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Maryland Becomes First State to Lower Gas Prices With Fuel Tax Moratorium

By STEPHEN NEUKAM AND E. A. BREEDEN
Capital News Service

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 18, 2022)—Maryland drivers got immediate relief at the pump Friday afternoon when Republican Gov. Larry Hogan signed into law a 30-day gas tax moratorium, after the legislation was fast-tracked this week by unanimous votes in the General Assembly.

The law, which went into effect immediately, suspends the state's nearly 37-cent gas tax. Prices at the Eastport Shell gas station in Annapolis dropped by 36 cents from \$4.29 to \$3.93 just minutes after the bill signing.

"This bipartisan action will provide some relief from the pain at the pump," Hogan said at the bill signing. "This, of course, is not going to be a cure-all, and market instability will continue to lead to fluctuations in prices."

Jen Gaynor of Catonsville was one of the first customers to buy gas at the reduced price at the Eastport Shell station.

"I was pretty happy to see \$3.93 pop up, because I do need gas," Gaynor said. "Otherwise, I'll need AAA to get me back to Catonsville."

Gaynor said she fills her 13-gallon tank about twice a week, which means she will save about \$40 with the lower price.

Hogan was joined at the signing by



PHOTO BY E. A. BREEDEN/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

Gov. Larry Hogan, with House Speaker Adrienne Jones, D-Baltimore County, to his left and Senate President Bill Ferguson, D-Baltimore to his right, signs into law a bill to lower Maryland gas prices by placing a 30-day moratorium on the state's gas tax.

Senate President Bill Ferguson, D-Baltimore, and House of Delegates Speaker Adrienne Jones, D-Baltimore County, who worked with the governor to introduce and pass the bill in just over a week.

"We are showing that Maryland leaders know that when there are problems that Marylanders are facing, we come together and we fix them," Ferguson said. Maryland became the first state to sus-

pend its gas tax in response to soaring fuel prices. Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp was expected to sign a similar bill Friday. The Georgia moratorium would suspend the state's 29-cent tax until May 31.

At least 17 other states are considering

See MORATORIUM Page A2

Council Chair Calvin S. Hawkins, II, Expresses Appreciation for Strong Capitol Hill Support for Relocation of New FBI Headquarters to Prince George's County

Federal Delegation Announces Major Step Forward for New, Consolidated FBI Headquarters in Omnibus FY 2022 Funding Package

By KAREN D. CAMPBELL
Prince George's County Council Media

The Prince George's County Council is deeply grateful for the leadership of U.S. Congress Members representing the state of Maryland and their strong and steadfast advocacy for relocation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) headquarters to Prince George's County. Two of the three relocation sites under consideration, Landover, and the Greenbelt Metro in the City of Greenbelt, are in Prince George's County.

On Tuesday, March 15, 2022, Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD-05), Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Congressman Anthony Brown (MD-04) secured the inclusion of language to advance the process for a new, consolidated FBI headquarters in the Omnibus FY2022 funding package signed into law this week by President Biden.

The language focuses the site selection process to the three sites previously identified after an exhaustive process by the General Services Administration (GSA) and the FBI during the Obama Administration—Greenbelt, Landover, and Springfield—and requires the GSA to choose among them as expeditiously as possible. After the site is selected, GSA would have 180 days to send a report to Congress that would allow Congress to authorize the construction of the FBI facilities at the site.

We thank our federal partners for continuing to work together to welcome the FBI headquarters to a new home and expand economic opportunity in Prince George's County.

Soaring Gas Prices Push Maryland Drivers to Alter Travel, Spending Decisions

By JOE RYAN
Capital News Service

BALTIMORE (March 17, 2022)—Hunter Williams stopped at a BP gas station in south Baltimore this week to add a little bit more to the tank. Normally, Williams, in town from Ohio to visit his daughter, would spend \$40 and have a nearly full tank.

But not this time. With prices at near records, Williams was more cautious and opted for \$20 worth of fuel. He only got four gallons.

Williams is like a lot of motorists these days. He said he finds himself making tougher financial decisions now and driving less.

"You know, I can't take a routine run to the grocery store anymore like that just because of gas prices," he said. "Now I've got

to do Instacart," a service that picks up groceries and delivers them to purchasers' homes.

Gas prices in Maryland have risen to near record highs. The average price of gas in the state has increased by 65 cents in the past 30 days, according to AAA, from \$3.56 for regular gas to the current average of \$4.21.

Drivers interviewed by Capital News Service said those costs are forcing them to make tough decisions about how they spend their money, from travel to fuel purchases to recreation.

The good news is the state's motorists are expected to get some immediate help beginning Friday. Republican Gov. Larry Hogan is expected then to sign into law a 30-day moratorium on the state's 37-cent gas tax. The law goes into effect immediately with his sig-

nature, so motorists should see a same-day reduction in fuel prices, if gas station owners pass the savings onto drivers.

Russell Geist said he is feeling the pinch of higher fuel prices in his personal life and in his business.

Geist owns Metropolitan Landscaping Management Inc., where he needs gas for the company's work trucks and gas-powered equipment in use every day.

