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Jason Hughes Wins!

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Black Women Veterans Advocate for Service Members Amidst Current Political Climate



From left to right: Sergeant Dyvette K. Collins – U.S. Army Women’s Corps / Veteran and Community Advocate, Chief Changamire “Shanni” Durall – AVP for Campus Safety & Chief of Police, Xavier University of Louisiana; Major Candyace Laster – U.S. Army / Associate Professor of Military Science, Tulane University, Master Sergeant (Ret.) Belinda Hill – U.S. Army / President, National Association of Black Military Women, New Orleans Chapter’ Staff Sergeant W. Mae Chapman – U.S. Army Reserves / LaVet Corps Navigator / CEO, Mae Chapman Casting LLC



Chief Changamire “Shanni” Durall – AVP for Campus Safety & Chief of Police, Xavier University of Louisiana



Master Sergeant (Ret.) Belinda Hill – U.S. Army / President, National Association of Black Military Women, New Orleans Chapter

Story and Photos by
Adia Fienagha
Data News Weekly Contributor

Women Veterans are raising awareness of how breaking the glass ceiling in the armed forces impacts them. As

Black Women Veterans, race also adds an additional factor in how they are perceived and what opportunities they can have in the military.

“One thing I keep in mind is I’m not fighting for one particular man; I’m fighting for the country that I sign my

name on,” said Maj. Candyace Laster, an Associate Professor of Military Science at Tulane University as she joined other women in service and Women Veterans to mark Veterans Day.

“That does not mean that I have to follow a rhetoric of something that is

unconstitutional. We have the choice to either fight their fight or fight for our country and that’s a decision that each soldier has to make,” Laster said as part of the “In Her Boots” Event spotlighting local Black Female Veterans as they shared their stories of service at the

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Civic Center on Xavier University of Louisiana's campus on Nov. 6th.

Several of the Women Veterans spotlighted how the issue of women serving in the armed forces has return to being a contentious political issue and enforced the need for community among veterans and resources for mental health in the community.

"Most females that I run across don't ask for help and I don't know if that's something that's been embedded in us to not ask for help," said Retired Master Sgt. Belinda Hill who served in the U.S. Army and is President of the National Association of Black Military Women's New Orleans' Chapter.

"It's like we feel we can do it by ourselves and we can't. Suicide is one of the leading things that is causing the death of Women Veterans now. We need to figure out how to reach out to each other," Hill said.

Although suicide rates of female veterans decreased by 24.1-percent between 2021 and 2022, Veterans Affairs reports have found that the rate of suicide among female veterans was 92.4-percent higher than

their non-Veteran Women. Suicide is among the leading cause of death for veterans over accidental death or death by natural causes, according to the VA. This higher-than-average rate is influenced by factors such as difficulty readjusting to civilian life, post-traumatic stress disorder, and low-to-no community support, the report found.

Staff Sgt. W. Mae Chapman of the U.S. Army Reserves and Sgt. Dyvette K. Collins of the U.S. Army Women's Corps who is a Veterans' Community Advocate shared how the current political climate is also affecting how they view their role as retired service members. The current administration's deployment of the national guard in various U.S cities, the arrests of United States Citizens and the changes to grooming standards for active-duty members have concerned veterans who are trying to make the military a more inclusive space, they said.

Currently, more women are enrolling in the military with an 18-percent jump in female recruitment from 2023 to 2024 compared

to men, which jumped only 8-percent. Despite this increase, as Women Veterans, they say that active-duty women still face hardships including gender bias, sexual harassment, and a lack of representation among armed services leadership.

"Just show up for us," Chapman said of the ongoing political climate. "There's a lot of times we need things even if we don't say we need things. Just provide something for us to say, 'Ok I need that,'" Chapman said of the impact of government spending cuts on resources for veterans.

The 43-day long government shutdown that ended on Nov. 13th. 2025 was the longest government shutdown in U.S. history and hit veteran families extremely hard, panelists said. The most recent shutdown resulted in disruptions of SNAP benefits. Around 1.2 million veterans live in households that rely on snap benefits.

"Just let us know that you're there for us, that's all we really want, just knowing that we can actually lean on someone, just be there for us when we call," Chapman added.

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Jason Hughes Wins New Orleans District E City Council Seat

Story by Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief
Data News Weekly

In a decisive victory that signals a shift toward fresh, bold, and visionary leadership in New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward, Jason Hughes has been elected to represent District E on the New Orleans City Council. Hughes, a state representative known for his legislative experience and community-focused advocacy, secured the seat with strong voter turnout across the district's diverse neighborhoods.

