

# The Weekly Press

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## Mayor Broome Selects First Director of Community Revitalization

BATON ROUGE, La — Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome announced today that Marlee Pittman will serve as the first Director of Community Revitalization for East Baton Rouge Parish.



Marlee Pittman

Pittman will head several inter-agency initiatives intended to create equitable, vibrant, affordable, and sustainable neighborhoods in Baton Rouge. Mayor Broome continues to be committed to quality of place and firmly believes in leading with the power of residents. With the Ms. Pittman joining the team, residents, partners, and agency leaders will have a point person dedicated to continuing the role of the Broome administration as the convener and leader of strategy for housing and neighborhood efforts.

"Throughout her career in public service, Pittman has led numerous notable community development initiatives, including Safe Hopeful Neighborhoods, the Mid City Committee, the Hickey Town Stabilization Initiative, and disaster recovery efforts for the 2016 floods," said Mayor Broome. "She's worked for several years alongside my administration to redesign how the City of Baton Rouge engages community members and empowers residents to be leaders in their own neighborhoods. She's an experienced program manager with years of community meeting, project, and event planning experience and a background in affordable housing and public policy."

Pittman graduated from LSU as a nationally recognized Truman Scholar, Congressman Findley Fellow, and Scoville Peace Fellow. She earned a Certificate in Urban Planning + Design from Harvard University, and was recently accepted into MIT's Master of City Planning program. A board member for three nonprofits, she was recognized by the Metro Council for her work in public transportation and was named a Baton Rouge Change-MAKER by the Baton Rouge Alliance for Students.

### WEATHER

	<b>MON. 05/16</b> Partly Cloudy High 95°
	<b>TUE. 05/17</b> Partly Cloudy High 95°
	<b>WED. 05/18</b> Partly Cloudy High 94°
	<b>THUR. 05/19</b> Partly Cloudy High 94°

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## Lawmakers seek contempt charge for former State Police leader in Ronald Greene case

Action includes \$5,000 fine, possibility of criminal referral



Reps. Tanner Magee, R-Houma, and C. Denise Marcelle, D-Baton Rouge, speak to one another during an April 7, 2022, meeting of the special House committee investigating the death of Ronald Greene in Louisiana State Police custody. (Greg LaRose | Louisiana Illuminator)

BY: WESLEY MULLER  
Louisiana Illuminator

Lawmakers investigating the death of Ronald Greene in Louisiana State Police custody advanced a resolution Wednesday to hold the agency's former leader in contempt of the Legislature for failing to provide personal

records in connection with the case.

A special House committee investigating how Greene's death was handled has ordered retired Col. Kevin Reeves to pay a \$5,000 fine for his alleged failure to comply with their subpoena.

The resolution, introduced by House Speaker Pro Tempore

Tanner Magee, advanced unopposed and will next head to the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, where Reeves will have the chance to argue against the contempt finding. If the Governmental Affairs Committee agrees with the contempt finding, the resolution will advance to the House floor for consideration,

Magee said. Magee said Reeves' attorney, Lewis Unglesby, has stalled in responding to the committee's subpoena for Reeves' private journal entries that detail the former superintendent's various thoughts and actions since

See GREENE, on page 2

## White House highlights Baton Rouge for crime, violence initiatives using American Rescue Plan Act

BATON ROUGE, La — The White House highlighted the City of Baton Rouge and other communities today for efforts to fight crime and violence using funding through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Courtney Scott, who coordinates community-based public safety efforts on behalf of Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome, along with Baton Rouge Police Chief Murphy Paul, participated in the roundtable discussion today at the White House.

Chief Paul, who is part of the White House's Community Violence Intervention Collaborative, discussed the public safety investments at BRPD, including updated police vehicles, gun violence reduction strategies and increased community policing, and technology investments such as automated license-plate readers and crime cameras.

Courtney Scott discussed Mayor Broome's community-

based programming and social services that support education, employment, behavioral health, youth initiatives, housing, violence-interruption strategies and community revitalization.

The discussion also highlighted Mayor Broome's efforts to bring together local, state, and federal law enforcement partners, and business and community partners to focus on strategic collaboration and resource sharing for community-based approaches to address individual and gang/group violence, and locations where violence is occurring.

