

The Washington Post

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Democracy Dies in Darkness

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2021 • \$2

In Georgia, waiting for Biden to deliver

Black voters give voice to disappointment behind president's drop in polls

BY CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR.

ATLANTA — W. Mondale Robinson spent a large chunk of last fall in clubs and bars and concert venues in Georgia, trying to convince disenchanted Black men that casting a ballot — in the 2020 general election, then the Georgia runoff for the U.S. Senate — could finally mean real change in their communities.

But Robinson, founder of the Black Male Voter Project, thinks the case would be a lot harder to make now. He remembers the exact moment his optimism that President Biden would be different began to fade: when Democrats in May said they were willing to significantly weaken a policing-reform bill to get Republican support.

More disappointments followed. Robinson was dismayed that Biden did not push for changes to the filibuster to enact a \$15 minimum wage. He was upset that the president did not try to halt a raft of voting restrictions passed by Georgia's GOP-led legislature.

"I think the frustration is at an all-time high, and Biden can't go to Georgia or any other Black state in the South and say, 'This is what we delivered in 2021,'" said Robinson, whose group believes it reached 1.2 million Black men in Georgia. "Black men are pissed off about the nothingness that has happened. . . . Does it make the work harder? It makes the work

SEE GEORGIA ON A4



Tamaki Caldwell, 53, waits at Carolina Blood and Cancer Care in Lancaster, S.C., where she has been undergoing treatment for ovarian cancer. Caldwell's doctor, oncologist Kashyap Patel, recently shared test results that indicated her cancer is in remission.

Covid delays: A crisis in cancer care

Doctors are seeing advanced cases, especially among people of color, as office visits resume

BY LAURIE MCGINLEY

LANCASTER, S.C. — Oncologist Kashyap Patel brandishes test results he's eager to share with his patient, Tamaki Caldwell, showing that her advanced ovarian cancer, once the size of tennis balls, is in remission. Smiling, she says, "I'm going to frame this."

It's a rare bright moment for Caldwell, 53, who knows she is in the fight of her life, one made significantly more arduous by the coronavirus pandemic. She started having abdominal pain last year — "it was like grab and release, grab and release" —

but she didn't see a doctor for months because of concerns about the pandemic and because she was taking care of her grandmother, who had covid-19, the disease caused by the virus.

Now, after six months of chemotherapy, Caldwell feels "like somebody whopped me," she said during a visit to Patel's clinic in late summer. "But I did what I had to do."

Covid and cancer are a menacing mix — for everyone, but especially for people of color from low-income communities. African Americans and Hispanics are about twice as likely as White people to die of covid, according to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention. Black cancer patients are at particularly high risk for complications and hospitalizations. Even before the pandemic, Black people had lower survival rates for many cancers compared with White people. Now, with the pandemic grinding on, many doctors fear those inequalities will worsen.

"Covid put cancer and health-care disparities on steroids," Patel said as he walked through his clinic, offering patients words of encouragement. "I have never seen this many people presenting at Stage 3 and 4." Even for people like

SEE CANCER ON A10

Most now feel climate impacts

DISASTERS WORSEN FOR 85% OF WORLD

Study ties harsher events to carbon emissions

BY ANNABELLE TIMSIT AND SARAH KAPLAN

At least 85 percent of the global population has experienced weather events made worse by climate change, according to research published Monday in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

After using machine learning to analyze and map more than 100,000 studies of events that could be linked to global warming, researchers paired the analysis with a well-established data set of temperature and precipitation shifts caused by fossil fuel use and other sources of carbon emissions.

These combined findings — which focused on events such as crop failures, floods and heat waves — allowed scientists to make a solid link between escalating extremes and human activities. They concluded that global warming has affected 80 percent of the world's land area.

"We have a huge evidence base now that documents how climate change is affecting our societies and our ecosystems," said lead author Max Callaghan, a researcher at the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change in Germany.

