

POLITICS & THE NATION

In Mich., a jackpot win turns into a lawsuit

BY JULIAN MARK

When Lizzie Pugh hit the jackpot while playing a slot machine at a Michigan casino in April, she was ecstatic.

"It felt amazing," the 71-year-old from Detroit told The Washington Post. She'd won \$20,000.

But when she tried to cash the check two days later, that feeling evaporated. Pugh, who is Black, claims in a lawsuit that employees at a Detroit-area Fifth Third Bank branch told her that the check from the casino was fraudulent, took it from her and would not return it. She eventually got it back that day and deposited it at her usual bank without issues, Pugh said.

The lawsuit, filed Aug. 29 in federal court in Michigan's Eastern District, alleges that Pugh's race was a "motivating factor" in the employees' actions and that the bank violated her civil rights by discriminating against her.

"I'm a 71-year-old woman that has the same rights as everybody else," Pugh told The Post.

Ed Loyd, a spokesman for the bank, said that after reviewing the claims, "we believe our employees' actions were well intentioned and have been misinterpreted."

The employees were following the bank's fraud-prevention procedures, Loyd said.

"At Fifth Third, we are committed to fair and responsible banking and prohibit discrimination of any kind," he said. "Our employees are trained to help every person with their banking needs — customer or non-customer — while minimizing the risk of any potential fraud."

"That said, we regret Ms. Pugh has come away feeling mistreated after her interactions at our branch. We never want someone to feel that way," he said.

Pugh, a retiree, won the jackpot while on a trip to the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort, about 150 miles northwest of Detroit, with her church group in April. She hadn't realized she had scored big until two smiling casino employees approached her and told her that she'd won \$20,000, Pugh told The Post.

"I couldn't believe I had just won that kind of money," she said.

Pugh said she paid the taxes at the casino, and one of her sons suggested she open a savings account at a bank other than the one she normally uses. That's what led Pugh to the Fifth Third Bank in Livonia, just west of Detroit.

After a short wait, Pugh met with a White bank employee and explained that she wanted to deposit the check from the casino into a new savings account, according to the lawsuit. The employee asked what Pugh did for work, but when the senior citizen said she was retired and won the money at a casino, the employee told Pugh that she believed the check was fraudulent and could not deposit it, according to the lawsuit.

The employee refused to give the check back and had a colleague, who was also White, inspect the check, according to the lawsuit. That employee also "insisted" the check was fake and said Pugh could not have it back, the lawsuit states. It alleges a third employee whom Pugh confronted told her she couldn't open an account or deposit the check.

"I was frustrated, I was upset, I was being accused of being a thief," Pugh told The Post.

Pugh refused to leave without her check, and after an unspecified period of time, the employees returned it to her.

Loyd, the Fifth Third spokesman, said one of the bankers was "attempting to verify the check with the casino" as part of its fraud-prevention procedures. He said the bank has a record of the phone call.

Nevertheless, Pugh went to her own bank to deposit her check, and it cleared the next day without issue, she said.

In an interview with the Detroit Free Press, Deborah Gordon, Pugh's lawyer, said that what happened to Pugh was a case of "banking while Black."

"This is just extremely disheartening," Gordon told the paper. "It's really unfortunate these stereotypes continue to exist right here in our metro area."

Pugh said that as someone who

Robot unveiled by researchers catches seniors before they fall

'Mr. Bah' awaits regulatory approval and is the latest device in elderly care

BY PRANSHU VERMA

Researchers last week unveiled a new robot that can predict and catch seniors before they fall — a potentially major development in caring for the world's rapidly aging population.

The new device, which looks like a motorized wheelchair, has guard rails that come up to a person's hip and are outfitted with sensors to judge when a person begins to go off balance. Users strap into a harness, and when they are starting to tip, the robot engages it to keep them from falling.

The machine's inventors, from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore, affectionately call the machine "Mr. Bah," a stand-in for its actual name: the mobile robot balance assistant. The device still needs regulatory approval in major markets like the United States, and faces significant funding challenges for getting to market, but it is targeted to be available in two years, researchers said.

"Mr. Bah" joins a growing number of technological advances for elderly care, including robots that

clean homes and provide companionship, and wearable devices that track key health metrics. The robot's inventors say their fall prevention robot is a crucial advance, especially since falls can often lead to serious injuries or deadly outcomes.

"[Falls] are a big problem worldwide," said Wei Tech Ang, a lead researcher for the project and executive director of the Rehabilitation Research Institute of Singapore (RRIS). "The... intention was to help people walk around at home without the fear of falling down."

Globally, falls are the second leading cause of unintentional injury deaths worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. In the United States, falls remain the leading cause of injury-related deaths among adults ages 65 and older, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data shows.

Ang became aware of that problem from personal experience. "My 85-year-old mother, she's a frequent faller," he said. "After she fell for the first time about 10 years ago, I started having this idea of creating a robot."

Ang partnered with researchers at NTU Singapore and Tan Tock Seng Hospital to create and pilot the robot. So far, the device has been only tested on 29 participants. They were patients who suffered from strokes, traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries.

