

The Weekly Press

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BRPD urging people to stop firing guns in the air to celebrate New Year's Eve



BATON ROUGE, La. - The Baton Rouge Police Department is urging people to be cautious and responsible ahead of New Year's Eve this weekend.

Sgt. L'Jean McKneely says celebratory gunfire is a common, but dangerous activity around the holidays and the department is asking for people to stop before someone gets hurt.

"It's illegal number one. Number two, it can kill somebody," McKneely said.

McKneely says people shooting their firearms into the air has led to property damage, and multiple people getting hurt in recent years.

"We've had situations that have happened in Baton Rouge where people have fired their guns in the air, the bullet has come down, and killed people," McKneely said.

Celebratory gunfire is against the law in Louisiana. If caught, violators could face up to \$1,000 in fines and/or two years behind bars.

"We can trace that bullet back to your gun if it's confiscated. We can shoot rounds and find out if that bullet came from that gun," McKneely said.

McKneely says they get dispatched to dozens of shots fired calls around this time of the year. He hopes people will put down the guns and find a safer way to celebrate.

"Just be mindful that you can hurt somebody with that, and you can possibly go to jail for the rest of your life," McKneely said.

WEATHER

	MON. 01/02 Thunderstorms High 79°.
	TUE. 01/03 Thunderstorms High 74°.
	WED. 01/04 Thunderstorms High 67°.
	THUR. 01/05 Mostly Sunny High 65°.

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U.S. House Jan. 6 panel report finds Trump incited insurrection, demands accountability



A protester holds a Trump flag inside the U.S. Capitol Building near the Senate Chamber on Jan. 6, 2021. (Photo by Win McNamee/Getty Images)

BY: JACOB FISCHLER AND ASHLEY MURRAY
Louisiana Illuminator

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House Jan. 6 committee late Thursday published its findings in a nearly 850-page report that accused former President Donald Trump of inciting an insurrection and recommended Congress consider how to determine whether those found to be insurrectionists should be barred from holding office ever again.

The report caps 18 months of work for the committee, which the House voted to form, mostly along party lines, in June 2021. It details the committee's central finding, gleaned through records reviews and dozens of interviews with White House, Trump campaign and other officials, that Trump's desire to overturn the results of a lawful and legitimate election was the driving factor in the unprecedented attack on the Capitol.

"[P]reventing another January 6th will require a broader sort of accountability. Ultimately, the American people chart the course for our country's future," Committee Chair Rep. Bennie Thompson wrote in his foreword to the report.

"The American people decide whom to give the reins of power. If this Select Committee has accomplished one thing, I hope it has shed light on how dangerous it would be to empower anyone whose desire for authority



President Donald Trump at a rally in Battle Creek, Michigan, on Dec. 18, 2019. (Photo by Andrew Roth)

comes before their commitment to American democracy and the Constitution," the Mississippi Democrat continued.

The report includes criminal referrals to the U.S. Department of Justice for four counts against Trump, including inciting, assisting or aiding an insurrection.

It is the first time in U.S. history a congressional body has recommended to criminally charge — and not simply impeach — a former president.

The panel has no power to actually bring criminal charges

and the Justice Department has not said how it will proceed, though Attorney General Merrick Garland appointed special counsel Jack Smith to investigate.

The eight-chapter report chronicles Trump's "Big Lie," his and others' efforts to deliver a fake slate of electors to Vice President Mike Pence, the major events and players involved in the planning of the insurrection, and the committee's witness interviews and information gathering.

Recommendations for the future

The report also includes recommendations to tweak the nation's electoral process and guard against future insurrections through legislative action, including amending the Electoral Count Act of 1887 — a proposal that is part of Congress' year-end government funding deal.

The panel also advises the courts and bar to review the conduct of attorneys who supported Trump's actions or participated in activities "aimed at subverting the rule of law."



Cassidy Hutchinson, a top former aide to Trump White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, testifies during the sixth hearing by the House Select Committee to Investigate the Jan. 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol on June 28, 2022. (Photo by Brandon Bell/Getty Images)



House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy is one of five Republicans members of Congress to be subpoenaed by the House Jan. 6 Committee for failing to testify. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Louisiana Gov. Edwards defends carbon capture projects



FILE—Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards speaks during a news conference in Baton Rouge, La., on Feb. 1, 2022. As Louisiana continues to be plagued by a spiraling insurance crisis, Edwards will travel to London this week to meet with the "world's leading insurance underwriter." (AP Photo/Matthew Hinton, File)

BATON ROUGE, La. — Proposed carbon capture projects continue to draw controversy and public backlash in Louisiana, but Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards remained adamant this week that the practice is a "safe" way to reduce the state's industrial emissions.

