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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16 -22, 2023

A PEOPLE'S PUBLICATION

VOL. 46 • NO.16 • FREE

Louisiana Lawmakers Choose Leaders

BY: Taylor Dane
BR Weekly Press

Lawmakers in Baton Rouge have decisively chosen Republican Senator Cameron Henry of Metairie for the position of Senate President and Republican Representative Phillip DeVillier from Acadiana as the Speaker of the House. The governor-elect expressed satisfaction with these selections, acknowledging DeVillier's hard work and strong support among House Republicans.



Senator Cameron Henry

The Speaker of the House position had five other contenders, including Jack McFarland from Winnfield, Brett Geyman from Moss Bluff, Daryl Deshotel of Hesser, Tony Bacala of Prairieville, and Julie Emerson from Carencro. However, over the weekend, it became evident that DeVillier was emerging as the top vote-getter and a consensus candidate.

Senator Cameron Henry, with prior experience in the House and entering his second term in the Senate, has garnered ample support for the role of Senate President. Notably, this marks the first time in over a decade that the legislature has selected its top leadership before inauguration day.

With Republicans set to control all three branches of government and holding supermajorities, Henry and DeVillier are poised to assume their new roles on January 8th without the need for votes from Democrats, signifying a significant shift in the political landscape.

READ ONLINE

■ Amtrak Baton Rouge to New Orleans Passenger Service Set to Launch in 2027

■ Brandon Lake Dominates at the 54th Annual GMA Dove Awards with Four Wins, Including Artist of the Year

■ Harvesting Better Health Festival Promises a Day of Fitness, Fun, and Community Wellness in Baker

■ BRCC Revives Training Program to Tackle Truck Driver Shortage

WEATHER



MON. 11/20
Showers
High 79°.



TUE. 11/21
Showers
High 63°.



WED. 11/22
Mostly Sunny
High 60°.



THU. 11/23
Mostly Sunny
High 63°.

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Jeff Landry picks former Trump official, first Black woman for environmental post



Aurelia Skipwith Giacometto the first Black woman to hold this position in the state, comes from a background in the Trump administration.

BY: JULIE O'DONOGHUE
Courtesy of the Louisiana Illuminator

Governor-elect Jeff Landry's appointment of Aurelia Skipwith Giacometto to head the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has stirred controversy. Giacometto, the first Black woman to hold this position in the state, comes from a background in the Trump administration, where she managed the federal government's endangered species program and international conservation efforts.

Before her federal role, Giacometto served as an executive at Monsanto Co., a major biotechnology and agricultural company. Her ties to conservative organizations opposing animal



Gov.-elect Jeff Landry introduces Aurelia Skipwith Giacometto as his pick for Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality head during a Nov. 15, 2023 press conference at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Also in the photo: Tim Hardy, from Landry's transition team, and the governor-elect's wife, Sharon. (Photo: Julie O'Donoghue/Louisiana Illuminator)

protections and mainstream environmental efforts have raised concerns among independent conservationists.

Giacometto's involvement in groups advocating for hunters and fishermen's rights, as well as her opposition to environmental ad-

See WOMAN, on page 3

Baton Rouge Named a Top 10 Digital City for Ninth Consecutive Year

BATON ROUGE, La. – Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome announced that Baton Rouge has been named a Top 10 Digital City for the ninth consecutive year by the Center for Digital Government.

Baton Rouge clinched the Top 10 ranking in the survey's mid-sized cities category, underscoring the City-Parish's dedication to streamlining internal operations, updating systems, and embracing cutting-edge technology to more efficiently serve the residents of East Baton Rouge Parish.

