

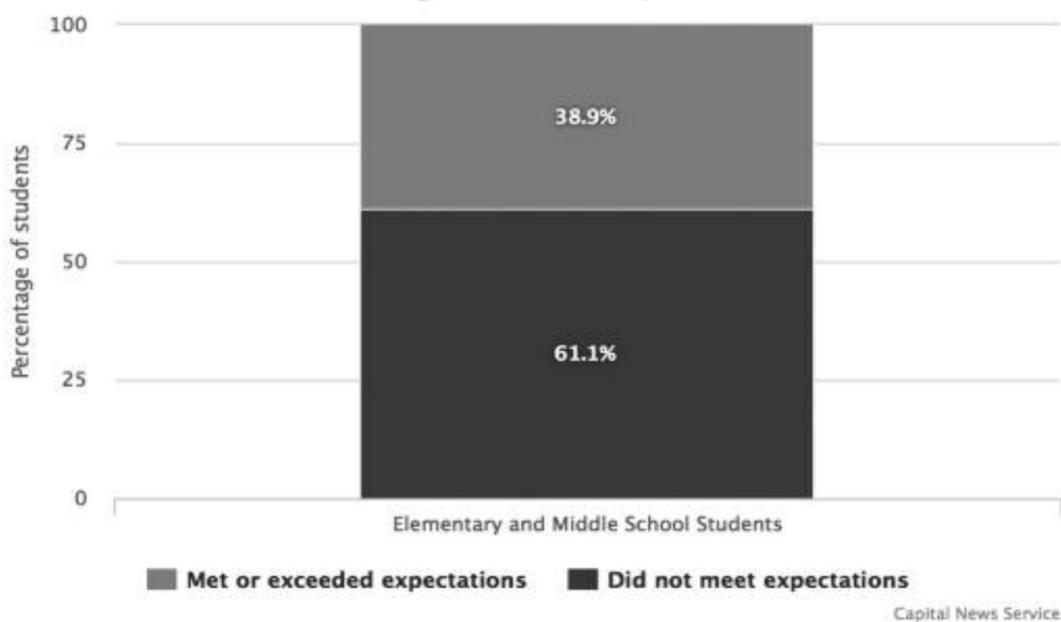
The Prince George's Post



A COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY Since 1932

Vol. 83, No. 51 December 17 — December 23, 2015 Prince George's County, Maryland Newspaper of Record Phone: 301-627-0900 25 cents

Two in Five Maryland Students in Grades 3-8 Meet or Exceed English Exam Expectations



Approximately 40 percent of elementary and middle school students scored at a level considered on-track for college at their grade level, according to Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) exams released December 8, 2015.

Elementary, Middle School PARCC Scores Again Fall Short of Readiness Levels

By MARISSA HORN
Capital News Service

BALTIMORE, MD—Following the release Tuesday of new, statewide exam scores showing that fewer than one-half of elementary and middle

school-aged students passed, Maryland Board of Education members appeared to be split over the practicality of continuing to use the exam in coming years.

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College

and Careers test, or PARCC, was administered in 11 states and the District of Columbia to high school, middle and elementary school students. The exam, which aligns with Common Core State Standards, proved to be controversial dur-

ing its first implementation this past spring.

Nearly 40 percent of students in grades 3-8 scored at or above grade-level expectations—a

See SCORES Page A5

PGCPS Receives Elementary and Middle School Results of New PARCC Test

By PRESS OFFICER
PGCPS

UPPER MARLBORO, MD—Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) has received the elementary and middle school test results for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. PARCC was administered for the first time in Spring 2015.

The data provided for the PARCC Assessment Performance Results is for students who took both the PARCC Performance Based Assessment (PBA) and the End of the Year Assessment (EOY) in Grades 3-8 during the 2014-2015 school year. PGCPS will distribute ELA and Math Home Reports for tested students on December 14.

"PARCC is a new rigorous test, and with anything new there are challenges," said Dr. Kevin M. Maxwell, Chief Executive Officer for PGCPS. "There is room for growth on the PARCC assessments. A low score does not mean a child is failing to learn. This is an opportunity for growth and fine tuning instruction, and that's exactly what we plan to accomplish."

PARCC is Maryland's new accountability program, replacing the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) in Reading and

Math. It is the first assessment aligned to Maryland's College and Career Ready Standards, and sets a higher bar for student learning. Through a test that requires students to demonstrate critical thinking, problem solving, and clear writing, readiness for more challenging academic work for elementary and middle school students is measured in ELA and Math. The assessment indicates how close a student is to meeting the new standards, and results are categorized into one of five performance levels: Level 1: Did Not Yet Meet Expectation; Level 2: Partially Met Expectations; Level 3: Approached Expectations; Level 4: Met Expectations; and Level 5: Exceeded Expectations. Elementary and middle school students achieving at levels 4 or 5 are considered on track for college and career.

Overall PGCPS and Maryland PARCC Performance

- Approximately 25 percent of PGCPS students in Grades 3-8 taking the PARCC English Language Arts/Literacy Assessments last spring scored at a Level 4 and 5 combined.

- Nearly 15 percent of PGCPS elementary and middle school (Grades 3-8) students attained Level 4 and 5 combined in the mathematics assessment.

See PARCC TEST Page A6

Drones Are Cutting Costs for One Maryland Service

By BETHANY HOOPER
Capital News Service

COLLEGE PARK, MD—Cell towers in Maryland need constant service, but a newer technology could save companies money: drones.

The new industry creates opportunities for faster, safer inspections, according to Shaun Capps, owner of Top Flight Digital Media LLC, a Frederick, Md., company that conducts cell tower and bridge inspections,

mapping services, photography and cinematography.

"One of the things I really thought of was safety," Capps said. "I am former Navy, and we haven't done some of the safest things known to man. When I was in, one of the things was that it has to be a safer and better way of doing things. And I kind of wanted to keep that in the back of my mind whenever I am doing anything."

See DRONES Page A5

Maryland Squirrel Pulled From Endangered List Following Conservation Action

By JACOB BELL
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, MD—While some squirrel species can be found hiding in neighborhood bushes or rummaging through city trash cans, the Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel largely stays in rural, woodland habitats.

Deforestation and hunting throughout the first half of the

20th century pushed the squirrel toward extinction and helped land it on the federal endangered species list. On Monday—more than 40 years after the squirrel's addition—the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will remove it from that list.

See SQUIRREL Page A3

Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation and Andrews Business and Community Alliance Collaborate to Preserve Safety Zone of Joint Base Andrews

By PRESS OFFICER
PGEDC

Last month the Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable, the Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation, and the Andrews Business and Community Alliance spearheaded an effort that would preserve the safety of the community surrounding Joint Base Andrews by collaborating with Congressman Chris Van Hollen on ways to secure \$25 million in federal funds to help relocate property owners located adjacent to the base that have the greatest potential for an accident due to base operations. The effort came in response to last week's passage of a new zoning bill by the County Council, establishing a Military Installation Overlay (MIO) Zone which will regulate the development and use of the property surrounding Joint Base Andrews and could

require many businesses and residents to relocate.

"Joint Base Andrews has been a part of Prince George's County for more than 60 years and has taken great pride in being a good partner to its surrounding business community," said Jim Estepp, President and CEO of the Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable. "We want to ensure that the safety and welfare of the residents and businesses around the base are not adversely affected by their proximity to Joint Base Andrews operations. The Roundtable is united with the County Council and other business leaders in its support for the Military Installation Overlay Zone legislation and the need for federal reparations to provide for the impacted community."

Congressman Van Hollen expressed his support at the November meeting of the Greater Prince George's Business



PHOTO COURTESY PGEDC

L to R: Britta Vander Linden, EDC Chief of Staff, Jim Estepp, Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable President & CEO, Jim Coleman, EDC President & CEO and Congressman Christopher Van Hollen, Jr. at Wednesday's meeting of the Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable.

Round Table held Wednesday at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center.

"I look forward to working with you to make sure we achieve the goal of making sure we address the safety issues of

Andrews. And I look forward to try to secure federal funds for that purpose," said Congressman Christopher Van

See ANDREWS Page A3

INSIDE

The State Fire Marshall Reminds All Marylanders to "Be Vigilant of Fire Safety"

"Fire and life safety is everyone's responsibility; by testing smoke alarms and CO detectors, keeping exits clear of obstructions, and maintaining fire alarms and fire sprinkler systems, we can all avoid injury or death from the effects of fire."

Community, Page A3

Sounding the Alarm: HIV's Hold in Communities of Color

To win the war on HIV/AIDS; to achieve the three zeroes; we cannot approach the epidemic as a stand-alone public health crisis. Our nation must develop a multi-pronged approach to HIV/AIDS that also addresses equal access to health care and civil rights.

Commentary, Page A4

Franchot Proposes Taxpayer Protection Act to Strengthen Enforcement of Tax Fraud, Identity Theft

The proposed legislation will enhance the tools available to the Comptroller and his staff of highly-skilled tax and enforcement professionals to detect and prevent tax fraud.

Business, Page A5

Movie Review: "Love the Coopers"

The film was directed by Jessie Nelson, who wrote and directed "I Am Sam," and written by Steven Rogers, with whom Nelson helped co-write "Stepmom." These two have a long history of making mediocre family-oriented nonsense, and "Love the Coopers" has them at the height of their vanilla-flavored powers.

Out on the Town, Page A6

Earth Talk

Dear EarthTalk:

Are green groups using the campaign finance system like other "special interests" through Political Action Committees (PACs) or otherwise?

—Wilson McClave,
Washington, D.C.

Features, Page A7

Towns and NEIGHBORS

In and Around Morningside-Skyline

by Mary McHale 301 735 3451

Phase I construction nearly complete at Andrews' medical center

Clinics will soon begin moving into the new Malcolm Grow Medical Clinics and Surgery Center. On Feb. 19 the first clinics to relocate will be Physical Medicine, Internal Medicine, Ophthalmology/Warfighter Eye Center, Optometry, and Dermatology.

On Feb. 26, Flight Medicine, Pediatrics, Allergy and Immunology, and Cardiopulmonary clinics will start to move in.

