

# The Weekly Press

SERVING BAKER, CENTRAL, AND ZACHARY

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8-14, 2022

A PEOPLE'S PUBLICATION

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## Congressman Troy Carter Vows to Keep Working to Prevent Gun Violence

### Condemns Extreme MAGA Republican Obstruction of Commonsense, Life-Saving Legislation



Congressman Troy Carter

NEW ORLEANS, L.A. — Congressman Troy A. Carter, Sr. reaffirmed their commitment to put People Over Politics and continue to work to end gun violence. "Gun violence is a tragedy that strikes every community and weighs on the heart every American. Whether it is in the streets, in our stores, or in our schools, we cannot stand by and watch more innocent Americans lose their lives," said Congressman Carter. "Tragically, guns are the leading cause of death among children and teens in Louisiana, killing an average of 112 of our babies every year. I am proud to work for Safer Communities, putting People Over Politics with commonsense reforms to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people."

On average, 1,036 Louisianians die from gun violence — the third-highest rate of gun deaths in the United States. Gun violence costs Louisiana \$14.3 billion each year, of which \$457.6 million is paid by taxpayers (Every Stat).

Congressman Carter shared his support for commonsense gun violence prevention laws, including legislation to require background checks for all gun sales, close loopholes that let dangerous people get guns, and keep our children safe that he voted to pass in Congress, including:

The Bipartisan Background Checks Act: Establishes new background check requirements for firearm transfers between private parties, closing loopholes that allow criminals and abusers buy weapons unchecked. Nearly every House Republican voted against this commonsense, bipartisan measure to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals.

Enhanced Background Checks Act: Closes the Charleston loophole, which allows dealers to transfer a

See **VIOLENCE**, on page 2

### WEATHER

	<b>MON. 09/12</b> Partly Cloudy High 88°.
	<b>TUE. 09/13</b> Sunny High 86°.
	<b>WED. 09/14</b> Mostly Sunny High 987°.
	<b>THUR. 09/15</b> Mostly Sunny High 88°.

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## The City of Baker Leaders Focus on Preparing First Responders for Rescue Situations



The City of Baker Fire Department was the recipient of a DHS Grant through East Baton Rouge Parish which allowed for three of our firefighters to attend Swift Water Rescue Training.

BAKER, La. — Our experience has taught us that preparation is key to safely navigating storms, heavy rain, and other weather events. As we face the uncertainty of future storm strengths, quantity, and other factors we have resolved to take as many steps as possible to prepare. One of those steps was to prepare our First Responders in new and effective ways to serve our community as well as neighboring communities by equipping them with the tools that are needed. Mayor Waites said "I am so pleased that we can utilize our increased revenues, key funding from charitable gaming, our administrative staff's talents, and our key strategic relationships with area partners all of which aid in funding these critical pieces of equipment and training for our first responders. Being prepared for all situations is paramount to community safety, and these items prepare us for rain or storm-related disasters."

The Baker Fire and Police

See **LEADERS** on page 3



Pictured left to right: Councilman Robert Young, Chief Dunn, Mayor Waites, Officer Andrew Murphy

## Queen Elizabeth II has died



Queen Elizabeth II

Queen Elizabeth II, the UK's longest-serving monarch, has died at Balmoral aged 96, after reigning for 70 years.

She died peacefully on Thursday afternoon at her Scottish estate, where she had spent much of the summer.

The Queen came to the throne in 1952 and witnessed enormous social change.

Her son King Charles III said the death of his beloved mother was a "moment of great sadness" for him and his family and that her loss would be "deeply felt" around the world.

He said: "We mourn profoundly the passing of a cherished sovereign and a much-loved mother."

"I know her loss will be deeply felt throughout the country, the realms and the Commonwealth, and by countless people around the world."

During the coming period, he said he and his family would be "comforted and sustained by our knowledge of the respect and deep affection in which the Queen was so widely held".