During testing, which spanned three days per participant, the robot-aided seniors with sitting, standing and walking. No falls were recorded during the trials, researchers said. (The results were announced last week.)

The team's goal is to get regulatory approval for the device in major markets across the world, including the United States. They envision releasing two versions of the robot. One is a hospital version, outfitted with many high-end sensors and cameras that track an elderly person's movements, and could cost around \$20,000. The other is an at-home version, which would either have fewer sensors and cameras in it or use lower-quality ones, and could go for \$3,000 to \$4,000, Ang said. But the team faces a steep challenge. They need around \$4 million in initial funding just to



The mobile robot balance assistant, affectionately called "Mr. Bah," is outfitted with sensors to judge when a person goes off balance.

get device approval from regulatory agencies in places like the United States, Europe, China and Singapore, Ang said. From there, they would need an additional \$10 million to \$20 million to get the device into market. "That is awfully difficult here," he said.

Should that happen, researchers said, the effects could be significant and represent a way for robots to improve the lives of

elderly people by giving them the feeling of independence.

"One of [the] key strategies is to empower patients," Karen Chua, a co-developer of the mobility robot at NTU's medical school said in a statement. "We want to make robotics therapies more sustainable and accessible in the community where our patients can lead healthier and happier lives."

Roberts defends court's legitimacy after tumultuous term

Chief justice makes first public remarks since Roe v. Wade's reversal

BY ROBERT BARNES AND MICHAEL KARLIK

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. defended the integrity of the Supreme Court on

Friday in his first public remarks following a tumultuous term, saying that disagreement with its decisions should not lead to questions about its legitimacy.

"The court has always decided controversial cases and decisions always have been subject to intense criticism and that is entirely appropriate," Roberts told a gathering of judges and lawyers in Colorado Springs. But he said that disagreement with the court's role of deciding what the law is has transformed into criticism of its legitimacy.

"You don't want the political branches telling you what the law is. And you don't want public opinion to be the guide of what the appropriate decision is," said Roberts, who added, to laughter, "Yes, all of our opinions are open to criticism. In fact, our members do a great job of criticizing some opinions from time to time. But simply because people disagree with an opinion is not a basis for criticizing the legitimacy of the court."

With the support of three justices chosen by President Donald Trump in the past five years, the Supreme Court now has a 6-to-3 conservative majority. Those justices sent the court on a dramatic turn to the right in the term completed this summer, overturning the guarantee of a constitutional right to abortion in *Roe v. Wade*, striking a gun control law in New York, limiting the power of the Biden administration to confront climate change, and scoring victories for religious conservatives.

The court's approval rating has dropped to one of its lowest levels ever in public opinion polls, led by unhappy Democrats and, by a lesser extent, those who view themselves as independent.

But Roberts said it is the Supreme Court's job to decide what the law is. "That role doesn't change simply because people disagree with this opinion or that opinion or with a particular mode of jurisprudence," he said.

Without speaking directly about the court's decision to overturn nearly 50 years of precedent in striking down *Roe*, Roberts acknowledged the difficulty of the past year.

"It was gut-wrenching every morning to drive into a Supreme



Speaking at the Bench & Bar Conference, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., right, said disagreements with the Supreme Court's decisions should not lead to questions of its integrity. "You don't want public opinion to be the guide of what the appropriate decision is," he said.

Court with barricades around it," Roberts said. And it has been "unnatural" to hold oral arguments by teleconference or before a small number of court personnel and reporters. The court has been closed to the public since March 2020 because of worries about the pandemic.

"When we take the bench the first Monday in October at 10 a.m., the public will be there to watch us," Roberts said. "I think just moving forward from things that were unfortunate is the best way to respond to it."

Roberts was interviewed by two fellow judges at the Bench & Bar Conference of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit. He was not asked about one of the things that made the term so contentious: a leaked draft of the Supreme Court's abortion opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

The leak of the draft opinion by Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. shocked the court, which prides itself on keeping internal deliberations secret. In May, Roberts ordered an investigation into the leak to Politico, but he has said nothing publicly about it since.

Earlier at the same conference in Colorado Springs, Justice Neil M. Gorsuch said the internal investigation was continuing and that he hoped a report would

"Simply because people disagree with an opinion is not a basis for criticizing the legitimacy of the court."

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.

come soon. He did not say whether it would be made public.

"Improper efforts to influence judicial decision-making, from whatever side, from whomever, are a threat to the judicial decision-making process and inhibit our capacity to communicate with one another," Gorsuch said.

The draft that leaked to Politico was substantially the same as the majority opinion that upheld the Mississippi law. Gorsuch was among the five justices who voted

to overturn *Roe*. Roberts said he would have upheld the Mississippi law but not overturn *Roe*, and the court's three liberals dissented.

The decision has led to protests outside the homes of the justices, most notably Roberts and Justice Brett M. Kavanaugh, who live near each other in suburban Maryland.

Karlik reported from Colorado Springs.

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