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Texas Governor Abbott Working on Legislation to Prevent Social Media Platforms from 'Canceling Conservative Speech'

"Section 230, a provision in the Communications Decency Act, currently protects social media companies from liability in relation to content posted on their platforms by third parties."

Why this is important: We predicted before the election that attacks on Section 230 would continue under either a Biden or Trump administration. We were right. This proposed legislation from Texas, which exists in concept only at the moment, would allow Texans to file discrimination lawsuits against social media companies for deplatforming, shadow-banning, and other forms of moderation based on viewpoint. It's difficult from a legal perspective to understand how this legislation would not violate the First Amendment, especially not without a formal draft in circulation, but that seems to be beside the point for the sponsors. The effort to combat perceived viewpoint discrimination on social media has all the momentum and shows no signs of slowing down. --- [Joseph V. Schaeffer](#)

Someone Tried to Poison a Florida City by Hacking into the Water Treatment System, Sheriff Says

"The hacker adjusted the level of sodium hydroxide to more than 100 times its normal levels, according to Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gaultieri."

Why this is important: The 15,000 residents of the small city of Oldsmar, Florida have reason to be grateful this week. A hacker infiltrated the city's water treatment system and increased the levels of sodium hydroxide (commonly known as lye, and a main component in drain cleaner) to over 100 times their normal settings. Luckily, the system's cybersecurity protocols functioned as designed, the intrusion was detected in real time, an operator returned the sodium hydroxide levels to normal immediately, and the issue never escalated to any of the additional layers of control designed to ensure system integrity and resident safety. This incident highlights the crucial importance of a well-designed and well-maintained cybersecurity system for entities and businesses of all sizes and types. With the increased reliance on technology to streamline delivery and improve performance comes the increased risks of bad external actors who are not always predictably motivated. Data breaches and cyberattacks can have extraordinary consequences for businesses and customers alike, and it is never too soon to ensure that

the protections in place will secure a company's systems, data, inventory, and more. --- [Risa S. Katz-Albert](#)

Tesla Says You Could Soon Pay for One of Its Cars with Bitcoin

"And the most valuable car company on the stock market said it is holding some of its cash in bitcoin rather than traditional currency."

Why this is important: There are two recent events involving Tesla that some see as adding credibility to bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. With 47 million followers on Twitter, Elon Musk's recent statements about his interest in cryptocurrencies and his temporarily adding the bitcoin symbol to his bio make some believe he contributed to an uptick in the currencies' value. Cryptocurrencies still suffer from naysayers, and even this article reports on recent statements that bitcoin's "value is an overpriced bubble." They have not yet gained widespread acceptance as a payment method, store of value, and more. Thus, any company's public statements in favor of the currencies help them in gaining that acceptance. The article reports on Tesla's annual SEC filing that advised it may begin accepting bitcoin for vehicle purchases. Moreover, Tesla reported that it invested \$1.5 billion in bitcoin (Tesla's balance sheet as of December 31, 2020 listed \$19 billion in cash and cash equivalents). The willingness of Tesla to make these statements helps the currencies in the road to acceptance. It will be interesting to see if Tesla follows through and begins accepting bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies and whether any other vehicle dealers follow suit. --- [Nicholas P. Mooney II](#)

Jeff Bezos-Backed Startup Nautilus Biotechnology Set to Go Public Via SPAC at \$900M Valuation

"The deal will inject approximately \$350 million into Nautilus, which is developing a next-generation platform to analyze the human proteome, or the body's full set of proteins."

Why this is important: Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, and other established VCs are supporting a public offering by Nautilus Biotechnology. They are accomplishing this through a new-ish format (Special Purpose Acquisition Company or SPAC), but that is not what this is about. Nautilus is attempting to develop hardware and software to analyze a person's proteome more quickly and more thoroughly. Proteomes are what genes express under various conditions. Understanding these better will aid drug development. Analyzing each individual's proteomics may help physicians prescribe treatments more effectively. Nautilus shows promise, particularly in fields like personal medicine, but they have a long way to go. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

U.S. Technology Company Clearview AI Violated Canadian Privacy Law

"Privacy commissioners found U.S. company collected photos of Canadians without their knowledge or consent."

