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November 7 - November 13, 2015 50th Year Volume 28 www.ladatanews.com

A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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Battle for the Governor Edwards Vs. Vitter



A new poll on Louisiana’s governor’s race shows Democrat John Bel Edwards (above) leading Republican David Vitter by a 52 to 40-percent margin. The survey was conducted by Anzalone Liszt Grove Research on behalf of the anti-Vitter Gumbo PAC.

by **Charlie Turner**
Data News Weekly Contributor
Charlie Turner Tweet: @charliemichio

The runoff election for Louisiana’s next governor will be held on November 21st between State Rep. John Bel Edwards (D) and U.S. Sen. David Vitter (R),

in what is arguably the state’s most important election within the last decade. If you are a one-issue voter on abortion or gun control, then this election holds little value as both candidates hold the same positions on most social issues. But on healthcare, education and social equality there are serious distinctions between the two candidates. Whoever inherits the \$1.6 billion

budget deficit will be in the position to decide the fate of several Louisiana universities and hospitals who are already on the chopping block to help plug the fiscal hole Gov. Jindal is leaving behind. Investments made by our government take years to see the fruits of, so what happens now will reverberate well past a four-year term.

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BIG NOVEMBER SALE PRICES IN EFFECT 11/3-11/11/2015. MERCHANDISE WILL BE ON SALE AT THESE AND OTHER SALE PRICES NOW THROUGH 1/2/16, EXCEPT AS NOTED.

It's Time to Check Your Health Care Coverage for 2016

By Bob Moos
Southwest Public Affairs
Officer, U.S. Centers for
Medicare & Medicaid
Services

Now's the time to check your health care coverage for 2016 or sign up for the first time.

About 9 million Americans, including 186,277 Louisiana residents, got coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace during last year's open enrollment period.

This year's marketplace open enrollment began on Nov. 1.

If you bought a health plan last year, you'll want to review it to make sure it still meets your needs. Every year, insurers make adjustments to premiums, out-of-pocket costs and benefits. You should have received a letter from your insurance company explaining how your costs and



benefits will change for 2016.

Even if you're satisfied with your current coverage, it'll be smart to

log into your marketplace account at www.healthcare.gov and update your information on household in-

come and family size. You may also contact the marketplace call center at 1-800-318-2596 to do that.

Updating your personal information is important, because you may be eligible for lower costs than last year. About eight in 10 people who enroll in health coverage through www.healthcare.gov qualify for financial help to make their monthly premiums more affordable. The average monthly assistance amounted to \$270 this past year.

Generally, if you bought a plan last year and do nothing this year, you'll be automatically re-enrolled. Yet as tempting as "doing nothing" sounds, you could be missing out on a better deal. Consumers who shopped and switched plans during the last enrollment period have saved about \$400 in premiums over the year.

Louisiana residents can choose from an average of 34 health plans, though the exact number will vary from county to county. Rural areas are likely to have fewer. By comparing all the available plans in your area at www.healthcare.gov, you may find one that saves you more money, offers more services or includes more doctors in its network of providers.

The open enrollment season runs until Jan. 31. But if you want any changes in your coverage to take effect on Jan. 1, you must act by Dec. 15.

This year's open enrollment also gives the uninsured the chance to obtain coverage through the marketplace. The private health plans all cover a comprehensive set of benefits, including doctor visits,

hospital stays, preventive care, pregnancy and prescription drugs.

Health plans sold through the marketplace must treat you fairly. Insurers can't deny you coverage because you have a medical issue, such as cancer or diabetes. Nor can they charge you more than they would someone who's in good health.

At www.healthcare.gov, you'll find out if you qualify for savings you can use right away to lower your premiums and out-of-pocket medical expenses. The application process has been streamlined so that it requires less time and work.

The marketplace simplifies your shopping for coverage by letting you make convenient comparisons of health plans. A new "out-of-pocket calculator" will give you an estimate of your total yearly costs for each health plan, based on factors like your age, gender, income, ZIP code and how much health care you expect to use. Then you can enroll in the plan that best fits your needs and budget.

If you expect frequent doctor visits or need regular prescriptions, you may want to pick a plan that has higher monthly premiums but pays more of the costs when you require care. If you don't foresee many visits through the year, you may prefer a plan with lower premiums.

Also, before you buy a plan through the marketplace, check whether your doctor is in the plan's network. Your out-of-pocket costs will be lower. The most direct way to find out is to call the insurance company's customer service line. You can get the number through www.healthcare.gov.

The website has been improved over the last year so that it's faster and smoother for consumers to shop, compare and enroll. If you like, you'll be able to access the website on your cellphone and sign up for coverage.

Another option is to contact the marketplace call center at 1-800-318-2596 and speak with a customer service representative. You can also visit localhelp.healthcare.gov/ to locate the organizations in your community that will assist you in signing up for coverage.

For most people, the open enrollment period from Nov. 1 to Jan. 31 is the only time during the year when you can buy health insurance through the marketplace. So don't delay. Start shopping today.

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Cover Story, Continued from page 2.

Funding and Support

It is surprising that Vitter almost did not make it into the runoff, garnering only 4% points over the next GOP rival in the open primary, considering the senator's name recognition and incredible fundraising numbers. Vitter has more financial backing than the other candidates combined, a feat he accomplished through capitalizing on the unrestricted nature of US campaign finance laws. In fact, Vitter has been more than a supporter of limitless corporate and union money in politics, his campaign has helped tear down some regulatory walls of his own. This past summer, a federal court ruled that Vitter's senate campaign dollars could be moved to his PAC for his gubernatorial race. The decision opens the door for presidential candidates, such as Marco Rubio or Ted Cruz, whose contributions for their senate seat may be shifted towards ambitions for the White House. Such a coup in an already lawless campaign finance environment was made possible from Vitter's strong ties to national GOP figures. The PAC dedicated to his gubernatorial race, Fund for Louisiana's Future, is run by Charlie Spies who was instrumental in establishing Mitt Romney's fundraising apparatus.

