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Inside C2

# Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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## Kansas votes to preserve abortion rights in first post-Roe v. Wade election test

Aug 2 (Reuters) - Kansas voters on Tuesday rejected an effort to remove abortion protections from the state's constitution, a resounding win for the abortion rights movement in the first statewide electoral test since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

The amendment's failure in the conservative state lifted Democrats' hopes that the issue of abortion rights will draw voters to the party in November's midterm elections even as they worry about surging inflation.

The result also will prevent Kansas' Republican-led legislature from passing severe abortion restrictions in the state, which has become a key abortion access point for America's heartland.

"This should be a real wake-up call for abortion opponents," said Neal Allen, a political science professor at Wichita State University. "When a total ban looks like a possibility, then you're going to get a lot of people to turn out and you're going to lose a lot of the more moderate supporters of abortion restrictions."

Political analysts had expected the Kansas amendment to pass, given that Republicans typically turn out in greater numbers for the state's primary elections than Democrats and independents.

But Tuesday's vote drew higher-than-expected turnout. With 98% of the vote counted, 59% of voters favored preserving abortion rights compared to nearly 41% who supported removing abortion protections from the state constitution, according to Edison Research.

"This is a titanic result for Kansas politics," said Allen.

Kansas' ballot initiative is the first of several that will ask U.S. voters to weigh in on abortion rights this year. Kentucky, California, Vermont and possibly Michigan will have abortion on the ballot this fall.

The successful "vote no" campaign in Kansas could offer a blueprint to abortion rights groups looking to harness voter energy in the wake of Roe's reversal, Allen said.

U.S. President Joe Biden joined Democrats across the country in applauding the results on Tuesday.

"This vote makes clear what we know: The majority of Americans agree that women should have access to abortion and should have the right to make their own health care decisions," Biden said in a statement.

Kansas voters to decide future of abortion rights



Abortion-rights supporters react at early poll rejection to abortion ban in Kansas  
Kansas votes to preserve abortion rights

A statewide survey released by the Docking Institute of Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University in February showed most Kansas residents did not support a total abortion ban.

Sixty percent disagreed that abortion should be completely illegal, and 50.5% said, "The Kansas government should not place any regulations on the circumstances under which women can get abortions."

Kansas Republicans had been pushing for a state constitutional amendment to eliminate abortion rights since 2019, when the Kansas Supreme Court ruled the state constitution protected the right to abortion.

As a result of the ruling, Kansas has maintained more lenient policies than other conservative neighbors. The state allows abortion up to 22 weeks of pregnancy with several restrictions, including a mandatory 24-hour waiting period and mandatory parental consent for minors.

**HIGH STAKES IN NOVEMBER**  
Patients travel to Kansas for abortions from Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri and other states that have

banned the procedure almost entirely since the Supreme Court in June overturned Roe, the 1973 decision that legalized abortion nationwide.

A spokesperson for the Trust Women abortion clinic in Wichita said 60% of their abortion patients are from out of state.

Tuesday's referendum drew national attention and money. The Value Them Both Association, which supported the amendment, raised about \$4.7 million this year, about two-thirds of that from regional Catholic dioceses, according to campaign finance data.

Kansans for Constitutional Freedom, the main coalition opposing the amendment, raised about \$6.5 million, including more than \$1 million from Planned Parenthood groups.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, a national anti-abortion group, said it spent \$1.4 million to promote the amendment and canvassed 250,000 homes in Kansas.

"Tonight's loss is a huge disappointment for pro-life Kansans and Americans nationwide," said Mallory Carroll, a spokesperson for the group. "The stakes for the pro-life movement in the upcoming midterm elections could not be higher."

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# WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

08/02/2022

## Pelosi's Final Political Journey

On her trip to Asia, Speaker Nancy Pelosi is expected to visit Taiwan despite warnings from President Biden's administration officials who are worried about China's response.

According to Taiwanese officials, Pelosi will stay one night in Taipei. The U.S. Defense Department officials are watching the clock and monitoring Chinese movement in the region and trying to develop a secure plan for her safety.