About 50 Louisiana residents traveled to Baton Rouge on Tuesday to speak in opposition to a global gas supply company's application for a test well permit in Lake Maurepas, where they plan to store carbon dioxide underground, The Advocate reported.

Most speakers at the hearing demanded that the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources pause approval of Air Products' project until the company releases an environmental impact statement detailing exactly how it would affect the lake and surrounding area.

But as residents, lawmakers and activists debated the project, Edwards voiced his support of carbon capture.

"As I've said many times, I believe in the safety and the science that underlies carbon capture and sequestration. I know it is an essential part not just to our climate action plan here in Louisiana to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, but really the plans for our country and the world," Edwards said during his monthly call-in radio show Wednesday.

These types of projects, which capture airborne carbon emissions created during industrial production and store them deep underground, are gaining traction since Congress approved \$3.5 billion for them last year.

In a November 2021 report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's top scientists said carbon capture and storage technology has to be part of the range of solutions to decarbonize and mitigate climate change. But they notably added that solar and wind energy and electricity storage are improving faster than carbon capture and storage.

Opponents of carbon capture and storage argue that projects pose threats to the public health of communities long plagued by air and water pollution.



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your heart with love, and
your life with laughter.*

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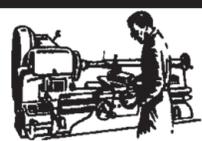


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Child poverty rates highest in states that haven't raised minimum wage

Louisiana has the second-highest child poverty rate in the U.S. at 26.3%



People gather together to ask the McDonald's corporation to raise workers wages to a \$15 minimum wage as well as demanding the right to a union on May 23, 2019, in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. (Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

BY: CASEY QUINLAN
Louisiana Illuminator

Of the 20 states that have failed to raise the minimum wage above the federal \$7.25 an hour standard, 16 have more than 12% of their children living in poverty, according to a States Newsroom analysis of wage and poverty data. Anti-poverty advocates say that's a sign that there's an urgent need for lawmakers to increase the federal minimum wage and do more to help struggling families.

Congress had the opportunity to achieve the latter by expanding the child tax credit before the end

of the year, but lawmakers did not arrive at a deal with Republicans to include it in the omnibus spending package. The expansion, which was part of the American Rescue Plan, provided as much as \$3,600 in monthly installments to qualifying families and is credited with lifting 3.7 million children out of poverty at least temporarily.

Raising the minimum wage would not lead to as fast or drastic an improvement, but a 2019 Congressional Budget Office analysis found that increasing the amount to \$15 an hour would lift more than 500,000 children from poverty. And the Eco-

nomics Policy Institute estimated in 2021, that if Congress passed a \$15 minimum wage increase by 2025, up to 3.7 million people wouldn't have to live in poverty — 1.3 million of those being children.

Ben Zipperer, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute, said there is a strong connection between the minimum wage and poverty.

"It's not a 1-1 connection, but there is a pretty strong connection," said Zipperer, whose expertise is on the minimum wage, inequality, and low-wage labor markets. "The main determinants of poverty in this country are whether you work and how much you work, so whether you have a job during the year and how many hours a week or weeks per year you work at that job. ... And then the third [determinant] is how much you were paid for an hour of work at your job. If you're getting paid relatively low wages, the minimum wage affects that."

Congress last raised the minimum wage in 2009, but 30 states now require employers pay more than the federal standard, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Numerous municipalities have also passed living wage laws for city or county workers.

Twenty-seven states, including New Jersey, Florida, California and Missouri, will raise their state's minimum wage in 2023, after passing legislation or voter-approved ballot measures that gradually increase the state minimum wage over several years or tie it to inflation. Washington (\$15.74), California (\$15.50) and Massachusetts (\$15) will have some of the highest state minimum wages in 2023, although the high cost of living in those states mitigates the effect on poverty rates.

In Missouri, where the minimum wage will be \$12 next year, a 2018 analysis from the Economic Policy Institute found that Proposition B, the ballot measure that is responsible for raising the wage, would increase wages for 677,000 people in Missouri.

States where legislatures have not raised the minimum above the federal \$7.25 an hour include Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina and South Carolina. All have child poverty rates of 20% or higher, according to U.S. Census data analyzed by 24/7 Wall Street, a financial news site. Mississippi has the highest child poverty rate in the United States, at 27.6%, with Louisiana following at 26.3%.

Louisiana last raised its minimum wage in 2008, the year before the federal rate increased to \$7.25 an hour.

Zipperer said that many of these low minimum wage states are concentrated in the Southern United States for a reason. He pointed to the political deals lawmakers made to leave Black workers out of 1930s labor rights gains, which were done for the benefit of Southern Democrats.