On March 4, Oral Surgery, Women's Health, and Operational Medicine will move, followed by Radiology and Pharmacy on March 11 and Emergent Care Center on March 16. Signs will be posted to all clinics.

Patients arriving at the new facility will park in the four-story parking garage connected to the main building by a covered pedestrian bridge. The Family Health Clinic is not scheduled to move until the end of Phase II. Those patients will continue to park in front of that clinic.

Volunteers are still needed to help staff information desks in the new building. Anyone interested can call the marketing office at 240-857-8925.

I drive past this construction several times a day and have wondered what's going on and why it's taken so long. I'm glad to have answers. I'm not military, so I don't know when or if I'll ever have the opportunity to visit this new complex. By the way, I understand that when Phases I and II are complete, they'll tear down the old Malcolm Grow Hospital.

Other changing landscape

Thanks to the military's help, there are more oysters in the Chesapeake Bay providing food and shelter for fish and crabs and clearing the water of algae and plankton, according to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. (One adult oyster can filter 50 gallons of water a day!)

The last two Metro stations, which sold paper fare cards, no longer do so as of last week. The end comes one month ahead of schedule.

The new development on the site of what used to be Murry's Steaks has been named Penn 95 Commercial Center. Rumor has

it that Thompson Creek Windows will re-locate there.

And here's one landscape that's happily not changing—Bladensburg's Peace Cross will stay, thanks to a December 1 ruling by a federal judge. The American Humanist Association had sought to have it removed or modified on the grounds that it violates the First Amendment ban on the government's establishment of religion. A plaque at the base of the Cross bears the names of 49 Prince George's men who died in World War I.

Morningside memories

Seventy-four years ago, December 7, the sailor who later became Morningside's longest-serving mayor was on leave in Pearl Harbor when the frenzied announcement came, "All sailors report to their ships!" Jerry Glaubitz told me a load of sailors piled into his car and they sped back to the USS San Francisco. (Jerry told me he never saw that car again.)

He survived the bombing, married Jean, raised two children, went to work for the Naval Research Lab, and became the very productive mayor of the Town of Morningside.

On Dec. 7, 1991 Jerry returned to Pearl Harbor as President of the Pearl Harbor Survivors. He and Jean accompanied President and Mrs. George H.W. Bush, by boat, to services aboard the Arizona Memorial. I'll always remember Jerry on Dec. 7.

Steve lived 14 years with a new heart

Back in 2001, Steve Ferralli was 46 and a popular teacher at Southern Middle School in Lothian, when he suddenly needed a heart transplant to survive. A donor heart eventually became available. He had that transplant and returned to be a teacher and school counselor at Southern Middle and an award-winning soccer coach.

However, this year he was found to need another transplant, but it didn't happen. Stephan Anthony Ferralli died Nov. 14 at Washington Hospital Center, awaiting another donor heart.

I got to know Steve when I edited St. Philip's 50th anniversary history in 2007. He had long experience with school

yearbooks and was able to advise me and help with production. Also, he knew St. Philip's because his wife grew up in Camp Springs and was a longtime member of St. Philip's Parish. He was great to work with. His memorial Mass was held Nov. 21 at St. Philip's.

He is survived by his wife Sharon Bohannon Ferralli, son Philip, daughter Bethany, granddaughter Paige, and brothers Peter and Samuel. The family suggests contributions be made in his honor to the AHF Heart Transplant Program that gave Steve 14 extra years.

May they rest in peace

Mary Leonard, my dear neighbor, died Dec. 13. She was among Skyline's original residents. I'll reveal more about this delightful woman in a future column.

Benjamin Basil "Ben" Surratt, Jr., 80, died suddenly at home and was buried from Our Saviour's (now St. Michael's Truth) Lutheran Church on St. Barnabas Road. Survivors include his daughter Angela, son Eric, sister Ruth, and granddaughters Chloe and Savannah.

I don't think I ever met Ben. But he called me many, many times over the years, to give information for my column and to invite me to barbecues given by candidates for office. I felt like I knew him. But now I find I know only what's in the very brief obit in the church program. Anyone who can tell me more about Ben, can call me at 301-735-3451.

Milestones

Happy birthday to my grandson Michael Gallegos, Dec. 19; Ricky Nichols, Dec. 20; Evelyn McKeown, Dec. 21; Timothy Flaherty and former Morningside Mayor Irving Robinson, Dec. 22; Paul Ford and Russ Kyser, Dec. 23; Kendall Lanehart and former Morningside Councilman Ken Miller, Dec. 24; Holly Jean Nichols, Jason Tomlinson Samantha Bowie, Christine Mucker and Loretta Hooe, Dec. 25.

Happy anniversary to Bill and Betty Malkowski, their 63rd on Dec. 20; Ray and Betty Call, Dec. 20; and Pastor and Mrs. Kelvin McCune, their 30th on Dec. 21.

*A Blessed Christmas
to all my Readers*

Brandywine-Aquasco

by Audrey Johnson 301 888 2153

CLASS 4A FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Dr. Henry A. Wise, Jr. High School football team won the 2015 Maryland 4A State Final Football Championship on Friday, December 4 against Howard High School at M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore. The score was 55-6. Head Coach is DaLawn Parrish. Congratulations to everyone who made this win happen.

CEDARVILLE STATE FOREST FIRST DAY HIKE

Join the Friends of Cedarville State Forest on a steady winter hike in the forest January 1, 2016 at 1:00 PM. Hot chocolate and refreshments will be provided after the hike in the headquarters. Families will meet at Cedarville State Forest—10201 Bee Oak Road, Brandywine, Maryland. Hot chocolate and refreshments will be provided after the hike in the headquarters. Families are encouraged to call Cedarville State Forest at 301-888-1410 to register.

BURNS NIGHT SUPPER

Come and dine with us at Darnall's Chance House Museum Saturday, January 30, 2016 from 6:00

PM-8:00 PM. You will experience the flavor and atmosphere of one of Scotland's oldest and most cherished traditions. Celebrate the life and works of Robert Burns, Scotland's National Poet. Program includes music, poetry bagpipes, dinner, history and fun. Advance reservation and payment are required. Ages 21 & up/ Fee: Resident \$45; Non-Resident \$54. Telephone number 301-952-8010; TTY 301-699-2544.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Invite your family and friends to join us for our Christmas Concert on Saturday, December 19, 2015, 6:00 PM at Westphalia United Methodist Church, Rev. Timothy West, Senior Pastor. The address is 9363 D'Arcy Road, Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20774. Visit www.westphaliaum.org or call 301-735-9373.

29th ANNUAL WINTER FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Come and see the spectacular holiday drive-through event at Watkins Regional Park Thursday, December 17 thru Friday, January 1, 2016 from 5:00 PM-9:30 PM (Daily). This year there will be more than one million lights.

Fee is cash only, \$5 for cars and vans; \$15 mini-buses and limos; \$25 buses; \$10 multi-visit passes for cars and vans. There is no cost December 25. Please bring a canned good to donate to local food banks. Visit www.pgarks.com/Festivals.htm for details. Telephone number is 301-699-2456; TTY 301-699-2544.

UNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (UEDC)

UEDC is currently seeking volunteers to serve as coaches for the My Budget Coach program. This program helps families and individuals to improve their ability to budget and make well-informed financial decisions by matching a trained budget coach with a participant. Each monthly session covers budgeting techniques, financial management and goal attainment strategies. If you are interested in serving as My Budget Coach Program Coach, please contact Williams Thomas, UEDC Program Director, at william.thomas@uedc.org or call 301-505-0331. Coach Training is provided.

Neighborhood Events

Edwards Co-Chairs Steering and Policy Committee Hearing on Prescription Drug Affordability

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards (MD-4) joined with Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and fellow co-chair of the Steering and Policy Committee Rep. Rosa DeLauro (CT-3) to lead a hearing on prescription drug affordability. The hearing was entitled "Ensuring Access and Affordability of Prescription Drugs, While Spurring Innovation."

"The intent of lifesaving drugs is just that — to save lives, not to solely fill the pockets of executives and investors of large drug companies," Edwards said. "We owe it to the people we serve to put a stop to the price-gouging that is bankrupting patients and overcharging Medicare, straining hospitals, and fleecing taxpayers. In today's hearing we heard expert witnesses and real stories that highlighted the severity of prescription drug costs and the impact these costs are having on Americans. We must continue to challenge each and every one of these drug companies, and by putting pressure on them, and even shaming them, they might change their tactics."

A recent *New York Times* article highlighted just one example, saying "Valeant attracted scrutiny from some members of Congress for acquiring two old heart drugs, Isuprel and Nitropress, in February and immediately increasing their prices by more than 500 percent and 200 percent."

To watch the entire hearing, please visit YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc33ixvY-Q>

Is It the Flu or Common Cold? Doctor Educates People about the Differences

LANHAM, MD—More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu-related complications each year. In addition to getting an annual flu shot, it is important to learn the differences between the flu and a common cold. Dr. Puneet Chopra, MD, chair and medical director of Observation and Emergency Services at Doctors Community Hospital, educates people about these two health conditions.

Q: What are the differences between the flu and a cold?

Usually, people start experiencing flu symptoms very suddenly, but cold symptoms usually emerge more gradually. The biggest sign of flu is a high fever—between 100°F and 102°F—accompanied by body aches, exhaustion and sometimes a cough. People who have colds often experience sneezing, and a stuffy or runny nose.

Q: Who is most at risk for getting the flu?

Anyone can catch the flu. However, people may be at a higher risk of developing related complications (e.g., dehydration, bacterial pneumonia, sinus infections, ear infections, etc.) because of their immune systems. These people include seniors, children, infants and pregnant women. In fact, ninety percent of flu-related deaths and more than half of the flu-related hos-



Congresswoman
Donna F. Edwards

pitalizations occur in people ages 65 and older.

Q: What can people do to treat their colds or flu?

There are no cures for colds or the flu. However, over-the-counter cold medicines and cough suppressants can offer temporary symptom relief. Gargling with warm salt water can help ease discomfort from a sore throat. Also, people should get plenty of rest and stay well hydrated.

Q: When should people visit their doctors?

