

The Weekly Press

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THURSDAY, APRIL 1-7, 2021

A PEOPLE'S PUBLICATION

VOL. 44 • NO.45 • FREE

LOCAL & STATE PG 2

LA LEGISLATORS TO INCREASE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC DEFENDERS

LOCAL & STATE PG 3

LA. AG ISSUES WARNS ABOUT FAKE COVID CARDS ONLINE

Louisiana senators worry federal aid could inflate budget

BATON ROUGE, La. — Louisiana senators opened their latest budget hearings Monday with concerns about using short-term federal coronavirus aid to pay for ongoing services and programs since the federal cash will disappear in later years.

Gov. John Bel Edwards proposed using more than \$600 million in enhanced federal Medicaid payments to help balance his \$36 billion-plus spending proposal for the budget year that begins July 1. Members of the Senate Finance Committee questioned whether the state will have enough money in later years to offset the federal aid when it disappears, particularly the Democratic governor's proposed education pay hikes, increases in college spending and other items.

Sen. Greg Tarver, a Shreveport Democrat, noted: "We'll have to find general fund money to replace this federal money. If we don't replace it, we're going to have to reduce services."

Louisiana's tax collections are rebounding from the lows of the coronavirus pandemic, but they haven't fully recovered. Edwards and lawmakers used \$920 million in federal virus aid and other stopgap financing to piece together this year's budget.

Improved tax collections will replace part, but not all, of that money in the upcoming year.

Edwards proposes using new rounds of federal assistance to close the rest of the shortfall and boost spending by \$186 million in the next budget year. He's proposing pay raises for K-12 public school teachers and college faculty, new dollars for the TOPS tuition program and other student aid and increased spending for public college campuses.

Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne, the governor's chief budget adviser, said the administration believes Louisiana's economy will return to pre-pandemic tax collections in later years, with growth to offset the lost federal aid.

WEATHER



MON. 04/05
Mostly Sunny
High 78°.



TUE. 04/06
Showers
High 79°.



WED. 04/07
Partly Cloudy
High 83°.



THUR. 04/08
Thunderstorms
High 83°.

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Unlikely forces join together to endorse Karen Carter Peterson



State Rep. C.
Denise Marcelle



Activist
Gary Chambers



Councilmembers
Cleve Dunn Jr.



State Rep.
Larry Sellers



Senator Karen Carter Peterson

By Lara Ashley
Contributing Writer

BATON ROUGE, La. — State Representative C. Denise Marcelle and Baton Rouge activist Gary Chambers publicly endorsed Senator Karen Carter Peterson for Louisiana's 2nd Congressional District.

The Louisiana State Senator is running against Senator Troy Carter to fill former Representative Cedric Richmond's seat. Former representative Richmond vacated the role to become the Senior Advisor to



City Year BR
Jada Lewis



Councilwoman
Carolyn Coleman

President Joe Biden and Director of the Office of Public Liaison.

One of Peterson's stances is

allowing women to make their choice dealing with their bodies. Rep. Marcelle agrees

"The reason I'm supporting Peterson is that she's pro-choice," she said. "I also stand with her health coalition and fight for justice reform. She's a wonderful representative in the capital. I'm excited to see her break the glass ceiling, becoming the first African American woman Louisiana sends to Congress."

See **ENDORSEMENT**, on page 3

Gov. Edwards eases capacity restrictions but warns 'we're not out of the woods'



Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards

BATON ROUGE, La. — Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards held a news conference about the state's response to the coronavirus Tuesday, March 30.

Gov. Edwards announced that he will be lifting capacity limitations for many of the state's businesses but the statewide mask mandate will remain.

"We did it, because we've had a framework for making these decisions since the very beginning. And it's on the gating criteria in combination with the baseline numbers. But at the

end of the day we're trying to be consistent, to do what we can. To always seek to strike the right balance between lives on the one hand, livelihoods on the other. I think we've done that in this case," said Edwards.

The governor will issue a new proclamation Wednesday, March 31 that will stay in effect until April 28.