It is not hard to understand why Vitter has received such a strong backing from national GOP figures that include John McCain, Chris Christie and others. During Vitter's tenure in the US Senate, he has proven to be a staunch ally of pro-business legislation as well as an effective disruptor against Democratic initiatives. On a political level, Vitter was instrumental in recruiting Bill Cassidy for the 2014 Senate race, seeing him as the best option to defeat Mary Landrieu.

Edwards has not served in a national office and is relying far more on local groups who are tired of Jindal's leadership. While Jindal was enjoying wide support from the state and from national conservatives, Edwards remained a critic of the Governor's reliance on tax breaks for big business and a refusal to increase taxes. (Jindal like Vitter have both signed the Grover Norquist no-tax pledge). As a result, Edwards has received the support of unions, the sheriff's department and major education officials - all groups that see Vitter's policies as too close to Jindal's.

While Edwards and Vitter have vastly different political backgrounds, it is their policies that are probably more important, especially on issues of poverty. Edwards has vowed to expand Medicaid, prevent

cuts in higher education and raise the minimum wage. Vitter, on the other hand, has been a roadblock for anti-poverty programs throughout his tenure in the House and Senate - often derided welfare efforts as wasteful and disincentives for work. The issue of economic equality and how to remedy it may be the largest distinction between Edwards and Vitter.

Minimum Wage

The movement for a higher minimum wage has not caught on in Louisiana as much as other states, but polls show that residents are ready for a boost. Rep. Edwards has repeatedly stated that increasing the state's minimum wage will be a number one priority. Those with the least money are more likely to spend their earnings to meet basic necessities, those an increase would help the economy while decreasing poverty.

Vitter, along with the national GOP, sees the minimum wage as an artificial levee on businesses that will prevent employers from hiring. But while raising the minimum wage may cause some loss of jobs, almost every study shows that the increasing consumerism from a higher minimum wage will not only improve the economy but also net more jobs.

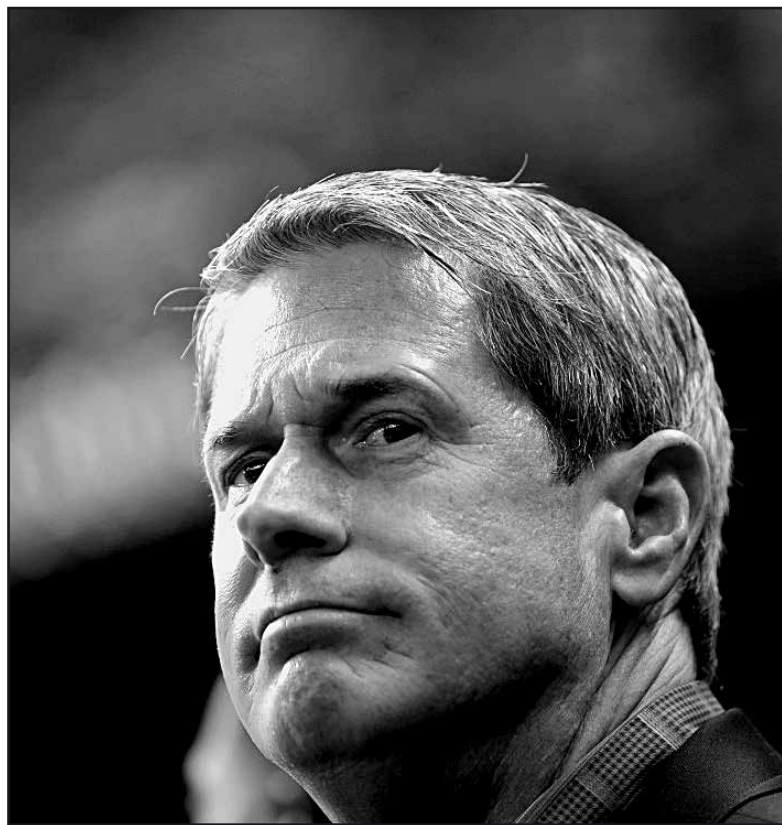
Medicaid Expansion

Edwards has joined the majority of Louisianians in stating the moral and economic responsibility to expand Medicaid with the other 40+ states that include many Republican governors. A Medicaid expansion will not solve the immediate issues in the state's healthcare, but would greatly help Emergency Room and preventive care services that are being currently cut.

There are plenty of sound bytes on Vitter's opposition to Medicaid expansion, including an appearance on CNN's Crossfire two years ago. The Senator viewed the provision of the Affordable Care Act as another burden on the state's budget despite the expansion being covered by federal dollars for 10 years. However, Vitter has changed his tone since the governor's race. He has now stated that he would be open to expanding Medicaid, but cannot say for sure until he has the position. Vitter has also made similar qualifications on other budget issues.