Flu symptoms usually subside within a week or two on their own, but sometimes medical treatment may be necessary. For example, congestion can lead to ear or sinus infections that may require antibiotics. Flu-related coughs can worsen and lead to serious conditions such as pneumonia. People should visit their primary care doctors or an emergency department if:

- Their fevers do not subside within a few days or worsen
- They can't keep down food or beverages for longer than 48 hours
- Their coughs worsen or lasts longer than two or three weeks
- Their congestion or headaches worsens and doesn't respond to cold medicine

If at any time people have difficulty breathing or experience chest pain, they should call 911 immediate to receive emergency care.

Q: What can people do to avoid getting sick?

Healthy lifestyles—exercising, balanced diets, not smoking, etc.—contribute to overall well-being. Also, people should wash their hands and surfaces (e.g., kitchen counters, stair railings, etc.) regularly where cold and flu germs are likely to be present. When people are sick, they should stay at home to prevent infecting others.

Also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone ages six months and older receive an annual flu vaccination with rare exceptions. Remember, this vaccination does not cause the flu.

Doctors Community Hospital's Emergency Department

Our board-certified emergency medical specialists are available 24/7 to treat people who experience severe cold and flu symptoms. With access to a diagnostic laboratory and technology, people can count on our Emergency Department to receive comprehensive and high-quality care conveniently available

in their neighborhood.

For more information, visit DCHweb.org/emergency.

Hospital Raises \$335,000 to Support Community Health Programs and Recognizes Physician Leader

LANHAM, MD—On Saturday, November 14, Doctors Community Hospital held its annual gala at the Ritz-Carlton in Virginia with Tony Perkins, Fox 5 evening news anchor, serving as the master of ceremony. With 730 people in attendance, the gala raised an estimated \$335,000. Also, the event honored Dr. Iradj Sadeghian as this year's Passion for Caring Award recipient. All donations supported community outreach initiatives that will help underserved residents of Prince George's County receive free preventative health services and chronic disease education.

The theme for this year's gala was "Moments in Time" in commemoration of the hospital's 40th anniversary. As mentioned by Robyn Webb-Williams, vice president of Doctors Community Hospital Foundation, "Our hospital was built on a continuous series of moments that have helped many people maintain or improve their health. Whether it was the moment when we partnered with the Prince George's County Health Department to provide free medical services in the area via our Wellness on Wheels mobile health clinic or the moment we opened the first comprehensive breast care center in the county, they all contributed to strengthening the health of our community. That's why giving to our hospital is so important — helping us create more of these types of life-saving moments."

Also, the gala recognized Dr. Iradj Sadeghian as this year's Passion for Caring Award honoree for providing exceptional medical care to the community for 40 years. After completing his internship at Sibley Memorial Hospital in 1959, he became a senior resident at Washington Hospital Center and completed a cardio-pulmonary fellowship at D.C. General Hospital. In 1967, he opened a medical office in Prince George's County where he currently cares for patients. He earned his second fellowship in cardiology at George Washington University in 1975. Later, he became Doctors Community Hospital's first director of cardiology.

"We are honored to recognize Dr. Sadeghian as our Passion for Caring Award recipient. His years of commitment to improving the health of our community while serving as a mentor to others are all characteristics that define a transformational leader who inspires us all to positively touch the lives of our neighbors and colleagues," stated Phil Down, president and chief executive officer at Doctors Community Hospital.

Throughout the year, Doctors Community Hospital Foundation provides many opportunities for people to make tax-deductible contributions that support local health programs. To learn more, call 301-552-8670 or visit dchfoundation.org.

COMMUNITY

Practical Money Skills

By Nathaniel Sillin

Americans Spend an Annual Average of \$2,746 on Lunch

If you want to uncover new ways to save money, start by thinking about what you spend on lunch every day.

A new Visa survey shows that American consumers are spending nearly \$3,000 on mid-day meals each year. But don't lose your appetite—this is actually a great opportunity to budget and save.



Visa's 2015 survey, intended to call consumers' attention to opportunities to save and budget in their discretionary spending, reports that the average American consumer spends roughly \$53 a week or \$2,746 per year on lunch. For meals out, that's an average of \$20 per week or \$1,043 per year. Additionally, Americans eat lunch out an average of nearly twice a week and spend more than \$11 per outing compared with only \$6.30 a day preparing their own.

Who are the biggest spenders on average in the lunch-out crowd? The survey shows that men outspend women by a whopping 60 percent. Men pay an average of \$24.93 each week on meals out, while women dole out \$15.56 by comparison. As for the biggest spenders, the survey found that 1 percent of diners spend \$50 or more lunching out for an average of more than \$9,000 spent a year. Meanwhile, 32 percent of respondents reported they don't buy lunch out at all.

Additionally, students eat out most often and spend the most with a weekly average of \$27.47; retirees spend the least at \$13.92. One worrisome number is that unemployed Americans purchase lunch out more than once a week on average, spending over \$15 weekly.

The most popular spot to eat lunch in America is at home, according to the Visa survey. Forty-two percent of American consumers report that they typically eat lunch at home. The second most popular location to eat lunch? Work. While 53 percent of office workers report they eat lunch at work, 26 percent say they do so right at their desks.

As for regional preference, Southerners lead the nation in frequency of lunches out and overall amount spent on lunch. The average southern resident spends \$1,240 a year on lunches out and an overall \$2,953 between lunches out and those made at home. Northeasterners came in second with highest amount spent on lunching out—\$1,001. Midwesterners followed at \$896 and Americans in the western states at \$866 spend on meals out.

To help Americans monitor their spending on the midday meal, Visa Inc. has developed a new free Lunch Tracker iOS app (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/lunch-tracker-1.0/id1049899081?mt=8>) that calculates monthly and annual spend and helps you adjust your spending habits to save money. Users can take the 30-Day Challenge to start saving, learn cost-cutting tips and share photos of meals with family and friends.

Paying attention to lunchtime spending habits—whether making lunch at home or eating out—can greatly impact your annual finances. Though lunch is a healthy expense, at least some of the close to \$3,000 could be reallocated for other money-smart funds. For example, it could be a great start for an emergency fund, (<http://www.practicalmoneyskills.com/emergencyfund>) rent or mortgage, education funds or maybe an affordable holiday.

Bottom line: Small choices can have a big impact on your wallet. Adjusting and tracking your lunch spending habits can be a surprisingly large source of savings.

PARCC Test from A1

- In contrast, nearly 40 percent of Maryland students in Grades 3-8 taking the PARCC English Language Arts/Literacy Assessments last spring scored at a Level 4 and 5 combined.
- Nearly 30 percent of Maryland elementary and middle school students attained Level 4 and 5 combined in the mathematics assessment.

Subgroup Trends in PARCC English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Grades 3-8

- On average, the percentage of PGCPs students in noted subgroups scoring at levels 4 and 5 combined was within 6.5 percentage points of the percentage of Maryland students in noted subgroups scoring at levels 4 and 5 combined.
- Also, substantial achievement gaps persist in PGCPs and across Maryland between White and African American

students; White and Hispanic students; and African American and Hispanic students.

- Achievement gaps in PGCPs, in most cases, are smaller than achievement gaps across the state.

- For example, the Black/White achievement gap in PGCPs is 24.6% and 22.8% for ELA and Math, respectively, but 29.7% and 29.4% in Maryland overall.

- The White/Hispanic achievement gap in PGCPs is 30.9% and 24.8% (ELA and Math) and 28.0% and 26.3% in Maryland overall.

- The Black/Hispanic achievement gap in PGCPs is 1.7% and 2.0% (ELA and Math) and 6.3% and 3.1% in Maryland overall.

For more information on the new PARCC assessments, visit the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) website at <http://marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/parcc/>

The State Fire Marshal Reminds All Marylanders to “Be Vigilant of Fire Safety as We Settle Into the Winter Season and Enjoy Upcoming Holiday Festivities Safely”

By PRESS OFFICER
Maryland State Fire Marshal

STATEWIDE SAFETY RELEASE—State Fire Marshal Brian S. Geraci reminds all Marylanders to check for fire safety where they live, where they work and even where they attend classes, trainings and meetings. “Fire and life safety is everyone's responsibility; by testing smoke alarms and CO detectors, keeping exits clear of obstructions, and maintaining fire alarms and fire sprinkler systems, we can all avoid injury or death from the effects of fire,” stated the State Fire Marshal.

To ensure your best chances of surviving a fire, the State Fire Marshal offers the following tips on both escaping a fire and preventing one to begin with.

- Test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms to ensure they are working properly. Remember, the effects of toxic smoke and gases can quickly overcome your ability to think clearly. Every second counts when escaping the ingredients of fire.

- Check exits from both your home and any place you go to ensure you will be able to get to safety. Blocked exits resulting from improperly placed chairs, tables or even holiday decorations can result in the delay of

getting out quickly and safely. Be vigilant of these safety concerns whether at church, school or even your local favorite eatery.

- When using portable unvented fuel-fired heaters, such as kerosene heaters, make sure to use only the recommended fuel specified in the owner's manual and NEVER use gasoline. Note: Portable kerosene heaters are banned for use in Baltimore City.

- If you find it necessary to use an electric space heater, use only one that has been approved by an authorized testing laboratory such as UL.

- Keep all portable space heaters at least three feet away from anything combustible.

- If heating equipment fails, do not use kitchen stoves or ovens to supply heat. These devices are not designed for that purpose and the chance of a fire improves greatly.

- When using fireplaces, woodstoves or pellet stoves; please ensure these heat sources have been installed and properly serviced by trained technicians according to state and local codes, allowing them to work at peak efficiency and lower the risk of a catastrophic failure.

- Please ensure you have the chimney cleaned and inspected before use.

- Never leave candles burning unattended. Extinguish the flame before leaving the room.

- Prevent fires from starting on the stove by staying in the kitchen and monitoring the food as it is being prepared. If a fire would occur in a pot or pan on the stove, calmly place a lid on it and turn off the burner. Allow it to cool before removal from the stove.

- If using a turkey fryer this season, please follow all safety precautions and the manufacturer's instructions.

- If you are using a cut tree for Christmas, special precautions need to be observed: Select a tree with green needles that do not remove too easily from the branches and the trunk should be sticky to the touch. Place the tree in a location away from heat sources and add water every day during the recommended two-week life span while on display.

- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree. Ensure candles are placed well away from tree branches. The use of battery operated candles is recommended to prevent fires.

- Dried out trees can ignite more readily. Remove the tree shortly after the holiday and place outdoors for disposal.

- Inspect holiday lighting for frayed or damaged wiring and check for cracked sockets.

Replace strands with new sets as they become worn. Follow manufacturer's guidelines when attaching additional strands.

- Always unplug or switch off all holiday lights before leaving home or going to bed.

- Take down holiday lighting after the holidays. Holiday lights are temporary seasonal decorations that should be limited to 30 days use.

- If a fire occurs inside your home, close the doors behind you as you vacate to the outside, call 911 and never go back inside the home. Tell arriving first responders if anyone is still inside.

Please enjoy a fire safe holiday season with your family and friends!

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is an agency of the Department of State Police dedicated to helping protect citizens from fire and explosion through a comprehensive program of education, inspection, investigation and fire protection engineering.

For more information on fire safety call 1-800-525-3124, or log onto our website at: www.firemarshal.mdsp.gov and you can also visit <http://facebook.com/MarylandStateFireMarshal>.

Andrews from A1

Hollen, Jr. “Where there is a will and determination, I think we can do this, and certainly when it comes to Andrews given the fact that it is a priority national military base that has unique function and capability. I look forward to working with you to achieve that goal.”

It is estimated to cost \$25 million to make whole the business owners and residents included in the MIO Zone—an amount that Congressman Van Hollen is determined to secure for the safety of Prince George's County residents and business owners.

“The safety of all of our residents and businesses is paramount to their ultimate success in Prince George's County,” said EDC President and CEO Jim Coleman. “The Economic Development Corporation is pleased to work with such distinguished partners as the Greater Prince George's Business Roundtable and the Andrews Business and Community Alliance to come up with innovative ways to preserve the viability one of our County's great assets - Joint Base Andrews. Working with Congressman Van Hollen, we will work tirelessly to ensure that they will be adequately compensated should their businesses be negatively impacted by the Military Installation Overlay Zones.”

Last week, County Council passed CB-42-2015 - The Military Installation Overlay Zone. This legislation is a proactive solution to address the potential of casualties outside of Joint Base Andrews. The Military Installation Overlay Zone establishes standards of use, design and construction for developments in the vicinity of Joint Base Andrews that could be impacted by air operations at the base. The law creates a ‘Clear Zone’ right off the runway, to significantly reduce

the potential for air accident casualties, reduce the high levels of from flight operations and protect base-area residents, workers and businesses.

“It's a pleasure to be able to partner with Chairman Franklin and Vice-Chairman Davis and business leaders, because it's the right thing to do to ensure that everything remains safe on Joint Base Andrews,” said Colonel Bradley Hoagland, Commander, 11th Wing, The Chief's Own, Joint Base Andrews. “And to mitigate risk, to continue to expand and grow Joint Base Andrews, but also make sure it's safe for the surrounding area.”

Squirrel from A1

The delisting comes at a time when the species, which is twice as large as the common gray squirrel, has a population size and range greatly above its historic lows. In 1967, the squirrel's range had been narrowed 90 percent, from the whole of the Delmarva Peninsula to four counties in Maryland. Research

from the Wildlife Service estimates there are now 17,000 to 20,000 squirrels across 10 counties and 135,000 acres of forest in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

The population bounceback stems largely from interstate and federal conservation efforts. The Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Program, for example, monitors, protects and rehabilitates at-risk

species. For the Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel, translocating individuals from areas of higher to lower squirrel density gave rise to 11 new, thriving populations.

“It takes a lot of time and effort to get to the point where you can take something off the list,” said Thomas Miller, a ranger at the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. “It's a very big deal for us when it happens.”

Blackwater is based in Dorchester County, Maryland, home to one of the region's largest fox squirrel populations. As such, the refuge helped contribute squirrels for translocation projects, according to Miller.

Blackwater also bought additional woodland in part to increase protected squirrel habitat,

See **SQUIRREL** Page A7

BBB Warning: Avoid These Holiday Scams

By PRESS OFFICER
Better Business Bureau

Santa isn't the only one keeping track of who is naughty and who is nice! Better Business Bureau is warning consumers to beware of these common holiday scams:

- **Look-alike websites:** When shopping online, make sure to use only legitimate websites. Watch out for URLs that use the names of well-known brands along with extra words.

- **Fake shipping notifications:** These can have attachments or links to sites that will download malware on your computer to steal your identity and your passwords. Don't be fooled by a holiday phishing scam.

- **E-cards:** Electronic cards can be great fun, but be careful. Two red flags to watch out for are: the sender's name is not apparent; you are required to share additional information to get the card.

- **Letters from Santa:** Several trusted companies offer charming and personalized letters from Santa, but scammers mimic them to get personal information from unsuspecting parents. Check with bbb.org to find out which ones are legitimate.

- **Grandparents scam:** Seniors should be cautious if they get a call from a grandchild claiming to be in an accident, arrested or hospitalized while traveling in another country. Never send money unless you confirm with another family member that it's true.

- **Phony charities:** Everyone is in a generous mood at the holidays, so scammers take advantage of that with fake charity solicitations in email, on social media sites, and even by text. Check out charities at give.org before donating.

- **Temporary holiday jobs:** Retailers and delivery services need extra help at the hol-

idays, but beware of solicitations that require you to share personal information online or pay for a job lead. Apply in person or go to retailers' main websites to find out who is hiring.

- **Unusual forms of payment:** Be wary of anyone who asks you to pay for holiday purchases using prepaid debit cards, gift cards, wire transfers, third parties, etc. These payments cannot be traced and cannot be undone. Use a credit card on a secure website; look for https in the address (the extra “s” is for “secure”) and the lock symbol.

- **Free gift cards:** Pop-up ads or email offering free gift cards are often just a ploy to get your personal information that can later be used for identity theft.

- **Social media gift exchange:** It sounds like a great deal; buy one gift and get 36 in return. But it's just a variation on a pyramid scheme and it's illegal.

COMMENTARY

Rushern L. Baker, III Executive of Prince George's County



Statement of Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III

New Prince George's County Council Chairman Derrick Leon Davis and Vice Chair Dannielle Glaros

UPPER MARLBORO, MD—Prince George's County Executive Rushern L. Baker, III, released this statement following the selection of Council Member Derrick Leon Davis (D-District 6) as Prince George's County Council Chairman and Council Member Dannielle E. Glaros (D-District 3) as Vice Chair for the coming year:

"I congratulate Council Member Derrick Leon Davis and Council Member Dannielle Glaros on being selected as the new Prince George's County Council Chairman and Vice Chair respectively. I look forward to working with them as we continue to enhance the quality of life of Prince Georgians by growing our economy, improving our education system, as well as continuing to focus on public safety and health care.

Both Derrick and Dannielle excel at serving the needs of their constituents while understanding that progress in all communities throughout Prince George's County is important to success in their respective districts. As advocates for children, they have the sense of ur-

gency to address the growing needs within our school system. And, as leaders, they are collaborators and innovators who know how to build consensus and get things done for the residents of Prince George's County. I am confident that under their leadership, the Prince George's County Council and our community will soar to new heights.

I also want to recognize the contributions and achievements of outgoing Council Chairman Mel Franklin. For the past two years he has been an advocate for this County and the people of District 9. Chairman Franklin worked diligently to make this County a better place and I applaud his commitment and leadership.

Prince George's County is at the precipice of fulfilling its destiny. Our success over the years is grounded in the executive and legislative branches working in collaboration to address important issues. Each day, we are working to make Prince George's County the "Place to Be" and I look forward to working with this leadership team and the entire Council to make it happen."

Marc Morial, President and CEO National Urban League



Sounding the Alarm: HIV's Hold in Communities of Color

"Three decades into this crisis, let us set our sights on achieving the "three zeros"—zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. On this World AIDS Day, let us pledge to work together to realize this vision for all of the world's people."

— Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, United Nations, World AIDS Day 2010

Over thirty years ago, America, and nations around the world, came face to face with HIV/AIDS—a devastating global, public health concern that decimated cities, communities and countries alike. In the three decades since its discovery, much has changed—and thankfully—much has improved. Today, advancements in prevention and treatment have led to a significant reduction in HIV transmission; the expansion of HIV screening and testing has resulted in far more people knowing their HIV status and getting help early; and new and better drugs are allowing those infected with HIV/AIDS to lead longer and better quality lives. That's the good news.

But the news that should give us pause is that while we stand undisputedly victorious on a variety of battlefronts against this devastating epidemic, we are losing a costly war—one that primarily claims young, male and female African-Americans and Latinos as its victims.

HIV/AIDS does not discriminate. Sexual orientation, race or gender cannot protect you from HIV infection, but unfortunately, in far too many cases, those factors could increase your risk of infection. An estimated 1.2 million people are living with HIV infection in the United States today. Compared to other races and ethnic groups, Blacks and Hispanics are the groups most affected by HIV—accounting for a higher proportion of new HIV infections, of those living with HIV and of those ever diagnosed with AIDS. In 2010, African-Americans accounted for 44 percent of all new HIV infections. While African-Americans are 12 percent of the U.S. population, in 2011, they accounted for 41 percent of people living with HIV. Hispanics represent 16 percent of the population, but accounted for 20 percent of those living with HIV. In 2010, Hispanics accounted for 21 percent of new HIV infections. The numbers are graver still for African-American women. CDC statis-

tics point to AIDS as the fourth leading cause of death among African-American women ages 35-44. According to the latest statistics, African-American women accounted for 64 percent of new HIV infections. Hispanic women accounted for 15 percent of all new infections and white women accounted for 18 percent.

To win the war on HIV/AIDS; to achieve the three zeroes; we cannot approach the epidemic as a standalone public health crisis. Our nation must develop a multi-pronged approach to HIV/AIDS that also addresses equal access to health care and civil rights.

