

World News Roundup

Education

Little Rock rejects plan

DeVos 'heckled' at the grad ceremony

DAYTONA BEACH, Florida, May 11, (AP): Education Secretary **Betsy DeVos** vowed support for the students at a historically black university at their graduation ceremony, but was nearly drowned out by booing and shouts of "Liar!" Many graduating students turned their back to her in protest.

DeVos sought common ground with her audience at Bethune-Cookman University on Wednesday by praising the school's founder and mission, delivering a plea to avoid the "chorus of conflict" and asking that people listen to those they may instinctively perceive as opponents.

"Let's choose to hear one another out," DeVos said, reading her prepared text in a measured tone despite continuing waves of boos, catcalls and only scattered applause.

DeVos alienated many African-Americans in February when she described historically black colleges as "real pioneers when it comes to school choice." After a storm of criticism, she acknowledged that these colleges were "born, not out of mere choice, but out of necessity, in the face of racism."



DeVos

In her keynote at the Daytona Beach university, DeVos repeatedly praised the school's founder, Mary McLeod Bethune, as someone who "refused to accept systemic and repulsive racism," and had "the courage to change old ideas."

"I am here to demonstrate in the most direct way possible that I and the administration are fully committed to your success and to the success of every student across this great country," she said.

As the crowd kept trying to shout her down, university president Edison Jackson briefly took over the microphone to sternly lecture the class of 2017.

"If this behavior continues, your degrees will be mailed to you. Choose which way you want to go," Jackson warned.

President Donald Trump's nomination of DeVos, a Republican fundraiser with no classroom experience, was so controversial that Vice-President Mike Pence had to cast a tie-breaking vote for her Senate confirmation.

Dismay

Some leaders of historically black colleges and universities later expressed dismay when Trump invited them to the Oval Office for a "listening session" that became an apparent photo-op for Black History Month.

DeVos has continued since then to cite historically black colleges as examples of alternative options for quality education, her stated goal for promoting the diversion of tax money from public schools to private companies and charters.

In her speech, DeVos praised Bethune-Cookman for providing the means to help its students overcome adversity and serve others.

"We should aspire to make all of America's institutions mirror that model — a singular focus on the unique needs of students," she said.

The booing became an uproar again mid-speech, when DeVos said she would be visiting the grave of the school's founder.

Shakindra Johnson, a 2008 graduate, said it should have been a proud day for the students and their families, but instead, DeVos seemed to be trying to appropriate the legacy of the school's founder.

"I think Betsy forgot her name was Betsy and not Mary McLeod Bethune," she said.

Some alumni and African-American leaders called the invitation a misguided effort to secure more funding. Students gathered petitions demanding she not be allowed to speak. Activists gathered outside, one carrying a sign that said "DeVos is not worthy."

Jackson gave DeVos a hug after her speech, then took the podium when she left the stage.

"As we have said repeatedly, be careful of the people you let in your place," Jackson said, seeming to acknowledge the criticism and drawing an eruption of laughter. But he said "Bethune-Cookman University can't do it alone. We need everyone to be a part of this continuation of our institution."

Some students agreed, saying the school needs help from anyone offering it, no matter their party affiliation.

"DeVos was here to hear our differences and at the end of the day I think that's what happened," added Keith Holt, who received a master's degree in transformative leadership.

In a statement afterward, DeVos said she respected the attendees, "including those who demonstrated their disagreement with me. While we may share differing points of view, my visit and dialogue with students leaves me encouraged and committed to supporting HBCUs."



An Arkansas school district set to lose millions of dollars in annual state desegregation aid could soon find itself with greater woes after voters rejected a proposal that would have helped pay for a new high school and other improvements.

Opponents of the plan to extend a property tax increase to pay for improvements said they were wary of giving the money to a district that hasn't had an elected school board since it was dissolved in 2015 as part of a state takeover. Supporters said Little Rock School District facilities need to be repaired and updated.

Local residents' distrust of state leadership over the district was at the center of Tuesday's vote.

"We've finally come to a point where people who've traditionally felt disenfranchised have to come to the end of the line," said Democratic state Sen **Joyce Elliot**, who added that everyone wants better for the district's children, but that a comprehensive, sustainable long-term plan is needed.

