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Analysis reveals Republican voter fraud crackdown is simply an effort to disenfranchise Black and Hispanic voters

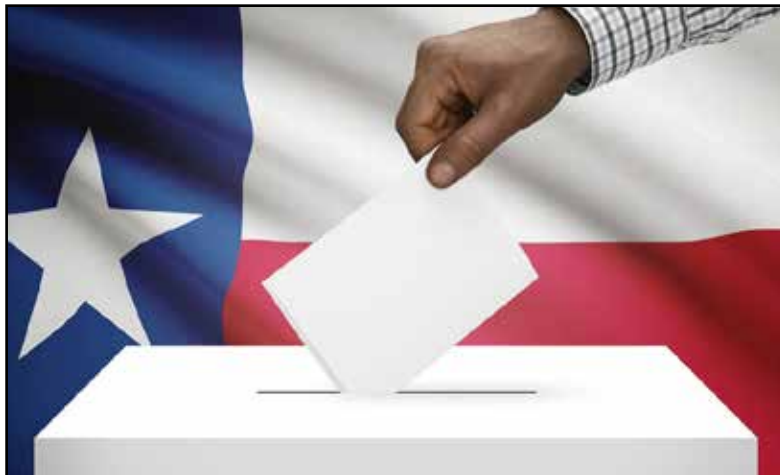
By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

The Republican Party's assault on suspected and unverified widespread voter fraud has come into view for what it is: an attempt to disenfranchise Black and Hispanic voters.

According to a study by The Washington Post, Republican-led voter fraud crackdowns disproportionately target Democrats and minorities. The newspaper's analysis found that Black and Hispanic people made up over 75 percent of defendants accused of voter fraud, while registered Democrats accounted for nearly 60 percent of those charged.

The analysis also revealed that the election integrity units established or expanded in six states after the 2020 election only obtained 47 convictions, most of which were for minor instances of voter fraud by individual voters. The analysis undermines claims by the twice-impeached and four-times indicted former President Donald Trump and Republicans that widespread voter fraud influenced the outcome of the 2020 election.

Among the key findings, registered Democrats comprised 58 percent of those charged with



"At best, these 'election integrity' units are for show, designed to placate far-right election denialists in the conservative base," Sawyer told the researchers. "At worst, they are used to justify new voting restrictions and to intimidate people — especially racial minorities — from exercising their right to vote." (Photo via NNPA)

identifiable party affiliations, compared to 23 percent for registered Republicans. The remaining cases involved defendants not registered with a specific party. The researchers determined a defendant's race, ethnicity, or political party in approximately 70 percent of cases.

Contrary to assertions by Trump and some Republican allies, the analysis revealed that the election integrity units did not uncover widespread schemes that could significantly impact election outcomes. Instead, the convictions were typically the result of small-scale fraud or errors made by individual voters, such as casting

multiple ballots, falsifying registrations, or voting while disqualified due to a conviction.

The data also showed that many pursued cases ended in dismissal, acquittal, or dropped charges. Out of 115 resolved cases as of mid-December, 42 had such outcomes, nearly equaling the number of guilty verdicts. All convictions occurred in Florida, Texas, and Ohio, with Virginia, Georgia, and Arkansas failing to secure any guilty verdicts despite substantial resources allocated.

Experts and advocates expressed

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Predicting outcomes in lymphoma

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44% of U.S. students start year behind

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New bombshell drops in the Trump saga

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People In The News ...



Beyonce Knowles



Taraji P. Henson

NDG Quote of the Week: "I was raised to believe that excellence is the best deterrent to racism or sexism. And that's how I operate my life."
— Oprah Winfrey

Beyonce Knowles

A Christmas morning fire broke out at the childhood home of global music icon Beyoncé Knowles-Carter. Authorities said the incident happened at around 2 a.m. on Monday at the home in the historic Riverside Terrace neighborhood of Houston.

According to local news affiliates, a prompt response from the Houston Fire Department, arriving at the two-story brick house within three to five minutes, prevented further devastation. District Chief Justin Barnes said



the flames were successfully contained within 10 minutes of their arrival, averting potential injuries or worse.

Beyoncé's family reportedly purchased the resi-

dence on the 2400 block of Rosedale in 1982, and the megastar herself resided there until the age of five. Notably, the home gained renewed attention when Beyoncé took photographs of the property during her visit to Houston for the Renaissance World Tour.

The now-damaged house, built in 1946, served as a backdrop to the singer's formative years and has been featured in various films and documentaries celebrating the artist's life.

Jack May, a neighbor living nearby, told KHOU-TV he witnessed the flames and emergency crews at work.

"My first thought was they have little children, so we came out, and there was no indication that there was any tragedy, so we watched and prayed for the best," May said.

"We have Beyoncé tourists here all the time; it's bizarre," May said. "This house was for sale in '93, which was when the Knowles moved out, and we took a look at it but ultimately didn't go forward with it."

For the family living in the home, now displaced, May hopes the Christmas morning fire doesn't draw additional fanfare.

"Oh, I hope [it draws] less people – there's nothing to see today that you couldn't see yesterday or six months from now," he said.

The cause of the blaze remains under investigation.

The singer who came to prominence in Destiny's Child recently made a new mark for herself with the release of the film "Renaissance."

The film accentuates her growth as a solo artist. From a vocalist who can dance at the highest level, to a leader who can knit together a family of musicians, dancers, designers and stage crew members and produce

an astonishingly beautiful concert tour. One that cataloged 56 dates in 39 cities grossing \$579M. Eighth highest grossing concert tour—ever. Highest grossing Black tour—ever. Furthermore, she's written, co-directed (James B. Merriman, Mark Ritchie) and stars in this doc/concert film.

For those who were unable to get to the concert tour in person, "Renaissance" offers a front row seat, and a visually stunning dive into the music and persona that have captivated millions for years.

Taraji P. Henson

In a recent SiriusXM interview with Gayle King, iconic actress Taraji P. Henson bravely addressed the pervasive issue of pay inequality in Hollywood, triggering an outpouring of solidarity from her peers. The 53-year-old star, celebrated for her roles in "Empire" and "The Color Purple," opened up about the substantial pay gap that Black women face in the entertainment industry.

"I'm only human and it seems every time I do something, and I break another glass ceiling, when it's time to renegotiate I'm at the bottom again like I never did



what I just did. And I'm just tired," Henson explained in an emotional Sirius XM interview. "It wears on you."

"When it's time for us to go to bat, they don't have any money," she added of her contract negotiations. "They play in your face.

And I'm just supposed to smile and grin and bear and just keep going."

Support for Henson flooded social media, with Gabrielle Union, 51, taking to X (formerly Twitter) to affirm, "Not a damn lie told. Not. A. Damn. Lie." Union emphasized the collective commitment of industry veterans to usher in the change necessary for future generations, acknowledging the toll it takes on one's mental health, soul, and career.

Keke Palmer, known for her role in "Nope," joined the conversation on Instagram, delving into the intricacies of Hollywood paychecks. Palmer drew parallels between the enter-

tainment industry and other businesses, shedding light on the collaborative efforts behind every successful actor. She discussed the financial complexities of managing a team, including agents, publicists, and assistants, echoing the sentiment that "more money means more problems," a reality in any industry.

Palmer further touched

upon the commonality of juggling multiple jobs in the entertainment sector, often out of necessity rather than choice. She highlighted the financial challenges faced by those pursuing success in America, emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurship while acknowledging its inherent expenses.

Henson's revelations struck a chord as she de-

tailed the financial strain actors endure, especially when negotiating contracts and managing the substantial expenses of their support teams.

"I'm just tired of working so hard, being gracious at what I do, getting paid a fraction of the cost," Henson replied. "I'm tired of hear-

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Candace Moore

(Black PR Wire) Race Forward recently announced Candace Moore, Esq., a policy and systems strategist with demonstrated experience addressing issues of equity and racial justice, will join the organization on January 8, 2024, as Senior Strategic Advisor. Moore brings executive government, legal practice and community-based advocacy experience to this role, in which she will focus on bridging and aligning the place-based work of Race Forward's programs and deepening collaborations. She will also lead the expansion into new sites of our place-based strategies, training



curriculum and tools for government and community.

"Race Forward is thrilled to have Candace Moore join our team during this time when attacks on communities of color continue unabated," said Race Forward President Glenn Harris. "From efforts to dis-

mantle the Voting Rights Act of 1965, to attacks on reproductive rights, and attacks on public education, we know the importance of local and regional governments working to advance racial justice and democracy. The experience Candace brings with a rich background and expertise in government and community-based work will allow her to develop innovative strategies and initiatives to advance racial equity and democracy in communities across this country."

Race Forward's Place-Based Strategy works locally and trans-locally to implement organizational

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Remembering the icons we lost in 2023

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

In a year of achievements and setbacks, 2023 said goodbye to several significant personalities who left a lasting impression on the entertainment, sports, civil rights, and art industries. Their achievements have influenced countless generations. Here, we list just some of those losses.

• Richard Roundtree: Iconic Star of "Shaft" (1942–2023)

Hollywood said goodbye to Richard Roundtree, the iconic Shaft star. While forever tied to the role that made him famous in 1971, Roundtree remained active for more than four decades, leaving an enduring mark on cinema.