"Baton Rouge's continued ranking as a Top 10 Digital City is a direct reflection of our continued focus on integrating groundbreaking technology across all our City-Parish departments and expanding the array of services available to Baton Rouge residents," said Mayor

See DIGITAL, on page 3

Low Early Voting Signals Potential Republican Sweep, Puts Democrats at Risk in Election

Lack of Enthusiasm Among Black Voters and Orleans Parish Residents Could Impact Democratic Prospects

Louisiana's preliminary voting numbers are pointing towards significant victories for Republicans in the upcoming statewide races, dashing Democratic hopes for securing any seats. The seven-day early voting period for the 2023 general election, featuring contests for secretary of state, attorney general, and state treasurer, concluded on Saturday, revealing an unexpectedly meager turnout of around 25% of registered voters.

Pollster John Couvillon commented, "The overall story is that a low-wattage

election season has lost even more of its wattage with respect to early voting for the general election. There's just a serious lack of interest."

The Louisiana Secretary of State's Office reported that the total early votes cast for the general election amounted to 260,156, marking a 26% decrease from early voting before the Oct. 14 primary and a significant 48% drop from the 2019 general election.

The absence of a runoff following Jeff Landry's victory in the governor's office last month has contributed to voter apathy. Still, more criti-

cal factors include an unusual lack of interest among Black voters and lackluster campaigns from the Democratic Party throughout the season, according to Couvillon.

This election has seen more Republicans casting early votes than Democrats, with significantly fewer Black voters turning out—deviating from the typical trends in Louisiana. This suggests positive outcomes for Republican candidates Nancy Landry for secretary of state, Liz Murrill for attorney general, and John Fleming for state treasurer. Couvillon anticipates

these candidates will secure victories over their Democratic opponents Gwen Collins-Greenup, Lindsey Cheek, and Dustin Granger.

Notably, Orleans Parish, usually a stronghold for voter turnout, ranks sixth in early voting, falling behind East Baton Rouge Parish and trailing 20% behind Caddo Parish. Couvillon remarked, "About the only candidate I've seen running ads in the New Orleans area is Liz Murrill. I'm not seeing anything from any of the Democrats. It's really strange and has led to just embarrassingly low turnout."

While low turnout is evident across both parties, it has

See ELECTION, on page 3

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Democrats urge feds to update banking ‘red flags’ on legal marijuana businesses

BY: JACOB FISCHLER
Courtesy of the
Louisiana Illuminator

The federal government unfairly penalizes state-legal marijuana businesses whose owners have been convicted of marijuana-related crimes, restricting them from loans and other banking tools, a group of U.S. Senate and House Democrats wrote to the Treasury Department asking for a change in policy.

The group of 20 lawmakers, who mostly represent states where recreational marijuana is legal, said in a Tuesday letter that 2014 guidance from the department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network to put “red flags” on marijuana businesses hurts the businesses’ chances of securing banking services or loans.

The warnings from a federal regulator unfairly restrict access to a fast-growing industry

that’s legal in many states, the lawmakers said.

But efforts to only address issues around banking have split advocates of marijuana reform.

Booker, Wyden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York introduced a comprehensive marijuana overhaul bill last year, which would decriminalize the drug completely.

Booker and Warnock have opposed bipartisan attempts to deal only with access to financial services, arguing that such reforms would benefit big marijuana businesses and would be unfair to the largely Black and Latino people who still suffer the consequences of marijuana-related convictions in states where it has since become legal.

“My fear is that if we pass this legislation, if we greenlight this new industry and the fees and the profits to be made off of it without helping those communities, we will just make the comfortable more comfortable,”

Warnock said at a September hearing on a bill to reform marijuana banking laws.

“And I see no historical evidence that suggests that when we do that we’ll go back and get those left behind,” he continued. “I don’t believe in trickle-down economics, and I don’t believe in trickle-down justice.”

The Senate Banking Committee approved the marijuana banking bill on a bipartisan 14-9 vote on Sept. 28. It has not received a floor vote.

Spokespeople for Warnock did not respond Thursday to messages seeking comment on the Treasury letter.

Booker and Schumer also opposed previous banking overhaul efforts, but Booker said that the addition to this year’s version of the bill, which he cosponsored, to provide states grants to help expunge marijuana convictions, made the bill worth supporting.

