

The Weekly Press

SERVING BAKER, CENTRAL, AND ZACHARY

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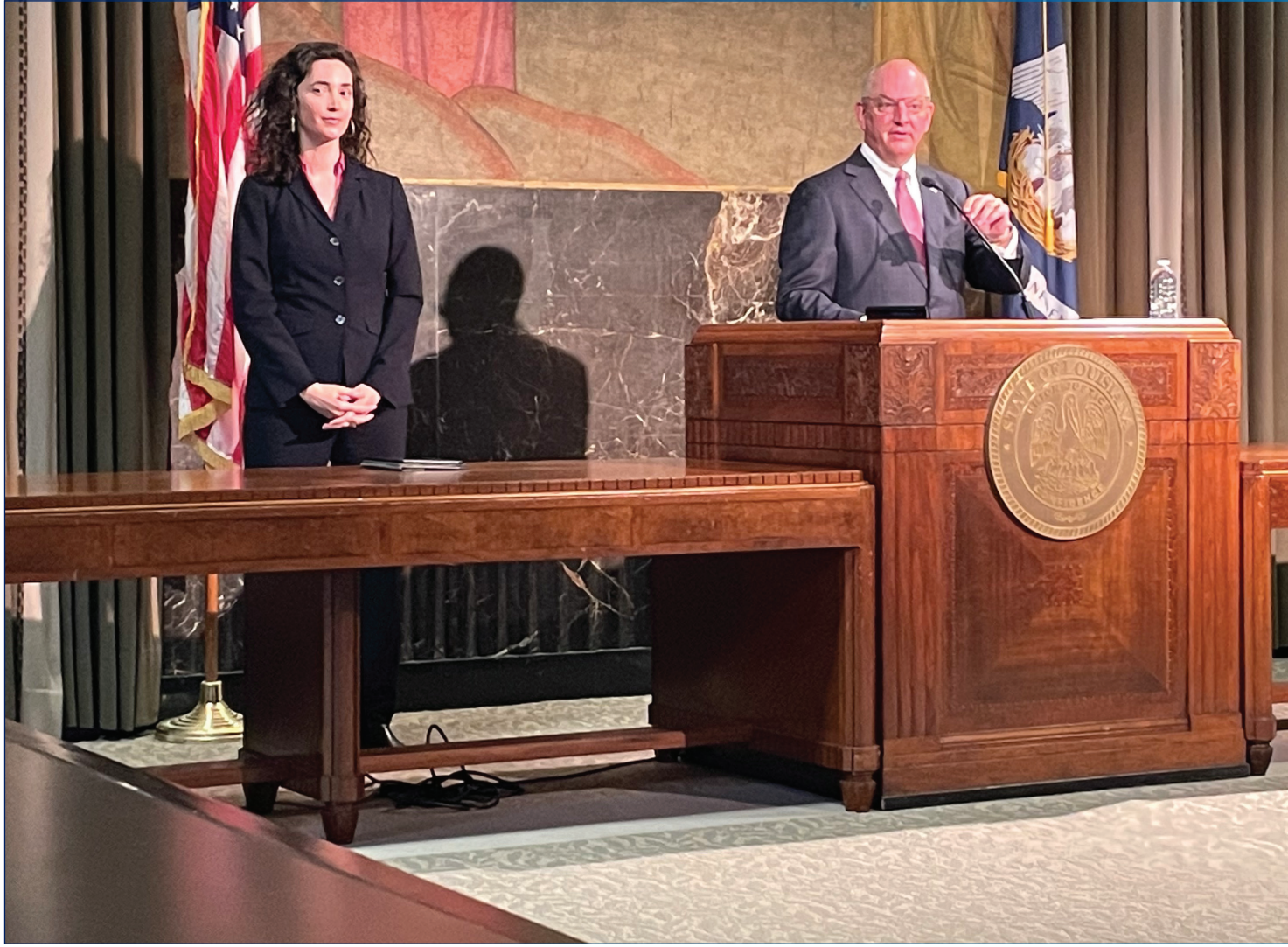
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CAMPAIGN AIMS TO RAISE HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS IN LOUISIANA

NEWS PAGE 5

UTILITY REGULATORS RESCIND CONTRACT GIVEN TO SUSPENDED LAWYER

Edwards unveils budget



Gov. John Bel Edwards on Monday proposed substantial spending increases on infrastructure and higher education. (Piper Hutchinson/LSU Manship School News Service)

"I think we have once in a generation, and maybe once in a lifetime opportunity in some respects, to move our state forward," Edwards said.