Under the proposal rejected by voters, state officials had asked that an existing property tax set to expire in 2033 be extended to 2047. Unofficial results show 65 percent of voters opposed the measure, which the district says would have raised \$160 million for improvement projects.

Little Rock School District Superintendent **Michael Poore** was not immediately available for comment Wednesday. But the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette reported that he said at an election watch party Tuesday that the rejection of the millage extension would delay the construction of the new school.

The district was at the center of the United States' first major desegregation battle played in 1957, when President **Dwight Eisenhower** used federal troops to escort nine black teenagers into Central High School.



A group of students stand and turn their backs during a commencement exercise speech by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos at Bethune-Cookman University, on May 10, in Daytona Beach, Fla. (AP)

Veterans

Deal reached on VA accountability bill

Homelessness 'continuous woe'

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island, May 11, (AP): The new Veterans Affairs chief shares the goal set by former president Barack Obama's administration of ending homelessness among veterans, but he says it will take longer than his predecessor predicted.

Reducing the number of homeless veterans nationwide from roughly 40,000 to 10,000 or 15,000 is an "achievable goal" for President Donald Trump's administration, VA Secretary David Shulkin told The Associated Press during a visit to Rhode Island last week.

"This is a continuous problem of people finding themselves in economically difficult situations and then being out on the street or going from shelter to shelter," Shulkin said.

Homelessness among veterans has been effectively ended in Virginia, Connecticut and Delaware and in more than 40 communities. The outgoing head of the VA, Robert McDonald, said in January that "we should be there" nationwide within a couple of years.

Shulkin, who formerly was VA undersecretary of health under Obama, said on Friday, "We're still looking at a multi-year process."

While advocates are encouraged to hear Shulkin's commitment, some wish he was more ambitious.

"My personal take is, the VA secretary is being cautiously optimistic about what can be achieved and not wanting to kind of set the administration up for a missed goal," said Lisa Vukov, who works to prevent and end homelessness in the Omaha, Nebraska, area. "I'm a firm believer in setting your goals big because you achieve more that way."

US Sen Richard Blumenthal, a Connecticut Democrat, said veteran homelessness can be ended during the Trump administration.

"There's no reason we can't achieve it if enough resources are dedicated to the fight," said Blumenthal, a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Shulkin said some veterans offered housing by the VA prefer other alternatives and high real estate prices and a shortage of available housing in some parts of the country make it hard to house veterans there. He sees the biggest challenge in Los Angeles.

Crisis

Democratic Mayor Eric Garcetti said that homelessness in Los Angeles is a long-term crisis, but that the city has housed more than 8,000 veterans since 2014 and he's fighting to ensure all veterans have a safe place to call home. Los Angeles voters approved a bond in November to raise \$1.2 billion for up to 10,000 permanent units.

Navy veteran Chris N. Cardenas said there are some veterans who refuse help or have trouble accessing benefits because of mental illness or substance abuse issues, but 40,000 homeless veterans is far too many.

"That's a very high number," Cardenas said. "It can get down to zero for the ones that want the help."

Meanwhile, Congressional Republicans and Democrats have reached agreement on a bill to make it easier for the Department of Veterans Affairs to fire its employees, part of an accountability effort touted by President Donald Trump.

The deal announced early Thursday could smooth the way for final

passage on an issue that had been largely stalled since the 2014 wait-time scandal at the Phoenix VA medical center. As many as 40 veterans died while waiting months for appointments as VA employees created secret waiting lists and other falsehoods to cover up delays.

The deal on Capitol Hill followed a fresh warning from the VA inspector general of continuing patient safety problems at another facility, the VA medical center in Washington DC after uncovering serious problems there last month, the IG's "rapid response" team visited the facility again on Wednesday and found at least two new instances in which patients were "placed at unnecessary risk."

In one case, they found a patient prepped for vascular surgery in an operating room, under anesthesia, whose surgery was postponed because "the surgeon did not have a particular sterile instrument necessary to perform the surgery." The team also found "surgical instruments that had color stains of unknown origin in sterile packs," according to the IG's letter sent to the VA. The inspector general again urged the department to take immediate action to correct problems.