The lack of access to healthcare must be addressed in communities of color if we are going to effectively address the prevalence of this disease. While the Affordable Care Act has expanded the coverage of HIV prevention services and medical care, it can only work where it exists. It comes as no surprise that in states that rejected ACA, which also tend to be poorer states, HIV/AIDS remains at crisis levels. One in every eight people diagnosed with HIV is unaware of their status. That lack of awareness, the lack of access to prevention and education are needlessly decimating communities of color. According to the CDC, African-Americans also have the worse outcomes for continued care after diagnosis. While there can be no true statistical measure of the effect of stigma, fear and discrimination around HIV, the oftentimes real fear of rejection and stigmatization plays a large role in people choosing to not get tested or to keep their status to themselves.

We must all do our part to stop the spread of this disease. The National Urban League has joined the Act Against AIDS Leadership Alliance. The organization is one of only 20 agencies taking part in the federal government's first HIV prevention media campaign in 20 years. As a part of AAALI, more than 500 HIV related events and trainings have taken place. The leadership of community based organizations, corporations, and local and the federal government is important, but there is work out there for every one of us. Know your status; get tested; and encourage the people you love to do the same. And when you meet someone with HIV/AIDS don't perpetuate the problem of stigma and discrimination, be a part of the solution and help us get to zero.

National Colonial Farm & Piscataway Park



Open to the Public

PHOTO CREDIT: NPS

NATIONAL COLONIAL FARM & PISCATAWAY PARK

Founded in 1957 to protect the view from Mount Vernon across the Potomac River, the Accokeek Foundation, an educational nonprofit, became one of the nation's first land trusts. Today, the Foundation stewards 200 hundred acres of Piscataway National Park in Accokeek, MD, where visitors can hike a network of trails winding through wetlands, visit a native tree arboretum, and observe an award-winning forest restoration project. The Foundation also runs the National Colonial Farm, a living history museum that depicts a Maryland middle-class family farm on the eve of the American Revolution. Through their heritage breed livestock and seed saving programs, nearly extinct heirloom crops and animals are preserved for future generations. The Foundation's organic Ecosystem Farm emphasizes the future of agriculture as farmers learn the tools of a new trade and practice sustainable use of natural resources. "Shares" of the farm's organic produce are sold to area households. The park's beautiful grounds, trails, and programs are open to the public year 'round.

Child Watch

by Marion Wright Edelman



Who Put the NRA in Charge of Our National Security?

"I have supported legislation in the past which would place reasonable and careful restrictions on the use of firearms, and I am co-sponsoring S.1 ... I believe this bill would impose unnecessary controls without unduly curtailing the use of firearms for legitimate sport shooting or hunting, and without curtailing the lawful activity of sport gun clubs.

Basically this legislation would only subject deadly weapons to the same control we have always imposed on automobiles, liquor or prescription drugs. The use and sale of these items are carefully regulated by Federal, State, and local government. The same should be true of firearms."

—Senator Robert F. Kennedy, May 2, 1967

With the echo of gunshots from the San Bernardino massacre ricocheting across the country, and another American community reeling with new broken hearts, it sounds like a reasonable plea for common sense legislation a responsible lawmaker might make today. This quote from Senator Robert Kennedy's letter to a constituent was written just over a year before he would be assassinated by a gun on June 6, 1968 in Los Angeles. Since Robert Kennedy's and Dr. Martin Luther King's 1968 deaths more than 164,000 children have died from gun violence in America—three times more than all the American soldiers killed in action in the Vietnam War and every external conflict since.

In the decades since the deaths of Senator Kennedy and Dr. King very little has changed. Mass shootings have become the new normal. Since the beginning of this year we've had on average more than one a day. After a new mass shooting makes headlines our national discussion of gun violence feels and sounds like a broken record stuck on one horrifying song that never ends. The President expresses his outrage that these tragedies continue to happen and calls on the public to push Congress and state legislatures to do the right thing. Members of Congress release proposals without a clear

timetable for a vote or a path to passage. Public support for gun safety measures swells. The gun lobby pushes back, accusing those who seek reform of politicizing tragedy while continuing their relentless work to loosen restrictions on the deadly weapons that continue the carnage. Broken families and communities struggle to pick up the pieces after the media leaves town. With too few exceptions nothing gets done and nothing seems to change and every day Americans not living in the immediately affected communities grow numb to the tragedy and continue their normal lives until the next mass shooting inevitably occurs and the cycle repeats itself.

These horrible mass shootings that destroy and shake up so many lives with ever-increasing frequency tell only part of the tragic cost of gun violence that pervades our cities and towns every single day across our nation. Violence romps through our children's playgrounds, terrifies them in their schools and child care centers, follows them down the street, and shoots through their bedroom windows. This should be

the chief public health issue in America. Data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control earlier this year show there was a death by a gun every 16 minutes and a child or teen was killed or injured by a gun every 30 minutes in 2013. More than 2,400 children and teens died from guns, enough to fill 122 classrooms of 20 children. Why in God's name are we so reticent to stand up to the pro-gun lobby when American children are 18 times more likely to die by a gun than children in 25 other high income nations? Are we so spiritually dead that the killing of children has become routine and unimportant? Where is the faith community?

While mass shootings grab fleeting public and policymaker attention we too often ignore the relentless everyday trauma of gun violence that snuffs out the lives of more American children and teens every four days than the 2012 massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School. How can we remain numb to the day

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The Prince George's Post

The Prince George's Post
P.O. Box 1001 15207 Marlboro Pike
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772-3151
Phone: 301-627-0900 • Legal Fax: 301-627-6260
Email: pgpost@gmail.com
Contents © 2015, The Prince George's Post

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Prince George's County, Md. Member National Newspaper Publishers Association, and the Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia Press Association. The Prince George's Post (ISSN 10532226) is published every Thursday by the New Prince George's Post Inc., 15207 Marlboro Pike, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151. Subscription rate: 25 cents per single copy; \$15 per year; \$7.50 senior citizens and students; out of county add \$1; out of state add \$2. Periodical postage paid at Southern Md. 20790. Postmaster, send address changes to Prince George's Post, P.O. Box 1001, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20772-3151.

BUSINESS

The American Counseling Association's Counseling Corner

Explaining Terrorism to Your Children

As parents, many of us have seen how recent terrorist acts can frighten our young children. Between the Internet, TV news, and the talk among friends, even fairly young children may worry that what has happened elsewhere might happen to them.

While there's no rational explanation for the recent horrific acts, don't simply dismiss your child's questions or fears about such incidents. Most young children can't really understand what has transpired, but will often personalize it, imagining it as something that could easily happen to them.

When children have to face things they don't understand, their imagination can take over. A tragic event, such as the senseless attacks in Paris, may have happened on the other side of the world, but that won't stop children from wondering why it won't happen right here.

Many of us may have asked that same question, but in terms of communicating with your children it's important to be positive, calming and reassuring, not to increase their fear levels.

You don't want to be dismissive, treating the child's question as absurd or not worth considering. A child's fears are always very real to the child and won't disappear simply because Mom or Dad says that's a "silly" thing to be worried about.

Instead, it's more helpful to explain to your child what has happened in age-appropriate words with an emphasis on reassuring the child. Let your child to know that he or she is safe and that you are there to protect. Yes, that bad people made the bad event happen, but that there is no connection to him or her, or your family.

Try to limit the information input. Don't let the kids watch the TV news and don't discuss your own concerns in front of them.

If your child is a bit older you might want to provide some detail on the "why" behind what has them scared. Yes, there are people in the world who are not sane, or who have no regard for the lives of others, but it's also important that the child understands such people are few in number and usually far away.

It would be nice if there were no bad things in the world to have to explain to our kids, but since that isn't the case, try to be as understanding, supportive and reassuring as you honestly can be when addressing their fears.

Counseling Corner is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

Watch from A4

in and day out cries of children and others robbed of their childhoods, robbed of their lives, or scarred for life by guns and bullets we have the power but not the decency, courage, and will to stop? Dr. King warned us that America may go to hell if we didn't deal with the violence of poverty in his last Sunday sermon. I am sure he would say we were going to go to hell as well today if we don't stop the violence of guns that is ravaging our families and communities and terrifying our children. We must act to save our country's soul. Lessons from America's public health history points us to what we can do now to stop the carnage. The public health approach to problem solving has been credited with a range of achievements, including adding 25 years to the life expectancy of people in the United States in the 20th century. One of the greatest victories of this approach has been a massive decline in automobile deaths. Few today can imagine getting in a car without an airbag, a seat belt, or a proper child safety seat. These safety devices and the laws we follow while on the road were not always in place—and American roadways were not always as safe as they are today. It took a concentrated effort by researchers, policymakers, and the public to identify and address the root causes of the epidemic of motor vehicle deaths before the 1960s.

Research efforts led to the creation of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and a revolution in vehicle safety, better designed roads, and increased enforcement of

laws to get drunk drivers off the roads. According to Dr. Mark Rosenberg, president and CEO of the Task Force for Global Health and former director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, "What we did in the '60s, redesigning the car, redesigning the roadway, redesigning the drivers, was a result of scientific research, and as a result we have saved, between the '60s and the beginning of this century, 325,000 lives." Dr. Rosenberg and many other public health professionals believe the same approach can help end today's epidemic of gun violence which is ravaging and terrorizing our nation.

Recent gun violence prevention research should help point the way forward. A recent study found that a Connecticut law that expanded background checks to all handgun purchases helped achieve a 40 percent reduction in gun homicides during the first 10 years following the law's enactment. Another study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association Internal Medicine found states with background checks on private as well as online gun sales had 16 percent lower gun fatality rates. Polling consistently shows a vast majority of Americans, including a large majority of gun owners, support expanding background checks to cover all gun sales—yet Congress has not yet demonstrated its capacity to act on such a simple, life-saving measure. As a result guns can be purchased without background checks from unlicensed private sellers and over

See WATCH, Page A6

Franchot Proposes Taxpayer Protection Act to Strengthen Enforcement of Tax Fraud, Identity Theft

Comptroller Discussed Legislation at Roundtable and at Annual MACPA Luncheon

By PRESS OFFICER
Comptroller of Maryland

ANNAPOLIS, MD—Maryland Comptroller Peter Franchot announced that he will be introducing legislation in January called The Taxpayer Protection Act to better protect Maryland taxpayers from tax fraud and identity theft at a roundtable discussion with media today in the Assembly Room of the Louis L. Goldstein Treasury Building. He later spoke to the Maryland Association of Certified Public Accountants at their annual luncheon in Baltimore where the proposed legislation was the main focus of his remarks.