"That legacy of racism plagued the initial years of the national minimum wage and labor law generally in the United States, and while it was somewhat improved and overcome through the civil rights movement, you see the parallel to that now where you have a lot of places in the South that don't have minimum wages and or have very low minimum wages, and so they follow the federal standard which Congress has refused to raise over the past 13 years," he said.

He added, "That kind of decline

Watching porn now requires age verification in La. because of new law

BATON ROUGE, La. - The porn industry has been around for a while and in today's digital age business is booming. When Laurie Schlegel isn't seeing her patients who struggle with sex addiction, she's at the Louisiana State Capitol.

The Republican state representative from Metairie passed HB 142 earlier this year requiring age verification for any website that contains 33.3% or more pornographic material.

"Pornography is destroying our children and they're getting unlimited access to it on the internet and so if the pornography companies aren't going to be responsible, I thought we need to go ahead and hold them accountable," said Schlegel.

According to Schlegel, websites would verify someone's age in collaboration with LA Wallet. So, if you plan on using these sites in the future, you may want to download the app.

"I would say so," said Sara Kelley, project manager with Envoc. "I mean, I think it's a must-have for anyone who has a Louisiana state ID or driver's license."

Kelley added there are other ways websites could ask you to verify your age if you cannot access LA Wallet. She added that although some personal information will be required, companies must not retain personal data after complete verification.

"It doesn't identify your date

of birth, it doesn't identify who you are, where you live, what part of the state you're in, or any information from your device or from your actual ID. It just returns that age to say that yes, this person is old enough to be allowed to go in," explained Kelley.

It will be the website's responsibility to ensure age verification is required when accessing their site in Louisiana. Schlegel said there will be consequences for those who fail to follow the law.

"Someone could sue on behalf of their child; they can sue if children are getting access to pornography. So, it would be up to the user to sue the company for not verifying age first," continued Schlegel.

She said problems like depression, erectile dysfunction, lack of motivation, and fatigue can be directly linked to porn. She also said to prevent these issues from occurring at younger ages, this law is imperative.

"It's tied to some of the biggest societal ills of human trafficking and sexual assault. And in my own practice, the youngest we've ever seen is an 8-year-old," noted Schlegel.

There is legislation in Washington, D.C. that looks to implement something like this on a national level. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, introduced a bill similar to Schlegel's.

Baton Rouge Celebrates 10th Annual Red Stick Revelry on New Year's Eve

Red Stick Revelry 2022, presented by BankPlus, will take place on New Year's Eve in downtown Baton Rouge with the city dropping its iconic 9-foot LED lighted red stick in Town Square at midnight for the tenth straight year.

"I am excited to ring in another New Year for Baton Rouge and continue this 10-year tradition," said Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome. "Red Stick Revelry has helped make Baton Rouge a regional destination for New Year's Eve celebrations, which means business for our community. I ask everyone to celebrate safely as we are joined by neighbors and visitors for another great evening in Baton Rouge."

The celebration kicks off with Red Stick Rising, a celebration for kids of all ages, that will be held on at the River Center Branch Library on North Boulevard from 11 am until 12:30 pm. Red Stick Rising will feature arts activities and entertainment by The Amazing Bacon, stilt walker and performer. At noon, a community sing-along

of Auld Lang Syne will take place at Town Square when the Red Stick is raised into place 60 feet above Town Square where it will rest until midnight.

Red Stick Revelry's evening activities begin at 8:00 pm on The Crest Stage in Davis S. Rhorer Plaza, adjacent to City Hall, with a performance by the Shaun Ward Xperience, led by world-class jazz violinist Shaun Ward, followed by New Year's Eve favorites, Phat Hat, back by popular demand to rock Baton Rouge into the new year.

The evening concludes when the Red Stick drops at midnight in the North Boulevard Town Square with a fireworks and high beam laser spectacular.

Andre Moreau, news anchor at Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB) will emcee the 10th annual Red Stick Revelry celebration.

For more information on Red Stick Revelry: email info@redstickrevelry.com or message Facebook.com/RedStickRevelry.

Search for your missing money in La., 48 other states - all from one website

BATON ROUGE, LA - Louisiana Unclaimed Property items are part of an online search site that now features free and secure searches of 49 states' unclaimed property departments. MissingMoney.com was recently revamped to grant citizens nationwide the ability to search multiple unclaimed property databases at one advertising-free site. MissingMoney.com is the only national search site endorsed by states.

"This is an impressive tool designed for the convenience of all citizens, including Louisiana residents and former residents," said State Treasurer John M. Schroder, whose office oversees Louisiana's Unclaimed Property program. "Military families who now call Louisiana home, but may have been stationed elsewhere previously, are just one example of those who will benefit from Louisiana's participation in the MissingMoney.com initiative."