Specific capacity limitations for restaurants, bars, gyms, and retail settings will no longer be in place, he said. Bars, in particular, can stay

See **WARNS**, on page 2

EBR Schools announces plan for 'Smart Start' school year

EBRPSS staff and students will return to campuses ahead of schedule for the 2021-2022 School Year

Superintendent Sito Narcisse aims to have a Smart Start to the school year by beginning the 2021-2022 school year ahead of schedule. Pending EBRP School Board approval, Dr. Narcisse will add eight school days to the district calendar to address learning gaps created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Superintendent Narcisse will discuss details of the plan during a press conference at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, March 31st at the EBR school board office, 1050 S. Foster Drive.

"We know all too well the costs associated with prolonged periods away from the classroom," said Superintendent Sito Narcisse, Ed.D. "We must reintroduce students to in-person



instruction as soon as possible to assess the greatest areas of need."

EBRPSS employees will return to school buildings two weeks ahead of schedule to participate in professional development activities focused on closing achievement gaps and accelerating student learning.

The proposed calendar amendments are as follows:

Smart Start Return to Campuses Timeline:

- July 12: Professional development week for principals and leadership

- July 19: Professional development and employee in-service week

- July 28: First day of school for EBRPSS students

The calendar amendment will go before the school board during the regularly scheduled meeting on April 22, 2021. The meeting begins at 5 p.m. and will be held at the Professional Development Center located at 3000 N. Sherwood Forest Blvd.

Southern University Law Center to hold graduation May 14

BATON ROUGE, La. — The Class of 2021 will get the chance to walk across the stage during an in-person graduation ceremony this spring, according to the Southern University Law Center (SULC).

After postponing its spring 2020 graduation due to COVID-19, SULC has officially announced that the campus will host a commencement ceremony on May 14 at 5 p.m. at A.W. Mumford Stadium.

The Law Center says it will continue to monitor state based coronavirus guidelines, once the date gets closer in order to provide further details about the ceremony

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VOTER'S GUIDE EDITION

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- Sample Ballots (Print & Digital)

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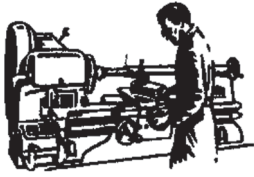
VOTERS GUIDE 04/24/2021



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STATE & LOCAL

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The Weekly Press

Newspaper is published weekly in Baton Rouge and distributed every Thursday with a circulation of 7,500. Subscription rates are \$65.00 per year for Louisiana residents; \$72.00 for one year for out-of-state residents; half price for six months subscription; and \$1.00 per single copy.

All money orders or checks should be made payable to The Baton Rouge Weekly Press
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LA legislators to increase funding for public defenders and change police practices

By Mahogani Counts
LSU Manship School
News Service

BATON ROUGE--In this spring's legislative session, criminal justice advocates will be pushing for increased funding for public defenders and for changes in policing practices.

Norris Henderson, the founder of Voice of The Experienced, a non-profit known as VOTE, said both areas represent crucial steps in reforming the state's justice system and making it fairer for minorities.

The Legislature provided an extra \$3 million for public defenders last year and is looking at whether to provide more. Police tactics came under question around the country after the death of George Floyd in custody last year in Minneapolis, and Louisiana lawmakers created the Police Training, Screening and De-escalation Task Force to address those practices here.

As of now, with the trial of one of the officers in the Floyd case in the headlines, the task force has made 21 recommendations for legislators to consider once the session begins.

These recommendations include bans on chokeholds, a pro-



Norris Henderson, the founder of a non-profit called Voice of The Experienced, is among the advocates pushing for changes in the criminal justice system.

hibition of "no-knock" warrants, requirements for officers to wear and turn on body cameras, reducing time for officers to find legal representation and reducing the time to complete an investigation of officers involved in possible wrongdoing.

VOTE was formed in 2004, and it aims to uphold civil rights for individuals who are most impacted by the justice system.

Henderson was drawn to social justice work because he was

directly impacted by the system. In 1997, he was wrongly convicted of murder and served 30 years in prison until the Supreme Court overturned his case in 2004.

While incarcerated, Henderson spent time reviewing the cases of other prisoners. He realized that many cases ended in convictions because public defenders lack the resources to provide defendants with an adequate defense.

Americans are entitled to a
See **FUNDING** on page 5

increase in cases and hospitalizations, likely because of the U.K. variant. We aren't yet out of the woods."