The King and his wife, Camilla, now Queen Consort will return to London on Friday, Buckingham Palace said.

Senior royals had gathered at Balmoral after the Queen's doctors became concerned about her health earlier in the day.

All the Queen's children travelled to Balmoral, near Aberdeen, after doctors placed the Queen under medical supervision.

Her grandson and now heir to the throne, Prince William, and his brother, Prince Harry, also gathered there.

Prime Minister Liz Truss, who was appointed by the Queen on Tuesday, said the monarch was the rock on which modern Britain was built, who had "provided us with the stability and strength that we needed".

Speaking about the new King, she said: "We offer him our loyalty and devotion, just as his mother devoted so much, to so many, for so long."

"And with the passing of the second Elizabethan age, we usher in a new era in the magnificent history of our great country, exactly as Her Majesty would have wished, by saying the words 'God save the King'."

Queen Elizabeth II's tenure as head of state spanned post-war austerity, the transition from empire to Commonwealth, the end of the Cold War and the UK's entry into - and withdrawal from - the European Union.

Her reign spanned 15 prime ministers starting with Winston Churchill, born in 1874, and including Ms Truss, born 101 years later in 1975.

She held weekly audiences with her prime minister throughout her reign.

At Buckingham Palace in London, crowds awaiting updates on the Queen's condition began crying as they heard of her death.

She would later describe him as "my strength and stay" through 74 years of marriage, before his death in 2021, aged 99.



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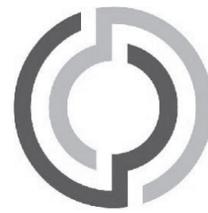
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# LOCAL & STATE

## State Accepting Public Comments on Plan to Increase Affordable Rental Housing, Clarify Workforce Development Program After 2016 Floods



**LOUISIANA**  
Office of  
**COMMUNITY**  
**DEVELOPMENT**

The Louisiana Office of Community Development is accepting public comments on an Action Plan Amendment that will reallocate funds in the Restore Louisiana Homeowner Assistance Program, as well as other Restore programs, to increase affordable rental housing stock and clarify a workforce development program for recovery from the Great Floods of 2016.

Action Plan Amendment 19 reduces the allocations of multiple Restore programs, using those funds to increase the budget for the Middle Market Loan program and create a new affordable rental housing program in Baton Rouge.

The state created the Middle Market Loan Program to provide gap financing for the construction or rehabilitation of affordable housing units that serve a range of household incomes, with the goal of using higher-cost units to generate deeper affordability for low- to moderate-income renters.

The increase in the MML program will provide more gap assistance for construction benefiting LMI renters.

APA 19 creates a new affordable rental housing program in Baton Rouge. This program will address long-term rental housing recovery needs of low- to moderate-income families by transforming about 1.6-square miles of two overlapping neighborhoods (Smiley Heights and Melrose East) in north Baton Rouge. The vision for this community is to develop a holistic, integrated revitalization plan that transforms Smiley Heights, Melrose East and Ardenwood Village into a community of opportunity for the people who live there through the construction of a new, mixed-income community adjacent to the existing community.

See **PLAN**, on page 3

### VIOLENCE from page 1

firearm to a buyer after 3 business days if the FBI background check has not been completed. Nearly every House Republican voted against closing a loophole that allows guns to get into the hands of people who are legally barred from owning guns.

The Protecting Our Kids Act: Raises the purchasing age for semi-automatic weapons from 18 to 21 years old, outlaws high-capacity magazines, requires the safe storage of firearms, and bans bump stocks and untraceable and deadly ghost guns. Nearly every House Republican voted against making our communities safer for our kids.

The Federal Extreme Risk Protection Order Act: Keeps guns out of the hands of people who pose a threat to themselves or others through a federal red-flag program. Nearly every House Republican voted against this life-saving legislation that protects victims of domestic abuse.

