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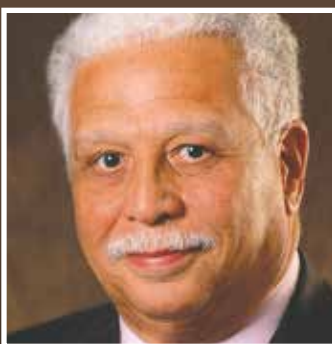
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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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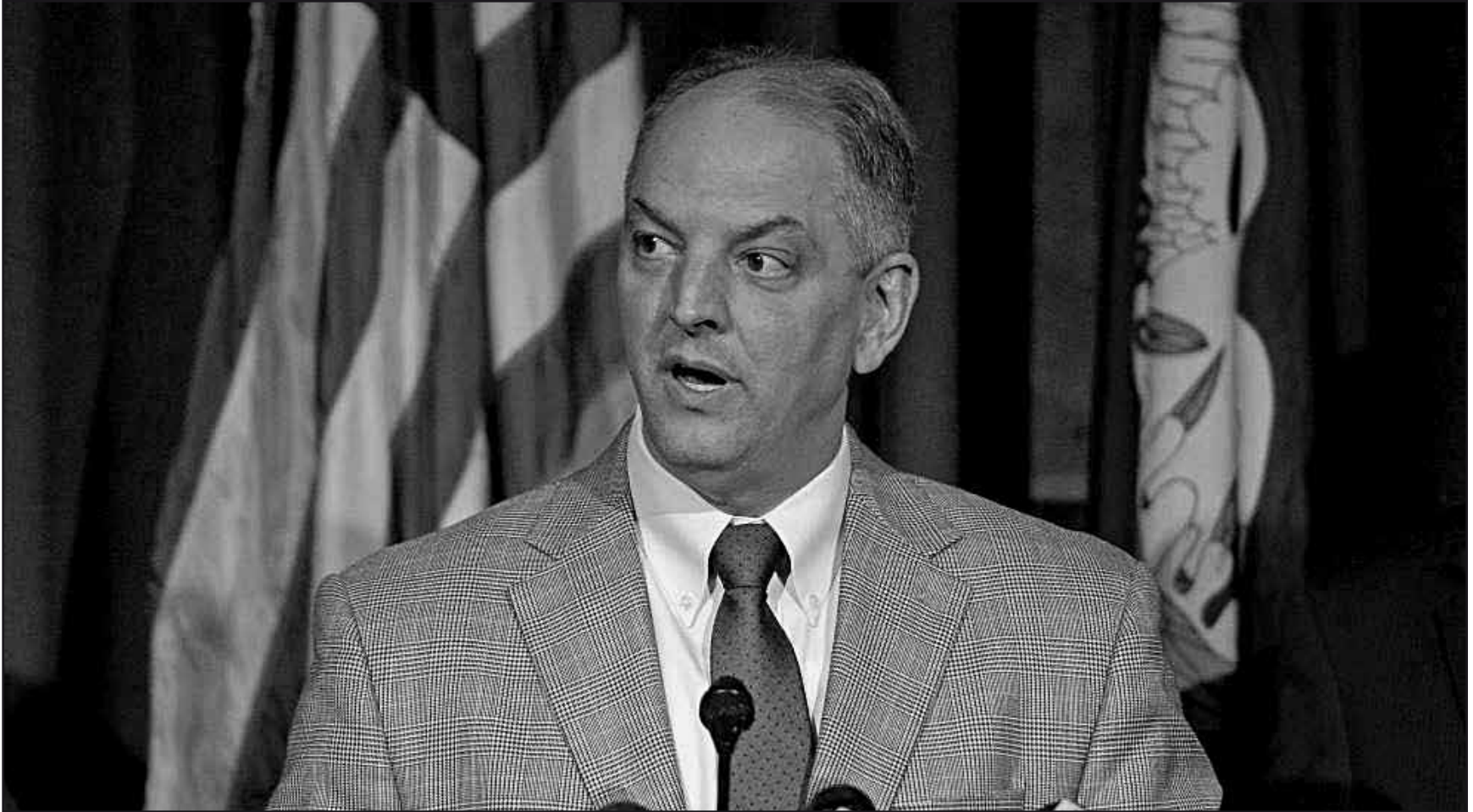
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# Gov. Edwards Makes Proposal to Deal with the Budget Issues



"This is not the budget plan I want to bring in my second week in office, but these problems are bigger than our state has ever seen," Edwards said.

