



**Issues/Program List for Withers Broadcasting
Paducah, Kentucky, Studios**

**WREZ-FM (Metropolis, Illinois)
WZZL-FM (Reidland, Kentucky)
WGKY-FM (Wickcliffe, Kentucky)
WRJJ-FM (LaCenter, Kentucky)**

The following programs are weekly broadcasts provided as timely and pertinent information or the community needs of Paducah, Kentucky, and the surrounding region in western Kentucky and southern Illinois.

Sundays at 5:00 am, the stations air InfoTrak.

Sundays at 5:30 am, the stations are Kentucky News Connection

Weekly program information can be found on the proceeding pages.



Call Letters: WILY-AM, WRXX-FM, WZZL-FM, WGKY-FM, WRJJ-FM, WMOK-AM, WREZ-FM, KGMO-FM, KREZ-FM, WKIB-FM, KAPE-AM, KJXX-AM, KYRX-FM, KBXB-FM, KRHW-AM, KBHI-FM, WDML

Weekly Public Affairs Program Time Aired: 5:00 AM WEEKLY

QUARTERLY ISSUES REPORT, OCTOBER-DECEMBER, 2023

Show # 2023-40

Date aired: Sunday, October 1, 2023

Timothy W. Fong, MD, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Jane and Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA, Director of the UCLA Addiction Psychiatry Consultation Service, Co-Director of the UCLA Gambling Studies Program

In just five years, legalized sports betting has swept the nation, now embraced as a revenue source by at least 37 states. Dr. Fong discussed gambling addiction, who is most at risk and how to recognize it, particularly in teenagers. Some well-known universities have signed deals with sportsbooks or casinos to advertise on campus, in athletic venues and in some cases, directly in students' university email inboxes. He offered advice for parents to prevent the start of addictive behavior in their teen.

Issues covered:

**Gambling Addiction
Government
Parenting**

Length: 9:54

Lee Newman, MD, MA, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Environmental & Occupational Health and Department of Epidemiology at the University of Colorado, Director of the Colorado School of Public Health's Center for Health, Work, and Environment

Today, the average American lives just 76 years, the shortest lifespan the country has seen since 1996. Dr. Newman talked about growing data that suggests that employers can dramatically affect the quality—and perhaps even length—of an employee's life. A recent report by Deloitte claimed life span could increase by an average of 12 years, and the number of years a person spends in good health by 19 years by 2040, if employers not only made sure their employees are safe on the job, but also addressed their health and well-being in other less traditional ways.

Issues covered:

**Longevity
Personal Health
Employment**

Length: 7:22

Baia Lasky, MD, board-certified physician in Blood Banking and Transfusion Medicine, Medical Director of the American Red Cross of Georgia

Dr. Lasky explained how several natural disasters this summer have contributed to a national blood shortage that could have far-reaching effects across America. She said the national blood supply has fallen by nearly 25%. She explained why the problem is so serious and how a first-time blood donor can get started.

Issues covered:

**Blood Donation
Public Health**

Length: 4:59

Show # 2023-41

Date aired: Sunday, October 8, 2023

Matt Levendusky, PhD, Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, Stephen & Mary Baran Chair in the Institutions of Democracy at the Annenberg Public Policy Center

Many Americans do not know what rights are protected under the First Amendment and a substantial number cannot name all three branches of government, according to the 2023 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey. Prof. Levendusky shared other findings from the survey, discussed the reasons behind today's widespread civic ignorance and explained why the trend is so worrisome.

Issues covered:

**Constitutional Rights
Citizenship
Education**

Length: 9:06

Marlene Schwartz, PhD, Director of the University of Connecticut's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health

Registered dietitians and other online influencers are being paid to post videos that promote diet soda, sugar and supplements on Instagram and TikTok. Prof. Schwartz discussed the little-known tactic often used by the multibillion-dollar food, beverage and pharmaceutical industries to sway consumers faced with often-contradictory health messages about popular products. She offered suggestions to help viewers recognize these paid messages.

Issues covered:

**Consumer Matters
Personal Health/Nutrition**

Length: 8:11

Jill Ciminillo, Managing Editor for the website Pickup Truck + SUV Talk, co-host of the Consumer Guide Car Stuff podcast

Minivans are frequently the go-to vehicle for families, not only for passenger comfort but also their ability to hold a lot of stuff. However, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety recently updated their methods for testing minivan safety, with disturbing results. Ms. Ciminillo outlined the new data and what consumers need to know.

Issues covered:

**Vehicle Safety
Consumer Matters**

Length: 5:10

Show # 2023-42

Date aired: Sunday, October 15, 2023

Devin Mann, MD, Professor in the Departments of Medicine and Population Health at NYU Grossman School of Medicine

Dr. Mann led a study of healthcare consumers that found that most of ChatGPT's responses to people's healthcare-related queries are nearly indistinguishable from those provided by human physicians. He believes the chatbots will be great tools for healthcare providers to communicate with patients, improve quality of care and reduce misdiagnoses and errors.

Issues covered:

**Artificial Intelligence
Personal Health**

Length: 9:02

Gary Painter, PhD, Academic Director of the Carl H. Lindner College of Business real estate program, Professor of Real Estate at the University of Cincinnati

Prof. Painter shared his research that Americans who pay more than 30% of their income toward rent are forced to make trade-offs in other areas of their lives that can last for years and contribute to many social ills. He said while some trade-offs, such as buying less clothing, might not have severe long-term consequences, some rent-burdened residents reported cutting back on medicine and other health care that could have cascading effects.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:18

Housing
Poverty
Economy

Jim Lorraine, military veteran, President of America's Warrior Partnership

Mr. Lorraine said the suicide rate of military veterans is roughly twice that of the general population, and is often spurred by more than just post-traumatic stress syndrome or depression. He said underemployment, irregular housing and other economic issues also play a large role in suicidal behavior. He talked about the resources that are available to veterans. He said that risk factors for veterans at risk of suicide vary significantly from one state to another, and his organization helps to identify the differences and develop strategies to help.

Issues covered:

Length: 5:03

Suicide Prevention
Veterans' Concerns
Mental Health

Show # 2023-43

Date aired: Sunday, October 22, 2023

Adia Harvey Wingfield, PhD, sociologist, Mary Tileston Hemenway Professor of Arts & Sciences and Vice Dean for Faculty Development and Diversity at Washington University in St. Louis, author of "*Gray Areas: How the Way We Work Perpetuates Racism and What We Can Do to Fix It*"

While explicit discrimination no longer occurs and organizations make internal and public pledges to honor and achieve diversity, black employees remain less likely to be hired, stall out at middle levels, and rarely progress to senior leadership positions. Prof. Wingfield discussed what she calls "gray areas:" the relationships, networks, and cultural dynamics that exist apart from specific expectations and duties required for any given job. She offered suggestions to address the problem.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:33

Racism
Workplace Matters

Lisa Damour, PhD, Senior Advisor to the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University, author of "*The Emotional Lives of Teenagers: Raising Connected, Capable, and Compassionate Adolescents*," co-host of the Ask Lisa podcast

Dr. Damour offered advice for parents to understand their teenagers' intense and often fraught emotional lives—and how to support teens through this critical developmental stage. She discussed some of the most common myths relating to teenage emotions and distress, and offered tips to help teenagers maintain or regain emotional control.