Extreme MAGA Republicans continue to oppose life-saving gun violence prevention legislation at every turn, siding with the gun lobby – not the vast majority of Americans who support laws, like universal background checks, that would help prevent these recurring tragedies with commonsense policies that still protect the Second Amendment rights of our citizens.

### READER INFORMATION



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**Correction Policy**  
The Baton Rouge Weekly Press strives to be fair and accurate. The newspaper corrects any significant errors of fact brought to the attention of the editor. If you think an error has been made, call 225-775-200

### Weekly Press

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## Baton Rouge Responds to Jackson, Mississippi Water Crisis



**Baton Rouge Water Company recently donated 2,500 gallons of water that was transported in five 500 hundred gallon tanks by the Church of God in Christ, World Missions Disaster Relief Hub Region L.**

**BATON ROUGE, LA**—Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome, the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank and community partners are donating drinking water to residents in Jackson, Mississippi to help respond to their water crisis.

“Baton Rouge residents know all too well the devastation a major crisis can bring to communities. We are proud to be able to lend support and respond to our friends and neighbors in Jackson, Mississippi,” said Mayor Broome.

“We remember the tremendous assistance we received from across the country last year following Hurricane Ida, so it is appropriate that we provide assistance to others in



**Mayor Sharon Broome**



**The City of Baton Rouge is providing resources to help out neighbors in Jackson, Miss. in the midst of an ongoing water crisis. (Office of the Mayor)**

need when we are able,” said Mike Manning, President and CEO of the Food Bank.

“Not only is it a part of the OMG Mission to serve, it’s our life

purpose, and we are grateful to have the support of the community and the Mayor’s office to help bring water to Jackson, Mississippi,” said Sashika Baunchand, Executive Director of Outstanding Mature Girlz.

The Mayor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness assisted in the coordination of the following relief efforts:

- The Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank shipped 22 pallets of bottled water last Thursday to our sister food bank in Jackson, in partnership with the Mississippi Food Network. An additional 3 pallets of water that were being stored for the Mayor’s Office of Homeland Security were released and provided today to the Outstanding Mature Girlz organization, for delivery to Jackson to aid in the ongoing water crisis.

- Baton Rouge Water Company recently donated 2500 gallons of water that was transported in five 500 hundred gallon tanks by the Church of God in Christ, World Missions Disaster Relief Hub Region L.



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# The Future is Bright in Baker and Rilei Douglas Shows Us Why!

On June 14, 2022, the City of Baker held its monthly council meeting with a surprise guest. Rilei Douglas, a precocious 9-year-old, graced City Hall with her presence as she was invited to speak by Councilman Robert Young. Ms. Rilei, also known as "Mayor Douglas," in her home, wrote a letter to the City Council about the summer program she is involved in.



Rilei Douglas, a precocious 9-year-old

The Church of Nazarene on 4366 Groom Road in Baker, holds a nightly service that teaches about the word of God, mentorship, respect, and better ways of communicating with one another. Rilei had nothing but great things

to say about the summer program known as "Respect". When asked about the program and how it felt to speak at the council meeting, "Mayor Douglas" had this to say: "I felt good because I was going up in front of the council members, and the mayor and I felt good speaking about the church because the church is good. If it weren't for Councilman Young, I wouldn't know about the program."

When asked what she would tell others about the program, she stated, "I would tell them that it's really good, you'd like to come, it's 6:00 pm-7:30 pm, they give

snacks in the afternoon, you get to play games, the coach is friendly, we get certificates and when we hand them in, we get prizes, we learn about respect, and it's been going for 3 weeks. It's really fun to learn because they're showing us things that we should know. I'm not very good at listening and this

program is helping me to be a better listener. It's inspiring because they reward us for participating in events and it's really fun."

She aspires to be a council person, attorney, and mayor one day. The City of Baker is truly grateful for this wonderful little girl and encourages her and all children

to follow their dreams! Pictured here is the letter Rilei presented to the City Council with Councilman Young's comments and a seal of approval from the City of Baker. Also pictured are Mayor Waites, Rilei Douglas, and Councilman Robert Young.