Chinese Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told the reporters that, "We would like to tell the U.S. once again that China is standing by and the Chinese People's Liberation Army will not sit idly by. China will take a resolute response and strong countermeasures to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity."



what Speaker Pelosi intends to do. Congress is an independent coequal branch of government. The decision is entirely the speaker's." Blinken said that such a visit has precedent noting past speakers and members of the U.S. Congress have visited Taiwan.

he question of Taiwan is "the most sensitive and important core issue in U.S. and China relations," the Chinese diplomat said.

We are very worried about the current situation in the Taiwan Strait. As Prime Minister Lee of Singapore said, "The two superpowers should coexist peacefully for the benefit of the world."

We hope that Speaker Pelosi will use her wisdom to write a glorious page in the final stage of her political career and never bring the threat of war to the world.



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in New York that, "We do not know



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## Editor's Choice



Member of the media film Joint Coordination Centre officials boarding Sierra Leone-flagged cargo ship Razoni, carrying Ukrainian grain, in the Black Sea off Kilyos, near Istanbul, Turkey. REUTERS/Umit Bektas



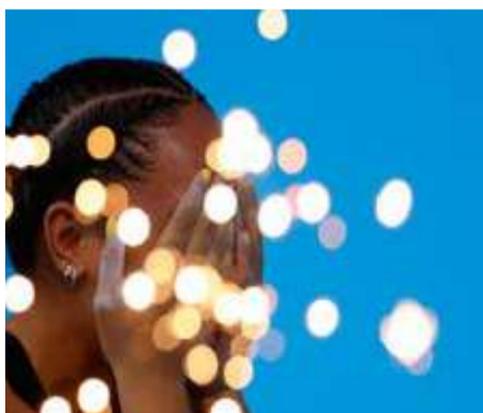
Britain's Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and Princess Charlotte are pictured in the stands during men's 1500m freestyle heats at the Commonwealth Games. REUTERS/Stefan Wermuth



A woman is helped to exit a U.S. Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter after being rescued from flooding in eastern Kentucky, U.S. in a still image from video taken July 28-29, 2022. Staff Sgt. Shaun Morris/U.S. Army National Guard/Handout via REUTERS



Aircraft participate in Pyramids Air Show 2022 where Egyptian Air Forces' "Silver Stars" aerobatics perform along with the South Korean "Black Eagles" aerobatic team, at the Pyramids Plateau in Giza, Egypt. REUTERS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh



Vanuatu's Ajah Pritchard-Lolo reacts during the Women's 87kg weightlifting final during Commonwealth Games. REUTERS/Hannah McKay



A child points a water pistol at a statue of Russian President Vladimir Putin riding a tank by French artist James Colomina in a playground in Central Park in Manhattan, New York City, August 2, 2022. REUTERS/Andrew Kelly

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Nearly Half Of New U.S. Virus Infections Are In Five States



Manhattan New York City During Lockdown

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Nearly half of new coronavirus infections nationwide are in just five states — a situation that is putting pressure on the federal government to consider changing how it distributes vaccines by sending more doses to hot spots.

New York, Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania and New Jersey together reported 44% of the nation's new COVID-19 infections, or nearly 197,500 new cases, in the latest available seven-day period, according to state health agency data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Total U.S. infections during the same week numbered more than 452,000.

The heavy concentration of new cases in states that account for 22% of the U.S. population has prompted some experts and elected officials to call for President Joe Biden's administration to ship additional vaccine doses to those places. So far, the White House has shown no signs of shifting from its policy of dividing vaccine doses among states based on population.

Sending extra doses to places where infection numbers are climbing makes sense, said Dr. Elvin H. Geng, a professor in infectious diseases at Washington University.

But it's also complicated. States that are more successfully controlling the virus might see less vaccine as a result.



"You wouldn't want to make those folks wait because they were doing better," Geng said. "On the other hand, it only makes sense to send vaccines to where the cases are rising."