Business owners who wish to view the coronavirus mitigation measures deemed necessary by the Louisiana Department of Health and the State Fire Marshal and can on OpenSafely.La.gov

The governor's address comes one day after all Louisiana residents 16 and older are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

READ MORE of this story ONLINE at www.brweeklypress.com

BRAC Announces 2021 Legislative Priorities

Tax reform, transportation top list for regional economic development organization

BATON ROUGE, La. -- The Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC) today announced the priorities for which the organization will advocate during the 2021 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, which begins on Monday, April 12, and runs through June 10. BRAC's agenda focuses primarily on tax reform and transportation, with additional advocacy around business competitiveness, workforce and talent development, and an accelerated and inclusive economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. BRAC's legislative priorities can be found in full at brac.org/legislative-priorities.

"We are approaching a fiscal session unlike any other," said Nial Patel, 2021 chair of BRAC's Legislative Committee. "With massive amounts of federal funding at play and the critical need to position the region and state as competitively as possible for future business investment, we simply can't afford to get this wrong."

"Transportation and tax reform have been on legislative wish lists across the state for decades," said Adam Knapp, president and CEO of BRAC. "We have the opportunity here to make significant progress on infrastructure issues, streamline our unnecessarily convoluted tax policies, and set our current and future talent up for success. Our 2021 legislative priorities reflect both the urgent issues facing our business community and the structural change needed for long-term success."

BRAC's 2021 legislative priorities are summarized below:

- Modernize the tax code to streamline the process for businesses and individuals by eliminating federal deductions, the franchise tax, and the inventory tax. These reforms will stabilize

the state's budget and make the state more attractive to both businesses and talent.

- Centralize sales tax collections to simplify the process and reduce the barrier to doing business in the state for small and mid-size companies without the resources or staff to navigate the current unwieldy process.

- Address the Capital Region's transportation crisis, specifically through support of a new Mississippi River crossing and connectors, and fully funding the I-10 widening through the heart of Baton Rouge. BRAC will continue to advocate for commuter rail between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

- Protect employee salaries, identities, and personal information by extending to the Louisiana Department of Economic Development the same confidentiality provisions for employee data as are offered for employee data disclosed to other state agencies.

- Prioritize Capital Outlay for the Capital Region, specifically in support of the LSU/City Parks Lakes revitalization project, Capital Area Groundwater Conservation Commission's request for proper monitoring and maintenance of the Southern Hills Aquifer, and talent development at regional institutes of higher education.

- Accelerate North Baton Rouge economic development through the creation of Economic Development Districts along Plank Road to incentivize investment.

- Support talent development initiatives being led by LCTCS to expand financial assistance to adult learners in credit and non-credit programs in target industry sectors through the MJ Foster Promise Program. BRAC will also advocate on behalf of legislation to allow for data sharing between workforce and education agencies to track

See **BRAC** on page 3



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CARDIO AT THE PAVILION
Independence Community Park
April 5 + 12 + 19 + 26 | 5:30-6:30 p.m.

SENSORY BUNNY
North Sherwood Forest Community Park
April 7 | 2:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m.

NICK BROSSETTE SPRING BREAK FOOTBALL CAMP
Kathy Drive Park
April 7 + 8 | 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

TEEN POP-UP & UNPLUG
Zachary Community Park
April 10 | 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

SATURDAY CAMP
Baker Recreation Center
April 10 | 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

BIRDS & BEYOND
Highland Road Community Park
April 10 | 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

ART UNWIND: BIRD NERDS
Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center
April 10 | 10:30 a.m.-noon

ADAPTIVE SUNSHINE SOCIAL: DISCO FEVER
Virtual
April 16 | 6-8 p.m.

SPRING BREAK HOLIDAY CAMPS

APRIL 2 + 5 + 9 brac.org/holidaycamp

BIOBLITZ
Zachary Community Park
April 16 + 17

RECTIME
North Sherwood Forest Community Park
Zachary Community Park
April 16 | 5:30-8:30 p.m.

PADDLE AWAY
Bayou Fountain
April 17 | 9 a.m.-noon

CAMP-IN
Cadillac Street Park
April 17 | 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

E-SPORTS TOURNAMENT: MARIO KART 8
Virtual
April 17 | noon

WEBB CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF TOURNAMENT
Webb Memorial Golf Course
April 17 + 18 | Tee Time 8 a.m.

