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Reps. LaFonta & Richmond Return \$127 Million to Louisiana Small Businesses & Consumers

State Reps. Juan LaFonta and Cedric Richmond, both current Congressional candidates, today joined with small business owners from around New Orleans and Miriam Brown, Treasurer of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, to detail a new federal proposal that would send millions in health insurance refunds to Louisiana small businesses and consumers, including \$127 million to Louisiana BlueCross BlueShield members.

The plan, a proposed amendment to the federal health care bill currently being debated in Congress, would penalize insurance companies that waste more than 10% of premiums on non-health care related costs, and require them to return these excess dollars to small businesses and other consumers.

"This plan would end the Wall-St driven race to the basement, spending less and less of premiums on actual health care. Instead of CEOs spending lavishly on marketing and sales to increase their profits, this will hold them to ninety cents on the dollar. Millions of dollars in wasteful spending rebated to local businesses and Louisiana residents could mean a real uptick in our

IN THE NEWS

Mark Ott Found Guilty in 2007 Murder of Robin Malta

An Orleans Parish jury, after only two and a half hours of deliberations found Mark Anthony Ott guilty of the 2007 murder of Salon D'Malta owner Robin Malta. Malta was found beaten to death in his Marigny home.

In an unusual twist, New Orleans District Attorney Leon A. Cannizzaro, Jr. tried the case himself. The case was based solely on circumstantial evidence, a single bloodstain, recovered by a hired cleaner. DA Cannizzaro gave a fiery closing argument and said that police could have done a better job gathering evidence in the days after the murder.

Ott receives the state's mandatory sentence of life without parole.

Robin's sister Monica Malta led the Malta family in thanking DA Cannizzaro before leaving the courthouse.

Robin Malta was a much loved member of the GLBT community and did much in his life to help those less fortunate and engaged in fundraising activities for many of his favorite charities and causes. He was Southern Decadence Grand Marshal XXVI and is sorely missed by his family and community.

economy," said Rep. Richmond.

"Instead of spending the money on critically needed medical care, these insurance companies have refused to pay claims, denied people with medical problems access to health insurance and taken the money to the bottom line. Greedy executives are stuffing this cash into their pockets in the form of big bonuses while individuals suffer and small businesses get ever increasing premium payments," said Rep. LaFonta.

The group released new data showing that BlueCross BlueShield collects more than \$2.1 billion in premiums in Louisiana, but spends only 84% of that, or less than \$1.8 billion, on health care costs- keeping hundreds of millions of dollars for profits and non health care-related spending.

"BlueCross BlueShield, the largest health insurance company in Louisiana, diverts a stunning 16% of health care premiums from actually providing health care. As New Orleans businesses continue to get back on their feet, our hard-earned dollars need to go directly to doctor's visits, medicines, and emergency procedures. Instead, health insurance companies spend more than ten cents of every dollar on CEO compensation, lobbying, marketing, and advertising," said Miriam Brown from the Hispanic Chamber of Com-

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● **Saturday, Dec. 26th**

11pm **Marcy Marcell's Golden Age Revue**
presents **A Who Dat Christmas**

● **Sunday, Dec. 27th**

12noon **Saints vs.**
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● **Thursday, Dec. 31st**

Show Bar of the Year JohnPaul's presents the 1st Show & Fundraiser of the New Year

11pm **New Year's Eve Party**

11:45pm **Dragging In The New Year**

12midnight **Champagne Toast**

after the show **Small Charity Auction**

● **Friday, Jan. 1st**

9pm **FourPlay's New Year's Show**

● **Sunday, Jan. 3rd**

12noon **Saints vs. Carolina Panthers**

Refreshments & Free Jello Shot with each Saints Touchdown

● **EVERY TUESDAY**

8-9pm **Country Western Dance Lessons**

9-10:30pm **Country Western Dancing**

Home Bar of Grey Cross Studios, Krewe of Amon Ra, Krewe of Petronius, LSGRA, POS

the "official" dish ...from 6

merce.

Nationally, private insurers currently spend on average only 81% of premiums directly on health care costs, according to a study by PricewaterhouseCoopers. By comparison, the public Medicare program spends almost 98% of its premium revenue on health care-related costs.