Issues covered:
Adolescent Mental Health
Parenting

Length: 8:45

Shahab Haghayegh, PhD, Research Fellow at the Brigham and Harvard Medical School

Getting enough sleep has never been more difficult. Prod. Haghayegh shared his research that found that women who struggled with getting enough sleep were at greater risk of developing hypertension, or high blood pressure. He said hypertension and sleep disorders are becoming increasingly prevalent among American adults. He also noted that, while his study only included women, it's likely the findings apply to men, as well.

Issues covered:
High Blood Pressure
Personal Health

Length: 5:03

Show # 2023-44

Date aired: Sunday, October 29, 2023

Ivan Misner PhD, founder of BNI, the world's largest business networking organization, author of "*The 3rd Paradigm: A Radical Shift to Greater Success*"

Mr. Misner discussed effective ways to complain at work. He explained the importance for businesses to take deliberate actions to be sure their staff is heard. He said scheduling regular "complaining meetings" can change the entire mood of the workplace, and lead to innovation and new ideas.

Issues covered:
Workplace Matters
Business

Length: 8:33

Nathalie Huguet, PhD, Associate Professor of Family Medicine, at the Oregon Health & Science University School of Medicine

Prof. Huguet led a study that revealed gaps in health insurance coverage for seniors residing in the US. She found that about a quarter of low-income patients receiving care at community health centers remain uninsured when they turn 65. The main reason is that they are not eligible for Medicare because they never paid into the Social Security system, in many cases because they are not legal US citizens. She said 20% of the uninsured patients had five or more health conditions, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, that need frequent treatment and management.

Issues covered:
Health Insurance
Immigration
Senior Issues

Length: 8:45

Rachel Cruze, personal finance expert, author of "*Know Yourself, Know Your Money: Discover WHY You Handle Money the Way You Do, and WHAT to Do About It!*"

40% of Americans during the pandemic could not cover a \$400 emergency in cash. Ms. Cruze explained the psychology that influences how we spend and save money, and how to change those ingrained habits.

Issues covered:
Personal Finance

Length: 5:10

Show # 2023-45

Date aired: Sunday, November 5, 2023

David S. Prerau, PhD, author of *“Seize the Daylight: The Curious and Contentious Story of Daylight-Saving Time”*

Mr. Prerau discussed the history of Daylight-Saving time. He dispelled the myth that farmers are the main proponents of DST. He also explained where efforts stand to end the annual time change, and outlined the possible options that Congress would choose from.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:30

**Government
Personal Health**

Martha Khlopin, Medicare expert, nationally syndicated radio host, founder of Get2insurance.com

Vague and misleading advertisements for Medicare Advantage policies are flooding the airwaves and mailboxes of Medicare recipients. Ms. Khlopin explained what Medicare Advantage is and how it differs from original Medicare. She also shared examples of complaints from seniors who had their plans changed without their consent or knowledge, and how the scams work. She warned that some TV ads and phone calls may give the impression that they are affiliated with the federal Medicare system, when they are not. She advised seniors to be careful and seek help from legitimate sources.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:38

**Medicare
Scams
Senior Issues**

Michal Schnaider Beeri, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry, Director of the Herbert and Jacqueline Krieger Klein Alzheimer’s Research Center at Rutgers Brain Health Institute

Prof. Beeri shared results of her study that found that people who were diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder at midlife had a threefold increased risk of developing dementia later in life, compared to those without ADHD. She also discussed possible explanations for the link between ADHD and dementia, and what role ADHD medications may play.

Issues covered:

Length: 5:15

**Alzheimer’s Disease
ADHD**

Show # 2023-46

Date aired: Sunday, November 12, 2023

David Newman-Toker, M.D., PhD, Lead Investigator and Director of the Johns Hopkins Armstrong Institute Center for Diagnostic Excellence

Dr. Newman-Toker led what is believed to be the first rigorous national estimate of permanent disability and death from diagnostic error. He estimates that 795,000 Americans die or are permanently disabled by diagnostic error each year. He said vascular events, infections and cancers cause 75% of the serious harms, and that stroke is the top cause of serious harm from misdiagnosis. He believes that a serious campaign to target diseases with high error and harm rates may reduce diagnostic errors and improve patient outcomes.

Issues covered:

Length: 8:30

**Medical Errors & Misdiagnoses
Public Health**

Johnnye Lewis, PhD, Professor Emerita in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at University of New Mexico Health Sciences, Co-Director of Community Environmental Health Program, Director of the UNM METALS Superfund Research Program

Prof. Lewis' research found that water from many wells and community water systems across the US contains unsafe levels of toxic contaminants. She discussed the health effects of seven contaminants, which include cancer, developmental delays, and preterm birth, and how they affect vulnerable populations and communities with lower income levels. She also talked about the challenges of removing these contaminants from water supply systems, and how larger systems tend to have more resources and monitoring than smaller systems

Issues covered:

**Drinking Water Safety
Pollution
Government**

Length: 8:54

Tom Appel, Publisher of Consumer Guide Automotive, co-host of the Consumer Guide Car Stuff podcast

7.9% of cars sold in the US in the third quarter of 2023 were electric vehicles. Mr. Appel outlined what consumers need to know about the three levels of EV charging currently available, and the pluses and minuses of each.

Issues covered:

**Electric Vehicles
Consumer Matters**

Length: 5:11

Show # 2023-47

Date aired: Sunday, November 19, 2023

Hilarie Gamm, tech industry expert, author of "*Billions Lost: The American Tech Crisis and The Road Map to Change*"

Ms. Gamm explained why parents, educators, and employers urgently need to understand today's generation of teens and young adults. She talked about the revolutionary effect that technological advances have had on education and the development of the human mind. She said every American needs to have a basic understanding of current technology because of the wide-ranging ramifications these changes have on legislation, regulation and privacy.

Issues covered:

**Education
Career
Parenting**

Length: 8:48

Kelsey Graham, PhD, pollinator conservation specialist at Michigan State University

Dr. Graham explained the importance of bees to the nation's food supply. She also discussed the role that pesticides and climate change may be having on bee populations in North America. She outlined simple steps that people can take to increase bee populations in their communities.

Issues covered:

**Agriculture
Environment**

Length: 8:27

Kristin Rosenthal, pedestrian and bike safety expert from Safe Kids Worldwide

About every five days, a child in the U.S. dies from a train collision. Ms. Rosenthal said young people, particularly teenagers, do not understand how dangerous railroad tracks and crossings are. She offered advice to parents to teach their kids to not walk or take selfies on railroad tracks, to not walk with earbuds in, and to never try to beat a train at a railroad crossing.

