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THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 97 - NUMBER 45 DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2018 TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 50 CENTS

Republican senator won't discuss 'public hanging' remark



One of the many participants in the PhoenixFest Parade. The parade and street fair was held between Phoenix Square and Phoenix Crossing Shopping Centers. See page 9.

Democrats promise congressional action on gun control

By MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Newly ascendant Democrats are promising congressional action on gun control amid a rash of mass shootings, including a late-night assault at a California bar that killed 12 people. Measures including expanded background checks and a ban on assault-style weapons are likely to reach the House floor when Democrats retake control after eight years of Republican rule.

"The American people deserve real action to end the daily epidemic of gun violence that is stealing the lives of our children on campuses, in places of worship and on our streets," said Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, the Democratic leader who is running for a second stint as House speaker.

Pelosi vowed to push for a range of actions to stem gun violence, including restrictions on high-capacity magazines and a measure allowing temporary removal of guns from people deemed an imminent risk to themselves or others.

The measures could win approval in the Democratic-controlled House next year but will face opposition from the Republican-controlled Senate and the White House, where President Donald Trump has promised to "protect the Second Amendment."

Still, gun control advocates believe they have the political momentum to make guns a central issue next year.

The political calculus on guns is changing, said Democratic Rep. Ted Deutch, whose Florida district includes the Parkland high school where 17 people were killed in February.

"We saw it start on Tuesday (Nov. 6) and we're going to see it accelerate in January," he said.

Gun control was a major issue even before the most recent shootings. Lawmakers debated action following the Parkland attack and a 2017 shooting in Las Vegas that left 58 dead, and ultimately took modest steps to boost school safety funds and improve compliance with the federal background check system for gun purchases.

The Democrats' new majority includes dozens of candidates who support gun control, including Lucy McBath in Georgia, whose 17-year-old son was fatally shot in 2012 and who made gun violence the centerpiece of her campaign.

At least 17 newly elected House Democrats back stricter gun laws, including Jennifer Wexton, Abigail Spanberger and Elaine Luria in Virginia, who defeated incumbents backed by the National Rifle Association. In Colorado, Democrat Jason Crow beat GOP Rep. Mike Coffman, who received an A rating from the NRA and more than \$37,000 in campaign contributions from the group.

"I do think there's new energy" on gun issues, even before the California assault late Wednesday night and an Oct. 27 shooting that killed 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue, said Kris Brown, co-president of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence.

"Our base is worked up, and people are reacting in a positive way at the ballot box," said Brown, who campaigned with the three Virginia Democrats in the final week alongside a stream of volunteers. "A large number of folks showed up and knocked on doors and said they finally have a candidate who will do something about gun violence," she said.

Wexton, Spanberger and Luria all made gun violence a central issue in their campaigns - disproving the notion that gun control is a "third rail" of politics that Democrats should not talk about, Brown said. "We're finding candidates who aren't afraid to talk about this issue," she said.

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By Emily Wagster Pettus
JACKSON, Miss. (AP) - A white Republican U.S. senator in Mississippi, a state with a notorious history for lynchings, says she will not answer questions about a video that shows her at a campaign event praising a cattle rancher by saying she would attend a "public hanging" if he invited her to one.

Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith appeared with Gov. Phil Bryant on Nov. 12 at a news conference at the Mississippi Republican Party headquarters, where she accepted an endorsement from the National Right to Life Committee.

Reporters asked Hyde-Smith repeatedly about the hanging comment, which grabbed attention Nov. 11 when the publisher of a liberal-leaning news site published it on social media.

"I put out a statement yesterday, and that's all I'm going to say about it," Hyde-Smith said.

In the brief video, shot Nov. 2 in Tupelo, Hyde-Smith says after a man introduces her to a small crowd: "If he invited me to a public hanging, I'd be on the front row."

Hyde-Smith faces a black Democratic challenger, former congressman and former U.S. agriculture secretary Mike Espy, in a Nov. 27 runoff. She said Nov. 11 that the remark was "an exaggerated expression of regard" for a friend who invited her to speak, and "any attempt to turn this into a negative connotation is ridiculous."

Mississippi has a bitter history of racially motivated lynchings of black people. The NAACP website says that between 1882 and 1968, there were 4,743 lynchings in the United States, and nearly 73 percent of the victims were black. It says Mississippi had 581 during that time, the most of any state.

"Cindy Hyde-Smith's comments are reprehensible," Espy campaign spokesman Danny Blanton said in a statement Nov. 11. "They have no place in our political discourse, in Mississippi, or our country. We need leaders, not dividers, and her words show that she lacks the understanding and judgment to represent the people of our state."

Bryant appointed Hyde-Smith to temporarily succeed Republican Sen. Thad Cochran, who retired amid health concerns in April. She will serve until the special election is resolved.

Bryant stood with Hyde-Smith at the news conference Nov. 12.

"All of us in public life have said things on occasion that could have been phrased better," Bryant said. "When you make as many speeches as we do in public life, that does occur. But I know this woman and I know her heart. I knew it when I appointed her. I know it now. She meant no offense by that statement. There was nothing in her heart of ill will."

Hyde-Smith and Espy each received about 41 percent of the vote in a four-person race Nov. 6 to advance to the runoff. The winner gets the final two years of Cochran's term.

Espy in 1986 became the first African-American since Reconstruction to win a U.S. House seat in Mississippi, and if he defeats Hyde-Smith, he would be the first African-American since Reconstruc

tion to represent the state in the U.S. Senate.

Hyde-Smith, who is endorsed by President Donald Trump, is the first woman to represent Mississippi in either chamber of Congress, and after being appointed is trying to become the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate from the state.

Lamar White Jr., publisher of a Louisiana news site called The Bayou Brief, posted the

video Nov. 11 on social media. White told The Associated Press he received the video late (Nov. 10) Saturday from "a very reliable, trusted source," but he would not reveal the person's name. He said that source received it from the person who shot the video. White said he believes he received the video because he has been writing about racism in the (Continued On Page 14)



SEN. CINDY HYDE-SMITH

Pelosi unveils plans to establish new House diversity office

By Lisa Mascaro
WASHINGTON (AP) - Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi wants to establish a House diversity office to recruit and retain employees from different backgrounds to Capitol Hill as one of the first acts of the new Congress, according to a letter obtained Nov. 8 by The Associated Press.

Pelosi told colleagues in the letter that Democrats "take great pride" in having a House majority that she says will be more than 60 percent women, minorities and LGBTQ representatives.

"We know that the diversity in our ranks is a strength and a reflection of the American people," she wrote.

The leader, who is shoring up support to win a race for House speaker, is tapping into an issue that has been a priority for the Congressional Black Caucus and other Democrats and that reflects the results of the midterm election that swept more female and minority representatives into office.

The House Diversity Initiative calls for creating a permanent office in the House with sufficient staff to help recruit and retain diverse employees to work in Congress, said a Pelosi aide.

The office would be led by human resource and diversity professionals and would partner with outside institutions to attract talent and provide training to help existing employees advance their careers.

The top Democrat on the Rules Committee, Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, has proposed the initiative as part of the package of rules for the chamber that will be voted on during the opening day of the new Congress in January, Pelosi said.

"Embracing the value of diversity within our offices, especially in senior positions, will strengthen our ability to represent our constituents and craft solutions that benefit all Americans," Pelosi wrote.

She called members of the "tri-caucus" - the Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus - "a vital resource."

Democrats had launched a similar effort when they last held the majority in 2010, but it languished after Republicans took control of the House. Democrats still run a similar program within their own caucus. But this move would make it a permanent office of the House.