"The Taxpayer Protection Act will improve our ability to prevent tax fraud, to expand our efforts to protect taxpayer information and to increase the authority of our field enforcement agents to effectively hold fraudulent filers and preparers accountable," said Comptroller Franchot, as the state's chief tax collector. "The new legislation will strengthen my agency's ability to enforce Maryland's Tax Code and protect Maryland taxpayers."

Since taking office in 2007, the Comptroller's Office has stopped nearly \$152 million in tax fraud. The proposed legislation will enhance the tools available to the Comptroller and his staff of highly-skilled tax and en-

forcement professionals to detect and prevent tax fraud. Among the key provisions of the legislation are to make major tax crimes a felony and to extend the statute of limitations for tax crimes to six years from the current three years to allow sufficient time to properly investigate and charge in fraud cases in what are commonly highly sophisticated schemes.

"The Taxpayer Protection Act is absolutely critical to protect Maryland taxpayers and to combat fraud, and I am calling on my colleagues in the General Assembly to pass this critical piece of legislation in the next session," Franchot said. "Passage of this act will allow my agency to keep pace with rapidly-increasing fraud schemes and fast-changing threats to sensitive data."

The bill also will:

- Change major criminal tax offenses to felony charges from misdemeanors;
- Add a fraudulent return preparer penalty;
- Make it a felony for anyone to try to evade or defeat any tax imposed under the Tax General Article and impose a penalty upon conviction of the offense; and,
- Provide legal authority to issue injunctions against preparers under investigation for fraud to protect consumers while investigations are ongoing.



PHOTO COURTESY THE OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER OF MARYLAND

Comptroller Peter Franchot announced legislation he plans to introduce in January called The Taxpayer Protection Act, which will better protect Maryland taxpayers from tax fraud and identity theft. The announcement was made Tuesday morning at a roundtable session with news media in the Assembly Room of the Louis L. Goldstein Treasury Building in Annapolis. He later made a similar presentation to the Maryland Association of Certified Public Accountants at their annual luncheon in Baltimore. Joining the Comptroller from his agency are from left: Field Enforcement Division Director Jeff Kelly, Deputy Comptroller Sharonne Bonardi and Deputy Director of the Revenue Administration Division

The introduction of The Taxpayer Protection Act is just the latest in a series of actions that Comptroller Franchot has taken to combat fraud. During the past nine years, the Comptroller's Office has made unprecedented investments in dedicated personnel and advanced technology to detect and prevent tax fraud. Earlier this month, the Comptroller signed a Memorandum of Understanding in collaboration with the Internal

Revenue Service, State Departments of Revenue, Tax Industry Electronic Return Transmission and related financial service organizations to protect taxpayers from the burdens associated with identity theft and refund fraud.

"As Comptroller, my top priority is to make sure that everyone is playing by the rules and paying their fair share, and to aggressively go after those who don't."

Drones from A1

The industry is booming, Capps said, but Federal Aviation Administration regulations have created backlogs in commercial licensing, a mandatory process for companies to use drones.

Capps received his registration, called a 333 exemption, within three months of his application. Now, the wait exceeds eight months, he said.

James Sean Humbert, associate professor in the mechanical engineering department at the University of Colorado Boulder, said the FAA is currently looking into ways to track all drones for safety reasons. However, the payload limit of drones does not allow them to carry tracking equipment like other aircraft do.

"There has been limited commercial and research permission

given by the FAA, but there isn't a blanket way to do this," Humbert said. "I think people are anticipating the FAA will figure this out at some point. So there is a lot of money getting invested in the development of technology of drones."

High demand for aerial drone inspections create profitable businesses and save companies both time and money, according to Capps.

The income for tower inspectors in Maryland is one of the highest in the nation, with an hourly mean wage of more than \$28, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This equates to larger costs for companies.

Although drones are expensive (prices range between \$2,000 and \$40,000), newer technology will eventually reduce costs, Capps said.

"As technology progresses, it will become more cost effective," Capps said. "Pretty soon we will start seeing these cell tower companies and agricultural companies buy their own equipment and doing the work themselves. Until that point, there will still be a need for guys like me."

Until then, Capps said he will continue to improve his business, eventually moving toward data processing.

"It's estimated by the end of next year, the drone industry will be a \$13.8 billion-a-year industry," Capps said. "It will supply 200,000 jobs in the first year alone once the FAA opens their roles. There will still be a lot of hurdles."

One of these hurdles in the Maryland area is the no-fly zone, a 15-mile radius that covers most of the District of Columbia region, including northern Virginia.

This means Capps cannot service cell towers in the area without obtaining a waiver from the FAA, called a certificate of authorization.

Although safety is key for government officials, recreational users still have the ability to fly drones without any regulation, according to Capps.

"It has to be a completely different system, and they don't have the technology available for the smaller drones to integrate into what's called the national airspace, or NAS," Humbert said. "So the legal issues from all of that are getting hammered out right now."

Drone registration for recreational use is expected to start next year.

"Efficiency is first, but safety is paramount," Capps said. "That is what it spawned into."

Scores from A1

Level 4 or 5—on the English Language Arts and Literacy assessments, while fewer than 30 percent statewide passed the math exam.

The scores for grades 3-8 mirror the state's high school scores released in late October, where fewer than 40 percent met or exceeded the grade-level standard on the English 10 exam, less than one-third passed Algebra I, and only 20 percent passed the Algebra II exams.

Some of the state's more advanced middle school students also took the Algebra I and Algebra II tests, with over 30 percent who took it passing the Algebra I exam and just over 20 percent passing the Algebra II exam. Math scores fell as the grade level increased because many of the advanced students instead took the upper-level math exams, Interim State Superintendent Jack R. Smith said.

"These initial results provide a new springboard for Maryland students, as we continue our work to better prepare them for what lies ahead," Smith said in a statement. "These results should be viewed in combination with other measures when assessing student progress."

Some board members wanted these results to be reported to them along with scores for the SAT exam, student transcripts and other standards, to put the PARCC results into perspective with other measures of student performance.

Despite the low scores across the board, most board members agreed that the complicated format for results and long delay for the exam's take-home reports were the least acceptable part of the process for parents and guardians. The tests were administered in each of the state's 24 jurisdictions in April or May.

"It's very dense. I think that one would have to have a 4 or 5

on the PARCC exam to understand it," said Chester E. Finn Jr., a board member. "We should have a place on the parent's report with a two-box option, 'is' or 'is not' on track for college and career. 'Is' or 'Is not'. Nothing else."

Maryland State Department of Education officials told lawmakers in mid-October that the new exam would also itemize results and show individual students' areas of deficiency for teachers. Some board members suggested that future take-home reports should also be available online with individualized results included for parents.

"I have been a fan of PARCC for years now, but this experience has begun to turn me against it," Finn said.

Local school systems also waited until Nov. 16 to begin distributing the scores to parents through take-home reports, which took too long, according

to several board members. But, the state is planning to administer the exam again in April or May, with scores coming back much more quickly—in a four-to six-week time period, Interim Deputy State Superintendent Henry Johnson said.

In three to four years, Johnson said, the return time of scores should be almost instantaneous.

"There is a vote coming up and some of us are in different places on how useful this tool is," board member Larry Giammo said of the future of PARCC exams. "It's a little difficult for us to be like 'Yeah this is the way to go'."

However, the board did not name a day or time that this "vote" or further discussion would be taking place. It has not been included on future agendas as of yet, education department spokesman Bill Reinhard said Tuesday. The next Board of Education meeting is scheduled for Jan. 26.

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OUT ON THE TOWN

ERIC D. SNIDER'S
IN THE DARK

Movie Review

“Love the Coopers”

Love the Coopers

Grade: C

Rated PG-13, some profanity

and vulgarity

1 hr., 47 min

You know the plot where the girl gets someone to pretend to be her boyfriend when she visits home so her parents won't nag her about being single? And the one where a guy has lost his job but pretends to go to work every day so his family won't know? “Love the Coopers” has BOTH of those plots, plus several more. It's better than it sounds like it would be (it sounds like it would be an excruciating nightmare), but not much.

Set entirely on the day of Christmas Eve as the various Coopers scramble around Pittsburgh doing last-minute things, the movie is too crowded to survive without a narrator, so Steve Martin was recruited to fill us in. After however many years of marriage, Charlotte (Diane Keaton) and Sam Cooper (John Goodman) are considering divorce, but they're waiting till after the Christmas Eve festivities to tell the family. Their son, Hank (Ed Helms), is the one who got fired and hasn't told anyone yet. Their daughter, Eleanor (Olivia Wilde), has just flown in but is in no hurry to get home, so she kills time flirting with an Army man, Joe (Jake Lacy), at the airport bar before persuading him to be her fake boyfriend.

Meanwhile, Charlotte's sister, Emma (Marisa Tomei), a “life coach,” has been arrested for shoplifting a gift for Charlotte. (Emma has issues.) She spends most of the film in the backseat of a police car being driven by Officer Williams (Anthony Mackie), whose robotic demeanor prompts Emma to pry into his life and eventually turn



Love the Coopers follows the Cooper clan as four generations of extended family come together for their annual Christmas Eve celebration. As the evening unfolds, a series of unexpected visitors and unlikely events turn the night upside down, leading them all toward a surprising rediscovery of family bonds and the spirit of the holiday.

this into a therapy session. Everything that happens between them, including the part where it takes several hours to drive from the mall to the police station, is phony movie garbage that doesn't make a lick of sense in the real world. Forget I mentioned them.

Also meanwhile, Charlotte and Emma's father, Bucky (Alan Arkin), is sad because he has breakfast at the same diner every single day (that's not the sad part) and his favorite waitress, Ruby (Amanda Seyfried), is quitting. Her life is in a rut here in Pittsburgh, so she's moving to ... Hot Coffee, Mississippi, to be a diner waitress there. I kid you not, that's her plan. Anyway, Bucky is sad.

(Are you wondering how Alan Arkin, 81, is father to both

Diane Keaton, 69, AND Marisa Tomei, 41? Or how Keaton and Tomei are sisters when they are 28 years and several ethnicities apart? Or how the age difference between them in flashbacks to their childhood is only about five years? Well, stop. It won't get you anywhere.)

