

LOCAL TALK

NEWARK • IRVINGTON • EAST ORANGE • ORANGE • WEST ORANGE • SOUTH ORANGE • MAPLEWOOD • BLOOMFIELD • MONTCLAIR & MORE

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“LET’S TALK FOR THE BETTERMENT OF OUR COMMUNITIES”

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER

ESSEX COUNTY • EAST ORANGE • ORANGE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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LOCAL FIGHTERS FACE OFF IN THE RING



Orange native Mike Lee (right) goes one on one with Paterson's Rickey Edwards. Photos By Felicia Laguerre Owens

MIGRANT PROBLEM DUMPED ON NEW JERSEY

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ELECTED CANDIDATES - ONE-THIRD NEW - TAKE OFFICE

By Walter Elliott

NEWARK - Inauguration Week 2024 is more than just the annual peaceful transfer of political power among 11 of "Local Talk's" towns, the Essex County Board of Commissioners here and in the State House in Trenton Jan. 1-9.

A majority of registered "Local Talk" area voters who mostly had their say in the Nov. 7 General Election elected 22 new or semi-new people into seats on the State Legislature, the Essex County Board of Commissioners and, on the local level, nine municipal and/or boards of education.

Those 22 sworn into their new positions make up 35 percent of the 58 seats on Nov. 7's ballot. By "mostly," there are several mu-



Newly sworn-in State Senator Britnee Timberlake

nicipalities who have named or about to name successors to mayor, deputy mayor, and/or school board president and vice president independently of election results.

The biggest shakeup, to culminate with Jan. 9's inauguration in Trenton, is found among the four legislative districts that represent "Local Talk" land, amounting to the changing of a generational guard.

The 27th, 28th, 29th and 34th Legislative Districts, like all 40 in New Jersey, had its 120 State Senate and General Assembly seats up for voters' choice. 2023, however, was the first year of the 2020-21 US census-driven decennial redistricting.

Incumbent senators and assembly members found themselves in neighboring districts by the redrawing. Many were facing the prospect of running against their neighboring colleges.

(Continued on page 4)

A Message from Councilwoman Quantavia Hilbert of Orange, NJ

Greetings and Happy New Year from the West Ward.

Firstly, I'd like to reflect on the beautiful people I've connected with in 2023. I am grateful for your visits, your support, and most importantly your stories.

I've enjoyed listening to the students, businesses, and families, and I truly believe we are all equally committed to a better future.

I look forward to serving you in 2024, and continuing to advocate for legislation that is in the community's best interest.

Yours truly,

Councilwoman Quantavia L. Hilbert



SEE PAGE 11



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Turn
To
**PAGE
9**



Editorial
Dhiren Shah
 Editor-In-Chief

Hello Readers,

The entire Local Talk team and I wish you all a happy, peaceful, healthy, and prosperous New Year 2024. Is the world changing for good? I don't think so. Money, Power, and Politics are taking over and very few think about the benefits of the people.

Harvard University President Claudine Gay has resigned after testimony she gave at a congressional hearing on campus antisemitism. Also, there were allegations of plagiarism in her academic work. Until the Israel-Hamas war, there was no accusation on any of her work. However, groups of students gathered and complained about their security and threats from Gaza-supporting students and groups.

In December 2023, University of Pennsylvania President

Liz Magill stepped down after her remarks sparked outrage at the same congressional hearing. After months of tension on campus, she was forced to resign. This is not a good direction our educational institutions are headed.

In well-developed countries, United States stands #16 for school education in the world. However, when it comes to college degrees, the United States has a well-deserved ranking due to many top-rated universities in the world. The United States has improved, but when it comes to spending money, the United States spends the most per student in the world. On this, the US is far behind many countries.

When it comes to elementary schools, the United States is way behind. They are ranked first in spending money per student, but not in the top 10 for elementary schools in the world for quality. As I heard from some sources, the United States stands 30th in the world.

Hamas deputy head Saleh al-Arouri has been killed by an Israeli drone attack in Beirut. Beirut is the largest and capital city of Lebanon and is not in Palestine. Israel targeted an office

building that belonged to Hamas and coincidentally, Saleh al-Arouri was killed in the strike.

A Japan airlines passenger flight collided with a coast guard flight while landing. All 379 passengers on the Japan Airlines flight JAL-516 got out safely before the Airbus A350 was fully engulfed in flames, Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito confirmed. However, 5 crew members lost their lives. This is totally unusual that the flight landing at the airport collided on the ground. There is a huge mistake by someone at the control center or by the ground crew. The coast guard flight was en route to provide aid after a huge earthquake took lives and threatened a tsunami.

The Russia-Ukraine war has made some turns. Ukraine attacked the Russian city of Belgorod on Dec. 30, killing at least 25 people and injuring over 100. Russian president Vladimir Putin ordered a strike on Ukraine's capital city Kyiv. About eight drones impacted the city, and several areas were left with no electricity or water. According to Ukrainian news, it was hypersonic air-launched ballistic missiles.

As you all know from January 1, 2024, the minimum wage

has increased to \$15.13 in New Jersey. However, California has raised their minimum wage to \$16.00, which is the highest in the United States. The lowest rate of \$7.25 in the US are: Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming. Most states have not changed their minimum wage since 2014. This will attract more business for those states, as everything will be cheaper there.

Sen. Bob Menendez is facing more charges. He is being accused of making positive remarks about Qatar in exchange for expensive watches.

Finally, the big anticipated event this year has to be the 2024 Presidential Election. So far, leading candidate and former President Donald Trump has been blocked from appearing on Colorado and Maine's ballots. However, the Supreme Court will likely have something to say about it. Time will tell where the country goes...

*Have a wonderful week.
 I'll talk to you next time.*

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WEATHER FOR THE WEEK

<u>THURSDAY</u>	<u>FRIDAY</u>	<u>SATURDAY</u>	<u>SUNDAY</u>	<u>MONDAY</u>	<u>TUESDAY</u>	<u>WEDNESDAY</u>
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ELECTED CANDIDATES

(Cont. from page 1)

Nine incumbents decided to retire or not seek re-election. Three assembly members, with Essex County Democratic Committee endorsement, successfully ran for senate. One incumbent was defeated in the June 6 primary by a colleague - only for the primary victor to end his campaign in August and set his retirement for Jan. 6.