Issues covered:

**Child Safety
Traffic Safety**

Length: 4:52

Show # 2023-48

Date aired: Sunday, November 26, 2023

Chris Bailey, productivity expert, author of "*Hyperfocus: How to Be More Productive in a World of Distraction*"

Mr. Bailey said that the human brain has two powerful modes that can be unlocked when we use our attention well: a focused mode and a creative mode. He explained how to unlock each of these mental modes in order to concentrate more deeply, think more clearly, and work and live more deliberately every day. He explained how to minimize distractions that can cause problems at work and in personal relationships.

Issues covered:

**Workplace Matters
Career**

Length: 8:31

Janet Murnaghan, journalist, author of "*Saving Sarah: One Mother's Battle Against the Health Care System to Save Her Daughter's Life*"

Ms. Murnaghan's young daughter desperately needed a set of donor lungs. A set of lungs was available and there was nothing standing in the way medically, but a federal policy barred children under the age of 12 from receiving adult lungs. Ms. Murnaghan talked about her quest to save Sarah and other kids in similar situations. After a court fight and through the use of social media, she eventually convinced the government to change organ donation rules permanently.

Issues covered:

**Organ Donation
Government Regulation**

Length: 8:44

KJ Dell'Antonia, editor of the Motherlode blog in the New York Times from 2011 until 2016, author of "*How to be a Happier Parent: Raising a Family, Having a Life, and Loving (Almost) Every Minute*"

Ms. Dell'Antonia said that in her research and writing about family life over the years, one topic keeps coming up again and again: parents crave a greater sense of happiness in their daily lives. She discussed the most common problem areas that cause parents the most grief, and suggested steps parents can take to make them better.

Issues covered:

Parenting

Length: 5:12

Show # 2023-49

Date aired: Sunday, December 3, 2023

Edward McFowland III, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Technology and Operations Management Unit at Harvard Business School

Prof. McFowland co-authored a recent study that found that the use of artificial intelligence tools elevates the skills of the lowest performers across a wide range of fields to, or even far above, what was previously average performance. Across a set of 18 tasks designed to test a range of business skills - from analysis to idea generation to persuasion - consultants who had previously tested in the lower half of the group increased the quality of their outputs by 43% with AI help, while the top half only gained 17%. He discussed likely limitations in what AI can do well in modern professional work. He believes that AI will not be able to replace most human creativity and problem-solving.

Issues covered:

**Artificial Intelligence
Employment**

Length: 8:51

Morgan Frank, PhD, Assistant Professor in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Computing and Information

Prof. Frank studies job prospects for fossil fuel workers in the green energy transition. He said that fossil fuel workers have skills that are compatible with green jobs, but they face geographic and social barriers to relocate. He also explained why green jobs will span across different skill levels and sectors, but they are not well aligned with the current locations of fossil fuel workers.

Issues covered:

**Energy
Employment
Environment**

Length: 8:32

Adrienne Lawrence, former ESPN anchor and legal analyst, author of "*Staying in the Game: The Playbook for Beating Workplace Sexual Harassment*"

Ms. Lawrence explained how most companies mishandle sexual harassment cases and why. She also discussed the mental health consequences faced by those who report sexual harassment and how to deal with it. She talked about the impact of the MeToo# movement and what she sees as the future of dealing with sexual harassment as a society.

Issues covered:

**Sexual Harassment
Women's Concerns
Workplace Matters**

Length: 5:03

Show # 2023-50

Date aired: Sunday, December 10, 2023

Tyra Fainstad, MD, Associate Professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine

Burnout is highly prevalent across most healthcare careers, but especially among trainee physicians. Dr. Fainstad developed a pilot program that successfully reduced burnout among female medical residents. She explained that while the program is digital, including videoconferencing coaching calls, she found that the group aspect was especially important in its effectiveness. She discussed the potential hurdles in expanding the training to hospitals and medical schools nationwide.

Issues covered:

**Public Health
Mental Health**

Length: 8:37

Jason M. Nagata MD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at the University of California San Francisco

Dr. Nagata's study of US adolescents found that both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying were more likely than other youth to experience eating disorder symptoms, including worrying about weight gain, self-worth tied to weight, and binge eating. He believes it is important that teachers and parents are aware that these experiences are relatively common among teens, and encourage kids to report online harassment if it occurs.

Issues covered:

**Cyberbullying
Eating Disorders
Discrimination**

Length: 8:44

Ana Lorena Fábrega, Chief Evangelist at Synthesis and author of "*The Learning Game: Teaching Kids to Think for Themselves, Embrace Challenge, and Love Learning*"

Ms. Fabrega traditional approaches to education, contrasting them with the ways kids really learn. She believes current methods of teaching children are outdated. She explained how her experience as a child who attended ten schools in seven different countries gave her an unconventional perspective. She suggested allowing children to learn through projects rather than strict curriculum, and explained why teaching kids of differing ages as a group, rather than segregating them in conventional grades and ages, can have major benefits.

Issues covered:

Education

Length: 5:05

Show # 2023-51

Date aired: Sunday, December 17, 2023

Laurence J. Kotlikoff, PhD, Professor of Economics and William Warren Fairfield Professor at Boston University, former Senior Economist on the President's Council of Economic Advisers, co-author of "*Social Security Horror Stories: Protect Yourself From the System & Avoid Clawbacks*"

Prof. Kotlikoff explained the problem of Social Security clawbacks. He said each year more than a million unsuspecting Americans receive letters from the Social Security Administration, demanding repayment of thousands of dollars of overpaid benefits, due to SSA mistakes that occurred sometimes decades earlier. He shared examples of elderly people who suffered from clawbacks, and proposed reforms to stop them.

Issues covered:

**Social Security
Government
Consumer Matters**

Length: 8:44

Andrew Perry, postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Educational Studies at Ohio State University

Mr. Perry was the lead author of a study that examined how teachers rate different approaches to student violence. He said teachers believe that removing or expelling students from school after a violent incident is the least effective response, because it may increase the risk of violence against teachers, as the student may come back bitter or angry. He said most teachers prefer proactive strategies, which aim to create a positive learning environment and a sense of community through socioemotional learning and school counseling.

Issues covered:
School Violence

Length: 8:41

Joel Kaufman, PhD, physician, Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at the University of Washington

Dr. Kaufman led a recent study that found a link between highway air pollution and higher blood pressure. He said the impact is significant enough to be comparable to other blood pressure factors such as sodium intake and medication. He also suggested some ways to reduce the exposure to traffic pollution both for motorists, and those who live near highways.

Issues covered:
Air Pollution
High Blood Pressure

Length: 5:08

Show # 2023-52

Date aired: Sunday, December 24, 2023

Ryan Kalember, Senior Vice President of Cybersecurity Strategy for online security company Proofpoint

Scammers have devised a new scheme to steal thousands of dollars from homebuyers who are about to close on a house. Mr. Kalember said buyers are often tricked into wiring their down payment on the day of closing to a fraudulent offshore account, by criminals who have hacked their real estate agent's or title company's email account. He explained how consumers can protect themselves.