Higher gas prices, Geist said, have made an already difficult situation worse.

"I work for residents who are already being squeezed by all of this inflation," he said, "and I have to inflate my prices as well, because it costs me more to do business."

Plus, Geist said, the equipment he uses requires fuel that is a mix

of higher octane gas and oil. The higher octane gas is on average 44 cents more expensive than regular, according to AAA.

Gas prices have been rising since January as relations between Russia, a major global source of crude oil, and Ukraine became unstable.

However, prices spiked after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Between the weeks of Feb. 28 and March 7, U.S. gas prices rose by 13%, according to an analysis of data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, and between March 7 and March 14 prices shot up again by another 5%, the agency's data shows.

Still, as Linda Ramirez pumped \$15 worth of gas into her car in Bethesda, she said it was worth higher prices to help Ukraine.



JOE RYAN/CAPITAL NEWS SERVICE

Russell Geist, filling up a gas can at an Exxon gas station in College Park [last] Tuesday, said the increased prices have forced him to raise customer prices at his landscaping business.

"I believe it's a good idea, because they're helping Ukraine as it's suffering," Ramirez, 22, said, "But ... (the government) should always look out for us as well."

Geist also said increased gas prices are worth it to support Ukraine, but he said the government could still do more to help lower costs.

"I don't think we're totally utilizing all the ways we can help to keep the prices down," he said.

Williams said there's not much he can do to reduce his fuel burden because of his location.

"My job, everything is 10 to 15 minutes away," he said. "So, I was like, man, that takes a toll on a man."

Governor Hogan Announces Donation of Critically-Needed Ventilators to Ukraine

50 Portable Ventilators to Front Line Hospitals

By SHAREESE CHURCHILL
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 21, 2022)—Governor Larry Hogan today announced that the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) has donated 50 Astral portable ventilators to treat patients at front line hospitals in Ukraine. Donated to the Paul Chester Children's Hope Foundation (PCCHF)—a Dickerson-based grassroots medical organization that provides

surgical care to people in developing countries—the ventilators will support the treatment of children and adults who have been wounded during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

"The State of Maryland continues to stand in solidarity with President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine," said Governor Hogan. "We are proud to make this donation to help save lives and aid the Ukrainians in the fight against Russian aggression."

"Contributing medical equipment to help treat

wounded Ukrainians in this great time of need is the least we can do," said MDH Secretary Dennis R. Schrader. "I commend Dr. Chester and his team for all their efforts to help Ukrainian doctors and nurses provide critical medical services to the citizens of Kyiv, Lviv, and other worn-torn areas."

"I am beyond grateful for Governor Hogan, Secretary Schrader, Delegate Kipke, and the Maryland Department of General Services for their generosity and kindness," said Dr. William Chester, PCCHF co-founder. "Without the help of truly dedicated individuals in the state and the assistance of the Maryland Society of Anesthesiologists, this would not have been possible. These ventilators will save lives during and after this terrible, senseless crisis."

The Maryland Department of General Services (DGS) provided logistical and other support. The

portable ventilators are scheduled to depart the United States today, and should arrive at front line hospitals throughout Ukraine later in the week.

"Like everyone, I'm horrified to see the tragic destruction and devastation in Ukraine because of the relentless attacks and invasion by Russia," said Delegate Nicholas Kipke. "We all want to do what we can to help people who are hurting there, which is why when I was approached by my friend Dr. Bill Chester about his efforts to send advanced level medical supplies to help in Ukraine I reached out immediately to the governor's office to help."

"These ventilators will help provide the additional support needed for the citizens of Ukraine," said DGS Secretary Ellington E. Churchill, Jr. "General Services continues to do everything in our power to help aid the nation of Ukraine during their time of need."

INSIDE

- Community in the Courthouse—March 29
- Local Students Selected to University of Minnesota Twin Cities Dean's List
- Bible & Leadership Institute—2022 Spring Semester

Around the County, Page A2

Health Department Announces Updates to Covid-19 Vaccination and Testing Locations in Prince George's County
Maryland Passes Historic and Equitable Energy Efficiency Legislation
Community, Page A3

To Be Equal: Women's History Month Sees Historic Progress for Black Women in America ...
Women's History Month is not only a celebration of women's achievements of the past, but of women who are making history today.
Commentary, Page A4

Governor Hogan Announces Elimination of Four-Year Degree Requirement for Thousands of State Jobs
Two Years Into the Pandemic, Underbanked Small Businesses Still Struggling to Build Back
Business and Finance, Page A5

Governor Hogan Proclaims 2022 as "The Year of Harriet Tubman" in Maryland
The state celebrates the 200th anniversary of the birth of the nation's most renowned freedom fighter.
Out on the Town, Page A6

COMMUNITY



PHOTO CREDIT: SENATE PHOTO/JOHN SHINKLE

Cardin Meets With Supreme Court Nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson

By PRESS OFFICER
Cardin Communications

WASHINGTON March 15, 2022—U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.) met Tuesday with U.S. Supreme Court nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, currently a member of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. Judge Jackson's hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee will be held next week. Senator Cardin chaired Judge Jackson's first confirmation hearing in 2009 when she was a nominee for the U.S. Sentencing Commission.