Voters in two Local Talk towns unseated board of education incumbents. Two appointees in their respective Irvington state senate and township council seats won their respective first elected terms.

STATE LEGISLATURE

LD 27 (West Orange, Montclair, "West Essex's" Livingston and Roseland plus Passaic County's Clifton):

Outgoing "old 34th District" Assemblyman John McKeon was elected to succeed the retiring Richard Codey, of Roseland.

McKeon, a former West Orange mayor, and Codey, however, had won their respective June 6 party primaries for assembly and state senate re-election.

McKeon was assemblyman of the "Old 34th LD," until West Orange and Montclair were moved into the "New 27th" by redistricting. Former governor and senate president Codey meanwhile survived a primary joust against "Old 34th."

Sen. Nia Gill, while strong in Montclair, was unable to make gains in some of the New 27th's other towns. Orange native Codey then announced his withdrawal from the General Election in August and made Jan. 9 his career sunset.

East Orange's LeRoy Jones called for a convention with other municipal Democratic committee chairpersons and members. McKeon, after surviving in-and-out bids by Essex County Commissioner Brendan Gill and wife Alixos Callazos-Gill, accepted his new run for senate.

Callazos-Gill, of Montclair, and outgoing Livingston Councilwoman Rosanne "Roxy" Bagolie accepted making their first as-

sembly runs - and were elected. They succeeded McKeon and the retiring Mila Jasey, of South Orange.

LD 28 (Irvington, South Orange, Maplewood, Newark's "southwest" and Vailsburg-West Wards plus Union County's Hillside):

Voters elected the appointed Sen. Renee Burgess to her first elected term. The outgoing Irvington Township Council President and former Irvington Board of Education president ran unopposed.

Burgess was appointed to succeed Ronald L. Rice, of Newark, who resigned Aug. 31, 2022 to focus on his battle against cancer. The longtime legislator died March 15, 2023.

Newcomer Garnett Hall, of Maplewood, was elected to the General Assembly on the same ECDC-endorsed ticket with incumbent Cleopatra Tucker, of Newark.

Hall succeeded two General Assembly members. Jacqueline "Jackie" Yustein, of Glen Ridge, was appointed to the post April 15 after Ralph Caputo, of Nutley, resigned March 22. The longtime assemblyman left to take a seat on Blue Cross/Blue Shield of NJ's board of directors.

LD 29 (Newark's North, East, Central, "southwest" and "West Side" wards):

For the record, incumbent Sen. M. Teresa Ruiz and assemblywomen Elina Pintor-Marin and Shanique Speight, both on the ECDC ticket, were re-elected.

LD 34 (East Orange, Orange, Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, Belleville, Nutley):

Voters ratified outgoing assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake, of East Orange, to take the lateral promotion of state senator. Timberlake succeeded McKeon.

Newcomer Carmen Morales, of Belleville, and outgoing Bloomfield Mayor Michael Venezia received voters' nods for General Assembly members. Morales succeeds Timberlake.

Venezia, depending on one's perspective, technically suc-

ceeded Yustein. He has meanwhile set his resignation as Bloomfield mayor for Jan. 9.

ESSEX COUNTY COMMISSIONER, SECOND DISTRICT (Irvington, Maplewood, parts of Newark's South and Central Wards):

Outgoing Newark Public Schools Board of Education Member A'Dorian Murray-Thomas was elected Nov. 7 to succeed the retiring Rufus Johnson, of Newark. Murray-Thomas has since resigned from the Newark schools board.

Whether Wayne Richardson, of Newark, and Vice President Carlos M. Pomares, of Bloomfield, will get to keep their seats will be known after Murray-Thomas' swearing in at the Donald M. Payne, Sr. School of Technology Auditorium 6 p.m. Jan. 2

MUNICIPAL LEVEL

In IRVINGTON'S SPECIAL COUNCIL ELECTION, Darlene Brown ran uncontested to complete Burgess' Township Council unexpired term. The Team Irvington Strong candidate was scheduled to be sworn in Jan. 2.

In EAST ORANGE, First-time campaigners Sameed Monk and Naima Fauntleroy were respectively elected to the open Second and Fifth Ward seats. Monk succeeds the outgoing Brittany Claybrooks; Fauntleroy succeeds Mustafa Al-M. Brent.

All 10 Council Members selected Third Ward Councilman Vernon Pullens, Jr. to succeed City Second Ward Councilman Christopher Awe as their Council Chairman this year. The former East Orange School District member was re-elected into his third term Nov. 7.

A new WEST ORANGE Council President was sworn in Jan. 2 although there were no Township Council elections held in 2023.

Four of five council members voted second-term Councilman Rev. William "Bill" Rutherford Dec. 19 to succeed Councilwoman Tammy Williams. Rutherford retains his senior pastordship in Orange's Ebenezer Baptist Church.

(Continued on page 5)

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SPORTS WRAP



Photos By Felicia Laguerre Owens



By William Hathaway, Jr.

This past week in the city of Newark, the Prudential Center hosted the 1st annual Brick City Fight Night, which was a showcase of local area boxers from Newark, Orange and the tri-state area. There were 11 boxing matches on the card for the day.

beat Weah Archiebald in 6 rounds. The six fight of the night saw Malik Nelson knock out Romel Tsanimp in a featherweight division match.

Mike Lee from Orange was up next, and competed against Rickey Edwards in a welterweight fight. Despite his efforts, Lee was unable to overcome



The first match of the undercard saw John Vallejo beat Rashad Bogar from Newark in 4 rounds in a super lightweight division match. The next fight had Kasir Goldston going over Elijah Ogun from Jersey City in the lightweight division.