**Baton Rouge Police Chief Murphy Paul and Assistant Chief Administrative Officer Courtney Scott discussed Mayor Broome's community-based programming and social services that support education, employment, behavioral health, youth initiatives, housing, violence-interruption strategies and community revitalization.**



## Louisiana gov. slams bill that could jail women for abortion

BATON ROUGE, La. — Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards, a Democrat with a history of opposing abortion rights, came out Wednesday emphatically against legislation that could subject women to prosecution and prison for getting abortions.

Edwards told a Baton Rouge civic club he would veto a measure by Rep. Danny McCormick, an Oil City Republican, according to news outlets.

Later, he issued a statement calling the bill "anti-woman." He called it "patently unconstitutional" and said it would criminalize some types of contraception and parts of the in vitro fertilization process.

McCormick's bill, set for debate in the state House on Thursday, was introduced in March. But it got its first legislative hearing last week, less than two days after the leak of a draft U.S. Supreme Court opinion indicating the high court is preparing to overturn decisions upholding a constitutional right to abortion.



Gov. John Bel Edwards

## EPA Announces East Baton Rouge Parish School System Wins Energy Star Award

210 organizations leading the way in support of America's clean energy transition

DALLAS, Texas — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 6 and the Department of Energy are announcing the winners of the 2022 ENERGY STAR Awards. The East Baton Rouge Parish School System is the winner of the Energy Star Awards. This district has saved more than \$1 million in 2021 and continues to develop and implement energy-saving measures.

"We know it's going to take all of us working together to tackle the climate crisis, and the 2022 ENERGY STAR award-winning partners are demonstrating what it takes to build a more sustainable future," said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. "These companies

See SCHOOL, on page 2



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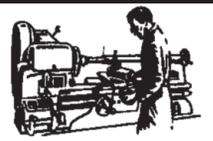
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**Correction Policy**  
 The Baton Rouge Weekly Press strives to be fair and accurate. The newspaper corrects any significant errors of fact brought to the attention of the editor. If you think an error has been made, call 225-775-200

## Weekly Press

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## Louisiana House guts abortion bill that could have sent pregnant patients to prison

BY: JULIE O'DONOGHUE  
 Louisiana Illuminator

The Louisiana House gutted a controversial abortion bill Thursday, removing language from it that could have sent people who undergo the procedure to prison, outlawed certain forms of birth control, and criminalized parts of the in vitro fertilization process.

The rewrite has stalled the legislation, because the bill's sponsor, Rep. Danny McCormick, R-Oil City, is refusing to move it forward without those unpopular provisions.

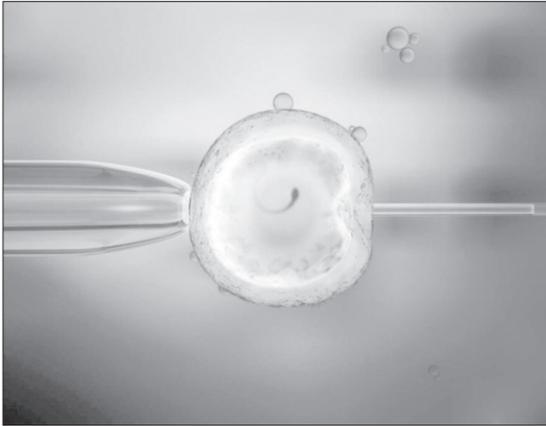
"Abortion is murder and as lawmakers we have a responsibility to end it," McCormick said, as he tried to fight off the changes to his proposal.

Anti-abortion House members overwhelmingly voted to replace McCormick's measure with language from another anti-abortion bill sponsored by Sen. Katrina Jackson, D-Monroe, that's already passed the Senate.

The bill, as amended, includes prison time and fines penalties for abortion providers, should the U.S. Supreme Court allow Louisiana to enact an abortion ban. Unlike its original version though, it explicitly exempts pregnant females who undergo abortions from criminal charges. It also includes language meant to exempt birth control and fertility treatments from being outlawed.