## LEADERS from page 1

Departments are focused on training current employees and hiring more trained help when it comes to water rescue safety. They're also looking to use available funding to procure more boats, trucks, and other water-based rescue vehicles in addition to providing specialized training to existing staff.

There were three key areas where the City of Baker has made important investments which are, purchasing a High-Water Rescue Vehicle (HWRV) for the Police Department, and purchasing a Search and Rescue (SAR) Boat for the Fire Department and three Baker Fire Firefighters participating in Swift Water Rescue Training.

HWRVs are designed and engineered specifically for high water evacuation operations. For example, standard fire truck apparatus is not designed for operations in high water (depths of over 12"-18"). Components like air intakes and electrical control systems do not function well or at all when submerged. HWRV also allows the body to be converted into a flatbed for other uses such as holding wheelchairs, gurneys, or mobile beds, as well as to haul pallets, which can contain drinking water, supplies, clean-up materials, clothing, fuel, or any number of other materials that need to be transported during a di-

saster. The vehicle also has a cover, as seen in the photos, to protect the occupants and contents from the elements.

Similarly, Search and Rescue (SAR) Boats come in a wide variety of styles and types geared toward specific purposes. The SAR Boat acquired by the City of Baker is designed to function best in what is termed an "urban-specific environment". This means it is made to navigate flood waters in areas that typically do not have standing water, where the depth of the boat must be shallow enough to operate while still safely accessible for both rescuers and civilians. These boats must be able to accommodate not only victims and rescuers but also their equipment. They must be light enough for firefighters to pick up and place in non-launchable areas of water if necessary as well as be carried on appropriate trailers to launch into deeper water. Therefore, quality and body construction is important.

The challenge of using the appropriate apparatus for victim evacuation during floods can be overcome by using purpose-built vehicles that are designed to operate in high water. HWRVs and SAR Boats are the best choices when evacuating large numbers of both mobile and non-ambulatory victims as well as making the rescuer's job easier, safer, and more efficient.

In addition to these acquisitions,

the City of Baker Fire Department was the recipient of a DHS Grant through East Baton Rouge Parish which allowed for three of our firefighters to attend Swift Water Rescue Training.

"Swift-Water Rescue is one of the most challenging and technical rescues first responders may face. Water rescue incidents require rapid and effective decision-making to perform a successful and safe rescue. This training is critical for First Responders, especially those who reside in flood-prone areas such as Louisiana." Chief Keith Pease told us as we discussed this program. He added, "The Fire Fighters Union Local 3797 and the Baker Fire Department Social Club's work with charitable gaming was instrumental in this acquisition. I hope more people will participate in the activities available which help pay for these things."

As a part of the unified preparedness planning and training, this DHS grant has also provided funding that supplied the Baker Fire Department with swift water rescue equipment.

Mayor Waites and the City Council are thankful to Chief Carl Dunn, Interim Chief Keith Pease as well as all of our various first responders, and other essential workers who put the safety of our citizens first.

## PLAN from page 2

In addition, APA 19 further clarifies the Flood-Ready Workforce Development program, including a program name change to PRO Louisiana.

The U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development considers APA 19 substantial, as it involves the movement of more than \$5 million and creates a new program. The total Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery allocation from HUD for Louisiana's recovery from the Great Floods of 2016 remains unchanged

at \$1,708,407,000.

The formal public comment period for APA 19 begins today, Sept. 7, and continues until 5 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 4, 2022. Residents, community leaders and elected officials can view and comment on the plan by clicking here and selecting the respective APA link.