More meanwhile, the John Goodman character has an aunt (June Squibb) who serves no function in the story except to waste time. The Ed Helms character has two sons (Timothée Chalamet, Maxwell Simpkins) whose usefulness escapes my recollection, plus a little girl (Blake Baumgartner) whose job is to say a certain vulgar word whenever we see her, because what good is an ensemble Christmas dramedy without a foul-mouthed little girl?

The film was directed by Jessie Nelson, who wrote and directed “I Am Sam,” and written by Steven Rogers, with whom Nelson helped co-write “Stepmom.” These two have a long history of making mediocre family-oriented nonsense, and “Love the Coopers” (that's an imperative phrase, by the way: PLEASE! LOVE US! has them at the height of their vanilla-flavored powers. The movie has the form of a touching, nostalgic look at Christmas, but for everything that works well—Wilde and Lacy, despite the dumbness of their story, are actually good together—there are three more than don't. The laughs are scant, the convincing emotions scander. Even John Goodman, who can usually improve anything, is forlorn and lost in this overstuffed holiday mishap.

Watch from A5

the internet with no checks at all. The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence reports some progress in states on expanding background checks but federal law changes are needed to ensure people cannot just traffic guns from states with weaker laws to those with stronger ones. Eighteen states and D.C. have extended background check requirements beyond federal law. It's way past time for citizens to retire members of Congress and state legislators who put gun manufacturer profits ahead of child, family, and human safety.

Some say that background checks alone will not prevent every gun tragedy and they won't, but they are a critically important step forward. We need more research on laws, other policies, and technologies that might save more lives. Proposals to require background checks for ammunition sales, impose a tax on ammunition, require liability insurance for guns, and smart gun technologies all merit immediate attention. Sadly, the National Rifle Association, other members of the gun lobby, and their cowardly allies in Congress and in many state legislatures have barred the CDC from conducting research and sharing the truth

about the impact of on gun violence on our nation's public health since the mid-1990's and imposed similar restrictions on the National Institutes of Health in 2011 due to fears that research might show concrete ways to reduce its deadly impacts. Just this week physicians' organizations including Doctors for America, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Student Association, and others delivered a petition to Congress from more than 2,000 doctors in all 50 states and the District of Columbia urging Congress to remove these barriers and provide funding for such research. Even former Representative Jay Dickey, who took the lead in banning CDC research on gun violence, has expressed his regrets in the wake of recent mass killings.

Why is the NRA afraid of the truth? Is it because they fear the research may show concrete ways to reduce the impact of guns which sapped 33,169 lives in America in 2013 and injured 83,075 yet remain the only unregulated consumer product? It makes no sense to regulate toy guns which kill not a single person and let real guns which should only be in the hands of the military kill tens of thousands annually. We should protect human beings rather than

guns. Might not the truth make us all safer? We should retire the NRA as the director of our public health research.

If we truly want to end the cycle of death and violence from guns that pervades our daily lives, we must stop being numb and doing nothing in the face of tragedy. And we should stop normalizing growing gun violence including assault weapons by selling them over the counter as if they were toasters or fishing poles. We must not be placated or deterred by angry words and hand-wringing and proposals that die with a whimper in Congress and in some state legislatures and local governing bodies. All of us—Democrats, Republicans, and independents, gun owners and non-gun owners—must stand up and demand every day that our leaders treat gun violence in America as the public health epidemic that it is and take the steps necessary to save the lives of thousands of our children, families, and all those victimized by relentless, preventable gun violence. Polling consistently shows that the gun lobby does not speak for America, American gun owners, or even a majority of NRA members. Until we shake off our sense of hopelessness and apathy in the face of persistent tragedy

and bullying by the pro-gun lobby in our communities, Congress and state legislatures will continue to do their bidding, putting their political lives ahead of the lives of our children and families and citizens who they are sworn to represent. It's way past time to combine “thoughts and prayers” with action and vote out those who place protecting guns higher than protecting babies and children and mothers and fathers. It's way past time for the American people to retire the NRA as our head of national security and public health and assure the safety of our children and families everywhere in America. Only then can we reclaim our nation's soul and affirm our commitment to the sanctity of life for all.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org.

Mrs. Edelman's Child Watch Column also appears each week on The Huffington Post

The Edge of Sports

by DAVE ZIRIN

Fight Transphobia and Move the Damn 2017 Super Bowl



Roger Goodell and the National Football League recently had the chance to do the right thing—or at least take a breath and listen to people counseling them to do the right thing—yet, at the speed of a young Deion Sanders, they were proactively pathetic. The question before Commissioner Goodell: Should the league consider moving the February 2017 Super Bowl out of the city of Houston.

Why move the big game? Well, Houston put some of their citizens' civil rights up for a vote and by a wide margin declared that LGBTQ people needed to accept a second-class form of citizenship. The referenda, aptly named the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO), would have extended nondiscrimination protections to also cover the LGBTQ community. Yet it wasn't even that it lost as much as how it lost, which should turn the stomach of anyone with an ounce of compassion. The anti-HERO forces took this fight to the gutter. The “no” campaign zeroed in on the “T” in LGBTQ and was viciously as well as unapologetically transphobic. The dominant slogan on T-shirts and signs was “No men in women's bathrooms.” As Republican lieutenant governor of Texas Daniel Patrick said, the campaign “was about protecting our grandmothers, and our mothers and our wives and our sisters and our daughters and our granddaughters.”

Texas Governor Greg Abbott even tweeted the phrase “No men in women's bathrooms,” just in case trans people hadn't been demonized quite enough. It was ugly as sin and spoke one of the most toxic traditions of the old South: the idea that any atrocity can be justified if done in the name of “protecting our daughters.”

It should be noted that not one example exists of a trans person exposing their genitals in a public bathroom, and that it would be illegal for anyone to do so in any context. And not that you heard Greg Abbott talking about it, but the record of men following women into bathrooms to commit sexual assaults actually exists. But this campaign was ginned up to divide and conquer the people of Houston. After the results were in, former Houston Astros star Lance Berkman—who also publicly campaigned against the ordinance—gave a quote for the ages when he crowed, “Tolerance is a virtue that's killing this country.”

I contacted Upworthy journalist Parker Molloy, who is a trans woman, for comment. “It's always frustrating when things like basic human rights are put to a public vote, and that's what happened Tuesday in Houston,” she said. “It's even more frustrating when those leading the opposition run a campaign based on lies, which again, was exactly what happened on Tuesday. Seventeen states and more than 200 municipalities have enacted similar protections without incident. But each time this gets brought up for discussion—whether you're talking about Houston or New York—the same lies get trotted out ... No matter which way last night's vote went, the fact that there was a single person (let alone thousands) willing to cast a vote to say I'm less human and less legitimate than they are is absolutely heartbreaking. I went to bed [Tuesday] night heartbroken for my friends in Houston.”

Now, without HERO, discrimination has not only been codified in Houston, it has been emboldened. This poses a threat first and foremost to the LGBTQ population of the city. It also creates a dangerous environment for employees of any business planning to travel to Houston—like the National Football League.

Under Roger Goodell's leadership, the NFL has established a pattern of responding to hot-button social issues in a manner that is, to be kind, reactive and skittish: Goodell waits, takes the temperature of public opinion, flip-flops, and looks like he has the spine of a Slinky. We've seen him publicly get weak in the knees when it comes to taking a stand on violence against women, the health of the players, or even whether to take money from the military to salute the troops. Usually this league does its business in shadows. When exposed, it backpedals faster than Richard Sherman covering Julio Jones.

Yet, when it came to Houston, Goodell was firm as oak. The ink had not even dried on HERO's defeat before the NFL issued an immediate statement saying, “This will not affect our plans for Super Bowl LI in 2017. We will work closely with the Houston Super Bowl Host Committee to make sure all fans feel welcomed at our events. Our policies emphasize tolerance and inclusiveness, and prohibit discrimination based on age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other improper standard.”

Translated, the message of this statement was, “The Super Bowl is not up for discussion.”

I spoke to Cyd Zeigler, one of the founders of OutSports and author of the forthcoming book *Fair Play: How LGBT*

See TRANSPHOBIA Page A7

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Calendar of Events

December 17 — December 23, 2015

Mistletoes Rock N' Roll Multicultural Holiday Celebration

Date & Time: Friday, December 18, 2015, 11 am
 Description: Sing along in this show packed with everyone's favorite holiday songs! Then, learn more about how customs such as lighting candles, exchanging gifts, festive meals, and family gatherings are universal to end-of-the-year holidays such as Christmas, Hannukah, Kwanzaa, Dongzhi, Three Kings Day and Eid-al-Fitr.
 Cost: \$10/person
 Ages: All ages welcome
 Location: Publick Playhouse Cultural Arts Center
 5445 Landover Road, Landover, MD
 Contact: 301-277-1710; TTY 301-699-2544

Seniors: Exercise Holiday Lunch

Date and Time: Friday, December 18, 2015, 11 am-1:30pm
 Description: Let's eat and rejoice about the excellent year we had together as well as ring in an exciting new year!
 Cost: Free
 Ages: 55 & up
 Location: Marlow Heights Community Center
 2800 St. Clair Drive, Marlow Heights, MD
 Contact: 301-423-0505; TTY 301-699-2544

G.E.A.R.: Holiday Cupcakes

Date and Time: Friday, December 18, 2015, 7-10 pm
 Description: Join us for a night of delicious treats as we bake holiday cupcakes to spread holiday cheer.
 Cost: Free with M-NCPPC Youth ID
 Ages: 10-17
 Location: Rollingcrest-Chillum Community Center
 6120 Sargent Road, Chillum, MD
 Contact: 301-853-2005; TTY 301-699-2544

Deck The Halls Senior Holiday Party

Date & Time: Saturday, December 19, 2015, 1-4 pm
 Description: Your favorite festive affair is back! Join us for a fun-filled afternoon of dancing, great food, arts & crafts, holiday bingo, caroling karaoke and more to celebrate the season.
 Cost: Resident: \$5; Non-Resident: \$6
 Ages: 60 & better
 Location: Southern Regional Technology & Recreation Complex
 7007 Bock Road, Fort Washington, MD
 Contact: 301-749-4160; TTY 301-699-2544