In the third fight, Newarker Anthony Johns scored a fourth round knockout on Israel Camacho in the flyweight division. Dwyke Flemmings Jr. defeated Houston native Luis Briceno Roman in a middleweight division match, while Paul Kroll

Edwards, who came out and got the victory. Meanwhile, Newark native Michael Anderson earn a 4th round knockout over Euby Bernarodo.

In the main event of the evening, it was Roseland sensation Vito Mielnicki, Jr. knocking out Salim Larbi from Cambrai, France for the victory. Mielnicki Jr. is now 17-1 on his career. He famously debuted at the Prudential Center a few years ago, scoring his first pro win while still in high school.



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ELECTED OFFICIALS

(Continued from page 4)

In MAPLEWOOD, Democratic incumbent Township Committee candidates Dean Dafis and Victor de Luca, while re-elected unopposed Nov. 7, yielded their respective Mayor and Deputy Mayor posts Jan. 1.

They and the rest of the five TC members voted Nancy Adams and Jasmine Cripe as mayor and deputy mayor at their Dec. 19 meeting, effective at Noon Monday's annual reorganization meeting. Maplewood and Nutley are the only "Local Talk" towns where township committee or commission members select a mayor and deputy mayor from amongst themselves.

In BLOOMFIELD, that township's Democratic committee may announce Michael Venezia's successor as mayor at their Jan. 4 regular or Jan. 8 conference meetings. It is not known as of press time whether the new mayor will be sworn in on those dates or at a later special meeting. Venezia steps down while taking his General Assembly oath of office in Tren-

ton Jan. 9.

In GLEN RIDGE, Friday, Jan. 3 will be borough residents' first opportunity to learn whether Council President Deborah Mans will be named mayor. Mans was Nov. 7's top vote-getter.

The Borough Council, however, may call for resumes for potential council successors to Mans should she be named mayor. Former mayor Daniel T. Murphy was appointed when then-Councilman Stuart K. Patrick was named mayor in 2016.

Campaign debutant Lori Jean Moody and incumbent David Lefkovits were elected and re-elected to their Borough Council seats. Former councilman and mayor Murphy declined running for re-election.

BOARDS OF EDUCATION

In WEST ORANGE, Maria Vera is to be sworn into Melinda Huertas' board seat during the Jan. 4 reorganization meeting. Voters favored first-timer Vera over first-termer Huertas Nov. 7. Brian Rock is the five-member panel's board president entering Thursday night.

(Continued on page 13)



UNITED STATES



MIGRANT PROBLEM DUMPED ON NEW JERSEY

The issue of migrants being bused from Texas and other locales is spilling from one side of the Hudson River to the other.

After New York made legislation that required charter buses bringing in migrants to give at least 32 hours notices, the people doing the busing found a loophole. They would instead dump them in New Jersey at bus and train stations, leaving them to finish their journey to New York.

Although the migrants were given tickets to finish their journey to the Empire State, there is no guarantee that they would do so. Among the mayors expressing concern is Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop, who pondered what would happen if the migrants began to strain resources in the Garden State.

The person most linked to the movement of migrants is Texas Governor Greg Abbott, who began the process of busing migrants who crossed the border of his state to sanctuary cities in order to alleviate the issues they brought in with them. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis also employed the practice.

While some call the measure inhumane, others have wondered why the cities simply won't revoke the sanctuary city status and concentrate resources on actual American citizens, rather than those considered as illegal immigrants.

MASS SHOOTING

FINAL 2023 TALLY

Information recent as of 12-31-2023 at 12 p.m.

2023 Mass Shooting Stats: (Source: Mass Shooting Tracker, <https://www.massshootingtracker.site/data/?year=2023>)

- **Total Mass Shootings: 748**
- **Total Dead: 916**
- **Total Wounded: 2943**
- **Shootings Per Day: 2.11**

WORLD



NEW YEAR, SAME WAR

Major aerial attacks causing widespread death and destruction of homes and civilian infrastructure have rained down on Ukraine in the first days of 2024 due to an intense new Russian offensive.

In a statement on Jan. 2, UN Humanitarian Coordinator Denise Brown strongly condemned the assaults targeting mostly cities.

"For the people of Ukraine, the new year started with loss, pain, and anguish. For the third day in a row, vast aerial assaults by the Russian Federation have caused death - including several children - and destruction of homes," Ms. Brown stated.

She emphasized that the situation is particularly alarming as many parts of the capital, Kyiv, have been left without electricity or water, which is particularly dangerous as temperatures are forecast to drop to -20 degrees Celsius later this week.

The humanitarian crisis is equally harsh in the Donetsk Region, where hostilities have left hundreds of thousands of people without any power, exacerbating the already dire situation.

In the face of this devastation, Ms. Brown reiterated the commitment of humanitarians to continue supporting the people of Ukraine.

"Today, my thoughts are with the families and friends of those killed or injured, and with those who fear for the missing," Ms. Brown said, stressing the need to aid those "suffering the

devastation caused by Russia's invasion."

In a tweet, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) posted that many children in the capital were forced to spend the night sheltering in the city's metro stations.

During the last meeting of the Security Council during 2023 - convened at the request of Russia on Dec. 23 - a senior UN political affairs official condemned attacks against the Russian city of Belgorod, located near the Ukrainian border.

At least 18 civilians were killed and more than 100 injured there, said Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General with the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

Ms. Brown once again reminded the Russian Federation that "indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure are strictly forbidden under international humanitarian law."

MIDDLE EAST



MEDICS PUSHED TO BRINK

Overwhelmed medics in Gaza on Dec. 26 continued to try to save victims of missile strikes including attacks near refugee camps in the center of the devastated enclave that have reportedly killed well over 100 people, the UN health agency said.

World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Medical Teams coordinator Sean Casey said that "100-plus patients" had been brought into Al-Aqsa Hospital in the space of 30 minutes, following reported blasts, including near Al-Maghazi refugee camp.

All of them needed urgent treatment for serious wounds, the WHO official told UN News, while "about 100" more lifeless bodies were brought into the hospital at around the same time.

The UN human rights office, OHCHR, also expressed deep concern on Tuesday at the ongoing "intense" bombing of central Gaza involving more than 50 strikes by the Israeli Defense Forces.