Unclaimed Property Director Kathleen Lobell, who is closing out her year as president of the National Association of Unclaimed Property Administrators (NAUPA), led the effort to work with vendors and contract to modernize online offerings with a reformatted site

powered by Kelmar Associates, a leading national unclaimed property data solutions company.

"We were particularly sensitive to the security needed for such a collaboration," Lobell said. She added that there is no advertising on MissingMoney.com and no charge to participate as a state or for individuals to search for their property. There have been more than 2.3 million searches and 137,000 claims submitted since the upgraded site was launched less than 2 months ago.

Unclaimed property involves financial assets that have become inactive and turned over to states' unclaimed property programs as required by law for safekeeping. Property types include uncashed checks from corporations, financial institutions, banks, insurance companies, and municipalities, inactive stock and brokerage accounts, unclaimed safe deposit boxes, and more.

Over 220 million properties totaling billions of dollars available to search and claim on MissingMoney.com. Louisiana's LACashClaim.org alone holds over \$1 billion worth of properties waiting to be claimed.

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National technology firm to establish New Orleans talent hub, create 150 jobs

NEW ORLEANS – Excella, an Agile technology firm that specializes in artificial intelligence and modernizing IT systems, announced it is establishing a talent hub in New Orleans to expand its software development team for government and business clients. The company plans to create 150 direct new jobs with an annual payroll of \$21 million over the next five years.

The Virginia-based company was founded 20 years ago with the mission to create modern, meaningful technology solutions for federal agencies, brands and nonprofits. Excella has grown into a 270-person, remote-flexible firm with locations in high-potential tech markets across the nation.

"This is a great win for Louisiana's rapidly expanding technology sector," said Gov. John Bel Edwards. "Companies like Excella are diversifying the state's economy while also driving innovation and empowering our workforce with quality, high-paying jobs."

To help foster tech growth in the state, Excella plans to partner and invest in Louisiana-based organizations and events such as NOLAvate, Operation Spark and Black Tech NOLA.

"I'm excited to bring Excella to Louisiana and be part of building the state into the country's most creative tech hub," said Excella CEO and cofounder Burton White.

The firm's offices are located at The Shop, a coworking space in downtown New Orleans. Excella looks to hire UX Designers, Software Developers, Project Managers, Agile Coaches, Data Engineers, DevOps Engineers and Business Analysts for its local team. Learn more about job opportunities, hiring events and news updates with Excella here.

"As the city's technology economy continues to expand, New Orleans Business Alliance is excited to welcome Excella," said Norman E. Barnum IV, NOLABA president and CEO. "NOLABA looks forward to working with Excella to connect with the vast and diverse talent networks available in New Orleans. The future of technology employment will continue to become more flexible, and New Orleans is poised to benefit from this trend."

To secure the project in New Orleans, the state of Louisiana offered Excella a competitive incentives package including a \$2.7 million Digital Interactive Media and Software Development Incentive tax credit.

"This announcement represents a homecoming for Excella co-founder Burton White, a long-time leading tech executive," said Michael Hecht, president and CEO of Greater New Orleans, Inc. "This validates the over 18 months that GNO, Inc. and partners have been working with Excella, and also the fact that – trends in remote work notwithstanding – connecting a company with a strong local community remains a winning strategy."

Congress Considers Bill Making \$60K the Minimum Salary for K-12 Teachers



Wilson, the chair of the Higher Education and Workforce Investment Subcommittee, said the financial incentive supports ongoing state efforts to provide competitive wages for teachers and address the national teacher shortage.

BY STACY M. BROWN
NNSA Newswire Senior
National Correspondent

Congresswoman Frederica S. Wilson (D-Fla.) introduced the American Teacher Act to incentivize states to increase the minimum K-12 teacher salary to \$60,000 and adjust inflation.

Wilson, the chair of the Higher Education and Workforce Investment Subcommittee, said the financial incentive supports ongoing state efforts to provide competitive wages for teachers and address the national teacher shortage.

"Teachers deserve a raise. Unfortunately, our nation's teachers have been underpaid, overworked, and deprived of resources for too long," Wilson stated.

"That's why I'm filing the American Teacher Act, to give our nation's teachers the raise they have earned and deserve."

Wilson called teachers the backbone of America's education system and economy.

She noted that they play a foundational role in the development of children.

"For seven hours a day, they help shape and inspire young minds as well as nurture students academically and socially," Wilson said.

"As the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill, teachers continued to play a critical role in our recovery, underscoring their indispensability."