Under the amended bill, abortion providers could face between one and 10 years in prison and a fine between \$10,000 and \$100,000 for performing an abortion on a person who is less than 15 weeks pregnant. Penalties could increase up to 15 years in prison and a fine of \$20,000 to \$200,000 should an abortion be performed on someone who is 15 weeks pregnant or more.

McCormick's original bill consumed lawmakers' energy for the better part of a week and made legislators across the political spectrum uncomfortable. Still, Republicans were unwilling to vote the proposal down outright, even after the state's



*In vitro fertilization is among the procedures that would have become a punishable crime, according to opponents of the original version of House Bill 813. Its author, Rep. Danny McCormick, wants to treat abortion the same as the crime of murder. (Canva image)*

leading anti-abortion groups came out against the measure earlier this week.

Conservative lawmakers feared that voting to kill any bill that prohibits abortion – even one that people widely believe is unconstitutional and unpopular – will still make it harder for them to be reelected in 2023. Instead, there was consensus among GOP lawmakers to heavily rewrite the legislation so it could be approved in the House.

The vote over McCormick's bill drew dozens of anti-abortion protesters to the Louisiana Capitol. Several sat in the House chamber balcony, shouting support for McCormick and accusing other Republican lawmakers of "lying" throughout the debate over the legislation.

The Capitol was also briefly evacuated, when the building's security was alerted to a suspicious, and ultimately nonthreatening, package near the Senate chamber.

Emotions surrounding McCormick's bill were unusually high, given the revelation last week that the U.S. Supreme Court is likely to allow state abortion bans to go into place later this

year. If the court throws out its landmark Roe v. Wade ruling, Louisiana will have an almost all-encompassing abortion ban immediately, under a 2006 law.

While the majority of legislators support a state abortion ban, several anti-abortion lawmakers have repeatedly said they don't think pregnant women should be targeted, even if the procedure becomes mostly illegal.

House Bill 813, in its original form, attempted to immediately classify all abortion as a homicide. It would have criminalized the behavior of both abortion providers and abortion-seeking patients and declared both federal laws and court rulings "void."

It also called for the removal of state judges who enforced federal laws, a provision lawmakers told McCormick would cause the bill to be thrown out by courts immediately.

"This bill will not prevent a single abortion from occurring, not a one," said Rep. Alan Seabaugh, R-Shreveport, one of the House's most conservative members.

In spite of the concerns raised about McCormick's legislation Thursday, the Louisiana House Committee on the Administration of Criminal Justice voted 7-2 last week to move it forward to the House floor. Seabaugh was one of the seven Republicans who voted in favor of it, though said Thursday he regretted that decision.

In spite of lawmakers' objections to McCormick's bill, the House has also blocked legislation that would explicitly prevent people from being prosecuted for trying to terminate a pregnancy.

The House criminal justice committee voted 6-4 last month to kill House Bill 1027, which would have prohibited the prosecution of people who tried to end their own pregnancy under an abortion ban.

"In the event that Roe v. Wade is overturned, we will have women that will want to terminate a pregnancy and try to do it on their own," said Rep. Mandie Landry, D-New Orleans, the sponsor of that bill. "We don't want a woman to stay home and bleed out. We want her to go to the doctor."

McCormick was one of the six Republicans who voted against Landry's legislation when it came up for the committee vote.

"I don't really understand the bill," he told Landry. "My confusion is that this may be used to legitimize abortion in the future."

## Strong criticism of Pineville VA Hospital physician Dr. Shivani Negi, but system prevails over individual rights



*RVP David and Kesha Hamilton with Primerica Financial Services*

BY TOM ASWELL  
 Courtesy of Louisiana Voice

The investigation into the practices of a physician at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Pineville appears to have ended with findings of no criminal wrongdoing on the part of Dr. Shivani Negi.

That's not to say that Dr. Negi escaped unscathed with then-5th District U.S. Rep. Dr. Ralph Abraham declaring, "The VA system is broken." Abraham also wrote that the Alexandria facility hired her "knowing that she had inadequate credentials for practicing medicine."

