

Violence

Org demanding action

Strike for Black Lives to highlight 'racism' in US

NEW YORK, July 9, (AP): A national coalition of labor unions, along with racial and social justice organizations, will stage a mass walkout from work this month, as part of an on-going reckoning on systemic racism and police brutality in the US.

Dubbed the "Strike for Black Lives", tens of thousands of fast food, ride-share, nursing home and airport workers in more than 25 cities are expected to walk off the job July 20 for a full day strike. Those who can't strike for a full day will walk out for about eight minutes – the amount of time prosecutors say a white Minneapolis police officer held his knee on **George Floyd's** neck – in remembrance of Black men and women who died recently at the hands of police.

The national strike will also include worker-led marches through participating cities, organizers said Wednesday.



Floyd

low-wage workers who never had the option of working from home during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We have to link these fights in a new and deeper way than ever before," said Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union, which represents over 2 million workers in the US and Canada.

"Our members have been on a journey ... to understanding why we cannot win economic justice without racial justice. This strike for Black lives is a way to take our members' understanding about that into the streets," Henry told the AP.

Among the strikers' specific demands are that corporations and government declare unequivocally that "Black lives matter". Elected officials at every level must use executive and legislative power to pass laws that guarantee people of all races can thrive, according to a list of demands. Employers must also raise wages and allow workers to unionize to negotiate better healthcare, sick leave and child care support.

The service workers union has partnered with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the American Federation of Teachers, United Farm Workers and the Fight for \$15 and a Union, which was launched in 2012 by American fast food workers to push for a higher minimum wage.

Social and racial justice groups taking part include March On, the Center for Popular Democracy, the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of over 150 organizations that make up the Black Lives Matter movement.

Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, a strike organizer with the Movement for Black Lives, said corporate giants that have come out in support of the BLM movement amid nationwide protests over police brutality have also profited from racial injustice and inequity.

"They claim to support Black lives, but their business model functions by exploiting Black labor – passing off pennies as 'living wages' and pretending to be shocked when COVID-19 sickens those Black people who make up their essential workers," said Henderson, co-executive director of Tennessee-based Highlander Research and Education Center.

"Corporate power is a threat to racial justice, and the only way to usher in a new economy is by tackling those forces that aren't fully committed to dismantling racism," she said in a statement.

Trece Andrews, a Black nursing home worker for a Ciena Healthcare-managed retirement home in the Detroit area, said she feels dejected after years of being passed over for promotions. The 49-year-old believes racial discrimination plays a part in her career stagnation.

"I've got 20 years in the game and I'm only at \$15.81 (per hour)," she said in a phone interview.

As the single mother of a 13-year-old daughter and caregiver to her father, a cancer survivor, Andrews said inadequate personal protective gear makes her afraid of bringing the coronavirus home from her job.

"We've got the coronavirus going on, plus we've got this thing with racism going on," Andrews said.

"They're tied together, like some type of segregation, like we didn't have our ancestors and Martin Luther King fighting against these types of things. It's still alive out here, and it's time for somebody to be held accountable. It's time to take action."

The strike continues a decades-old labor rights movement tradition. Most notably, organizers have drawn inspiration from the Memphis sanitation workers' strike over low wages, benefits disparity between Black and white employees, and inhumane working conditions that contributed to the deaths of two Black workers in 1968. At the end of that two-month strike, some 1,300 mostly Black sanitation workers bargained collectively for better wages.

"Strike for Black Lives" organizers say they want to disrupt a multi-generational cycle of poverty perpetuated by anti-union and other policies that make it difficult to bargain collectively for better wages and working conditions.

Systemic poverty affects 140 million people in the US, with 62 million people working for less than a living wage, according to the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, a strike partnering organization. An estimated 54% of Black workers and 63% of Hispanic workers fall into that category, compared to 37% of white workers and 40% of Asian American workers, the group said.

"The reason why, on July 20th, you're going to see strikes and protests and the walk-offs and socially distanced sit-ins and voter registration outreach is because thousands and thousands of poor, low-wage workers of every race, creed and color understand that racial, economic, health care, immigration, climate and other justice fights are all connected," the Rev William Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, said in a telephone interview.

"If in fact we are going to take on police violence that kills, then certainly we have to take on economic violence that also kills," he said.

Organizers said some striking workers will do more than walk off the job on July 20. In Missouri, participants will rally at a McDonald's in Ferguson, a key landmark in the protest movement sparked by the death of Michael Brown, a Black teenager who was killed by police in 2014. The strikers will then march to a memorial site located on the spot where Brown was shot and killed.

In Minneapolis, where Floyd was killed on May 25, nursing home workers will participate in a caravan that will include a stop at the airport. They'll be joined by wheelchair attendants and cabin cleaners demanding a \$15-per-hour minimum wage, organizers said.

Angely Rodriguez Lambert, a 26-year-old McDonald's worker in Oakland, California, and leader in the Fight for \$15 and a Union, said she and several co-workers tested positive for COVID-19 after employees weren't initially provided proper protective equipment.

As an immigrant from Honduras, Lambert said she also understands the Black community's urgent fight against police brutality.

