

Education

'We are coming after you'

Local school boards emerge as hot races

COLUMBUS, Oct 10, (AP): In a school district near the Ohio state capital, school board members up for reelection this year have been subjected to a steady stream of lawsuits and attacks, both in-person and online. In another, an incumbent up for reelection who supports student mask requirements received a letter from someone angered by her stance who warned: "We are coming after you."

A 15-year veteran board member in yet another Ohio district decided against running for reelection because of the escalating public attacks.

It's not just in Ohio. Across the U.S., local school board races have emerged as an intense political battleground in the Nov. 2 elections, with much at stake for students.



Reynolds

Parental protests over COVID-19-related mask mandates, gender-neutral bathrooms, and teachings about racial history, sexuality and social-emotional learning are being leveraged into full-fledged board takeover campaigns that will get their first widespread test in just a few weeks.

"What's happening in 2021 is a prelude to some of the messaging, some of the issues we'll see going into the midterm elections," said Scott DiMauro, president of the Ohio Education Association, the state's largest teachers union.

Local school board elections typically have been relatively quiet affairs where incumbents sail to reelection, often unopposed. This year, candidate training academies organized by national conservative groups and state-level recruitment efforts are encouraging challenges by right-leaning political newcomers. The results could have consequences for public education and coronavirus safety measures across the country.

Thousands

The thousands of local school districts in the U.S. make it difficult to know how many sitting board members are facing challenges next month from conservative-leaning community members. But the challenges appear widespread.

In Wisconsin, a conservative legal institute is providing free legal advice on school board recalls to parent groups. In Iowa, Gov. Kim Reynolds, a Republican, has taken the unusual step of endorsing a conservative candidate for a local school board seat. And in Colorado, a group calling itself MAD that opposes remote-learning during the pandemic and what it says are partisan leanings in curriculum is endorsing like-minded school board candidates.

"It feels like schools have become a political battleground, and they shouldn't be," said Dan Maloic, a former Army Green Beret who runs the Colorado group. "Kids should be able to walk in and not know what their teachers believe politically or their administrators and be protected from what society's arguing about so that they can focus on learning to read and write, understanding math, learning an unbiased history."

Teachers unions, which for years have helped elect their own allies to school boards, are opposing the push. Their position is that many right-wing candidates are conspiracy theorists who are taking moderate positions to get elected, but once in office will oppose mask requirements and other COVID safety protocols, micromanage educators and censor classroom content they dislike. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, called it "a craven and anti-democratic attempt to usurp local control over our kids' education."

"Their goal is to limit students' understanding of historical and current events and attack common-sense safety measures such as masking by bullying those who believe in science and teaching honest history," she said in a statement to The Associated Press.

FreedomWorks, a conservative group that supported the rise of former President Donald Trump, launched a candidate academy in March that already has trained about 300 people nationwide, with the largest number from Ohio, said Laura Zorc, the group's director of education reform. About 1,000 people have signed up, she said.

Message

"My message to these parents is: Run for office if you don't like it (and) you don't feel your voice is being heard," Zorc said.

Among those who acted on that message is Jennifer Feucht, a candidate in the Olentangy Local School District outside Columbus who completed training through FreedomWorks' academy. After fighting to lift mask mandates and to get the district to declare its opposition to critical race theory, the mother of three said she has also been the victim of "vicious" attacks on social media.

"I've learned that they're allowed to say things that are untrue because you're a public figure. I never imagined that at the local level," she said.

An especially common claim among the challengers is that schools are teaching Black children that they're victims and white children they're villains as part of their, which they attribute to critical race theory. It's a characterization of districts' responses to last year's racial protests that national education and civil rights organizations have rejected as false and dangerous.

Critical race theory is a way of thinking about America's history through the lens of racism that was developed in the 1970s and 1980s. While there is little evidence it is taught in schools, the concept has become a flashpoint in the culture wars since the killing of George Floyd prompted a national reckoning on race. Julie Feasel, who had been on that Olentangy school board since 2006, opted to retire this year because all the ugliness made the job exhausting. She said she hadn't faced a candidate challenge since 2013.

"It's the storm of all ages when it comes to public service," she said. "People have to educate themselves as to who's hiding behind the curtain. It's like the Wizard of Oz - who's pulling the strings?"