Issues covered:
Crime
Online Security
Personal Finance

Length: 7:43

Diane Redleaf, family defense attorney, author of "*They Took the Kids Last Night: How the Child Protection System Puts Families at Risk*"

The number of children in the U.S. foster care system is at record levels, thanks in part to the opioid crisis. With nearly 450,000 children in the system, Ms. Redleaf discussed what happens when caseworkers make mistakes, taking children from parents who are neither abusive nor neglectful. She noted that minority families are disproportionately affected by this trend. She also said that once children are taken, parents and their attorneys sometimes can't learn where the children are being housed.

Issues covered:
Foster Care
Minority Concerns
Parenting

Length: 9:24

Andrew Gewirtz, PhD, Professor in the Institute for Biomedical Sciences at Georgia State University

Dr. Gewirtz was the co-author of a surprising study that found that adding highly refined fiber to processed foods could have negative effects on human health, including liver cancer. He explained what ingredients consumers need to watch for on processed food labels. He said the simplest solution is to eat fruits and vegetables naturally rich in soluble fiber, rather than processed foods.

Issues covered:

**Nutrition
Cancer
Personal Health**

Length: 5:01

Show # 2023-53

Date aired: Sunday, December 31, 2023

Brandi Britton, District President of Office Team, a staffing service providing temporary administrative and office support staff

Ms. Britton discussed the most common social media mistakes that take job seekers out of the running for a position. She noted that negative or inappropriate comments and questionable photos are the most common social media issues. She said a job hunter should always assume that a company has combed through their social media profile before even scheduling an interview.

Issues covered:

**Employment
Career
Social Media**

Length: 7:28

Jennifer Bradley, co-author of "Make it Zero: The Movement to Safeguard Every Child"

Ms. Bradley discussed the issue of human trafficking in the U.S. She said five main factors contribute to the problem, including poverty, abuse and isolation. She explained the shocking role that the foster child system plays in the issue, and she offered suggestions for individuals to make a difference in preventing and stopping human trafficking.

Issues covered:

**Human Trafficking
Child Abuse
Poverty**

Length: 9:43

Richard Thaler, PhD, Professor of Behavioral Science and Economics at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, President of the American Economic Association

Prof. Thaler discussed what happens when economics meets psychology and how irrational human beings greatly influence the US and world economies. He explained how research is in progress to understand human miscalculations, with the goal of developing better decision-making in business, government and life in general.

Issues covered:

**Economics
Consumer Matters
Mental Health**

Length: 4:49

Kentucky News Connection

10/1

September 27, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

More than 300,000 Kentuckians charged for cannabis over past two decades

Nadia Ramlagan

Kentuckians continue to be charged, jailed and fined for cannabis-related offenses at high rates, despite dramatic shifts in public opinion, according to a **new report**.

Kaylee Raymer, policy analyst at the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, said many people might not view a cannabis misdemeanor as a big deal. But hundreds or thousands of dollars in criminal fines and fees along with a record appearing on background checks can affect people financially and make finding employment difficult.

She noted depending on a person's criminal record, they could find themselves on probation.

"What the data shows us is people are being charged with this," Raymer observed. "They're being prosecuted, and more than half of them are being convicted. So these consequences are real for a lot of Kentuckians."

Kentuckians in 120 counties have faced cannabis offenses, but Western Kentucky is the region with the highest conviction rate, followed by the Appalachian region and Louisville. Before a newly passed medical cannabis law goes into effect in 2025, possession, trafficking and cultivation of cannabis remain illegal.

Raymer argued any legislation to legalize cannabis in Kentucky should also include provisions such as expungement and other measures to would address the criminal justice effects.

"For people who have been affected by this in the past, like these 300,000 people we're talking about," Raymer urged. "So that they don't continue to be harmed by these collateral consequences."

In addition to calling for the legalization, taxation and regulation of cannabis, the report called on state lawmakers to take steps to remedy the disproportionate effect such convictions have on communities of color, noting legalization policies should include proactive steps to ensure any potential tax revenue generated by the cannabis industry is invested back into affected communities.

Kentucky News Connection

October 5, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

KY domestic violence programs struggle to meet demand

Nadia Ramlagan

October is **National Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, and state data show in Kentucky, **more than 45%** and around 35% of men have experienced intimate partner violence.

According to the group **ZeroV**, in the past five years, its regional shelter programs have provided safe havens and resources for **more than 10,000 women** and 6,000 children.

Christy Burch, CEO of the Ion Center for Violence Prevention, one of ZeroV's member programs in Northeastern Kentucky, said her center is seeing more extreme violence cases, but federal **Victims of Crime Act** budget cuts have forced her staff to do more with less.

"It has really put a stressor on how we continue to maintain these basic needs of survivors, if I'm going from 36 staff, on this VOCA funding, to 14," Burch explained.

The federal fund collects millions of dollars from criminal cases and funnels the money into programs for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, but the amount of money coming into the fund has decreased over the past decade. Now, Congress is proposing further cuts, of up to 40%.

Burch pointed out centers rely on federal funding to provide direct services like crisis intervention, counseling and legal assistance to survivors.

"We've got two emergency shelters, we provide and respond to every hospital emergency room in our region," Burch outlined. "Folks who present with partner violence as well as sexual violence, because we're a dual-designated program."

Brittany O'Bryan, a domestic violence survivor and Graves County resident, said she when brought her kids to a shelter, Merryman House and ZeroV's Housing Program helped her forge a new, independent life.

"They helped me with housing, they put me in an apartment and I lived there for two years," O'Bryan recounted. "It was based off my income, so I was able to steadily pay the bills and get up on my feet."

Gov. Andy Beshear will sign a proclamation for Domestic Violence Awareness Month in Frankfort on Oct. 18. In recent years, the state has announced millions of dollars in **additional grant funding** to help reduce the effects of federal cuts.

Kentucky News Connection

10/15

October 11, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Caregiving, rising cost of living top concerns for older Kentucky voters

Nadia Ramlagan

Kentuckians will cast ballots for governor on Nov. 7, and many of the state's older voters said lack of support for caregiving, retirement savings, inflation, and the rising cost of living are all top concerns.

Gov. Andy Beshear, the Democratic incumbent and Republican candidate Daniel Cameron will both speak at a **candidate forum** tomorrow in Paducah.

Gary Adkins, community volunteer for AARP Kentucky, said the candidates are proposing different solutions to tackle the issues.

"We are in the process of trying to get voter information out for the questions that we posed to the Republican and Democratic candidates for governor," Adkins explained.

Beshear said in a recent AARP Bulletin interview he favors **increasing Medicaid payments** for in-home services to support caregivers. Cameron said reducing individuals' tax burden would help caregivers.

Unpaid caregiving by Kentucky's more than **600,000 caregivers** is valued at more than \$8 billion, according to AARP state data.

Adkins pointed out health care costs continue to burden Kentucky residents 50 years and older.