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[ SEPTEMBER ]

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**INCLUSIVE BASKETBALL SKILLS DAY** Lovett Road Park  
Sept. 10 | 9 a.m.-noon

**GRANDPARENT'S DAY**  
Forest Community Park  
Sept. 10 | 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

**SATURDAY MORNING STUDIO: MONA LISA CAT**  
Milton J. Womack Park  
Sept. 10 | 10:30 a.m.-noon

**LITTLE PICASSO'S**  
Zachary Community Park  
Sept. 13 + 15 + 20 + 22 | 4:30-5:30 p.m.

**LOOSE ENDS** Baringer Art Center  
Sept. 14 + 29 | 4-5 p.m.

**SUNSHINE SOCIAL: FIESTA TIME**  
Jefferson Highway Park  
Sept. 16 | 6-9 p.m.

**ART UNWINE** Milton J. Womack Park  
Sept. 16 | 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**END OF THE SUMMER POOL PAWTY**  
Liberty Lagoon  
Sept. 17 | 10:30 a.m-5:30 p.m.

**DOG DAY AT THE SWAMP**  
Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center  
Sept. 17 | 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

**INSIDE OUT ARTS**  
Zachary Community Park  
Sept. 24 | 10-11:30 a.m.

**COMMUNITY CARE DAY: BBQ IN THE PARK**  
North Sherwood Forest Community Park  
Sept. 24 | 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

**SOLAR VIEWING**  
Highland Road Park Observatory  
Sept. 24 | noon-2 p.m.

**FALL WREATH MAKING CLASS**  
Independence Community Park  
Sept. 24 | 2-4 p.m.

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# RELIGION

## Whose side are you on?

By Dr. Tony Evans

In Joshua 5, we read about the battle of Jericho. God had already promised Joshua victory in this battle, but Joshua still had to partner with God in bringing this victory into history. God was going to give Joshua victory but only on His terms. In other words, if the walls of Jericho were going to fall, Joshua had to follow God in order for the walls to fall.

As we read about this partnership in the process of securing the victory over Jericho, we learn more about how God sets an example for us when it comes to politics. The story we are going to look at starts in verse 13 where we read,

Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" He said, "No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (vv. 13-15)

In this passage, we find a man who is ready to fight. He is ready to go to battle. He has his sword drawn in his hand when Joshua runs into him. The obvious question comes from Joshua at this point, "Are you for us or for our enemy?" In other words, "Whose side are you on?"

This is a common question we hear when it comes to politics

in America. Are you a Republican or a Democrat? Whose side are you on? Are you a liberal? Or are you a conservative? Are you a left-winger? Or are you a right-winger? It's a common question we hear today, and it is really no different than what Joshua wanted to know of the man holding the sword and standing in front of him. It matters what side someone is on, or at least we think it does. Joshua wanted to know where this man leaned so that he could figure out his strategy and approach in confronting Jericho. After all, he was holding a sword.

But rather than take a side, the man told Joshua that he was on no one's side but God's. He was the captain of the host of the Lord. He hadn't come to take sides. He had come operating on a whole other level. He was representing a whole other program. Joshua came from the chosen people and the chosen nation, but that didn't equate to God taking sides. Just because they were His chosen people didn't mean God automatically took their side. Nor was He on Jericho's side, a city of people who barely knew His name. Rather, God is a kingdom independent. Let me write that again in case you missed it: the God of the Bible is a kingdom independent. He doesn't take sides when it comes to doing battle. He sits as the King over all and it is His glory and His kingdom He seeks to expand.



Dr. Tony Evans

God is on His own side. Because of this, if anyone ever asks me if I am a Republican or a Democrat, I respond that I am neither. I am a kingdom independent. In fact, I would encourage all Christians to view themselves as kingdom independents. A kingdom independent is a Christian whose ultimate political alliance is to those persons, policies, and platforms that best represent the values of the kingdom of God. Now, that may manifest itself as either a vote for a Republican candidate or a Democrat candidate, or you may vote as a libertarian, or even as a write-in, but the only absolute alignment there should be is with God and His kingdom perspective.