Edwards' plan includes \$1.1 billion for critical infrastructure. The two biggest-ticket items are a new Mississippi River bridge in Baton Rouge, which would be funded partly by \$500 million from the state, and statewide improvements to water and sewage systems, which will also cost \$500 million.

The governor's proposal includes significant investments in education at all levels. The plan calls for a pay raise of at least \$1,500 for K-12 teachers and a \$750 pay raise for support staff. It also includes \$43.4 million for early childhood education.

Calling for significant investments in education, infrastructure

By PIPER HUTCHINSON
LSU Manship School News Service

BATON ROUGE—With the state flush with cash, Gov. John Bel Edwards unveiled a proposed budget Monday that includes more than \$1.1 billion in infrastructure spending and investments in education at all levels.

"I think we have once in a

Edwards proposed \$31.7 million for faculty pay raises and another \$97.2M for higher education funding, including money to open Title IX offices, which adjudicate charges of sexual harassment and assault, throughout the state.

generation, and maybe once in a lifetime opportunity in some respects, to move our state forward," Edwards said.

He outlined his budget priorities at a news conference at the Capitol. The budget is for the fiscal year that begins July 1, and the state has lots of money to spend following federal pandemic relief and higher-than-expected state tax revenues.

Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne will present the plan on Tuesday to the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget. The Legislature will decide by June what the final bill looks like.

Edwards' plan includes \$1.1 billion for critical infrastructure. The two biggest-ticket items are a new Mississippi River bridge in Baton Rouge, which would be funded partly by \$500 million from the state, and statewide improvements to water and sewage systems, which will also cost \$500 million.

The plan also includes \$100 million for the I-10 bridge in Lake Charles.

Edwards shared a question he was asked during his monthly radio show. "For decades, Louisiana has

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Three finalists chosen in Southern University President Chancellor Search



Laurence Alexander, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff



Walter Kimbrough, Dillard University in New Orleans



Dennis Shields, University of Wisconsin Platteville

BATON ROUGE, La.—The Southern University System President-Chancellor Search Committee today announced three finalists for the position of president of the Southern University System and chancellor of Southern University and A&M College. The decision was made after virtual interviews with five semi-finalists on Jan. 18 and Jan. 19.

The three finalists are:

Laurence Alexander, chancellor of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
• Walter Kimbrough, president of Dillard University in New Orleans
• Dennis Shields, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin Platteville

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EBR School Board Member Dadrius Lanus is running for councilman of District 5

"School board member Dadrius Lanus is the voice we want and the fighter we need to represent District 5 as Councilman."



Dadrius Lanus

BATON ROUGE, La.—East Baton Rouge School Board Member, District 2 Dadrius Lanus announces that he is running for councilman of district 5. He is ready to continue to fight for and serve the community that he has lived in his entire life. Currently, Dadrius Lanus serves as a school board member that serves 80% of District 5 for almost 4 years. Over the years, Mr. Lanus has been committed to the growth and development of what truly is the heart of Baton Rouge. He understands the history and the progress that the district has made but wants the opportunity to do more for his people. Although, Mr. Lanus was

not appointed, he says he is the representative that this community needs to press forward by focusing on the prevention of crime, creating more opportunities, producing more jobs, enhancing education, and providing essential redevelopment programs. He believes the people of this community deserve to choose who they believe reflects and understands their wants and

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Richmond issues blistering Voting Rights attack against GOP, Trump

By STACY M. BROWN,
NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

White House Senior Advisor Cedric Richmond continued the administration's forceful tone on voting rights with a blistering attack on Republicans and former President Donald Trump.

Richmond, who served as Louisiana's representative in the U.S. House for a decade before assuming his current role as the White House Office of Public Engagement Director, said during a Zoom gathering of reporters, that voting rights are the "bedrock of democracy."

But GOP lawmakers have a palpable fear of Trump and losing re-election bids if they go along with Democrats who want to make voting easier for all Americans.

"Let me be very clear, what has changed is Donald Trump and his stronghold on the Republican Party and people who don't want to get primaried," Richmond asserted.

The senior advisor to the President was asked why no Republicans support passing voting rights legislation today, despite 16 Republicans in 2006 voting in favor of extending



White House Senior Advisor Cedric Richmond promised that the President would continue to make voting rights a theme of his presidency.

the measure when pushed by then Republican President George W. Bush.