"We want to try to decrease the cost and the expense of medicines," Adkins emphasized. "One of the good things that we've had out of the legislature recently was the passing of reduction and the cost of insulin."

Polls will be open from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 7, and voters will need a photo ID. All registered voters can cast a ballot early and in person from Nov. 2-4. The deadline to request a mail-in absentee ballot is Oct. 24.

Kentucky News Connection

(10/16)

October 16, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Proposed KY law criminalizing homeless camping 'will make our work harder,' advocates say

Nadia Ramlagan

A lengthy proposal aimed at reducing crime recently unveiled by Kentucky lawmakers has housing advocacy groups concerned about the impact on the homeless.

The **Safer Kentucky Act**, currently in draft stages, is expected to be introduced when the legislature convenes next year. The proposal includes a statewide camping ban, with penalties of up to \$5,000 and one month in jail, and funding penalties to any jurisdiction refusing to enforce the ban.

Tish Shupe, housing director for Clark County Community Services, said organizations who provide services to the homeless are deeply concerned the measures could make their work more difficult, and are shocked at the lack of input from people working on the ground.

"We've got a lot of good smart people in Kentucky working on the issues with mental health and homelessness," Shupe pointed out. "It's just kind of disappointing that the Legislature didn't address those two issues more directly with those people."

Supporters, including Rep. Jared Bauman, R-Louisville, the bill's lead sponsor, said the legislation will reduce the number of homicides and keep communities safer. The proposal also includes increased penalties for attempted murder and a three-strikes law for persistent felony offenders.

Shupe countered being arrested and incarcerated is not going to do anything to help stabilize individuals with mental health issues and substance-use issues, which likely contributed to their being homeless, nor make communities safer.

"Having a policeman come up to them, and then just hold them back to the car and the handcuffs and throw them in jail, well, that's only gonna make that issue worse," Shupe contended. "If I've been working with anybody, and they've actually made some progress, well, that just sets them back."

The measure is calling for the creation of "homeless outreach teams" which would require law enforcement to force unhoused people into state-run encampments under threat of arrest.

A **2020 study** found criminalizing homeless people limits their access to services, housing and jobs; while fines and time spent in jail create further barriers to accessing stable housing.

Kentucky News Connection

10/29

October 24, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Eastern KY residents could see hefty energy-bill increase

Nadia Ramlagan

Eastern Kentucky's largest utility, Kentucky Power, wants to raise its residential and commercial rates. The state's Public Service Commission is slated to hear the **case** on November 28th, and if approved, changes would likely go into effect next year.

Carrie Ray, director of energy programs with the Mountain Association explains that residential customers could see a 20% percent rate increase, and a 14% base-fee increase under the proposal. Ray says a review of the electric bills of just a portion of their clients showed that these businesses, nonprofits, city buildings, community centers and other institutions would shell out collectively an additional more than \$413,000 dollars per year toward energy bills, adding that the region's economy is already struggling with high energy costs.

"The average small commercial bill went up 13.5%, and the average large commercial bill, which is your hospital, your grocery store, that bill went up 7.6%."

In a **statement**, Kentucky Power says a series of natural disasters in recent years, including 2022's historic flooding, the loss of several large commercial and industrial customers, and overall population decline are driving up rates.

Amethyst Muncy, law clerk with Appalachian Citizens Law Center argues that instead of raising rates, the utility should be investing in energy efficiency programs, and helping customers make wise decisions about how they want the future of their energy to look.

"The service region has the highest average residential bills in Kentucky," Muncy said. "And so there's really no good reason for them to continue to raise rates and continue to increase the bills that customers in Eastern Kentucky will have to pay. "

Ray added residents don't have to be energy experts to make their voices heard on how the rate increase would impact their family, business, or community. Public comments can be submitted at psc.ky.gov.

"One of the things that the PSC has specifically said is they want to know how their decisions are going to affect the ratepayers themselves," Ray said.

Last year, one in five American households struggled to pay for an energy bill, and that rate was 50% higher for households of color, according to a **report** by the Energy and Policy Institute and Center for Biological Diversity.

Kentucky News Connection

11/5

October 31, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Kentucky governor's race on track for new fundraising record

Nadia Ramlagan

*By Anna Massoglia for **OpenSecrets**.**Broadcast version by Nadia Ramlagan for Kentucky News Connection reporting for the OpenSecrets-Public News Service Collaboration*

The Kentucky governor's race has been nothing short of a financial juggernaut, with gubernatorial candidates collectively raking in more than \$36.8 million in contributions, a new OpenSecrets analysis found.

The booming fundraising puts the race on track to set a **new record** in the state. The most ever collectively raised by gubernatorial candidates in a prior election year was \$37.1 million in 2007.

As money continues to pour into this year's gubernatorial race, incumbent Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear has a hefty cash advantage after raising over three times as much as his Republican rival in the general election, Attorney General Daniel Cameron.

Beshear is leading the pack in fundraising with an eye-popping \$17.3 million raised so far this election. About \$10 million of that was raised for the general election, new campaign finance disclosures filed Sept. 12 show. The incumbent governor's campaign has already spent more than \$10.7 million on the general, with \$4.2 million cash on hand at the start of September.

After winning the Republican primary in May to become the first major-party Black nominee for governor in Kentucky's history, Cameron raised about \$2.8 million for the general election. His campaign's total fundraising this cycle has topped \$4.6 million, according to new campaign finance filings submitted Sept. 12.

During the general election period, Cameron has spent about \$1.4 million and had about \$1.4 million cash on hand at the start of September.

While incumbents and top fundraisers are often at an advantage in elections, Cameron has won races where he was outraised before.

The top fundraiser in the 12-candidate Republican primary field was Kelly Craft, who served as United Nations ambassador in former President Donald Trump's administration, though her campaign was heavily self-funded. Craft's campaign brought in over \$12.3 million ahead of the May primary including the candidate's self-financing - over \$10 million more than Cameron raised during the primary. But Trump ultimately endorsed the Kentucky attorney general, and he went on to win the nomination.

Both Beshear and Cameron took money from political action committees. But Beshear has benefitted from nearly twice as much PAC money as Cameron, with the candidates having taken \$134,000 and \$69,900 respectively

The bulk of Beshear's political action committee contributions during the **60-day pre-general election period** have come from PACs affiliated with unions. He has also taken from several corporate PACs affiliated with companies in the healthcare industry including \$2,100 from Eli Lilly And Company's PAC, \$1,000 from Genesis Healthcare Corp PAC, \$2,000 from Molina Healthcare's PAC, \$2000 from Centene Corp. PAC and \$2,000 from Elevance Health PAC.

Beshear also took \$2,000 from a PAC affiliated with WalMart, \$2,100 from Duke Energy's PAC, \$2,100 from Deloitte PAC, \$2,100 from CSX's PAC, \$2,000 from Dell Technologies' PAC, \$2,100 from Atmos Energy Corp's PAC and \$2,100 from a PAC affiliated with Nucor, a steel company.