Hansel & Gretel Tea Party

Date and Time: Saturday, December 19, 2015, 2 pm
 Description: Visit Darnall's Chance when it is decorated like a gingerbread house to listen to the story of Hansel and Gretel! Tea and dessert will be served to get in the holiday spirit. Registration fee required for all attendees—children and adults
 Capacity is limited; advance reservations and payment required
 Cost: Resident \$17; Non-resident \$20
 Ages: 5 & up
 Location: Darnall's Chance House Museum
 14800 Governor Oden Bowie Drive,
 Upper Marlboro, MD
 Contact: 301-952-8010; TTY 301-699-2544

Holiday Concert

Date and Time: Saturday, December 19, 2015, 7-9 pm
 Description: Local schools, churches, colleges and community organizations will ring in the holiday at this concert. If you would like to participate in this event, please call the community center.
 Cost: Resident \$5; Non-Resident \$6
 Ages: All ages welcome
 Location: Potomac Landing Community Center
 12500 Fort Washington Road, Ft. Washington, MD
 Contact: 301-292-9191; TTY 301-699-2544

Holiday Community Dance

Date & Time: Saturday, December 19, 2015, 6-10 pm
 Description: Join us for an evening of socializing, good food, and music while dancing the night away. Don't forget your camera so that you can capture the moment by the photo area!
 Cost: Resident: \$10; Non-Resident: \$12
 Ages: 50 & up
 Location: College Park Community Center
 5051 Pierce Avenue, College Park, MD
 Contact: 301-441-2647; TTY 301-699-2544

Xtreme Teens: Ice Skating Jam

Date and Time: Saturday, December 19, 2015, 7-10 pm
 Description: Teens will travel to Wells Ice Rink to enjoy ice skating. We will depart by 6:30 pm and return by 10 pm. A signed specialized permission slip by a parent/guardian is required. Please wear socks and bring your own spending money.
 Cost: Free with M-NCPPC Youth ID
 Ages: 10-17
 Location: College Park Community Center
 5051 Pierce Avenue, College Park, MD
 Contact: 301-441-2647; TTY 301-699-2544

Xtreme Teens: Pajama Holiday Movie Night

Date and Time: Saturday, December 19, 2015, 7-10 pm
 Description: School's out for winter, so why not unwind with a holiday movie in your pajamas? Sit back, relax and enjoy the film.
 Cost: Free with M-NCPPC Youth ID
 Ages: 10-17
 Location: Good Luck Community Center
 8601 Good Luck Road, Lanham, MD
 Contact: 301-552-1093; TTY 301-699-2544

EARTH TALK ... Are There Any Green PACs Working to Influence Elections?

Environmental PACs and SuperPACs to be Major Players in 2016 Elections

Dear EarthTalk:

Are green groups using the campaign finance system like other "special interests" through Political Action Committees (PACs) or otherwise?
 —Wilson McClave,
 Washington, D.C.

As a matter of fact, green Political Action Committees (PACs) emerged as major funders last fall in the run-up to the 2014 Congressional elections, and look to play an even larger role in next year's Presidential and other races. According to the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP), PACs are political committees, typically representing specific business, labor or ideological interests, organized for the purpose of raising and spending money to elect and defeat candidates. They must register with the Federal Election Commission and are limited to donations of \$5,000 to any given candidate per election—but can also contribute \$5,000 annually to any other PAC and up to \$15,000 annually to any national political party. PACs can receive as much as \$5,000 from any one individual, PAC or political party per calendar year.

Meanwhile, so-called Super PACs aren't beholden to fundraising or spending limits, but can't make contributions directly to candidates or political parties like regular PACs. "They do, however make independent expenditures in federal races—

running ads or sending mail or communicating in other ways with messages that specifically advocate the election or defeat of a specific candidate," reports CRP, which produces the OpenSecrets.org website scrutinizing what PACs are spending and on what.

The biggest among the new breed of green PACs is billionaire hedge-fund manager Tom Steyer's NextGen Climate Action super PAC, which poured some \$50 million toward battling climate "deniers" in races across seven key states in 2014. NextGen has already committed upwards of \$5 million into the 2016 election cycle, with much more likely to come over the next several months in an effort to "disqualify" presidential candidates who deny that climate change is real or caused by human activity.

"The effort will be called Hot Seat, and NextGen Climate says it will involve media and on-the-ground campaigns in key electoral states aimed at linking Republican deniers to the Koch brothers and other interests that seek to undermine climate science," reports Kate Sheppard in *The Huffington Post*. "The idea ... is to force candidates skeptical of climate change to defend their views right out of the gate."

Another big player is the League of Conservation Voters' super PAC, which pledged \$25 million alongside NextGen in 2014. The next two biggest green super PACs to date are the Sierra



CREDIT COURTESY OF EARTHTALK

Hedge fund billionaire Tom Steyer is pouring tens of millions of dollars of his own money into influencing voters to use the democratic process to oust public officials blind to the real causes and effects of climate change.

Club's Independent Action and the Environment America Action Fund, both which spent roughly \$1 million to influence 2014 elections. The Defenders of Wildlife Action Committee spent \$350,000 on 2014 elections.

As for regular PACs, those already amassing their funding war chests for 2016 include the League of Conservation Voters, the Center for Coastal Conservation, Ocean Champions, Environment America, The NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) Action Fund, Defenders of Wildlife Action Fund, Environmental Defense Action Fund, and the Sierra Club. Other green PACs are expected to join the fray.

While not a PAC per se, Crowdpc gives everyday people the ability to research candidates based on their own values

and priorities and provides an easy online mechanism for making direct campaign donations. The website's founders view Crowdpc as a tool for democratizing the U.S. election and campaign finance processes. Maybe you don't have to be a billionaire to influence politics in America?

CONTACTS: CRP's OpenSecrets.org, www.opensecrets.org; NextGen Climate Action, www.nextgenclimate.org; Crowdpc, www.crowdpc.com

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Send questions to: earthtalk@emagazine.com.

Squirrel from A3

Miller said. "It's kind of a major species that we feel ownership for in this refuge."

"We are proud to be a major partner in the recovery of the Delmarva fox squirrel after 40 years of conservation efforts," Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary Mark Belton said in a press release issued Friday. "This success story would not have happened without the cooperation of federal

and state agencies and conservation groups, as well as the private property owners of Maryland and Delaware who provided habitat for the endangered species on their own land."

Under the Endangered Species Act, endangered species are those at risk for extinction across a "significant portion" of their range. When establishing the endangered species list, the Wildlife Service looks at factors such as habitat destruction, disease, predation and effects of hu-

man intervention, and reviews the status of each listed species every five years.

Reviews in 2007 and 2012 concluded reclassification and ultimately delisting of the squirrel was warranted. After completing the regulatory steps, which include opening the decision to public and scientific comments and revisions, the Wildlife Service had the green light for removal.

"The natural world is amazingly resilient, especially

when a broad collection of partners works together to help it," said U.S. Senator Ben Cardin, D-Md., a senior member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, said in the press release. "Today's announcement is a major victory for the Endangered Species Act and the Delmarva fox squirrel itself, and much credit is due to the federal biologists who have worked for decades to rebuild the squirrel's populations ..."

COOL YOUR FIREPLACE

Lighting a blazing fire on a cold winter day can decrease energy efficiency. Here are ways to limit the loss of heat when sitting by the fire.

- ▶ Reduce heat loss by opening dampers in the bottom of the firebox or the nearest window slightly;
- ▶ Keep it clean by hiring a chimney sweep to inspect your chimney each year;
- ▶ Install tempered glass doors and a heat-air exchange system that blows warmed air back into the room;
- ▶ Check the seal on the flue damper;
- ▶ Use grates made of C-shaped metal tubes to draw cool room air into the fireplace and circulate warm air back into the room;
- ▶ Keep your fireplace's damper closed when you aren't using it; and
- ▶ Consider a gas fireplace if you are planning to install a new one. These look like the real thing and can be 70% more efficient than regular fireplaces.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Transphobia from A6

Athletes Are Claiming Their Rightful Place In Sports. He was stunned by how rapid the response had been. "What's so strange about this is how slow the NFL was to respond to virtually the same exact situation in Indiana, where the NFL holds its annual Scouting Combine, yet here it took them about 12 hours, and for most of that Goodell was sleeping," he said. "I think with most things with big-money sports you have to go to the root: big money. The Super Bowl is the biggest money of the year, and I can only guess they didn't want any of that money getting nervous. The swift way in which the

NFL has spoken makes it crystal clear that, as an institution, it doesn't give a crap about equal rights or discrimination protection for the average LGBT fan."

This decision by the NFL comes after the New York Giants became the first team to finally make a "You Can Play" video against LGBTQ discrimination. It comes after the league took demonstrable steps to portray themselves as having a zero tolerance policy on anti-LGBTQ bigotry. Yet clearly, when it comes to the Super Bowl—a k a Woodstock for their corporate partners—there can be no discussion of moving the game, even if it imperils a portion of the people coming to the city.

The idea that the Super Bowl must never "have its plan affected" by politics flies in the face of its own history. This is a league that in 1991 threatened to move the Super Bowl from Arizona because of the state's refusal to make Martin Luther King Day a holiday. Paul Tagliabue was commissioner back then. One wonders if Goodell was in charge whether that threat would have been made at all, or if he would have just said, "This will not affect our plans at all."

The MLK story will be told a great deal over the next year as Goodell is pushed to move the game. Within hours of the vote, an online petition was put up by football fan Ben Douthett. It references that precedent and says,

"By pulling the game from Houston, the NFL can demonstrate its commitment to equality, freedom and justice in a truly meaningful way."

Will Goodell listen to the league's LGBTQ fans and supporters? Will he listen to his league's own history? He will if people rally, petition, and argue that Houston, a city that elected an openly lesbian mayor, Annise Parker, was divided by a sick campaign of lies. He will if he's pushed.

If there is one thing we know about Goodell it's that, if pushed, he could very well topple. Do it for our daughters, Roger. But also for our sons and everyone finding space between those two labels.

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