Welfare Programs

The term 'roadblock' was used previously to describe Sen. Vitter's views on welfare programs such as food stamps, but that



U.S. Republican Senator David Vitter (above) almost did not make it into the runoff, garnering only 4% points over the next GOP rival in the open primary.

may be an understatement. Vitter proposed a bill in the Senate that would mandate food stamp recipients to show a photo ID to the cashier in order to stop abusers of the program. It is difficult to see a photo ID law saving the government much money since data shows that food stamp fraud is quite rare, and has fallen to the lowest rates of all time despite the surge in enrollment after the Great Recession. However, photo ID laws may cause a decrease in those who use the program, especially African Americans. According to the Brennan Center School of Justice, 1 in 4 African Americans do not have the identification required to participate in SNAP under Vitter's proposed law, while no efforts are made to help distribute IDs to these low income residents.

But when fully examining Vitter's record on anti-poverty initiatives it is clear that his issue is more on principle rather than what is effective. He has also called on violent offenders to lose all government-sponsored assistance despite serving their time in prison. He has also voted to require drug-testing in order to qualify for federal assistance, a proposition that not only adds another layer of bureaucracy but also implies that welfare users must be proved worthy before receiving aid. In a state with a highest-incarceration rate in the country, it is difficult to see how barring criminals from food stamps will help a sinking economy or improve public safety. It does offer the chance to appear 'tough on crime' while placing more

requirements on an effective tool against poverty.

Perhaps scariest for Louisiana's Black community is Vitter's support for photo ID laws in federal elections. A tactic used in North Carolina and other states to help boost GOP candidates, has been barred from Louisiana so far. Vitter has voted for such a measure in the US Senate in 2007.

Edwards has not had the opportunity to speak on national welfare programs, but has shown a commitment to increasing aid to low-income families where he has been able to find the money.

Being a US Senator is powerful position, but a symbolic vote railing against drug users can be easily shadowed by more responsible votes. There is far more power involved as Governor, and as Bobby Jindal has shown us, it is far more difficult to hide behind ideology compared to Congress. While both are the same on many social issues, on the issue of poverty they could not be any different - an important difference as Louisiana remains the second poorest state in the union.

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2015 Voodoo Fest aka "Aqua Boogie Baby"!

By Kichea S. Burt
Data News Weekly Contributor

While New Orleanians look forward to Voodoo Fest every year for the tremendous line up of the best music talent the City has to offer, this year's festival was marked by cancellation of the third day due to inclement weather and

a muddy, watery field that looked like brown soup. Due to dangerous weather conditions including persistent rain and flash flood warnings for Orleans Parish on Sunday, November 1, the final day of the 2015 Voodoo Music + Arts Experience (Voodoo Fest) was cancelled. Fan safety is the top priority for the producers of the festival and conditions at City

Park did not meet the standards for maintaining a safe experience.

While Voodoo is a no refund, rain or shine event, producers will make refunds available this year given the severe weather conditions. For 3-Day credentials holders, 1/3 of posted price at time of purchase will be refunded. For

Single Day credential holders who purchased for Sunday, November 1, a full refund will be refunded. Fans should visit www.worshipthemusic.com for further information regarding refunds. You know us though, and on Friday and Saturday, the music played and the people had too much fun. Of course before the rain came, Data was there!!!

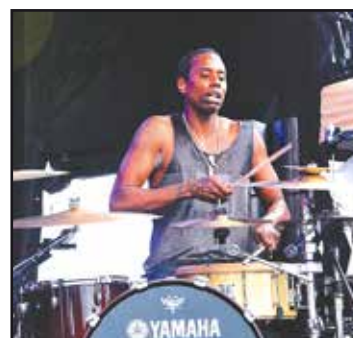
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Starring:
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ABCT Presents Simply Irma!

By Michelle Briscoe-Long
Data News Weekly Contributor

Grammy Award winner Irma Thomas will play herself in this musical production that documents the pitfalls and successes of her dramatic music career. You will sing and dance in the aisles to her many hits, such as It's Raining, You Can Have My Husband, Ruler of My Heart, I Wish Someone Would Care, Hip Shaking Mama, and many more!

The unrivaled Soul Queen of New Orleans – a title officially bestowed by local officials is New Orleans' most enduring musical ambassador. "She remains one of America's most distinctive and classic singers, a treasure from the golden age of soul music who remains as compelling and powerful as ever..." says Rounder Records.

HistoryMakers reports, "Blues vocalist Irma Thomas was born Irma Lee on February 18, 1941, in Ponchatoula, Louisiana. She was raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, and attended New Orleans' McDonald 41 public school. Thomas displayed her early vocal talents as a teen. She sang with a Baptist church choir and a gospel quartet at Home Mission Baptist Church. Her very first recording was a school song, which was recorded at Cosmo's studio with fellow classmates. At the age of eleven, Thomas won The Ritz Theater's talent night and two years later, she auditioned for Specialty Records.

Her big break came in 1959 when she captured the attention of band leader Tommy Ridgley while she was a waitress at New Orleans' Pimlico Club. Thomas offered to sing with Ridgley



and his band against the wishes of her boss, who fired her for singing instead of waiting on tables. Ridgley arranged a recording contract for her with a local label, Ron Records. Her debut single, Dorothy LaBostrie's "You Can Have My Husband, But Please Don't Mess With My Man" hit #22 on the Billboard R&B charts in May 1960. Thomas felt that Ron Records did not pay her the royalties she deserved, so she left them to join the Minit record label. Most of her early 1960s Minit recordings were written and produced by Allen Toussaint and were strong regional sellers. In 1963, Minit was bought by Imperial Records. Thomas' first single with Imperial, "Wish Someone Would Care," was the biggest hit of her career and reached #17 on Billboard's pop charts in the spring of 1964. Thomas released nine singles and two albums during her three-year period with the Imperial label. During the 1960s, Thomas was a popular per-

former on the Southern college circuit. In 1970, Thomas moved to California where she worked at a department store and as an automobile parts salesperson. During this time, she continued working club dates on weekends and also recorded for several labels, including Atlantic Records in 1971. In the mid-1970s, she moved back to New Orleans where she remained popular as a live performer.