It was a real pleasure to meet with Judge Jackson today. I'm familiar with her background and many of her rulings. She also is a former Maryland resident. We had much to talk about—she has many connections to our state," said Senator Cardin after the meeting.

"Judge Jackson is eminently qualified. We talked about her personal experience and her commitment to equal justice under the law, especially for those who have difficulty accessing our legal system. We discussed the importance of an independent judicial branch of government and protecting the rights of individuals against powerful special interests. I was impressed with Judge Jackson throughout our conversation. Our meeting reinforced how critical it will be to have her on the Supreme Court."

"Judge Jackson deserves consideration by all members — Democrats and Republicans. I hope she gets many Republican votes," Senator Cardin added.

The Wayne K. Curry Sports and Learning Complex mass vaccination clinic will close after Friday, April 8.

Health Department Announces Updates to Covid-19 Vaccination and Testing Locations in Prince George's County

Sports and Learning Complex Vaccination Clinic, Temple Hills Community Center Testing Site, two state-run testing sites in the county are closing

By GEORGE LETTIS
Prince George's County Health Department

LARGO, Md. (March 16, 2022)—The Prince George's County Health Department is announcing the following updates to COVID-19 vaccination and testing locations in the County:

County-operated COVID-19 vaccine clinics

The Wayne K. Curry Sports and Learning Complex mass vaccination clinic will close after Friday, April 8.

County-operated COVID-19 testing sites

The Temple Hills Community Center will no longer offer COVID-19 testing services after Friday, March 25.

State-operated COVID-19 testing sites

University of Maryland Laurel Hospital public testing site shut down Friday, March 11.

Doctors Community Hospital/Washington Education Zone testing site in Lanham close[d] after Thursday, March 17.

"Thanks to the teamwork of Prince George's County residents, our COVID-19 Community Level is low and our vaccination rate is among the highest in the nation," said Prince George's County Health Officer Dr. Ernest Carter. "The demand for testing and vaccines has decreased, but both are still readily available at locations County-wide. With many community partners providing most of the testing and vaccine services to residents, the Health Department can begin to reduce its capacity at this point in the pandemic while being ready to ramp up again if necessary."

The County continues to operate and support free COVID-19 testing sites at the Bunker Hill Fire Station in Brentwood, the First United Methodist Church in Hyattsville, and the Roseau Medical Center in Laurel. Visit

health.mypgc.us/COVIDtesting for testing updates and an interactive mapping tool to find other testing sites near you.

Free at-home rapid test kits and KN95 masks are available for pick up at multiple library branches and Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission community centers in the County, while supplies last.

The Health Department highly encourages residents 5 and older to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible and to get tested if they have symptoms or have been exposed to COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status. In addition, residents that are eligible for a booster shot should get one as soon as possible. For more information or updates about COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, including a complete list of clinics operating in the County and the State of Maryland, visit health.mypgc.us/Coronavirus.

Washington, D.C. Area Students Win Top Prizes in C-SPAN Video Documentary Competition

** Silver Spring Middle Schoolers Win Grand Prize **
Students express how the federal government impacts their lives

By PRESS OFFICER
C-SPAN

WASHINGTON (March 16, 2022)—Today C-SPAN announced that students in Silver Spring, Rockville, Potomac, Bethesda, Poolesville, Germantown and Bladensburg, Maryland as well as Washington, D.C. are winners in C-SPAN's national 2022 StudentCam competition.

The 2022 grand prize winners are twins Tyler and Dermott Foley, students at Eastern Middle School in Silver Spring. The Foleys will receive \$5,000 for the documentary, "What Happened to Gibson Grove?," about highways, racial injustice and the fight to save America's Black cemeteries. This documentary will air on C-SPAN at 6:50 a.m. ET and throughout the day April 21.

Evelyn Shue and Ida Chen, students at Richard Montgomery High School in Rockville and

Winston Churchill High School in Potomac, will receive \$3,000 as first prize winners in the East region of the documentary, "Something in the Water," about the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974. This documentary will air on C-SPAN at 6:50 a.m. ET and throughout the day April 19.

The following Prince George's County students are honorable mention prize winners and will receive \$250:

Madison Harvey and Gidey Gezae, students at Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg for the documentary, "Greater Evil: The Baltimore Wheelabrator Incinerator."

The competition, now in its 18th year, invited all middle and high school students to enter by producing a short documentary. C-SPAN, in cooperation with its cable television partners, asked students to explore a federal policy or program and address the

theme: "How does the federal government impact your life?"

In response, more than 3,000 students across the country participated in the contest. C-SPAN received over 1,400 entries from 41 states, Washington, D.C., Morocco and South Korea. The most popular topics addressed were:

- Environment & Pollution (10%)
- Health Care & Mental Health (9%)
- COVID-19 & Recovery (7%)
- Immigration (5%)
- 2nd Amendment & Firearm Legislation (4%)

C-SPAN is funded by America's cable television companies, who also support StudentCam. In Silver Spring, Rockville, Potomac, Bethesda, Poolesville, Germantown, Bladensburg and Washington, D.C., C-SPAN is available locally through Comcast.