## Data News Staff Edited Report

In an effort to deal with the current \$750 million shortfall, Gov. John Bel Edwards said he will propose increasing the state sales tax and use the Rainy Day Fund to help deal with Louisiana's budget woes.

Edwards held a news conference Tuesday afternoon in Baton Rouge to discuss the ongoing meetings his administration has been having to solve two years of critical budget shortfalls. He said the state faces an estimated \$750 million shortfall for Fiscal Year 2016 and a shortfall of up to \$1.9 billion in Fiscal Year 2017.

"It is now more important than ever for our state's leaders, citizens, and stakeholders to come together to solve this problem. The last eight years of bad budgeting and annual cuts to vital services have left us in a fragile position. There is no sugar coating that fact," Gov. Edwards said.

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## DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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Cover Story, Continued from previous page.

He said he will call the Legislature into a three-week special session in February to address the state's budget crises. Edwards began by addressing his options for how to deal with this year's budget shortfall.

Some of the options include using the state's Rainy Day Fund, redirecting non-coastal dollars from the first year of BP oil spill payments to the state and cutting at least 10 percent from \$1.6 billion in discretionary state funds that are dedicated to certain uses in statute, but not constitutionally protected.

Edwards moved onto how his administration would address the \$1.9 billion budget shortfall in 2017. He said the options would provide long-term structural fixes for the way the state funds its government.

"Raising taxes is not my first, second, or even third option when seeking to fill the state's budget shortfall," Edwards said. "We must enter a season of shared sacrifice – enormous sacrifice – to fix the systemic budget problems in Louisiana."

Edwards said his plan includes a bridge to future long-term structural budget improvements for the state. He said the proposal would add one additional cent of state



Governor Edwards addresses the State of Louisiana Budget shortfall.

long-term options include cuts to the percentage of federal excess itemized deductions Louisiana taxpayers can deduct on their state tax

“Raising taxes is not my first, second, or even third option when seeking to fill the state's budget shortfall,” Edwards said. “We must enter a season of shared sacrifice – enormous sacrifice – to fix the systemic budget problems in Louisiana.”

sales tax to the existing four-cent state sales tax, but would not be applied to groceries, prescription drugs and residential utilities. He said the measure would raise \$216 million before June 30.

The governor moved on to explaining his administration's long-term options for dealing with the \$1.9 billion shortfall. He said while the drop in oil prices has contributed to the budget woes, the majority of the shortfall comes from lower-than-expected revenue and excessive use of one-time money.

Edwards said his administration will make changes to the income tax brackets in the state. Other

returns and he will propose a constitutional amendment to eliminate the deduction for federal income taxes paid in exchange for lowering individual and corporate tax rates.

A few other long-term proposals to deal with this year's budget shortfall include raising the tobacco tax to \$1.08 per pack of cigarettes, raising other excise taxes, reducing tax credits and making changes to how corporations and business are taxed, Edwards said.

Related: Tax hikes, furloughs, cuts being weighed to balance Louisiana budget

“This is not the budget plan I want to bring in my second week in

office, but these problems are bigger than our state has ever seen,” Edwards said. “The challenge before us is one we must address collaboratively and comprehensively in order for our state to prosper again.”

Edwards said he will direct each member of his cabinet to submit proposals for budget reductions based on a minimum 10 percent reduction. He said their budgets would have to reflect the current financial conditions without additional revenue.

With the proposals he plans to introduce, Edwards said the state will stabilize the budget shortfall and minimize severe cuts in the next three months, which would hurt citizens, hospitals, public schools and universities.

“My administration welcomes all constructive engagement in this process. Together we will meet this challenge, stabilize our budget, and build a solid foundation for our state's future,” he said.

Story courtesy of WDSU New Orleans.

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# Alden McDonald Delivers Keynote Address at Dedication of Freedman's Bank Building

## Data News Staff Edited Report

WASHINGTON D.C. - Liberty Bank and Trust Company President, Alden McDonald delivered keynote remarks at a U.S. Treasury Department ceremony commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company (Freedman's Bank).

At the event, the U.S. Treasury dedicated the Treasury Annex Building as the "Freedman's Bank Building". The building stands

on the site of the original Freedman's Bank that was created to help newly emancipated slaves integrate into the nation's economy.

