

Top Court

'18-month absence'

Abortion, religion top Supreme Court term

WASHINGTON, Oct. 2, (AP) - The future of abortion rights is in the hands of a conservative Supreme Court that is beginning a new term Monday that also includes major cases on gun rights and religion.

The court's credibility with the public also could be on the line, especially if a divided court were to overrule the landmark Roe v. Wade decision from 1973 that established a woman's right to an abortion nationwide.

The justices are returning to the courtroom after an 18-month absence caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and the possible retirement of 83-year-old liberal Justice Stephen Breyer also looms.

It's the first full term with the court in its current alignment.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, the last of former President Donald Trump's three high-court appointees, is part of a six-justice conservative majority. Barrett was nominated and confirmed last year

Breyer

amid the pandemic, little more than a month after the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Trump and Republicans who controlled the Senate moved quickly to fill the seat shortly before the 2020 presidential election, bringing about a dramatic change in the court's lineup that has set the stage for a potentially law-changing term on several high-profile issues.

With abortion, guns and religion already on the agenda, and a challenge to affirmative action waiting in the wings, the court will answer a key question over the next year, said University of Chicago law professor David Strauss. "Is this the term in which the culture wars return to the Supreme Court in a big way?" Strauss said.

No issue is bigger than abortion.

The justices will hear arguments Dec. 1 in Mississippi's bid to enforce a ban on most abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. Lower courts blocked the law because it is inconsistent with high court rulings that allow states to regulate but not prohibit abortion before viability, the point around 24 weeks of pregnancy when a fetus can survive outside the womb.

Mississippi is taking what conservative commentator Carrie Severino called a "rip-the-Band-Aid-off" approach to the case by asking the court to abandon its support of abortion rights that was laid out in Roe and the 1992 case of Planned Parenthood v. Casey.

Support

Mississippi is among 12 states with so-called trigger laws that would take effect if Roe is overturned and ban abortion entirely.

By a 5-4 vote in early September, the court already has allowed a ban on most abortions to take effect in Texas, though no court has yet ruled on the substance of the law.

But that vote and the Mississippi case highlight the potential risk to the court's reputation, said David Cole, the American Civil Liberties Union's legal director. The arguments advanced by Mississippi were considered and rejected by the Supreme Court in 1992, Cole said.

"The only difference between then and now is the identity of the justices," he said.

Jeff Wall, a top Justice Department lawyer under Trump, said the court could sharply expand gun rights and end the use of race in college admissions, but only abortion is likely to move public perception of the court. "I still don't think that's going to create some groundswell in the public, unless it's accompanied by some kind of watershed ruling on abortion," Wall said.

In early November, the court will take up a challenge to New York restrictions on carrying a gun in public, a case that offers the court the chance to expand gun rights under the Second Amendment. Before Barrett joined the court, the justices turned away similar cases, over the dissents of some conservative members of the court.

Until Barrett came along, some justices who favor gun rights questioned whether Chief Justice John Roberts would provide a fifth, majority-making vote "for a more expansive reading of the Second Amendment," said George Washington University law professor Robert Cottrol, who said he hoped the court would now broaden gun rights.

More than 40 states already make it easy to be armed in public, but New York and California, two of the nation's most populous states, are among the few with tighter regulations.

The case has gun control advocates worried. "An expansive Second Amendment ruling by the Supreme Court could restrict or prohibit the sensible solutions that have been shown can end gun violence," said Jonathan Lowy, vice president and chief counsel at the gun violence prevention group Brady. Lowy included state laws requiring a justification to carry a gun as examples of such "sensible solutions."

Rights

A case from Maine gives the court another opportunity to weigh religious rights in the area of education. The state excludes religious schools from a tuition program for families who live in towns that don't have public schools.

Since even before Ginsburg's death, the court has favored religion-based discrimination claims and the expectation among legal experts is that parents in Maine who sued to be able to use taxpayer money at religious schools will prevail, though it's not clear how broadly the court might rule.

Affirmative action is not yet on the court's agenda, but it could still get there this term in a lawsuit over Harvard's use of race in college admissions. Lower courts upheld the school's policy, but this is another case in which the change in the composition of the court could prove decisive. The court upheld race-conscious admission policies as recently as five years ago but that was before Trump's three appointments accentuated the court's conservative tilt.

