

# THE WEST SIDE Journal



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PORT ALLEN, LOUISIANA

## DA Ricky Ward announces his retirement

In announcing his future plans as district attorney of the 18th Judicial District, Ricky Ward made the following statement.

"Friends, I wish I could put into words how grateful and honored it has been to serve as your district attorney for the past 29--and now going on 30--years."

"I truly wish everyone in this country could experience for just one day the feeling of privilege and honor that I have been so fortunate to do every day of my life for the past almost 30 years," Ward



DA Ricky Ward

continued in a prepared statement.

"It is truly a humbling experience to wake up every day of the week and to immediately know that you represent everyone—every man, every woman and every child—within the three parishes that you represent and serve," he said.

As a person of strong faith in God, Ward said he is "always honest and fair in reviewing all criminal cases" that come through his office.

"I believe that honesty and fair mindedness are the two most important characteristics a district attorney must have," Ward said.

He went on to say, "I have loved being your district attorney but I believe it is time for me to close this chapter of my life. This decision has not come easy and it came only after much prayer and many hours of discussion with my wife, family members, staff members—who are the best in the world—and

close friends."

"So, to all of you, my friends, I have decided not to run for reelection as district attorney," Ward announced.

The election for the district attorney's seat for the 18th Judicial District will be in November and the new district attorney will take office in January 2021, so Ward will remain in office until then.

"For me, one of the great things about being DA is the privilege of having over 50 employees, many of whom have been with me since my first day in office," he said. "As happens so often, because I have so many capable employees, I also often have the opportunity to make decisions concerning them that have a great and positive impact on them and my office, one of which happened at the beginning of this year."

"It is with much honor and pleasure that I appoint Tony Clayton to the position of first assistant district attorney," Ward said. "Tony has proven time and

time again that he is one of the best prosecutors in the state of Louisiana and has been one of my most loyal and trusted employees for nearly 20 years, most of them as my chief felony prosecutor."

According to Ward, Clayton has tried almost every major felony case in which someone was murdered or raped and has done so with an almost perfect record of convictions.

"He, no doubt, has more experience prosecuting murder, rape and other crimes of violence than any other person in Louisiana," Ward said. "Among the hundreds of cases Tony has successfully tried and convicted are two that everyone will remember—serial killers Derrick Todd Lee and Sean Gillis."

"Both serial killers terrorized south Louisiana for years and were first prosecuted by Tony Clayton as my lead prosecutor for murder," he continued. "Both serial killers were convicted as charged by

Clayton and received life imprisonment sentences."

During his lengthy career as a prosecutor, Clayton was the first of only two persons ever in Louisiana to receive the coveted Home Run Hitters Award from the National District Attorneys Association (NDAA), Ward said.

The NDAA annually inducts a select few prosecutors into the Home Run Hitters Club to recognize their outstanding work in trying complicated and high profile cases, according to the district attorney.

"The Home Run Hitters Award is the highest national award given in recognition of exceptional prosecution to honor those prosecutors who step up to the plate and score a 'home run hit' for their office," Ward said.

Clayton received this award for the successful prosecution of a case in which the defendant killed six minor children using his vehicle as a weapon, according to Ward.

"Clayton successfully

prosecuted the case and secured five death penalty verdicts against the defendant," he said. "In addition to being recognized by their peers as the best in the nation, winners receive a genuine Louisville Slugger baseball bat inscribed with their names."

Ward said Clayton was additionally named Prosecutor of the Year in 2015 by Crimefighters of Louisiana, a victims advocacy organization created to protect and advocate on behalf of the victims of crime, for his successful prosecution of Karl Howard and Monique Kitts for the murder for hire death of Corey Kitts Jr. in West Baton Rouge.

"I can't think of anyone who is more qualified by experience and training in prosecuting serious criminal cases in the 18th Judicial District and to bring us into the next decade than Tony Clayton," Ward said.

## Gov. John Bel Edwards inaugurated for second term

Primary objectives for the next four years, along with renewed focus on familiar goals, highlighted the inaugural speech last Monday for the second term of Gov. John Bel Edwards.

Funding for roads and bridges, coastal restoration, a close on the gender pay gap and a hike in minimum wage played a prominent role in the inaugural speech – issues that came to light four years ago when he took office after a win over David Vitter.