"It is a special treat for me to be a part of this history making event

because on Monday I celebrate 50 years of involvement in the banking industry," said Alden McDonald in his remarks in the Cash Room at Treasury. "To be able to stand before you today to share that bank's history makes this a very special moment for me." In his comments, McDonald talked about the tradition of "inclusive prosperity" in the history of this country and pointed out that the establishment of the Freedman's Bank following the Civil War was one of the more inspiring efforts aimed at developing a stable,

diverse middle class and lessening the disparity between rich and poor Americans. "From 1888 to 1934 African Americans owned more than 130 banks in the U.S. and the number of black owned businesses rose from 4,000 to 50,000," said

McDonald, "Liberty was founded in 1972, following what I like to call the 2nd Civil War - The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's."

Today, there are approximately 25 African American owned institutions in the United States, including Liberty Bank and Trust. During the great recession of 2008, these institutions served some of the most economically challenged markets in the country. McDonald affirmed that African American financial institutions continue to face challenges relative to earnings, capital, and costs, but many continue to improve and have been very

successful in serving the African American populations and low-and moderate-income Americans. "We have learned how to effectively serve disadvantaged communities, build credit worthiness, and expand economic opportunity for small businesses and young professionals," continued McDonald, "and we understand that we have to be engaged in providing great-



Alden McDonald, President of Liberty Bank & Trust

er social, political and economic opportunities for the people we serve." McDonald concluded his speech challenging the Treasury Department, members of Congress

and other guest to continue the quest for inclusive prosperity, "We are stewards of a sacred American legacy that every man and woman has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Let's make future generations proud of what we accomplish together"

The Freedman's Bank was established in 1865 to create an opportunity for wealth-building among the nation's four million newly emancipated African-Americans. During its nearly 10-year existence, approximately 100,000 African-American individuals and institutions amassed \$57 million (equivalent to \$115 Billion today) in the bank's Washington, D.C. headquarters and its branches in 37 cities across 17 states. Despite the closing of the Freedman's Bank in 1874, it remains a significant part of American history and this event will highlight the historical significance of the bank and its original mission - to promote economic integration and financial inclusion.

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## NORDC Teen Council To Host Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball

NEW ORLEANS - On Friday, Jan. 22, 2016, the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) and Chevron will host a Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball. Led by the NORDC Teen Council, this free event will feature music by DJ Chicken, a photo booth, food, a special musical guest and the election of the 2016 Teen Council Mardi Gras Court. All Orleans Parish teens, ages 12-17, are invited to celebrate a happy and safe Mardi Gras with members of the NORDC Teen Council.

Supported by Chevron, the NORDC Teen Council empowers youth, ages 12 to 17, by developing a social

growth environment through structured teen programs. These emerging leaders actively participate in civic and community engagement by designing and implementing citywide teen programming. At each monthly NORDC meeting, a teen is selected to address the commission with a report on recent and current activities. The teens also speak personally about what the Teen Council means to them.

Select NORDC Teen Council members are chosen for the Chevron Future Leaders Program, which offers an array of monthly learning activities, events and trips. The program supports professional leadership and skills

development and enables early career exploration.

Teens can RSVP and reserve transportation by visiting [NORDC.org/Teens](http://NORDC.org/Teens). Formal attire is required.

For more information, please visit [NORDC.org/Teens](http://NORDC.org/Teens) or call NORDC at (504) 658-3000.

**WHAT:** NORDC Teen Council Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball

**WHEN:** Friday, Jan. 22, 2016  
7 p.m. to 10 p.m.

**WHERE:** Gallier Hall  
545 St. Charles Ave  
New Orleans, LA 70130

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# Shoot Ya Best Shot!

## Mighty Mayor's Krewe Extravaganza

Photos by Glenn Summers  
Data News Weekly Contributor



It's almost Mardi Gras, and that means some of the year's most anticipated events are taking place here in New Orleans. That includes the 2016 Mighty Mayor's Krewe Extravaganza which was held on January 16, 2016 at Xavier University Convocation Center. The event featured the Zulu Mayor & First Lady Dorian & Cendi Rawles, the Zulu Big Shot and everybody else too. Oh yeah, it's almost time, and of course, Data was there!!!

Visit [www.ladatanews.com](http://www.ladatanews.com) for more photos from these events

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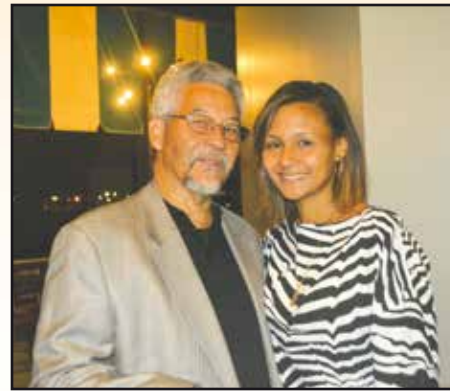
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# Shoot Ya Best Shot!