Spokespeople for Booker did not respond to a message

seeking comment Thursday.

“I’m grateful to my colleagues for working with me to ensure key provisions were included in this bill that will increase access to capital for small and minority-owned businesses and increase banking services for underserved communities,” he said in a statement a week before the committee vote. “Even after this bill is passed, there will be a lot more work to do to reverse the many injustices of our nation’s failed marijuana policies.”

“Under this red flag guidance, a marijuana business owner with a marijuana conviction may be permitted to participate in a state licensing program on paper, but in practice may be unable to access a bank loan to grow her business because she is considered a high-risk customer,” the lawmakers wrote.

The guidance disproportionately harms businesses owned by people of color,

who are more likely to have a marijuana-related conviction, even though they are not more likely to have broken marijuana use laws, the letter reads.

Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Raphael Warnock of Georgia and Rep. Earl Blumenauer of Oregon led the letter, according to a release from Warren’s office.

Other signers include Sens. Cory Booker of New Jersey, Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith of Minnesota and John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, and Rep. Val Hoyle of Oregon.

The group asked Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Financial Crimes Enforcement Network Director Andrea Gacki to update the guidance, which they noted predates many state laws legalizing recreational marijuana.

The update should allow people who have been pardoned

or were convicted of an offense that is no longer considered a crime under their state’s law to have full access to financial services without a red flag from the federal government, the lawmakers wrote.

Messages seeking comment from the Treasury Department and Financial Crimes Enforcement Network were not returned Thursday.

Split among advocates

Access to banking is one of the challenges that marijuana-related businesses face, even as many states have moved to decriminalize or outright legalize recreational use in recent years and it has grown to be a multibillion-dollar industry.

Last year, 22 states brought in a combined \$3.8 billion in tax revenue from marijuana sales, according to the advocacy group the Marijuana Policy Project. Recreational sales in Oregon alone are about \$1 billion per year.

Building House District 63 Together, One Step Closer to Progress

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LOCAL & STATE

City of Baker School Board Appoints James T. Stroder as Superintendent of Schools

Baker Mayor Darnell Waites extends congratulations on Mr. Stroder's new role

BAKER, La. — In a landmark decision, James T. Stroder, the current Interim Superintendent of The City of Baker School System (CoBSS), has been appointed as the next Superintendent of Schools. The CoBSS Board finalized this appointment on Saturday, November 11, 2023.

With over 16 years as a Superintendent and 25 years as an educator, including prior national-level superintendent experience, Mr. Stroder brings a wealth of knowledge to his new role. His journey includes serving as a Principal/Director of Academics and Assistant Principal before assuming leadership positions.



James T. Stroder

Joining CoBSS in July 2021 as the Supervisor of K-12 curriculum and instruction, Mr. Stroder took on the role of Interim Superintendent on July 1, 2023. His dedication to education is evident as he expresses, "I am very enthusiastic and passionate about my life's calling, which is education, and it is an honor to serve the community of Baker as their Superintendent."

Advocating for a per-

sonalized approach, Mr. Stroder believes in the unique potential of every child and sees educators as instrumental in helping them discover their purpose. The CoBSS Board is excited about his appointment, with President Joyce Burges noting, "I am very excited about Mr. Stroder's leadership. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to CoBSS that has already proven to be beneficial for our teachers, staff, and students. Since taking over as interim superintendent, we have seen some very positive and significant strides, including our district's performance scores."

Mayor Darnell Waites joined in congratulating Mr. Stroder on this achievement. The Mayor expressed confidence in Mr. Stroder's ability to lead, stating, "I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Mr. Stroder on his appointment as the Superin-

tendent of the City of Baker School System. I look forward to witnessing the positive impact of his leadership on both the educational system and the community."

Beyond his professional endeavors, Mr. Stroder is a devoted family man, married to Megan, a native of New Roads. He takes on the roles of a father, stepfather, and grandfather to twin granddaughters and a grandson. Outside of the educational realm, he enjoys quality time with his family, fishing, golfing, and pursuing his culinary interests.