Kentucky's identity is intrinsically linked to bourbon, and the alcoholic beverage industry wields influence far beyond barrels of booze. Beshear's campaign tapped into this, securing financial support from key industry players including \$2,100 - the state's campaign contribution cap - from Beam Suntory's PAC, \$2,100 from the Kentucky Distillers' Association's PAC and \$2,100.00 from Diago North America's PAC.

Cameron also enjoyed his share of corporate PAC support. His campaign's top corporate contributors include PACs affiliated with Koch Industries, Home Depot and Lifepoint Health, which each gave \$2,100 to his campaign - the legal limit in the state.

Cameron also received \$2,100 from Save America, Trump's PAC.

Some PACs played both sides. For example, the Kentucky Land Title Association gave \$2,100 to each candidate.

Political ads flood Kentucky governor's race

Political advertising has flooded the airwaves in Kentucky as a part of the hotly-contested gubernatorial race with abortion **emerging** as a key issue.

On Sept. 20, Beshear's campaign **released an attack ad** targeting Cameron on abortion rights.

"Anyone who believes there should be no exceptions for rape and incest could never understand what it's like to stand in my shoes," the woman in the ad says, sharing a story about being sexually assaulted by her stepfather.

Earlier this month, Beshear launched another **ad campaign** describing Cameron's previously stated opposition to exceptions for rape as "extreme" and "dangerous."

While Cameron previously expressed opposition to exceptions to abortion bans, he indicated on Sept. 18 that he would **sign legislation** that allows exceptions for rape and incest. Cameron also announced that he supports birth control.

Planned Parenthood Action Kentucky, a PAC **largely funded** by the political arm of Planned Parenthood's national organization, also launched a **six-figure ad campaign** attacking Cameron over his anti-abortion rights stance.

While Beshear has an edge over Cameron when it comes to campaign fundraising and the support of several PACs, outside groups have poured big money into the race supporting both candidates.

School Freedom Fund, a super PAC allied with the conservative Club For Growth, is one group that has been heavily involved in opposing Beshear with spending reaching **around \$3 million**.

The super PAC recently launched an ad **claiming** that Beshear's decision to release some prisoners early during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed a man convicted of sodomizing a child to "roam free" - a claim that has been **debunked**. Multiple ads bankrolled by School Freedom Fund have **raise questions** and been debunked.

School Freedom Fund was **almost entirely bankrolled** by **Jeff Yass**, the billionaire founder of **Susquehanna International Group**, during the 2022 cycle. The School Freedom Fund super PAC is also affiliated with Club For Growth, a pro-free market group co-founded by billionaire GOP megadonor Harlan Crow - whose **close relationship with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas** has received recent scrutiny - and largely funded by Yass and Republican-aligned billionaire shipping magnate **Richard Uihlein**.

Bluegrass Freedom Action, another PAC supporting Cameron's run, spent more than \$4.4 million to help Cameron in the Republican primary and has continued to spend during the general election - racking up more than \$1.43 million in ad buys by the first week of September, according to Lexington Herald-Leader reporting using numbers from ad tracking firm Medium Buying.

The largest contributor to the pro-Cameron PAC has been the Concord Fund, a "dark money" group previously named **Judicial Crisis Network** that does not disclose its donors. Concord Fund is part of a **shape-shifting network** of secretly-funded conservative nonprofits working to **reshape** the federal judiciary. It is connected to **Leonard Leo**, a powerful leader in the conservative legal movement who helped shape Trump's unprecedented effort to stack the federal judiciary with conservative judges.

Defending Bluegrass Values, a PAC tied to the Democratic Governors Association, has also raised and spent big money on the Kentucky gubernatorial race. The PAC has reported more than \$4 million in contributions in campaign finance filings and has made \$13.7 million in ad buys supporting Beshear's reelection campaign as of the first week of September - more than every other PAC spending on the race combined, according to Lexington Herald-Leader reporting.

Update: As of October 30, 2023, Kentucky's gubernatorial candidates have now raised in more than \$44 million dollars in contributions, according to a new analysis by OpenSecrets.

Incumbent Democratic Governor Andy Beshear has now raised more than \$23.1 million, and over \$15 million of that is for the general election.

Republican candidate Daniel Cameron has now raised about \$4.7 million for the general election. His campaign's total fundraising this cycle has topped \$6.5 million, according to campaign finance filings.

*Anna Massoglia wrote this story for **OpenSecrets**.*

Support for this reporting was provided by The Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Kentucky News Connection

November 10, 2023

11/12

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Kentucky Veterans' caregivers financially overburdened

Nadia Ramlagan

Veterans Day happens once a year, but all year round, Kentuckians provide care for the veterans they love. According to **data from AARP**, they spend on average more than \$11,000 a year in out-of-pocket costs related to caregiving.

In a region with a high number of military families, said Gary Adkins, **AARP Kentucky** volunteer state president, the stresses of veteran caregiving affect entire communities.

"It's a terrible situation," he said. "Kentuckians caring for veterans shouldn't have to worry about finances on top of their caregiving responsibilities. But many do."

Research shows 43% of veteran and military caregivers experienced at least one financial setback, such as having to take on more debt or dip into personal savings. The Department of Veterans Affairs' **Caregiver Support Program** offers financial-aid, mental-health and respite-care services, but only 34% of Kentucky's more than 233,000 veterans have used these benefits at their local VA center, according to **census data**.

Nationwide, millions of veteran and military caregivers provide the equivalent of \$14 billion in unpaid labor. Adkins said veterans and their families deserve better.

"Our veterans have fought for our families, for our country, and a world where our kids can grow up and inherit a future," he said. "Unfortunately, a lot of times, our veterans are left hanging."

The **Elizabeth Dole Foundation** has developed an online guide for veterans and their caregivers to help prioritize mental and emotional health. Tips include talking and processing feelings with a friend, counselor or therapist, engaging in positive activities, setting boundaries, and recognizing warning signs such as changes in alcohol consumption or persistent feelings of hopelessness.

AARP also has a Family Caregiving hotline, open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, at 877-333-5885, and **online through the AARP Facebook Family Caregivers Discussion Group**.

Kentucky News Connection

November 13, 2023

11/19

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Report finds Kentucky maternal deaths extend into postpartum period

Nadia Ramlagan

Maternal mortality has increased in Kentucky, and **the latest data from the United Health Foundation** show more moms - especially those of color - are struggling with substance use and mental distress, during and after pregnancy.

Ashley Brandt - director of early care and education with Metro United Way in Kentucky - said the findings come as more families lag behind amid the rising cost of living, lack of affordable child care, and other systemic issues.

She added that most maternal deaths are preventable.

"It's really just an indicator that we're not setting up the system to support families from day one," said Brandt, "which impacts the rest of their lives."

Barriers to preventive care for high-blood pressure, diabetes and other chronic conditions during pregnancy are also driving factors.

According to **the latest available state data**, more than half of maternal mortality cases in Kentucky were linked to a substance use disorder.