## Vaughn Fauria Celebrates Her Birthday

Photos by Terry Jones



Vaughn Fauria, Executive Director of NewCorp celebrated her birthday on Saturday, January 9th at Dook's Place, the new Sports Bar & Restaurant owned by Edgar and Gretchen Chase. It is located at Armstrong International Airport on the Southwest Airlines concourse. There were many well wishers in attendance and champagne flowed through-out the evening.

# Data News Weekly is Hiring

Data News Weekly Newspaper, The People's Paper, is hiring for two positions in our New Orleans Office.

## Editor/Reporters

### About the Job

Journalists — tired of reading of layoffs, closings, the dire straights of the profession? Recent college graduates — think your job prospects are bleak? Not with us!

At Data News Weekly, we are expanding! This includes starting a print newspaper/digital endeavor in one of the most dynamic and exciting cities, New Orleans.

If you want to be an integral part of your community, tell stories in a multi-media environment — look no further.

If interested, send your resume, cover letter and at least three clips of your work to Terry Jones Publisher, Data News Weekly, 3501 Napoleon Ave, New Orleans, LA 70125, or via email to [terrybjones@bellsouth.net](mailto:terrybjones@bellsouth.net), or call (504) 821-7421.

## Sales Manager/Retail Ad Manager

### About the Job

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# Michigan Poisons Poor to Save a Few Bucks



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

Flint, Michigan is impoverished. The auto plants have closed. Forty percent of the city's 100,000 residents live below the poverty level. It is majority minority. It's been in fiscal crisis since 2011, with the state taking over budgetary control

and a state-appointed "emergency manager" driving policy focused on cutting spending.

Flint residents are Americans, but like many impoverished Americans they are forgotten. And state officials led by Gov. Rick Snyder have shown that they consider the residents disposable.

In Flint, the water supply has been poisoned by lead. Police are now delivering bottled water from door to door. But it may be too late for hundreds of kids who are already suffering from elevated levels of lead in their blood. The damage done is irreversible with lifelong consequences, including lowered intelligence and long-term mental and emotional damage.

How did this happen? The emergency manager — accountable only to the governor and state officials — decided to save money by switching Flint's water supply from Lake Huron to a cheaper source, the Flint River. Only the river had been poisoned by waste from nearby factories for generations. The toxic wastes not only turned the water brown, it corroded the aged pipes of Flint's water system, unleashing lead into the water. Federal law required that the water be treated, but that would have cost \$100 a day, so it was not done.

Parents began to complain of rashes and hair loss. The state's environmental quality agency denied there was a problem. High-level

state officials knew that the water supply was lead poisoned for six months before declaring an emergency. Finally, a Flint pediatrician tested the blood of children and discovered lead levels double and even triple the prior amounts. State officials denounced her work before realizing the truth could no longer be hidden.

Finally, Gov. Snyder ended the denial. He declared an official emergency, and four days later called for delivering bottled water. The head of his environmental agency resigned. Snyder apologized for the catastrophe, but calls for him to resign continue to build.

Flint is not alone. Across America, in ghettos and barrios, reser-

ventions and rural valleys, the poor are isolated and too often forgotten. Systems basic to civilization — plumbing, water systems, school houses, garbage collection and treatment, roads and public transport — are in squalor, lacking even the investment to keep them up to minimum standards. Impoverished neighborhoods often lack hospitals, grocery stores, and decent public spaces. The poor are left to fend for themselves, rising to attention only when violence breaks out, when innocents are shot, when tragedies like Flint become public.

The cost of this callousness — in lives lost, disease, mental damage,

Commentary,  
Continued on page 9.

# The State of the Union Address: Class Act, Crass Responses



Julianne Malveaux  
NNPA Columnist

President Obama did his thing when he delivered the State of the Union address (SOTU) on Tuesday night. There was confidence in his speech, some off-the-cuff humor and a little swagger when he rattled off his accomplishments and asserted that the SOU is "strong." While I disagree with parts of the address, especially around economic issues, I was delighted with the President's forceful tone, and with his insistence of speaking both of issues and of our toxic political climate.

Our President is, above all things, consistent. He loves these United States of America, and he always has. He believes in our unity. He believes that we can come together, transcending party lines, for the good of our nation. As he always has, he spoke of bipartisan coopera-

tion, holding out an olive branch to House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI), pledging to work with him on poverty and criminal justice reform. And our president humbly shared "one of the few regrets of my presidency — that the rancor and suspicion between the parties has gotten worse instead of better".