The transition to the role of CoBSS Superintendent is scheduled for January 1, 2024, marking a significant milestone in Mr. Stroder's dedicated career in education.

Louisiana Receives Federal Funding to Combat Crime and Clear Crime Lab Backlog

BATON ROUGE, La. — In a decisive move to tackle rising crime, U.S. Congressman Garret Graves announced seven grants from the Department of Justice (DOJ) pouring into Louisiana. The multimillion-dollar investment aims to bolster law enforcement, with a focus on identifying and apprehending violent gangs and drug dealers statewide.

Part of the funds, totaling \$312,708, will directly address the Louisiana State Police's backlog of criminal cases. The infusion targets expediting forensic evidence processing, including DNA tests, and facilitating the hiring and training of forensic personnel.

Graves emphasized the urgency, noting a one-year backlog in evidence processing. This initiative aligns with his 2021 efforts, securing funding for an additional DNA processing center in

the Capitol Region.

Specific grants for Louisiana's 6th Congressional District include \$41,007 for Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office to combat gun crimes and violent offenders, \$320,721 for Terrebonne Parish to address the overdose crisis, and \$20,395 for technology upgrades in the Terrebonne Parish Sheriff's Office.

Major beneficiaries within the Louisiana State Police are allocated \$3,418,156 for the Anti-Heroin Task Force Program and \$2,000,000 for the Anti-Methamphetamine Program, signaling a comprehensive approach to combat various criminal activities.

As these funds pour in, expectations are high for strengthened law enforcement, reduced crime rates, and a swift resolution to the persistent challenges posed by case backlogs in crime laboratories.

ELECTION from page 1

disproportionately affected the Democratic side. Granger in the state treasurer's race has performed relatively better among Democratic candidates, securing more total votes (321,000) in the Oct. 14 primary than any other Democrat on the ticket, including the party's gubernatorial candidate, Shawn Wilson, who received just 275,000 votes.

Couvillon expressed concern about the lack of infor-

mation surrounding the races, stating, "It's the oddest thing I've ever seen."

Election Day is scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 18, encompassing three statewide races, districtwide races for the state legislature and state school board, and various local government offices throughout Louisiana. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturday. Voters can find their voting location and additional information on the Secretary of State's website, GeauxVote.com, or by calling (800) 883-2805.

WOMAN from page 1

vocacy and climate science, has sparked criticism. She holds leadership positions in organizations like the Ducks Unlimited Conservation Policy Committee, the National Rifle Association's Hunting and Conservation Committee, and Protect the Harvest, a nonprofit countering animal rights groups.

Furthermore, Giacometto is associated with the Steamboat Institute, a Colorado nonprofit skeptical of mainstream climate change science. Her role on the advisory board of Colossal BioSciences, a genetic engineering company

focused on "de-extinction" projects like resurrecting the woolly mammoth, adds another layer to her diverse portfolio.

Giacometto's past tenure as the head of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service drew objections from conservationists due to her agribusiness industry background, with Monsanto facing lawsuits over alleged pollution. Landry, during the press conference, hinted at a potential shift away from Governor John Bel Edwards' efforts to make Louisiana more "carbon neutral," emphasizing a balance between environmental concerns and the economic impact on industries like petrochemicals, oil, and gas.

A personal note: Aurelia Skipwith Giacometto's late husband, Tony Giacometto, had a background in Montana state politics, serving as chief of staff to U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns and working as a lobbyist. The couple married in 2021 in New Orleans, and Tony Giacometto passed away in 2022, the woolly mammoth from extinction. The organization refers to itself as a "de-extinction" business.

Several independent conservationists objected when Giacometto took over the federal fish and wildlife service for Trump, particularly because of her background in the agribusiness industry. Monsanto has had to settle several lawsuits with states over alleged pollution in recent years.