A former investigator for the Louisiana Attorney General's Office even said, "We were headed

toward an indictment" (of Negi) until Jeff Landry defeated his boss, incumbent Buddy Caldwell, in the 2015 election and closed the investigation. Investigator Arthur Orga left the AG's office shortly after Landry took over.

Complaints against Negi included allegations that she withheld treatment for patients, administered steroids to a diabetic patient even though he informed her he could not take steroids, that she altered medical records in another state to cover her failure to order a blood culture on a patient, that she screamed at staff, threw charts at fellow workers and was often referred to anger management classes. The most damning,

See **PINEVILLE VA**, on page 3

## GREENE from page 1

Greene's death on May 10, 2019, in Union Parish. Police body camera video shows that state troopers beat, kicked, choked, dragged and used stun guns on him following a vehicle pursuit. Troopers claimed Greene succumbed from injuries when his car ran into a tree, a finding that would later be debunked.

Magee, who's also a lawyer, said Unglesby has produced some pages from Reeves' journals but has refused to disclose others that the two attorneys reviewed together and found to be relevant to the committee's work.

"As we stand today, we have yet to receive the documents that we requested, we subpoenaed," Magee said. "We received a partial amount as decided by Mr. Unglesby."

According to the journal pages Unglesby has so far disclosed, Reeves appeared to know early on in the case that the troopers' actions were a "problem" that he "must address immediately," though Reeves never followed through.

For more than a year, Greene's death remained shrouded in secrecy while State Police took no action against the troopers seen on video beating Greene until details of the case were leaked to the Associated Press.

If the House of Representatives sustains the contempt resolution and the civil fine of \$5,000, the committee members will consider filing a referral for criminal prosecution with the district attorney's office, Magee said.

Unglesby did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday.

Reeves and other LSP administrators in charge at the time of Greene's death have since testified before the committee. Magee and other lawmakers on the panel have accused nearly all of them of withholding information.

In an interview after Wednesday's committee hearing, Rep. Mandie Landry said the LSP administrators claim to not remember anything whenever the committee asks a question.

"They don't recall, there were no policies or they didn't know them, someone else decided, they retired, etcetera," Landry said.

Trooper in charge of discipline 'unaware' of details

That trend continued Wednesday when the commit-

tee heard testimony from more LSP officials. Maj. Jay Oliphant, who was in charge of making disciplinary recommendations for troopers in the case, told lawmakers he could not recall what recommendations he made.

Oliphant also continued to push the narrative that Greene died from injuries suffered in a car wreck. That claim was contradicted in initial pathology findings and eventually discredited by the FBI, which reviewed the autopsy and eliminated the crash and a diagnosis of "agitated delirium" as causes of death.

The committee has yet to find out who reported Greene's supposed "agitated delirium" symptoms to the medical examiner in the case, a move that allowed State Police to deem Greene's death an accident for more than two years.

Oliphant said he did not know the FBI had conducted a review of the autopsy and changed some of the causes of death.

Rep. Debbie Villio, a former state prosecutor, pointed out that troopers failed to take photos of Greene's vehicle, recover the vehicle's data recorder or conduct an accident reconstruction. "All of the things I think you would agree are done in a fatal crash, but none of that was done," she said.

"Did that ever strike you as inconsistent?" Villio asked Oliphant.

"I was unaware that that wasn't done," the major replied.

When Villio asked Oliphant if he was on the disciplinary review committee for the Greene death investigation, Oliphant said, "I'm pretty sure I was; I normally am."

"You're pretty sure you were?" Villio responded. "I mean this wasn't an everyday event, was it? Don't you think you would remember?"

Oliphant said he could not specifically remember.

Despite the difficulty lawmakers have faced in getting direct answers from LSP brass, Magee told the Illuminator the committee has exposed some important things about the case.

"It's been clear that the troopers used excessive force, and the top of state police failed to act to properly investigate," he said. "Early on, Col. Reeves acknowledged the problem and possible measures to address but didn't."

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## SCHOOL from page 1

are showing once again that taking action in support of a clean energy economy can be good not only for the environment, but also for business and customers."