President Obama appeals to our common sense, to our better selves, to the notion that we are all in this together in the name of our democracy. "Democracy grinds to a halt without a willingness to compromise, or when even basic facts are contested, or when we listen only to those who agree with us. Our public life withers when only the most extreme voices get all the attention. And most of all, democracy breaks down when the average person feels their voice doesn't matter; that the system is rigged in favor of the rich or the powerful or some special interest."

Thus, with spirit, Obama offered important facts about economic distribution — "After years now of record corporate profits, working families won't get more opportunity or bigger paychecks just by letting big banks or big oil or hedge funds make their own rules at everybody else's

expense. Middle-class families are not going to feel more secure because we allowed attacks on collective bargaining to go unanswered. Food Stamp recipients did not cause the financial crisis; recklessness on Wall Street did. Immigrants aren't the principal reason wages haven't gone up; those decisions are made in the boardrooms that all too often put quarterly earnings over long-term returns. It's sure not the average family watching tonight that avoids paying taxes through offshore accounts."

President Obama offered a meaty speech, with much to chew on. Much as I applauded, I was disappointed that he overstated our nation's economic success. Yes, the unemployment rate is lower, but too many people have dropped out of the labor force. Yes, there are more jobs than there were eight years ago, but there are fewer jobs than there should be. Wages are stagnant. It would not have hurt our President to examine some of our economic weakness, especially if he highlighted the legislation he has sent to this Congress that would employ more people. Touting a strong economy genuflects to those who are enjoying this strong

economy. Too many are not. I'm not sure I'd call the SOU "strong".

The President said many of the right things about education, women's issues, income inequality, and immigration; he could have said things differently, but one doesn't expect policy details from a SOU Address. I guess it is too much to ask that our President address the African American community, even in a sentence. As I listened to the speech, I hoped that, in this last address, the President might acknowledge his staunchest supporters

While President Obama exuded nothing but class, it was amazing to watch the very crass House Speaker Paul Ryan behaving like a bored child. He was mostly inexpressive, but he also fidgeted, rolled his eyes, and at one point put his hand to his nose (I think — maybe he was picking it), as if he could not be but so bothered. He never clapped nor cracked a smile at a joke. He behaved as if like he didn't want to be there.

There was more Republican crass. Are we surprised that Donald Trump was sour? Or that Marco Rubio (R-FL), the invisible Senator who deigned show up for SOU had little relevant to say? At

the same time, there was some Republican class. South Carolina governor Nikki Haley offered a well-delivered and gracious partisan response to the SOU. Some of her comments echoed those of President Obama when she noted, "Some people think that you have to be the loudest voice in the room to make a difference. That is just not true. Often, the best thing we can do is turn down the volume. When the sound is quieter, you can actually hear what someone else is saying. And that can make a world of difference."

Both Governor Haley and President Obama are asking for civility in political discourse, and the loudest voices are rejecting that. Republicans attacked Haley because she said that Republicans needed to own their part in the "erosion of public trust". President Obama optimistically declared the SOU "strong". Crass responses to Nikki Haley's comments suggest that the SOU is disruptively divided and weakened by the toxic nature of political discourse.

Julianne Malveaux is an author, economist and Founder of Economic Education. Her latest book "Are We Better Off? Race, Obama and Public Policy" is available for pre-order at [www.julianne-malveaux.com](http://www.julianne-malveaux.com).



# The African American State of the Union



**Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.**  
President, National Newspaper  
Publishers Association

While millions of people across the United States and throughout the world will continue to affirm, discuss, or respond in various ways to the last State of Union by America's first President of the United States who is an African American, there are still priority issues that challenge African Americans going forward. Of course, as one would expect and predict, President Barack H. Obama's 2016 State of the Union address was a message to all people in the U.S., as well as to all people in the global community.

President Obama's leadership will be judged by history and his legacy will be the subject of focus for generations to come. One thing, however, is for certain concerning the executive success of the Obama Administration in the face of unprecedented political opposition from the very first day that the Obama family moved into the White House.

But, in truth, the success of the President Obama is indisputable in

leading the steady recovery of the economy of the U.S. with the enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) that has enabled millions of people to acquire health care insurance, the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility and Disclosure (CARD) Act that has protected millions of people from predatory financial schemes, and the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act that has helped thousands of African Americans in particular avoid preventable home foreclosures across the nation.

Yet, there is a need, I believe to first say thank you to President Obama respectfully for his outstanding national and global leadership. Today, secondly, we are obligated to issue an independent African American State of the Union.