Attacks have killed more than 100 Palestinians since Dec.

24, OHCHR reported, adding that this was particularly concerning given that Israeli forces had "ordered residents from the south of Wadi Gaza to move to Middle Gaza and Tal al-Sultan in Rafah."

Three refugee camps were hit, OHCHR spokesperson Seif Magango said in a statement, naming Al Bureij, Al-Nuseirat and Al-Maghazi. "Two strikes hit seven residential buildings in Al-Maghazi camp, killing an estimated 86 Palestinians and injuring many more," he said. "An unknown number of people are still believed to be trapped under the rubble."

In a social media post on X (formerly Twitter), WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus condemned the "carnage" caused by Israeli airstrikes in retaliation for Hamas's 7 October terror attacks on communities in southern Israel, in which some 1,200 people were slaughtered and another 240 taken hostage.

"WHO is extremely concerned about the unbearable strain that escalating hostilities are putting on the few hospitals across Gaza that remain open - with most of the health system decimated and brought to its knees," the WHO chief said.

In a social media post, WHO's Mr. Casey described the situation in Al-Aqsa Hospital as a "bloodbath." He pointed to a boy of nine, Ahmed, who lay dying on the floor of the facility after sustaining terrible blast injuries as he crossed the street near Nuseirat.

"We've seen children, women, young men, old men and women, people bleeding out," he said, noting that patients could not easily be referred elsewhere for lifesaving treatment.

"There's blood everywhere in these hospitals at the moment. We're seeing almost only trauma cases come through the door, and at a scale that's quite difficult to believe. It's a bloodbath as we said before, it's carnage."

The development follows a joint WHO and UN aid coordination office (OCHA) Christmas Day visit to Al-Aqsa Hospital to assess needs after strikes in Gaza's central area.

Although Al-Aqsa Hospital has medical supplies and fuel to run generators, Mr. Casey con-

(Continued on page 7)

WORLD NEWS FLASH

(Continued from page 6)

firmed that the facility was taking in far more patients than its bed capacity and staff could handle, meaning that many injured patients would not survive the wait for treatment.

This situation was happening up and down the Gaza Strip, the WHO official continued, speaking from the UN Joint Humanitarian Operations Center in Rafah in the south, that also doubles as a medical facility.

UNITED KINGDOM



GETTING TOUGH ON STUDENT VISAS

Restrictions to student visa routes came into effect Jan. 1, as the government continues to slash migration and curb abuse of the immigration system.

International students starting courses this month will no longer be able to bring family members on all but postgraduate research courses and courses with government-funded scholarships. The changes, first announced last May, have also seen people banned from using the student visa as a backdoor route to work in the UK and will see an estimated 140,000 fewer people come to the UK.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated that net migration was 672,000 from June 2022 to June 2023. In the year ending September 2023, 152,980 visas were issued to dependents of students, a more than 930% rise from the 14,839 in the year ending September 2019.

The changes to student dependent rules are part of a wider package of measures to come into force that will drastically bring down the high numbers of migrants coming to the UK to sustainable levels, and crack down on those who take advantage of the flexibility of the UK's immigration system.

Home Secretary James Cleverly said: "This government is delivering on its commitment to

the British public to cut migration. We have set out a tough plan to rapidly bring numbers down, control our borders and prevent people from manipulating our immigration system, which will come into force throughout this year.

"Yesterday (Jan. 1), a major part of that plan came into effect, ending the unreasonable practice of overseas students bringing their family members to the UK. This will see migration falling rapidly by the tens of thousands and contribute to our overall strategy to prevent 300,000 people from coming to the UK.

Tom Pursglove MP, Minister for Legal Migration and the Border, said: "Our world-leading universities rightly attract some of the brightest students from around the world to the UK. But we have seen a surge in the number of dependents being brought by students, which is contributing to unsustainable levels of migration.

"We are completely committed to seeing a decisive cut in migration. The action implemented yesterday to restrict bringing dependents on the student visa route allows us to better protect our public services, while supporting the economy by allowing the students who contribute the most to keep coming here.

"This is part of a series of measures which together will see 300,000 fewer people coming to the UK compared to last year."

At the same time, the government is stopping the boats and tackling illegal migration. Small boat arrivals to the UK are down 35% this year, illegal working raids have increased by 70%, migration agreements have been signed with France, Bulgaria, Turkey, Italy, Georgia and Ethiopia, more than 5,000 Albanians have been returned and arrivals from Albania are down by 90%. This is on top of signing a new treaty with the government of Rwanda and introducing new legislation making it clear that Rwanda is a safe country and allowing asylum seekers to be relocated there as a safe third country.

The changes to student visas strike the right balance to continue to preserve the attractiveness of the UK's world-leading



Family Support Organization of Essex County (FSOEC) offers support groups and workshops for parents and caregivers of children with special needs. You're not on this journey alone!

JANUARY 2: Nurtured Heart Approach meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 1st Tuesdays for English and Spanish-speaking parents to connect and address their concerns, questions, and feelings about raising a child with special needs.

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JANUARY 9: Let's Talk — Parent Support Group meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 2nd Tuesdays to help parents and caregivers learn new strategies that effect positive change.

JANUARY 25: Better Together Dads meets 6:30 p.m. monthly on 4th Thursdays to give fathers a safe place for connection with other passionate dads.

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higher education sector, while removing the ability for institutions to undermine the UK's reputation by selling immigration not education.

The government remains committed to the International Education Strategy which recognizes the important benefits that international students bring to the UK, including the economic contribution they make. This means balancing the commitment to lower overall levels of migration with ensuring those coming to the UK are highly skilled and provide the most benefit to our economy.

The government will work with universities to design an alternative approach, in order to continue to attract the brightest and the best to the UK, and so they can bring dependents to the UK's world-leading universities, while continuing to reduce net migration.

In December, the Home Secretary announced a further set of measures to bring legal migration down to sustainable levels. This includes ending the abuse of health and care visas by stopping overseas care workers from

bringing dependents, and requiring care firms in England to be regulated by the Care Quality Commission in order to sponsor visas.