Hughes campaigned on a platform centered on improving public safety, strengthening economic development in underserved areas, investing in youth programming, and restoring trust between residents and city leadership. Throughout the race, he emphasized that District E, since Hurricane Katrina, has long been burdened by infrastructure challenges and slow economic recovery. With his victory, he will continue his advocacy for urgent, strategic investment and consistent representation at City Hall.

In his victory speech, Hughes thanked voters for their confidence and pledged to bring "effective leadership, accountability, and a renewed sense of hope" to District E. "Our community has waited far too long for the attention and resources it deserves," Hughes said. "Tonight, you didn't just elect a councilmember, you declared that District E matters, and that our future begins now."

Leaders from business, civic, culture bearers, and beyond credited Hughes' win to his deep roots in New Orleans East, his record of responsive constituent service, and his ability to build broad coalitions across neighborhood associations, faith communities, and local businesses.

As he prepares to take office, Hughes will face pressing issues including rising crime, ongoing flood protection concerns, and stalled development along major corridors. Residents expressed optimism that his experience in the state legislature, particularly on the state's budget committee, will help secure funding and drive policy changes that can accelerate growth and stability in the district.

With Hughes' victory, District E enters a new chapter, one that many hope will finally bring the revitalization and representation the community has long sought and deserves.



City Councilmember-Elect Jason Hughes with family and supporters during his victory celebration.



City Councilmember-Elect Jason Hughes with Data News Weekly Publisher Terry Jones. Data News Weekly endorsed Hughes and several other candidates this election cycle as part of its commitment to helping elect leaders who can move the city forward.



Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events.



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Local Organizations Step Up to Help Community During Federal Funding, Benefit Cuts

Story and Photos by
Kristopher Beavers Data
News Weekly Contributor

On Nov. 12th, 2025, the Trump administration finally ended the 43-day-long government shutdown. The record government shut down led to numerous federal jobs layoffs, a slowdown in commercial air travel, and cuts to government benefits in which millions of Americans lost Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or better known as SNAP benefits.

"With SNAP being gone for that long, we gotta come as a community together and be our own SNAP," said Dezoray Spears, a Mid-City resident. "SNAP is not just about the food, it's about being able to wake up every day by God's grace, and you know and be able to live,"



Local college students volunteer with the Early Childhood Education Power Coalition event on Nov. 14.



Volunteer Ori Wilson with the Power Coalition drive in New Orleans.

Spears added.

Nearly 42 million citizens and 23 million households of the United States are beneficiaries of the SNAP benefits, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The cut to SNAP benefits over the past 43 days has emphasized food

insecurity as a rising problem in the nation, local food banks said. The City of New Orleans notes that 70,000 residents are at risk of food insecurities this year. The demographic that is negatively affected the most is children and the elderly. The government shutdown

and the legal challenge to releasing SNAP benefits put the program back into public debate. The Louisiana Department of Health provides SNAP month benefits to low-income households to supplement food costs. Several local organizations coordinated Community Wellness Events building up to Thanksgiving with food drives to supplement those who recently lost their benefits.

"A part of Power Coalitions' values is to uplift our community by utilizing community-based organizations that are already active and specializing in certain issues or causes," said Ori Wilson, a seventh ward native and core member of the organization team for the coalition. Power Coalition, a Louisiana-based non-profit organization, assists with voter registration for marginalized communities around several parishes and wards of Louisiana. The

organization has hosted events to educate citizens of Louisiana that their voices matter, featuring voting assistance and community speaking events, where they provide home-cooked meals for attendees.

"In the past few days, we have hosted a speaking event to not only educate the numerous communities of New Orleans about the current SNAP situation but also to learn about what the people want to see changed within the government," Wilson added.

Another organization that has given back to the New Orleans residents this week was the DePaul Community Health Center and the Second Harvest Food Bank. Ever since 2021, both organizations have assisted citizens of New Orleans with free food giveaways on the second Friday of each month at the DePaul Community Health Center Warehouse at 3201 Short Street.

"All of our community initiatives are in the middle of the city, so it can be accessible to anyone within our communities," said Damara Jackson Miller, the Community Health Operations Manager for the DePaul Community Health Centers. "We have food pantries in at least hundreds across the city, and this is just a way that we can give back to the community," Miller added.

"In times like these, communities will always support one another and will continue to do so," Wilson added.

State & Local News

Helena Moreno's Transition Team Launches Job Portal and Announces Inauguration Co-Chairs

Glenda Bell
Data News Weekly
Contributor

As New Orleans prepares for a new chapter in leadership, Mayor-Elect Helena Moreno and her transition team, New Direction New Orleans, are setting a tone of transparency, inclusion, and opportunity. The transition effort has announced both the launch of a new job portal for current unclassified city employees and the co-chairs who will help lead Moreno's Historic Inauguration.