Her comeback as a recording artist started in 1986 when she produced an album, The New Rules, with Scott Billington of Rounder Records. Thomas received her first Grammy nomination in 1991. She received her second Grammy nomination in 1998 along with Marcia Ball and Tracy Nelson. She has continued to maintain an active recording and touring schedule since. Thomas married her manager, Emile Jackson, in 1977. Thomas has a total of seven children."

The Anthony Bean Community The-

ater (ABCT) was established in Spring 2000 to meet the growing demands of New Orleans area residents seeking a quality, culturally diverse, performing arts venue. The theater also met the needs of individuals seeking to learn the art of acting, set design and theatre management. In recent years, ABCT has become a vehicle to enter New Orleans' booming "Hollywood South" film industry.

The Ensemble

Najua Cook Walter Dixson IV
Madyson Barbain Jean-Marck
Charles Jewel Mart
Allieta Blue Nechele Francis Kiersten Moore
Sheleta Burke-Manuel Sierra
Green Immanuel Simon
Myia Carter Polanco Jones,
Jr. Nina Tauriac

'Simply Irma' creative team includes: Anthony Bean (Co writer, director), Giselle Nakhid (Choreographer), Steve Burke Sr. (Vocal Directions) John Grimsley (Scenic), Lyn Caliva (Lighting) Ms. B (Costumes), Yolanda Cephus (Hair and makeup) Staci Tolliver (Stage Manager), and Michelle Briscoe-Long (Production Manager).

Hurry! Limited Seats Available!

Performances are November 6 – 15. Friday and Saturday at 8:00 pm, & Sunday matinee at 3:00 pm. Tickets are \$25 and are available by calling the Box Office at (504) 862-7529. (Box Office hours are Thursday - Saturday, 6pm - 8pm and two hours before performances.) Tickets can also be obtained on line at www.anthonybeantheater.com

Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events

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Charters and Heavy Testing Hurt Our Schools



By Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr
Founder & President, Rainbow
PUSH Coalition

Across the country, parents have been in revolt against high-stakes standardized testing, with kids tested over and over again while creativity is cut out of classroom curricula. Parents — particularly in targeted urban schools from Chicago to Boston — are also marching against the forced closing of neighborhood schools, displacing kids

and shutting down needed neighborhood centers.

Now there is more and more evidence that the parents have it right — and the deep-pocket “reformers” are simply wrong.

First, the Obama Administration — which has pushed high-stakes testing as central to its education agenda — announced that kids were being tested too often, with too much school time devoted to preparing for and taking required tests. In what a writer for the New Yorker described as a major “*mea culpa*,” the administration now recommends that standardized testing be limited to 2 percent of class time. Maybe music, art and creativity will have a chance once more.

Second, a report by the Center for Media and Democracy on charter schools — the center-

piece of the so-called reformers’ agenda — reports that some \$3.7 billion in federal money has been larded onto charter schools in the past two decades with virtually no accountability. The result is often a simple rip-off: schools that never open or open for a few months and shut down. Some highly touted cyber charters — schools featuring online courses — are, as Education Week reported, essentially useless, like not going to school at all. Others, like the highly touted New York Success Academy Schools, apparently boost their test scores by identifying low-performing students who have “got to go” and finding ways to get rid of them.

And now the National Assessment of Education Progress, the gold standard for measuring prog-

ress, reports that American kids have lost ground in math, and either were stagnant (4th graders) or worse (8th graders) in reading.

Charters are spreading like kudzu; wall-to-wall standardized testing is nearly universal — and the parents are right: It isn’t working.

The reality, as National Education Association President Lily Eskelsen Garcia has pointed out, is that the nations that have outperformed the U.S. in recent years don’t do the things that the deep-pockets reformers have been touting. They don’t terrorize teachers; they train, respect and pay them. They don’t set up private charters and drain money from public education; they devote more resources to the poorest students, not less. They don’t do repeated high-stakes standardized testing;

they evaluate teachers and students carefully, mentor them and improve them.

The school “reformers” are hurting, not helping. Closing neighborhood schools too often divorces parents from their students’ schools. Demeaning teachers is leading to higher turnover, when experience is central to becoming a good teacher. Repeated standardized testing takes the joy out of learning, making kids less likely to find their strength.

As Jeff Bryant of the Education Opportunity Network writes, parents are driving an “education spring,” revolting against an elite reform agenda that is driving away good teachers, undermining public schools, and draining funds and fun from our public schools. Parents are right to keep the pressure on.

We Need to Stop Calling the Cops on our Students



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

Richland County Senior Deputy Sheriff Ben Fields seemed to think the only way he could get a young black girl out of her seat was to fling her across the room. His brutal attack on her was filmed by one of her classmates, and it’s a good thing he documented the incident. It was said that the young lady punched the officer before Eddie Robinson, Jr. started taping, but he indicates that she was quiet and simply refused to get out of her seat. He said she had only taken her phone out for a minute and “she didn’t do anything wrong”.

On Wednesday, October 28, Sheriff Leon Lott announced that Fields had been fired because his behavior was inconsistent with the

training he had. But in response to a question at the press conference he held, he reported that Fields did not feel remorseful, that he was sorry the incident happened, but he was “just trying to do his job.” Not only did he brutalize a young girl, but he also arrested another young woman who simply asserted that the officer was wrong to treat her classmate so roughly. No other student said a word, and they were perhaps frightened to speak up.