"President Joe Biden has said that politicians worry about the next election, but statesmen and stateswomen worry about the next generation," Richmond continued.

"The President and the Vice President stood up as a statesman and a stateswoman." "Unfortunately, these Republicans fear the wrath

of Donald Trump, and that is truly unfortunate when you think about how important this is to the country. Their lack of displayed courage is something that we can't allow to stop us and what we need to do."

Richmond promised that the President would continue to make voting rights a theme of his presidency.

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Visit Baton Rouge celebrates 50th anniversary

BATON ROUGE, La. - Visit Baton Rouge, the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Louisiana's Capital City, is proud to announce its 50th anniversary. As the sole tourism agency for East Baton Rouge Parish, Visit Baton Rouge will celebrate the past five decades of promoting East Baton Rouge Parish as a travel and tourism destination as we look forward to the changes that the industry is beginning to see.

Since 1972, Visit Baton Rouge has helped promote local businesses, provide marketing and sales resources to local partners, attract visitors from around the world, and helped host major events to boost economic impact to the city. The DMO has seen several obstacles along the way, such as major floods, hurricanes, and the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the challenges, Baton Rouge has adapted to safely continue being a host city for major events in previous years, such as the Bayou Country Superfest, the



Martucci World Series, Miss USA in 2015, and this April, Garth Brooks' Stadium Tour at Tiger Stadium.

"The impact that we've had on this city has been a reward of its own," said Paul Arrigo, President and CEO of Visit Baton Rouge. "It has been an absolute honor to serve as Visit Baton Rouge's President and CEO for nearly 20 years. We're known for being an effective organization that knows how to get the job done, no matter what the circumstances are. We've

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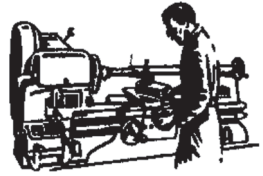
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LOCAL & STATE

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Campaign aims to raise human trafficking awareness in Louisiana



First Lady Donna Edwards announces the launch of a human trafficking awareness campaign in Louisiana with Gov. John Bel Edwards at the Governor's Mansion on Jan. 25, 2022. (Photo by Greg LaRose/Louisiana Illuminator)

A statewide campaign to raise awareness of human trafficking in Louisiana will start with an emphasis on major sporting events, which law enforcement officials say attract the illegal activity.

Gov. John Bel Edwards and First Lady Donna Edwards announced the campaign Wednesday at the Governor's Mansion.

The effort, Stop Trafficking LA: Human Trafficking is REAL, will focus on how to identify when a trafficking victim needs help and more specific services for victims.

The first major event the campaign will focus on to raise awareness is the NCAA Men's

Final Four Championship in New Orleans, which takes place in April.

"Human trafficking is modern day slavery, and we hope to educate the general public and deter trafficking activity during

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been on the top of too many bad lists and the bottom of too many bad lists. How do we get off the bottom of those lists?"

His answer to that: education. "Education cures a lot of ills," Edwards said.

The governor's proposal includes significant investments in

education at all levels. The plan calls for a pay raise of at least \$1,500 for K-12 teachers and a \$750 pay raise for support staff. It also includes \$43.4 million for early childhood education.

Edwards proposed \$31.7 million for faculty pay raises and another \$97.2M for higher education funding, including money to open Title IX offices, which adjudicate charges of sexual harassment and assault, throughout the state.

The plan also calls for \$550 million in federal funds from the American Rescue Plan to replenish the state's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, which was depleted during the course of the pandemic.

That investment would bring the fund back up to the statutory requirement of \$750 million, Edwards said. Using the federal funds avoids triggering a tax on all businesses, he said.

Edwards said \$108.9 million would be set aside for deferred maintenance of public buildings.

The state had a \$1 billion surplus in the last fiscal year. After constitutional requirements are met, there will be about \$400 million to be spent at the Legislature's discretion.

At the time the surplus was announced, Dardenne indicated that about \$133 million would go to deferred maintenance, but due to greater-than-expected transportation needs, they are calling for slightly less.

Edwards emphasized that he wanted to use these one-time funds only for one-time expenditures, unlike the Jindal administration, which frequently used one-time funds to take care of recurring expenditures.

"The first budget that I inherited, the last six months of that budget year, more than \$800 million in one-time money plugged in for recurring expenditures," Edwards said. "We didn't, and we don't, want to create those types of problems again."

