

NATION & WORLD

DIGEST

Judge orders terror plot suspect to stay jailed

OKLAHOMA CITY — An Afghan man accused of plotting an Election Day attack in the U.S. was ordered Thursday to remain in custody as officials disclosed that he previously worked as a security guard for a U.S. military installation in Afghanistan.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Suzanne Mitchell in Oklahoma City ruled after testimony from an FBI special agent that Nasir Ahmad Tawhedi, 27, of Oklahoma City and his brother-in-law, a juvenile, took steps to obtain rifles and ammunition and planned a Nov. 5 attack on large crowds. Mitchell also determined there's probable cause to bind Tawhedi over for trial.

An FBI agent testified that Tawhedi also is linked to an investigation in France that led to arrests this month of three people, including two of Tawhedi's brothers, who authorities say were plotting a terrorist attack in that country. Authorities say the suspects were inspired by Islamic State ideology.

CDC survey shows US teen tobacco use fell

NEW YORK — Teen smoking hit an all-time low in the U.S. this year, part of a big drop in the youth use of tobacco overall, the government reported Thursday.

There was a 20% drop in the estimated number of middle and high school students who recently used at least one tobacco product, including cigarettes, electronic cigarettes, nicotine pouches and hookahs. The number fell from 2.8 million last year to 2.25 million this year — the lowest since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's key survey began in 1999.

A previously reported drop in vaping largely explains the overall decline in tobacco use from 10% to about 8% of students, health officials said. The youth e-cigarette rate fell to under 6% this year, down from 7.7% last year — the lowest at any point in the last decade. The results come from an annual CDC survey, which included nearly 30,000 students at 283 middle and high schools. The response rate was about 33%.

BRIEFLY

UKRAINE WAR: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday his government has intelligence information that 10,000 troops from North Korea are being prepared to join Russian forces fighting against his country, warning the conflict could turn into a "world war."

TRANS CARE: A lawsuit announced Thursday by Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton alleges Dr. May Lau, a physician in the Dallas area, provided hormones to more than 20 minors in violation of a state ban on gender-affirming care for youths.

ASSASSINATION PLAN: The U.S. Justice Department announced criminal charges Thursday against Indian government employee Vikash Yadav, 39, in a foiled plot to kill a Sikh separatist leader living in New York City.

CAPITOL RIOT: Peter Moloney, 60, of Bayport, N.Y., a former Long Island funeral home owner, pleaded guilty Thursday to spraying wasp killer at police and assaulting two journalists during the Jan. 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol riot.

GEORGIA: National and state Republicans on Thursday appealed a judge's ruling this week that said seven election rules recently passed by Georgia's State Election Board are "illegal, unconstitutional and void."

LEBANESE: The Biden administration announced temporary legal status Thursday for Lebanese citizens already in the U.S., likely pleasing some Arab voters.

— Associated Press



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SECRET SERVICE

Panel: Changes needed

Review blames agency for failures at July rally where Trump was shot

REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An independent panel investigating the attempted assassination of Donald Trump at a July 13 campaign rally in Pennsylvania says the Secret Service needs "fundamental reform" and new leadership, and that "another Butler can and will happen again" without major changes in how candidates are protected.

The review faulted the Secret Service for poor communications that day and failing to secure the

building where the gunman took his shots. It also found more systemic issues at the agency such as a failure to understand the unique risks facing Trump and a culture of doing "more with less."

The 52-page report issued Thursday recommended bringing in new, outside leadership and refocusing on the Secret Service's protective mission.

"The Secret Service as an agency requires fundamental reform to carry out its mission," the authors wrote to Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas of the Homeland Security Department, the Secret Service's parent agency, in a letter accompanying their report. "Without that reform, the Independent Review Panel believes another Butler can and will hap-

pen again."

One rallygoer was killed and two others wounded when Thomas Matthew Crooks climbed onto the roof of a nearby building and opened fire as Trump spoke. The former president was wounded in the ear before being rushed off the stage by Secret Service agents. That shooting, along with another incident in Florida when Trump was golfing, has led to a crisis in confidence in the agency.

The report by a panel of four former law enforcement officials from national and state government follows investigations by members of Congress, the agency's own investigators and by Homeland Security's oversight body.

The Secret Service said it was

making changes.

"We have already significantly improved our readiness, operational and organizational communications and implemented enhanced protective operations for the former president and other protectees," the agency's acting director Ronald Rowe said in a statement Thursday.