The nonprofit Teacher Salary Project helped Wilson draft

the bill, which they said responds to a national teacher shortage and low professional morale.

The bill creates a four-year federal grant program to increase teachers' annual salaries to a minimum of \$60,000 nationwide.

Additionally, it would create a four-year federal grant available to states and local educational agencies to guarantee the \$60,000 minimum wage.

The bill wouldn't reduce salaries for those already making more than \$60,000 and wouldn't replace existing federal, state, or local funds used toward teacher pay.

Earlier this year, EducationWeek estimated that more than 36,500 teacher vacancies exist in the United States.

They noted that uncredentialed teachers filled more than 163,500 positions. Meanwhile, the Teacher Salary Project pointed out that 74% of teachers don't believe they receive fair pay.

"How do we get (teacher pay increases) to happen when people in the position to make change are so scared or intimidated by the price tag and the controversial topics associated with higher pay, like performance-based pay and increases in taxes?" Ellen Sherratt, board president of the Teacher Salary Project, told Education NC.

Wilson said teacher shortages count among the most pressing threats to education access today, with districts across the country forced to radically adjust school offerings to respond to turnover and

prolonged vacancies.

"While teachers have never received the wages and respect commensurate with the work they do to help all children reach their promise and potential, the culture wars and stagnant wages of the last few years have made this worse," stated Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers.

"Recruiting and retaining a diverse teaching force has become increasingly difficult – indeed, most parents say they wouldn't want their kids choosing teaching as a career," Weingarten remarked.

Weingarten continued: "Rep. Frederica Wilson's bill directly addresses these challenges by providing states with federal funding to incentivize school districts to create a minimum salary of \$60,000 for teachers."

"It also funds a national campaign highlighting the value of the teaching profession and encouraging young people to become teachers, using many of the recommendations in the AFT's Teacher and School Staff Shortage Task Force report 'Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?'" for recruiting the best candidates into teaching, including increasing compensation.

"This bill says put your money where your mouth is. We thank Rep. Wilson for her bold legislation addressing the low starting salaries that have plagued the teaching profession for generations, and we are proud to support this legislation."

The Claiborne Awarded Prestigious Well Certification

Claiborne Senior Living Communities achieve WELL Certification at the Health-Safety level

The Claiborne at Baton Rouge has announced that it has been awarded WELL Certification at the Health-Safety level for its family of senior living communities by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI). The prestigious distinction was awarded through IWBI's WELL v2, the latest version of the WELL Building Standard. WELL is the premier building standard to focus on enhancing people's health and well-being through the buildings where we live, work and play.

Claiborne Senior Living consists of 10 communities across Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. Their boutique senior living communities provide independent living, assisted living and memory care services to older adults. Claiborne is committed to enhancing the lives of their employees, their residents, and the families they serve by crafting meaningful relationships within their communities and delivering excellence.

Created through seven years of rigorous research and development working with leading physicians, scientists, and industry professionals, the WELL Building Standard is a performance-based certification system that marries best practices in design and construction with evidence-based scientific research. Claiborne earned the distinction based on ten categories of building performance — Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Movement, Thermal Comfort, Sound, Materials, Mind and Community — and achieved a Health-Safety level rating. IWBI is the leading authority for transforming health and well-being with its people-first approach to buildings, organizations, and communities.

"We decided to pursue our

WELL certification as it perfectly coincides with our desire and passion to create the best possible environment for our residents and team members," commented Justin Wray, Chief Operating Officer of Claiborne Senior Living. "Learning and understanding that we spend approximately 90% of our time indoors, regardless of age, was even more of a driving factor to focus on environmental changes that promote wellbeing."

Project features that helped Claiborne communities achieve its WELL Certified Health-Safety level rating include:

- Smoke free environment
- Ventilation effectiveness
- Moisture management
- Humidity control
- Promoting movement, physical activity, and active living
- Waste management
- Mental health support and education
- Restorative spaces, support, and programs
- Emergency preparedness
- Community access and engagement

WELL is grounded in evidence-based research that explores the connection between the buildings where we spend approximately 90 percent of our time, and the health and well-being impacts on the people inside these buildings. To be awarded WELL Certification by IWBI, all Claiborne communities underwent rigorous testing and a final evaluation carried out by third parties to ensure it met all WELL Certified Health-Safety performance requirements.

Caremark OGB Contract Moving Forward

State Employees and Retirees Should Consider Filling Medicines Before Dec 31st to Avoid Risk Of Delays and Confusion



It has been confirmed that Louisiana's Office of Group Benefits (OGB) will proceed with the Caremark CVS pharmaceutical Contract that has received much opposition from state legislators and independent pharmacies throughout the state of Louisiana. Today, during the latest round of litigation between the independent pharmacists and OGB, the judge dismissed the case, stating that securing and executing this contract is a function of the Executive Branch of government. This means the new contract will go into effect on January 1, 2023.