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needs. Dadrus Lanus believes that once the torch is passed to him, he will continue the race that has been ran by the councilmembers before him and be a great lifeline to the heart of the city, District 5.

Mayor Waives Statement Regarding the BESE Board Approval of GEO Academies Charter Application in Baker

It is difficult to fully express my level of disappointment in the January 18th BESE Board decision to approve the Geo Academies Charter School application to locate in the City of Baker School District. My position is based upon our collective community's overwhelming support for public schools and opposition to charter schools as a means of defunding, dismantling, and privatizing our public education system. On Tuesday I was joined by Baker Schools Superintendent Dr. De'Ette Perry, Police Chief Carl Dunn, Councilpersons Rochelle Dunn and Robert Young and community leaders at the BESE Board meeting where they, along with the overwhelming majority of those in attendance, voiced strong opinions in opposition to this application. Senator Regina Barrow also sent a letter of opposition.

Approximately 30% of the Baker student body is currently enrolled in a dozen charter schools located in the immediate vicinity of the Baker School System. The list of charter schools which have appropriated students away from Baker are as follows: Geo Prep MidCity Baton Rouge, Geo Next Generation High School, Geo Prep Academy, Madison Prep Academy, Louisiana Key Academy, Impact Charter, Advantage Charter, Collegiate Academy, Louisiana Virtual Charter Academy, University View Academy, Helix Aviation Academy and IDEA Public Schools. This BESE board approval clears the way for an additional Geo Academies School expansion directly into the city limits of Baker where the entire student body is less than 1300 students.

The very idea that a dozen charter schools funneling funding away from four public schools in Baker is not harmful, is willfully turning a blind eye to the undermining of our democratic system of government and right to self-determination. Further, it is creating a system of taxation without representation in majority Black areas of this state .by the Louisiana

Department of Education and BESE Board. The letters of public support which Geo Academies Charter Schools submitted with their application whereas exposed during the BESE Board meeting as largely fallacious by local community leaders. The only community engagement GEO presented consisted of letters of support, a vast majority of which were found to have been misrepresented as Baker residents. When copies were obtained, only two letters were from actual Baker residents and one of those two persons retracted their support after they were fully informed of what was taking place.

There was zero engagement with the City of Baker administration, the City of Baker School District, the community at large or any local leadership with regard to Geo Academies desire to open a facility in the City of Baker.

It is unacceptable to come to any city and not even ask anyone if they are interested in adding another unremarkable low performing entity to their school district. And it completely exposes the lack of any true concern to improve the system and help the community. How can you possibly help without even so much as asking those who live, study, and work there what the needs are?

We cannot and will not stand idly by and allow this type of disrespectful behavior to continue. The City of Baker does not need additional schools, we need better performing schools, and Geo Academies has poor performance grades which have been declining year over year.

We can look at study after study that shows us these institutions, which are generally owned out of state corporations, are targeting our community. A 2013 analysis of Louisiana charter schools conducted by Stanford University found that charter schools in New Orleans and Baton Rouge had a ratio of 82% Black students vs.

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This is a very important matter for the Southern University System and Southern University and A&M College," said Alfred Harrell, co-chair of the committee. "We are excited about moving forward with this process."

The finalists will visit South-

ern's Baton Rouge campus on Feb. 1-3 for a series of meetings with stakeholders, including the Southern University System Board of Supervisors, employees, students, and alumni. The schedule of events for the February stakeholder meetings will be provided later this week.

For more information on the search, go to sus.edu/president-search.

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"It is a very clear fact, a given, that the election in 2020 was one of the most safe and secure in our history. The fact that [Trump] has pushed the big lie - some representatives have stood up to it, and most have not. It is just an indication that their Party has been hijacked by former President Trump," Richmond declared.

Earlier, both President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris gave speeches about the significance of getting voting rights passed.

In what the White House called one of his most forceful speeches, Biden insisted that he

would "defend your right to vote and our democracy against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

He questioned where U.S. senators stood on the issue.

On Thursday, January 13, Biden met with Democratic senators in Capitol Hill to discuss voting rights and even asked that they consider abolishing or altering the draconian filibuster to ensure passage.

"The 15th Amendment passed on a party-line vote. One Party delivered the vote to protect African Americans' right to vote," Richmond remarked.

"The filibuster rules shouldn't trump the Constitution. The rules are a means to an end. The end here is voting rights and free and fair elections."