East Baton Rouge Parish Public School System is a public school district headquartered in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, United States. The district serves most of East Baton Rouge Parish; it contains 54 elementary schools, 16 middle schools, and 18 high schools. Since developing the energy management program in 1999, EBRPSS has made several key accomplishments such as achieving ENERGY STAR certification at two schools in 2020, was declared the winner of the EPA's Battle of the Buildings program and reduced total energy consumption by 33 percent.

For 30 years, ENERGY STAR has been America's resource for saving energy and protecting the environment. In 2020, energy savings from ENERGY STAR and its partners helped reduce U.S. electricity consumption by the equivalent

## Baker Heights Elementary School Pre-K Scores Among the Highest Internationally

We had the pleasure of interviewing Desiree Collins, the Family and Community Engagement Coordinator of EBR Early Childhood Development Network and Baker resident, to discuss how EBR Early Childhood Community Network has implemented Instructional Learning supports, which have resulted in remarkable improvements at Baker Heights in the Pre-K classes earning them scores that are ranked High Proficient in LDOE Performance Profile 2020-2021 and Spring 2022 scores as high as a 6.50 with Third-party observers. Baker Heights delivers best practices in early child development and learning, measured by this international CLASS™ assessment tool.

Annually, schools are assessed through C.L.A.S.S.™, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, an international tool that measures high-quality interactions and experiences in early child development. Mrs. Collins explained how the scoring system was developed to assess classroom quality in preschool through 3rd grade. A score ranging from

1 (minimally characteristic) to 7 (highly characteristic) is given for each dimension. The CLASS™ tool is an observation tool that focuses on the effectiveness of classroom interactions among teachers and children, assessing daily interactions that promote children's social and cognitive development. The CLASS™ observation tools have been developed for Infant, Toddler, Pre-3rd grade. The program focuses on interactions that support learning at every age or grade level, utilizing developmentally appropriate interactions organized into domains and dimensions.

The highly admirable results of the educational staff of Baker Heights, where 3 of 4 teachers scored a minimum of 6.0 (Leigh Glaser and Shantell Easley and Tina Walker and Precious Vincent, Marissa Garner-Jones and Carolyn Lewis) with 6.0 -7 range being an excellent score. Edna Harvey and McArthur Bell, co-teachers of SPED, scored a 5.97; this score is highly proficient.

### PINEVILLE VA from page 2

however, was the question raised over her qualifications in light of her failure to reveal to the State of Virginia the fact that her application for a license to practice had been rejected by the State of Florida.

In her application to the Virginia Board of Medicine, there was a section in which she was required to provide details about any prior denial of a medical license. She left that section on her application blank even though Florida had rejected her application on the grounds that she had concealed the fact that she had altered an admission order sheet after the fact to hide the fact that she had neglected to order a blood culture on a patient while employed at Maryland General Hospital.

A committee that investigated the incident reported that her actions and her subsequent "implausible response" reflected "not only bad judgment but also unethical behavior."

She was never licensed in Louisiana, but her Virginia license was considered adequate for her employment in the VA system.

Dr. John Sam, who worked with Dr. Negi for more than a decade at the VA facility in Pineville said that every year he worked with her, someone would report her behavior to the VA Office of Inspector General and she would end up in anger management. "Dr. Negi was rude and spoke in a harsh tone of voice to almost all the staff while I was a patient there," wrote one former patient in a sworn affidavit.

Another former patient, Dennis Egelston said, "The first time I saw Dr. Negi, she took me off

the antibiotics and started me on steroids. I told her I was diabetic and couldn't be put on steroids. This did not stop her even though I pleaded with her not to. She told me, 'I am the doctor and you are the patient, and I will do what I want to.' My blood sugar shot up from 180 to almost 500. This woman has no regard for human life."

Floyd Hamilton has been a particular thorn in Negi's side after she put in orders to remove his 84-year-old father from a breathing machine and took him off antibiotics against the wishes of the family.

Floyd Hamilton has been fighting a lonely battle against Negi and the VA 13 years, taking his case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court which refused to hear his case.

He then went to law enforcement but with similar results.

While it appeared briefly that there might be a criminal indictment, those hopes were dashed with the election of Jeff Landry in 2015.

He fared no better with the office of 14th JDC District Attorney John DeRosier and his special investigator Hugo Holland.

