

# TYSON EXECS SUSPENDED AFTER VIRUS BETTING CLAIM

The Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Tyson Foods suspended top officials at its largest pork plant on Thursday and launched an investigation into allegations that they bet on how many workers would get infected during a widespread coronavirus outbreak.

The company's president and CEO, Dean Banks, said he was "extremely upset" about the allegations against managers at its plant in Waterloo, Iowa, saying they do not represent the company's values. He said the company has retained the law firm Covington & Burling LLP to conduct an investigation, which will be led by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

"If these claims are confirmed, we'll take all measures necessary to root out and remove this disturbing behavior from our company," Banks said in a statement.

Banks said the accused have been suspended without pay. A spokesman for the Arkansas-based company said it would not release their names during the investigation by Holder, who served as attorney general for six years under President Barack Obama.

Tyson has faced a backlash over recently amended wrongful death lawsuits in which plaintiffs' lawyers allege that Waterloo plant manager Tom Hart "organized a cash buy-in, winner-take-all betting pool for supervisors and managers to wager on how many employees would test positive for COVID-19."

Hart allegedly organized the pool last spring as the virus spread through the Waterloo plant, ultimately infecting more than 1,000 of its 2,800 workers, killing at least six and sending many others to the hospital. The outbreak eventually tore through the broader Waterloo community.

The lawyers represent the estates of Sedika Buljic, 58; Reberiano Garcia, 60; Jose Ayala Jr., 44; and Isidro Fernandez, age unknown. Buljic, Garcia and Fernandez died in April, and Ayala died May 25 after a six-week hospitalization.



PHOTOS BY BARRY SLOAN



## Adding to charter fleet

One of two new Bombardier Challenger 604 jets is seen at Ventura Air Services at Republic Airport in East Farmingdale on Thursday. The 10-passenger, twin-engine jets, with a maximum range of 3,756 miles and top speed of 528 mph, are part of Ventura's investment in an enhanced fleet due to increased demand for private charter flights during the pandemic. The interior, at left, seats 10 comfortably.

## Safety agency seeks input on self-driving car oversight

The Associated Press

The U.S. government's road safety agency is asking for public comment on how it should regulate safe deployment of self-driving vehicles.

Seeking public comment is an early step in drawing up regulations, but that process takes years and could be changed by the incoming administration of President-elect Joe Biden.

About 60 companies are already testing autonomous vehicles, some on public roadways without human backup drivers. One, Alphabet Inc.'s Waymo, is running a limited fully autonomous ride-hailing service in the Phoenix area.

So far the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

has taken a voluntary approach to autonomous vehicles without standards and regulations. That has brought criticism from the National Transportation Safety Board and safety advocates for being too hands-off.

NHTSA said Thursday it wants public input on a proposed regulation of autonomous vehicle sensors, how the vehicles detect other road users and infrastructure, how they plan routes and how they carry out that plan.

"This rulemaking will help address legitimate public concerns about safety, security and privacy without hampering innovation in the development of automated driving systems," said Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, whose depart-

ment includes NHTSA.

The agency says in documents that a new generation of motor vehicle safety standards should give manufacturers of vehicles, sensors, software and other autonomous vehicle technology "sufficient flexibility to change and improve without the need for frequent modifications to the regulations."

Last year the NTSB blamed lax regulation in part for a 2018 crash involving an Uber autonomous test vehicle in which a pedestrian was killed.

"There's no requirement. There's no evaluation. There's no real standards issued," NTSB member Jennifer Homendy said at the time.

While NHTSA is looking at standards, it said in the pro-

posed rulemaking documents that it will address unreasonable safety risks by using its existing defect-investigation and remediation powers. It said any regulations must be supported by data on safety needs without stifling innovation.

Jason Levine, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, called the request for input strange because it comes at the end of the Trump administration. His organization petitioned NHTSA seeking autonomous vehicle regulations two years ago but heard nothing, he said.

"The optimistic way of looking at it is the DOT (Department of Transportation) finally decided that a zero oversight of the self-driving car industry was a bad idea," he said.