Among other notable cases, the justices will consider reinstating the death sentence for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The Biden administration is pushing for the capital sentence, even as it has suspended federal executions and President Joe Biden has called for an end to the federal death penalty.

The court will also weigh two cases involving "state secrets," the idea that the government can block the release of information it claims would harm national security if disclosed. One case involves a Guantanamo Bay detainee who a lower court said was tortured in CIA custody. The other involves a group of Muslim residents of California who allege the FBI targeted them for surveillance because of their religion.

Decisions in the most of the big cases won't come before spring because the justices typically spend months drafting and revising majority opinions and dissents.



President Joe Biden speaks with members of the press before boarding Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House, Saturday, Oct. 2. (AP)

Britain

London police battle loss of trust

Queen reflects on love for Scotland

LONDON, Oct. 2, (AP) - Queen Elizabeth II opened the sixth session of the Scottish Parliament on Saturday and reflected on the "deep and abiding affection" she and her late husband, Prince Philip, shared for Scotland.

The 95-year-old monarch arrived for the ceremony with her son, Prince Charles, and his wife, Camilla, who in Scotland are known as the Duke and Duchess of Rothesay. The ceremony in Edinburgh began with the royal mace and the Crown of Scotland being brought into the chamber.

"I have spoken before of my deep and abiding affection for this wonderful country and of the many happy memories Prince Philip and I always held of our time here," the queen told lawmakers.

The couple spent many summers at the royal residence in Scotland, Balmoral Castle, often joined by members of the royal family. The queen arrived in Edinburgh from the castle.

It is the first time she has opened a new session of the Scottish Parliament without Philip by her side. The prince, who was officially known as the Duke of Edinburgh, died in April at the age of 99.

"The beginning of a new session is a time for renewal and fresh thinking, providing an opportunity to look to the future and our future generations," the queen said during her remarks to lawmakers.

That opportunity is especially ripe this year, she said, with the United Nations' annual climate summit scheduled to take place between Oct. 31 and Nov. 12 in Glasgow, Scotland's biggest city Glasgow. The queen said she will be attending the event, known as COP26 for short.

"The eyes of the world will be on the

United Kingdom - and Scotland, in particular - as leaders come together to address the challenges of climate change," she said.

In response to the queen's speech, Scotland's first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, offered her "deep sympathy and shared sorrow" over Philip's death, and thanked the monarch for being a "steadfast friend" of the Scottish Parliament since its establishment in 1999.

Meanwhile, London police were desperately trying Friday to regain the trust of women after evidence presented in court showed that a serving officer used his position to abduct, rape and murder a marketing executive as she walked home from a friend's house.

Unprecedented

The Metropolitan Police Service took the unprecedented step of issuing a statement that advised women and girls on how to protect themselves if they are suspicious of officers who stop them on the street.

The statement Thursday came after evidence presented during the sentencing of Wayne Couzens showed that he used his police identification to stop 33-year-old Sarah Everard on March 3, 2021, then handcuffed her, threw her in the back of a car and drove her to a remote location where he raped and strangled her. Suggestions that earlier offenses may have been overlooked further stoked outrage.

"The full horrific details of his crimes are deeply concerning and raise entirely legitimate questions," the department said. "We completely hear the legitimate concerns being raised and we know women

are worried. All our officers are concerned about the impact of these horrific crimes on trust in the police, and we want to do all we can to rebuild that trust."

Couzens, 48, this week was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole after pleading guilty to Everard's abduction and murder. Confidence in the police force's ability to protect women has been further shaken by the murder of primary school teacher Sabina Nessa, 28, who was killed Sept. 17 as she walked through a south London park to meet a friend.

The department said it would soon publish a new strategy for combating violence against women.

In response to the revelations about Couzens, police stressed that it was rare for a sole plainclothes officer to question a woman, and that if this does occur other officers should arrive soon after.

It is "entirely reasonable" for women who find themselves in this situation to seek assurances about the officer's identity, the department said. Women should ask the officer "searching questions" about the absence of other officers, why the officer is in the area and exactly why they are being stopped.

If after doing so a woman still feels she is in danger, she should shout to others on the street, knock on doors, wave down a passing bus or call 999, Britain's emergency phone number, the police said.