DIGITAL from page 1

Broome. "This recognition speaks to the remarkable progress made by our departments, the value of these investments on our broader community, and the importance of our continued investment in digital resources. We are excited to build upon this work and create a more digital Baton Rouge for everyone."

The Center for Digital Government, a national research institute that specializes in IT policies and digital practices for state and local governments, conducts this survey each year and sends it to all cities, towns, villages, and consolidated city-county governments in the country. The Top 10 Digital City rankings celebrate a select group of cities that have effectively implemented best practices and enhanced digital experiences for their residents and the government alike. This year, Baton Rouge proudly stands alongside fellow digital trailblazers, such as Scottsdale, Ariz. and Alexandria, Va.

Honorees were recognized Nov. 16 at an awards reception in Atlanta. For more details about the 2023 Digital City awards.

COMMUNITY UPDATE!

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-Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome

DETAILS AT:
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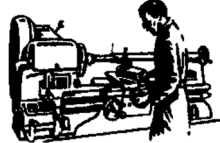


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SHARON WESTON BROOME



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RELIGION

Empowered And Resilient: Navigating The Path Of Singlehood In Faith

BY: Ivory D. Payne
New Birth Full Gospel Fellowship Church

Living as a single Christian in today's world presents unique challenges, but embracing our faith reveals that we are already complete and successful in Christ. Our strength is multi-faceted, enabling us to overcome life's trials with resilience.

Trials touch everyone, regardless of relationship status. How we respond determines whether we remain

stuck or move forward. Recognizing the purpose behind suffering allows us to mature spiritually. Although God does not will bad things, He permits them to foster growth. The assurance that God never abandons us makes it easier to persevere: "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles... Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:17,19, NKJV).

Relying solely on our-

selves in relationships is a form of self-reliance. God calls us to automatic reliance on Him, using suffering to refine our dependence. Jesus, the perfect example, endured suffering for our sake: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10, NKJV).

Jesus, despite facing immense challenges, unwaveringly depended on

the Father. Our faith in Christ's endurance puts our temporary struggles in perspective: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Faith in Christ's journey helps us view our situation in a new light.

Recognizing that life and relationships are imperfect is key to growth. External pressures challenge our thinking and strengthen us. The believer's faith provides peace, acknowledging that God is greater than life's challenges: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

An easy life lacks growth and development. Embracing momentary troubles propels us forward: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). The mature single Christian, guided by God during challenges, emerges stronger and wiser. Understanding the purpose of suffering fortifies us on our Christian journey, regardless of life's season.



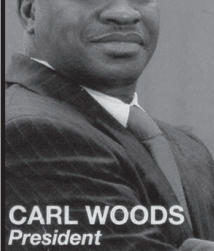
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BUSINESS

Closing the Wealth Gap in Black America: A Collective Mindset Shift

By Phillip Washington
Dallas Weekly Magazine

In this meticulous exploration, we embark on a profound journey to address the intricate challenge of closing the wealth gap in Black America, immersing ourselves deeply in the imperative for a transformative collective shift in mindset. Generations, holding the mantle of economic architects, intricately shape and innovate within a perpetual cycle of transformation. The stark dichotomy between the old and new economies becomes palpable. The former, entrenched in a scarcity mindset, clings to antiquated mechanisms such as manipulation and debt, while the latter pioneers uncharted territories like bitcoin, AI, and influencer marketing, unveiling unprecedented avenues of wealth.

