



## FED CUTS KEY RATE

THE FEDERAL RESERVE, CHAIRED BY JEROME POWELL, LEFT, CUTS INTEREST RATES BY A QUARTER POINT, WITH A NARROW FED MAJORITY PENCILING IN AT LEAST TWO MORE CUTS THIS YEAR. **C1**

WASHINGTON

## Fired CDC chief sees ‘dangerous place’ ahead for nation’s health



**S**usan Monarez, fired as director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after clashing with Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. over vaccines, arrives Wednesday to testify before a Senate panel on Capitol Hill. She warned lawmakers America’s public health system is headed to a “very dangerous place” with Kennedy and his anti-vaccine advisers in charge and that deadly diseases like polio and whooping cough could be poised to make a comeback in the U.S. “I believe preventable diseases will return, and I believe we will have our children harmed by things they don’t need to be harmed by,” she said. See C1. *Luis Magana, Associated Press*

WASHINGTON

## As threats surge, lawmakers make security a priority

*Killing of conservative activist fuels funding push to enhance congressional safety.*

**Benjamin J. Hulac** *NJ Spotlight News*

Threats and violence against members of Congress, their staff and their families have sharply increased in recent years, a trend that places an almost ubiquitous cloud of risk over lawmakers of both political parties.

Threats come in over the phone, via social media or in person. Often they include detailed information about a lawmaker’s family. Racial epithets are common. Slurs too.

“I try to be alert and aware of my surroundings,” Rep. Donald Norcross, D-1st Dist., said in an interview with NJ Spotlight News. “I have people with me when I’m at public events.”

Rep. Herb Conaway, D-3rd Dist., a first-term member, said he had been “lax” in upgrading security at his house. But when he got to Congress, stories of violence other members told him prompted him to shift, he said. “It has spurred me to make sure that I deal with the security threats around my home.”

In interviews, New Jersey lawmakers said the blend of the Internet, social media and partisan vitriol has fueled an uptick in political violence — the latest example being the assassination last week of hard-right commentator Charlie Kirk, an event that rattled lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Yet the shooting, the latest in a string of politically motivated acts of violence, is extremely unlikely to spur Congress to **SEE SAFETY, A6**

TRENTON

## Detective: Man confessed before killing

**Kevin Shea** *For Times of Trenton*

A Trenton man charged with killing his girlfriend in a Bensalem, Pennsylvania motel earlier this year confessed the crime to a New Jersey detective, authorities say.

Orenthia Upshur, of Trenton, returned to the city after allegedly shooting Maisha Coon on Jan. 15 at the Sleep Inn & Suites on Street Road. Hours later, a Mercer County tactical team arrested him after an early-morning standoff in the city’s West Ward during which he fired at police.

While in custody in Trenton, Upshur admitted killing Coon in room 317, the Bucks County District Attorney’s Office said Tuesday.

During a four-hour police interview, detailed Tuesday at a preliminary hearing in Bucks County by Detective Carlos Estevez, Upshur said Coon pleaded for help, and Upshur responded: “It’s all going to end tonight.”

Estevez is a New Jersey State Police detective assigned to Trenton’s Shooting Response Team, which investigated the Trenton side of the case. In Mercer County, Upshur faces 58 felonies for what police say was a shooting spree allegedly committed while he was looking for other Coon family members.

Upshur, 51, was extradited to Pennsylvania shortly after the crime and will first face murder and a host of related charges in Pennsylvania for the death of Coon, who was 49 and also lived in Trenton.

After Tuesday’s preliminary hearing, a judge held the case for trial. Upshur remains in custody in Bucks County.

Upshur’s attorney did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Authorities have previously described crimes that occurred on both sides of the Delaware River within a half hour that initially were not known to be related.

At about 5 a.m. on Jan. 15, an Upshur relative walked into the Pennsylvania State Police Trevoese station, in Bensalem, and reported Upshur had come to his house earlier in the morning and said he’d just shot and killed his girlfriend.

The man said Upshur made the remarks while holding a handgun and acting erratically.

The tipster said the crime apparently occurred at a motel, although he did not know exactly where, and that Upshur and Coon had prior domestic issues.

The man said he’d been on a call with Coon earlier in the night and heard her say, “I didn’t think you would harm me,” and “Please don’t do this to me,” before the call ended.

Pennsylvania police started tracking Coon’s phone and pinpointed it to a cluster of motels. They found her in room 317 about 90 minutes later, shot dead, “executed,” one official said.

Meanwhile, at about 4:30 a.m., Trenton police were alerted to gunfire around Parkside Avenue and Oak Lane. As officers arrived, they heard more shots.

Police later said it was Upshur and he was looking for Coon family members who lived in the area. He first fired at an occupied Uber vehicle, then kicked in the door of a home on Oak Lane that he knew, but it was not a Coon family home. Police evacuated residents from it after Upshur went to the second floor. He then fired at police officers below. None were able to fire back.

Mercer County’s Tactical Response Team arrested Upshur about two hours later.

Upshur’s Mercer County charges include 11 counts of attempted murder of a police officer.

The case is pending in Superior Court of Mercer County, the Mercer County Prosecutor’s Office said Wednesday.

STATEHOUSE

## Human composting takes root in N.J.

**Jackie Roman** *For Times of Trenton*

There’s a new organic compost on the market in New Jersey — human.

No, this is not a scene from “The Sopranos.”

Gov. Phil Murphy recently signed a bill making New Jersey the 14th state to legalize natural organic reduction, often referred to as human composting.

Right now, residents who wants to be composted must have their bodies flown out of state to a regulated facility. The new law paves the way for the creation of human composting facilities right here in New Jersey, operated under the supervision of a licensed funeral director. Right now, residents who wants to be composted must have their bodies flown out of state to a regulated facility. The new law paves the way for the creation of human composting facilities here in New Jersey, operated under the supervision of a licensed funeral director.

However, it doesn’t go into effect for 10 months to give the funeral industry time to prepare for a new service option.

Although human composting is already legal in nearby states like New York, Delaware, and Maryland, none of those states has a licensed facility yet. It takes time to create regulations for a new industry and for funeral directors to incorporate a new service into their business models, industry experts have said.

Human composting transforms the human body into nutrient-rich soil in about six weeks. At the end of the process, loved ones can scatter the compost in places that are meaningful or use it to nourish houseplants, trees or flower gardens.

The human composting bill received support from the New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association, which helped craft

the legislation.

“Natural organic reduction as a process is still in its infancy as far as consumer education,” said Samantha Link, director of government affairs for the state funeral directors association, in a statement sent to NJ Advance Media on Tuesday. “Yet, what we have seen is a growing interest in green alternatives in funeral planning across age demographics. Now, consumers wishing to select to undergo the natural organic reduction process will no longer need to fly their loved one across the country, but the service can be provided right here at home.”

In contrast, the New Jersey Cemetery Association opposed the legislation in a letter sent to lawmakers, arguing that “it removes requirements in existing law that human decomposition take place on cemetery grounds.”

Under the law, human composting in New Jersey must be performed by a licensed funeral director. There’s no cemetery involvement at all.

The New Jersey Cemetery Board is responsible only for maintaining a list of cemeteries that may receive remains of the deceased.

By comparison, burial, cremation, and entombment are all currently required by state law to take place on cemetery grounds.

The cemetery association said its opposition isn’t specific to human composting. The issue is that cemeteries aren’t more involved.

“Allowing for a new form of human decomposition to be performed outside of a cemetery is upending current law in a major way, and as more and more cemeteries struggle to stay afloat financially — this is the last thing the state should be doing right now,” the cemetery association wrote to lawmakers.