Where are our women’s organizations? Where are our African American and civil rights organizations? Or our African American educators? Granted, this is just a few days after the fact and perhaps some of these folks will speak up eventually. Perhaps they are waiting to hear “the facts”, but as Sheriff Lott said there was no excuse for a young lady to be dragged in the way that she was.

Sheriff Lott said his community, a suburb of state capital Columbia, South Carolina, was an “orderly” community. He said there were no marches, no confrontation, because “that is not how we do things here.”

While the Sheriff did the right thing by firing Ben Fields, his own attitude could stand some adjusting, and perhaps a march might be a way to express dissatisfaction at his approach (and that of the school system). In his press conference, he said that Fields’ behavior was inappropriate, but he basically blamed the young lady for her plight.

While civil rights leaders routinely turn it out when black men are beaten or killed, far fewer seem to care about what happens to black women. From the time that video hit the airwaves there ought to have been cries of outrage (and perhaps they are coming). Ben Fields’ actions should not simply be called “unacceptable” but also criminal.

Why did the school call the police anyway? From what I understand, the young lady was not making noise or disrupting class. She failed to comply with a request regarding her cell phone (some say she was asked to put it away, others said she was asked for the phone). Either way, the penalty for noncompliance should not have been arrest.

Last year, the Department of

Education released a report that showed that African American and Latino students were suspended or expelled far more frequently than their white counterparts, often getting a different level of punishment for the same offense. Some of the suspensions and expulsions even happen at the preschool level — meaning that three and four year old children are being kicked out of school simply because they are little children (who frequently misbehave).

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, around 43% of our nation’s public schools had police officers on their grounds during the 2013-2014 school year, including 63% of middle schools and 64% of high schools. Why are officers of the law on school grounds? How often is their behavior inappropriate? It is unlikely that is the first time former officer Ben Fields behaved so badly toward a student. Indeed, the student who was arrested for speaking up (he said she was disruptive) indicated that Fields had a bad reputation. He was the subject of at least two com-

plaints for excessive force.

While Fields has been fired, he needs to be held accountable, sued. But the bigger picture is the criminalization of our young people by arresting them (leaving them with a criminal record) for minor offenses. Where are the voices lifted to protect a young woman whose simply “no” earns her a brutal beating? Where are the women, the civil rights leaders, the others who often have something to say? Are they silent because this is a girl? The two young women who were arrested need to be lifted up and affirmed by the African American community and that sheriff’s office needs to be confronted by the community. Sheriff Lott was gratified because there was no marching. There needs to be.

Julianne Malveaux is an author and economist based in Washington, D.C. Her latest book “Are We Better off? Race, Obama and Public Policy” will be released in November 2015 and is available for preorder at www.julianne-malveaux.com.

Friends! Got Any Real Ones?



James Washington
Guest Columnist

Some of you are aware that I have a book coming out which is a compilation of many of these columns. I came across this one and it still has quite an impact on me. Hopefully, it will again for you. This is an effort to get you to define who your friends really are. Who is it that you can absolutely depend on? I am one of those people who believe that you can deter-

mine this more in difficult circumstances than in situations where life is good and things are going well. The bible is full of chapters and verse about friendship even unto death, if you can believe that. John 15:13. According to the bible friends love each other, do not forsake each other, and more than anything a friend can be trusted. Even when a friend criticizes you, he or she is doing so to help, protect, build you up and yes correct you when they and you know you are dead wrong.

"Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." Proverbs 27:6.

My point about identifying and relating to true friends is pretty much a very basic concept. It just happens to be spiritually based.

When all hell is breaking loose in your life, will your friend(s) pray with you? Pray for you? Will your friend(s) suggest maybe you ought to have a talk with the Lord? Will he or she let you know where the answer lies for whatever ails you? Shame? Addiction? Greed? Pride? Promiscuity? Whatever? By example, Job's friend knew where he should turn. "But if I were you, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before Him. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted..." Job 5: 8-9. Now whatever you think about the motives of Job's friends, you got to give them credit for knowing where to seek help. All I'm asking you is which one of your so called friends will point you in the right

direction? I pray you have several, although one will surely do.

I can't help but be reminded of Christ and the paralytic. Mark 2. Jesus Heals the Paralytic. I'm just moved to point out verse 5. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven." This is mind boggling to me. Jesus healed somebody because his friends had faith. Can you believe that? The folk you hang out with may not be the folk who have faith in you. But the people who have faith, the ones who will take you and your problems to the Lord, are the ones He listens to; often times on your behalf. Now I do not know about you but, these are the kind of friends I need. I also believe I have a couple in my life and I am very

thankful for them. My question to you is can you identify those in yours. If you cannot, then understand you are the reason for this particular column. No one should go through life without a friend who will pray for you if not with you and let you know, that's what you should be doing also. Mark 2 just lets us know that God pays attention to such things and values such friends. Their love for you acknowledges their faith in Him and I think He welcomes them for their faith and you for bringing it out in them. Now that's something to shout about I think.

May God bless and keep you always,

James

City Residents Trick or Treat Come Hell or High Water

By Ivory Bibbins
Data News Weekly Staff
Writer

Mother Nature decided to be a witch this All Hallows Eve as she brewed up several storms across Louisiana over the weekend. Minions, Spiderman, and Princess Elsa roamed the streets a day early as Halloween activities for several parishes across the state were moved from Saturday, Oct. 31 to Friday, Oct. 30.