The spike in cases has been especially pronounced in Michigan, where the seven-day average of daily new infections reached 6,719 cases Sunday — more than double what it was two weeks earlier. Only New York reported higher case numbers. And California and Texas, which have vastly larger populations than Michigan, are reporting less than half its number of daily infections.

Though Michigan has seen the highest rate of new infections in the past two

weeks, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said she does not plan to tighten restrictions. She has blamed the virus surge on pandemic fatigue, which has people moving about more, as well as more contagious variants.

"Taking steps back wasn't going to fix the issue," Whitmer said as she got her first vaccine Tuesday at Ford Field in Detroit, home of the NFL's Lions. "What we have to do is really put our foot down on the pedal on vaccines" and urge people to wear masks, keep their social distance and wash their hands.



Whitmer got the shot the day after Michigan expanded eligibility to everyone 16 and older. She asked the White House last week during a conference call with governors whether it has considered sending extra vaccine to states battling virus surges. She was told all options were on the table.

In New York City, vaccination appointments are still challenging to get. Mayor Bill de Blasio has publicly harangued the federal government about the need for a bigger vaccine allotment almost daily, a refrain he repeated when speaking to reporters Tuesday.

"We still need supply, supply, supply," de Blasio said, before adding, "But things are really getting better."

On the state level, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has not called publicly for an increase in New York's vaccine allotment, even as cases ticked up in recent weeks and the number of hospitalized people hit a plateau.

In New Jersey, where the seven-day rolling average of daily new infections has risen over the past two weeks, from 4,050 daily cases to 4,250, Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said he is constantly talking to the White House about demand for the coronavirus vaccine, though he stopped

short of saying he was lobbying for more vaccines because of the state's high infection rate.



Vaccine shipments to New Jersey were up 12% in the last week, Murphy said Monday, though he questioned whether that's enough.

"We constantly look at, OK, we know we're going up, but are we going up at the rate we should be, particularly given the amount of cases we have?" Murphy said.

New virus variants are clearly one of the drivers in the increase, said Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, chair of the department of epidemiology and biostatistics at the University of California at San Francisco. Failure to suppress the rise in cases will lead to more people getting sick and dying, she said, and drive increases in other parts of the country.

"More vaccine needs to be where the virus is," Bibbins-Domingo said, adding that people should get over the "scarcity mindset" that has them thinking surging vaccine into one place will hurt people elsewhere.

In Florida, relaxed safeguards during a busy spring break season likely helped spread virus variants, said University of South Florida epidemiologist Jason Salemi. The state's seven-day average of daily new infections has exceeded 5,400, an increase of 20% in the past two weeks.



While many new infections appear to be among younger people, Salemi said he's worried about Florida's seniors. About 78% of residents age 65 and older have received at least one vaccine dose, but roughly 1 mil-

lion more still have not gotten any shots. "We seemingly have the supply," Salemi said. "Are these people not planning to get vaccinated?"

Talk of sending extra shots to some states comes at a time when the number of daily infections in the U.S. has fallen dramatically compared to a January spike following the holiday season. However, the seven-day average of daily infections been rising slowly since mid-March.

The five states seeing the most infections stand out. As of Tuesday, 31 U.S. states were reporting seven-day averages of fewer than 1,000 new daily cases.

White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients said Tuesday more than 28 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines will be delivered to states this week. That allocation will bring the U.S. total to more than 90 million doses distributed in the past three weeks.

The news came as Biden announced more than 150 million coronavirus shots have been administered since he took office, and that all adults will be eligible to receive a vaccine by April 19.



About 40% of U.S. adults have now received at least one COVID-19 shot, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 23% of American adults have been fully vaccinated — including more than half of Americans 65 and older.

Geng said the nation should take a step back and go slow. Even just a few more weeks of Americans sticking with social distancing and other precautions could make a huge difference.