Maryland Passes Historic and Equitable Energy Efficiency Legislation

By PRESS OFFICERS
NRDC, NHT, GHHI

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 21, 2022)—The Maryland General Assembly passed legislation today that will deliver healthier housing and significant annual energy savings to the state's most cost-burdened households.

HB 108 and SB 524, sponsored by Delegate Lorig Charkoudian and Senator Brian Feldman, will require the state to specifically provide energy-efficient upgrades for the hundreds of thousands of low-income residents, where an unfairly large share of the energy-cost burden falls.

The following is a statement from Deron Lovaas, Senior Policy Advisor for NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council):

"This desperately needed legislation will ensure that the Marylanders who live in the most dangerous conditions and pay the highest percentage of their income on energy bills, will no longer be left behind.

"This first in the nation legislation will ensure that everyone has access to the many benefits of energy efficiency, lowering energy bills for the most vulnerable

while creating safer homes."

The following is a statement from Raymond Nevo, State & Equity Policy Manager at the National Housing Trust:

"This legislation could have significantly reduced the health disparities my family and I endured growing up. Most see affordable housing as just four walls and a roof, but it is so much more. This legislation gives those most in need a chance to live in their homes with dignity."

The following is a statement from Ruth Ann Norton, President, and CEO of the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative:

"The Green & Healthy Homes Initiative commends the leadership of Delegate Lorig Charkoudian and Senator Brian Feldman for the successful passage of House Bill 108 and Senate Bill 524, Public Utilities - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Programs - Energy Performance Targets and Low-Income Housing. Passage of this historic legislation not only creates a national model but more importantly puts Maryland one step closer to making tangible progress on energy equity and setting forth a plan to protect our climate and the health and well-

being of our state's most vulnerable citizens.

"This legislation will ensure that critical weatherization investments are made in housing in the state's most under-resourced communities which will create more stable, affordable, and healthier homes."

Background:

Beginning in 2008, the EMPOWER Maryland program required investments in efficiency upgrades for businesses and homes across Maryland, but the program benefits of lower energy costs and improved safety have predominately applied to upper- and middle-class residents. The policy failed to provide adequate funding for Maryland's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which manages the energy efficiency programs for low-income residents.

HB 108 and SB 524 will require the state to provide funding to achieve 1% annual energy savings for low-income households by 2026. This funding will lower energy bills for 32,000 low-

See ENERGY Page A4

TOWN OF BERWYN HEIGHTS NOTICE OF A PROPOSED REAL PROPERTY TAX INCREASE

The Town Council of the Town of Berwyn Heights proposes to increase real property taxes.

1. For the tax year beginning July 1, 2022, the estimated real property assessable base will increase by 5.4%, from \$386,863,752 to \$407,701,652.
2. If the Town of Berwyn Heights maintains the current tax rate of \$0.545 per \$100 of assessment, real property tax revenues will increase by 5.4% resulting in \$113,567 of new real property tax revenues.
3. In order to fully offset the effect of increasing assessments, the real property tax rate should be reduced to \$0.5171, the constant yield tax rate.
4. The Town of Berwyn Heights is considering not reducing its real property tax rate enough to fully offset increasing assessments. The Town proposes to adopt a real property tax rate of \$0.545 per \$100 of assessment. This tax rate is 5.4% higher than the constant yield tax rate and will generate \$113,567 in additional property tax revenues.

A public hearing on the proposed real property tax rate increase will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 13, 2022 at the Council Chamber in Town Hall, 5700 Berwyn Road. It will also be broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website at www.berwynheightsmd.gov/town-council/pages/watch-council-meetings. Residents can comment by joining the meeting in person, calling 301-474-9570 and e-mailing Mayor Dewey at adewey@berwynheightsmd.gov.

The hearing is open to the public, and public testimony is encouraged. Persons with questions regarding this hearing may call 301-474-5000 for further information.

Give a Shout-Out to Involved Dads At the Inaugural Kids First! Daddying Film Festival

Student Submissions Deadline Approaching

By PRESS OFFICER
KFDFFF

CHEVY CHASE, Md. (March 15, 2022)—There is one month left until the call for entries deadline for the inaugural KIDS FIRST! Daddying Film Festival (KFDFFF). The KFDFFF provides a stage for students, 1st grade through college undergrads, to express themselves about the importance and impact of fathers/father figures in their lives. KFDFFF encourages kids to create and submit 1- to 5-minute short films or videos for FREE with the theme "A Letter to My Father/Fa-

ther Figure." Finalists will receive a \$250 award and have their film/video screened during the virtual Festival the week leading up to and including Father's Day 2022.

WHO: DADvocacy Consulting Group's Daddy Appleseed Fund and KIDS FIRST! Film Festivals are reaching out to parents, teachers, students, librarians, and youth/family-focused organizations to help boost student submissions.

WHEN: Submissions due Friday, April 15. The KFDFFF runs June 13–20.