• Tina Turner: Legendary Singer and Performer (1939–2023)

The music world mourned the loss of Tina Turner, the legendary singer renowned for her sultry voice and a string of platinum hits. Turner's impact on the music industry and her boundless passion for life captivated millions worldwide.

• Andre Braugher: Acclaimed Actor (1962–2023)

The acting community bid farewell to Andre Braugher, an acclaimed actor known for his roles in "Homicide" and "Brooklyn-Nine-Nine." Braugher's extraordinary talent earned acclaim, particular as Det. Frank Pembleton on "Homicide." Nominated for an Emmy 11 times, Braugher won the award four times.

• Harry Belafonte: Singer, Actor, and Civil Rights Activist (1927–2023)

The world said goodbye to Harry Belafonte, a singer, actor, and staunch civil rights activist. Belafonte's lifetime of activism transformed the arts while advocating for civil rights, leaving an enduring legacy.

• Richard Hunt: Visionary Sculptor and Art Pioneer (1935–2023)

The art world bid farewell to Richard Hunt, a trailblazing sculptor and the first Black artist to receive a solo retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. With over 160 public sculptures across the U.S., Hunt's seven-decade career left an indelible mark on contemporary art, influencing generations.

• George McGinnis: Indiana Basketball Legend (1951–2023)

Indiana mourned the loss of basketball legend George McGinnis, whose impact on the sport spanned from his All-American days at Indiana University to his championship runs with the Pacers. McGinnis will be remembered as a symbol of Hoosier basketball excellence.

• Jean Knight: Soulful Songstress and Grammy-Nominated Artist (1943–2023)

The soulful voice behind "Mr. Big Stuff," Jean Knight, passed away, leaving a void in the world of R&B. Knight's legacy extends beyond her musical achievements.

• George "Funky" Brown: Kool & The Gang Drummer and Songwriter (1949–2023)

The rhythmic heartbeat of Kool & The Gang, George "Funky" Brown, left an indelible mark with his contributions to iconic songs like "Celebration" and "Ladies Night." Brown's musical genius and resilience were evident even in the face of a battle with stage-4 cancer.

• D.J. Hayden: Former NFL Cornerback and Athlete (1989–2023)

Tragedy struck the sports world with the untimely death of former NFL cornerback D.J. Hayden. The car crash that claimed his life has left the sports community in shock. Hayden's

athleticism and contributions to the game will be remembered.

• C-Knight (Arnez Blount): Rapper and "Cha Cha Slide" Creator (1971–2023)

The hip-hop community lost a creative force with the passing of C-Knight, known for birthing the international dance craze with the "Cha Cha Slide." His legacy lives on through the rhythmic beats that brought joy to countless dance floors, making him a lasting presence in music.

• Walter Davis: NBA All-Star and UNC Basketball Legend (1954–2023)

UNC basketball mourned the loss of one of its finest players, Walter Davis, a two-time All-ACC honoree and NBA All-Star. Davis, whose basketball prowess extended from the 1976 USA Olympic team to an illustrious NBA career, remains a symbol of skill and sportsmanship.

• Bertie Bowman: Capitol Hill Veteran with a Legacy of Service (1931–2023)

Capitol Hill bid farewell to Bertie Bowman, whose more than 60 years of service spanned roles from custodial to politically significant. Colleagues and the Capitol community will remember his legacy as a dedicated public servant.

• Rudolph Isley: Founding Father of The Isley Brothers (1938–2023)

The music world said goodbye to Rudolph Isley, a founding member of The Isley Brothers. His musical genius and timeless contributions to the industry, including hits like "Shout" and "Twist and Shout," cemented the Isley Brothers' place in music history.

• Charles Porter Jr.: Houston's First Black Reporter and Resonant Voice (1942–2023)

Houston mourned the loss of Charles Porter Jr., a trailblazer who became the city's first Black reporter and anchor. His deep, reso-

nant voice and coverage of significant events, including the swearing-in of late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, left an indelible mark on Houston's media landscape.

• Hughes Van Ellis: Tulsa Race Massacre Survivor and WWII Veteran (1921–2023)

The nation bid farewell to Hughes Van Ellis, one of the last surviving witnesses of the Tulsa Race Massacre. A proud US Army veteran who fought alongside the British in WWII, Ellis symbolized resilience and a living connection to a crucial chapter in American history.

• Zoleka Mandela: Granddaughter of Nelson Mandela (1980–2023)

South Africa mourned the loss of Zoleka Mandela, Nelson Mandela's granddaughter. Her battle with cancer came to an end, leaving behind a legacy intertwined with the struggle for justice and freedom.

• Irish Grinstead: R&B Singer of 702 (1979–2023)

R&B lost a soulful voice with the passing of Irish Grinstead, part of the award-winning trio 702. Fans all over the world will remember her contribution to the late 1990s R&B scene and her enduring influence on the genre.

• Clarence Avant: "The Black Godfather" of Music (1931–2023)

The music industry lost a true legend with the passing of Clarence Avant, known as "The Black Godfather." Those he inspired will always recognize Avant's contribution to the entertainment industry.

• Sheila Oliver: New Jersey Lieutenant Governor (1952–2023)

New Jersey mourned the loss of Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, the first Black woman to serve in a statewide elected position. Oliver's dedication to public service

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Predicting lymphoma patients' treatment outcomes

Cedars-Sinai Cancer Investigators Discover New Way to Predict How Patients With an Immune-System Cancer Will Fare After Bone Marrow Transplant

(Newswise) — LOS ANGELES -- Cedars-Sinai Cancer investigators have discovered a new way to predict whether a cancer of the immune system will recur in patients treated with a bone marrow transplant. Their study, published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, is the first to use a novel technique called spatial profiling to predict patient outcomes, and could lead to more precisely targeted treatment.

"Our method of predicting how Hodgkin lymphoma patients will respond to treatment was more accurate than the most advanced method in current use," said Akil Merchant, MD, co-director of the Lymphoma Program at Cedars-Sinai and co-senior author of the study. "Our paper is also one of the first to show that this leading-edge technique can be adapted for a clinical setting—a finding that can potentially be used across cancer types."

Hodgkin lymphoma is a cancer that affects the lymphatic system, a network of organs and tissues—including the bone marrow, lymph



Akil Merchant, MD, led a research team at Cedars-Sinai that discovered a new way to predict how Hodgkin lymphoma patients will respond to bone marrow transplant. (Cedars-Sinai)

nodes and mucous membranes—that helps protect the body from infection.

To treat Hodgkin lymphoma, doctors commonly perform a stem cell transplant, using healthy blood stem cells from the patient's own body, to help the bone marrow recover and to create new immune cells that can fight the cancer cells.

"Our new test, developed at Cedars-Sinai, allows us to identify a group of patients who will likely remain disease-free after this stem cell transplant," Merchant said.

"For these post-transplant patients, the goal is to end subsequent treatments, sparing them from additional therapy with potentially life-threatening side-effects. Our findings could also help us design clinical trials to identify therapies to help patients not cured by their transplant."

In this study, done in collaboration with Christian Steidl, MD, PhD, of British Columbia Cancer, investigators analyzed biopsies from 169 patients with Hodgkin lymphoma. They

compared the cells and tissues immediately surrounding tumors from patients cured by bone marrow transplant with those from patients whose cancer returned following transplant.

By looking at the distance between the cancerous cells and other cell types, they were able to predict how the cancer would respond to a transplant using the patient's own stem cells.

"Our study made use of massive datasets combined with machine learning that enabled us to focus on two

or three key data points that could be used in a clinical test," Merchant said. "The test could be widely used to predict which patients are at high risk for relapse after transplant and allow clinicians to tailor their therapy accordingly."

Alexander Xu, PhD, research scientist at Cedars-Sinai Cancer and co-first author of the study emphasized the value of such a quantitative tool. "Diagnosis and prediction often involve judgment calls. Because our study is quantitative, it will be important in maintaining consistent results from patient to patient and clinic to clinic," Xu said.

The investigators are exploring creation of such a test. They are also pursuing projects to identify similar predictive tests for other types of cancer.

"This work opens new avenues for the development of spatial biomarkers that can guide treatment of cancer patients in a precise, targeted way," said Dan Theodorescu, MD, PhD, director of Cedars-Sinai Cancer and the PHASE ONE Distinguished Chair.

"Translation of this leading-edge research to a test that can be clinically deployed will help bring the promise of precision medicine to increasing numbers of patients—and will eventually benefit patients with many cancer types."

Funding: The study is supported by Terry Fox Research Institute Program Project Grants 1061 and 1108; Genome Canada Large Scale Applied Research Project grant 13124; Genome BC grant 271LYM; Canadian Institutes of Health Research grant GP1-155873 and Foundation grant 148393; Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute grant 705288; the BC Cancer Foundation; Paul G. Allen Frontiers Group Distinguished Investigator grant 12829; the Japanese Society for The Promotion of Science; the Uehara Memorial Foundation; the Lymphoma Research Foundation; The Kanae Foundation for the Promotion of Medical Science; and a Lymphoma Research Foundation Lymphoma Scientific Research Mentoring Program scholarship.

UTHealth Houston researchers find link between lonely veterans and firearm purchases

Newswise — Low-income U.S. veterans who are experiencing feelings of loneliness are more likely to purchase firearms, according to new research from UTHealth Houston.