One of the active groups in Ohio is Ohio Value Voters, which created its own spinoff - Protect Ohio Children Coalition - in April, state business records show. The group's leaders did not return phone calls or emails seeking comment, but its website coaches parents to show up in groups of 30 and employ a "tsunami strategy" to raise hot-button social issues and disrupt board meetings.

The group also keeps an interactive "indoctrination map" that takes aim at districts offering what it describes as critical race theory, comprehensive sexuality education, and social-emotional learning. It also directs parents to the FreedomWorks training academy, stating as one of its goals "replacing radical school board officials through the election process."

Charlie Wilson, a school board member in Worthington, another Columbus suburb, and the immediate past president of the National School Boards Association, said board seats are particularly vulnerable to challengers emerging from that movement in a year like this.



President Joe Biden arrives at St. Joseph on the Brandywine Catholic Church in Wilmington, Del., with his grandchildren Finnegan Biden and Natalie Biden, to attend Mass, Sunday, Oct. 10, 2021. (AP)

America

Police officer gunned down: A Georgia police officer was gunned down outside a police station during his first shift with the department early Saturday, authorities said.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation said Officer Dylan Harrison, 26, was fatally shot outside the Alamo Police Department by Damien Anthony Ferguson, 43, remained on the loose Saturday night, despite the launch of a large manhunt.

Officials did not immediately say what prompted the shooting in Wheeler County, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) southeast of Macon. "Officer Harrison was a part-time Alamo police officer working his first shift with the department last night," GBI spokesperson Natalie Ammons said during a news conference, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. She said Harrison was also a full-time Oconee Drug Task Force agent in nearby Dodge County. (AP)

Missing boy found alive: A 3-year-old Texas boy who was missing for four days was found alive in a wooded area Saturday and seemed to be in good health, authorities said.

Christopher Ramirez was found following a tip from a citizen and was being taken to a hospital for evaluation, according to Grimes County Sheriff Don Sowell. It's not yet clear how the child survived after he wandered off while playing with a family dog in the yard of his family's home in southeastern Texas.

"He's drinking lots of water, but he's good," Sowell said. "He's alive, laughing, cutting up, crying. His mom is crying. He's in good shape." The child disappeared Wednesday afternoon from his yard near Plantersville, about 60 miles (100 kilometers) northwest of Houston. He was found not far from where authorities had been searching, Sowell said. (AP)

GOP hopeful has COVID: Tea party firebrand Allen West, a candidate for the Republican nomination for governor of Texas, said Saturday that he has received monoclonal antibody injections after being diagnosed with COVID-19 pneumonia.

The antibodies are used to treat those in the early stages of a coronavirus infection. "My chest X-rays do show COVID pneu-

monia, not serious. I am probably going to be admitted to the hospital," West wrote. "There's a concern about my oxygen saturation levels, which are at 89 and they should be at 95."

He also said his wife, Angela West, also tested positive and has received monoclonal antibodies. According to his Twitter account, Allen West did not get vaccinated against the virus, but his wife did. (AP)

Deputy 'on life support': A man-

Military

Right-sizing the force

Army offers armor for smaller troops

WASHINGTON, Oct 10, (AP): Army Capt. Kim Pierre-Zamora remembers the protective vest she was issued when she went to basic training a number of years ago. It was a size medium that hung down too far and made it difficult for her to even bend over to pick up something.

"Whenever I tried to move or tried to shoulder my weapon or shoot on a pop-up range really quickly, I would have to physically pick up the vest and move it in order to shoulder my weapon," Pierre-Zamora said.

It's a common complaint from female soldiers and small-stature men who have struggled with the bulky armor they've worn over two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in recent weeks, the Army for the first time has begun handing out armor in three additional sizes: extra small short, small short and small long. The armor can be adjusted in multiple ways to fit better and allow soldiers to move faster and more freely.

The "modular scalable vest" was distributed to more than 4,500 soldiers so far in the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, over the past

few weeks. Female soldiers also will be able to get new versions of the combat shirt more tailored for a woman's shape. Those shirts are given out only when soldiers deploy.

Army researchers have been working on the changes for years, trying to come up with combat gear that is lighter and fits better.

Effort

Initially, the effort to add more sizes was in response to complaints from female soldiers, who are increasingly moving into combat jobs previously open only to men.

As more women deployed to a war zone, they often found that they were shorter and smaller than many of the men and needed armor that allows for narrower shoulders, a bust and hips.