WHERE: Students may submit

short films for FREE at Film-Freeway's KFDFFF site: <https://filmfreeway.com/KIDS-FIRSTDaddyingFilmFestival>

MORE INFO: KFDFFF winners will receive a generous scholarship (amount TBD) and an "Atticus," which symbolizes Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Finch, an iconic single dad, represents several ideal daddying qualities. Specifically, he is attuned to his children's feelings and ideas and takes the children as seriously as they take themselves. Winners will be selected by public online vote during Festival week.

COMMENTARY

Marc Morial

President and CEO, National Urban League



To Be Equal:

Women's History Month Sees Historic Progress for Black Women in America, But Work Remains to Achieve Full Equality

"From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength, and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well ... Understanding the true history of our country will help us to comprehend the need for full equality under the law for all our people."

—President Jimmy Carter, proclaiming the first National Women's History Week

This goal can be achieved by ratifying the 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which states that 'Equality of Rights under the Law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.'"

When labor activist Theresa Malkiel established the first official Women's Day in 1909, only four states and four U.S. territories granted women the right to vote. The 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law, did not apply to women.

Two years later, some European countries joined the United States in the observance of International Women's Day. The United Nations began celebrating International Women's Day in 1975, and in 1987

Congress designated March as Women's History Month for the first time.

Throughout much of America's history, the advancements of women's rights applied only to white women. The National Women's History Alliance, which was instrumental in establishing Women's History Month, declared: "despite our best intentions, we have not done enough to challenge racism within the sphere of women's history. In the past we have failed to effectively speak out against racism in our collaborative spaces."

So, it is especially significant that the first Black woman nominated to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court, Ketanji Brown Jackson appear[ed] before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Monday as the first step in the confirmation process. This Women's History Month also has seen the confirmation of the first Black woman to head Office of Management and Budget, Shalanda Young, and the confirmation of Lisa Cook, the first Black woman to serve on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, is imminent. Beginning with his historic selection of Kamala Harris to serve as Vice President, President Biden has appointed a record number of women—and women of color—to key roles in his administration and nominated more Black women to the federal courts than any president in history.

National Urban League and the Urban League have long shared this commitment to gender equality. From Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth to Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer, women have been the driving force in the fight for equal rights. The National Urban League was co-founded by philanthropist and social activist Ruth Standish Baldwin in 1910. More than half of our 91 affili-

ates are led by dynamic women CEOs, and nearly 70 percent of the National Urban League's senior vice president and vice president positions are held by women.

Women's History Month is not only a celebration of women's achievements of the past, but of women who are making history today. Among the honorees at the National Urban League's most recent Women of Power Awards were Stacy Abrams, who confronted voter suppression in Georgia and inspired an estimated 800,000-plus new voters to register through her efforts; immunologist Kizzmekia S. Corbett, whose research was central to the development of the COVID-19 vaccines and treatment; and Amanda Gorman, who inspired the nation as the youngest poet to read at a presidential inauguration and became the first National Youth Poet Laureate.

As we celebrate the progress women—especially Black women—have made in recent years, it's important to recognize the work we have yet to do. The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed countries, and Black women are about three times more likely to die during pregnancy or shortly after birth than white women, yet reproductive rights are under attack across the nation. Women still are paid only 84 cents for every dollar paid to men, and Black women are paid only 63 cents for every dollar paid to white men.

President Obama once said there is no greater form of patriotism than the belief that "it is in our power to remake this nation to more closely align with our highest ideals." Achieving and protecting the equal rights of all women is among the most sacred of those ideals.

Marion Wright Edelman

President Emerita,
Children's Defense Fund



ChildWatch:

Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson: Breaking Another Barrier

At the White House event where President Biden introduced her as the nominee for the United States Supreme Court, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson gave a moving speech describing her journey from her early childhood as the daughter of public school teachers to her nomination to the highest court in the nation. She ended by sharing a coincidence she said "meant a great deal to me over the years": "As it happens, I share a birthday with the first Black woman ever to be appointed as a federal judge: the Honorable Constance Baker Motley. We were born exactly 49 years to the day apart. Today, I proudly stand on Judge Motley's shoulders, sharing not only her birthday but also her steadfast and courageous commitment to equal justice under law. Judge Motley's life and career has been a true inspiration to me as I have pursued this professional path. And if I am fortunate enough to be confirmed as the next Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, I can only hope that my life and career, my love of this country and the Constitution, and my commitment to upholding

the rule of law and the sacred principles upon which this great nation was founded will inspire future generations of Americans."

It was a lovely tribute to the brilliant and trail-blazing Judge Motley and the principles that have served as a guiding light for both of them. It was also a clear reminder that as the first Black woman to be nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court, Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is breaking a new barrier and adding to the long, painfully slow, but unstoppable legacy of African American women securing justice in the courtroom for ourselves and others.

This is a legacy that stretches back to women like Elizabeth Freeman, an enslaved Massachusetts midwife and nurse who successfully sued for her own freedom in 1781 after she heard Massachusetts's newly ratified state constitution read aloud, and realized its declared rights to freedom and equality for all should apply to her too. In the decades that followed other Black women occasionally received justice in the courts as plaintiffs, including Sojourner

Truth, who in 1828 sued to have her five-year-old son returned to her after he was illegally sold and taken from New York to Alabama. In 1872 Charlotte Ray graduated from Howard University School of Law, and she became the first Black woman lawyer in the U.S., the first woman admitted to the District of Columbia Bar, and the first woman admitted to practice before the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia.

