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Shutdown's impact looms on state's horizon



STAFF PHOTO BY SOPHIA GERMER

Second Harvest board Chair Bill Hoffman gets boxes ready to be filled with food at Second Harvest Food Bank in Harahan on Wednesday. Amid the shutdown, the Trump administration has warned aid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program could run out.

Much of Louisiana hasn't seen effects yet, but as stalemate continues, consequences will broaden

BY STEPHANIE RIEGEL | Staff writer

In his day job as president of Woodward Interests, Bill Hoffman hasn't much noticed the federal government shutdown. His New Orleans real estate development firm is still planning projects, like the redevelopment of the former Lindy Boggs Medical Center in Mid-City, and operating as usual with no disruptions to supply chains or services.

As a volunteer for Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana, however, Hoffman has seen the effects up close. He's worked with the nonprofit organization's leadership to identify new funding sources at a time when more people around New Orleans need food assistance and federal support



Landry

is drying up. He fears it's about to get a lot worse.

Thousands of federal workers in the state have been furloughed or are working without a paycheck. Loans and other federal funding sources are no longer flowing. And beginning Nov. 1, food stamps benefits — which help put food on the table for nearly 19% of Louisianans and more than 1 in 5 people in New Orleans — are set to run out.

The severity of that potential loss in food support prompted Gov. Jeff Landry on Friday to issue an emergency order aimed at helping him replace that federal funding with state dollars. But Second Harvest worries that food banks and other service agencies, still reeling from

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federal budget cuts earlier this year, will continue to see a strain.

"We're already seeing more federal workers coming to us, and that number is going to grow," said Hoffman, who also serves as Second Harvest board chair. "We will start to see this ripple out into the broader economy and will all start to feel it."

Until now, the federal government shutdown, which enters its fifth week Wednesday, has mostly been a problem for the nation's federal employees, who have been furloughed or, in the case of air traffic controllers and other essential employees, forced to

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Amtrak's Gulf Coast service shatters projections

Since launch, nearly 30,000 are on board with route

BY POET WOLFE | Staff writer

When Amtrak's Mardi Gras service launched this summer, every seat was booked. Nearly three months later, the demand shows no signs of slowing down, with tourists and commuters alike opting to travel the Gulf Coast by train instead of car.

The route carried nearly 19,000 passengers from mid-August to the end of September — a daily average of 109 passengers, according to Knox Ross, the chairman of the Southern Rail Commission. As of Thursday, that total has climbed to almost 30,000.

The figure is more than double Amtrak's original estimate for ridership, despite the line debuting during the company's slower months, Ross said. The projection for the entire first year of service was 71,000 passengers.

Trains run twice daily between New Orleans and Mobile, Alabama, stopping in the Mississippi cities of Bay St. Louis, Biloxi, Gulfport and Pascagoula, with one-way fares starting at \$15.

The service revives the Gulf Coast Limited, a route that began in 1996 but was discontinued within nine months due to funding issues among the states and limited service, with only one train running per day. Restoring the line cost \$278 million and decades of work from political leaders and civic boosters who argued the importance of reconnecting the Gulf Coast cities.

Trains on the Gulf Coast Limited were 75% full on some days, according to reports at the time. On the new Mardi Gras service, Ross said, ridership averages about 90%.

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La. colleges are paying athletes, but records are secret 'Revenue sharing' arrangements raise concerns for some

BY JOSEPH CRANNEY | Staff writer

College athletes at public universities across Louisiana are expected to receive at least \$20.7 million in compensation this year, records and interviews show, after a landmark NCAA settlement in June allowed them to begin collecting paychecks directly from their schools.

LSU has earmarked \$18 million in direct payments to its athletes, a senior athletic administrator said, 90% of which will go to football and men's basketball players.

Among Louisiana's remaining public schools, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, the University of Louisiana at Monroe and McNeese State have said they'll pay players more than \$2.7 million, according to payroll records and athletic officials for those schools.

The payments are a turning point in college sports.

College athletes have been allowed to earn money through endorsements since 2021, which led to windfalls for brand-forward Louisiana athletes like LSU gymnast Olivia Dunne. Endorsements are still permitted and will likely remain the primary breadwinners for many college athletes,



Dunne

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Public radio, TV stations grapple with federal cuts

Already lean, fundraising is key aspect of keeping to the airwaves

BY JENNA ROSS | Staff writer

SHREVEPORT — News director Jeff Ferrell arrived before sunrise at Red River Radio. Until 6:31 a.m., everything went as planned.

He unlocked the doors, flipped on the lights and switched on the radio in his office, forever tuned to 89.9 FM. He updated the weather in the script he'd printed the night before, knowing that if the paper jammed at 5:30 a.m., he'd be the only one here to troubleshoot.

Then, alone in the studio on a recent October day, he cleared his throat, pressed a button and turned a dial.

"The time is now 6:04 on this Wednesday, and you are listening to Red River Radio News," he said, shaking his hands to add emphasis to his voice.

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STAFF PHOTO BY JILL PICKETT

Kermit Poling, general manager of Red River Radio, hosts a show on Oct. 8 during the station's Fall Fund Drive at the station's studios and offices in Shreveport.