For more than 45 million African Americans, the State of the Union is a complexed set of realities, challenges, and opportunities. The reason why the "Black Lives Matter" movement has taken a front position in the consciousness and support from the vast majority of African Americans is because fatal police brutality has become once again too prevalent in too many of our communities. Prosecutorial misconduct that has worked to protect and shield the perpetrators of police violence demands louder outcries of national protest.



**Benjamin Chavis**

Today we remain disproportionately incarcerated in America's jails and prisons: women, men and young juveniles are overflowing behind bars. There is an urgent demand for criminal justice reform without further delay or debate. Mass incarceration is a reality for Black America that needs to be challenged and ended.

The spending and annual consumerism of African Americans continues to exceed \$1.2 trillion. Our "State of the Union" indicates glaringly that we are big spenders, but we are not big savers or investors. The economic development of our families and communities is really in our own hands. As we begin 2016, there is no greater urgency than for all of us to do more to attend to how to advance the economic sustainability of our com-

munities.

The high quality education of our children has to be at the top of our priority list for next year and beyond. Yes, also "Black Minds Matter." I highly recommend that you take the time to read and get an update about an ongoing study in the state of California that I believe will have a significant impact on national education policies and programs that are focused on the education of African American children and others who still have to grapple with inequality and inequities in the nation's educational system.

"Black Minds Matter: Supporting the Educational Success of Black Children in California, examines how the nearly 1 million Black youth in California are faring from preschool through college and reveals the distressing disparities

that newly released state and national data show persist at all levels of their educational journey. The report also highlights the groundbreaking efforts underway to reverse these trends in California and close achievement and opportunity gaps for African American students." We need a national study done based on the model developed in California.

The State of Union for African Americans simply means we have to continue to struggle for freedom, justice, equality and empowerment. We have to build alliances and coalitions to achieve progress and to maximize our continued presence and contributions to make the nation and the world a better place. But it all starts not with the government or with some outside benevolent factor.

It starts with African Americans. It starts with each one of us taking more responsibility for the improvements of our families. Yes, we have made progress! Yes, there is still much to be done. But there is many more opportunities than there are problems to move forward. The glass is not half empty, it is half full. A Luta Continua!

Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. is the President and CEO of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and can be reached for national advertisement sales and partnership proposals at: [dr.bchavis@nnpa.org](mailto:dr.bchavis@nnpa.org); and for lectures and other professional consultations at: <http://drbenjaminfchavisjr.wix.com/drbcfc>.

**Commentary, Continued from page 8.**

crime, drugs, hopelessness — are immense. This isn't about money. We pay more on the back end — in prisons and emergency rooms, cops and guards, prisons and addiction centers — than we would have to spend on the front-end investments that would give every child a chance.

Conservatives continue to call for dismantling environmental regulations. They slash budgets for policing violations by corporations or cities. They want to slash support for poverty programs and block-grant them to the states and localities. The next time you hear that rap, think of Flint, its poorest children betrayed by state officials. Think of Flint deprived even of safe water in order to save a few bucks. Think of Flint and investigate your own community — the horrors of Flint are not exclusive to that city.

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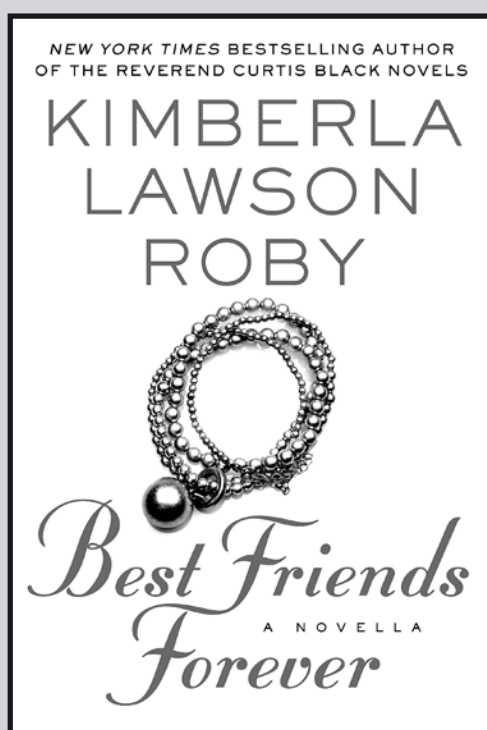
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# Best Friends Forever



**"Best Friends Forever"**  
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183 pages



Photo: Paul Crave

By The Bookworm Sez  
Data News Weekly Columnist

## You'd do almost anything for your best friend.

You'd take a bullet, take her in, or take her anywhere she needed to go. You keep her kids and her confidences. And, as in the new novel, "Best Friends Forever" by Kimberla Lawson Roby, she'd do the same for you. Probably.