Holland, in a three-page letter to the junior Hamilton, noted that the doctor's actions did not rise to the level of homicide or, for that matter, even medical malpractice.

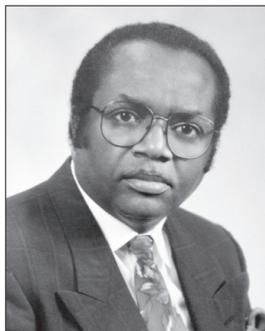
Holland, who hires himself out to a dozen or more district attorneys across the state, specializes in more high-profile, primarily capital, cases involving defendants with few financial resources to mount a formidable defense and showed little interest in pursuing a case against a doctor and a federal agency with the resources to fight back.

## First Southern University System Board chairman, community leader Lionel Johnson Sr. dies

Funeral services for the Rev. Lionel Johnson Sr., first chairman of the Southern University System Board, who died on Thursday, April 28. Johnson laid in state on Friday, May 13, at 4-7 p.m. at St. Joseph Baptist Church in St. Gabriel, Louisiana. On Saturday, May 14, services were held at First Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in St. Gabriel, viewing 8-10 a.m. and the funeral beginning at 10 a.m. Burial was at the Heavenly Gates Mausoleum in Baton Rouge.

Johnson, who was a Southern University and A&M College alumnus, was appointed to the newly formed system of Southern's institutions in 1974 by then-Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards. Johnson was subsequently elected as chairman, a position he held for 10 years. At the time, the system included Southern University and A&M College and Southern University Law Center in Baton Rouge, Southern University at New Orleans, and Southern University Shreveport. The Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center was established as a fifth system institution in 2001.

"The Southern University System family extends our condolences and prayers to Rev. Johnson's family, former colleagues and others who knew him well," said Ray L. Belton, president of the Southern University System and chancellor of Southern University and A&M College. "Rev. Johnson's service to our institutions



Rev. Lionel Johnson Sr.

was part of a great trajectory, forming Southern into the first system of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the nation. He was the epitome of a servant-leader not only for Southern but also for his community. While his physical presence will be missed by many, his contributions will live on through countless more years to come."

Among Johnson's other appointments:

- Appointment by Gov. Edwards as a member of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

- Appointments by Gov. Dave Treen and Gov. Edwin Edwards, respectively, to the Governor's Special Commission on Educational Services (now Office of Student Financial

Assistance) as member and chair.

- Appointed by Gov. Edwin Edwards as an inaugural alderman for the Town of St. Gabriel and subsequently elected by the people.

- Appointment by the Iberville Parish Police Jury as a member and vice-chair of the Iberville Parish Charter Commission.

- Appointment by Iberville Parish School Board as a member and chair of the Zero Tolerance Commission.

- Johnson, who served 28 years as chief administrative deputy of the Iberville Parish Sheriff's Office, founded and became president of the Iberville Coalition of Black Peace Officers. He was also a founding member and president of the East Iberville Community Complex Incorporated, which is now the site of the current St. Gabriel City Hall. He was a member and first Black president of the Capital Economic

Development District Council, which included the parishes of Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Point Coupee, St. Helena, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, Washington, West Baton Rouge and West Feliciana.

Johnson, who was also an English teacher for eight years in East Feliciana Parish, was a pastor for more than 36 years at three churches — Third Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Sunshine, Louisiana; St. Joseph Baptist Church in St. Gabriel, Louisiana; and Greater Ebenezer Baptist Church in Plaquemine, Louisiana.

In addition to his bachelor's degree in English from Southern, Johnson received a master's degree in curriculum development from the State University of New York at Albany. He was also an alumnus of the Law Enforcement Basic Training Academy at Louisiana State University.

## The Affordable Internet Connectivity Program is Available!



As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides eligible households \$30 per month off their internet bills.

In addition, 20 leading internet providers will offer ACP-eligible households a high-speed internet plan for no more than \$30 per month.

Eligible families who pair their ACP benefits with one of these plans can receive high-speed internet at no cost.

You can find more information at GetInternet.gov and you can find internet providers offering plans for \$30 per month at Companies Near Me where there are currently 80 providers listed as offering service in the 70714 zip code!