10 & UNDER TENNIS TOURNAMENT
Highland Road Community Park
April 24 | 8:30 a.m.-noon

LIBERTY LAGOON WEEKEND OPERATIONS BEGIN
April 24



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Grants available for continuation into Bootcamp and Immersion programs

Operation Spark, a non-profit tech bootcamp dedicated to changing lives by advancing technology skills for today's workplace, offers a FREE two-week introduction to coding class, starting April 26.

"Prep is the first phase of Operation Spark's 6-month workforce program of intensive learning for a high-wage, high-demand job in tech. It gives students the opportunity to try their hand at software programming without a full-time or financial commitment," Founder John Fraboni said.

The course meets virtually for two consecutive weeks, Monday through Thursday. To register for the Prep Program, interested candidates must participate in a Virtual Information Session prior to enrollment, held twice on Mondays. For times and information or to register, go to <https://www.operationspark.org/info-session>

"If you lost your job because of COVID, now is a good time to consider a career in tech. Programming is one of the few areas where the job outlook is still strong," said Fraboni. "Coding jobs are in everything from data and software engineering to web and video game development. These jobs can provide significant lifetime earnings and are available in every industry in the world. It doesn't require a college degree, and starting salaries average \$60K."

Software technology is Louisiana's fastest-growing career field, and coding skills are now required for the nation's most in-demand jobs. Operation Spark's Prep program helps candidates determine if software engineering is a career they may be interested in pursuing.

Students who pass the Prep Program will receive a Level One Industry-Based Certification (IBC). They can then choose to continue into Operation Spark's Bootcamp

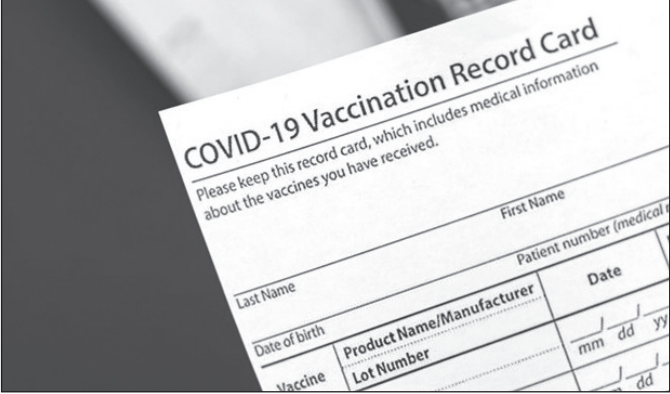
La. AG issues warning about fake COVID vaccine cards sold online

BATON ROUGE, La. - Attorney General Jeff Landry issued a warning to Louisiana residents Thursday, April 1, about fake COVID vaccine cards being sold online.

Landry has joined 44 other attorneys general in urging Twitter, eBay, and Shopify to immediately take action in preventing marketing and selling bogus COVID vaccine cards that contain the CDC's logo on them.

"The use of your platform to disseminate the deceptive marketing and sales of fake vaccine cards is a threat to residents of our states," said Landry and his colleagues in letters to the big tech giants. "As a result, we are asking you to take immediate action to prevent your platform from being used as a vehicle to commit these fraudulent and deceptive acts that harm our communities."

Legitimate vaccination cards are given when a person receives the vaccine. People who



buy fake cards can have their own information added to the card or add it in themselves, so it appears they have been vaccinated when they have not.

"The false and deceptive marketing and sales of fake COVID vaccine cards threatens the health of our communities, slows progress in getting our residents protected from the virus, and is a violation of the laws of many states," Landry added.

Landry and the other attorneys general made the following

requests of Twitter, eBay, and Shopify:

Monitor their platforms for ads or links marketing or selling, or otherwise indicating the availability of, blank or fraudulently completed vaccine cards

Promptly take down ads or links identified through that monitoring

Preserve records - such as the content, username, and actual user identity - pertaining to any such ads or links

ENDORSEMENT from page 1

Chambers admitted that the decision to endorse Peterson was not an easy one but said that he thought of what was best for Louisiana's citizens.