### Voting as a Kingdom Independent

The God of the Bible does not ride on the backs of donkeys or elephants. The God of the Bible is His own independent. He only votes for Himself. Problems arise when it comes to our decisions regarding voting when there exists no political party that only votes God's way. Some represent God's priorities on certain things but not on others. And vice versa. Thus, when it comes time to vote, one person may vote Republican because they are voting with an emphasis on life in the womb. But others may vote Democrat because they are voting with an emphasis on justice for life after the womb. We pick and choose based on our own personal histories and priorities; our conscience and how God is guiding us at that time. Regardless, you must only view yourself as a kingdom

independent since your primary commitment will be to the kingdom of God over the politics of men.

No political party ought to ever hold your entire allegiance, because if it veers from God's values and priorities you need to remain committed to God. No politician or party should receive the worship you are to give to God alone. Did you notice what Joshua did when he heard the captain of the Lord's army declare who he was and whose side he was on? Joshua didn't argue. He didn't offer his opinion. He didn't point him to a popular talk show or political pundit. No, Joshua fell down on the earth and bowed down before him. When he bowed down on his knees, he was symbolizing his allegiance to God's cause.

We have Christians today who will bow down or take a knee for social causes, but won't bow down before God. It is time for all people who name the name of Jesus Christ to bow before the Almighty God and His kingdom cause. Bowing includes a position of submission. It indicates the intentional yielding to a relationship.

Are you willing to take a knee for God in spite of your political persuasion? Are you willing to take a knee for the King and His kingdom? That's what kingdom voting is all about.

## The Foundation For a Righteous Life

By Creflo Dollar

In today's society, the word "righteous" has been turned into a meaningless buzzword. In its biblical context, it's the quality of being justified, holy, and in right-standing with God. This may sound intimidating; achieving this status on our own is impossible. For Christians, righteousness comes not from doing the right things, but from what God says about us and our belief in that.



Creflo Dollar

The world itself is unrighteous; as believers living apart from the world, our righteousness comes from Christ living in us. Being born again makes Him the foundation for our lives and takes us from being sinners to saints. "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His...'" (2 Timothy 2:19, NKJV). This allows us to build our lives on a foundation that has already been laid.

The enemy is constantly attacking our minds; one of his strategies is to confuse us about who we are in Jesus. Satan wants us to forget that Christ gave us the same identity that He has. "God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, 'If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31, NLT). We have access to gifts the world doesn't have. When we're in Him, we're the righteousness of God.

Trying to build our lives on any foundation other than Christ

dooms those efforts to failure. It's like walking on sand that keeps shifting under our feet; we simply can't get any traction or stability. Because of Him, we have something to stand on that's even more solid than rock. "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Jesus made sanctification and holiness available; however, He left the final decision of whether or not to claim them up to us. It's our choice whether or not we want to be blessed, healed, redeemed, and wise. Those manifestations hinge on whether we try to earn our self-righteousness or depend on God's righteousness.

Our right-standing with the Father is a gift that can't be revoked because it isn't based on our daily behavior. Our true identity is based on what Jesus did on the cross, and our belief in that. The Holy Spirit has permanently sealed believers' salvation. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13, 14, NKJV).

For us, sin is no longer an issue. When we know with absolute certainty whose we are, what we do will reflect that identity. Even when we do sin, God still sees us as righteous. "Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace" (Romans 6:14, NLT).

We can compare building our lives on Christ to building a house on bedrock instead of soft mud. Anything less just won't hold up when trouble hits (Matthew 7:24-27). As God's people who trust in Him, our righteous standing can't be shaken or toppled.

