior enlisted advisor for SETAF-AF headquarters, and as "a permanent member on my battalion's monthly promotion boards." "My opinion matters whether you like it or not," said Blackall at the end of his post.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT

[Army Brass Noncommittal on Push to Remove COs from Sexual Assault Prosecution Decisions](#)

[Patricia Kime, *Military.com*, 11 May 2021]

The Army's top uniformed and civilian leaders said Monday they are remaining "open-minded" while weighing a proposal that commanders be removed from the process of deciding whether to

prosecute sexual assaults. Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville and Acting Secretary John Whitley said the service is examining the recommendations of an independent review panel as well as the data and analysis behind the decision before giving Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin their opinion. The services have opposed this proposal since it was first introduced in Congress in 2013, arguing that it would undermine good order and discipline and send a message that commanders cannot be trusted to make difficult decisions.

[Drill sergeant married trainee, was reprimanded and is now out of the Army](#) [Davis Winkie, *Army Times*, 10 May 2021]

A drill sergeant at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, who married one of his former trainees and had inappropriate relationships with two other trainees, is no longer in the Army after being punished late last year, post officials confirmed. The acknowledgment comes as the Army continues an investigation into alleged sexual assault by instructors against a trainee at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. An undisclosed number of cadre members were suspended in early April, and specialized Army CID agents were dispatched to Fort Sill to support the ongoing probe. In the past two years, the Army has charged at least 18 soldiers under a new law designed to protect trainees, cadets and applicants from sexual abuse by training instructors. But the problem is persistent. Fort Jackson spokesperson Leslie Sully confirmed a drill sergeant at the post was handed down a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand in October 2020, but declined to disclose the identity of the soldier. Sully also declined to share the nature and character of the soldier's discharge.

[Marine veteran sentenced to 30 years for drugging, prostituting hundreds of women near Camp Lejeune](#) [Todd South, *Marine Corps Times*, 14 May 2021]

A former Marine convicted of drugging and trafficking hundreds of women over two decades near Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, has been sentenced to 30 years in prison for his crimes. Jesse Gabriel Marks, 38, was arrested on a drug bust involving methamphetamine in 2019 by Onslow County, North Carolina Sheriff's deputies, according to court records. He "prostituted hundreds of women, including at least one minor, over nearly two decades," according to a U.S. Attorney's Office statement. "He used drugs, including heroin and methamphetamine, to keep them dependent on and prostituting for him." Marks would physically and emotionally abuse many of his victims and also gave women "drug cocktails" without their knowledge, the statement said. And "once they were unconscious or nearly unconscious, sexually assaulted them." "He recorded many of those sexual assaults on video," according to the statement. The scale of the operation was "staggering," officials said. Victim estimates range between 200 and 600 in the past two decades.

[Senator "baffled" by DOD testimony on sexual assault incident visibility at unit level](#) [Karen Jowers, *Military Times*, 13 May 2021]

A senator who has been pushing defense officials for years to root out sexual assault and harassment in the ranks said she was "baffled" and "exasperated" by a defense official's testimony that DOD doesn't have visibility over what's happening on the ground at units and installations with these issues. Isn't that the unit commander's job?" asked Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., during a hearing of the personnel panel of the Senate Armed Services Committee May 12. Gillibrand said the military has more data about these incidents than any

district attorney's office has, because the services conduct annual surveys, and have reporting requirements. "This is supposed to be something the command has taken seriously, with zero tolerance for the last decade," she said. "It's not lack of visibility. It's not lack of information," she said. "It's lack of will."

[This Army unit will now immediately start separating soldiers found guilty of assault or harassment](#) [Haley Britzky, *Task & Purpose*, 10 May 2021]

The 18th Airborne Corps has directed that anyone found guilty of sexual assault or harassment will immediately begin the process for administrative separation, marking a significant departure from how assault and harassment are handled elsewhere in the Army. The changes are a direct result of a series of pitches soldiers made during the corps' Dragon's Lair, a Shark Tank-esque challenge open to the roughly 90,000 service members in the corps, and thousands more family members and Army civilians. The changes went into effect on May 1 and have been recommended to Army leadership to be made into service-wide policies. One of the biggest changes is that administrative separation will be initiated against an enlisted soldier or officer found guilty of sexual assault by civilian court, by nonjudicial punishment under article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or at a court-martial where a punitive discharge isn't determined. In addition to the changes that went into effect last week, the corps has also awarded a contract to start building out SHARP virtual reality training—another one of the ideas pitched in February, from Staff Sgt. Shameka Dudley.

[University of Michigan officials didn't act on reports of sexual misconduct against former university physician for decades, report says](#) [Alec Snyder, *CNN*, 12 May 2021]

An investigation that began in March 2020 into Dr. Robert Anderson, a former University of Michigan physician, details decades' worth of allegations that Anderson sexually assaulted and abused at least several hundred patients and that the university failed to act on reports it received about his conduct. The investigation, completed by Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP—better known as WilmerHale—released its findings in a [240-page report](#) on Tuesday after having interviewed hundreds of former patients, as well as "approximately 200 current and former University employees, including administrators, faculty members, and coaches, as well as additional (University Health Services), Athletic Department, and Michigan Medicine personnel," the report said. The University of Michigan commissioned and paid for WilmerHale's services, which had already been retained for an unrelated investigation.