A study led by principal investigator Alexander Testa, PhD, assistant professor, and co-investigator Jack Tsai, PhD, professor, from the Department of Management, Policy and Community Health with UTHealth

Houston School of Public Health, was published recently in *Social Science & Medicine*.

"Loneliness was significantly associated with a higher likelihood of purchasing a firearm in the past year," Testa said. "To put the findings in context, loneliness was measured on a scale of zero to six, and the findings showed that 13.7% of persons with a loneliness score of six had purchased a

new firearm in the past year, compared to 5.1% of persons with a loneliness score of zero."

Researchers collected data from a national survey conducted in December 2022 and January 2023 involving 1,004 low-income U.S. veterans. Utilizing Firth logistic regression, a method designed to address biases in small-sample studies, the study aimed to explore the association between loneli-

ness and firearm acquisition in the past year.

Among the key findings, approximately 5.4% of all respondents reported purchasing a new firearm within the past year. The study revealed a positive association between loneliness and recent firearm acquisition, even after controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, and household variables.

"There are public health concerns about social isola-

tion and safe firearm ownership as separate issues among veterans, and this study highlights a potential important connection between the two," said Tsai, who is also regional dean in San Antonio. "Helping address one issue may affect the other, and it'll be worthwhile to examine this further and determine whether this connection also exists among other adults."

Investigators also discov-

ered the potential risks associated with both loneliness and firearm ownership, including veteran suicide. The researchers said the findings show the necessity of targeted interventions to address loneliness and promote safe firearm practices within the veteran community, and may contribute valuable insights for future efforts to improve the mental health and well-being of U.S. military veterans.



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Biden commutes sentences and pardons marijuana offenses in sweeping criminal justice reform

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent

In what the White House called a decisive move echoing the core tenet of equal justice under law, President Joe Biden announced a set of substantial clemency actions aimed at addressing glaring disparities within the U.S. criminal justice system. The president, underscoring bipartisan consensus on the need for a fair and unbiased legal framework, declared a series of important measures toward realizing the promise of equal justice in American communities.

"I am announcing additional steps I am taking to make the promise of equal justice a reality," Biden declared, emphasizing that equal justice is a "foundational principle on which America was built."

The first measure involves commuting sentences for 11 individuals serving extended terms for non-violent drug offenses. Among the notable cases receiving commutations are Darryl Allen Winkfield of Augusta, Ga., Leroy Lymons of Pensacola, Fla.,



The president, underscoring bipartisan consensus on the need for a fair and unbiased legal framework, declared a series of important measures toward realizing the promise of equal justice in American communities. (Photo via NNPA)

and Earlie Deacon Barber of Dothan, Ala., each of whom was sentenced to life in prison. Winkfield was convicted in 1998 of conspiracy to distribute and to possess cocaine. Biden commuted the sentence, leaving intact a 10-year probation when Winkfield is released in April 2024.

In 2012, Lymons was sentenced to life for conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of a mixture and substance containing a detectable amount of cocaine. The commutation clears Lymons for release after 27 years. In 2009, Barber

was sentenced in Alabama for conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute five kilograms of a mixture and substance containing cocaine base. He will now be released in April 2024, with a remaining 10 years of supervised probation.

In the president's words, these individuals "would have been eligible for reduced sentences" under current standards. He said the move underscores his administration's commitment to rectifying outdated and unjust sentencing practices.

Drawing attention to the crack-to-powder sentenc-

ing disparity, Biden noted that he supports initiatives to eliminate the sentencing difference, asserting that it "does not advance public safety." He said the move aligns with his broader push for criminal justice reform.

"I have exercised my clemency power more than any recent predecessor has at this point in their presidency," Biden stated. "And while today's announcement marks important progress, my administration will continue to review clemency petitions and deliver reforms that advance equal justice, address racial disparities, strengthen public safety, and enhance the wellbeing of all Americans."

The White House insisted that law enforcement and experts now recognize that the crack-to-powder sentencing disparity is not

supported by science, does not advance public safety, and disproportionately impacts Black communities.

Administration officials said Attorney General Merrick Garland has also expressed support for eliminating the crack-to-powder sentencing disparity and has directed federal prosecutors to promote the equivalent treatment of crack and powder cocaine offenses.

"As the president proposed as a senator in 2007, a fair criminal justice system requires that Congress end, once and for all, this unjust and racially discriminatory sentencing disparity," the White House said in a statement. "And Congress must make these changes fully retroactive." Building on his previous pardon of simple possession offenses, Biden added, "It's time that we right

these wrongs."

The move extends to marijuana offenses committed on certain federal lands, encapsulating a comprehensive approach to marijuana reform, to which the president also signed a proclamation to pardon additional offenses related to the use and possession of marijuana under federal and D.C. law. "Too many lives have been upended because of our failed approach to marijuana. It's time that we right these wrongs," Biden insisted.

"Just as no one should be in a federal prison solely due to the use or possession of marijuana, no one should be in a local jail or state prison for that reason, either. That's why I continue to urge governors to do the same with regard to state offenses and applaud those who have since taken action."

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Forty-Four percent of public school students began 2023-24 year behind grade level in at least one academic subject, principals say

WASHINGTON —

Public school leaders nationwide estimated that, on average, 44 percent of their students did not begin the 2023-24 school year at grade level in at least one academic subject, an improvement over the 49 percent reported for the start of the prior school year, according to data released today by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the statistical center within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

"The information we are releasing provides valuable context for the challenges facing public schools as they continue the vital work of education recovery, including staffing and academic gaps for students," said NCES Commissioner Peggy G. Carr. "On one hand, 44 percent of students are behind in at least one subject, school



Kenny Elitson / Unsplash

leaders tell us. On the other hand, this does signal progress compared with the start of the prior year, when a larger share of students, 49 percent, were considered behind academically."

The new data also shed light on teaching vacancies. Twenty-one percent of public schools reported having multiple teaching vacancies in October 2023,

the data show, down from 26 percent a year earlier. Multiple teaching vacancies were more prevalent in schools with 1,000 or more students, those in high-poverty neighborhoods, and in schools serving primarily students of color.

For non-teaching staff, 29 percent of public schools reported multiple vacancies. Some of the

non-teaching staff positions for which the highest percentages of vacancies were reported include tutors (11 percent), classroom aides (8 percent), and transportation staff (7 percent).

The new results from the School Pulse Panel (SPP) also shed light on the tutoring programs available in public schools. Most public schools — 82 percent — offer

some type of tutoring support in 2023-24. In the prior academic year, about 83 percent of schools reported offering some type of tutoring support. Thirty-nine percent of public schools offer high-dosage tutoring (HDT) in 2023-24, and 52 percent offer standard tutoring.

Additional data collected from 99 public K-12 schools in the U.S. Outlying Areas (OA) — American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands — are also available. Results from this collection include the finding that an estimated 52 percent of OA public school students did not begin the 2023-24 school year at grade level in at least one academic subject, according to school principals.

The findings released today are part of an experimental data product from the School Pulse Panel,

NCES's innovative approach to delivering timely information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on public K-12 schools in the U.S. The data, collected between October 10 and October 24 of this year, came from 1,421 participating public K-12 schools from every state and the District of Columbia.

Experimental data products are innovative statistical tools created using new data sources or methodologies. Experimental data may not meet all of NCES's quality standards but are of sufficient benefit to data users in the absence of other relevant products to justify release. NCES clearly identifies experimental data products upon their release.

All data released today can be found on the School Pulse Panel dashboard at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp>.

University delves into how technology and economics can help save endangered species

(Newswise) — COLUMBUS, Ohio — A lot has changed in the world since the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was enacted 50 years ago in December 1973.

Two researchers at The Ohio State University were among a group of experts invited by the journal *Science* to discuss how the ESA has evolved and what its future might hold.

Tanya Berger-Wolf, faculty director of Ohio State's Translational Data Analytics Institute, led a group that wrote on "Sustainable, trustworthy, human-technology partnership." Amy Ando, professor and chair of the university's Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics, wrote on "Harnessing economics for effective implementation."

Berger-Wolf and her colleagues wrote, "We are in the middle of a mass extinction without even knowing all that we are losing and how fast." But technology can help address that.

For example, they note the value of tools like camera traps that survey animal species and smartphone apps that allow citizen scientists to count insects, identify bird songs and report plant observations.

New tech has allowed scientists to monitor animal and plant populations at scale for the first time, said Berger-Wolf, who is also a professor of computer science and engineering, evolution, ecology and organismal biology, and electrical and computer engineering. One challenge is to find new ways to extract

all the information from these new sources of data.

"But even with all this data, we are still monitoring only a tiny fraction of the biodiversity out in the world," she said. "Without that information, we don't know what we have, how different species are doing and whether our policies to protect endangered species are working."

Most important, Berger-Wolf said, is the need to make sure to keep humans in the process. Technology needs to connect data, connect different regions of the world, connect people to nature and connect people to people.

"We don't want to sever the connection between people and nature, we want to strengthen it," she said.

"We cannot rely on technology to save the world's

biodiversity. It has to be an intentional partnership between humans and technology and AI."

Economics should be another partner in the fight to save endangered species, Ando said.

"There's this tendency to think that protecting endangered species is all about biology and ecology," Ando said. "But various tools in economics are very helpful in making sure the work we do to implement the Endangered Species Act is successful. That is not always obvious to people."

For example, bioeconomic research is a multidisciplinary effort between economists and biologists to work together to see how human behavior interacts with ecological processes and systems.