To address the impact of these costs, the group called for passage of Senator Al Franken's "Ensuring Value for Premiums" amendment, requiring that private insurance companies spend 90% of their revenue from premiums on health care related costs. The amendment would require that private insurance companies give their customers refunds on any non-health care-related costs over 10% of the premium. Consumers would see a decrease in premium costs- as well as an increase in the amount of coverage provided- as insurance companies sought to avoid paying a refund.

The rebate required by the amendment would mean \$127 million returned to BlueCross BlueShield customers in Louisiana.

Amid the slow holiday shopping season, local small business owners explained how inflated premiums harm their livelihoods, and in turn, the local economy, still recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

"The high cost of health insurance means three to five people I can't hire this year," explained Andrew Gross, president of Radiation Technical Services. "Multiply that times thousands of small businesses and we're losing tens of thousands of new jobs. It's completely unconscionable that a nimble, small business like ours can't compete with larger companies because we we're not big enough to get access to lower health insurance premiums," added Gross.

A decrease in sky-high premiums would allow small business owners like Gross and Brown to help spark an economic recovery, in New Orleans, around Louisiana, and across the country. It would enable them to invest in the future of their companies and the City of New Orleans -instead of having to make tough choices between growing their businesses and offering health insurance to their employees.

The following small business owners joined the rally to explain the impact of inflated premiums on their livelihoods:

* Miriam Brown also started her own business this year, Miriam Brown & Co., which provides accounting for other small businesses. A Honduran native who has lived in New Orleans for over three decades, Brown offers bilingual financial services to the city's growing Hispanic population.

* Andrew Gross, President of Radiation Technical Services provides health insurance for all of his 100+ full time employees, but is himself ineligible for his own company's plan because of pre-existing conditions. His companies have experienced a 22% increase per year in insurance premiums.

* Helen Morgan, in her 60s, owns The Fine Arts Center, a restored historic theater that now hosts receptions. She can only afford catastrophic insurance and fears what a hospital stay might cost her-and her business.

* Maude Varella runs KidUtopia a start up family day care center. Because of dramatically increasing premiums, she cannot afford to health insurance for herself, only her daughter.



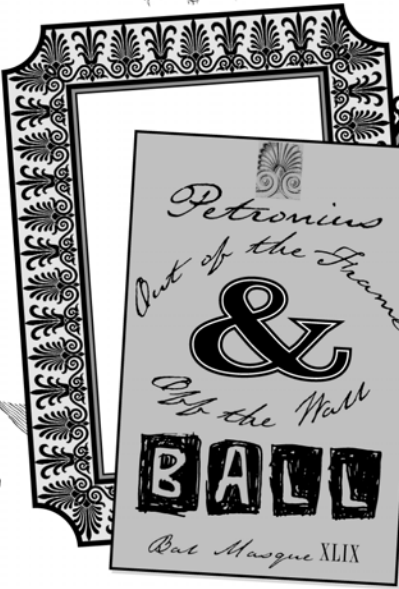
The full report is available on request.

Forum For Equality Announces Endorsements

The Forum For Equality PAC, founded in 1989 and dedicated to good government and equal rights for all in Louisiana, has

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made endorsements in the upcoming New Orleans elections to be held on February 6, 2010.

The Forum For Equality PAC membership interviewed candidates on numerous topics including economic development, crime, government ethics, education, equal rights, and the rebuilding of our area. The candidates listed below have received the Forum For Equality PAC endorsement.

New Orleans Mayor — Dual Endorsement for Ed Murray and John Georges

New Orleans Councilmember at Large — Jackie Brechtel Clarkson and Arnie Fielkow

Councilmember, District A — Jay Batt

Councilmember, District B — Stacy Head

Councilmember, District C — Kristen Gisleson Palmer

Councilmember, District D — Cynthia Hedge-Morrell

Councilmember, District E — No Endorsement, unable to reach 60% threshold for endorsement

Assessor — Dual Endorsement for Janis Lemle and Erroll

Williams

Judge Civil District Court, Division J — Paula Brown

Judge Juvenile Court, Section E — Tracey Flemings-Davillier

Sheriff — Marlin Gusman

Clerk Civil District Court — Dale Atkins

Clerk Criminal District Court — Arthur Morrell

ACLU Announces Newly Elected Board Members

The ACLU of Louisiana announces that four new members will join its Board of

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**Fridays 9pm
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New Orleans Bears

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UNDER THE GAYDAR

by Tony Leggio
Email: tonymgp@hotmail.com
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Broadway Cares About New Orleans

Everyone knows that Broadway has a big heart. Most people are familiar with Broadway Cares/ Equity Fights AIDS, the nation's leading industry based HIV/AIDS fundraising and grant-making organization. But Broadway also cares about the Crescent City in a big way. Recently, *The Color Purple* Company, along with their producer Scott Sanders, met at the home of Lynette Harvey on December 2 for a very special occasion. Her home is the first of 20 Katrina ravaged homes being rebuilt

through the fundraising efforts of *The Color Purple* tour, in conjunction with the New Orleans grassroots organization, the St. Bernard Project. It was an amazingly touching moment as the company placed a wreath on the door, then moved Ms. Harvey's furniture into her home just in time for the holidays.