[VA to create specialists to handle military sexual trauma claims](#) [Nikki Wentling, *Stars and Stripes*, 12 May 2021]

The Department of Veterans Affairs will designate specialized offices to handle veterans' claims of military sexual trauma in an effort to reduce the rate that the claims are denied, the agency announced Wednesday. Government watchdogs have recently criticized the agency's handling of claims for military sexual trauma. The VA Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office have said that the claims are especially complex and suggested they be handled by processors who receive special training. The VA began the process May 3 of sending all the claims to five offices across the U.S. where processors are undergoing more training. Thomas Murphy, acting undersecretary for benefits at the VA, said the change would be complete

before Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year. He made the announcement Wednesday at a hearing of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

[Women recount claims of sexual harassment by veterans charity leader](#) [Barbara Behrendt, *The Tampa Bay Times*, (St. Petersburg, Fla.), 12 May 2021]

A Pasco County nonprofit created to help veterans deal with trauma has been rocked by accusations that its founder sexually harassed and abused women who worked there. The accusations against Brian James Anderson, 39, a former Green Beret, came to light after a separate incident in October, when a massage therapist filed a police report against him. Anderson was charged March 11 by the state attorney with misdemeanor battery in that case. He has pleaded not guilty. Now, three other women say that while they worked at Veterans Alternative in its early years, Anderson made unwanted physical contact and sexual advances. Anderson co-founded the nonprofit in 2014. The case has roiled the small nonprofit, which provides therapy services to area veterans. Anderson has been placed on administrative leave, for a second time, related to the allegations.

[\[REPRINT\]](#)

SUICIDE

[Air Force Says Suicide Rates are Dropping in 2021 After Two Years of Increases](#) [Brian W. Everstine, *Air Force Magazine*, 13 May 2021]

Suicide rates in the Air Force are starting to drop after back-to-back years of exceptionally high rates as the department enacts new policies to address the problem. There were more than 100 suicides in the Air Force in both 2019 and 2020, causing leaders to order a "tactical pause" to discuss the issue and study new policies aimed at curbing the problem. Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, the deputy chief of staff for manpower, personnel, and services, told the Senate Armed Services personnel subcommittee May 12 that though it is only five months into the year, there has been some progress. The Air Force for the first time offered training for family members, including ways for loved ones to identify warning signs "and act as another sensor in our detection and prevention methods," he said. So far, more than 4,785 family members have taken the training.

[His Son Died by Suicide. So This City Employee Made Suicide Prevention His Job](#) [Kate Elizabeth Queram, *Route Fifty*, 11 May 2021]

Last week, seated before the Colorado Senate Education Committee, Rick Padilla prepared, once again, to tell the story of the worst day of his life. "I represent our family, and our son, Jack," he told legislators at a hearing on Thursday. "Jack was a freshman at Cherry Creek High School who died by suicide two years ago." Padilla, an administrator with the city of Denver, was there to testify in support of a proposal that would require the state Department of Education to consult stakeholders, including parents of bullied students, during a planned update of its bullying prevention plan. Should it pass, the bill, approved 6-0 by the education committee, would be known as Jack and Cait's Law, in honor of Padilla's son and Cait Haynes, another Colorado teen who died by suicide. Telling Jack's story is never easy, but there is a purpose to it, Padilla said. Nationally, suicide is the [second-leading cause of death for teens](#) between the ages of 15 and 19; in Colorado, the rate of suicide among teens in that age group [has doubled](#) since 2010.

VETERANS

[A Marine special operator's fragmented legacy: Blast, impact, trauma, and everything that comes after](#) [Worth Parker and Dr. Rachel Lance, *Task & Purpose*, 7 May 2021] [OPINION]

TBI is a condition as misunderstood by its victims as anyone. When related to the brain, the word trauma may give rise to concerns of mental illness. Especially in military culture, which values stoicism and stability, such concerns make service members loathe to report anything that may affect their duty status. Thus, those suffering symptoms that accompany TBI are often reluctant to acknowledge the common symptomology caused by the very service they seek to continue: headache, confusion, amnesia surrounding the time of the event, short-term memory problems, difficulty concentrating, mood alteration, difficulty sleeping, and anxiety. The possibility of TBI in my own brain was identified in a far less dramatic fashion. My brain scans appeared healthy most of the time during testing at my command, as displayed in green. But a portion of my brain was colored red and orange. Reviewing those results, a cognitive psychologist asked if it was possible I'd suffered exposure to blast injuries in the area behind my left ear. I laughingly asked: "Do about thirty-five different incidents of plastic explosive detonating within thirty feet of my head count?"