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## City of Baker VETERANS SYMPOSIUM



Thursday, May 19 - 9 a.m.

Baker Municipal Center  
3325 Groom Road - Baker, La.

• EVENT VENDORS •

Mayor Darnell Waites, MSG (USA Retired) - Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs  
Secretary Joey Strickland, COL (USA Retired) - Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs  
Outreach Division - Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs Veteran Assistance Counselor  
Volunteers of America (Support Services For Veterans and Their Families Division)  
Quad Vets - American Legion Post 416 - Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4224  
VA Health Care Enrollment Team - Mobile Medical Unit (Provided by Southeast La. Veterans Health Care System) - Magnolia Veterans Home - Jobs For Veterans State Grants Liaison

Colors will be presented by the Southern University ROTC Color Guard Team

Register on Eventbrite by searching Baker Veterans Symposium OR call Larry Williams at 225.276.8626 or call Reatha Wright at 225.615.4174

# RELIGION

## Connecting to God through prayer

BY CREFLO DOLLAR

As Christians, we must understand the power of prayer. It's not overly-dramatic to say that we're engaged in spiritual warfare with the devil and praying is part of our arsenal of weapons. Most people have no idea how their prayers connect them to heaven; the enemy capitalizes on this ignorance and tries to prevent us from hearing God in the heat of the battle. When the devil attacks our minds, it's critical to keep the lines of two-way communication with God open.



**Pastor Creflo Dollar**

Most of us learned as children to memorize a set of words that the world considers praying. Religion tells us that prayer is hit-or-miss and that we won't always get an answer from God when we pray. However, praying according to the finished works of Jesus Christ allows God to answer every prayer we offer up to Him. "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Luke 11:9, 10). This kind of prayer isn't begging and pleading for God to do something He already did, but thanking and praising Him for making it possible for our prayers to be answered.

Prayer isn't simply reciting



empty phrases; there's no power in that. God is our heavenly Father who wants to hear what's really weighing on our hearts and minds. He loves us deeply and wants us to open up and be honest with Him. He already knows what we need and He's simply waiting for us to ask Him for it. "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as

the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matthew 6:7, 8).

Prayers are direct conversations with God and shouldn't all be homogenous. At any given time, we all have different issues and

face different struggles; therefore, everyone's prayer will differ. What gives our prayers such power and connects us to Him is their ability to put us in His presence. "... The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). When our prayers

See **PRAYER**, on page 5

## BET to air 36th Annual Stellar Gospel Music Awards on August 1st at 8 pm EST



Gospel legend Tye Tribbett and multiple Stellar Award winner Jekalyn Carr will host the highly-anticipated event, which will feature inspirational performances from the genre's most celebrated artists.

CHICAGO, IL – The gospel event of the year, the 36th Annual Stellar Gospel Music Awards, will air on BET on Sunday, August 1st, at 8 pm ET / 5 pm PT. Gospel legend Tye Tribbett and multiple Stellar Award winner Jekalyn Carr will host the highly-anticipated event, which will feature inspirational performances from the genre's most celebrated artists.

Yolanda Adams, Kierra Sheard and Avery\*Sunshine have been added to this year's list of dynamic performers who will hit the Stellar stage at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center in Nashville, TN. Viewers can also expect moving performances from gospel superstars Jonathan McReynolds, J.J. Hairston, Maverick City Music, Pastor Mike Jr., Tamela Mann, Jason Clayborn, Hezekiah Walker, CeCe Winans and hosts, Tribbett and Carr. The Clark Sisters, who will receive the James Cleveland Lifetime Achievement Award presented by AT&T, will deliver a moving performance at this year's ceremony.

The Stellar Awards not only

recognizes the year's best performances in the genre, but honors Gospel music icons and those who have been instrumental in advocating for the gospel industry. Top nominees for this year's ceremony include Anthony Brown & group therAPy, Kierra Sheard, Maverick City Music, and Pastor Mike, Jr., each receiving seven nominations, including a nod each for Artist of the Year. Other celebrated artists receiving multiple Stellar nominations include Tasha Cobbs Leonard, The Clark Sisters, Rev. Luther Barnes and the Restoration Worship Center Choir, the Chicago Mass Choir, and host Jekalyn Carr. The incomparable Lady Tramaine Hawkins will receive the Aretha Franklin Icon Award presented by Toyota for her contributions to gospel music. The AT&T Dream in Black Emerging artist performers will include Jokia, Nia Allen, and Terrian.