Salary thresholds across the skilled worker route will also be increased by nearly 50% to £38,700, while the government is also cracking down on cut-price labor from overseas by scrapping the 20% salary discount for shortage occupations and replacing the Shortage Occupation List.

The minimum income requirement for British or settled people sponsoring family members to join them in the UK will also be increased to £38,700 by Spring 2025, while the Migration Advisory Committee will be commissioned to review the Graduate route to prevent abuse and ensure the integrity and quality of the UK higher education system is maintained.

This package of measures, taken in addition with the measures on student dependents, means that around 300,000 people who came to the UK last year would not be able to in the future - the largest reduction ever.

LOCAL TALK

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DISCLAIMER: The following items are primarily drawn from first responders. Responders' accounts may not be their full activity range. Grand juries hand down indictments when evidence presented them warrant a trial. Named suspects/defendants are innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

NEWARK

City elders intend to apply Mayor Kenneth Gibson's "Wherever urban America goes, Newark will get there first," quote to conditionally lowering the voting age here after 12:30 p.m. Jan. 10.

The Municipal Council introduced and unanimously passed a resolution that will lower the city's voters age to 16 years old - applicable only for the Third Tuesday in April's Board of Education Member and School Budget elections.

The measure - pending a second reading, public hearing and final vote Jan. 10 - would allow 16- and 17- year-old city residents to register for the above said elections. The US Census-counted 7,257 teenagers, if the resolution passes, would be able to register in time for the April 16 elections.

Newark would become the first New Jersey municipality to lower its minimum voting age from 18. Mayor Ras Baraka and Council President LaMonica McIver, who sponsored the city bill, cited NJ's Constitution and Title 19 as its legal standing.

"I'm very proud to see Newark take the lead on this issue," said Baraka Dec. 21. "Democracy is stronger when more people participate and

bringing more young people into the fold, who have so much at stake, is a great idea. Our elections will be energized and our school boards will benefit."

NJ Institute for Social Justice CEO Ryan Haygood and People's Organization for Progress Lawrence "Larry" Hamm were among those who voiced their support that Wednesday night. Haygood's institute has a Vote16NJ website. Hamm was 17 when he was appointed to the Newark Board of Education as a student member in the 1970s.

State Legislators have meanwhile reconciled differences between Assembly Bill No. A3690/ Senate Bill No. S1888 - The Voter Empowerment Act - Dec. 21 and sent their measure to Gov. Phil Murphy's desk for signing. Their bill will allow 17-year-olds statewide to vote in party primary elections.

IRVINGTON

The State Regional Examiner's Office is conducting an autopsy on the couple who were found dead in a Grove Street apartment here Dec. 23 to determine what caused their death.

Responding Irvington Police officers found a man, 25, and a woman, 27, "unresponsive" that Friday at 607 Grove St. A preliminary IPD investigation has ruled out carbon monoxide poisoning and foul play.

SHU Grad, CPA Kelly, 72.

Last rites for Seton Hall University graduate and CPA Michael J. Kelly were a Dec. 17 visitation at Shook-Farmer Funeral Home and a Dec. 18 Funeral Mass at Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament Church prior to his burial at East Hanover's Gate of Heaven Cemetery.

Kelly, 72, died at his Roseland home with his family around him Dec. 12. He was born Aug. 5, 1951 here in Irvington to Thomas and Mary Kelly. Brother Charles Kelly and sisters Rita and Joan were his siblings.

It is not clear when Patrick

moved to Roseland but he graduated from SHU with an accounting degree and was one of the first members of the school's Pi Kappa Alpha - Eta Beta Chapter, which was founded in 1970. He married his childhood sweetheart, the former Diane Reilly, in 1974. Patrick and Diane would alter raise Kristine, Kathryn and Kelly.

Kelly worked in the IRS-Newark office and taught accounting at SHU and Becker CPA prep courses prior to his retirement. Seven granddaughters are also among his survivors; his parents and sister Joan Mahon predeceased him.

EAST ORANGE

The ECPO Homicide/Major Crimes Task Force is looking for the person who shot a city man and left him for dead yards south of the city border Dec. 23.

Newark Police officers, who were responding to a shooting at its 100 block of Mountainview Avenue, found Kareem Abdul Jarmon Guilford, Jr., 22, of East Orange, lying near the Grand Avenue intersection with fatal gunshot wounds. He was pronounced dead at the Vailsburg scene at 6:34 p.m.

Guilford's funeral arrangements have not been publicly announced as of Jan. 2.

Hit-and-Run Victim Buried

Last rites for Melody Tiana Regus, 42, who was the victim of a Dec. 15 hit-and-run here, were held at Newark's Alvarez Funeral Home and North Arlington's Holy Cross Cemetery Dec. 27. Regus, who was born in Jersey City Feb. 8, 1981, worked for the Essex County Division of Family Assistance & Benefits and had previously resided in Orange and North Newark.

Regus was riding an electric bicycle when she was struck by a Nissan Rogue at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Grove Street 4:25 a.m. that Friday. The vehicle kept going. She was declared dead at Newark's

University Hospital at 4:50 a.m.

ORANGE

Maguedala Filocsaint and her five children, who occupied Mayor Dwayne D, Warren's City Hall office in an eviction crisis Nov. 8, have been staying with her sister through the Holidays.

How long she and her children can stay there is an open question in part thanks to the bureaucracy she is navigating to find new living space.

Filocsaint and eight members of her family came to 29 North Day St. Nov. 8 in an 11th-hour appeal for help. Her landlord at 756 Vose St. was seeking to lock her out of the two bedroom apartment that Wednesday sunset.

Filocsaint showed Deputy Planning Director Chris Mobley, and wanted to show Mayor Warren, three years worth of code violation summonses and other documentation exhibiting what she said was the landlord's neglect of the apartment. She had resorted to a rent strike.

