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# The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDED

VOLUME 98 - NUMBER 24

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2019

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PRICE 50 CENTS

## N Carolina man pleads guilty to killing 3 Muslim students

By Emery P. Dalesio

(AP) - Moments after a North Carolina man pleaded guilty to gunning down three Muslim university students, a prosecutor played a cellphone video of the slayings in the courtroom Wednesday, June 12, as one of the victims' relatives fainted, others wept openly and a man hurled an expletive at the confessed killer.

Craig Stephen Hicks, 50, entered the plea to three counts of first-degree murder in a packed Durham courtroom. It came more than four years after the February 2015 slayings and two months after incoming District Attorney Satana Deberry dropped plans to seek the death penalty in hopes of concluding a case that she said had languished too long.

"I've wanted to plead guilty since day one," Hicks told Superior Court Judge Orlando Hudson. The judge said Hicks had agreed as part of his plea to accept three consecutive life sentences without parole and 64 to 89 months for the crime of discharging a gun into a building.

Police say Hicks burst into a condo in Chapel Hill owned by 23-year-old Deah Barakat and fatally shot Barakat, his wife, Yusor Abu-Salha, 21; and her 19-year-old sister Razan Abu-Salha.

At the time of the shootings, Chapel Hill police said Hicks claimed he was provoked by competition over parking spaces at the condo complex. Relatives of the victims said their family members were targeted because they were Muslim, and they asked federal authorities to pursue hate-crime charges. Authorities later indicated they did not have sufficient evidence to successfully prosecute Hicks on those charges.

Moments after Hicks' entered his plea, Assistant District Attorney Kendra Montgomery-Blinn played a cellphone video of the slayings as the victims' parents and siblings watched from the front row.

Women wept openly and a young man hurled an expletive at Hicks after watching the video, shown on a large pull-down screen and on two flat-screen televisions that were used to give people in the courtroom a better view. The prosecutor also showed a video of Hicks' confession and a series of still photos portraying happy moments in the victims' lives. Barakat's older sister, Dr. Suzanne Barakat, fainted while watching the video. She later appeared at a news conference with other family members, and an attorney said she was OK.

Montgomery-Blinn said Deah Barakat had turned on his phone's video to capture an exchange with Hicks, who she said was often seething during his previous encounters with the victims.

The video shows Hicks complaining that Barakat and the Abu-Salha sisters are using three parking spaces. When Barakat responds that they're not taking any more spaces than condo rules allow, Hicks pulls a gun from his holster and fires several times.

The phone drops to the floor inside the front door, the sounds of women screaming can be heard, and then several more shots are heard.

"In 36 seconds, Mr. Hicks executed three people," Montgomery-Blinn said.

Barakat was shot several times as he stood in his doorway, autopsy results showed. His wife and her sister were shot in the head at close range inside the condo.

Barakat, a dental student at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and Yusor Abu-Salha had been married for less than two months, and she had just been accepted to the dental school. Razan had just made the dean's list in her first semester at North Carolina State University. All three were making plans to visit Turkey during their coming summer break to volunteer in a dental clinic at a camp for Syrian war refugees.

The victims' families and Muslim advocacy groups had asked federal authorities to pursue hate-crimes charges against Hicks. Joe Cheshire, a prominent defense attorney who has been working with the victims' families and guiding them through the legal process over the past four years, said at a news conference after the plea hearing that authorities could not satisfy themselves that Hicks' actions met all the required conditions for bringing a successful hate crime prosecution. He said they couldn't discount Hicks' initial explanation that the violence was provoked by a parking space dispute.

Cheshire said the families were not happy with the decision. "It hurt a lot of feelings and it added to the false narrative," he said. "Our government failed this family and our multicultural democracy."

During the hearing, Hicks listened attentively as Montgomery-Blinn described him as a man who was watching the American Dream slip away while the victims were pursuing it. She said Hicks' third marriage was disintegrating and he'd recently quit his job in anger after workers described him as constantly playing computer sniper games.

"The defendant was an angry and bitter man," Montgomery-Blinn said.

## Street outside NASA's DC office re-named for 'Hidden Figures'

WASHINGTON (AP) - The street outside of NASA's headquarters has been renamed "Hidden Figures Way" to honor the African American women who served as "human computers" in the effort to send humans to the moon.

News outlets report dignitaries gathered Wednesday, June 12 in Washington, D.C., to unveil the new street sign, including district officials, NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and others.

"Hidden Figures" author Margot Lee Shetterly and the families of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan and Mary Jackson also attended. Shetterly's 2016 book details the women's struggles as they crunched numbers at the NASA Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, in the pre-computer age. Johnson is now 100 years old and is the last of the three women still living.

Cruz sponsored the Hidden Figures Way Designation Act.



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER - Arnold Dennis, center, is presented with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Durham Business & professional Chain, from Larry Hester, chairman of the Board and Mrs. Denise Hester, chair Communications Committee. See story on page 6.

## Mnuchin says 2020 deadline for Tubman \$20 bill not possible

By Martin Crutsinger

WASHINGTON (AP) - Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin on Friday called "completely erroneous" a published report that an initial 2020 deadline for completing the design of a \$20 bill featuring Harriett Tubman could have been met.

Mnuchin told a congressional committee last month that the redesign of the \$20 bill featuring Tubman, a 19th century abolitionist leader, had to be delayed.

But The New York Times on Friday published an image of a \$20 bill featuring Tubman which it said it had obtained from a former Treasury Department official. The image depicts the bill featuring Tubman in a dark coat with a wide collar and a white scarf.

The newspaper said the design process was far enough along that the Trump administration likely could have met the original 2020 deadline.

Mnuchin and officials at the department's Bureau of Engraving and Printing rejected this assertion.

"As secretary, my first responsibility is to ensure all security and anti-counterfeiting measures are properly taken in accordance with BEP's mandates," Mnuchin said in a statement. "The suggestion that this process is being stalled is completely erroneous."

Bureau of Engraving and Printing Director Len Olijar said that the government had not "scrapped" any earlier design and that all options remained on the table.

He said the design published by the newspaper was not a new \$20 note because it lacked the new security features that the government plans to include.

"There is nothing about that illustration that even begins to meet technical requirements for the next family of notes," Olijar said in his statement.

He said the bureau's plan was always been to redesign the \$10 and \$50 bills first. In testimony last month before a House committee, Mnuchin had said that officials believe it is important for security reasons to redesign the \$10 and \$50 bills first.

He said the redesigned \$20 bill will now not come out until 2028, with decisions on the final design including who will be featured on the bill not being announced until 2026.

Two Democrat senators said they were not satisfied with the explanations being given by the Trump administration. During the 2016 campaign, Trump criticized the Obama administration's decision to put Tubman on the \$20, calling it an act of "pure political correctness" and saying he wanted to see the nation's seventh president, Andrew Jackson, a Trump hero, remain on the \$20.

The announcement to replace Jackson with Tubman, famous for her efforts to spirit slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad, was made by Obama Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew, who said the redesign should be completed in time to coincide with the 100th anniversary in 2020 of the passage of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote.

Two Democratic senators on Friday said they were not satisfied with the explanation Mnuchin has given for missing the 2020 deadline.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H. and the sponsor of legislation to put Tubman on the \$20 bill, said "the Trump administration has no excuses left for its needless delay of the redesign of the \$20 bill."

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, said, "Rather than technical delays, it appears the administration simply does not want to see an African-American woman placed on our currency. Congress needs answers about how far along the redesign was before Secretary Mnuchin blocked it."

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