National Medical Director for Maternal and Child Health at UnitedHealthcare Lisa Saul said deaths related to suicide and drug use, in the months after a mom leaves the hospital, have spiked in the past few years.

"What we're finding is that maternal mortality is not just confined to the hospital stay and to birth," said Saul. "But really, we're seeing an impact in terms of deaths in the postpartum period."

Infant deaths are also on the rise. According to **a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report**, congenital syphilis among babies has become more than ten times as common in the past decade.

Last year, the disease caused 231 stillbirths and 51 infant deaths. In many of those cases, the person giving birth had received no prenatal care.

Kentucky News Connection

November 22, 2023

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KY substance abuse groups focus on recovery equity and expansion

Nadia Ramlagan

A new **statewide program** in Kentucky is providing addiction advocacy groups and recovery centers with flexible funding to focus on resource equity and expansion of services.

Gary Biggers, program operations manager for the nonprofit Voices for Hope, said the nearly \$50,000 grant will be used to provide staff with training centered on listening, empathy, and nonjudgmental communication when working with diverse populations. The group will also work with communities of color to provide education on overdose, substance use trends, and community resources for recovery.

He pointed out large gaps remain in awareness about recovery services and harm reduction in Black and Latino populations.

"It affects all communities, all diversities, all racial backgrounds and ethnicities," Biggers outlined. "Everyone should have those same opportunities and be educated on the resources if they happen to suffer from substance use disorder."

State data show **more than 2,100 Kentuckians** lost their lives to a drug overdose last year, a decline of more than 5% compared with the previous year and the first decline since 2018. The majority of overdose deaths involved opioids, and fentanyl continues to be a driving factor, accounting for more than 70% of overdose deaths nationwide in 2022. Methamphetamine was also a significant contributor to deaths caused by drug overdoses.

Katie Vogel, director of development for the Hope Center in Lexington, said her organization's \$50,000 grant offers a chance to enhance existing services and bring caseworkers into communities. She noted money will go toward a Mobile Case Coordinator who will engage with at least 25 people every month who use drugs, connect them with harm reduction services, and provide referrals to medical care.

"Our mobile outreach is out in the Fayette County, Lexington community five days a week," Vogel explained. "Parked in a different church downtown or a different downtown location every day, to provide resources."

Research shows people who use drugs perceive mobile outreach as a benefit to their communities and themselves by improving access to care, without the stigma associated with walking into to a clinic or drug treatment center.

Kentucky News Connection

November 27, 2023

12/3

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Kentucky's gubernatorial race breaks records, exceeds \$44 million

Nadia Ramlagan

*By Anna Massoglia and Jimmy Cloutier for **OpenSecrets**.**Broadcast version by Nadia Ramlagan for Kentucky News Connection reporting for the OpenSecrets-Public News Service Collaboration*

Kentucky's 2023 gubernatorial race set a nominal state fundraising record, with candidates in the primary and general election raising more than \$44.6 million, according to an OpenSecrets analysis of campaign finance reports.

Independent political groups spent an additional \$45.3 million, mostly on negative ads targeting incumbent Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear or his Republican rival, Attorney General Daniel Cameron. The latest campaign finance filings cover political spending through Oct. 23.

When adjusted for inflation, the gubernatorial race ranks among the most expensive in Kentucky history — and is the latest high-profile state election to be awash in cash. Virginia state legislative races this year also broke state fundraising records, OpenSecrets **found**.

Beshear, who won reelection in the Republican-leaning state, raised more than \$23.1 million — three times as much as Cameron, reports show.

Cameron, who became Kentucky's first major-party Black nominee for governor following an expensive primary contest, raised about \$6.5 million.

While the race tightened in the final weeks of the campaign, Beshear won a second term on Nov. 7 by a comfortable margin, defeating Cameron with 53% of the vote, **according** to the Kentucky Secretary of State.

Since this will be Beshear's second consecutive term as governor, he must wait at least one election cycle before running for governor again. Kentucky is one of 26 states that allow governors to serve an unlimited number of four-year terms.

Beshear's **top funder** was the Kentucky Democratic Party.

Both the Kentucky Democratic Party and Beshear are now under **civil investigation** by state campaign finance regulators for allegedly accepting political contributions over the legal limit from Randall Weddle, the mayor of London, Ky.

In June, after reporting by the Kentucky Lantern, Beshear **announced** that his campaign and the Kentucky Democratic party inadvertently took \$202,000 in "excess" contributions from Weddle but noted the money was refunded. A Kentucky Registry of Election Finance **notice sent Monday** confirms an investigation is ongoing.

Beshear also received substantial support from labor unions, which accounted for most contributions to his campaign from political action committees.

Like Beshear, Cameron's biggest **donors** were also party committees, with the Kentucky Republican Party topping the list.

While Beshear topped campaign fundraising, Cameron benefited from more **outside group spending** on independent expenditures.

The attorney general benefitted from over \$25 million in spending by outside groups while Beshear benefitted from about \$20 million. The bulk of that paid for negative advertising with \$19.4 million on ads attacking Cameron and \$18.2 million on anti-Beshear ads.

The top two spenders were **Defending Bluegrass Values** and **Kentucky Values** — political action committees affiliated with the Democratic and Republican governors associations, respectively.

Defending Bluegrass Values reported more than \$4 million in contributions in campaign finance filings this year and made \$13.7 million in ad buys supporting Beshear's reelection campaign in the first week of September — more than every other PAC spending on the race combined, according to the **Lexington Herald-Leader**. It spent nearly \$16.8 million in total on the election, according to the latest campaign finance reports.

Kentucky Values reported spending more than \$12.4 million, mostly on independent expenditures opposing Beshear's reelection.

A PAC called Bluegrass Freedom Action also ranked among the top outside spenders, pouring more than \$4.9 million into the primary and general elections to boost Cameron's campaign. Most of that money traces back to The Concord Fund, a conservative "dark money" group well known for financing efforts to **reshape the federal judiciary**.

As a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization, The Concord Fund — formerly known as the Judicial Crisis Network — is not required to disclose its donors. It has steered \$3.3 million to Bluegrass Freedom Action, as of Oct. 23.

Another top spender boosting Cameron was the **School Freedom Fund**, an out-of-state super PAC allied with the conservative Club For Growth. The super PAC has yet to report any new donors this year, but in 2022 it was **bankrolled** by billionaire **Jeff Yass**, the founder of **Susquehanna International Group**, according to federal campaign finance reports.

School Freedom Fund spent **around \$3 million** opposing Beshear, records show. Multiple ads from the super PAC about Beshear's decision to release some prisoners early during the COVID-19 pandemic **were debunked**.

Club for Growth, a pro-free market conservative group active across the country, spent another \$2.2 million boosting Cameron in the gubernatorial race.