"We have to take into account feedback effects. People take an action, and that changes the ecosystem and that changes what people do," she said. "We need to capture those feedback effects."

The result can be novel ways to protect endangered species, such as "pop-up" habitat modification. For example, ranchers can take down fences temporarily while elk are migrating to allow them to move freely. Rice fields can be temporarily flooded during shorebird migration to give them a place to rest and feed on their travels.

We can "draw upon economics to optimize the timing, location and extent of temporary actions to maximize their net benefits to society," Ando wrote in *Science*.

Another way economics can help is to develop policies that protect species before they become so threatened that they need ESA protection.

A common issue is that multiple landowners will all need to work together to protect the habitat of threatened species. But often, if some landowners take actions to protect a species, other landowners will think they don't have to.

"Economists have been working to understand how we can coordinate landowners where we don't have to implement draconian land use regulations, but still protect habitat," Ando said.

"That is a very promising tactic that can protect species and also reduce the cost to people of doing so."

New bombshell audio shows Trump and RNC Chair Rona McDaniels allegedly conspiring to steal election in Michigan

By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Senior National
Correspondent



According to newly revealed audio recordings, former President Donald Trump personally pressured two Republican members of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers in Michigan not to certify the 2020 presidential election results.

The recordings, obtained and reported by *The Detroit News*, show Trump urging two canvassers, Monica Palmer and William Hart-

mann, not to sign the certification documents and suggesting they would look "terrible" if they did. Trump also told them, "We've got to fight for our country," and vowed to provide them with attorneys. The revelation of Trump's direct involvement in attempting

to undermine Biden's win in Michigan comes as he faces more than 90 criminal charges related to the 2020 election.

The Nov. 17, 2020, phone call, which also involved Republican National Committee Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel, urged canvassers to do whatever it took to keep Trump in office.

"We've got to fight for our country," said Trump on the recordings, which the newspaper said were made by a person present for the call with Palmer and Hartmann. "We can't let

these people take our country away from us."

McDaniel, a Michigan native and the leader of the Republican Party nationally, said at another point in the call, "If you can go home tonight, do not sign it. ... We will get you attorneys." To which Trump added, "We'll take care of that."

Palmer and Hartmann left the canvassers meeting without signing the official statement of votes for Wayne County, and the following day, they unsuccessfully attempted to re-

scind their votes in favor of certification, filing legal affidavits claiming they were pressured. The moves from Palmer, Hartmann, and Trump, had they been successful, threatened to throw the statewide certification of Michigan's 2020 election into doubt.

The newspaper noted that the revelation of the contents of the call with the twice-impeached and four-times indicted former president comes as he faces four counts of criminal conspiracy to defraud the United States and its voters of the

rightful outcome of the election. Efforts to prevent certification of Democrat Joe Biden's 154,000-vote victory in Michigan are integral to the indictment.

Jonathan Kinloch, a former Democratic member of the Wayne County Board of Canvassers in November 2020, said what happened on the call with Trump was "insane."

"It's just shocking that the president of the United States was at the most minute level trying to stop the election process from happening," Kinloch said.

MOORE, from Page 2

goals in and across places. Collective power building goals include transforming the public sector to govern for racial equity, building governing power of communities of color, and building narratives

that advance a just multiracial democracy. Candace's leadership will help Race Forward to achieve scale and impact in local communities across the country.

"We are in a moment

in our fight for racial justice that demands we build new ways of collaborating and demonstrate to our communities that a system rooted in racial inclusion is worthy and can deliver a more fair and just democracy," Moore said. "This is why I am excited to step

into my next chapter at Race Forward. Throughout my career, the work of Race Forward has been an anchor grounding me in ideas, strategies, and tools to drive equity and racial justice in the communities I've served. Whether serv-

ing in Chicago as a civil rights attorney or the city's first Chief Equity Officer, my goal has always been to demonstrate that we can make real change toward racial justice."

Prior to joining Race Forward, Moore served as

the first chief equity officer for the City of Chicago; a senior staff attorney for education equity at the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights; and a campaign coordinator for the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence.

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New SPCA of Texas CEO brings his love of animals to the wider community

The acts of serving others and his community were instilled in the fiber of Chris Luna's being at an early age. And the resulting actions continue today.

Luna was named President & CEO of the SPCA of Texas in late November 2023, and he hit the ground running. His first day—November 29th—was spent meeting with employees at the Ellis County Animal Care Center in Waxahachie, Texas, the Dallas Animal Care Center, the Myron K. Martin Spay/Neuter & Wellness Clinic, and the Dealy Animal Rescue Center—all in Dallas.

Mid-afternoon of the same day, Luna held a Press Conference at the organization's headquarters alongside SPCA of Texas Board Chair Hiren Patel. With a look of pride, Patel noted, "Chris is an inspiring and innovative leader with deep experience and a proven track record in expanding organizational reach and impact leading to increased operational excellence. The Board search committee worked diligently for the last nine months to find the right candidate and we are confident that Chris will guide the SPCA of Texas into a bright future."

When Patel introduced him, Luna graciously spoke about his delight in



Chris Luna was named President & CEO of the SPCA of Texas in late November 2023 (Courtesy photo)

being chosen for such a unique opportunity. "Leading the SPCA of Texas into its next chapter of serving the animals and people of North Texas is an honor and a privilege," he said. "I am beyond thrilled to work together with this exceptional organization of dedicated staff and volunteers as well as community partners to drive meaningful programmatic impact."

When asked what about this job made him know it was the job for him, Luna didn't miss a beat when

he responded, "animals!" He has always loved animals and grew up with pets including a Dachs-hund named Dodie (after a character in a '60s sitcom), Thor (a German Shepherd), rabbits, fish, gerbils and "all kinds of animals."

Luna was quick to add that the job's appeal is about combining his passion for animals and working with a great organization.

"I really feel like the

See SPCA, Page 13

← HENSON, from Page 2

ing my sisters saying the same thing over and over. I hear people go, 'You work a lot.' I have to. The math ain't mathing."

She pointed out that behind every successful actor is a team of people supporting them. "Big bills come with what we do. We don't do this alone," she said. "The fact that we're up here,

there's a whole entire team behind us. They have to get paid."

The actress conveyed frustration at consistently finding herself negotiating as though she had not already broken barriers in her career. Henson candidly shared the industry's tendency to lack financial support when it comes time

for equitable compensation negotiations.

Despite these challenges, Henson emphasized the importance of diversifying income streams. Beyond acting, she has launched side projects, such as her TPH haircare line, to fortify her financial standing and safeguard her well-being in an industry that, as she put it, "if you let it, it'll steal your soul."



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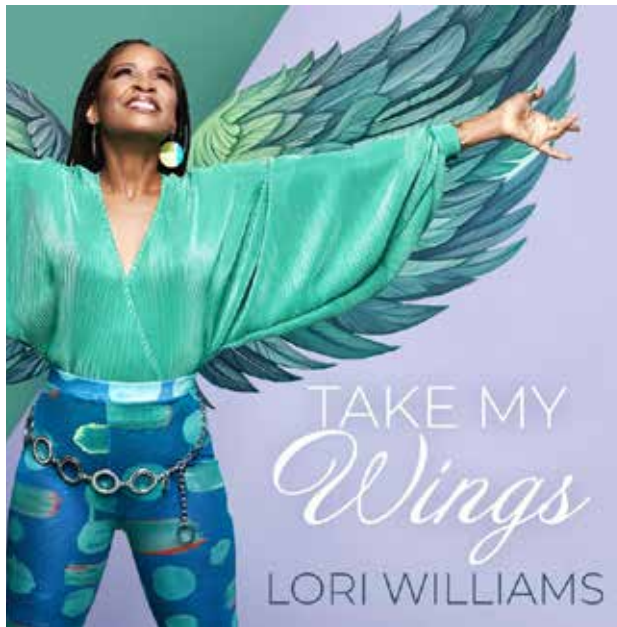
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Lori Williams' latest release is medicine to the ears for jazz fans

(Newswire.com) - Lori Williams released her latest independent single "Take My Wings" [Lori-Jazz]. This song is an uplifting song of faith and unconditional love, showcasing Lori's seamless vocal prowess, and relatable and uplifting lyrical writing skills.

Charting at #1 on the UK Soul Chart Breakers, a noteworthy accomplishment for a vocalist, "Take My Wings" is a timeless message of strength and faith while overcoming adversity and rising above fear.

Described by President Joseph R. Biden as having "the voice of an angel...absolutely amazing," Lori Williams has a most



impressive resume as an international recording artist, artist in residence (Old Dominion University / NCA&T), award-winning

music educator, veteran choral director, songwriter/producer, musical theater actress, non-profit business owner (PositiveMusicPM.

org), radio announcer/voiceover artist, and producer/host (St. James Live ATL/Sunday Jazz Lounge) with over 30 years of experience.

This Washington, D.C. native and resident of Atlanta, GA, has an engaging reputation and level of respect in the music business that is top-shelf and unimpeachable. She was honored as the 2023 Excellence in Arts and Entertainment Award recipient by The Atlanta Chapter of the National Hampton Alumni Association. Lori Williams has been highly regarded and aligned with artists like Ella Fitzgerald, Nancy Wilson, Dianne Reeves, and Bette Midler.