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See **AWARDS**, on page 5

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# BUSINESS

## Louisiana Senate rejects permanent local say for industrial tax breaks

BY: GREG LAROSE  
Louisiana Illuminator

The relatively new voice local taxing bodies have over whether industrial projects receive major tax breaks could soon fade after the Louisiana Senate rejected an attempt Tuesday to make their say permanent. Gov. John Bel Edwards issued an executive order six years ago that gave locals the right to approve or reject their share of the Industrial Tax Exemption Program (ITEP), and a proposed amendment to bake that change into the state constitution failed to gain the support it needed.

Lawmakers in the upper chamber rejected Senate Bill 151 from Sen. J. Rogers Pope, R-Denham Springs, in a 14-21 vote. It would have allowed voters statewide to decide whether sheriffs, school boards and parish councils would retain their authority over ITEP, which forgives up to 80% of property taxes owed on large-scale business investments.

According to statistics Pope shared with senators, 96% of projects seeking the ITEP incentive have been partially approved at the local level and 84% have been fully approved.

"That tells me all the locals want the business. Nobody's trying to drive business out of the country," Pope said on the Senate floor.

Proponents of Pope's proposal argued it was essential because the next governor, likely to be a Republican, would remove Edwards' order and restore the



The Louisiana Senate chamber, photographed on Feb. 2, 2022. (Greg LaRose/Louisiana Illuminator)

ITEP break back to 100% of local property taxes.

Sen. Jay Luneau, D-Alexandria, supported the bill and noted Louisiana was the only state that allows a non-elected body, the State

Board of Commerce and Industry, waive local property taxes to the extent the Industrial Tax Exemption Program does.

Opponents included Sen. Bret Allan, R-Franklin, who said that a change made to it last month gives too much negotiation power over tax breaks to local officials. Reform of local taxes is needed before any Industrial Tax Exemption Program adjustments are made, he said.

Sen. Jay Morris, R-West Monroe, said making the ITEP changes permanent would send Louisiana's "economic development efforts

into chaos." He had suggested a compromise that would give local taxing bodies control of a portion of the property taxes due to them, but Morris' amendment to do so failed when Pope's bill was on the Senate floor in late April.

Morris said forces conspired against his amendment because they want to see ITEP returned to its full exemption status after Edwards leaves the governor's seat in two years.

"They didn't want to this bill to have a chance at that compromise," Morris said.

### PRAYER from page 4

are based on faith in Jesus Christ, God sees us as righteous regardless of what we may have done in the past.

In battle we have other soldiers alongside us to watch our back. In the spiritual realm, these soldiers are other believers. Intercessory prayer for them gives our prayers added power and strength. "Pray at all times (on every occasion, in every season) in the Spirit, with all [manner of] prayer and entreaty. To that end keep alert and watch with strong purpose and perseverance, interceding in behalf of all the saints (God's

consecrated people)" (Ephesians 6:18, AMPC). While we're praying for them to stay strong, someone is also praying for us.

The presence of the Holy Spirit makes a big difference in our prayers because He intercedes for us when we can't find the right words. "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). Praying in the Spirit puts us in direct contact with the Father. Satan knows that, done properly, prayer can completely shut him down. In these last days, the stakes are too high to risk missing out on this vital connection to God.

### AWARDS from page 4

including State Farm (Song of the Year presenter), Toyota, P&G (Traditional Female Vocalist presenter), and McDonald's Inspiration Celebration Gospel Tour, the 2021 Stellar Music Awards is set to be the gospel event of 2021.

The Stellar Awards will tape live at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center on Saturday, July 10th and will air on BET, BET HER, and BET Gospel on Sunday, August 1st, as well as BET International on August 2nd. For ticket updates, follow us on social media and check our website for the link to purchase. COVID-19 safety protocols are posted as well.

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