"I wasn't going to make an endorsement at all, but this is bigger than me," he tweeted. "I'm endorsing Karen Carter Peterson. I didn't get to this decision to endorse Karen without a lot of thought and many difficult conversations."

Chambers believes that Senator Peterson can bring the issues that are important to Louisiana citizens to Congress.

"Too often, we want leaders that everybody likes," Chambers said. "Those people usually don't get much done to help people. Karen Peterson got my support

because she'll speak up even when it's controversial to do so."

Some of those issues Senator Peterson tackles include raising the minimum wage to \$15 and endorsing the Green New Deal. The Green New Deal addresses climate change while also creating jobs and reducing economic inequality. The New Orleans Democrat voiced environmental justice issues in the state, including the controversial "Cancer Alley."

"I'm hoping to work with the state leaders and the local leaders to save lives," she said. "People at least need to be listened to, and we need to hear them out and understand the health implications. It's not always just about economic development and jobs."

Peterson's environmental stance led to her getting endorsed by the National League of Conservation Voters. Councilmem-

bers Cleve Dunn Jr. of District 6, Councilwoman Erika Green of District 5, Councilwoman Carolyn Coleman District 10, Vice President & Executive Director for City Year Baton Rouge Jada Lewis, and State Representative Larry Sellers also support Senator Peterson.

Early voting for the April 24 election is on Saturday, April 10 through Saturday, April 17 (excluding Sunday, April 11), from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, visit www.GeauxVote.com.

BRAC from page 2

the effectiveness of career and technical education programs in successfully placing students in high-growth, high-wage jobs.

- Expand access to capital for small and minority owned businesses by using federal funding to enhance capital opportunities

for early stage and high-growth-potential businesses.

- Responsibly allocate federal funds by bolstering the Unemployment Trust Fund to avoid reduction in benefits to the unemployed and a corresponding tax increase on businesses.

BRAC's full rationale on its legislative priorities is available at brac.org/legislative-priorities.



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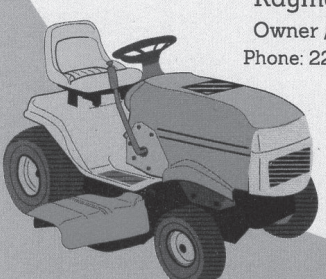
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RELIGION

Your Faith Leads to an Experience of God



By Tony Evans

Hebrews 11:6 makes it crystal clear that without faith you won't see God. This is because without faith, you do not please Him. The absence of faith results in the absence of the manifest presence of God. In other words, you may know He exists, but you won't necessarily experience His existence in your day-to-day life. That's why God urges us so often in Scripture to live our lives by faith.

He wants us to experience Him.

He desires to intervene in our situations.

He wants to reveal His power in our circumstances.

But it requires our faith to participate in the process of His providential hand. Remember, faith is acting like it is so even when it's not so in order that it might be so simply because God said so. Faith is verifiable. You never have to guess if you have faith because it shows up in your walk, not just your talk.



Tony Evans

Faith is made real when you choose to obey God even when you cannot see the reality or rationale of your obedience from a human perspective.

What's more: faith must always precede sight. Once you have sight, it is no longer faith. That's why Hebrews 11:1 declares, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." If you have to see it first, you have cancelled faith. Faith is prior to, and apart from, sight. In fact, faith leads to sight. But, even so, most people first decide what they are going to do by what they see. As a result, they regularly cancel out the supernatural from taking place in their lives. Don't make that mistake, for God wants you to experience more of Him.

The resurrected Jesus transforms us



By Creflo Dollar

When we read the Gospel, it is important to read it in its proper context. Reading it through the Old Testament lens of the Law of Moses gives us an outdated interpretation that is no longer valid, but reading it through the lens of grace reveals the power of the resurrected Jesus. When we understand that we don't have to live by old standards that no longer apply to us, we're free to rightly divide the Word of truth. Correspondingly, we limit ourselves when we lift Scriptures out of context and wrongly interpret the Word.

Under the Law of Moses, punishment and condemnation were key motivators, but Jesus replaced the law with His grace and truth. Before, strict obedience and

constant atonement for sin was necessary to please God, but faith is all that is needed, now. The truth that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for sin highlights the significance of what He did on the cross. Letting this get down inside us begins to transform us.