Although Warren was not in the office that Wednesday morning Mobley arranged a private call between the mayor and Filocsaint - and the Essex County Division of Welfare's Temporary Rental Assistance office. Filocsaint told a reporter that no one had room for her that day - until her sister stepped in.

Filocsaint added that she is in a bureaucratic quandary. The recent divorcee receives alimony and child support, on one hand, which disqualifies her from receiving some assistance. Landlords, on the other hand, require a certain income to rent - a figure affected by inflation.

Filocsaint's path to a new dwelling is also not straightforward thanks to "The Scarlet E" - Eviction - on her records. The documentation does not allow explanation on why the eviction - just that the tenant has been evicted, which turns off many landlords.

(Continued on page 12)

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*From
The
Pastor's
Heart*

OP-ED BY DR. ROBERT KENNEDY

**We Are Members
Of One Another**

Have you heard the phrase more often than ever, "We are more divided in America than we have ever been?" Appeals have been made over the airwaves during the year to those who go to Thanksgiving and Christmas meals with family members to be as civil as they can be, because the level of anxiety is so profound that a lot of people are just waiting for an opportunity to curse off one another.

The same appeals are being made to the churches of the USA, for it is being said they are experiencing their most significant divisions ever. In a blog, *S. Michael Houdmann* argues that "while church divisions have always been the case, but now, in addition to being divided from other churches, churches are divided within themselves. Solid, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians are sharply divided from other solid, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians. In recent conversations with pastors

and friends with more ministry experience than me, it has been repeatedly confirmed that the division is significantly worse than ever." (<https://www.gotquestions.blog/division-in-the-church.html>)

Houdmann further comments that "Whether it is Trump, social justice, masks, vaccines, or stolen election claims, some Christians are taking such tight-fisted and widely divergent viewpoints that they are no longer able to fellowship with those who disagree. Churches have split. Pastors have resigned or have been fired. Factions have formed. Vitriol has replaced discourse. Distrust has replaced peace. Most churches who have survived the last several years relatively unscathed have done so by avoiding these issues as much as possible." (<https://www.gotquestions.blog/division-in-the-church.html>)

I do not know how great the conflicts and deep the divisions were in the churches of Rome or Corinth, but it is evident that there were divisions enough for the apostle Paul to make the appeals:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone among you, not to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of

faith. ⁴For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. (Romans 12:3-5 NKJV).

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. ¹³For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴For, in fact, the body is not one member but many. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NKJV).

Paul's point was that all who belong to the church and Christ are members of one body. He uses the body image throughout his calls for unity in diversity. Each part of the body is part of the whole. No part can function effectively by itself. However, one might think of themselves as head, hand, heart, foot, eye, ear, nose, or whatever part of the body; each part has an important role, meaning we cannot live in isolation. Let me repeat in outline:

- We do not live in isolation.
- We all live in one community.
- Our actions affect the people around us.
- We do not live in a vacuum.
- If one part of your body hurts, all hurt.
- We are responsible for each other.
- When we work together, we build up one another.
- When we work apart, we are like a body turning upon itself, like cancerous cells destroying the whole.

In effect, we need to let go of pride, competition, and resentment that drive us and recognize that our successes and blessings come from cooperation and collaboration. In fact, it is not just because of survival, but because the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:5). Or as Paul says, we need to follow the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31), the way of love (1 Corinthians 13).

Yes, where love reigns, we will build community; where love is lost, we will live in divisions. My invitation is for us to pray that God will help us and all in the varied communities we encounter to love so that instead of the continuing social divisions, we can build better relationships in our homes, families, churches, and public spheres.

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 10)

WEST ORANGE

Township officials said that they have spent more than \$14,000 in legal fees while contesting bagel shop owner Jarrett Seltzer - and are anticipating to spend more while Seltzer takes his case to State Appellate Court.

Readers recall that a West Orange Municipal Court judge ruled on Nov. 7 that zoning code inspectors were correct in finding Seltzer and his Bagels by Jarrett shop at 451 Mt. Pleasant Ave. in violation of its window visibility rule. The judge agreed with Township Attorney Richard Trenk's contention that more than 30 percent of window area is obscured to the customers.

Seltzer contended that his bagel shop in-

herited the window coverings when the dance studio in the same building had closed. The shop remains take-out-only since the pandemic. The windows' opaqueness and customer in-and-out saves on energy costs.

The judge assessed Seltzer \$4,566 in fines, based on the up to \$1,500 daily penalties made by the zoning officers. The \$4,566, however, is stayed until Seltzer's appeals outcome.

Trenk and his Trenk, Isabel, Siddiqi & Shahdan P.C. firm, of Livingston, meanwhile billed the township \$14,770 Aug. 1-Oct. 31. The bill, on one hand, is based on the firm's \$100 to \$150 an hour billing and Trenk's own \$150 an hour rate. It does not include postage and other fees.

Most of the \$14,770-plus billing, even if the township recoups \$4,566 from Seltzer, will be paid by West Orange taxpayers.

SOUTH ORANGE

Authorities, on Dec. 18, have identified the man who was fatally struck by a NJTransit Morris & Essex train just south of South Orange station here Dec. 13 as Joseph DeBari, 21, of Bridgewater.

DeBari, according to NJTransit Police, was struck by an eastbound out-of-service train across from Fourth Street at about 7:37 p.m. that Wednesday. The train was being moved by its crew as an unpassengered express to New York Penn Station.

South Orange Police and Rescue, the South Essex Fire Department and NJTransit Police were promptly at the Solan Street side of the station, which was promptly closed. M&E service between Newark Broad Street Station and Millburn were suspended until 10:30 p.m.

(Continued on page 14)



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ELECTED OFFICIALS

(Continued from page 5)

The MAPLEWOOD - SOUTH ORANGE SCHOOL DISTRICT will have three new members to swear in at its Jan. 4 reorganization meeting - and then pick a new president and a new vice president.

A majority of two-town voters picked Shayna Sackett-Gable and Will Meyer, both of South Orange, and Maplewoodian Elizabeth "Liz" Callahan over a pair of write-in candidates Nov. 7.