The new accountability measure, led by Sen Marco Rubio, R-Fla, softens portions of a bill that had passed the House in March, which Democrats criticized as unfairly harsh on workers. Sens. Jon Tester of Montana and Johnny Isakson of Georgia, the top Democrat and the Republican chair on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, worked to make modifications that in part would give VA employees added time to appeal disciplinary actions.



This April 8, 2017 image made from a video and obtained from the Columbus Police Department through a records request by the Associated Press shows a Columbus officer restraining a prone man and preparing to handcuff him as a second officer appears to kick him in the head. The officer used 'unreasonable' force that wasn't part of his training when subduing the restrained suspect in a way that appeared to show him kicking the suspect in the head, police in Ohio said May 10. The highlighted circle in the image was added by source. (AP)



Landriu



Jones

America

Vet, love letter reunited: A love letter lost in the walls of a New Jersey home has reached a World War II veteran 72 years after it was written.

Melissa Fahy and her father were renovating her Westfield home when they found the letter in a gap under the stairs. It was postmarked May 1945 and written by a woman named Virginia to her husband, Rolf Christoffersen, who was a sailor in the Norwegian Navy.

Fahy tells WNBC-TV in New York she couldn't believe the love and admiration Virginia had for her husband.

She tracked down the couple's son in California, who read the letter to his 96-year-old father.

Virginia had died six years ago this weekend.

Fahy says, "I guess it's his wife coming back and making her memory alive again." (AP)

Amphibious landings on Guam:

Troops from the US, Japan and two European nations are gathering on remote US islands in the Pacific for drills they say will show support for the free passage of vessels in international waters amid fears China could restrict movement in the South China Sea.

The drills around Guam and Tinian may also send a message to North Korea about the US commitment to the region and the breadth of its allies. Tensions between the US and North Korea spiked last month after Pyongyang launched a ballistic missile and the US sent an aircraft carrier strike group to the region.

The drills, which are led by France and include the United Kingdom, will practice amphibious landings, delivering forces by helicopter and urban patrols.

Two ships from France are participating, both of which are in the middle of a four-month deployment to the Indian and

Pacific oceans. Joining are UK helicopters and 70 UK troops deployed with the French amphibious assault ship FS Mistral. Parts of the exercise will feature British helicopters taking US Marines ashore from a French ship.

"The message we want to send is that we're always ready to train and we're always ready for the next crisis and humanitarian disaster wherever that may be," said US Marine Corps Lt Col **Kemper Jones**,

the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment. About 100 Marines from Jones' unit will be part of the drills slated for this weekend and next week. (AP)

2nd Confed statues removed: Workers Thursday morning removed the statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in New Orleans, the second of four Confederate monuments slated for removal in a

contentious, months-long process that has sparked protests on both sides.

As the statue was lifted from its perch on a grassy median along one of the city's main thoroughfares, a cheer went up from some of the dozens of protesters on the scene who have been pushing for the monument's removal. It was then lowered behind trucks encircled around the monument's base and out of view of media gathered on the scene.

Removal of the statue — a larger-than-life image of Davis atop an ornate granite pedestal roughly 15-feet high — follows recent protests at the site by supporters and opponents of the monuments. City officials had refused to give advance public notice of the work because of threats of violence against contractors and workers involved in the effort. The statue was first unveiled in 1911.

Dozens of protesters both supporting the monuments and calling for their removal stayed up overnight to watch the proceedings which happened in early-morning darkness. The demonstrators were separated by metal barriers set up by the police and heckled each other from opposite sides of the barricade. About fifty police officers encircled the monument and kept watch on the protesters.

New Orleans Mayor **Mitch Landriu**, who first urged the City Council to remove the monuments in 2015, praised the effort in a news release.

"These monuments have stood not as historic or educational markers of our legacy of slavery and segregation, but in celebration of it. I believe we must remember all of our history, but we need not revere it. (AP)



US Postal Service stamps are displayed on May 10, 2017 in San Anselmo, California. The US Postal Service is seeking to raise the price of stamps by a penny or more after reporting a quarterly loss of \$562 million as the use of first-class mail continues to decline. (AFP)