For example, Holy Communion celebrates Jesus' work on the cross but, if we're not careful, we can incorrectly interpret the Scripture on communion. The apostle Paul wrote that whoever partakes of communion in an unworthy



Creflo Dollar

manner eats and drinks damnation to himself. An Old Testament mindset immediately goes to sin-consciousness and condemns us as being unworthy to take communion. However, this Scripture is actually advising us to examine ourselves beforehand; it does not say to meditate on our sins and avoid communion altogether.

Reading this Scripture in context, we see that we take the bread and wine in memory of Jesus, not of our sins. Interpreting this incorrectly traps us in fear, guilt, and condemnation. Interpreting it correctly frees us to receive, by faith, what grace has made available. Reading the Word in the proper spirit opens our eyes to the forgiveness God offers us through the new

PRAYER:

God, in Your mercy You sent us Your Son to replace the condemnation and sin-consciousness of the old covenant with grace and love. You released us from the requirements of the Law of Moses and gave us freedom through Jesus. Thank You for giving us Your Spirit to properly interpret what You say to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SCRIPTURES:

2 Timothy 2:15
John 1:17
Romans 6:14
Hebrews 11:6
Hebrews 10:1-14
1 Corinthians 11:24, 25, 27-29

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Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. - Hebrews 10:25


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Wednesday Inspirational Service 7pm

- Youth ministry every Sunday and Wednesday
- Women's Ministry 2nd Saturday's



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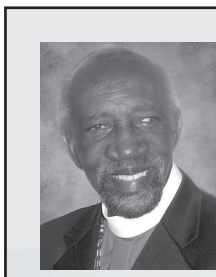


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Bishop I. J. Payne, Pastor


'THE NEW LIFE' Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. — 2 Corinthians 5:17




SUNDAY WORSHIP
Every Sunday at 11:30 A.M.



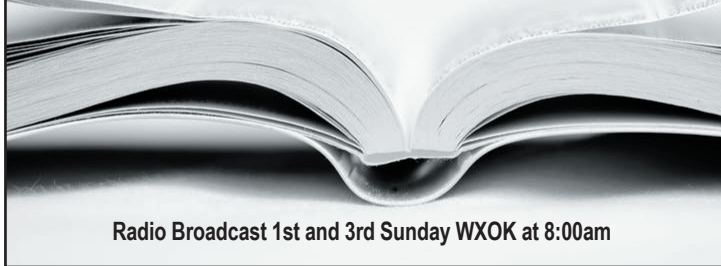
SUNDAY SCHOOL
Every Sunday at 9:30 A.M.



HOLY COMMUNION
Every 3rd Sunday at 11:30 A.M.



HOOR OF POWER
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ST. JOHN BAPTIST CHURCH

Dr. Donald R. Ruth, Pastor
820 New Rafe Mayer Road
Baton Rouge, LA 70807
Phone: 225-775-9756
Web Address: saintjohnbc.org



Dr. Donald Ruth, Pastor

Worship Times:

CrossWalk Classes: Sundays 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM
Sunday Worship Experience: 11:00 AM
Uplift Training: Thursdays 7:00 PM - 8:00 PM



NEW HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH

5856 Greenwell Springs Road • Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806
Telephone: (225) 926-0246 • Facsimile: (225) 925-8022
Toll Free: 888-700-6174
Websites: www.newhopebr.com

Rev. Leo Cyrus Sr., Pastor
CHURCH SCHEDULE

Sunday Morning Worship 10:45 AM
Lord's Supper 3rd Sundays
Sunday School 9:30 AM
Prayer Service Wed. @ 6:00 PM
Bible Study Wed- @ 7:00 PM

Mission Statement: New Hope Baptist Church is a family of baptized believers who worship the Lord our God in spirit and in truth, teach the saved to reach the lost and minister to the needs of others, while encouraging one another through acts of love and living in obedience to Gods Word

BUSINESS

The American Rescue Plan Provides Relief for Small Businesses

By Stacy M. Brown

The White House on Tuesday released a fact sheet on President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, noting that millions of main street small businesses are struggling to make ends meet in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis.