"The take-home message here is, let's not jump the gun," Geng said. "There's light at the end of the tunnel. We all see it there. And we will get there. Slow and steady." (Courtesy apnews.com/)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

COVID Immunity Levels Can Be Measured In 15 minutes

Houston Startup Develops Ground Breaking COVID Immunity Test

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



A team of researchers at Brevitest has developed a quick, finger-stick blood test to determine immunity to COVID-19, using a small, desktop device they invented that conducts the test using robotic technology with proprietary testing cards used to analyze the blood samples. Photographed at their offices, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Houston. (Photo/Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

A Houston startup has developed a revolutionary COVID-19 test that can measure immunity levels and determine whether or when people need a new vaccine or booster to protect themselves from the disease.

The instant test could be widely available soon, if the Food and Drug Administration grants the new device fast-track approval. Knowing personal immunity levels could become increasingly important in the face of new variants, like omicron, when people need to decide whether or when they need a new vaccine or booster shot.

The affordable, first-of-its-kind fingerstick blood test is offered by Brevitest, a company developed at Fannin Innovation Studios, a life sciences incubator in River Oaks. Researchers invented a new method for measuring antibodies, using cloud computing to process results and delivering them in 15 minutes to determine if an immune system needs a boost.

Doctors, companies and public health officials can use the tests to determine the COVID immunity levels for individuals, workforces or entire communities so they can employ more targeted strategies for slowing the disease. Since the technology is protected by patents, Brevitest can license the unique device and potentially become one of the most significant startups to emerge from Houston's life sciences community in a decade.

Leo Linbeck III, the CEO and co-founder of Brevitest, said his company's technology builds on recent

research that has determined how many antibodies per unit of blood people need to fight off or minimize a coronavirus infection. The new test lets people know where they stand, whether from a vaccination or natural immunity to determine if they need a booster or difference vaccine Brevitest can adapt the test to detect antibodies for any variant, including omicron. Once approved, the company could begin deploying the device across the country within a few months to carry out millions of tests a week.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — worried about vaccines wearing off — recently authorized COVID-19 booster shots six months after vaccination, prioritizing those over 65 years old. But individual needs vary widely and some people lose antibodies quicker than others.

"Everyone's biology is different, and the data seems to indicate that it could be anywhere from three months to 12 months when you see the antibody level begin to wane," Linbeck told me. "That's particularly problematic for older people who tend to have less of an immune response or those who are immunosuppressed or immunocompromised."

Fast tests to detect SARS-CoV-2 antibodies have been on the market since early in the pandemic, but they only offer positive or negative results and don't measure antibodies.

Doctors who have patients with weak immune systems have relied on a precise blood test called an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, or ELISA, that are currently done at central laboratories. But those results can take several days to return.

"We're trying to build a point-of-care ELISA because the way we look at it, either you can have accuracy that will take time or you can have speed, and then you lose accuracy," ex-

plained Dr. Dev Chatterjee, a co-founder and co-inventor. "The question we asked ourselves is, is there a way we can marry the two?"

The Brevitest device allows a technician to place a small blood sample on a custom-designed cartridge, which is inserted into a shoebox-sized device that produces digital diagnostic data, the same as the precision test.

The device sends the data to the cloud, where it is processed using proprietary software Linbeck wrote. Patients receive an alert and can access the results with their phones, which also allows them to compare their result with the latest COVID immunity data.

The new company can make a profit at the same \$43 reimbursement rate insurance companies pay for a central lab test, Linbeck said. Brevitest is offering tests at its lab in Houston.



Until recently, researchers were unsure how many antibodies someone needed to fend off the virus. But that changed in September when the journal Nature Medicine published a new study that used the World Health Organization standard to measure antibody levels and showed a correlation between antibody levels and infection rates.

Healthy people can use the test to determine if they need a booster or should wait a few months to take full advantage of their vaccine or illness-induced antibodies.

"There's some evidence that if you wait longer and you let your antibody count drop, when you get that vaccine (booster), you get a bigger bump. You get more antibody production than you would if you had taken it while you still have active antibody response," he added.

