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SCOTUS denies Trump effort to block tax return subpoena

The move clears the way for prosecutors in New York to receive eight years of the ex-president's tax returns and financial records.

PAGE 16



'An easy target'

GOP opposition to Haaland rankles Native Americans.

PAGE 9

Urgency to ramp up vaccination clashes with Biden's equity focus

Virus variants are adding pressure to speed up vaccinations, complicating efforts to ensure hard-to-reach communities don't get left behind.

PAGE 7



Matt Wuerker

The cartoonist's daily take on the world of politics.

PAGE 18

U.S. surpasses 500K Covid deaths

'As a nation we can't accept such a cruel fate,' Biden said before a national moment of silence

BY BRIANNA EHLEY

The U.S. surpassed half a million coronavirus deaths on Monday, reinforcing the magnitude of the pandemic even as more Americans get vaccinated and Covid deaths and hospitalizations are declining.

The milestone, based on a tally maintained by Johns Hopkins University, came just over a month after the nation's death toll passed 400,000 and as public health officials train their sights on new, more contagious coronavirus strains that

have been reported in almost every state and threaten to tax already stressed local health systems.

"As a nation we can't accept such a cruel fate," said President Joe Biden, before holding a moment of silence for those who have died. "We have been fighting the pandemic so long, we have to resist becoming numb to the sorrow. We have to resist viewing each life as a

statistic or a blur or on the news."

The president ordered flags be flown at half-staff for the next five days.

Biden, soon after being sworn in, predicted the nation would hit half a million deaths by the end of February while warning his administration would be unable to dramatically increase the pace of vaccinations. The half-million mark,

beyond its symbolism, underscores how quickly Biden's team has come to own the health crisis as tensions build with states over vaccine allocations, school reopenings and basic public health measures like mask mandates.

"It really is a terrible situation that we have been through, and that we're still going through,"

DEATHS on Page 10



AL DRAGO/AP

Attorney general nominee Merrick Garland is sworn in at his confirmation hearing on Monday. Sen. Richard Blumenthal said Garland "is about as sure a bet as you can have ... that he will be confirmed."

Garland cruises through confirmation hearing

Republicans nudged AG candidate to commit to allowing federal prosecutors to press on with politically sensitive investigations

BY MARIANNE LEVINE AND JOSH GERSTEIN

President Joe Biden's pick to lead the Justice Department, D.C. Circuit Judge Merrick Garland, appears to be coasting toward an easy confirmation after a relatively low-key outing before the Senate Judiciary Committee

on Monday.

Republicans did use the opportunity to gingerly push Garland to commit to allowing federal prosecutors to press on with politically sensitive investigations into the Department of Justice probe of Donald Trump's ties to Russia and into the business affairs

of Biden's son Hunter.

But beyond vowing that politics would play no role in his decisions, Garland made few promises. Despite that, there was little acrimony and many Democrats and Republicans on the panel appeared to treat his confirmation

GARLAND on Page 11

Tanden in jeopardy as two Republicans oppose nomination

BY MARIANNE LEVINE AND BURGESS EVERETT

Neera Tanden's nomination to be President Joe Biden's budget chief is in even more trouble.

GOP Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Mitt Romney of Utah said on Monday they will oppose Tanden to lead the White House Budget Office, dealing a decisive blow to her hopes of confirmation. And Democrats aren't even sure whether Tanden will receive a vote on the Senate floor.

Tanden's bid to become director of the Office of Management and Budget first became imperiled Friday, when Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W. Va.) announced he would oppose

TANDEN on Page 12



LEIGH VOGEL/AP

Neera Tanden's nomination to lead the Office of Management and Budget is in trouble.

Democrats plot their Plan B to save minimum wage hike

BY CAITLIN EMMA AND AARON LORENZO

Democrats are scrambling to piece together a backup plan that could save their minimum wage hike from getting tossed out of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package and win over moderates wary of the proposal.

The budget tool that Democrats are using to steer Biden's plan through Congress without GOP support, known as reconciliation, is laden with thorny restrictions waiting to ensnare the \$15 mini-

mum wage boost they've added to the next tranche of coronavirus relief. The wage increase is also running into strong headwinds from two influential Senate Democratic centrists, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who are both resistant to enacting the sweeping policy change through the powerful budget process.

The White House and Democratic leaders have been waiting to see how the Senate's parliament

MINIMUM WAGE on Page 13

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AN OPEN LETTER ON HEALTH DISPARITIES TO PRESIDENT BIDEN, VICE PRESIDENT HARRIS, AND MEMBERS OF YOUR NATIONAL HEALTH CARE TEAM

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Members of Your National Health Care Team:

It is with great hope that we welcome you to the White House.

As Black female CEOs of some of the nation's leading health care organizations, we share your priority to get the pandemic under control through the safe, free, and equitable distribution of vaccines. COVID-19 continues to serve as a stark reminder of the racial disparities that exist in our healthcare system, especially for Black Americans who have died of the virus at a rate of more than twice that of White Americans.

In addition to the devastation from COVID, the Black community continues to experience health care disparities across all generations, from birth throughout the lifespan. We constantly see the impact of these inequities through the work of our organizations in responding to the health care needs of Black children and adults with disabilities; Black mothers and babies; and Black women, men and children struggling with chronic illnesses including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity.

We applaud your commitment to improve and expand the Affordable Care Act and to protect Medicaid so that all Americans, regardless of age or color, have access to quality, affordable health care with intervention and prevention programs to address conditions that disproportionately affect the Black community. These actions promise to change the trajectory for communities of color in achieving social determinants of health which a recent scientific review revealed are shaped by the distribution of money, power, and resources, and are mostly responsible for health inequities.

The racial divide in health care is the result of 400 years of policy, legislation, laws, and infrastructure that continues to disenfranchise Black Americans. Undoing these inequalities has been a struggle throughout our nation's history, but we must wade through the racism built into the system as we try to right these wrongs.

We urge you to prioritize solutions to remedy these persistent health care inequities within the Black community that have only worsened during the pandemic. It is imperative that we ensure that all Americans have equal access to resources to enjoy optimal health and well-being in a just society.

We welcome the opportunity to work with you to further the vision of a more United States.

We cannot do this alone.

Your presence brings us hope for long overdue change.

Sincerely,



Tracey D. Brown
American Diabetes Association®
Chief Executive Officer



Linda Goler Blount, MPH
Black Women's Health Imperative
President and CEO



Angela F. Williams
Easterseals
President and CEO



Stacey D. Stewart
March of Dimes
President and CEO