Celine Richardson was absolutely furious at her husband, Keith.

It was bad enough that he came home at 5 a.m., but lying about where he'd been was the last straw. It was obvious that Keith was cheating on Celine – but what Celine couldn't figure out was why.

He claimed that she acted like she never had time for him, and Celine had to admit that she'd been awfully busy for the last few months. Building her business took a lot of her time, but didn't they have date nights? Sure, she'd been preoccupied now and then, but when they sent their ten-year-old daughter, Kassie, to spend the weekend with Celine's best friend, Lauren, didn't Celine and Keith spend alone-time together?

They did, but that wasn't good enough for him. He was cheating on Celine with some tramp, but he wouldn't come out and admit it.

And yet – that wasn't the worst thing in Celine's life.

Just a few days before Keith's first lie, she found a lump in her breast and, after rounds of doctor visits and too many tests, her worst fears were confirmed. It was malignant, but Keith was full of excuses why he couldn't accompany her to the hospital and Celine knew instantly that she could never again rely on her husband for support. Still, she wasn't alone. With the help of

her best friend and her brother - and no thanks to her no-good, absent husband - she'd be just fine.

But Keith wasn't done, and neither was cancer. Celine's recovery didn't go well, and her soon-to-be-ex had a bombshell to share, one that she sensed wasn't the whole story. And just when Celine thought she couldn't take any more, Lauren spoke her mind...

Friendship, as you know, is never one-sided. It's a give-and-take, and that includes "Best Friends Forever."

From the very first scene in which a delicious scandal erupts, author Kimberla Lawson Roby gives her fans a story that's sordid and scary but also, in an odd way, spiritually uplifting. Roby's Celine is a strong, God-loving woman who's totally out of patience, but I enjoyed that she's given a lifeline as well as two surprises, one right after the other. While that ultimately leads to what I felt was an abrupt ending that left me hanging, it also gave me hope that we haven't heard the last of these characters.

And the takeaway? I liked it, and I think you will, too: readers get a great girlfriends novel that's easy to read, super-quick to finish, and that can happily be passed around or recommended for a book group. If that sounds like a dream read for you, then get "Best Friends Forever." It could be a book you'll do anything for.

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# African American Designer Shines at Toyota

By Freddie Allen  
Senior Correspondent

Rob McConnell, the manager for body engineering at the Toyota Technical Center said that he often draws inspiration from the fashion industry.

"A little secret, hopefully no one is recording, but me and my wife sit and watch 'Project Runway,'" McConnell told a small group of Black journalists at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. "Yeah, I'll admit it."

McConnell said that, in a lot of ways, fashion designers are engineers.

"It's all connected. You gotta pull from a lot of different places to get your inspiration, your ideas," said McConnell. "You gotta come up with something new. That means you have to look outside the box."

McConnell said that he gets excited about the fashion industry and how we can marry the fashion industry to the development and design of the vehicle and how we can execute it through engineering.

McConnell discovered that he was passionate about design at an early age, as he played with Matchbox cars, Hot Wheels and Legos. He also competed in the Boy Scouts' pinewood derby.



"That's engineering and that's design," said McConnell. "That's the biggest challenge that we have when we're kids, realizing that this excitement may actually lead to bigger and better things."

For McConnell, those bigger and better things included a 15-year (and counting) professional career at the Japanese automaker and a number of United States patents related to his work. According to a company biography, McConnell served as the "project design lead for multiple North America Production vehicles including the dramatically restyled 2013 Toyota Avalon."

McConnell was also the team leader for the body and exterior

for the 2014 Toyota Camry, Toyota Sienna, Toyota Venza, and Toyota Tundra. Now he manages exterior lighting development for vehicles like the Toyota Camry and Toyota Avalon.

McConnell noted that eyewear has risen as a fashion statement in recent years.

"A lot of people have turned what's functional into a fashion element and that's something that you can execute in a car. How do we do that? We do that in the headlights," said McConnell. "The headlights are a statement, they are a signature, they are the eyes of the vehicle, and with the 2016 Toyota Avalon, we refined

the daytime running lights."

McConnell said that when you see the 2016 Toyota Avalon coming down the road or in your review mirror, you know exactly what it is and his goal was to create a memorable experience for Toyota customers.