"Our message is that we're all human and we should be treated like humans - we're demanding justice for Black and Latino lives," she told the AP.

"We're taking action because words are no longer bringing the results that we need," she said. "Now is the moment to see changes."



People attend a drive-in movie screening of the film 'Yesterday,' Wednesday, July 8, 2020, in a parking lot behind the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, in Boston. Access to the free July Drive-in Movie Series put on by the city is granted to Boston residents only. (AP)

Politics

Bid to capitalize on his union ties

Biden proposes 'Buy American' campaign

WASHINGTON, July 9, (AP): Launching an economic pitch expected to anchor his fall presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Joe Biden is proposing sweeping new uses of the federal government's regulatory and spending power to bolster U.S. manufacturing and technology firms.

Biden calls for a \$400 billion, four-year increase in government purchasing of U.S.-based goods and services plus \$300 billion in new research and development in U.S. technology concerns. Among other policies expected to be announced Thursday, he proposes tightening current "Buy American" laws that are intended to benefit U.S. firms but can be easily circumvented by government agencies.

An outline released by Biden's campaign also touts his long-standing promises to strengthen workers' collective bargaining rights and repeal Republican-backed tax breaks for U.S. corporations that move jobs overseas.

"This will be the largest mobilization of public investments in procurement, infrastructure and (research and development) since World War II," senior adviser Jake Sullivan told The Associated Press, with the campaign promising additionally that Biden would require that effort in domestic markets before negotiating any new international trade deals.

The former vice-president will discuss the proposals Thursday at a metal works concern in Dunmore, Pennsylvania. It's the first of a series of addresses Biden plans as he shifts his line of attack against President Donald Trump to the economy. It's political turf the Republican incumbent once considered a clear advantage before the coronavirus pandemic curbed consumer activity and drove unemployment to near-Depression levels.

An opening emphasis on manufacturing and labor policy is no coincidence: Biden wants to capitalize on his union ties and deliver on oft-made claims he

can win back working-class voters who fueled Trump's upset win four years ago.

Biden will continue in coming weeks with an energy plan to combat the climate crisis and a third package on what the campaign has dubbed the "caring economy," with a focus on making child care and elder care more affordable and less of an impediment to working-age Americans. Campaign aides told reporters that all of Biden's policies would target immediate recovery from the pandemic recession and address systemic inequalities Biden says are "laid bare" by the nation's ongoing reckoning with racism.

"What's going on here, we need to build back, not just to where we were but build back better than we've ever been," Biden told the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers on Wednesday. "We're going to take a monumental step forward for the prosperity, power, safety and dignity of all American workers."

The Democrat's agenda carries at least some rhetorical echoes of Trump's "America First" philosophy, but the former vice president's aides describe his approach as more coherent. They cast Trump's imposition of tariffs and uneven trade negotiations with other nations as a slapdash isolationism compromised further by tax policies that enrich multinational corporations. The Biden campaign also pointed to an uptick in foreign procurement and continued outsourcing of jobs by U.S.-based corporations during Trump's presidency.

Republicans nonetheless have made clear they will attack Biden on trade and the economy, framing the Democratic establishment figure as a tool of the far left on taxes and a willing participant in decades of trade policy that gutted American workers. Trump also has lampooned Biden as "weak on China."

On trade, at least, it's a similar line of attack Biden withstood from the Democratic primary runner-up, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and one that Trump used effec-

tively against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Biden voted for the North American Free Trade Agreement in the Senate in 1994, an anchor of Trump's criticism and Sanders' attacks before that. One of Trump's signature achievements is an overhaul of NAFTA, which he accomplished with backing from many Democrats on Capitol Hill. Since the 1990s, including during two presidential campaigns, Biden has advocated tighter controls in future trade deals, and he's promised to have organized labor and the environmental movement at the table.

The campaign's outline ahead of Thursday emphasizes that Biden wants a resurgence in U.S. markets before engaging in new trade deals abroad. That includes joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership that Biden advocated when he served as President Barack Obama's vice president. Trump opposed TPP as a 2016 candidate. China is not a TPP member.

Trump and Biden have called out China for unfair trade practices, but Biden accuses Trump of instigating a trade war with a commensurate economic power that the president "has no plan" to win.

Biden's team insisted his approach falls within World Trade Organization rules, but aides also acknowledged that a Biden administration would try to modify an existing WTO deal, the Government Procurement Agreement, which effectively creates a shared open international market for participating governments to secure goods and services.

For now, Biden has not identified how he'd pay for the proposed new spending. Aides said he has identified revenue sources for all ongoing spending proposals but not for the one-time or short-term investments like the \$700 billion in procurement and research. That raises the possibility that Biden could declare that spending to be deliberate deficit spending to stimulate the struggling economy.