On the heels of his re-election after a close win over Republican Eddie Rispone, Edwards touted the efforts he and lawmakers made when he inherited a \$2 billion shortfall from the Bobby Jindal administration.

"Funding for our universities and community and technical colleges had been cut more than anywhere else in the nation," he said. "As a result, tuition also increased more than anywhere else, putting the burden of balancing the budget on the backs of our students."

Edwards also touted the common ground established among lawmakers

that helped to end the deficit and bring about a \$2 billion budget surplus.

The extra revenue paved the way for more than 1,300 improvement projects that created thousands of miles of better roads and bridges statewide, he said.

He also hailed the \$700 million bill for transportation projects across the state. The package – spearheaded by State Sen. Rick Ward, R-Port Allen – paved the way for the \$125 million project near Interstate 10 that will connect La. 415 to the Intracoastal Waterway on La. 1 South.

"This was the largest single new investment in 30 years, which was made possible by the bipartisan efforts of the legislature – yet another example of what we can do for the people of our state when we cast party labels aside and work together," Edwards said.

Edwards also cited the expansion of Medicaid to the working poor of Louisiana, which has brought the number of medically insured residents to more than 450,000 in the state. The expansion saved taxpayers more than \$300 million, he said.

"And we haven't had a single hospital close," he said. "But most importantly, health outcomes are improving across Louisiana. People can afford to go to the doctor, receive lifesaving care, fill their prescriptions and return to work."

The \$20 million investment in early childhood education during the 2019 session will mark the start of what Edwards considers his biggest priority for the next four years.

Early education will figure as the highest priority for new investments in education during the next four years, he said.

"Eighty percent of brain development happens before the age of 3, and experts agree that reaching children during these pivotal first years is one of the greatest tools we have for closing the achievement gap that has for too long plagued our state," Edwards said.

He also plans to increase classroom funding and give educators additional pay raises that will get them to at least the Southern regional average.

Edwards also continued the push for a hike in the

minimum wage, an issue he targeted when he took office in 2016.

He wants to bring Louisiana up to par with 21 other states that raised their minimum wage to begin the new year.

"Sadly, Louisiana remains only one of five states without its own minimum wage, and we know that an overwhelming majority of Louisianians support increasing the minimum wage," Edwards said. "Congress has made it clear that they are out of the business."

Edwards also made another plea to lawmakers to close the gap in gender pay, which he called the biggest in the nation.

"That offends me, and it should offend you too," he said. "Because when women succeed, families succeed, and when families succeed, so does Louisiana."

The state's future will rely on a willingness by the two parties to work together, Edwards said. "...Louisiana was born from exploration and the hope of a better tomorrow. Today, we embark on a new expedition."

## Mysterious death in Addis is under investigation by multiple agencies

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The Addis Police Department and the West Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office are investigating the death of a 63-year-old man whose body was found last Monday afternoon.

Authorities did not believe foul play was involved when Jeffery Tircuit, 7777 La. 1, Addis, was found dead in his home, but Police Chief Ricky Anderson asked for the assistance of the Sheriff's Office when an autopsy determined he died of asphyxiation. Portions of Tircuit's body were found tied, authorities said, but one of the objectives of the investigation at this time is if anyone else was involved.

Chief Deputy Coroner Yancy Guerin reported in the autopsy Tircuit died of asphyxiation and determined his "cause of death" was homicide. He said he could not provide further

details about Tircuit's death due to the ongoing investigation.

The District Attorney's office of the 18th Judicial District is now involved in the case.

"It's our position in a situation like this that we investigate it like a homicide until it's proven not to be," said Assistant District Attorney Tony Clayton. "We're not going to leave one stone unturned."

"It's our obligation to the public to ensure that we don't have a killer running loose," he continued.

Despite repeated attempts to contact Anderson after his initial statement, phone calls, text messages and emails went unanswered.

Maj. Zack Simmers, the public information officer for the West Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office, said that while his office was involved in the investigation, he had no comment since sheriff's detectives were not the lead investigators.

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INSIDE

News.....1A-2A  
Events .....3A

Lifestyles.....3A, 4A - 5A  
Opinion.....6A

Obits.....7A  
Arrests.....7A

Bids, Notices.....8A  
Sports.....1B

Legals.....2B - 7B  
Classifieds.....8B