The mayor's office announced in an official statement that it strongly recommended businesses and organizations to move up Halloween activities to Friday due to the National Weather Service's warning of severe weather on Halloween night. Outside of the City, several other parishes and cities across the state, including Jefferson and St. John the Baptist parishes, and cities like Gretna, Kenner and Westwego issued similar calls to the public to move Halloween activities up to the Friday.

Many outdoor activities like



festivals and parks suffered setbacks due to the weather and cancelled events. In Metairie, the organizers of the Annual Monster Bash at Lafreniere Park cancelled its family-themed events on Saturday, Oct. 31. The Voodoo Music and Arts Experience, or simply Voodoo Festival, still went on with its activities at least up to Saturday.

The festival's schedule consisted of three days, Friday, Oct. 30 to Sunday, Nov. 1. The event featured art, culture, and various musical acts. However, the Sunday activities for the festival were cancelled given the consecutive days of downpour. Festival organizers stated in an official announcement that they cancelled the event's Sunday acts due to the conditions of City Park, which at that point, was not able to sustain a safe environment for both staff and fans of the festival. Fans who purchased tickets for Sunday are able to receive a full refund.

Many indoor events saw a boost from the cancellation of outdoor activities. Residents said they turned to Haunted Houses, Halloween-themed musicals, and at parties at the cities bars and restaurants who kept their doors open regardless of the storms brewing outdoors. On Saturday many of the annual events that draw tourists and residents alike drew characters of all seedy types. Some residents said they were surprised the City even had

the authority to move the holiday, and thought officials were playing a trick on the public.

"I didn't believe it at all because it was hearsay from my friends so I wasn't sure whether or not it was a joke," said Gabriel Cambel, 22, a University of New Orleans student. Cambel said he didn't agree with moving the date itself, but that he understood the reasons for the move. The well-being of the children in the City resonated as the most acceptable rationale as to why trick or treating should have been moved up, residents said.

"I do think the idea to move Halloween was a good one, so that children would still be able to get candy and not be subject to the weather," said Amber Turnipseed, 22. Despite the warning of bad weather, the rain still couldn't keep the enthusiasm down for people who participated in activities on the Oct. 31.

"I got wet and still had fun," said Starr Puipuro, a Dennis' Seafood employee, as she recalled her trip to the reopened House of Shock.

Russell Simmons Speaks Out on RushCard Glitch

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Contributing Writer

Russell Simmons hasn't slept much since news broke in mid-October that users of his RushCard couldn't access their own money and were locked out of their accounts, due to a computer glitch, leaving some unable to make rent payments, pay utility bills or buy groceries for their families.

"Technology glitches happen, but this was a tsunami," said Simmons in an exclusive, hour-long interview with the NNPA News Wire.

Users began experiencing problems when Simmons' company switched to a new transaction-processing provider, something that he said they've done successfully at least four times.

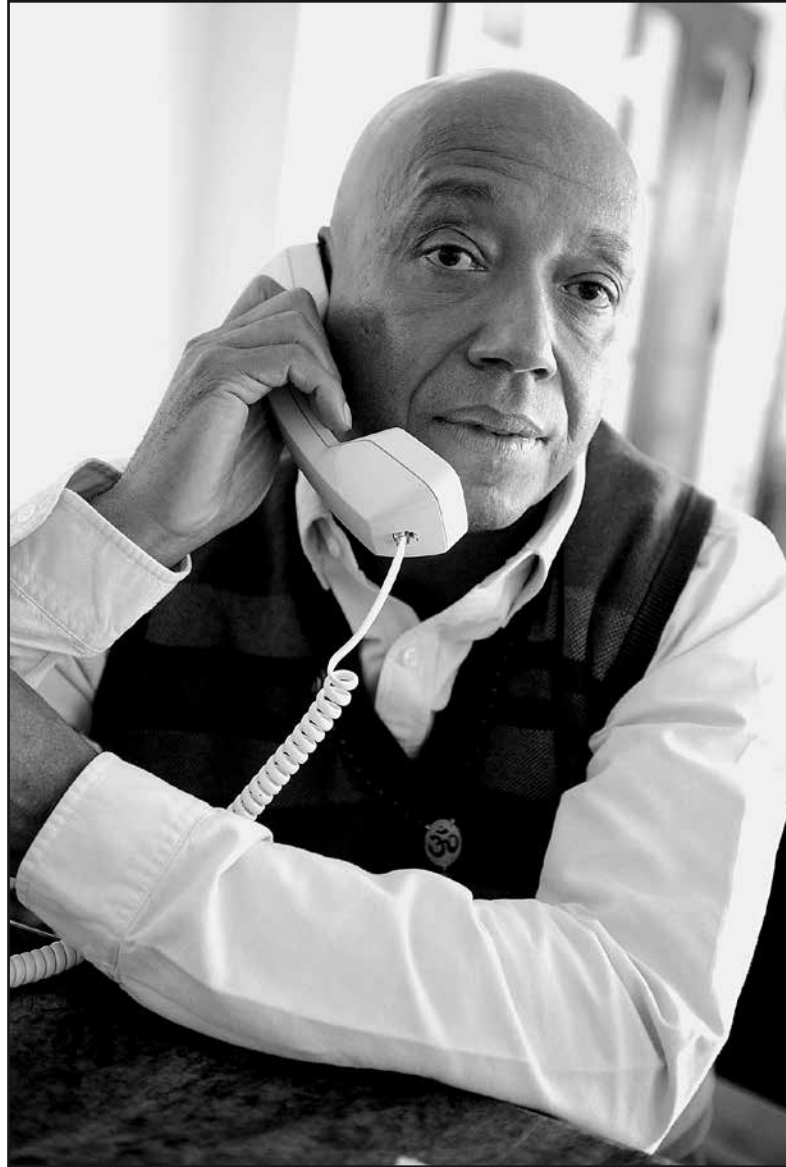
"We made the transfer of pro-

cesses four separate times in the past and the next thing you know, I get a text message that we sent to our customers that we were down for two hours," said Simmons, the iconic business magnate who founded Def Jam Records and the Phat Farm clothing line. "Our call center usually gets about 600 calls and now it's [getting] 600,000 calls."