Following her successful

2022 release of "Too Late (It's My Time)" for which she received two Platinum Medals by the 2022 LIT Talent Awards under the category Best Original Song Music Video and Best Audience Impact Music Video, Williams has teamed up again with producer Chris "Big Dog" Davis to co-write "Take My Wings". Lori Williams was inspired to pen lyrics from motivational words shared with her by her late parents (Robert and Myrtle Williams).

For over three decades, Lori's collaborations in-studio and on-stage with Nathan East, Najee, Stanley Jordan, Tom Browne, Maysa, Lloyd Price, The Blackbyrds, and other no-

table artists further solidify the peer acclaim of this versatile songstress. As Michael J. West (Jazz music critic) states, "She's got a soft-edged, creamy voice that's a natural vehicle for introspection, but also one that you could happily curl up and get lost in. It's stunning, supple, subtle, sumptuous, soulful music—let's call that the five S's of Lori Williams, shall we?"

"Take My Wings" is being well-received by Jazz, R&B, and Christian / Inspiration formats for its positive messages and universal theme.

Download and listen to her music on all streaming sites and visit her website (LoriJazz.com) to stay connected.

SPCA, from Page 8

SPCA of Texas is a community jewel; a long-tenured, respected organization that everybody loves and respects," Luna said. "I'm the custodian and it's my job to make sure this institution does well, grows, and remains a great community asset. Then, I hand it off to the next leader."

Something else Luna's parents instilled in him that overflows into this leadership position is to be involved in his community—whether it was school, boy scouts, or their church—and to give back. His parents were overachievers and led by example.

Both were the first high school and college graduates in their families. Mr. Luna was an engineer for the same oil and gas company in Houston for almost 40 years, until retirement. Mrs. Luna served as a Registered Nurse in labor and delivery at a hospital for many years before she joined the administration of the Visiting Nurses Association in Houston, where she retired as an executive. All the while raising eight successful children and volunteering as

much as possible.

Chris was seventh of those eight.

One of his dad's favorite volunteer activities was being a Boy Scout leader. Luna loved the Boy Scouts as well, and worked hard to become an Eagle Scout, the highest honor awarded by the organization. "I really liked the Boy Scouts and what it taught me and I'm the over achiever type. That and my competitive nature are what really helped me achieve the Eagle Scout award," he said.

Luna graduated college and Law School from The University of Texas at Austin and immediately moved to Dallas in 1986 to clerk for Chief Judge Robert C. McGuire, U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Texas. This was an exciting experience for Luna for several reasons. Not only because he wasn't representing a client but rather was a lawyer to the judge, conducting research and drafting opinions. "I also got to experience some great lawyers arguing cases and watching them in court. But, the clerkship also brought me to Dallas,"

he smiled.

Luna was embraced by several communities within Dallas he said. "I was kind of an outsider, a native of Houston moving in from Austin, but I met so many lawyers, UT alumni, individuals from my neighborhood, and others. Within five years, I was elected to serve on the Dallas City Council.

"That's what I love about the Dallas area," Luna added. "If you're willing to show up, participate, and be involved, Dallas will love you back."

Luna practiced law at prestigious firms in Dallas for more than a decade before joining T-Mobile where he served for more than 18 years in several roles, including Vice President, Legal Affairs and Chief Counsel, Sales & Distribution. "I liked being at law firms, but, I really liked being an in-house lawyer," he said. "I preferred working directly with the businesspeople—waking up thinking about that one client and going to bed thinking about that one client."

Luna brings that same focus to the SPCA of Texas and has begun immersing

himself into the organization. Often when an outsider is brought in to lead an organization, it is expected that changes will be made pretty quickly. It's just the opposite with Luna and the SPCA of Texas. He plans to spend time getting to know the SPCA of Texas people and structure.

"Because the Board brought someone in from outside, it says they are willing to change things, if necessary," Luna said. "However, I want to move slowly and get to know the organization, its processes, and its structure; I want to make sure we have the right people in the right place before any changes are made."

In the few weeks that Luna has been in the President & CEO position he has put his focus and service qualities to work at the SPCA of Texas. He already has worked at one of the organization's monthly Drive-thru Pet Pantries (every 3rd Sunday), served food at the employee Holiday Luncheon, and attended the Home for the Holidays Adoption Pavilion at NorthPark Center.

Luna believes that the SPCA of Texas "front lin-

ers"—the employees that work directly with the clients; people that handle adoptions, investigations, and community impact events; as well as those that care for the animals and work with the public need to be invested in and supported. "These are the people we need to take care of, and I want to be sure we are offering appropriate professional development and training opportunities for them," he explained.

In the 21st century non-profit arena, an organization's leader is expected to be a primary development partner to raise money. This is another area where Luna excels. He already has identified numerous generous philanthropists in the North Texas donor world that are not affiliated with the SPCA of Texas and is partnering with the Development team to cultivate them. "I want to be involved in who we are talking to and identifying who we are missing," Luna said.

Not only does he have successful fund-raising experience, but Luna also has a strong understanding of development from the other side—the money

giving side. "More funders and grant-making entities are looking for results and metrics," he explained. "They want to know how their investment is going to help solve a problem and to know how results will be measured."

Chris Luna and his partner Kent Mecklenburg, who also is an animal lover, have been together for 27 years. The couple has Bacio, a Maltese, who is almost 18 years old. (Bella, Bacio's sister, went to heaven about three years ago.) They previously rescued a precious Dachs-hund, Sophie, and Rasputin, a black cat.

The couple enjoys travelling and a few years ago, began taking cruises where the itineraries allow them to visit several hot spots on one trip. "Every port is a whole new experience," Luna smiled. "We also really love visiting Nantucket in the summer where temperatures will be in the 60s and 70s while in Texas it's 110 degrees!"

Chris Luna, J.D., joining the SPCA of Texas as President & CEO has breathed new life into the organization, one that looks to a bright future ahead.

Acy Brown aims to showcase the 'The Art of Business' documentary at international film festivals

TORONTO - Dec. 26, 2023 - PRLog -- Acy Brown, acclaimed businessman and film executive, is hoping to make waves in Canada as he launches his new documentary project in early 2024.

As the home of the Toronto International Film Festival, Toronto serves as the perfect backdrop for this groundbreaking documentary. Acy's gaze is fixated upon Toronto, in hopes that his new project will make its way to this prestigious film festival in the very near future.

Reason being, TIFF is dedicated to presenting the best of international and Canadian cinema and creating transformational experiences for film lovers and creators of all ages and backgrounds. As Canada's premiere home of cinema, TIFF offers screenings, lectures, discussions, festivals, workshops, events, professional development and opportunities to meet, hear and learn from filmmakers from Canada and around the world.

"I am looking forward to taking this impactful documentary all around the world—in one way or another—and I believe that film festivals such as TIFF, Cannes Film Festival, Tribeca Festival, Raindance Film Festival, BFI London Film Festival, Atlanta Film Festival, and the Sundance Film Festival would be the perfect launchpads for this noteworthy project," stated Acy Brown.

According to their website, the Sundance Film Festival is the ultimate gathering of original storytellers and audiences seeking new voices and fresh perspectives. Their annual program includes dramatic and documentary features, short films, and episodic content. They also host daily filmmaker conversations, panel discussions, and other events. Since



1985, hundreds of films launched at the Festival have gone on to gain critical acclaim and reach new audiences worldwide.

Acy has always believed in shooting for the stars! When it comes to his brand, Acy has a vision as big as the sky. He has earned his stripes in the modeling industry, as well as in the business world; And now he is blazing new trails in the film industry. Acy along with his co-Executive Producer, Anthony Little, have created a new documentary, *The Art of Business: The Best of Both Worlds*, that is set to be released in February.

With Toronto being the host city to one of the world's largest and most prestigious film festivals, Acy sees this as the ideal time and place to heighten his visibility in North America. He is keenly aware that positioning his product—which in this case is his documentary—in front of the illustrious audience that this film festival brings would be the ideal platform to introduce this "masterpiece" documentary to the world.

As a seasoned businessman, Acy is clearly cognizant of the benefits of expanding his brand globally, via film festivals. Here's why: They provide an opportunity for filmmakers to showcase their work to a wide audience, often providing invaluable feed-

back and exposure. They also provide a platform for industry professionals to network and discuss new projects.

Moreover, networking at film festivals allows indie filmmakers to tap into a vast pool of industry expertise and knowledge, enabling them to gain insights, advice, and even critical feedback on their work. The aforementioned benefits confirm the fact that exploring film festival opportunities would be a smart business move for Acy's multimedia company, which includes the Acy Brown Media Group [ABMG].

For his first ABMG production project, Acy joined forces with Anthony Little of Charlotte, North Carolina to create this riveting and transformative documentary, *The Art of Business: The Best of Both Worlds*. This notable film captures the essence of grit, determination, resilience, camaraderie, and next-level business acumen. Throughout the documentary, the viewer is taken on an eventful journey through the lives of two businessmen who have managed to successfully build their empires despite setbacks, hardships, unforeseen tragedies, and familiar loss. Through it all, Acy and Anthony have emerged as remarkably successful men,

See FILM, Page 14

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FTC's new CARS rule to protect car buyers could level the playing field for dealerships

By Lori Lee
NDG Contributing Writer

The FTC last week announced a new rule to support American consumers when making an automobile purchase. The Combatting Auto Retail Scams (CARS) rule addresses tricks of the trade, like bait and switch advertising and add-on fees. The measure requires transparency in a sales process clouded by misleading prices and hidden fees. It is expected to save consumers near \$3.4 billion each year.