Jacqueline Fernandez (left) and Elizabeth Garcia, sisters of James Garcia who was shot and killed by Phoenix Police, hold up a sign during a news conference demanding the release of police body cam footage, Wednesday, July 8, 2020, in Phoenix, in the Phoenix Police shooting death of their brother. Phoenix Police Chief Jeri Williams announced Tuesday that she is requesting the agency conduct an independent probe to see if 28-year-old Garcia's civil rights were violated during the July 4 shooting. (AP)



Milley



Esper

America

Pentagon chiefs face grilling:

The Pentagon's top leaders are going before Congress for the first time in months to face a long list of controversies, including their differences with President Donald Trump over the handling of protests near the White House last month during unrest triggered by the killing of George Floyd in police hands.

The House hearing Thursday will provide the first congressional testimony by Defense Secretary **Mark Esper** and Gen **Mark Milley**, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, since March 4, when they appeared to discuss the administration's defense budget proposal. That was before the full impact of the coronavirus pandemic became apparent and before nationwide civil unrest threw the Pentagon's relations with Trump into crisis.

Trump's push for an aggressive response to the civil unrest led to an extraordinary clash with Esper and Milley, who on June 1 accompanied the president when he walked from the White House to St John's Church on Lafayette Square, where he held up a Bible for photographers. That same day, a National Guard helicopter was flown at extremely low altitude to help disperse protesters from the capital's streets, prompting a Pentagon investigation into whether that was a proper use of military resources. (AP)

Latino launches \$10m drive:

A national organization is announcing a \$10 million campaign to turn out Hispanic voters in several of this year's battleground states.

Mi Familia Vota, based in Phoenix, said it will spend \$7 million on get-out-the-vote measures and an additional \$3 million on digital and television ads, starting in Arizona and Florida.

Arizona in particular is seen as a battleground because of shifting demographics in the traditionally Republican state. Hispanics

are a growing proportion of the electorate.

The campaign comes amid rising concerns about Latino turnout in a year when that community has been hit particularly hard by the coronavirus. Latinos account for higher rates of infection from COVID-19 when compared to their share of the population in a number of states, and many are struggling financially from lost jobs and lower wages.

"Basically what we're saying is we're not going to wait for political parties to do it themselves. They don't invest in our communities," said the group's executive director and CEO, Hector Sanchez Barba.

According to the Pew Research Center, 13.3% of eligible voters in the US this year are Latino, a record high. Pew projects

that in Arizona, 24% of eligible voters this year are Latino, up 2 percentage points from 2016. In Florida, Latinos are projected to be 20% of eligible voters. (AP)

Atlanta mayor defies gov:

Atlanta's mayor has signed an executive order mandating masks in Georgia's largest city, defying Gov Brian Kemp's decision to strongly encourage but not require face coverings.

Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms on Wednesday signed the order requiring masks, which could set up a confrontation with the Republican Kemp. The governor has already clashed with the mayor recently over policing issues, calling out the National Guard to protect state government offices after an



People protest Nevada's public mask mandate on July 8, 2020, in Henderson, Nevada. Gov Steve Sisolak issued a mandatory face covering policy for public spaces throughout the state due to the coronavirus. (AP)

8-year-old girl was fatally shot by armed people at the site of a fast food restaurant where an Atlanta police officer shot and killed a Black man.

"We will continue to take active measures to help slow the spread of COVID-19 infections in Atlanta," Bottoms said in a statement. "Public health experts overwhelmingly agree that wearing a face covering helps slow the spread of this sometimes deadly virus."

Like a number of other local leaders in Georgia, Bottoms has unsuccessfully appealed to Kemp to change his order that local governments can't exceed the state's requirements.

"Other cities have taken the approach that they are going to defy the governor's executive order. Savannah has done it, some other cities have done it, and Atlanta is going to do it today," Bottoms told MSNBC in a Wednesday interview. "Because the fact of the matter is that COVID-19 is wreaking havoc on our cities, specifically black and brown communities with higher death rates."

Spokespeople for Kemp did not immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday. Kemp on Tuesday asked mayors and county commissioners to help him in a statewide push for voluntary masking.

"We don't need a mandate to have Georgians do the right thing, but we do need to build strong, public support," Kemp told mayors, according to prepared remarks released by his office.

Bottoms announced Monday

that she has tested positive for COVID-19. Joe Biden has been considering the Democrat as his vice-presidential running mate. (AP)

Nurse detained:

Five former detention officers and a nurse at a North Carolina jail have been charged with involuntary manslaughter after a man died last December, a district attorney said Wednesday.

Forsyth County District Attorney Jim O'Neill announced the charges at a news conference, news outlets reported. The five officers are free on \$15,000 unsecured bond apiece, and it's not known if they have attorneys. The nurse hadn't been served with an arrest warrant as of Wednesday afternoon, authorities said.

John Neville, 57, died Dec 4, 2019, four days after Kernersville police arrested him on a misdemeanor charge of assault on a female. According to O'Neill, Neville, who was Black, was placed in a prone restraint, meaning he was face down and restrained in some fashion. As a result, Neville was unable to breathe, which caused a brain injury that would eventually kill him, O'Neill said.

There is video of the incident but it has not been publicly released.

The Forsyth County Sheriff's Office took seven months to issue a statement about his death, prompted by questions from the Winston-Salem Journal. Before Wednesday, the sheriff's office had released only limited information. (AP)