Since September, The Color Purple National Tour has been working with presenting cities to raise money to rebuild homes for families who were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The tour has raised over \$300,000 which will place 20 families back into their homes.

This is just another reason why we

are thankful to have Broadway back in the Big Easy. Until our lovely Saenger Theatre returns in 2011, the Broadway shows can be seen at the newly renovated Mahalia Jackson Theatre. If you did not get a chance to see the astounding performance of *The Color Purple*, do not fret, there are three more shows rounding out this season. Next up is *Mamma Mia* - February 2 - 7, 2010, *Wicked* - March 24 - April 11, 2010, and *Avenue Q* - June 8 - 13, 2010.

I cannot begin to tell you how this city has deeply missed Broadway touring companies performing in our city. Our cultural atmosphere in New Orleans suffered tremendously after Katrina, and it is exciting to have these shows back.

For information on purchasing tickets to any upcoming shows or season tickets for the 2010-2011 season, contact www.broadwayacrossamerica.com or call the box office at 504.287.0351.

Art Against AIDS 2009

The 23rd Annual Art Against AIDS Gala took place on December 5 at the Shops at Canal Place and it was an incredible night of shopping, eating, drinking and bidding. Every year, the NO/AIDS Task Force hosts this fabulous fundraiser where it is all about the art. This year artists designed customized holiday ornaments for 200 lucky patrons. I was very fortunate to choose an ornament created by none other than Satyricon's talented artist and performer Stephen Rizzo. So many artists donated their time to make these one-of-a-kind keepsakes of the evening. I cannot even begin to name all the artists, but one other artist that did several ornaments was Amon Ra's Daryl Dunaway.

In addition to the ornaments by the artists, many schoolchildren around the New Orleans metro area created ornaments for sale in the retail area, run by NO/AIDS very own talented artist, Larry Mercier. The silent auction was also filled with plenty of art, gift certificates and baskets of goodies, which made it easy for me to do my Christmas shopping all in one place. The cuisine was the next thing that made the evening special, being able to try many different restaurants. Loved the salmon from Benedict's Plantation and the pasta from Louisiana Pizza Kitchen. Also, a new twist on an old restaurant is returning to the Crescent City and I can't wait. Vicky Bayley and Mike Fennelly are bringing back a new version of Mike's on the Avenue back to their old location at the Lafayette Hotel, 628 St. Charles Avenue, called Mike's East-West.

And there was plenty of libations around to help loosen up your purse strings. Art seems much better with cocktails, which was graciously donated by the Goldring Family Foundation. The entertainment this year was especially good. Johnaye Kendrick is my new favorite performer in the city. She is a melodic singer that makes you just want to listen to her for hours. You can check her out all over the city including Irvin Mayfield's new place in the Royal Sonesta. The Gay Men's Chorus also performed along with a DJ provided by the Bourbon Pub/Parade.

Special thanks also go out to the committee who put on this fabulous night which included Arthur Roger as Honorary Art Chair. Mr. Roger actually began this event twenty-three years ago and has since been a stalwart supporter of the event and the organization. The committee also included David Aranda and Daryl Dunaway from Amon Ra, Candy Ulmer Cranch, Kathleen Gross, Larry Mercier and yours truly.

One special thank you goes out to Director of Development of the Task Force Heidi Nagele Chapman, who I have worked with on this event for years. Heidi will be leaving us this month to move to Atlanta and she will be terribly missed. She received a wonderful honor at the event, as well as a lovely party hosted a few days later at Louisiana Pizza Kitchen. In addition to Heidi, CEO Noel Twilbeck has made this event one of the top things to do in the city.

Other thanks go out to Director of Volunteers Doreen Tollerson, Communications Manager TJ Rogers and Development Coordinator Chad Stelly. For more information on the Task Force, or how to

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