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Supreme Court Justice Breyer to step down

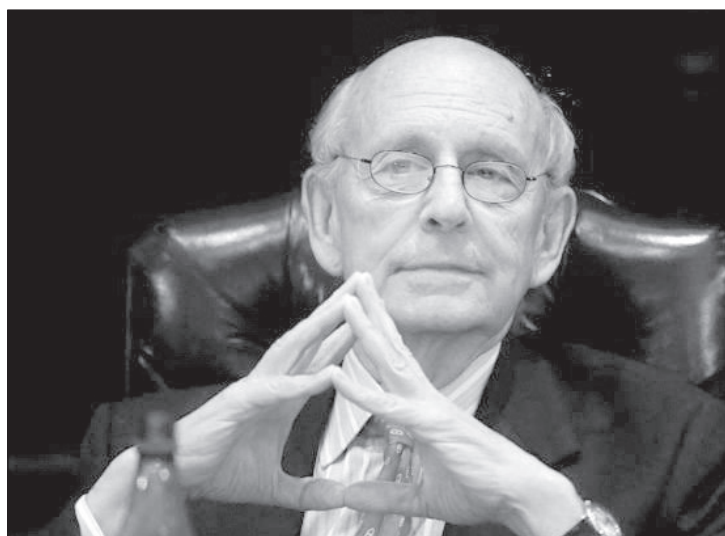
WASHINGTON — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer is planning to announce his retirement in the coming days, according to multiple press reports Wednesday.

The decision by the 83-year-old justice, who was nominated by President Bill Clinton in 1994, would give President Joe Biden his first chance to nominate a member of the Supreme Court, though the evenly divided Senate could significantly affect that choice.

Biden pledged during a presidential primary debate in February 2020 to nominate a Black woman to the court — a potential history-making move.

“We talked about the Supreme Court. I’m looking forward to making sure there’s a Black woman on the Supreme Court, to make sure we in fact get every representation,” Biden said in response to a question about a personal motto, personal belief, or favorite quote that candidates believe represented them.

The White House, however, has



According to sources familiar with his decision, Justice Stephen Breyer will decide to leave the Supreme Court at the end of the term. President Joe Biden will get a chance to nominate a justice.

not yet weighed in on the reports. Press secretary Jen Psaki tweeted that there was no information to share.

“It has always been the decision of any Supreme Court Justice if and when they decide to retire, and how

they want to announce it, and that remains the case today,” she wrote.

A spokeswoman for the court did not immediately return a message seeking confirmation.

So far, the president has nominated eight Black women to the 13 U.S. Courts of Appeals, and if they are all confirmed, it would double the number of Black women confirmed to federal appellate courts to 16.

While Biden has not released an official short list of picks for the Supreme Court, a list of possible contenders includes Georgia U.S. District Court Judge Leslie Abrams Gardner, who is 47 and the sister of Stacey Abrams, who is running for governor in Georgia.

Another potential nominee is D.C. U.S. District Court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, who is 51 and was confirmed by 50 Senate Democrats and three Republicans last year. Jackson was also on President Barack Obama’s short list for a Supreme Court pick in 2016.

Health official bows out of Mardi Gras parade; cites threats

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans’ health director says she won’t take part in one of the earliest parades of the Mardi Gras season, citing threats over the city’s resumption of COVID-19 restrictions to combat the highly contagious omicron variant.

The Krewe du Vieux says it still considers Dr. Jennifer Avegno its queen and will include her float in its parade, one of the first in the Carnival season leading up to Fat Tuesday, news outlets reported. The parade, known for wild satire, will be held Feb. 12 under the theme “Vaxxed and Confused.”

Avegno’s letter to the parade group did not describe any specific threats, The Times-Picayune / The New Orleans Advocate reported.

But she wrote that city officials are facing more “negativity and hatred” since COVID-19 mitigation measures were re-imposed.

“I do not want to create a security risk by my participation,” Avegno wrote, “and so believe the best place for me this year is behind the scenes helping to continue pro-

tecting our community.”

This year, Carnival is going on despite rapidly rising COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant. State officials said last week that Louisiana’s surge may be peaking but numbers are expected to remain high.

A city spokesperson told the newspaper that Avegno’s decision does not imply that other city officials will avoid public appearances during the Mardi Gras season.