*Anna Massoglia and Jimmy Cloutier wrote this story for **OpenSecrets**.*

Support for this reporting was provided by The Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Kentucky News Connection

December 5, 2023

12/10

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KY advocates: It's time to bury medical debt

Nadia Ramlagan

It's estimated that one in three Kentuckians struggles to pay medical bills, and the issue continues to be a driving factor in personal bankruptcy cases. Local organizations are working to address the issue by partnering with debt-buying agencies to relieve residents' medical debt.

Reverend Kent Gilbert, pastor of Union Church in Berea, said during the pandemic, several churches teamed up with a debt consolidator to eliminate millions of dollars of medical bills. He said without boosting consumer protections, such as those enacted recently to stop surprise medical billing, the problem will worsen.

"What this really tells us is that we need to stop this debt from happening in the first place, and I think that should be our ultimate goal," Gilbert continued.

Research shows Black Americans, people living in the South and those living in states that have chosen not to expand Medicaid are more prone to carrying significant medical debt.

Kentucky Voices for Health is also tackling the issue by partnering with RIP Medical Debt, a charity that uses donations to forgive delinquent debt. For more information visit [KYVoicesForHealth](#) ."

Kelly Taulbee, director of communications and development with Kentucky Voices for Health, said while systemic changes are needed to address skyrocketing health-care costs, many Kentuckians need immediate help paying bills. She explained that through her organization's partnership with RIP Medical Debt, \$1 donated helps eliminate more than \$100 in medical debt. She said eligible cases are identified using consumer data from health-care providers to locate accounts that meet the criteria for debt relief.

"Donations made completely abolish that medical debt, no strings attached, no tax consequences. These portfolios are bought at a fraction of the original costs, and then once the debt is relieved, recipients are notified that their debt is gone," Taulbee said.

A 2018 [consumer survey](#) found 72% of Kentucky adults have struggled with health-care affordability. In eastern Kentucky, nearly 80% of people reported having problems and 1/3 said they'd been contacted by a debt-collection agency.

Kentucky News Connection

December 13, 2023

12/17

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

KY Apprenticeships offer a debt-free career path

Nadia Ramlagan

The number of registered active apprentices **more than doubled** in Kentucky between 2013 and 2021, including carpenters, cement masons, construction laborers and electricians, among more than 100 occupations.

A **new report** found apprenticeships deliver big benefits for communities and employers.

Research shows apprentices earn more than comparable workers, with an average starting salary of \$50,000 per year and increased estimated earnings of \$300,000 over the course of a lifetime.

Ed Willoughby, administrator of the Kentucky Laborers' Training Fund, said his organization is always recruiting, and currently has small waitlists. His concern is ensuring immediate full-time employment for apprentice grads.

"The big key with apprenticeship and to make an apprenticeship work is to have a job for those people to go directly to," Willoughby pointed out.

According to a recent report, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act called for infrastructure improvements and repairs, abandoned mine land reclamation, repurposing shuttered coal plants, grid modernization and renewable energy growth, which will require boosting the nation's skilled-trade workforce.

Willoughby noted an apprenticeship also offers workers a chance to get hands-on experience without paying tuition, gain college credits, and earn a paycheck while learning on the job. He added residents interested in apprenticeship training should visit the state's apprentice website to learn more.

"You get paid while you're working," Willoughby emphasized. "You get your training or education paid for. So you won't incur the student loans with college."

The nation's unionized construction workforce has aged steadily over the past three decades. As workers retire, a new crop of younger workers is needed to meet demand. According to the report, more than 61,000 construction laborers in the Commonwealth have received apprenticeship training.

Kentucky News Connection

December 18, 2023

12/24

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Advocates: KY has billions in rainy-day funds that could benefit communities

Nadia Ramlagan

In less than a month, lawmakers will convene for the 2024 Kentucky General Assembly.

Advocates said they want fewer dollars stockpiled in the state's rainy day fund and more money going to resources to help address the housing crisis, teacher and bus driver **shortage** and economic hardship brought about by **inflation**.

According to the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, the state has nearly **\$4 billion** in its "rainy day" or Budget Reserve Trust Fund, and it's expected lawmakers will continue padding its savings.

Jason Bailey, executive director of the Kentucky Center for Economic Policy, said the cash stockpile could be used to justify tax cuts down the road, which would disproportionately benefit the wealthiest Kentuckians, while the state's problems grow.

"We have child care centers that are on the brink," Bailey pointed out. "We have needs in our state that are unfulfilled, and the money's there for the first time in a long time to begin to reinvest it."

Supporters of bulking up the state's rainy day fund argue the money is needed to buffer the state from future economic downturns and provides extra cash for natural disaster aid. The rainy day fund is expected to top \$5 billion by next summer, an amount Bailey argued exceeds what is necessary to protect against hard times.

Courtney Rhoades Mullins, black lung organizer for the Appalachian Citizen Law Center, said residents in eastern Kentucky are still out of their homes, living in tents or FEMA campers a year-and-a-half after 2022's devastating floods. She stressed money to build new homes continues to be a need.

"People are still having to adapt," Rhoades Mullins explained. "People are still trying to navigate in this world after this devastating flood that not only took several people's lives but has displaced so many."

Kentucky recently changed its income tax rate from a graduated rate up to 6% to a flat 4% rate. According to some economists, the Commonwealth's General Fund, typically fueled by income taxes, will likely fail to keep pace with inflation over the next few years.

Kentucky News Connection

12/31

December 26, 2023

Available files: mp3 wav jpg

Kentucky leads nation in advanced cervical cancer fatalities

Nadia Ramlagan

January is **Cervical Health Awareness Month** and health experts said they are concerned about the growing number of cervical cancer diagnoses nationwide.

Kentucky already has the highest rate of cervical cancer in the U.S., with the state's Appalachian region having cases at **twice the national rate**.

Rebecca Gibron, CEO of Planned Parenthood in Kentucky, said cervical cancer takes years to develop, and can be prevented easily with regular screenings for early detection and with the HPV vaccine. Middle-aged patients who missed early detection are at highest risk.

"Older women are more vulnerable," Gibron explained. "I think the reason is this age group in particular may not have received the recommended number of screening tests with normal results before they stopped having Pap smears."

Studies have shown women ages 40-44 who live in the south are less likely to be vaccinated against HPV or screened for cervical cancer, and also comprise the demographic who did not have access to the vaccine during adolescence. The American Cancer Society estimated in 2023, **more than 4,000 women** died from cervical cancer nationwide.

Infection with HPV is the single greatest risk factor for cervical cancer. It is estimated more than 90% of cervical cancer cases are caused by HPV each year. Gibron encouraged Kentuckians to prioritize their reproductive health in the new year. She added regional Planned Parenthood Health Centers offer PAP exams and more.

"We often are the only provider of **affordable** reproductive health care or the only provider that offers specialized care," Gibron pointed out. "We want folks to take control of their health care and get their annual wellness visit, get their HPV test, young people get your HPV vaccine."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the HPV vaccine for children ages 11 and 12, but adults **up to age 45** can also receive their shot. Condom use has been shown to help lower the chances of spreading HPV.