The study provides hard numbers to back up the lived experiences of people from New York

SEE CLIMATE ON A7

A new responder to mental health calls

Albuquerque deploys social workers instead of armed officers

BY GRIFF WITTE

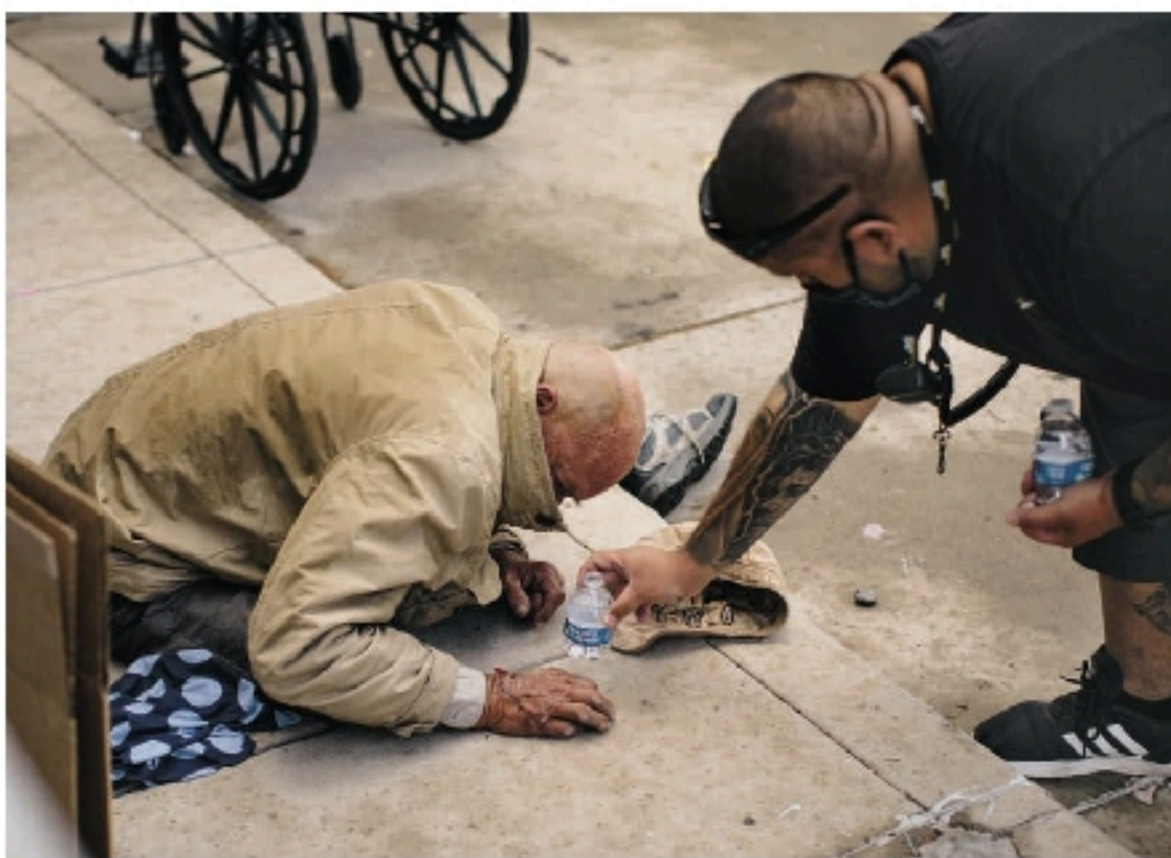
ALBUQUERQUE — Elisha Lucero was known in her family as a painter, a fisherwoman and a caretaker who had put aside her ambitions to nurse relatives through bouts of poor health.

She was also gripped by mental illness, and on a summer's night in 2019, the 28-year-old was behaving so erratically that a cousin called 911 from their suburban Albuquerque home. Sheriff's deputies banged on the door and demanded that Lucero, who stood 4 feet 11 inches with her shoes on, come outside.

When she did, the deputies shot her 21 times.

While the circumstances remain disputed — authorities say Lucero rushed toward them with a knife, a claim her family denies — the case prompted questions

SEE MENTAL HEALTH ON A8



Walter Adams, a member of Albuquerque's new Community Safety Department, hands water to a disoriented man who was sprawled on the pavement outside a shuttered gas station.