Bait-and-switch advertising uses low prices to lure people to dealerships, explained Associate Director of FTC's Division of Financial Practices Malini Mithal. Dealers may pitch a low price but often fail to mention the multitude of fees that will puff up the price at the end of a very long day. Extra financing charges are often hidden in an ad's fine print, and fees are buried in lengthy contracts, said Mithal.

Added charges for coatings, sealants and extended warranties can add thousands to the sales price, while often needless Guaranteed Asset Protection (GAP) agreements add little value, added FTC attorney Sanya Shahrabi. Over the past two years, dealers have substantially



The Combatting Auto Retail Scams (CARS) rule addresses tricks of the trade, like bait and switch advertising and add-ons. The measure requires transparency in a sales process clouded by misleading prices and hidden costs. (Mink Mingle / Unsplash)

increased costs for add-ons even though the products are largely unconstrained by supply, said Shahrabi. People are either paying for these add-ons without knowledge or they're assuming they're a necessary part of the process. One example cited was the Napleton case, where add-ons were most frequently charged to Black consumers, and in higher amounts.

In long contracts, sometimes up to 60 pages long, said Shahrabi, these fees can be very difficult to spot. In fact, many won't know what they've signed until after the deal is done.

By the time buyers drive away in their new cars, many have skipped over much of the contract, rushed by dealers motivated to maximize profits. The commission cited one

consumer: "They only let you scan through the paperwork. You're so tired, You're worn down. You don't want to be there. They take advantage of that."

Dealerships mislead customers in all kinds of ways, added Jamie Brooks, attorney for the FTC's Division of Financial Practices. One dealership even had the nerve to pretend to be affiliated with the federal government in a fake Covid relief offering, complete with a mock government check and a fake government seal, said Brooks.

Dealers will advertise a low price, then bury large down payment requirements and lengthy terms in fine print. One Kia dealer's TV spot showed \$99/month, but in illegible fine print explained the three low payments were

followed by multiple payments of over \$500/month, with additional fees added on.

Under the new rule, dealers are required to explain total costs when it quotes monthly payments, and disclosures must be easily understandable. If it is advertising or negotiating in one language, all documents must be in the same language, added Brooks. Consumers need to understand what they are agreeing to.

Cars are one of the most expensive purchases many people will make in their lifetimes, second only to buying a home, noted Mithal. Last year's average car was \$46,000 new and \$30,000 used, and financing for these high-ticket items is the third largest source of debt in the country. It is an essential purchase that grants ac-

cess to vital services like food, work and healthcare, and with average monthly payments at \$741 new and \$533 used, cars are only increasing in price.

A car's high cost and essential nature make auto sales a priority for the agency. Though the FTC doesn't act on every single complaint, if a large number comes in or with a high dollar amount, the agency will bring a case, said Mithal, and auto sales are consistently among the top ten complaints received by the agency.

Dealers can no longer mislead with rebates, extraneous financing or hidden charges, said Mithal. Under the new rule, a dealer can only charge for items the consumer is aware of, while services that provide no benefit, like duplicative warranties, are prohibited. Incompatible services, like

oil changes on an EV, are also illegal.

Since the rule makes it easier for the FTC to get money back for consumers, dealers will likely try harder to comply with the new rules, Mathil added. And more so than punitive fines, getting money back for consumers is the agency's focus. When the FTC sues a company and wins, money is awarded back to consumers without the need of a class action. We look at the victims, determine who was misled, and we put money back in peoples' pockets, she said.

Mithal recommends that when car shopping, consumers should read the fine print, refuse to pay for add-ons, and let dealers know they are aware of their rights. If dealers still won't offer a fair price, she suggests they report it to the FTC.

Namify redefines business naming with AI integration

HOUSTON - (PRLog) -- Namify, a leader in business name generation just announced the integration of AI into the platform. The new AI-powered Namify now accepts prompts as input to offer highly customized brand name suggestions that are meaningful and usable, unlike those suggested by other business name generators. This AI upgrade responds to the

growing demand for contextually relevant and legally sound brand names.

Namify has also introduced new filters that allow users to refine brand name suggestions by specifying category, tone, style, keywords, target audience, and language preferences. Along with existing features such as trademark checks, domain name checks, social media username avail-

ability, and a free logo, the platform now offers names in 8 languages, including Spanish, French, German, and more.

Statistically, 77% of consumers purchase an item based on the brand name rather than the product's name. This trend highlights the crucial role of brand names in influenc-

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US Consumer Confidence increased again in December

NEW YORK (PRNews-wire) -- The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index increased in December to 110.7 (1985=100), up from a downwardly revised 101.0 in November. The Present Situation Index—based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions—rose to 148.5 (1985=100) from 136.5 last month. The Ex-

pectations Index—based on consumers' short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions—leapt to 85.6 (1985=100) in December, up from its downwardly revised reading of 77.4 in November. This sharp increase brings expectations back to the levels of optimism last seen in July of this year.

"December's increase

in consumer confidence reflected more positive ratings of current business conditions and job availability, as well as less pessimistic views of business, labor market, and personal income prospects over the next six months," said Dana Peterson, Chief Economist at The Conference Board. "While December's renewed optimism was seen across all

ages and household income levels, the gains were largest among householders aged 35-54 and households with income levels of \$125,000 and above. December's write-in responses revealed the top issue affecting consumers remains rising prices in general, while politics, interest rates, and global conflicts all saw downticks as top concerns. Consumers' Per-

ceived Likelihood of a US Recession over the Next 12 Months abated in December to the lowest level seen this year—though two-thirds still perceive a downturn is possible in 2024."

Peterson added: "Assessments of the present situation rose in December, as seen by the more positive views of business conditions and the employ-

ment situation. By contrast, when asked to assess their current family financial conditions (a measure not included in calculating the Present Situation Index), the proportion reporting "good" ticked down while those saying "bad" rose slightly. This suggests consumers' view of their current finances

See CONSUMER, Page 16

L.A.I. Communications wins prestigious Platinum MarCom Award for Excellence in Marketing and Communications

WACO, Texas - Nov. 3, 2023 - PRLog -- This week, the international MarCom Awards announced that Lindsey & Associates International Communications, also known as L.A.I. Communications, is the recipient of the Platinum MarCom Award for its comprehensive work on the Grand Opening of the Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame, the State of Ohio's newest \$24 million dollar tourism attraction. Presented by the Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals, the MarCom Awards honors excellence in marketing and communications while recognizing the creativity and hard work of industry professionals.

"This is an amazing honor for the team at L.A.I. Communications, which is dedicated to delivering empowering communications and consumer experiences. We took on the enormous project to launch the Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame to help raise the



Dr. Tyrha Lindsey-Warren of L.A.I. Communications (Courtesy photo)

profile of the incredibly talented African American musical artists from Southwest Ohio as well as to give back in a special way to the city where our firm was founded," states

Dr. Tyrha M. Lindsey-Warren, Managing Director of L.A.I. Communications. "To be recognized globally amongst such Fortune 500 companies like P&G, Bank of America, Accenture, Blue Cross & Blue Shield, AARP and more,

illuminates the wonderful talent, vast experience, and incredible passion of the team at L.A.I. Communications to produce excellence for our clients!"

The 2023 MarCom Award winners were chosen from more than 6,500 entries from corporate and educational marketing and communication departments, advertising agencies, public relations firms, design shops, production companies and freelanc-



ers throughout the United States, Canada and several other countries.

As a full service marketing and communications agency, L.A.I. Communications strategically developed and executed an extensive integrated marketing and communications campaign in the City of Cincinnati that built brand awareness for the new tourism attraction. The firm began working on the Grand Opening of the Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame in 2022 and produced the 2022 Induction Ceremony, which set the stage for the Grand Opening celebration in the July 2023. Specifically, L.A.I. Communications produced two years

of GRAMMY style Induction Ceremonies featuring world renown musical artists for over 8,000 attendees. The firm also performed media and digital buying services, media relations, public relations, and community relations as well as talent management services, an influencer management program, TV/Radio and Video production services, graphic design, copywriting, script writing, website development, social media strategy and execution, Red Carpet logistics and management, sponsorship cultivation and management, live events production management, and outdoor consumer experiential activations.

"I am so incredibly proud of the work that L.A.I. Communications created for the Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame. We made history with our work that supported a legacy of Black Excellence in music and the performing arts. It was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity for L.A.I. Communications," states Dr. Lindsey-Warren.

The Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame is an interactive state of the art tourism attraction founded by Hamilton County Commission President and former State of Ohio Tourism Director, Alicia Reece. The Cincinnati Black Music Walk of Fame is a one-of-a-kind, outdoor tourist attraction that celebrates the contributions of Black musical artists, songwriters, and producers of various genres of music from Southwest Ohio. The attraction is located along the Ohio Riverbank across from Paycor Stadium – home of NFL's Cincinnati Bengals.

NAMIFY, from Page 11

ing consumer behavior and decision-making. In a marketplace driven by brand perception and identity, Namify, with its AI integration, meets the critical need for brand names that resonate with consumers. By offering names in multiple

languages and incorporating filters, Namify provides businesses with a powerful tool to establish a strong, relevant brand identity in a global market.