At the epicenter of bridging the wealth gap lies the indispensable need for active and purposeful participation in this new economic paradigm. Black individuals ascending in diverse fields epitomize a momentum that seamlessly aligns with the ethos of the era's more open and expansive collective mindset. However, embracing the new economy transcends the confines of personal success; it becomes the bedrock for fostering an unequivocally equitable society. Contributions from Black individuals on a global scale not only usher in wealth but also plant the seeds of happiness, peace, and joy within the broader community. Yet, the journey to close the wealth gap is a nuanced and multifaceted endeavor. It demands a sustained and introspective collective shift in mindset, challenging deeply en-

trenched internal biases rooted in the fear of the unknown. Overcoming these internal barriers becomes paramount in sculpting a future defined by diversity and opportunity, especially for those perched at the edges of innovation. Phillip Washington, Jr., an esteemed registered investment adviser and the resonant voice behind the Wealth Building Made Simple Podcast, generously imparts this detailed information for educational enrichment. However, a clarification call for caution echoes — before venturing into strategic endeavors, a judicious consultation with qualified financial advisers and/or tax professionals is imperative. It's crucial to acknowledge that investments inherently involve risk, and past performance serves as an imperfect guide to future results in this dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of wealth creation.



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[NOVEMBER]



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ART UNWINED Drusilla Lane Park
Nov. 3 | 6:30-8:30 p.m.

EDGE OF NIGHT
Highland Road Park Observatory
Nov. 10 | 4:45-6:45 p.m.

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BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo
Nov. 11 | 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

SATURDAY MORNING STUDIO
Milton J. Womack Park
Nov. 11 | 10:30 a.m.-noon

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GLOW IN THE PARK
North Street Park [9 Square]
Nov. 15 | 6-7:30 p.m.
Anna T. Jordan Community Park [Volleyball]
Nov. 16 | 6-7:30 p.m.

SUNSHINE SOCIAL: S'MORE FUN
Milton J. Womack Park
Nov. 17 | 6-9 p.m.

ZOO RUN BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo
Nov. 18 | 8-10 a.m.

HOOPER HUSTLE Hooper Road Park
Nov. 18 | 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

FAMILY FUN FEST Zachary Community Park
Nov. 18 | 1-4 p.m.

ZOOLIGHTS BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo
Nov. 24-Dec. 30 | 5:30-8 p.m.

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- VA - Department of Veterans Affairs Loans
- RD - Rural Development Loans¹
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Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce

“I am honored and humbled to be endorsed by FuturePAC, the political action committee of the Baton Rouge Area Chamber. As a legislator, I will continue to take a pro-business approach to advance future economic growth in District 63 and our state.”



ELECTION DAY

November 18, 2023 7AM-8PM

VOTED FOR THE FOLLOWING CAPITAL REGION PROJECTS LOCATED ALONG THE NORTH BATON ROUGE CORRIDOR:

- **Stupp Corporation (2019)** - investment of \$22 million to upgrade its two steel pipe manufacturing plants in Baton Rouge. The expansion project created 128 new direct jobs at an average annual salary of \$60,567, plus benefits, while retaining 338 existing jobs at the Baton Rouge facility. Louisiana Economic Development estimates the project also resulted in 296 indirect jobs, for a total of 424 new jobs for East Baton Rouge Parish and the Capital Region. Stupp estimates the expansion activity will support 93 construction jobs.
- **Baton Rouge Coca Cola & Bottling UNITED (2021)** - \$42 million investment to expand its bottling facility in Baton Rouge. The expansion creates 15 direct new jobs, with an average salary of \$43,000, plus benefits. Those new jobs, created, supplement the current 558 jobs, which are retained on site at the Baton Rouge facility. Louisiana Economic Development estimates the completed project result in 27 indirect jobs, for a total of more than 40 new jobs in Louisiana’s capital region.
- **ExxonMobil (2023)** - a \$500 million expansion, took nearly four years of planning. The expansion created 65 direct jobs, all of which had been filled, at an average annual salary of \$105,000. Officials said construction alone, which employed 650 workers at its peak, had already generated \$20 million in sales tax revenue for East Baton Rouge Parish. It also helped fuel growth in industrial virtual reality training programs in south Louisiana.
- **Georgia Pacific (2023)** – made a significant investments, totaling more than \$50 million, at its Port Hudson mill in Zachary, Louisiana. The investments greatly enhances the company’s retail consumer towel business. The newest investment will not create any new permanent jobs, according to LED estimates, but it will create 25 construction jobs.

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