Senator Heather Cloud, who has openly expressed opposition of the contract, said, "There isn't much we can do at this point because of time constraints. State workers may have trouble filling prescriptions with trusted local independent pharmacies. My recommendation

to them is to fill needed medications before January 1st."

Although some independent pharmacies have claimed that they are opting into the contract, they will actually be filling them on a script-by-script basis, which still leaves the possibility that some individuals could encounter issues getting certain prescriptions filled.

Senator Cloud went on to say, "Please continue to voice your concerns and situation to the Office of Group Benefits. You can, of course, continue to contact my office and let us know what hardships you're facing, and we'll do our best to assist and pass on all correspondence to the correct agencies. Rest assured that your legislators, both Democrats, and Republicans, have fought hard and will continue to fight so that you have healthcare access to your local pharmacies."



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RELIGION

U.S. faith leaders urge lawmakers to pass expanded child tax credit

BY JACK JENKINS

Faith leaders joined members of Congress on Capitol Hill on Thursday to voice support for the expansion of the child tax credit, urging lawmakers to reinstate a broader version of the anti-poverty benefit before the end of the year.

"For many of us, this is a season of miracles — the miracle of Jesus' birth, the miracle of Hanukkah," said Abibat Rahman-Davies of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a Quaker group. "But expanding the CTC? That shouldn't take a miracle."

Democrats, Republicans race to strike year-end tax and spending deal

The event was part of a sustained advocacy push by a group of faith leaders from across the theological spectrum, with liberal-leaning religious groups and conservative evangelical organizations joining forces to push for lawmakers to embrace an expanded version of the credit that helps combat child poverty. Earlier this year, the group published an advertisement in Politico Magazine and sent a letter to all 535 members of Congress and to the White House asking them to make the child tax credit "fully refundable and available to low-income families on a permanent basis."

Lawmakers allowed the expanded version of the credit, created as part of the American Rescue Plan, to expire last year, sparking frustration among anti-poverty advocates. Members of Congress are wrangling over competing last-minute proposals put forward by both parties in hopes of passing something as part of an omnibus bill before the end of the year.

The forgiveness option



Psalms 103:10-11

Good relationships require giving and receiving forgiveness.

Because we are human we will mess up in one way or another. And those failures impact our relationship with others at times.

That's why forgiveness is an essential part of Our faith. Jesus did not come to create perfect people. He came to restore broken relationships.

The amazing plan of God was to restore relationships through the power of forgiveness. Jesus said I did not come into the world to condemn the world but that the world through me might be saved. (John 3:17)

Forgive is a compound word For is ownership Give is to release, you have the power to release others as well as yourself.

Forgiveness is an important component of our faith, the power of forgiveness is the willingness to do so! without requiring someone to behave in the way you want them to.

When you forgive someone without them working for it, it produces true repentance and

freedom.

As a teenager I experienced the loss of my dog that I raised from a puppy because of a miss understanding, my father took her life.

I held that Against him for years, I was fifty nine years old and he was deceased before I addressed the condition of my heart. God help me to realize that the people you look up to as your heroes are human first.

God reminded me of how this same man when I fell on a heater severely burning my arm he nurtured me back to health, times when I was sick he would pray until I fell asleep or the pain was gone, he was my protector, my earthly Provider.

But he was just a human like all of us making mistakes. God said to me do to him what I have done for you, he said to his father

forgive them for they know not what they do!

My father has been deceased since 2005 forgiveness is not for the dead, I am free because of my willingness to forgive.

My life is better and those that are in my life today, get the benefit of my willingness to yield to the will of God when it come to forgiveness.

All of us are recipients of forgiveness. Jesus mentions it when he taught is disciples too pray Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

We can't limit or determine Gods level of forgiveness, but if we don't forgive others the way he forgives us it reveals that we don't understand his level of love.

You see God's way of loving is matchless, no one can compare to it, he will leave the ninety nine looking for you, to forgive you without judgment.

"He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.



Pastor Jerome Smith, Sr.

Jonathan McReynolds Notches Fifth Gospel Airplay No. 1 With 'Your World'

The single is McReynolds' fifth straight, matching Todd Dulaney for the most in a row



Jonathan McReynolds

The single is McReynolds' fifth straight, matching Todd Dulaney for the most in a row

Jonathan McReynolds' "Your World" ascends to the top of Billboard's Gospel Airplay chart (dated Dec. 10), marking his record-tying fifth No. 1 in a row, encompassing all his leaders.