Inside Blue Origin: Low morale, mistrust, delays

Workers say toxic culture at Bezos's space venture led to exits, lack of success

BY CHRISTIAN DAVENPORT AND RACHEL LERMAN

SEATTLE — In 2019, a mid-level employee at Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin had grown fed up with the company, and as he left, he wrote a long memo that he sent to Bezos, chief executive Bob Smith and other senior leaders: "Our current culture is toxic to our success and many can see it spreading throughout the company." The problems at the space-flight company were "systemic," according to the memo, which was obtained by The Washington Post and verified by two former employees familiar with the matter, and "the loss of trust in Blue's leadership is common."

It was one of a number of warnings to Blue Origin's leadership in recent years that the

company's culture had become dysfunctional, resulting in low morale and high turnover, significant delays across several major programs and a failure to successfully compete with Elon Musk's venture SpaceX, current and former employees said.

The new management's "authoritarian bro culture," as one former employee put it, affected how decisions were made and permeated the institution, translating into condescending, sometimes humiliating, comments and harassment toward some women and a stagnant top-down hierarchy that frustrated many employees.

As it quickly grew from a small start-up to a large corporation with nearly 4,000 employees, Blue Origin grappled with how to improve its culture. In 2019, the company fired its head of recruiting after employees complained of sexism. A consultant retained by Blue Origin conducted a review of the company's leadership, finding that the primary challenge was Smith's ineffec-

SEE BLUE ORIGIN ON A18

IN THE NEWS



MIKE SEGAR/REUTERS

Indigenous Peoples' Day A D.C. rally urged climate action, while other events marked the day, including in New York, above. B1

Md. couple due in court Prosecutors seek to keep them detained before trial on charges they tried to sell nuclear submarine secrets. A2

THE NATION Southwest Airlines faced a fourth day of disruptions, after canceling hundreds of flights over the weekend and delaying many others. A3

Some monuments to Christopher Columbus have come down, but he is still honored in thousands of spots across the United States. A6

A new California law will require large retailers to have gender-neutral toy sections beginning in 2024. A9

THE WORLD Sydney reopened after a 106-day coronavirus

lockdown, and the first stop for many was the local pub. A12

A new Austrian chancellor was sworn in after Sebastian Kurz, once the bright hope of Europe's conservatives, took a tumble. A14

Security forces have detained a senior member of the Islamic State who was once among the most important players in the group's financing efforts, Iraq's prime minister said. A14

China's largest coal-producing region was hit by severe flooding, threatening the nation's power supply and displacing more than 120,000 people. A20

THE ECONOMY Focusing on data, Frances Haugen has broken through where many Facebook whistleblowers have not. A17

Three U.S.-based economists were awarded the Nobel Prize in economics for their work drawing conclusions by observing the real-world causes and effects of policies. A20

health-care workers in California and Oregon authorized a strike over pay, benefits and working conditions. A20

THE REGION More than half a billion dollars went to keeping Washington-area renters in their homes ahead of a federal deadline. B1

A former D.C. firefighter has settled a lawsuit with Fairfax County for \$390,000 after he was wrongfully arrested in 2018 and convicted. B1

INSIDE



HEALTH & SCIENCE 'Mommy brain'? Small studies support the existence of a cognitive change after birth, but there's room for more research. E1

STYLE A stylized shift Pop stars' all-caps and lowercase song titles aren't just superficial, writes critic Chris Richards. C1

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AN ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT CREATED BY MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute

Convergent Therapy Offers Relief for Those Dealing with AFib

The older you get, the more likely you are to develop atrial fibrillation (AFib), an irregular heartbeat that may cause palpitations – the uncomfortable sensation of a racing, irregular heartbeat or a flip-flopping in the chest. Some patients also develop weakness, reduced ability to exercise, fatigue, lightheadedness, dizziness, shortness of breath, and even chest pain. Most significantly, though, patients with AFib are at increased risk of stroke.

While the symptoms can be frightening and debilitating – and worsen over time – a procedure known as Hybrid AF™ Convergent Therapy offers patients with longstanding persistent AFib (LSPAF) the chance to return to a more normal life. (LSPAF patients are those who have had continuous atrial fibrillation for more than a year.)