Simmons said that three multi-billion dollar corporations were involved in the process and each has been helpful in resolving the technical issues related to the latest transition.

Simmons credited MasterCard CEO Ajaypal Singh Banga with immediately responding to the problem and helping to fix it.

"He's the CEO of a \$120 billion company and he picked the telephone up on the first ring," Simmons said, adding that Banga has



said it's just one way of regaining the trust of his loyal base.

"I like when this company is really profitable, then we can go out and help the community in a way that no bank, no non-Black institution ever will," he said.

UniRush, LLC, the company that owns RushCard, was co-founded by Simmons 12 years ago to help low-to-moderate income individuals and families have an easier time paying bills and managing their money.

"The RushCard is the embodiment of my message of empowerment, because it is a better and more transparent option for millions of 'underbanked' and 'unbanked' Americans, who often suffer at the hands of large financial institutions," Simmons said.

Simmons also said that fees for his card aren't as high as other prepaid cards and RushCard members have access to 25,000 free ATMs.

According to Bankrate.com, the Prepaid Visa RushCard "Pay As You Go Plan" is among a handful of cards that have no monthly maintenance fees. The card does carry an activation fee that ranges between \$3.95 and \$9.95 and users are also charged 50 cents for every out-of-network ATM balance inquiry.

In comparison, Walmart's MoneyCard Plus has a \$3 monthly maintenance fee, an activation fee that can be as high as \$4 and charges \$1 for every ATM balance inquiry, except for inquiries made at MoneyPass ATMs.

Simmons said his company has hired additional employees to help answer and resolve customer complaints and that cardholders should continue to report problems and any financial hardships caused by the two-week outage to the RushCard call center.

"I want my customers to know that we will restore RushCard as the gold standard of [prepaid debit card] services in our community," said Simmons.

Simmons continued: "I want to assure those who rely on the RushCard that I will not rest until we have regained your trust."

talked a lot about finding ways to reach underserved communities and others who don't use traditional banks.

In the aftermath of the outage that wreaked havoc on the lives of thousands of cardholders, RushCard created a multi-million dollar fund to compensate customers who were affected.

Simmons also said that he has heard the criticism about the outage loud and clear and he's accepted it and now he's doing everything in his power to make his cardholders whole, even going beyond that.

"The way I view it, I will take every complaint and claim and pay it, if it has any legitimacy," said Simmons. "I've heard people being

put out of their apartments or in the hospital needing medicine and what I have done, what I do, is if they say they [lost] \$400, I've given them back that exact amount and I've also adjusted their fees."

In addition to restoring customer accounts in full, Simmons said that from Nov. 1, 2015 through February 29, 2016, RushCard customers will enjoy a no-fee holiday, which will exempt card users from paying monthly, transaction and ATM fees during that period. People who open new accounts will also be eligible for the no-fee holiday benefits, but all cardholders will still be responsible for paying third-party fees.

While it will cost him money, he

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Saints Continue to Turn Tide on the Season with Win Against Giants

By Jermal Greenbery

Data News Weekly Staff Writer

After a slow 0-4 season start, the New Orleans Saints find themselves at .500 with a 4-4 record. Quarterback Drew Brees looks like his old self again, completing 39-50 passes for 511 yards, seven touchdowns and two interceptions. Brees now has a quarterback rating of 148.71 as he tied an NFL record of 7 touchdown passes. The Saints defense still has more work to do, as they surrendered six touchdown passes to New Orleans native and New York Giants Quarterback Eli Manning. Isidore Newman High School and LSU standout Odell Beckham, Jr. also had a big day with three touchdown receptions. Despite an off day by defense, the black and gold was able to come away with the win of 52-49 against the Giants.

The Saints are now at the midpoint of the season. After eight regular season games, fans weigh in on the performance of their beloved Saints. "It's been an emotional roller coaster so far, but I think we still have a chance to go all the way," said Latasha Smith, a New Orleanian and self-proclaimed lifelong Saints fan. A lot of fans like Smith seem hopeful but others don't see the black and gold having a successful year. Uptown resident Bryan Goldman explained, "I enjoyed the high scoring affair between the Saints and Giants but I don't think this is our year." Goldman, like many in the City sum up their fear of their hopes being dashed by future per-



Fans across New Orleans were thrilled with the performance of QB Drew Brees in the Saint's 52 - 49 victory over the NY Giants on Sunday.

formances by Saints' defense.

If this current 2015 New Orleans Saints team wants to make it into post-season and go far they will indeed have to play better defense, at least according to the stats. The Saints defense is one of the league's worst, as they are ranked second to last on most polls. The defense has tried to come on strong—creating turnovers and pressuring their opponents' Quarterbacks in the last three games.

For the Saints to maintain its winning streak in the next three out of four games, observers say they will have to start fast on offense and create more turnovers on defense. The Saints being a young team with the untapped potential of its players have fans hopeful that a burst of genius will sustain the team throughout the season. Key players

Drew Brees, Marques Colston, and Kennan Lewis play a crucial role in inspiring younger plays to go all the way, fans say.