In the tracking week ending Dec. 4, "Your World" increased by 22% in plays, according to Luminate.

McReynolds co-authored the song with Dee Wilson.

McReynolds ties Todd Dulaney, who also boasts an active run of five straight Gospel Airplay No. 1s. In September, Dulaney notched his fifth in succession with "Satisfied," featuring Smokie Norful (marking Dulaney's sixth

leader overall, and Norful's third).

For the 33-year-old McReynolds, who hails from Chicago, "Your World" follows "Grace," which dominated for a week in August 2021. "Movin' On," a collaboration with Mali Music, topped the tally for one frame in October 2020; "Make Room" became a one-week leader in December 2019; and "Not Lucky, I'm Loved" paced the chart for a week in September 2018.

McReynolds has notched one additional top 10, "Gotta Have You" (No. 5, August 2015).

Plus, "Your World" completes McReynolds' quickest trip to the Gospel Airplay summit: 15 weeks. The ascent passes "Grace," which reached the penthouse in its 21st week.

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BUSINESS

Energy company ordered to refund millions of dollars to customers, officials say

BATON ROUGE, La. - The Louisiana Public Service Commission ("LPSC") was pleased with two recent decisions that found System Energy Resources, Inc. ("SERI"), an Entergy subsidiary, overcharged customers.

According to officials, customers were being overcharged for years and now SERI owes millions of dollars.

SERI overbilled customers served by Entergy Louisiana, LLC, Entergy New Orleans, LLC, and Entergy Arkansas, LLC, officials said.

Reports show the company has to pay \$160 million to Entergy Louisiana customers, \$190 million to customers served by Entergy New Orleans, and \$241 million to Entergy Arkansas customers.

The LPSC, Council, and APSC said they are surprised by Entergy's announcements over the last week that no more refunds are due on the uncertain tax positions and consider it blatantly inaccurate. No fair reading of either decision could support Entergy's interpretation.

"For reasons unknown, Entergy is attempting to mislead its consumers, investors and the public regarding the consequences of FERC's findings of unjust and unreasonable conduct by SERI," said LPSC Chairman Lambert Boissiere.

In a discussion, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ("FERC") rejected each of SERI's arguments to justify its failure to reduce rate base for the taxes collected from customers, officials added.



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WAGE from page 3

in the cost-of-living adjusted value of the minimum wage disproportionately harms the people who are paid the lowest wages in the U.S. economy and because of our sexist and racist labor market, that is women and people of color."

In Louisiana, for instance, 64% of women of color earn less than \$15 an hour, while 58% of Black workers and 50% of Hispanic workers also earn less than \$15 an hour, according to Oxfam America's analysis of U.S. Census data.

Peter Robins-Brown, executive director of Louisiana Progress, said several factors contribute to the number of Louisianans living in poverty. Louisiana hasn't prioritized putting funding into programs that would provide economic relief, has focused its tax reform on benefits for the wealthy and for businesses, and has a particularly unjust criminal justice system that punishes the poor, he said.

"Social services in Louisiana are largely underfunded, making it easier for generational poverty to continue," Robins-Brown said.

The state also favors landlords' rights over tenants rights and people living in the southern parts of the state that experience the most severe weather disasters have to live with high premiums for homeowners insurance, which further contribute to economic inequality, Robins-Brown explained.

Although Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards is a Democrat, and has expressed support for raising the minimum wage, both chambers of



Dollar store employees march in protest in New Orleans, seeking safer working conditions and better pay, Dec. 10, 2022. (Greg LaRose/Louisiana Illuminator)

the Louisiana Legislature are controlled by Republicans. Louisiana is one of 24 states without a process for citizens to offer ballot initiatives and voter referendums.

"Both the House and Senate committees that deal with labor issues are low-priority for Republicans and Democrats because industry interests usually predetermine the outcomes in those committees," Robins-Brown said.

For these reasons, Robins-Brown says Louisianans are de-

pending on the federal government to take action to raise the minimum wage. He said his organization supported expanding the child tax credit because it was a powerful tool in reducing child poverty.

Congress last failed to increase the minimum wage in 2021, when it was proposed as part of a larger pandemic relief package. Fifty Senate Republicans and seven Senate Democrats voted against raising the minimum wage to \$15 by 2025. The exclusion of the expansion of

the child tax credit in Congress' omnibus bill is one more lost chance to reduce child poverty.

"The child tax credit enormously reduced poverty during the recent expansion of that program and unfortunately that was temporary," Zipperer said. "But I think that's a very clear demonstration that we actually have, to some degree, the capacity to eliminate a lot of poverty in this country. All it takes is overcoming the political opposition to do that."