Ray eventually had to give up her law practice because she could not secure enough clients. But as the first African American woman lawyer she laid a path that was followed by others like Jane Bolin, the first Black woman to graduate from Yale Law School, who became the first Black woman to serve as a judge in the U.S. with her appointment to the New York City Domestic Relations Court (later Family Court) in 1939. Judge Bolin, in turn, paved the way for Judge Motley to become the first Black woman federal judge in the U.S. in 1966, and then Judge Motley became the role model for future Black female federal judges like Ketanji Brown Jackson. Now Judge Jackson deserves to be swiftly confirmed as U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Jackson, where she is poised to serve as a role model for the next generation.

In a nation that has never made it easy for Black women to break any barriers, it is little surprise that some of the same racism and sexism Judge Jackson's predecessors all faced is still very present today. She was a national speech and debate star and student body president in high school, but was still told by a school counselor that applying to Harvard would be setting her sights "too high." She applied anyway, and graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College. She then received her law degree cum laude from Harvard Law School, where she was an editor

of the prestigious Harvard Law Review, and has served as a Supreme Court law clerk, a federal public defender, in private practice, as a trial court judge, as vice chair of the U.S. Sentencing Commission, and is currently serving on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, considered the second most powerful court in the nation. Despite all this she is still facing predictable complaints from some of the same familiar quarters that she is somehow "not qualified." But President Biden knew better; the Senators from both parties who have already voted to confirm her for three previous positions know better; and above all, Judge Jackson knows better. She is very well aware of who she is and on whose shoulders she stands.

In his White House introduction, President Biden explained that when he began searching for a replacement for retiring Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer he promised "the process would be rigorous, that I would select a nominee worthy of Justice Breyer's legacy of excellence and decency—someone extremely qualified, with a brilliant legal mind, with the utmost character and integrity, which are equally as important. . . who will bring to the Supreme Court an independent mind, uncompromising integrity, and with a strong moral compass and the courage to stand up for what she thinks is right. For too long, our government, our courts haven't looked like America. And I believe it's time that we have a Court that reflects the full talents and greatness of our nation with a nominee of extraordinary qualifications and that we inspire all young people to believe that they can one day serve their country at the highest level." I agree! Our nation has never yet lived up to its professed creed of justice for all, but Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson is prepared to be the next Justice for all that we need right now.

Brown, Hoyer, Ruppersberger, Sarbanes, Mfume, Raskin and Trone Request Investigation Into Bias in Maryland National Guard

Black and women officer candidates were dismissed at significantly higher rates

WASHINGTON (March 18, 2022)—Congressmen Anthony G. Brown, Steny H. Hoyer, Dutch Ruppersberger, John Sarbanes, Kweisi Mfume, Jamie B. Raskin and David Trone (all D-MD) called on the National Guard Inspector General to investigate bias in the Maryland National Guard.

According to Maryland Army National Guard Data from 2017 to 2021, Black Officer Candidate School candidates were almost twice as likely to be dismissed as white candidates. During the same time period, female candidates were dismissed

70% more often than their male counterparts.

"The reserve and active duty components must be able to operate as one armed force to meet our security objectives as a nation," the Members wrote. "It is critical that the implementation of US Army and National Guard policies and procedures within the Maryland National Guard are in conformity to expected standards and with full respect for the rights of the individuals who so choose to answer the call to serve.

The Members continued, "As such, we request

that you conduct an investigation into the general consistency of the implementation of US Army and National Guard policies and regulations within the [Maryland Army National Guard Officer Candidate School] program. In the course of such an investigation, we ask that you identify the root causes of any racial disparities in acceptance, dismissal, and graduation rates of officer candidates.

We further request that you recommend corrective action based on any findings of your investigation to ensure consistent implementation of all policies and regulations in the [Maryland Army National Guard Officer Candidate School]."

In 2021, Members were made aware of various allegations cov-

ering a range of racial and gender bias in the Maryland Army National Guard Officer Candidate School, from individuals being forced to wear symbols of enslavement, to the subjective dismissal of candidates, to subtle yet persistent discrimination. The Maryland Army National Guard has substantiated a portion of these allegations.

Energy from A3

come households each year and lower energy bills for all 450,000 low-income Marylanders—in 13 years. At the current funding rate, it would take 130 years to reach all these households.

Nationally, low-income households spend 8 cents of every dollar on energy costs. But in Maryland, low-income households spend 13 cents of every dollar—and in some cases, it can be as high as 42 cents.

NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers,

scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, MT, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter @NRDC.

National Housing Trust creates and preserves affordable homes to provide opportunity, advance racial equity, reduce economic disparities, and strengthen community resilience through practice and policy. Visit us at www.nht-inc.org and follow us on Twitter @NatlHousingTrust.

Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI) is dedicated to addressing the social determinants

of health and the advancement of racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe, and energy-efficient homes. By delivering a standard of excellence in its work, GHHI aims to eradicate the negative health impacts of unhealthy housing and unjust policies for children, seniors, and families to ensure better health, economic, and social outcomes for low-income communities of color. As the nation's leading healthy housing organization, GHHI provides evidence-based direct services, policy support, and technical assistance to partners across the country on innovative financing and integrated health, housing, and energy models. Visit us at www.ghhi.org and follow us on Twitter @HealthyHousing

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BUSINESS AND FINANCE

Governor Hogan Announces Elimination of Four-Year Degree Requirement for Thousands of State Jobs

Maryland Launches First-in-the-Nation Initiative to Recruit Experienced, Non-Degree Candidates

By SHAREESE CHURCHILL
Office of the Governor

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (March 15, 2022)—Governor Larry Hogan today announced the launch of a multi-pronged, first-in-the-nation workforce development initiative to formally eliminate the four-year college degree requirement from thousands of state jobs. Spearheaded by the Maryland Department of Labor and the Maryland Department of Budget and Management (DBM), the state will work with partners to recruit and market these roles to job seekers who are “Skilled Through Alternative Routes” (STARS).

The governor was joined for today’s announcement by Secretary Tiffany Robinson of the Maryland Department of Labor and Byron Auguste, the CEO and co-founder of Opportunity@Work, a nonprofit workforce development organization that will work with DBM to specifically identify Maryland “STARS” in the IT, administrative, and customer service sectors.

“Through these efforts we are launching today, we are ensuring that qualified, non-de-

gree candidates are regularly being considered for these career-changing opportunities,” said Governor Hogan. “This is exactly the kind of bold, bipartisan solution we need to continue leading the nation by giving even more Marylanders the opportunities they need to be successful.”

The State of Maryland employs more than 38,000 individuals and DBM estimates that more than half of those jobs can substitute relevant experience, training, and/or community college education for a four-year degree. There are more than 300 currently open state government jobs that no longer require a four-year degree, all of which are now listed on “Stellarworx,” Opportunity@Work’s innovative STARS talent marketplace.

STARS are age 25 or older, active in the labor force, have a high school diploma or equivalent, and have developed their skills through alternative routes such as community college, apprenticeships, military service, boot camps, and most commonly, on-the-job. Opportunity@Work estimates that there are currently

more than 70 million STARS in the United States.

“There are over 1 million Marylanders who do not have bachelor’s degrees, but do have skills for jobs that are in demand by both the State of Maryland and other employers,” said Auguste. “These Maryland workers are STARS—Skilled Through Alternative Routes—such as community college, military service, workforce training, on-the-job learning and more. By launching this initiative and sourcing STARS talent on Stellarworx, Governor Hogan and his administration are making clear that Maryland values all the skills of its diverse workforce. This will enable more Marylanders to work, learn and earn to their fullest potential and is a promising model for other states and employers to follow.”

Of the 2,869,000 workers in Maryland today, more than 1.3 million, or 47%, are considered STARS. Nationally, 61% of Black workers, 55% of Hispanic workers, 66% of rural workers of all races, and 61% of veterans are STARS.

Two Years Into the Pandemic, Underbanked Small Businesses Still Struggling to Build Back

Even as most federal relief programs have closed, many small businesses are still feeling the economic effects of the pandemic—with underbanked communities being hit the hardest. The Southern Opportunity and Resilience Fund is helping reverse this trend by providing low-cost funding and support to small businesses.

By PRESS OFFICER
SOAR Fund

(March 15, 2022)—After two years of retooling and resilience, small businesses still face a difficult recovery, with nearly 80% of small businesses reporting continued negative effects and 63% reporting a reduction in revenue compared to 2019. Minority-owned businesses have been hit the hardest, with Black-, Asian-, and Latino-owned businesses being significantly more likely to report being in “fair or poor” financial conditions compared to white-owned businesses.

At the same time, federal relief programs like the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan program have closed. This leaves small businesses—particularly those in underbanked communities—struggling to find affordable capital.

The Southern Opportunity and Resilience (SOAR) Fund, created by community lenders, is designed specifically as a long-term resource to combat this trend through low-interest loans and free business support for the smallest of small businesses across the South. To date, the SOAR program has deployed nearly \$23 million to more than 470 businesses and currently has \$40 million still available.

“The SOAR Fund isn’t a stopgap relief program. It is a long-term investment in the South’s future to help build an economic recovery that is equitable, broad, and driven by the region’s entrepreneurs,” said Chris Caines, Senior Impact Manager at Community Reinvestment Fund, USA, which is hosting the Fund’s online platform. “Community development financial institutions, or CDFIs, have a proven track record of providing trustworthy capital to underbanked small businesses. The SOAR Fund enables them to expand their scale and make a lasting, structural change in who has access to small business funding.”

Long-standing inequities in small business lending often mean the small businesses most in need of financing are unable to access the funds they need to thrive and grow. Even before the pandemic, minority-owned small businesses were routinely denied funding at higher rates than their white-owned peers. The smallest of small businesses also face barriers to accessing funding because traditional financial institutions often do not make small-dollar loans.