Why this is important: Four Canadian privacy commissioners found that Clearview AI violated Canadian law by assembling data on Canadian citizens in its database. Clearview AI, for its part, disagrees on the basis that the photos it collected were publicly available. And, in any case, Clearview AI says that it's a moot point: it has ceased doing business in Canada. But, among the commissioners' recommendations were for Clearview AI to stop the collection of data from Canadian citizens and to delete any such data from its systems. And, that raises an interesting compliance problem: how can a company like Clearview AI determine someone's nationality? This is a broader problem faced by companies whose operations can put them at odds with the laws of jurisdictions that they might never have anticipated applying. --- [Joseph V. Schaeffer](#)

Canada Approves First Bitcoin ETF, Raising Hopes that the US SEC Will Soon Follow

"The U.S. government has been hesitant to approve a bitcoin ETF product, which tracks the price of bitcoin and is traded on a stock exchange, due to bitcoin's supposedly shallow liquidity and risks the asset could be manipulated."

Why this article is important: The question of whether the U.S. will have a bitcoin exchange-traded fund ("ETF") has been discussed for the past few years. So far, it hasn't happened and now Canada has beaten the U.S. to the punch. The Ontario Securities Commission recently approved the launch of Purpose Bitcoin ETF, which is described as "the first in the world to invest directly in physically settled Bitcoin, not derivatives, [and which will allow] investors easy and efficient access to the emerging asset class of cryptocurrency." Not surprisingly, the article notes that some commentators see this move as possibly opening the door for the U.S. to approve a bitcoin ETF. --- [Nicholas P. Mooney II](#)

Smartphone-Controlled Brain Implant the Size of a COIN Combats Drug Addiction in Rats

"It could be used to treat Parkinson's disease and depression in humans."

Why this is important: Cyber humans are here! Not really. South Korean researchers have experimented with light inside the brains of rats to treat Parkinson's disease. They inserted light diodes into the area of the brain that they believed could alleviate some Parkinson's effects. This was connected wirelessly to a cell phone and presumably could be monitored and directed by a human patient. Light has been used for decades, if not centuries, to treat a variety of mental health problems. It is used today, particularly to treat some forms of depression. But, that is light outside the body. This took the light and put it inside the brain to target groups of neurons. It was effective on rats with Parkinson's. We still do not know the practical application of this to humans, but it is intriguing in two ways. It is possible that brain implants may be effective in the future against Parkinson's. Perhaps more important, this proves that lights inside the brain can be used to trigger neurons. It may affect nerve cells in other organs as well. That may have many other applications. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

Civil Rights Group Threatens Suit Over Bar Exam Facial Scans

"A prominent civil rights group is threatening to sue the State Bar of California unless it agrees to stop using facial recognition technology to prevent cheating on online bar exams, which the group says discriminates against women and people of color."

Why this is important: The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has demanded that the California Bar Exam cease using facial recognition technology or it will sue. The Committee cites to the disproportionate error rate of the technology in recognizing women and people of color, and argues that continued use will create a disparate impact on certain groups of bar exam takers. This demand comes after several test takers could not take the October 2020 bar exam due to the technology failing to recognize them. This suit is not the first time that concerns about the artificial intelligence ("AI") used in facial recognition mistaking women and non-Caucasian faces more frequently than their white, male counterparts. Without a human override option, law school graduates, namely women and minorities, who dedicated three months to study could not take the bar exam. But, the issue goes beyond test-taking. Similar concerns have been raised relative to AI being used in lethal autonomous weapons, airport security, criminal investigations, and more. --- [Risa S. Katz-Albert](#)

How Agricultural Nanotechnology Will Influence the Future of Farming Sustainability

"The agricultural sector is dealing with enormous challenges such as rapid climatic changes, a decrease in soil fertility, macro and micronutrient deficiency, overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and heavy metal presence in the soil."

Why this is important: Agriculture is a base that many hope to use by applying nanotechnology* to develop better strains of food, commercial products, consumer products and more. It also is used to solve problems in our environment, including climate change. This is a good summary of those efforts. *Nanotechnology is the science and engineering of items at a scale of 100 nanometers (100 billionths of a meter) or less. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

Elon Musk Wants Clean Power. But Tesla's Carrying Bitcoin's Dirty Baggage

"Yet the electric carmaker's backing of bitcoin could turbo-charge global use of a currency that's estimated to cause more pollution than a small country every year."

Why this article is important: We reported above about Tesla's recent move to invest \$1.5 billion in bitcoin and its statement that it may accept bitcoin for vehicle purchases. This article reports on the confluence of several issues related to Tesla, bitcoin, the future of money, and the future of the environment. Called by the article the "poster child of low-carbon technology," Elon Musk has been open about his support for cryptocurrencies. The paradox is that bitcoin is created during a process called "mining," in which "high-powered computers compete against other machines to solve complex mathematical puzzles." Currently, this process often is powered by fossil fuels. At current rates, bitcoin mining uses the same amount of energy annually that the Netherlands did in 2019. Mining is estimated to generate between 22 and 22.9 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year, which is about the same levels as those produced by Jordan and Sri Lanka. To combat this problem, the article speculates that the entrance of socially conscious corporations into the cryptocurrency space could lead to the creation of "green bitcoin" that would be mined using renewable energy. --- [Nicholas P. Mooney II](#)

How is 3D Printing Changing Biomedical Engineering?