New Orleans Mayor-Elect Helena Moreno

Building a Team for a New Direction

Recently, New Direction New Orleans unveiled an online form at NewDirectionNOLA.com/jobs for current unclassified City of New Orleans employees who wish to re-apply for their positions or express interest in other roles within the incoming administration.

The initiative represents a standard but essential step in mayoral transitions, ensuring a smooth staffing process while identifying talent across City Hall.

Renee Lapeyrolerie, Executive Director of the Transition Team, said, "We know there is a ton of talent at City Hall. This transition isn't just about taking New Orleans in a New

2026, when Helena Moreno takes the Oath of Office alongside newly elected officials. The inauguration will symbolize a fresh start for New Orleans — one grounded in optimism, collaboration, and shared purpose.

Mayor-Elect Moreno announced the leaders who will oversee planning and coordination for the Inauguration. Mrs. Gayle Benson will serve as Honorary Chair. The Inauguration planning committee will be Co-Chaired by Rico Alvendia, Sheila Burns, Jennifer Heebe, Barry Kern and Dotie Reese.

Moreno's New Direction New Orleans Initiative continues to lay the foundation for an administration focused on an efficient, transparent, and accountable government. Through public engagement, recruitment of top talent, and policy development, the effort underscores Moreno's vision for a city that is safer, more affordable, and full of opportunity for all.

As anticipation builds for Inauguration Day, the message from City Hall is clear: New Orleans is ready to move forward — together — in a new and right direction.

Direction — it's about taking the city in the right direction. This is an opportunity to build a government that truly works for our residents."

The transition process, guided by Moreno's principles of urgency, accountability, and inclusion, seeks to assemble a team that reflects the diversity and resilience of New Orleans. Department heads and senior leaders will be identified through a merit-based review, ensuring continuity where it is working and change where it is needed most.

Preparing for a New Era at City Hall

Looking ahead, the city will mark a pivotal moment on January 12,



America's Maternal and Infant Health Crisis Deepens

Stacy M. Brown
Black Press USA
Senior National
Correspondent

The March of Dimes has released its 2025 Report Card, and across the United States, the data paints a troubling picture of mothers and infants facing preventable risks that too often end in tragedy. Nationally, the preterm birth rate remains at 10.4 percent. Babies born to mothers insured through Medicaid experienced an even higher rate—11.7 percent—compared to 9.6 percent for mothers with private insurance. For Black mothers, the rate soared to 14.7 percent, the highest of any racial or ethnic group in the country.

"Behind every statistic is a mom, a baby, and a family that deserves their best chance at a healthy start," said Dr. Elizabeth Kielb, Director of Maternal and Infant Health at the March of Dimes.

Preterm birth is one of the leading causes of infant mortality and long-term health complications. Yet many mothers never receive the early prenatal care needed to detect risks. Rural and urban communities alike are suffering: hundreds of counties in the U.S. now have no obstetric providers or birthing facilities. Some families travel hours for a routine prenatal checkup; others simply go without care due to full clinics, transportation barriers, or lack of insurance coverage.

The Commonwealth Fund's 2025 national analysis adds another alarming layer. The United States continues to have the highest maternal mortality rate among wealthy nations, with Black women facing the gravest risks. Delays in care, chronic conditions left untreated, inconsistent insurance coverage,



and insufficient access to trusted providers all contribute to these disparities—patterns echoed in the March of Dimes findings.

The organization identifies several systemic factors driving the crisis. Many women enter pregnancy with unmanaged hypertension or diabetes. Large regions of the country—particularly the South and Midwest—are considered maternity care deserts, with no birthing hospitals and few clinicians trained in maternal health. Millions of women lose insurance shortly after delivery, leaving postpartum complications unmonitored. Black and Native mothers frequently report that their symptoms are dismissed, leading to life-threatening conditions that could have been prevented.

Geographically, the crisis spans every region. Mississippi recorded a 14.8 percent preterm birth rate, followed by Alabama (13.6 percent), Louisiana (13.2 percent), South Carolina (12.7 percent), and Georgia (12.4 percent)—all receiving failing grades. Urban centers like Memphis, Detroit, and Fresno continued to see some of the nation's highest racial gaps in maternal and

infant outcomes. Even Washington, D.C., saw a steep rise, reaching 11.8 percent.

While states such as Maryland and Virginia show modest improvements, both continue to grapple with racial disparities and shortages in maternal health providers.

The March of Dimes is responding with mobile health units, NICU Family Support programs, and partnerships with hospitals aimed at improving maternal care. Nationally, the organization is calling for expanded postpartum Medicaid coverage, stronger maternal mortality review committees, and renewed federal investment through the PREEMIE Act.

Dr. Michael Warren, the March of Dimes' Chief Medical and Health Officer, underscored the urgency: "As a clinician who has seen how much is possible when we get it right, the data is deeply frustrating. We have known about the risk factors for years."



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