"Your eyes can tell a story and the eyes of the vehicle can tell a story," said McConnell. "They speak to the depths of the vehicle and the soul of the vehicle and that's what I hope to accomplish with the future vehicles that I work on."

McConnell suggested that young people who are interested in going into engineering or automotive design should sharpen their critical thinking skills, get involved in team projects, or even work on cars in an effort to expose themselves to the opportunities that are out there. He said that students in middle school and high school need to think about college and their careers as early as they can.

McConnell continued: "The key point is that you gotta open your mind and it's really about understanding the opportunities that are out there. You may get into it and decide that you don't want to go into engineering, but it might spawn your thought to go in a different direction, which is really the push."

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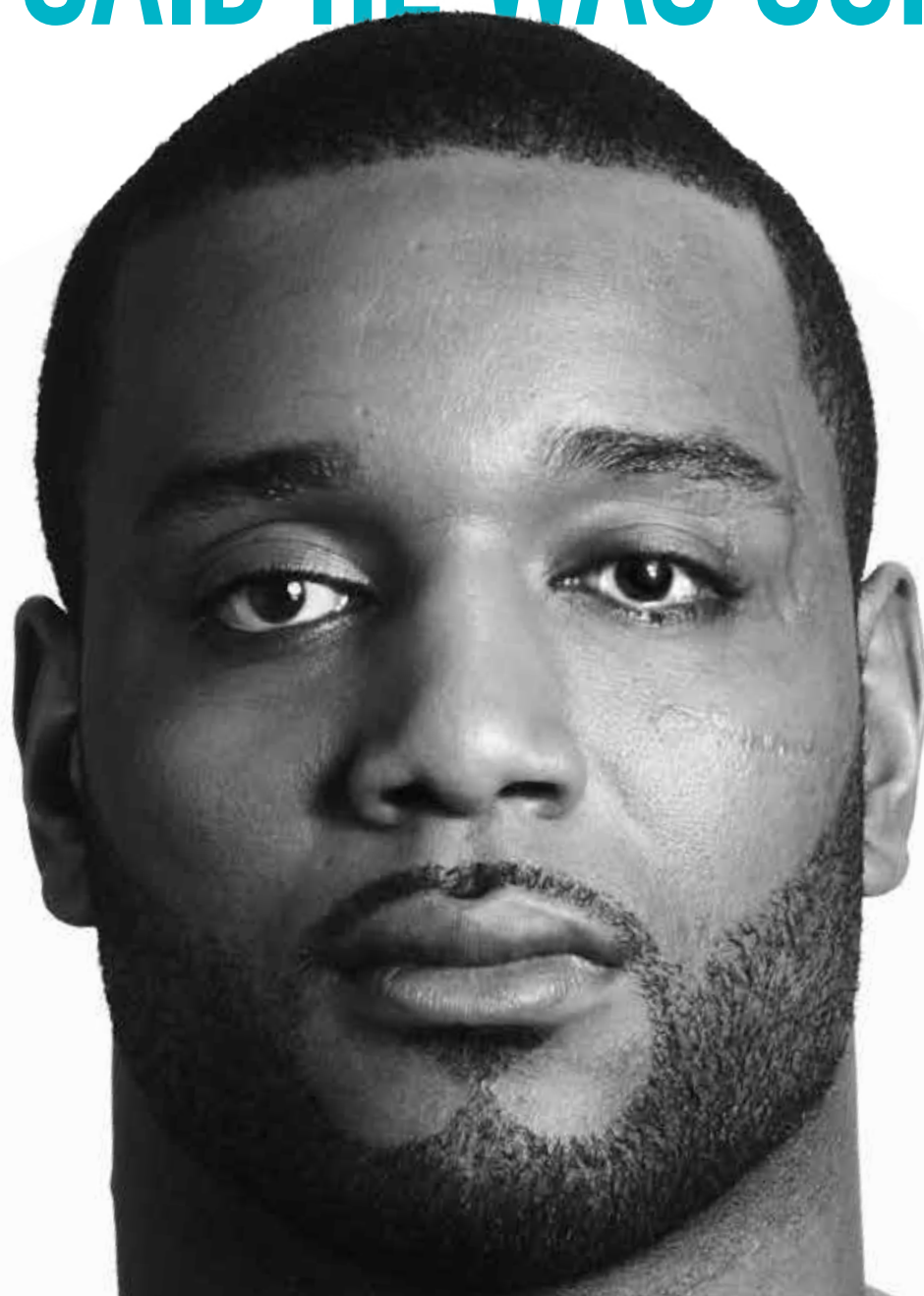
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