MedStar Health was the first health system in the Baltimore-Washington area to offer Hybrid AF™ Convergent Therapy, and its MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute team of experts is the area's most experienced with this technology.

"We recognized the value of this procedure and were early adopters, as a result MedStar Health is one of the most experienced centers in the world," said Christian Shults, MD, cardiac surgeon at MedStar Washington Hospital Center. "Most patients experience a substantial improvement in their AFib symptoms." The region's first procedure was performed at MedStar Washington Hospital Center in 2011.

"Historically, patients with LSPAF have been challenging to treat, and about half suffer from progressively worsening symptoms," says Zayd Eldadah, MD, PhD, Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology at MedStar

Health. "The recent FDA approval of Hybrid AF therapy reinforces the indication for this effective treatment option."

"The two-part procedure elegantly marries the specialties of cardiac surgery and electrophysiology," explains Brian Bethea, MD, Chief of Cardiac Surgery at MedStar Union Memorial Hospital. The surgeon performs the first procedure by making a small incision in the upper abdomen. "Using a camera to see the back wall of the heart, we apply radiofrequency ablation (heat) to stop the erratic signals that cause AFib," he continues.

The second procedure, performed by the cardiac electrophysiologist either immediately after the surgery or on another day, is known as endocardial ablation. The electrophysiologist uses a catheter to deliver therapeutic energy to areas of the heart to block the abnormal electrical activity.

Hybrid AF™ Convergent Therapy is offered at MedStar Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore and MedStar Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C., both part of MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute, offering patients in the Baltimore-Washington region access to leading cardiovascular specialists, advanced treatments, and the latest research.

"We have seen many patients who have been told in the past they had no options but are now doing very well after receiving the hybrid ablation treatment," said Glenn Meininger, MD, Director of Cardiac Electrophysiology Services for the Baltimore Region at MedStar Health.

For more information, visit www.medstarhealth.org/afib

This special supplement was prepared by MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute. The production of this supplement did not involve the news or editorial staff of The Washington Post. For more information contact MedStar Heart & Vascular Institute.



South Carolina oncologist Kashyap Patel talks with patient Gisela Gaither, 48, at his health-care clinic. She was receiving treatment there during the summer but recently died of breast cancer.



TOP: Crystal Whetstone, 37, is a breast cancer patient at Patel's clinic in Rock Hill, S.C. She found a lump in spring 2020 but said she was too nervous about the virus and too busy with work and child care to get it checked. BELOW: Patel hopes to expand services and secure funding for mobile lung cancer screening next year.



terologist at NYU Langone Health in New York, worries that the pause in colorectal cancer screenings in early 2020 has hurt progress against the disease in Black Americans, the racial group most likely to be diagnosed with the illness and to die of it.

Federally qualified health centers, which provide care to many low-income Americans, routinely hand out fecal immunochemical tests, called FIT and administered at home to detect blood in the stool, which can be an early sign of colorectal cancer. If the test is positive, a patient is advised to get a colonoscopy. During the pandemic, distribution of the tests was temporarily suspended, as were follow-up colonoscopies at many facilities.

"It is going to be a huge mountain to climb to get back to where we were" in narrowing disparities, Balzora said. "People will be diagnosed at a later stage and the later your stage, the worse your likelihood of survival."

Kavita Patel, a health policy expert and primary care physician who works at Mary's Center clinic in Prince George's County, Md., an area hit hard by the pandemic, said uninsured patients are facing major delays in getting colonoscopies and other tests. "I have written orders for mammograms eight months ago that have expired, and I have had to reorder," she said.

Haas at Massachusetts General said the lesson from the pandemic is that "maybe we shouldn't expect everyone to come to doctors' offices," knowing that it is easier for people who are affluent and insured. She said more at-home tests, including for the human papillomavirus, a major cause of cervical cancer, would increase screening. Hospitals, including hers, are hiring more community health nurses to reach people outside of the hospital and doctors' offices, she said.

Other groups are urging people of color and other patients to resume cancer screenings, including the Community Oncology Alliance, which represents cancer doctors, and the nonprofit group CancerCare. Kashyap Patel is the president of the community oncologists' group.