Avegno said on Jan. 11 that masks would again be required in indoor public spaces, days after New Orleans entered the Carnival season that began Jan. 6 and climaxes on Mardi Gras, March 1 this year. City officials canceled last year’s parades, and officials have said the 2020 season was an early virus superspreader.

When the Krewe du Vieux announced Avegno’s decision on its Facebook page, it also said it was shortening its route because of a shortage of police officers. City officials had announced in December that major parades would have shorter routes because there

are fewer police officers, medics and other first responders to handle crowds.

Krewe du Vieux’s parade will include Avegno’s float and also her costume, Captain Sebastian Boegershausen told the newspaper.

“Krewe du Vieux will spare no effort in making sure that her decision receives our Krewe’s signature treatment during the parade,” the group posted on its Facebook page, according to news reports.

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always managed to excel in our roles here, and I couldn’t be more excited and proud of our team that we’re celebrating 50 years of serving this community.”

To commemorate five decades of the DMO, Visit Baton Rouge has several events lined up for the year-long celebration.

BAKER from page 2

13% white students enrolled in the 91 facilities studied. How do we interpret this kind of glaring disparity in the “school choice” conversation?

We see year after year that charter schools are not performing remarkably better than our public schools even though the standards for which charters operate are not comparable. Everyone should be deeply concerned because the reporting for charter performance is far from transparent. Meanwhile public schools are held to intense scrutiny and even impossible hurdles meant to hobble them if remanded to the Recovery School District (RSD).

Ultimately, we are witness to state administrative bodies who refuse to engage with local government, community leaders, the local school districts, or the public in any capacity with respect to our needs, wants or how to manage issues within our community. They are eager to hand over public education via the RSD fast track to private entities. Private entities whose corporate headquarters are largely located out of state and who bear little to no responsibilities or accountability similar to what public

schools are forced to comply with. And it is affecting our Black children, our Black neighborhoods, our Black communities and cities, by an overwhelming majority in comparison to white children, neighborhoods, communities and cities in the state of Louisiana.

Let me assure you that we will persevere in the fight against this and the further encroachment by Charter schools into our school district.

I find this unacceptable. I hope you do too. In closing, I ask you to join me in vehemently protesting with the members of the BESE Board who voted in favor of this application. Their contact information is as follows:

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this major sporting event, which is often the perfect environment for this crime to flourish,” Donna Edwards said.

During a press conference at the Governor’s Mansion, the First Lady detailed the acronym REAL: recognizing the signs, educating others, acting immediately, and listening to victims and survivors.

More information from the Human Trafficking Prevention Resource Center of Louisiana is available at HumanTrafficking.la.gov, and more on the statewide public awareness campaign can be found at StopTraffickingla.com.

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RELIGION

Tributes pour in for Atlanta's 'The Happy Preacher'

BY SHELIA POOLE,
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Tributes are pouring in for Elder Cal Merrell, who was a local legend and fixture at funerals and other events for celebrities, community leaders and everyday Atlantans.

Several people said they couldn't remember a King holiday without the presence of the man affectionately known as "The Happy Preacher."

At Monday's annual Martin Luther King Jr. Beloved Community Commemorative Service, Bernice King, CEO of the King Center and daughter of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King, noted Merrell's absence and held a moment of silence.

"Over the past 40-plus years," King said, choking up, "we were graced with the presence of a very special man and voice in this service. The Happy Preacher. ... This commemorative will never, ever, ever be the same without The Happy Preacher," she said.

A nephew, Carlos Myers of Lithonia, confirmed his death and said his uncle was found in his Atlanta apartment on Saturday. It's unknown when he actually died. His age was not immediately available.

Social media posts circulating over the weekend and Monday's King service reflected that his last name also was often spelled Murrell.

The Rev. Timothy McDonald III, senior pastor of First Iconium Baptist Church on Moreland Avenue, said he last spoke with Merrell, whom he had known about four decades, a few weeks ago. Merrell had reached out to him to ask whether McDonald would handle



Cal Merrell, otherwise known as "The Happy Preacher" and whose last name was sometimes spelled Murrell by others, shouts out during the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday commemorative service at Ebenezer Baptist Church where King preached, Monday, Jan. 18, 2016, in Atlanta.

his services.

"He knew something," said McDonald, who said he doesn't know the cause of death.

He said Merrell was a fixture at several churches, including Ebenezer Baptist Church and First Iconium.