Namrata Arya, Head of Product at Namify, said, "In a world where AI-driven

solutions are becoming the norm, any service that lacks AI capabilities risks becoming obsolete. Namify's AI integration signifies a pivotal transformation in how we approach business name generation. By leveraging AI, we are able to analyze and understand the nuances of our users' requirements,

enabling us to provide highly personalized and context-specific brand name suggestions. This AI capability ensures that the names generated are unique and align closely with each business's individual identity and goals. Our aim is to empower our users with a tool that simplifies yet enhances the

process of brand naming in today's diverse and dynamic market landscape."

Namify's AI integration represents a critical leap forward in catering to the complex needs of solopreneurs. This advancement ensures that Namify remains at the forefront by offering innovative and essential solu-

tions for starting a new business in a saturated market.

With the AI upgrade, Namify establishes itself as an essential tool for businesses striving to create a compelling and resonant brand identity. For additional information and to explore Namify's features, visit www.namify.tech.

Goya spreads holiday cheer by donating 250,000 pounds of food to people in need for Christmas

(PRNewswire) -- Goya Foods of Texas donates 250,000 pounds of food to families and individuals in need throughout Texas with the help of Catholic Charities of Houston, Catholic Charities of San Antonio, Houston Food Bank, and North Texas Food Bank.

"As we celebrate the birth of Christ within the blessed union of the Holy family, we're helping to bring families in need to-

gether by providing a nourishing meal. This donation is a gift from our Goya family to families in Texas," said Bob Unanue, the President and CEO of Goya Foods. "With the spirit of giving ingrained within our company values, we are committed to serving communities and advancing the wellbeing for all throughout the world."

By partnering with local food banks and charitable

organizations throughout Texas, Goya Foods of Texas will be able to efficiently distribute the food to communities where it will have the greatest impact.

The donated food includes pantry staples, such as beans, rice, canned vegetables, broth, and spices, among others, allowing families to prepare hearty and nutritious meals.

Goya's commitment to giving back extends be-

yond Texas.

Through the company's global initiative, Goya Gives, Goya is always at the forefront of natural disasters and humanitarian relief efforts, donating millions of pounds of food each year in the United States and worldwide. Most recently, Goya donated food to the people of Mexico, Maui, California, Turkey, and Syria.



Goya's Christmas donation of 250,000 pounds of products including beans, coconut water, and other products will be distributed directly to thousands of families in Texas with the help of Catholic Charities of Houston, Catholic Charities of San Antonio, Houston Food Bank, and North Texas Food Bank.

Ironside HR named to No. 7 on the 2023 SMU Dallas 100 Entrepreneur List

DALLAS - Nov. 3, 2023 - PRLog -- Ironside Human Resources was named as Placeholder No. 7 last night during the Annual Dallas 100 Entrepreneur Awards Gala hosted by the SMU Cox School of Business. The gala took place at the Hyatt Regency in Dallas. Representatives from each of the recognized companies were present at the event.

This year marked the 33rd year anniversary for the Dallas 100 Entrepreneur Awards, a long-standing accolade known to be one of the most highly sought after recognitions for local Dallas business owners. This list ranks the fastest growing DFW small businesses based on each company's sales growth measured

across a three-year period. The list includes companies from a wide variety of industries, including construction, staffing, and technology among many others. This year marks the third consecutive year Ironside HR has been recognized on the D100 list, ranking within the Top 10 as No. 7. In 2021, Ironside placed as No. 84, and in 2022, as No. 33, making this year an especially significant win for the entire Ironside HR team, boasting 3 years of high-volume growth.

Ironside Human Resources is a multi-award-winning national healthcare talent acquisition firm, headquartered in Dallas since 2011. Their Founders are Doug (CEO) and Kara (COO) Carter, the company's pres-

ent day Executive leaders. Ironside HR was founded on the goal of not becoming the biggest healthcare staffing firm, just the best. The best for their clients, candidates, and employees, while fully embracing the entrepreneurial spirit that drives the company to reach new heights year after year as made evident through the Ironside team's gradual

and continuous growth in their team size and annual revenue.

Doug Carter, CEO, shared the following statement: "To be recognized as one of D100's top ten fastest-growing companies is a tremendous win for the entire Ironside HR team. We are deeply honored and grateful to all the people who believed in us and

continue to believe in us and our mission to provide quality healthcare staffing services to communities across the nation. Moreover, with this award, I am hoping that my employees see firsthand the impact our

company is making within our local community. We are a member of a truly extraordinary community, composed of entrepreneurial innovators and small

See D100, Page 15

VOTERS, from Page 1

alarm over the findings, with Heather Sawyer, executive director of the watchdog group American Oversight, describing the units as a waste of money undermining democracy. Republicans defended the units, emphasizing their role in ensuring election integrity and instilling confidence in voters.

Critics argue that the racial and political disparities in the crackdowns, along with the limited number of convictions, question the necessity and fairness of election integrity initiatives. The analysis has

prompted concerns about potential voter suppression efforts under the guise of combating fraud, encouraging calls for reevaluating the allocation of resources in election integrity units.

"At best, these 'election integrity' units are for show, designed to placate far-right election denialists in the conservative base," Sawyer told the researchers. "At worst, they are used to justify new voting restrictions and to intimidate people—especially racial minorities—from exercising their right to vote."



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Another Jingle Bell Christmas in the Tree

By Dr. James L. Snyder

It doesn't seem possible another Christmas has come and gone. They come and go so fast that I'm not sure I can keep up with all of this. Every year, our family has more people, which is never bad.

One thing we do is gather as a family around the Christmas tree and enjoy a wonderful time of fellowship. We will open our Christmas gifts together and just laugh at all of those gifts.

After the gifts are opened, we play a game called "Jingle Bells on the Tree."

What it is, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage will get together a bunch of Jingle Bells. They will be different colors: blue, yellow, red and green.

This game is new to me, but with The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, nothing seems to be new. Along with the colored Jingle Bells, there is a little box filled with tickets: each ticket has one of the four colors associated with the Jingle Bells.

The idea of the game is that the box with the little



tickets is passed around, and everyone would have to pick a ticket. Now, the color of that ticket matches the color of one of the Jingle Bells.

If, for example, you pick a blue ticket, you would have to get up and go to the blue Jingle Bell and jingle it for at least one minute. While that was happening, everybody was clapping and singing, "Jingle Bells."

I'm not sure where she came up with that idea, but I never know where she comes up with any of her ideas. But everybody enjoys the little game.

As I was sitting there participating in the game, the kitchen table was behind me. On the kitchen table, I had my coffee. I occasion-

ally took a sip and then put it back on the table. But, also on that table were several plates of Christmas cookies. These were the cookies that The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage had baked in anticipation of our Christmas gathering.

I never thought too much about it, but this year, just before everybody came for the Christmas dinner and celebration, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage told me I could only have one cookie. As she said that, she handed me one cookie and then said, "This is your one cookie. Do you understand?"

Of course, I understood. I smiled and shook my head as I munched that delicious little cookie.

A thought began dancing in my head as we played the game. I love it when I have a thought, which, by the way, is very rare.

That thought had to do with the cookies on the table behind me. All the cookie plates were within reach because God gave me long arms. Now I know why I have such long arms.

How am I going to take advantage of this family game time? Nobody was paying attention to me; everybody was watching the person going up to ring the Jingle Bell on the tree.

I casually reached back, got my coffee, took a sip and returned the cup. When I did that, my thoughts began to crystallize

It boils down to this: whenever someone picked a ticket and went up to the tree to ring the appropriate Jingle Bell, I could reach behind me and pick a cookie. Everybody was so focused on the game that nobody realized what I was doing.

I must confess I was smiling quite a bit because I was getting away with something, and I did not believe I would get caught.

I cheered the next person going up to ring the Jingle Bell as loud as I could get away with. Everybody was focused on that. While that was happening, my right arm reached behind me to collect the next cookie. I munched on that cookie while everybody laughed, clapped and sang Jingle Bells.

I have never enjoyed a family game as much as this one. I don't remember how many cookies I ate then, but I enjoyed every one.

Of course, there was that time when I had to pull my ticket, then go up, and ring the Jingle Bell, which cost me my next cookie. But I needed to keep the ruse moving to collect some more cookies.

Nobody makes better cookies than The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. I tell her that all the time, and once in a while, she will give me a cookie when I say it. But only one.

Finally, the family time was over, and everybody had gone home. The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and I sat in the living room smiling about our

wonderful time. I looked at her and said, "We have a wonderful family and it was a great time tonight."

Looking at me, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said, "You did not eat any of the Christmas cookies tonight, did you?"

I was unsure what she knew, so I said, "I don't think I did."

Still looking at me, she said, "Then why do you have cookie crumbs in your mustache?"

When you're caught, you're caught.

Later, I thought of a Bible verse in Numbers 32:23, "...be sure your sin will find you out."

You will eventually be found out, no matter how careful you think you are. God knows everything, and we will be held accountable. The best advice is to be honest.

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail jamesnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafellowship.com.

FILM, from Page 10

both personally and professionally.