The Saints face the Tennessee Titans on Sunday, Nov. 8 and will be without running back Khiry Robinson. Robinson is out for the season, with a broken tibia. Robinson was a big factor for the Saints offense and fans say they are concerned about his loss. Meanwhile, running back C.J. Spiller will become more of an important role for this offense. With the Saints, Spiller has had two touchdown receptions for a record 196 yards. One of those touchdowns was an 80-yard catch to clinch an overtime victory over the Cowboys five weeks ago. Just recently, he made an important touchdown reception to tie the score late in the fourth quarter that

helped the Saints get a win over the New York Giants.

Fans say the season, like their love for the team has been full of ups and downs. This past Sunday, the team showed there was no giving up. Even if they could have folded in the towel and took a loss, they showed resiliency. Many believed the Saints just weren't there offensively and defensively, despite the win. Fans also had doubts about losing key players across the season to free agency and talks of Sean Payton maybe leaving New Orleans after this season. There were also rumors of Drew Brees being traded. Could this team really handle that many distractions?

Despite the talks and rumors, the Saints are sitting at a 4-4 and are still in control of the fate of this season. As in the past, the current Saints team is beginning to show signs that it could find itself and at the right time. For those who doubted Drew Brees, saying that he's not capable of throwing a 300 plus yard game, Sunday was their answer—511 total yards to be exact. On the defensive side of the ball, fans continue to hope for progress. In the first four games, the defense did not get any pass rushes. In the last five games, the defense had a total of 19 sacks. Fans so the comeback earns the team a B for the effort and hard work they have shown in the first eight weeks of the season. Starting out slow, the Saints have climbed their way back to the top. The City's loyal fans hope the team continues making the strides they need to push for a playoff run.

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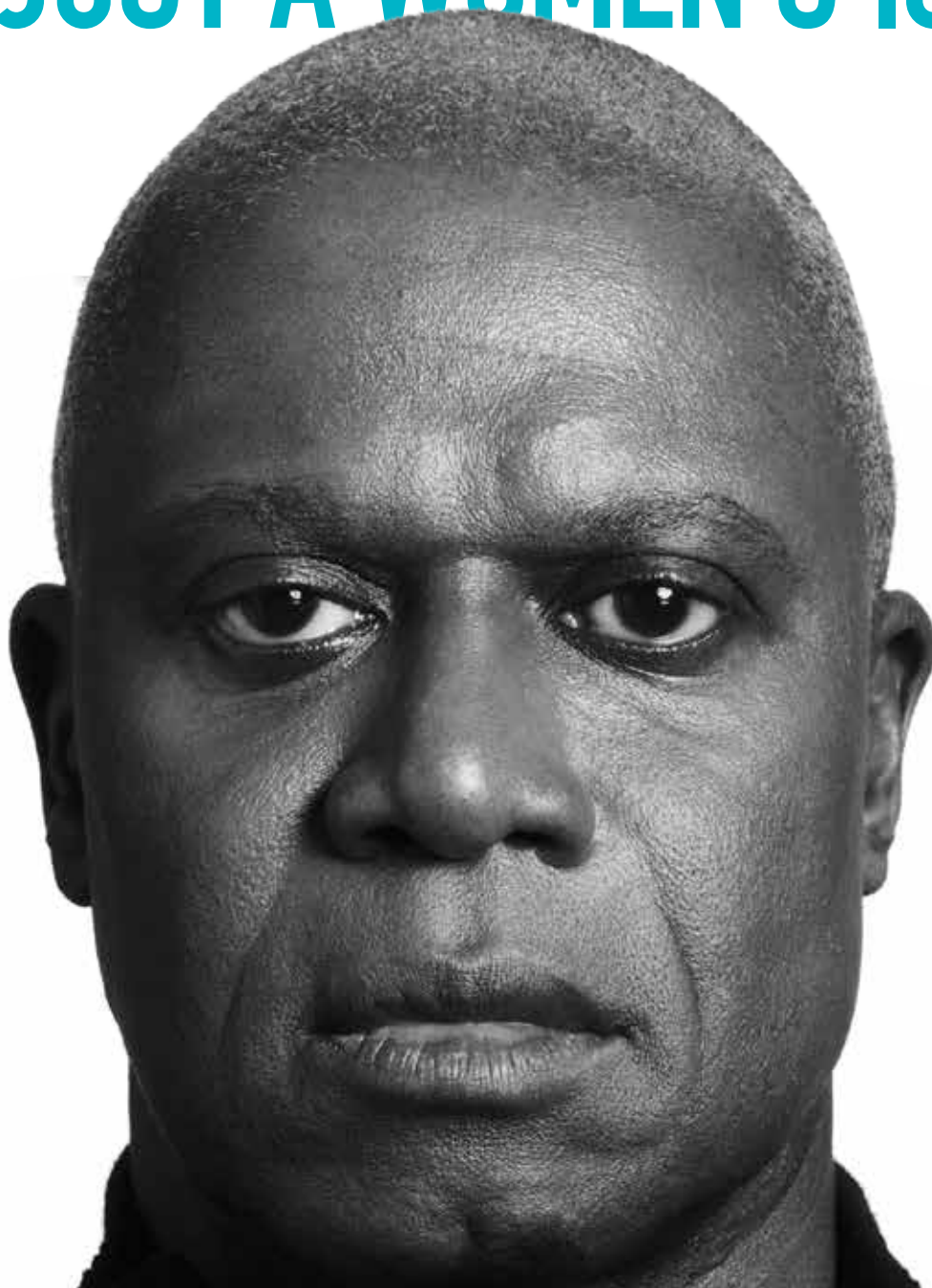
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