When the pandemic hit last year, Patel, who is chief executive of Carolina Blood and Cancer Care Associates, scrambled to keep treating patients while keeping them and his staff safe. He closed the Lancaster clinic for several months and referred his patients to his second clinic, in Rock Hill, S.C.

Patel switched some patients from chemotherapy infusions to oral anti-cancer drugs to minimize the risks of in-person visits. Once coronavirus vaccines became available, he and his staff persuaded more than 150 patients and their relatives to get the shots, including some skeptics who described the vaccine as "chemical warfare." He added several hours to his clinics' schedules to try to catch up with patients, while worrying about the stress on his staff.

And he is trying to expand services, hoping to receive funding for mobile lung cancer screening next year.

The coronavirus remains a serious threat in Lancaster County, which is an hour south of Charlotte and dotted with tobacco and corn farms and mobile homes. The positive rate for coronavirus tests is near 12 percent, about double the national average, according to the CDC. Less than half of the population in that county has been fully vaccinated, the CDC says.

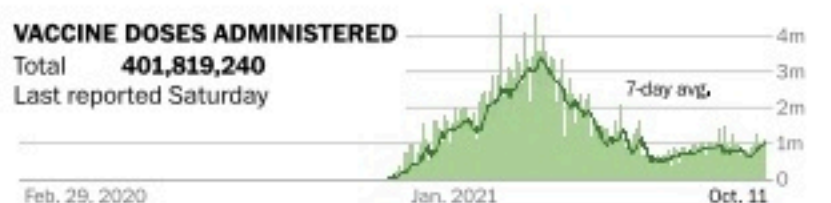
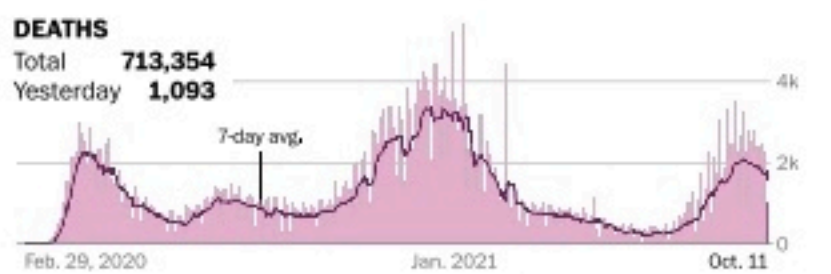
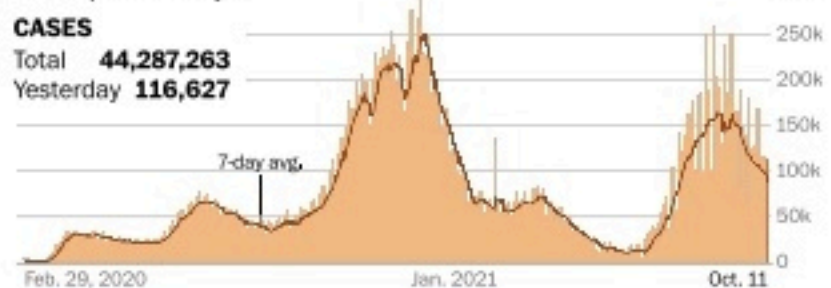
Still, Caldwell remains upbeat, praising Patel and her siblings for taking care of her. Looking back, she said, she "really had too much going on" to immediately react to the pain she now realizes was caused by cancer.

"Hopefully, I am getting over this," she said. "I am going to beat this and get back to my regular life."

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New coronavirus cases, deaths and vaccine doses in the U.S., by day

As of 8 p.m. Monday



Introducing the first FDA-approved ablation treatment for longstanding persistent atrial fibrillation.



Are your AFib symptoms keeping you from living the life you love?

This treatment could be the answer for you.

MedStar Health physicians were the first team of experts in the region to offer Hybrid AF™ Therapy—a breakthrough treatment for atrial fibrillation—and they remain the area's most experienced specialists with this technology. Patients who received this treatment most often experienced a major reduction of symptoms or became free of AFib.

Visit MedStarHealth.org/AFib or talk to your doctor today.



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