But British media reverberated with outrage over what many saw as a tone-deaf response amid longstanding concerns that police haven't made it a priority to investigate, prosecute and prevent crimes against women.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II prepares to deliver her speech in the debating chamber to mark the official start of the sixth session of the Scottish Parliament, in Edinburgh, Scotland, Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021. (AP)

America

'Everybody is frustrated': President Joe Biden on Saturday acknowledged frustrations as Democrats strain to rescue a scaled-back version of his \$3.5 trillion government-overhaul plan and salvage a related public works bill after frantic negotiations failed to produce a deal.

"Everybody's frustrated, it's part of being in government, being frustrated," Biden told reporters before leaving the White House for a weekend stay at his home in Wilmington, Delaware. He pledged to "work like hell" to get the two pillars of his domestic agenda passed into law, but refrained from laying out a new deadline.

The president had gone to Capitol Hill on Friday for a private meeting with House Democrats that was partly a morale booster for the disjointed caucus of lawmakers. According to lawmakers in the room, he discussed a \$1.9 trillion to \$2 trillion-plus price tag for the larger package that would expand the country's social safety net.

The White House and its allies in Congress are prepared for protracted negotiations. Biden said he would soon travel around the country to promote the legislation and he acknowledged concerns that the talk in Washington had become too focused on the trillions in new spending and taxes in the bill.

He pledged to do more to educate the public about the plan's new and expanded programs, which he contended have the support of the vast majority of the electorate.

Holdout Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia had dashed hopes for a swift compromise on a framework when he refused to budge late Thursday on his demands for a

smaller overall package, about \$1.5 trillion.

Without a broader deal, prospects for a vote on the companion public works bill stalled out as progressives refused to commit until senators reached agreement. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., told colleagues that "more time is needed" as they shape the broader package.

The House passed a 30-day measure to keep transportation programs running during the stalemate, essentially setting a new deadline for talks, Oct. 31. The Senate was set to follow with a vote Saturday, to halt the furloughs of more than 3,500 federal transportation workers, a byproduct of the political impasse. (AP)

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Islamic State figure charged: A leading Islamic State media figure and foreign fighter

has been charged in U.S. federal court in Virginia with conspiring to provide material support to a terrorist organization resulting in death, federal officials said Saturday.

Mohammed Khalifa, a Saudi-born Canadian citizen who was a leading figure in the Islamic State of Iraq, was captured overseas by the Syrian Democratic Forces in January 2019, federal officials said. He was recently transferred into FBI custody, at which point he was first brought to the Eastern District of Virginia.

"As alleged, Mohammed Khalifa not only fought for ISIS on the battlefield in Syria, but he was also the voice behind the violence," said Raj Parekh, Acting U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia. "Through his alleged leading role in translating, narrating, and advancing ISIS's online propaganda, Khalifa promoted the terrorist group, furthered its worldwide recruitment efforts, and expanded the reach of videos that glorified the horrific murders and indiscriminate cruelty of ISIS." (AP)



Pelosi



Manchin

Radisson Blu Hotel kicks off BBQ season



It's Wednesday evening, the weather is cooling down and the terrace of Al Bustan Restaurant of Radisson Blu Hotel comes to life. The chefs fire up the barbecue. When the smoky smell and sounds of sizzling meat fill the air, you know that the BBQ Wednesday at Radisson

Blu Hotel is about to start. This all-you-can-eat buffet is going to be unforgettable.

The live grill, cooking and carving stations feature everything you might desire. Ribs, steaks, lamb, kebab, chicken, fish, seafood and all garnishes await at the stations spread over the entire terrace

of Al Bustan Restaurant. Inspired by local, European and South Asian cuisine, your palate will explore both familiar and exciting tastes. The Chefs of Radisson Blu Hotel will grill your favorites to perfection right in front of you.

Inside the restaurant, you'll

find islands full of colorful salads, mezzeh, smoked and fresh fish, seafood, sushi and much more. The food is abundant. Delight your taste buds with vibrant, crispy and fresh ingredients bursting with delicious flavors and textures.

Don't forget to please your sweet tooth! Finish the

evening on a sweet note with your choice of our marvelous desserts, cakes and pastries.

Treat yourself to the chocolate fountain that will truly delight the younger ones (and those who are young at heart). See you at 6:30 pm every Wednesday at the Radisson Blu Hotel, Kuwait.