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Record Number of People Signed up For Obamacare During 2022

By Stacy M. Brown
*NNPA Newswire Senior
 National Correspondent*

President Joe Biden said he promised to lower costs for families and ensure that all Americans have access to quality affordable health care.

On Tuesday, Dec. 27, the president proclaimed that he'd delivered on that promise.

A record number of people – nearly 11.5 million – signed up for insurance on HealthCare.gov – about 1.8 million more and an 18% increase over last year.

With enrollment remaining open through Jan. 15, and not counting those who signed up for coverage through their state marketplaces, Biden said gains like those have helped to drive down the uninsured rate to eight percent, the lowest level in U.S. history.

"In recent days, we received further proof that our efforts are delivering record results and bringing families the peace of mind that comes with health insurance," the President stated.

"Right now, four out of five peo-

ple who sign up for health insurance through the Affordable Care Act can find health care coverage for \$10 a month or less. These lower rates were set to expire at the end of this year, but thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, we were able to extend them and save millions of Americans on Obamacare an average of \$800 a year."

The Biden administration noted that, on Jan. 1, Americans will see the benefits of additional cost-saving measures because of the Inflation Reduction Act.

That includes seniors realizing a month's supply of insulin capped at \$35, Medicare beneficiaries paying \$0 out of pocket for recommended adult vaccines covered by their Part D plan, and prescription drug companies needing to pay Medicare a rebate if they try to raise their prices faster than inflation for drugs administered at a doctor's office.

"We're not finished working to make health care a right, not a privilege," Biden declared.

The administration continues to encourage individuals to visit HealthCare.gov by Jan. 15 to take advantage of lower rates and sign up for health care for the coming year.



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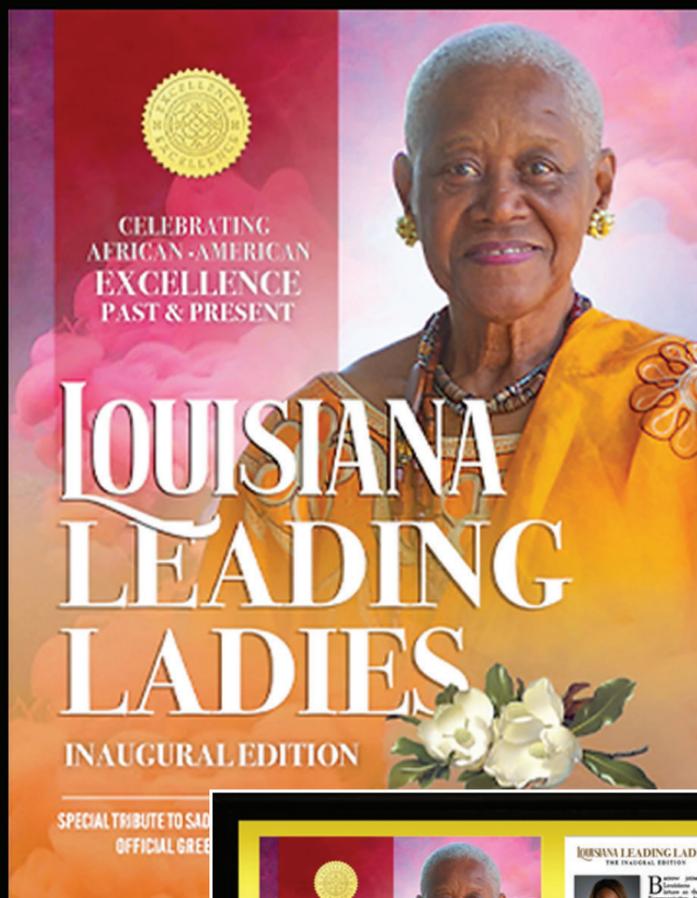
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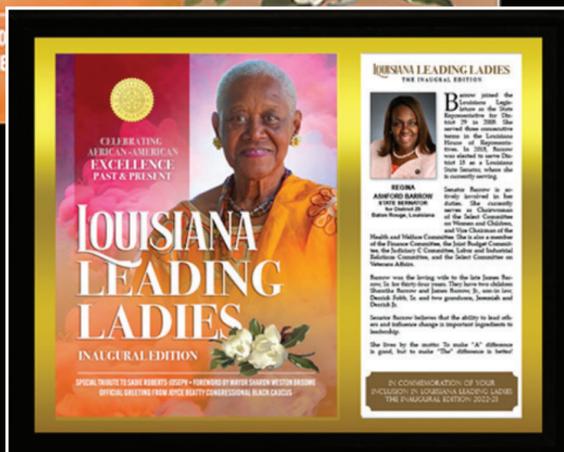
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