The White House "especially noted" the struggles of Black- and Brown-owned businesses. Without additional government assistance, these challenges could worsen in the months ahead and the national vaccination program would be hobbled, administration officials noted.

The American Rescue Plan will change the course of the pandemic, deliver immediate relief for small businesses and American workers, and build a bridge towards economic recovery.

Many Americans already have received a \$1,400 stimulus check, making good on President Biden's pre-inaugural promise of \$2,000 payments – Americans received \$600 in the weeks prior to the new administration.

The White House fact sheet noted full support for small businesses through the current crisis.

"Since the beginning of this pandemic, 400,000 small businesses have closed and millions more are hanging by a thread," the administration offered in the fact sheet.

"President Biden's plan will provide emergency grants, lending, and investment to hard-hit small businesses so they can rehire and retain workers and purchase the health and sanitation equipment they need to keep workers safe," the statement continued.

Further, the American Rescue Plan will:

Deploy community navigators to increase awareness of the participation in COVID-19 relief programs for small business owners who currently lack access, especially underserved entrepreneurs without banking relationships, lawyers, accountants, and consultants.

Allocate \$15 billion in flexible grants to help the smallest, most severely impacted businesses persevere through the pandemic.

Provide \$28 billion for a new grant program to support hard-hit small restaurants and other food and drinking establishments.

Bolster the Paycheck Protec-



The American Rescue Plan will change the course of the pandemic, deliver immediate relief for small businesses and American workers, and build a bridge towards economic recovery.

tion Program with an additional \$7.25 billion in funding to support small businesses and nonprofits that were previously excluded.

Devote an additional \$1.25 billion in funding to support

live venue operators, theatrical producers, live performing arts organization operators, museum operators, motion picture theatre operators, and talent representatives that are struggling to make

ends meet.

Invest \$10 billion in successful state, local, and tribal small business financing programs to help small businesses innovate, create and maintain jobs, and provide

the essential goods and services that communities depend on.

Help small businesses rehire and retain workers by extending the employee retention credit through the end of 2021.

In addition to providing direct relief to hard hit small businesses, the American Rescue Plan will bolster a whole-of-government COVID-19 response that will change the course of the public health crisis, administration officials wrote in the fact sheet.

The American Rescue Plan will "devote \$1 trillion toward building a bridge to economic recovery for working families, including those who work for small businesses; and provide critical support to communities that are struggling in the wake of the pandemic."

The White House concluded:

"The American Rescue Plan will address the immediate crises facing small businesses. In the coming weeks, President Biden will lay out his economic recovery plan to invest in America, create millions of additional good-paying jobs, and build back better than before."

FUNDING from page 2

fundamental right to legal counsel, and Henderson acknowledges that a lack of funding for public defenders creates a burden on defendants when the system cannot meet constitutional standards.

While proposals to modify the criminal-justice system tend to spark debate, many legislators recognize the need for changes. The Legislature formed the

Louisiana Public Defender Board Optimal Funding Group to address this issue.

Henderson stressed that public defenders need a dedicated stream of funding because they are overworked and underpaid. Public defenders are expected to provide an adequate defense for each client, but they also carry heavy caseloads that can make it difficult for them to thoroughly advocate on behalf of their clients.

Henderson said minority communities are the most affected because they

disproportionately rely on the services of public defenders.

VOTE also is pushing the Legislature to eliminate funding disparities between district attorney offices and public defenders. District attorney offices are subsidized by the state, while public defenders rely on payments from traffic tickets for funding.

Due to the pandemic, this presents a problem for public defenders because there has been a reduction in crime and traffic stops. Henderson believes that both types

of offices should receive equal funding to insure justice.

He adds that "if the money is not equally disbursed, there's always going to be inequity."

Members of the Louisiana Public Defender Board Optimal Funding Group met in early February to discuss the funding disparities. During the meeting, the Senate Fiscal Services Division presented a report showing that balances for DA offices were 4.2 times higher than those of

public defenders.

Sen. Regina Barrow, D-Baton Rouge, who chaired the meeting, said this report would help the group promote legislation to increase funding for public defender offices.

She added that increases in funding are "crucial to ensuring justice" for the people of Louisiana.

In addition to supporting public defenders, VOTE is working with lawmakers to change policing practices.



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