Linbeck, Chatterjee and co-inventor Dr. Atul Varadhachary founded Brevitest in 2013 to create an office-based blood testing system that would generate precision blood test results quicker. The National Institutes of Health provided a grant during the test's early development, and the Centers for Disease Control asked Brevitest to develop an Ebola test during the 2014 outbreak.



Aquinas Companies CEO Leo Linbeck works on code for a BreviTest analyzer, BreviTest is one of the startup companies helped by Fannin Innovation Studio which helps researchers and scientists with life science product develop-

ment July 7, 2016, in Houston. (Photo/James Nielsen / Houston Chronicle)

Chatterjee and Varadhachary said the scientific challenge was far more formidable than expected. Designing a new cartridge that prepared the blood for scanning in a new way took years. Linbeck, an engineer, worked on reliability and durability to meet exacting medical standards. "Once you actually get down to developing for the real world versus creating something for the lab, there is a whole ocean of problems that you have to solve," Chatterjee explained.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the company refocused on measuring SARS-CoV-2 antibodies.

Brevitest is one of four life science start-ups spun out of Fannin Innovation Studio, Linbeck's biotechnology development company. He is best known as the executive chairman of the Linbeck Group, a construction company founded by his grandfather that built many of the structures at the Texas Medical Center. Linbeck and Varadhachary started Fannin to commercialize discoveries made at TMC. But Brevitest was Fannin's homegrown effort to address the lengthy delay in returning accurate blood test results, a goal of many companies.



A team at Brevitest has developed a quick, finger-stick blood test to determine a person's immunity to Covid-19 using a small, desktop device they invented that conducts the test using robotic technology with proprietary testing cards used to analyze the blood samples. Photographed at their offices, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021, in Houston. (Photo/Mark Mulligan, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer)

The most famous attempt to develop a rapid diagnostic device is Therasys, a Silicon Valley-based company that promised a hand held workup from a tiny vial using a handheld device. Linbeck, Chatterjee and Varadhachary say Therasys's claims never made any sense to them, and the company's founder, Elizabeth Holmes, is in federal court this week fighting federal fraud charges. In contrast to Therasys, Brevitest only claims to conduct one test per fingerstick and will release its testing data for outside review, Chatterjee said.

Brevitest will never replace the broad tests best done by a central lab, for things like annual physicals, because they require a large amount

of blood and the big machines are more efficient, Linbeck said. But the team foresees doctors and clinics using Brevitest to routinely monitor patients with compromised immune systems or to track specific biomarkers for cancer and other infectious diseases.

Most breakthrough research in health care and medical devices never makes it out of the lab because investors lack the patience required to bring a product to market.



Leo Linbeck III, left, founder and chairman of Fannin Innovation Studio and managing partner Atul Varadhachary, right, develop medical technologies along with their portfolio companies like Procyron. Wednesday, Nov. 12, 2014, in Houston. (Photo/Marie D. De Jesus, Staff / Houston Chronicle)

The company's strategy of licensing bio-medical discoveries and gathering researchers under the studio's umbrella to keep administrative overhead low until they had a commercial product. Linbeck said the investor community needs to have more conversations about the best way to finance life science startups.

"There's a lot of misconceptions about the way that this stuff works," he said. "Having been down in the weeds, I have a greater level of humility and respect around just how difficult this is. The human body doesn't like to be tinkered with, which is great news for us from an evolutionary standpoint, but it's not so great from a medical innovation development standpoint." From an investor perspective, Linbeck said the most significant challenge was finding the right people to manage the transition from the research lab to a for-profit company. Fannin recruits and trains people with medical and life science skills who are interested in entrepreneurship.

"This is about making a big pile of money because that's also what will sustain us over the long haul," Linbeck said. "That means that we get involved early, and it takes longer, but when the payoff happens, I think it'll be really-big multiples."

Energy projects and technology investments can pay off big, too, and take less time. But Linbeck said he doesn't mind the wait to build a business that saves lives.

"Anything really important and high impact takes a decade," he said. "It just does." (Courtesy houstonchronicle.com)