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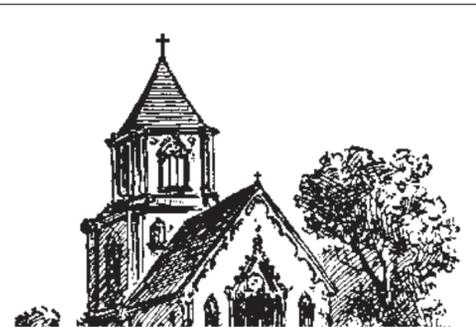
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# BUSINESS

## Telecom giant moves to stop federal broadband grant for northeast Louisiana



East Carroll Parish resident Wanda Manning speaks at a press conference Aug. 31, 2022, organized by Delta Interfaith and Together Louisiana after telecom giant Cable One blocked federal grant money from bringing new high-speed broadband service to their area. (Photo credit: Wesley Muller/Louisiana Illuminator)

BY: WESLEY MULLER  
Louisiana Illuminator

Frustrated residents from rural northeast Louisiana descended on Baton Rouge Wednesday after their local internet provider filed a formal protest to prevent federal grant money from bringing new high-speed broadband access to the area.

Last week, Gov. John Bel Edwards was planning to attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony in East Carroll Parish to kick start the state's first and perhaps most significant rural broadband expansion project — one that would move East Carroll from ranking last in the state for broadband access to among the top 10, according to a joint press release issued by Delta Interfaith and Together Louisiana, two advocacy groups that have lobbied heavily to bring higher internet speeds to rural parts of northeast Louisiana.

The governor visited Lake Providence on July 25 to make an initial announcement about the grant award, but last week's ribbon-cutting ceremony was canceled after Sparklight, a subsidiary of telecom giant Cable One, filed a formal protest with the Louisiana Office of Broadband Connectivity. The company's action came after it learned that a new competitor, Conexon Connect, would be coming to town with a \$4 million federal grant that Sparklight, itself, never applied for.

Conexon Connect, an upstart from Missouri that partners with rural electric utility cooperatives to provide high-speed internet services to hard-to-reach communities,

could lose the money depending on how the state handles Sparklight's challenge.

At a Wednesday press conference near the Louisiana State Capitol, residents from East Carroll Parish and other areas of the state aired their frustrations with big cable companies and with the state laws that allow them to protest grant awards so late in the process.

"Existing internet operators don't want to serve rural areas," East Carroll resident Wanda Manning said. "They say it doesn't make money. And here's the crazy part: They don't want anyone else to serve these areas either."

Reached by email Wednesday, Cable One spokesperson Tammy Gabel said the company already services the Lake Providence area with high speeds up to 1 gigabit per second and doesn't feel the area needs grant money for broadband expansion.

"The company believes public grant funds would be best used in areas of Louisiana that do not already have access to broadband," Gabel said.

Sparklight and AT&T are two major internet providers in East Carroll Parish. The residents said service from both companies is unreliable and slow to the point of making video streaming nearly impossible.

Louisiana's Delta Region, economically depressed and majority-Black, has become the focus of efforts to close the so-called "digital divide" as the region has some of the worst internet access in the state, according to the Federal Communications Commission's broadband

coverage map, which shows zero East Carroll Parish residents having access to 1 gigabit internet speeds as of June 2021.

Delta Interfaith, a local advocacy group, spent the last two years conducting research and gathering data on the lack of internet access in East Carroll. Delta Interfaith's Laura Arvin said the group studied customers' bills and ran numerous speed tests that revealed current internet providers were charging premium prices for premium broadband speeds that customers were not receiving.

Arvin and other Delta Interfaith members said large telecom companies have so far challenged 26 of the 67 rural broadband GUMBO grants, made available with funding from President Biden's American Rescue Plan Act, that have been awarded across the state. Delta Interfaith and Together Louisiana are urging the governor and the Louisiana Division of Administration, which houses the Office of Broadband Connectivity, to promptly deny the challenges and allow the expansions to begin.

Mary Anne Mushatt, a New Orleans resident who attended the press conference to support the East Carroll residents, pointed out that although the challenges might ultimately fail, they cause delays that could prove costly for smaller businesses such as Conexon Connect while forcing rural customers to renew contracts with existing providers that provide subpar service.