First Vice President Elissa Malespina and fellow first-termer Courtney Winkfield decided to pursue re-election. Johanna Wright also decided to call time on her long tenure - only for the board to re-appoint her to fill an absence.

Kaitlin Wiitleder remains as Board President and Nubia DuVall Wilson Second Vice President entering Thursday night's meeting.

In BLOOMFIELD, newcomer Stephanie Parry will be sworn into her board seat during their Jan. 2 reorganization meeting. Parry

ran with re-elected incumbents Kasey Dudley and Nadiesha Greene Nov. 7.

Jill Fischman and Dudley are the board's president and vice president into the 6 p.m. Tuesday reorganization.

In MONTCLAIR, who will be named board president and vice president for 2024 is about the only matter in suspense ahead of their Jan. 4 reorganization meeting.

Current President Allison Silverstein, and incumbent members Melanie Deysher and Phaedra Dunn were allowed by Nov. 7 voters to have their first full three-year terms. The Montclair Board of Education is in the midst of transitioning from a mayor-appointed to a voter-elected panel.

Crystal Hopkins is the board's vice president until at least their Thursday night meeting.

In GLEN RIDGE, newcomer Darius Kevin Dehnad will be sworn onto the Glen Ridge Public Schools board along with incumbents and Nov. 7 running mates Joycelyn Gottlieb and Duval Hopkins Graham here 7 p.m. Jan. 3.

Elisabeth Ginzburg is the board president going into Wednesday's reorganization meeting. Tracey St. Auburn and David Campbell are its respective first and second vice presidents.

In BELLEVILLE, who will be named as Trustees president and vice president will be made after Esteban Leon, Lissa Missagga and Brenda Pachero are sworn-in as first-time members Jan. 2 at 6 p.m.

Voters chose to succeed campaigning incumbents Nelson Barrera and Erika V. Jacho Nov. 7. Outgoing BOT President Luis Muniz withdrew from his campaign. Gabrielle Bennett-Meany remains its vice president until at least Tuesday night.

In NUTLEY, the only suspense in the school board's reorganization Jan. 3 is whether Salvatore Ferraro and Salvatore Balsamo will get to keep their presidency and vice presidency.

Ferraro, Balsamo and fellow incumbent Lisa Duchak-Martin were re-elected in a four-way race Nov. 7.

The Observation Booth



OP-ED By Andrea Dialect

PINKY PROMISES

Why do people make New Year's resolutions?

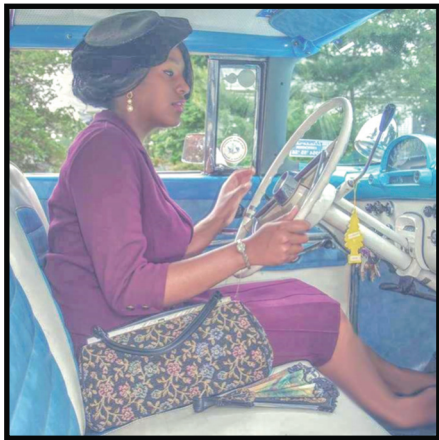
"The New Year offers a blank slate - an opportunity to get things right. When we set New Year's resolutions, we are utilizing a very important concept called self-efficacy, which means that by virtue of aspiring to a goal and following through on it, I have a sense of control over what's happening in my life."

Would've, Could've, Should (Part 2) is our welcome into 2024. I found Pinky Promises as a title to be befitting because, for me, it is associated with the death promises that we'd also often hinge onto someone else's

death as kids - which, to date, is a bit of child's play.

Unbeknownst to me, when Googling the act of a Pinky swear, I found its definition to be a bit disturbing. I was totally unaware that my pinky promises back then meant that during our throwing the word around like confetti (Pinky Swearing), it was a gesture taken to signify that the person can break the finger of the one who broke the promise. The tradition appears to be a relatively modern invention ... OH, My Word!

But despite it all, it is safe to say that following through with those New Year Resolutions or not wouldn't, couldn't, and shouldn't bring such dire consequences as reneging on a pinky swear should. I also think that It's safe to say that we are at liberty to safely make such a choice whether we follow the decision or not. For this one, I took it to the Dem Street. Enjoy the folk here who were bold enough to make a PBA and participate in our survey. Bravo!



STEP BY STEP

"My New Year's Resolution is to get closer to God. Do the ministry God calls me to do by helping others because we should think of others instead of only helping ourselves. God gave me the ministry of prayer, bible discussions, and praying for others by phone." - Doris Brown

"To get closer to God, of course, more and more. I want to start a podcast with my boys, eat healthier, pull my family together more, and spend more time with my family and my son. I also want to help the homeless by volunteering, getting back in church, and going to church more." - Julious Brown

"My resolution is to call my Grandma every day. I'm on the phone with her as we speak. She's my rock, and I want to continue to do that." - Tarik

"My name is Shaylan. My resolution is to keep doing what I'm doing and to keep eating healthy, be beautiful, and kind!"

"I'll be getting a newer vehicle and save money to get out of

East Orange." - Mark V
 "No, I don't have one because I usually don't keep them. How about you?" - Carrie Webster Ramsey

"My New Year's resolution is less spending and more saving." - Pamela Brown

"To act more like a King." - Gabriel Robinson

"I want to take it one at a time. I never make resolutions because I always break them, so what's the point? When I chose to stop smoking after 20 years, I said I wasn't buying anymore, and I quit smoking. I do that." - Miss Evelyn

"To win the Power Ball, that's it. That's my resolution." - Bobby from New York ...

Read this article in its entirety at www.localtalkweekly.com and type The Observation Booth in the search bar. For questions or comments, send an email to localtalkandrea@gmail.com.



Photos By Andrea Dialect

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 12)

DeBari, according to Seton Hall University and Kearns Funeral Home - Whitehouse, was a junior accounting major in the university's Stillman School of Business. He was on the sports editing staff of "The Setonian" student newspaper.

Born in New Brunswick, DeBari was a lifelong Bridgewater resident before moving here. The Bridgewater-Raritan High School Class of 2021 graduate enjoyed playing and spectating many sports and having family days at the beach.