"He was just one of a kind," McDonald said. "There will never be another Happy Preacher. He was well loved, especially by preachers. I loved his authentic praise. It didn't matter what church he was at, what venue or whether it was a funeral or worship service. ... The Happy Preacher was going to be praising. He brought his praise with him."

McDonald said he was amazed at how Merrell knew about everybody's funeral "under the heavens."

He said Merrell, as much as a local icon as he was, wanted his own service to be "totally the opposite of what people might think. He didn't want it to last over an

hour. He wanted to be cremated. He didn't want a whole lot of folks talking over him. He loved a big funeral but didn't want one."

The Rev. Darryl Winston said Merrell, a native of Valdosta, leveraged his connections to help a lot of people, including getting underserved youth into college. He left Valdosta when he was 18 and moved to Atlanta.

Winston said Merrell also marched for social justice.

"He touched lives," said Winston. "There was more to him than his public persona." He said Merrell would sometimes carry a photo album around that showed him with famous and historic figures."

Others also took to social media to remember Merrell.

One Twitter user said Merrell was Atlanta's "first Black Christian socialite."

Others posted photos or videos of him with his trademark tambou-

rine or praise dancing.

Willie A. Watkins, of Willie A. Watkins Funeral Home, will handle the arrangements, which are pending.

He's handled the arrangement for civil rights veterans the Rev. C.T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis, both of whom died in 2020.

"There was a certain flair about him," said Watkins. "He was able to maneuver himself around to get pictures with all the stars."

Watkins said he once asked The Happy Preacher how he was able to speak out so quickly just as the minister was wrapping up at a service or sermon. "He said it was about timing. He watched the minister's mouth. Just when he was about to close it, that's when he spoke out. He was right on time with his amens."

Another time Watkins said he was getting in the car that took flowers to the cemetery when he caught a movement out of the corner of his eye.

It scared him for a minute because no one was supposed to be in the car but him.

It was "Happy."

Watkins asked how he got in the car. Merrell's response was simple: "We're all going to Lincoln Cemetery, aren't we? He made it his business that if there was a service he was going to ride in the flower car or the hearse and nobody had a problem with it. Most of the families were happy."

What people may not know is that Merrell was a great baker. He made wonderful sweet potato pies and chocolate cake that would melt in your mouth, Watkins said.

"There was an uniqueness to him."



... And that is what He said!

BT DR. LISA GAYLE YOUNG

Hey, y'all! If you have read this column before you know that I love my Daddy, Pastor Roosevelt Harrell, Sr. and miss him. I long for his familiarity, his wisdom, his correction, and his staunch belief that God could do anything! He and my mother taught us to take the Lord at His Word. And I still do.

So often we hear at church, "Saints if God said it that settles it." ... take him at His Word! Then we see their lack of faith demonstrated when the Doctor calls it "cancer" and don't let them say "terminal cancer." #Itsfaithtime

The disease of sickle cell and the trait were prevalent in the generations of my family. I had the trait and suffered a lot growing up. Although I was taught, I would be healed, I just could not imagine that, since it was inherited, and I was always in pain.

My precious Daddy didn't live long enough to see my faith kick in, oh, but I know he is rejoicing with me now. He sees me for who I am, "The Lord's Healed Woman."

Through my health trials with tumors, lupus, fibromyalgia, heart disease, and more, I borrowed Daddy's faith, clung to the healing Word, and just focused on what God said.

When we are down and drifting, diseased and doubting, confused, and confounded, meditate on what God said and believe! Then act on what you believe.

There are 101 things that God said in scripture about healing. We will cover all 101 this year together between this column and with the guest on our 24-hour gospel internet radio station 24/7 praise radio at <https://www.247praiseradio.com>.

Its healing time- let's head to the Word! Our first scripture is Exodus 15:26. Here the Lord says, "I am the Lord that health thee." Your Job: Believe that He is your Healer and act healed. #Iaminfaith

In 2022, I am inviting you to join me, the staff of the BR Weekly Press, and the Baton Rouge community as we work the word of healing, right here every week.

Together let's be in faith for our healing and the healing of those in our community. As long as we are going to be in faith for our healing, we should be in faith for the healing of others, right? Amen! You must believe that you are healed right now! So, let's practice the language of healing.

Here we go! Every day we will say, "I believe that my body is a temple that houses my spirit man, my emotions, thoughts, desires, and is my forgiveness center. I believe now that I am healed. God has done a great work in me. I harbor no feelings of anger, hurt, disappointment or unforgiveness. I no longer identify with disease, death and dying, depression and disappointment. I am victorious, I have conquered my lack of faith and there is no drought in my life.