"At the least, it's going to be a delay," Mushatt said. "So, the communities are suffering while these companies are playing tricks."

## Slovak gas importer SPP signs LNG supply deal with Exxon



PRAGUE - Slovakia's national gas importer SPP has signed a liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply deal with ExxonMobil (XOM.N), SPP said on Thursday, as Europe races to secure alternatives to Russian gas.

SPP said the amount of gas in storage and its diversified supplies were grounds for optimism its customers would not face disruptions this winter, but added it was vital for the European market and cross-border connections to remain functional.

"A contract with a strategic partner that ExxonMobil is opens new opportunities in access to natural gas and LNG," SPP said in a statement, without giving the volumes or price of the deal.

It said transport arrangements to the landlocked central European country had been secured from LNG terminals in Italy and Croatia.

Slovakia uses around 5 billion cubic metres of gas per year and has mostly been served by Russian gas pumped through Ukraine. Russia has reduced supplies to Europe this year in retaliation for Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine.

But Slovakia has secured extra supplies of LNG and piped gas from Norway, which it said would cover most of the needs of SPP, which serves around two thirds of the Slovak market.

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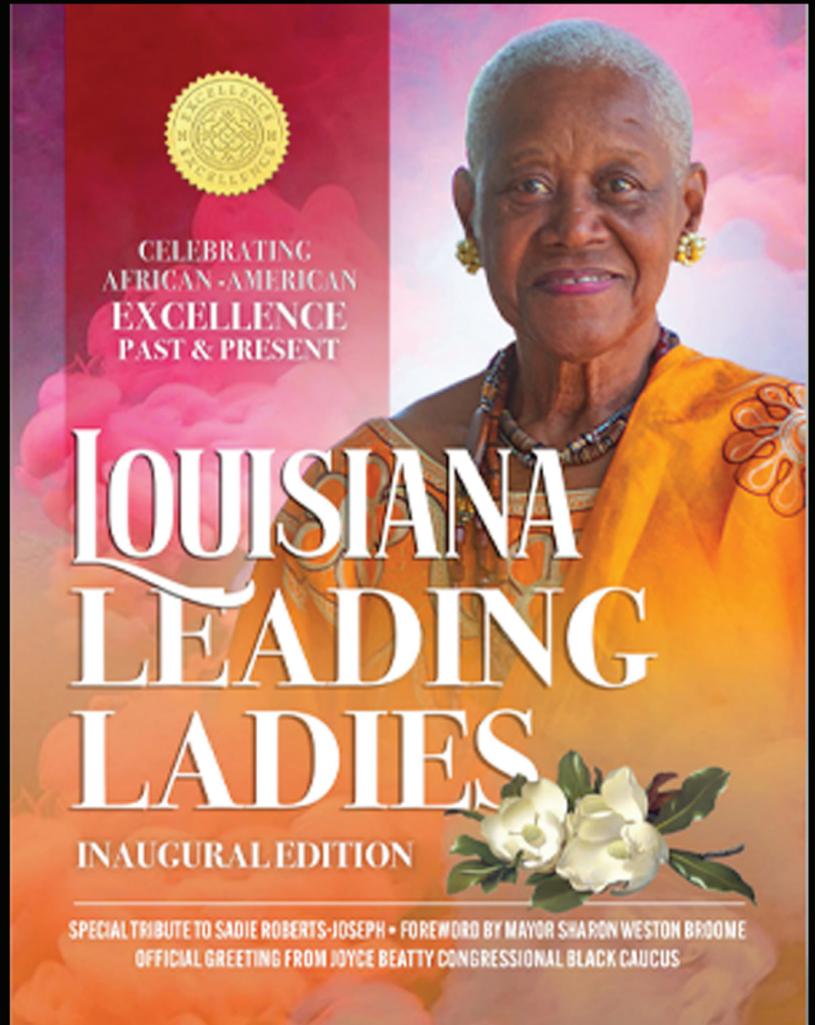
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