Parents Giovanni and Angela DeBari, maternal grandfather Albert Demeter and brother Christopher are among his survivors. His funeral was set for Kearns-Whitehouse on Dec. 21, followed by burial at Basking Ridge's Holy Cross Cemetery. Memorial do-

nations may be made to Aaliyah in Action.

MAPLEWOOD

Township police detectives are asking the public to be on the lookout for the two males who committed a push-in armed house robbery here in Newark Heights Dec. 15.

A resident of a Hughes Street house told responding MPD officers at 10:20 p.m. that he had heard a knock on the door. Two males pushed in, one of who was holding a knife.

The suspects stole cell phones, several other electronic devices, a bag of clothing and "other personal items." They were both described as African or African American males 25 to 30-years-old wearing black hooded sweatshirts with the hood pulled over their ski masked faces.

Suspect No. 1 is described as being 5-ft.,

5-in. tall, of thin build and wearing gray pants. Suspect No. 2 is described as being 6-ft, tall, of heavier build and wearing black pants.

BLOOMFIELD

A township firefighter has spent his year end holidays suspended without pay and a permanent restraining order from the fellow firefighter who has accused him of racial harassment.

Four year BFD Firefighter Patrick Thomas, who has been off duty since Nov. 16, and attorney Thomas R. Ashley have filed their harassment complaint against Ff. Walter Coffee and notified the department, other particular officers and the township Dec. 19.

"I'm going to look into evidence that there was previous knowledge with respect (Continued on page 15)

TOWN WATCH

(Continued from page 14)

to what Mr. Coffee was going to do," said Ashley to a reporter, "and, whether by virtue of their silence, they turned a blind eye to his racist actions.

Ff. Thomas said that he has been unable to return to duty after what he said was the second incident over a noose in a week by Ff. Coffee happened in Nov. 16. Thomas, Coffee and other BFD members were having a rope and rappelling training day when the latter handed the former a rope tied into a noose.

"He (Coffee) was laughing and he was like 'I want you to figure out what type of knot this is,' " said Thomas. "My reply was, 'I know exactly what this is - a noose. This is what people used to my ancestors from trees.' My Captain and another one of the firefighters came in to check on me - and I could tell by the look on their faces they were in shock."

Thomas said Coffee the week before told him, "There's a noose upstairs on the table." Thomas replied "Why would I want to see a noose? He looked at me, laughed and was like, 'I'm just telling you.'"

ECPO attorneys, in their charging documents, said that the Nov. 16 incident was captured on firehouse video. A township spokesman said that its officials are outraged and disappointed, found the actions unacceptable and re "exploring all disciplinary options."

MONTCLAIR / GLEN RIDGE

Glen Ridge High School's loss may be Verona's gain come next football season when Montclair native Manjeet Singh takes the helm as the Hillbillies' head varsity coach.

The Verona Board of Education voted at their Dec. 12 meeting to hire Singh to succeed former seven-year head Hillbilly coach Kevin Batty. Batty's teams amassed a 33-26 win-loss record, including a 12-0 NJSIAA Section 2, Group 2 Championship in 2019. Verona, however, finished this season 2-8.

Singh's contract does not include teaching in Verona Public Schools. He works as a Montclair-based Compass real estate agent "off-season." Verona also tends to hire their coaches on a year-to-year basis.

Singh, who was St. Joseph's Regional High School of Montvale's assistant coach 2018-20, joined Glen Ridge Public Schools in 2022. His GRHS team garnered an 11-10 record those two seasons, including

winning the 2022 NJSIAA Group 2, Section 1 Regional Invitational Championship - the Ridgers' first playoff victory since winning the 1982 Group 2, Section 1 crown.

The Montclair High School Class of 1996 graduate was part of the Mounties' 1994 state championship team as a wide receiver and tight end. "Manj" is also flag football director for Centercourt Montclair. Singh began his coaching career by being freshman defensive coordinator for Don Bosco Preparatory High School 2016-18.

"Being from Montclair growing up, all you heard was Montclair, Cedar Grove and Verona," said Singh Dec. 12. "Coaching against Verona the past two seasons, I felt the energy in that program. When the opportunity came, I said, 'Why not give it a shot?'"

BELLEVILLE

The Belleville Board of Education Trustees, in a split vote here Dec. 18, have agreed to settle its renovation work in the leased 335 Union Ave. with its property owner Michael Melham.

The board accepted a Nov. 30 settlement to break its five-year lease with Melham by paying him \$2,500.

Trustees Nicole Daddis, Frank Velez and Tracy Williams voted to approve. Outgoing Trustee Erika Jacho voted "no." Trustees Gabby Bennett-Meany and Luis Muniz abstained and Mike Derro was absent.

BPS had entered the five-year lease with landlord Melham to lease 335 Union in 2021 but moved out when Melham had trouble securing a Certificate of Occupancy because Mayor Melham was in litigation on a separate matter with Belleville's construction code official.

Landlord Melham got a COO from the Lyndhurst code official in 2022 and BPS moved back in around Aug. 30, 2023. Landlord Melham, however, asked about the rent BPS did not pay while they had vacated.

NUTLEY

A former Nutley bank employee, accused of committing wire fraud for four years here, posted a \$100,000 unsecured bond after his Dec. 12 arraignment in Newark's federal court. It is unlikely that Jorge Nova, 35, of Passaic, will be visiting this township anytime soon.

U.S. Department of Justice attorneys

said that Jorge "was an employee at a commercial bank in Nutley in 2014, where a customer received Social Security Administration retirement benefits via direct deposit."


The SSA was not notified of the customer's death and the deceased's checks kept coming to his account. into October 2018. Nova is accused of using self-issued debit cards to drain the deceased's beneficiary SSA deposits.

"Nova also registered new accounts with a money service provider in the deceased's name," continued the federal indictment. "He withdrew more than \$105,000 from that second account."

The wire fraud count is punishable by a maximum \$1 million in fines and 30 years' imprisonment. Neither the bank in Nutley nor the money service provider were named in the indictment.

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