The agency said it was looking at how to retain personnel, modernize technology and bolster training, and was working with Congress to increase funding.

Mayorkas said in a statement that his department is taking action in response to "the security failures" at the rally and what the review panel describes as "systemic and foundational issues that underlie those failures."



STEPHANIE SCARBROUGH, ASSOCIATED PRESS

EARLY VOTING STARTS IN STORM-BATTERED NORTH CAROLINA

People stand in line at a polling place Thursday in Black Mountain, N.C. Early in-person voting began statewide Thursday in the presidential battleground state, including in mountainous areas where thousands of potential voters still lack power and clean running water after Hurricane Helene's epic flooding in late September. Election officials said all but four of 80 sites in the 25 western counties hardest hit by the storm were open for the 17-day early voting period.

Grand jury indicts father, son

Teen allegedly took assault-style rifle to high school, killed 4

JEFF AMY
Associated Press

ATLANTA — A grand jury indicted both a father and son on murder charges Thursday in a mass shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia.

A Barrow County grand jury indicted 14-year-old Colt Gray on a total of 55 counts, including murder in the deaths of four people and 25 counts of aggravated assault. Grand jurors for-

mally charged his father, Colin Gray, with 29 counts, including two counts of second-degree murder and two counts of involuntary manslaughter. Both also face multiple counts of cruelty to children.

Both are scheduled to appear for arraignment on Nov. 21, when each would formally enter a plea. Colin Gray is being held in the Barrow County jail. Colt Gray is charged as an adult but is being held in a juvenile detention center in Gainesville. Neither has sought to be released on bail and their lawyers have declined to comment.

The Sept. 4 shooting killed

teachers Richard Aspinwall, 39, and Cristina Irimie, 53, and students Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo, both 14. Another teacher and eight more students were wounded.

Second-degree murder is an unusual charge under Georgia law, resulting from a death of a child when someone is committing the crime of cruelty to children. Colin Gray, 54, is accused of committing cruelty to children by giving his son access to a gun and ammunition "after receiving sufficient warning that Colt Gray would harm and endanger the bodily safety of another," the indictment states.

District Attorney Brad Smith told reporters on Sept. 6 he had never prosecuted a second-degree murder charge.

Thursday, Smith told reporters he charged Colt Gray with 25 aggravated assault counts for everyone at the school who was in the line of fire, although Colt Gray shot 11 people. The 20 cruelty to children charges against Colin Gray are for every child at whom Colt Gray is alleged to have shot.

"Every person, every kid in that school was a victim," Smith told reporters. "Kids in all the other schools that were locked down during this were victims."

President visiting allies in Europe ahead of vote

He will spend Friday in Berlin, meet with other 'Quad' leaders

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BERLIN — President Joe Biden will spend Friday in Berlin with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz as the U.S. election approaches.

There is also a meeting with other two leaders in the "European Quad": French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre described Biden as having a "close relationship" with Scholz, who early this year helped broker a multicountry prisoner swap that brought

back to the U.S. the journalist Evan Gershkovich and former Marine Paul Whelan. The German leader told Biden before the deal in words to the effect, "For you, I will do this."

The U.S. and Germany are the largest sources of aid to Ukraine as it fights to repel a Russian invasion. Biden also feels obligated to ready allies for the possible return to the White House of Republican Donald Trump, who antagonized U.S. allies while displaying an appreciation for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The administration said Biden, whose trip began Thursday, had no plans to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The two spoke Wednesday about additional military aid.

1M public workers see student debt canceled

Biden touts milestone for those in nonprofit, government jobs

COLLIN BINKLEY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A student loan debt cancellation program for public workers has granted relief to more than 1 million Americans — up from just 7,000 who were approved before it was updated by the Biden administration two years ago.

President Joe Biden announced the milestone on Thursday, saying his administration restored a promise to America's teachers, firefighters, nurses and other public servants. He celebrated it

even as his broader student loan plans remain halted by courts.

"For too long, the government failed to live up to its commitments," Biden said in a statement. "We vowed to fix that, and because of actions from our administration, now over 1 million public service workers have gotten the relief they are entitled to under the law."

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program was created in 2007, promising college graduates that the remainder of their federal student loans would be zeroed out after 10 years working in government or nonprofit jobs. But starting in 2017, the vast majority of applicants were rejected because of little-known eligibility rules.