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Structural issues and safety a concern after hundreds of crashes on the Lake Charles I-10 bridge

# A SPAN TOO STEEP



STAFF PHOTO BY LESLIE WESTBROOK

The Interstate 10 Calcasieu River Bridge is seen May 21 in Lake Charles. More than 100 people have been injured on the bridge in recent years. While it is rated structurally deficient, officials assure it remains safe due to regular inspections and timely repairs.

BY MEGAN WYATT  
Staff writer

First in a series

Lolly Comeaux Sr. rarely wore a seat belt 20 years ago when he worked as a truck driver in Westlake.

But he buckled up on the morning of May 23, 2006, while hauling sand in an 18-wheeler from Kinder. He was driving up the steep incline of Interstate 10's Calcasieu River Bridge when he and another 18-wheeler collided to avoid a stalled taxi.

Both tumbled 40 feet off the bridge's pistol-lined guardrail.

Now 73, Comeaux lived to tell the tale.

"There's a few other people that've

went over the side of that bridge since then," said Comeaux, who was born the same year the bridge finished construction. "I know what they went through."

It was the kind of nightmarish wreck that those who frequently drive the bridge say they fear most on the imposing structure with a steep incline, narrow lanes and no shoulders. More than 100 people have been injured in crashes on the bridge since 2018, The Advocate found in an analysis of state data that tracks bridge crashes, injuries and fatalities.

Several factors make the bridge a concern — both for drivers and for those in charge of maintaining it.

It's rated a 3 out of 9 by the Federal

Highway Administration and considered to be in "poor condition," based on annual inspections dating back to 2011.

The rating, which the feds used to describe as "structurally deficient" before a 2017 classification change, means that structural components have started to deteriorate. Engineers base the ratings on inspections of a bridge's deck where vehicles drive, along with its other structures and supports.

Still, bridge engineers say the low rating does not mean it's unsafe for drivers.

"We at DOTD want to stress that the bridge is regularly inspected and

► See **BRIDGE**, page 8A



Comeaux

## For clergy, sermons come from the heart, not AI

Pope Leo warns priests to write their own homilies

BY BOB WARREN  
Staff writer

The Rev. Kurt Young says nothing is off-limits, but treads carefully around hot topics. Deacon Eddy Beckendorf works to make it relatable, such

as telling the story about the time he got hit by a truck. And Monsignor Keith DeRouen is a stickler for the eight-minute rule.

"But sometimes four is better," DeRouen said. "C'mon, you know the listening capacity of most people. If you're just making one point, you don't have to say it 16 times."

Different clergy, different

► See **SERMONS**, page 6A



STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD

The Rev. Kurt Young teaches homiletics at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans. Young spends three semesters teaching seminarians the process of writing and delivering effective homilies during Mass.

## Senate race could be closer than expected

Polls show gap narrowing between Letlow, Fleming

BY TYLER BRIDGES  
Staff writer

U.S. Rep. Julia Letlow appeared to hold an insurmountable advantage coming out of the Republican Senate primary on May 16 when she led state Treasurer John Fleming by 17 points and nearly won the election outright.

But signs have emerged before the June 27 Republican Senate runoff that the outcome will be much closer, and a victory by Fleming is possible, even though Letlow's side is badly outspending him, and she has President Donald Trump's endorsement.

In what will be a low-turnout election, Fleming appears to have supporters who are more committed to him, especially among Republicans who back him because of his vigorous opposition to carbon capture and sequestration. That's a new technology where companies want to build pipelines to transport carbon dioxide from industrial plants to locations where it would be injected deep underground.



Letlow



Fleming

► See **SENATE**, page 4A

## Baton Rouge man arrested in teen's disappearance

Police suspect missing 15-year-old is dead

BY CHARLES LUSSIER  
Staff writer

A 51-year-old Baton Rouge man was arrested on a count of first-degree murder Saturday in connection with the disappearance of 15-year-old Ja'Derrius Minnieweather, who is believed to be dead but whose body has not been found.

Baton Rouge police apprehended Maurice Farms at his house Saturday morning. He already was facing counts of indecent behavior with juveniles and computer-aided solicitation of a minor.

Minnieweather was last seen around 2 a.m. June 5 on Bradley Street in the Foster and

► See **ARREST**, page 4A

WEATHER  
**HIGH 90**  
**LOW 78**  
PAGE 8B



Business .....	<b>1E</b>	Deaths .....	<b>4B</b>	Opinion .....	<b>6B</b>
Classified .....	<b>2F</b>	Living.....	<b>1D</b>	Nation-World.....	<b>2A</b>
Commentary .....	<b>7B</b>	Metro .....	<b>1B</b>	Sports .....	<b>1C</b>

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