"In other industries, new technologies can help companies earn more money, but in medicine, they can save lives."

Why this is important: This is a good summary of how 3D printing already is providing solutions in biomedical engineering and how its use will continue to accelerate, particularly in prosthetics and orthopedics. 3D printing also is developing as a platform to "print" human organs. We may be years away from 3D printing organs to use in the human body, but these quasi-functional organs are excellent test material for new drugs and new applications of existing drugs. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

When Software Becomes a Medical Device

"In many cases, manufacturers may not even be aware that they are developing a medical device, because even health and wellness apps for smart phones might fall into this category."

Why this is important: The FDA and EMA already struggle with this concern because most "medical devices" require some level of regulatory investigation and approval. Where do you draw this line? For example, I have a friend whose Apple Watch alerted him to a potentially serious heart arrhythmia. He went to the ER, which, doctors told him, probably prevented a stroke. So, is an Apple Watch a medical device? Software is classified as a medical device when it is used for medical purposes. This article provides an easy read and quick background for this difficult question. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

Charlottesville-Based Bank Says It is the First in the Country to Allow Bitcoins to be Bought and Sold Using Its ATMs

"It is doing so in response to what bank officials see as growing demand for Bitcoin, a type of cryptocurrency developed first in 2009 as an alternative to conventional currencies such as the U.S. dollar."

Why this article is important: Blue Ridge Bank, based in Charlottesville, Virginia, has announced that 19 of its ATMs now will allow customers to buy and sell bitcoin in addition to making usual dollar transactions and account inquiries. Bitcoin ATMs didn't originate with the bank. There are thousands of stand-alone bitcoin ATMs across the country. However, Blue Ridge stated that its addition of bitcoin transactions to some of its ATMs makes it the first commercial financial institution in the country to offer this service. Blue Ridge's CEO referenced its desire to be forward-looking and to anticipate its customers' needs in connection with making this new move. Another significant point to this move involves acceptance of cryptocurrencies. As we reported in other articles, these currencies still are trying to gain widespread acceptance as a payment method, store of value, and more. Blue Ridge's move helps nudge that acceptance forward. --- [Nicholas P. Mooney II](#)

Will the Pandemic Finally Get Americans to Embrace QR Codes?

"Now, in cities like Bangkok and Hong Kong, the technology has been tapped to help curb the COVID-19 pandemic; codes posted at the entrance to grocery stores and public transit centers help contact-tracing efforts in case of outbreaks."

Why this is important: QR codes are those small, funky boxes, with black squares and lines running in different directions. You see them on some fast food, on billboards, in magazines. You take a picture with your cell phone, and it links to, for example, the menu for the restaurant. In Asia, they have become common, so the menu is available without having to touch anything but your phone. That also may let the restaurant know that you linked to it. This article explains why QR Codes will become more common around the world, and how they will aid contact tracing for pandemics, such as COVID-19. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

Raising the Steaks: First 3D-Printed Rib-Eye is Unveiled

"An Israeli company unveiled the first 3D-printed rib-eye steak, using a culture of live animal tissue, in what could be a leap forward for lab-grown meat once it receives regulatory approval."

Why this is important: Watch out vegan burgers, now we have synthetic steaks! We already experiment with replacing bones, joints, and perhaps even human organs with 3D printing. An Israeli company found an even more important use, good (and presumably kosher) meat! A San Diego company is developing 3D printed seafood. Soon, when we go to store, we'll have to ask, "Is it real, or is it Memorex?" [For those under 40, that was a famous cassette ad in the 1970s and 1980s.] On a related point, Bill Gates recently opined that "all rich nations" should eat only synthetically produced beef. He said that we all can get used to the taste. I'll leave that to your own interpretation. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)

Researchers Produce Tiny Nanoparticles and Reveal Their Inner Structure for the First Time

"The researchers have also been the first to fully determine the particles' internal structure."

Why this is important: Researchers at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenburg, Germany have developed technology, using dye, to see the internal structure of produced nanoparticles. This will increase greatly the knowledge and understanding of different nanoparticles. And, it will aid in both identifying the best use and even designing nanoparticles for specific purposes, including pharmaceutical and biomedical uses. The potential applications of this technology in manufacturing and construction also could be vast. --- [Hugh B. Wellons](#)



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