Building an equitable economic recovery requires filling these gaps, which is exactly what the SOAR Fund is doing. Of

funds distributed to date, 78% of loans have gone to business owners who self-identify as a woman or a person of color, with 52% going to Black-owned businesses. Nearly 90% of the loans went to businesses with 10 or fewer full-time equivalent employees, and 82% of recipients have annual revenues less than \$500,000.

For many small businesses, even a modest loan can go a long way—not only helping to cover necessities like rent and payroll, but also opening doors to investments that lead to growth and job creation.

Calvert Impact Capital is arranging and LISC Fund Management is managing the Fund. Community Reinvestment Fund, USA is the technology service provider for the program.

The SOAR Fund offers low-interest loans and free support to businesses and nonprofits with 50 or fewer full-time equivalent employees in Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia. Businesses can apply online and be matched to one of 12 participating community lenders in less than five minutes at www.thesoarfund.org.

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THE REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
at <https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/807/Central-Services>.

Photo: David Wilson

Prince Georges County Office of Central Services LARP Land Acquisition & Real Property Division

Social Security Matters

Ask Rusty:

Please Help Us With Social Security Planning

By RUSSELL GLOOR, AMAC Certified Social Security Advisor
Association of Mature American Citizens

Dear Rusty: Would you please advise on my wife and my Social Security planning? I'm 69 & 2 months, my wife is 66 & 2 months, so we both hit full retirement age. We both plan on starting to take SS next month. My benefit would be about \$3,300 per month, and my wife's benefit would be about \$1,900 per month. Spousal benefits confuse me. Should I start Social Security now so my wife can get a spousal benefit from me? Is that even possible? Or is it better for each of us to get our own? **Signed: Uncertain**

Dear Uncertain: From what you've shared, it doesn't appear that your wife will be entitled to a spousal benefit because her own benefit at her full retirement age (FRA) is more than half of your FRA benefit amount. If your age 69 benefit is about \$3300 then your FRA (age 66) benefit amount was about \$2660. Half of your FRA amount (\$1330) is less than your wife's FRA amount (\$1900), so no spousal benefit will be available to your wife.

In your specific circumstance, both you and your wife should consider your individual objectives in deciding when to claim Social Security. If you plan to claim next month at age 69, you will get a benefit which has increased by about 26% due to the Delayed Retirement Credits (DRCs) you've earned since you reached your FRA of 66. Claiming at her FRA, your wife will get the full SS retirement benefit she has earned from a lifetime of working.

Although your current strategy is a good one, because you were born before 1954 and haven't yet filed you have another option. If your wife claims her SS first, you will be eligible to file a "Restricted Application for Spousal Benefits Only." You could use the restricted application to collect a spouse benefit from your wife (half of her FRA benefit amount) while allowing your personal benefit to grow for another 9 months to maximum at age 70.

If financially feasible and your longevity suggests, both you and your wife might consider waiting even longer to get a higher benefit, but that is a personal choice which you each need to make. Claiming now at age 69 will reduce your payment by about 6% from your age 70 maxi-

mum. Since your wife isn't eligible for a spouse benefit but has reached her FRA, she might also consider delaying a bit longer if her financial needs and her estimated longevity suggest that is wise. Like you, she can delay claiming until she is 70 when her benefit would reach its maximum (about 30% more than it is now).

If you'd like to get a personal estimate of your life expectancy, I suggest using this link: <https://socialsecurityreport.org/tools/life-expectancy-calculator/>. The reason life expectancy is important is this: if you live at least to "average" life expectancy, you'll collect more in cumulative lifetime benefits by waiting longer and maximizing your SS benefit. According to Social Security, "average" life expectancy is about 84 for a man and 87 for a woman in good health in their 60s. But using the tool above to estimate your personal longevity should further assist with making your claiming decision.

The 2.4 million member Association of Mature American Citizens [AMAC] www.amac.us is a vibrant, vital senior advocacy organization that takes its marching orders from its members. AMAC Action is a non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the membership in our nation's capital and in local Congressional Districts throughout the country. And the AMAC Foundation (www.AmacFoundation.org) is the Association's non-profit organization, dedicated to supporting and educating America's Seniors. Together, we act and speak on the Association members' behalf, protecting their interests and offering a practical insight on how to best solve the problems they face today. Live long and make a difference by joining us today at www.amac.us/join-amac.

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the AMAC Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association (NSSA). NSSA and the AMAC Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

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Moratorium from A2

and March, U.S. gas prices rose by 13%, according to an analysis of data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Between March 7 and March 14 prices shot up again by another 5%, the agency's data shows.

Earlier [last] week, consumer advocates and tax experts sounded off on whether the gas tax holiday policy would lead to decreased fuel prices.

Howard Gleckman, senior fellow at the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center at the Urban Institute, said consumers might not be able to tell if they are seeing the benefit of the tax holiday as initial price drops drive up demand, further increasing costs.

It will not be possible to tell if gas stations are pocketing some of the tax break, Gleckman said in an interview with Capital News Service, as prices continue to change quickly.

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