In the documentary, we witness a bird's-eye view of both of their lives. Acy's life showcases his rural hometown of Chatham, Louisiana whereas he wears many hats; including being a man of faith, a family man, a businessman, a caretaker, a commercial/fashion print model/actor and community activist. Acy parlays his business savvy into creating an expansive brand, despite being based in a small town. Conversely, Anthony's backdrop of a thriving metropolis gives him far-reaching access to a myriad of professional resources that are available to him in Charlotte. The Art of Business: The Best

of Both Worlds was borne out of their desire to work in tandem with one another to create a cinematic masterpiece that would inspire emerging business owners—as well as people from all walks of life—to tap into their God-given greatness to create a masterpiece of their own: In business and in life.

This captivating documentary is essential viewing for those of you who want more out of life. It will resonate with viewers who are determined to be successful in whatever environment they find themselves in. Anthony's salient takeaway from the film is: "I want the viewers to understand that hard work is not only the key to success but also business

entrepreneurship can take your imagination around the planet and give you insight on family values that will help you to understand that we are only passing through and that we must cherish the moment and plan for the future not the present."

The Art of Business: The Best of Both Worlds was directed by Curt Braden, and was Executive Produced by Anthony Little and Acy Brown. For a sneak peek of this "Anointed, Timeless, Masterpiece" check out the film's trailer, by clicking this link: <https://youtu.be/iTaiVgzlhEg> Connect with Acy and Anthony via Instagram @AcyBrown and @anthony33little; YouTube @captonbrandsnetwork7675; Facebook The Art Of Business The Best Of Both Worlds

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Start a New Year with a New Attitude



Sister Tarpley
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Some things God gives often, but He only gives “time” once.

The flowers of spring return new again and again. The grass turns green, and trees burst into new foliage year after year. But “time” does not come twice to anyone.

This is the start of a “New Year” you can learn from mistakes that were made last year to make positive changes in your life from this day forward. You will be happier and so will those around you, because—

Life is short no matter how long we live, so use it wisely. Life never seems to



be enough no matter how long one gets to live.

I have never heard anyone (in the right frame of mind) say, “Ninety years is enough living for me, so I will just die now!”

Usually, people just don’t speak like that when it comes to their life. Generally, everybody wants to live to that ripe old age, and if we (only) had a say in how long we should stay, we would all shout, “For-

ever!”

It is true most of us love life! What do we know about this thing we hold so dear?

1) It is a gift from God. 2) It is not ours to keep; it can be taken away at any time. 3) It can be worthwhile or worthless (it depends on the individual.)

Here are some things to keep in mind and put an effort in doing in 2017.

First, we should keep

Christ as our center. Second, we should be grateful for the many blessings of the previous year.

We are not worthy of more from God if we are ungrateful for what He has given us.

Third, may we determine to be sympathetic toward all less fortunate than we are. Having a soft heart is a big accomplishment.

Fourth, let us resolve to place the best reasonable construction on the words and deeds of others.

Fifth, let us build our life on the good foundation of loving God and our fellowman.

Those of us who are alive need to know that we are at the mercy of the

“Life-giver,” He is God.

The time that we have been given should not be spent on trying to preserve this life, but fulfilling the

purpose for which we were created.

Knowing that we all must go the way of the flesh, should hasten our resolve (especially now, a New Year) to put things in perspective.

Some of the questions you should be asking are, “What have I done with my life? What do I want to do with the rest of my life?”

If this was your time to die, would your life be celebrated or mourned? You are the one who will say how the rest of your life story plays out.

Will it be worthwhile or worthless, the choice is certainly yours to make.

We may not always realize that everything we do, affects not only our lives, but also others, too!

For a little bit of thoughtfulness that shows someone you care creates a ray of sunshine for both of you to share.

Yes, every time you offer someone a helping hand—every time you show a friend you care and understand—

Every time you have a kind and gentle word to give, you help someone find beauty in this precious life we live.

For happiness bring happiness and love ways bring love; and giving is the treasure that contentment is made of.

A HAPPY AND BLESSED NEW YEAR TO ALL!

(Editor’s Note: This column originally ran in January 2017.)

ICONS, from Page 3

and pioneering role in New Jersey’s political landscape will be remembered.

• John Beasley: Actor and Activist (1943–2023)

Best known for his roles on Everwood and The Soul Man, died at 79. The actor died after being hospitalized in his hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, after his health took an “unexpected turn for the worst” following testing on his liver, according to reports.

• Jim Brown: Football Legend, Activist, and Actor (1936–2023)

The sports and entertainment world lost a multifaceted icon with the passing

of Jim Brown, a football legend, activist, and actor. Brown’s influence extended beyond the field, making him a prominent figure in popular culture.

• Vida Blue: MLB Pitcher and World Series Champion (1949–2023)

Baseball mourned the loss of Vida Blue, a former MLB pitcher who led the Oakland Athletics to three consecutive World Series victories in the 1970s.

• Tori Bowie: Olympic Gold Medalist in Track and Field (1990–2023)

The world of athletics lost Tori Bowie, an Olympic gold medalist in

track and field. The track and field community celebrates Bowie’s remarkable achievements and impact on the sport.

• Willis Reed: NBA Hall of Famer and Knicks Legend (1942–2023)

In basketball, fans mourned the loss of Willis Reed, an NBA Hall of Famer, and iconic Knicks captain. His contributions to the sport, including leading the Knicks to two NBA championships, made him a basketball legend.

• Lola Chantrelle “Gangsta Boo” Mitchell: Rapper (1979–2023)

Memphis and the hip-hop community mourned the loss of Gangsta Boo,

one-third of the award-winning R&B trio 702.

Many others were also lost in 2023, and though they are too numerous to print, they are also fondly recalled, and their contributions are not forgotten.

D100, from Page 13

businesses that are creating jobs and contributing to the continuous growth of the Dallas economy, making Dallas the best place to live, work, and do busi-

ness.”

In addition to making the D100 list for their third year, earlier this year, Ironside HR was also recognized as one of the fast-

est growing companies by the Inc. 5000 Southwest Division as No. 38, Financial Times as one of “The Americas’ Fastest Growing Companies 2023,” as No. 94, and the national Inc. 5000 list as No. 239.

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NDG Book Review: Kids books about siblings by various authors and illustrators

By Terri Schlichenmeyer

You always wanted a sister. Or a brother, maybe both.

Once you got what you wanted, then you had to learn to get along and that wasn't easy. But your brother or sister is your best playmate, best friend, best person to share with. So why not share these great picture books about siblings...?

Your family is full of love, but what does it look like? In "Love Like Chocolate" by Tracy Banghart, art by Alina Chau (Little, Brown, \$18.99), it looks like cookies and ice cream and pancakes to a young boy who welcomes a new adopted sister home.



But she doesn't look like him, and that's okay. There's total acceptance, joy and comfort, and enough chocolate treats to go around. Love is freely given in this adorable book that's readable in any season, and for any 4-to-8-year-old wel-

coming a new adopted sibling.

If your family is growing, then your youngster may enjoy "Love Comes First" by Jenna Bush Hager & Barbara Pierce Bush, illustrated by Ramona Kaulitzki (Little, Brown \$19.99). It's

the story of twin girls (yes, the twin daughters of the former President) and how much they wanted a younger sibling. They wished and wished, and their wishes came abundantly true when their baby brother was born, followed by a new baby girl cousin.

Was it easy having a younger sibling? No, and the authors are honest about that. Their brother bugged them a lot, but they adjusted and learned to include the "littles" in their pretending and their play. Written in a simple, cute rhyme that hammers home the theme of love expanded, this book is a great choice for a multi-kid household and the 4-to-8-year-old in it.

A big family celebration almost ruined by sibling rivalry. Does that sound familiar in your house? Then find "Wish Soup: A Celebration of Seollal" by Jung-hwa Park (Little, Brown, \$18.99), the story of tradition and a rotten little sister.

It's the Lunar New Year (February 10 this coming year) and Sohee is very eager to have her annual bowl of tteokguk, which means she'll be another year older. This year, she'll be a con-ni – a "big girl" – and she won't have to put up with her annoying younger sister, Somi. But while Sohee is helping in the kitchen, one chore after another takes her away from her yummy bowl of tteokguk, and when

she's finally ready to eat it, it's gone! How can she grow bigger than Somi if she doesn't eat her bowl of wish soup? Though a pronunciation guide would've been helpful here, three-to-five-year-olds who are half of a sibling rivalry pair will love this book.

For more great books – for you, or for your child – about siblings, adoption, rivalry, and learning to get along, take your kiddo to the library or bookstore and ask for help. Your favorite librarian or bookseller might be a sibling from way back, and they'll know what to put in your child's hands and what books you'll want to read yourself. Oh, brother!

CONSUMER, from Page 12

may paint a more tempered picture than the perception that overall conditions are better than a month ago."

"Consumer expectations for the next six months

also increased in December, reflecting improved confidence about future business conditions, job availability, and incomes. Expectations that interest

rates will rise in the year ahead plummeted to the lowest levels since January 2021, and consumers' outlook for stock prices rose to levels of optimism last seen in mid-2021.

Meanwhile, average

12-month inflation expectations continued to recede, and now stands at 5.6 percent. Consumers' views of their expected family financial situation,

six months hence (not included in calculating the Expectations Index) also improved in December. Likewise, on a month-to-month basis, buying

plans for autos, homes, and big-ticket appliances rose moderately across the board, ending the year on a slightly more positive note."

DOING THE RIGHT THING

The time is always right to do what is right." — Martin Luther King, Jr.

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