Early on, however, the Army made the decision to make the vests unisex. The decision, said Lt. Col. Stephen Miller, was based on the belief that smaller male soldiers who might need a short or small sized vest would refuse to take anything that was "stamped female." He's product

manager for soldier protective equipment at PEO Soldier, an Army organization that coordinates the fielding of armor, weapons and other equipment.

That move has proved to be a success. Nearly 25 percent or 1,200, of the 82nd Airborne soldiers so far have gotten armor in the three new sizes, said Pierre-Zamora, who works as an assistant product manager at PEO Soldier. Of those 1,200, about 100 have been women.

There are five other regular sizes that have been available previously - extra small, small, medium, large and extra large.

Pierre-Zamora said the new short and long versions fit many soldiers better. As an example, she said that she and another female soldier appear to be about the same size, but she said she wears an extra small, while the other soldier wears an extra small short.

"Outwardly we both look like we're about the same size, but her torso is a little bit shorter than mine," she said.

The vest, she said, also allows soldiers to move the ballistic armor plates that can be inserted for additional protection.



West



Harrison



The senior management and staff of Al Seef hospital with dignitaries from CIPS (Kuwait branch) and the British Embassy, Kuwait



Mr. Tareef Al Awadi and Mr. Ashraf Elhag receiving the CIPS award from Mr. Jassem M. Alshatti (CIPS Kuwait Chairman) in the presence of the British Ambassador to Kuwait Mrs. Belinda Lewis and DIT-Director Ms. Shikha Tiwari

Al Seef Hospital is the first hospital in Kuwait to earn CIPS Corporate Ethics Mark

Becoming the first Hospital in Kuwait to achieve this global milestone, Al Seef Hospital announced that it had successfully obtained the Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS) Corporate Ethics Mark. To earn this internationally renowned CIPS Ethics Mark, the Materials Management team of Al Seef Hospital managed to complete the Institute's specialized eLearning program on ethical procurement and supply practices, and pass a test. The Mark demonstrates the hospital's strict commitment to maintaining the highest global ethical standards across all its transactions.

Globally recognized as the largest and leading professional body for procurement and supply, CIPS offers a world-class eLearning program for all levels of procurement professionals. The CIPS ethics training and test provides quality education and guidance for organizations looking to enable its individuals to hone their skills and knowledge in the profession, ultimately demonstrating their

commitment to sustainability and other activities such as eliminating fraud and corruption through ethical practices.

On his part, Mr. Tareef Al Awadi, Vice President - Marketing and Public Relations commented "I would like to thank the presence of her Excellency the British Ambassador to the State of Kuwait, Mrs. Belinda Lewis and for her participation in the honoring ceremony of the Materials management team at Al Seef Hospital.

Also I would like to thank our Materials Management Team for all their dedication in achieving this Global Award. We are very proud to be the first Hospital in Kuwait to receive this award from the largest professional body in the world for procurement and supply. This award demonstrates our commitment to maintaining world class procurement standards and ensuring ethical sourcing and management of suppliers."

During the ceremony, the CEO of the hospital, Mr. Ashraf Elhag, expressed his happiness on achieving this

certificate, saying: "On my behalf and on behalf of the hospital's executive committee, I thank all the employees and officials who contributed to obtaining this certificate, which came as a result of their sincere dedication and hard work, and the keenness of the hospital administration to work according to the highest Global standards of Ethics and implementing excellent procurement and supply management policies."

Commenting on the achievement, CIPS, Managing Director Sam Achampong said: "Good healthcare is a vital aspect to our lives that enables us to continue to work, travel and take care of our families, so knowing that procurement is being conducted with ethical principles in mind is a comfort and differentiates the hospital from others in the region.

I commend the team at Al Seef Hospital for their knowledge and dedication in going through the rigorous detailed training and for taking the test, providing confidence to their

colleagues, stakeholders and patients that important ethical issues are high on the agenda."

British Ambassador to Kuwait Mrs. Belinda Lewis said: "I'm delighted to celebrate Al Seef Hospital's achievement of a British qualification in Corporate Ethical Procurement and Supply, awarded by the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS).

The UK education sector offers a wide range of qualifications from awarding bodies such as CIPS. These qualifications can be academic, vocational or skills-related and are recognised throughout the world across a range of professions: from procurement to engineering, and healthcare to HR. It was a pleasure to congratulate the Al Seef hospital team on their CIPS Award".

The event was attended by several dignitaries from CIPS (Kuwait Branch), Department of International Trade (British Embassy) and the management and staff of Al Seef Hospital.