Saints, remember that the leapers were healed when they started acting healed... and headed to the priest to show themselves." So, you betta act right. #andthatiswhatsaid #Iamnotacompromiser #healed #Iamactingright



Dr. Gayle Young

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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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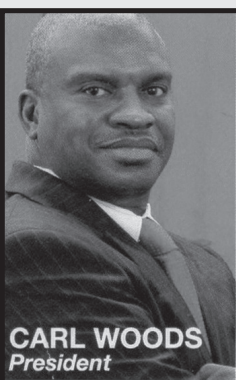
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BUSINESS

Louisiana utility regulators rescind contract given to suspended lawyer



Louisiana Public Service Commissioner Foster Campbell (right) questions consultant Scott McQuaig about his qualifications and suspended law license on Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022. (Image taken from meeting live stream)

BY: WES MULLER
Louisiana Illuminator

The Louisiana Public Service Commission on Tuesday rescinded a state contract it awarded to a consultant with ties to one of the commissioners who approved the deal last month.

In a 3-2 vote, the Public Service Commission reversed its Dec. 14 decision to hire Scott McQuaig as a consultant on electric vehicle charging stations. The commission will reopen the bidding process.

McQuaig, a former personal-injury attorney from Metairie, said he surrendered his law license in March 2019 and thereafter opened his own consulting firm, the McQ Group. He was the only bidder on a contract worth \$44,000 to research whether electric vehicle charging stations should be considered a public utility under the Public Service Commission's jurisdiction.

McQuaig had done previous work for the commission, both as a consultant and as outside counsel. He won two contracts in 2020 worth nearly \$180,000 total for consulting work on 5G utility pole attachments and cybersecurity issues. He also

held two contracts in 2013 worth more than \$350,000 combined to serve as outside counsel to help the commission establish disaster planning best practices and rules and regulations for prison phone systems, according to PSC records.

His latest bid sparked controversy when Commissioner Foster Campbell (D-Shreveport) alleged a conflict of interest between McQuaig and Commissioner Eric Skrmetta (R-Metairie). As detailed in previous reports from the Illuminator, McQuaig and Skrmetta have personal and business ties that go back decades, and Skrmetta voted to award McQuaig each of the five contracts.

The pair performed legal work for each other and founded several social organizations and a political advocacy group, according to Jefferson Parish court records and the business filings with the Louisiana Secretary of State's Office.

When the electric charging stations contract was up for a vote last month, Campbell planned to question McQuaig regarding his qualifications and his relationship with Skrmetta. But McQuaig unexpectedly left the meeting shortly before he was called to testify. Instead, Skrmetta took the

floor, repudiating the conflict of interest allegations and said he would answer any questions on McQuaig's behalf.

Having previously postponed awarding of the contract due to the conflict-of-interest allegations, PSC Chairman Craig Greene of Baton Rouge, a Republican whose votes regularly cross party lines, called the matter to a vote at the Dec. 14 meeting and approved McQuaig as the winning bidder.

The following day, Campbell sent Greene a letter complaining that Skrmetta should not have been allowed to speak on behalf of McQuaig when the majority of the commissioners had previously agreed to have McQuaig answer for himself. Greene granted Campbell's request for a rehearing, bringing the matter to Tuesday's meeting, which McQuaig attended.

Under questioning by Campbell, McQuaig said he was unaware he was needed to testify at last month's meeting and explained that he left because he had to pick up his vehicle from a mechanic's shop.

"I was never told that I was needed to speak at the last meeting," McQuaig said.

McQuaig admitted to commissioners he does not have specific experience with electric vehicle regulation but brought along a business associate he believes is qualified for the job. The associate, Richard Demint, a former executive for AT&T, has also worked as a consultant for the Public Service Commission.

Campbell also questioned McQuaig about the suspension of his law license. McQuaig said he voluntarily agreed to the suspension, which he said was only interim. But when pressed further, he would not say if he is trying to get his license back and said the matter has nothing to do with the Public Service Commission contract in question.

"Well, it matters a hell of a lot to me when you're dealing with the public's money," Campbell said.

Skrmetta said rescinding the contract will only discourage companies from wanting to work with the commission.

"I can guarantee we will have fewer people bidding," Skrmetta said. "This isn't about electric charging stations ... this is about vengeance."

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