

# American Press OPINION

## American Press

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The Opinion page is a daily forum for opinions on local, state, national and world issues. Columns and letters represent the views of the writers and not necessarily those of this newspaper.

### OUR VIEW

## Sales tax holidays are bad tax policy

**B**ills aimed at bringing back Louisiana's sales tax holidays that were suspended in 2018 until 2025 have been filed for the current legislative session. The legislation that would cost the state \$18.6 million over the next four years comes at a time when lawmakers are trying to end a number of tax breaks as part of tax reform.

The conservative Tax Foundation has repeatedly said sales tax holidays don't promote economic growth or significantly increase consumer purchases. Studies have shown that consumers simply shift the time of their purchases.

Calling sales tax holidays political gimmicks, Tax Foundation said they distract from genuine, permanent tax relief. It said if policymakers want to save money for consumers, they should cut the sales tax rate year-round.

Rep. Neil Riser, R-Columbia, wants to restore the Annual Louisiana Sales Tax Holiday that takes place on the first consecutive Friday and Saturday of August of each year. It would cost the state \$4.2 million annually and would exempt the first \$2,500 of the sales price of any consumer purchases from the 4.45 percent state sales tax.

Riser's second bill restores the annual sales tax holiday for purchases of hurricane preparedness items or supplies during the last weekend in May. It would exempt the first \$1,500 of the sales price of any consumer purchases. The state would lose \$100,000 in revenue annually.

A special hurricane preparedness law established the holiday for one time in 2020 to provide tax relief for citizens recovering from Hurricanes Laura and Delta and the coronavirus pandemic.

Rep. Chris Turner, R-Ruston, wants to reinstate the Annual Louisiana Second Amendment Weekend. It had been from the first Friday through Sunday in September, but Turner wants to move it to the last consecutive Saturday and Sunday in July.

The legislation would exempt firearms, ammunition and hunting supplies from the state sales tax. The first \$2,500 of the cost price would be exempt. The state would lose \$350,000 annually.

Five bills were filed in 2019 reinstating sales tax holidays, including one that consolidated all of them into one holiday. However, none of the bills were heard by the committees to which they were assigned.

Tax Foundation makes a good point when it says sales tax holidays area not an effective solution to the current economic crisis because the drop in consumption is caused by a public health crisis, not less desire to spend.

In 2010, 19 states conducted sales tax holidays, which has been the highest number. Only 16 states conducted them in 2020.

Tax Foundation said the holidays distract policymakers from real, permanent and economically beneficial tax reform, which Louisiana lawmakers are currently trying to do. We urge them to resist the temptation to bring those sales tax holidays back and leave that decision to businesses that like them.

**'Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.'**

— Judy Garland



### OTHER VIEWS

## Students need civics lessons

Suspicious confirmed. Those of us who taught American history and civics (government) years ago have often wondered whether those subjects have been de-emphasized at today's educational institutions.

Yes, they have been, and the evidence is clear. Five members of Congress — two Republicans and three Democrats — last month introduced the Civics Secures Democracy Act that they say restores “the importance placed on civics education in American classrooms...”

The bill was filed by U.S. Sens. Chris Coons (D-Del.) and John Cornyn (R-Texas), and U.S. Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), Tom Cole (R-Okla.) and Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.).

The fact that members of two political parties are working together on this issue is rare these days (it's called bipartisanship). They clearly understand the importance of what they are trying to do.

Coons said, “Civic engagement is vital for the health of our democracy. With expanded civics education in K-12 and higher education, this will equip new generations of Americans with a deeper understanding of their cherished rights...”

Cornyn said, “The United States continues to be a model for the world because we are taught from a young age the merits of democracy, our Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the civic duties that are inherently part of being an American.”

DeLauro said, “Over the last several decades, civics education in American schools has seen a significant decline. The divide in this country continues to grow as we neglect civics education and fail to build a nation adequately informed of our democratic principles, norms and institutions...”

Cole said, “As a former history teacher, I believe the lack of knowledge of America's history is one of the greatest threats to preserving our republic and ensuring a prosperous future for generations to come...”

**Jim Beam**



She said when people are informed, they become more engaged and participate in government.

The members of Congress said research shows that students who receive quality civics education are more likely to vote, discuss politics at home, complete college and develop skills that lead to employment.

How do we know today's students and others aren't measuring up? Here is some of the evidence:

Less than 30 percent of fourth-, eighth- and 12th-grade students were proficient in civics, according to one report.

Another survey of 1,416 adults revealed that only one-third of them could name the three branches of government. One-fifth of them think that a 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court ruling is sent back to Congress for consideration.

More than 5 million persons took naturalization tests to become American citizens between 2009 and 2016, and those taking both the English and civics tests had an overall national pass rate of 91 percent.

Tom Lindsay, a former college professor of political science and political philosophy, in an article last year in Forbes magazine said, “While 90 percent of immigrants to this country pass the USCIS Citizenship Test (passage of which requires answering correctly six of 10 multiple-choice questions), only a third of native-born Americans can pass the test.”

Lindsay said 74 percent of senior citizens can pass the test, but only 19 percent of Americans under the age of 45 can answer even six of the 10 questions correctly.

“Civics education in the United States is in a state of crisis,” Lindsay

said, “which, if not addressed, will doom our constitutional democracy.”

In a 2017 report, the Civics Education Initiative (CEI) explained what led to the decline in civics education and knowledge. The country's education system began to focus on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), standardized testing became the way to measure success and performance and teaching what is tested became the norm.

The article said the goal of CEI at that time was to make passing the U.S. citizenship test a requirement for high school graduation. To pass would require answering at least 60 of 100 questions correctly. If persons being naturalized can get 91 percent of the English and civics questions right, that isn't too much to ask.

Lindsay said Abraham Lincoln in 1838 urged his countrymen to practice as well as teach their children “reverence for the Constitution and its laws.” If not, Lincoln said American democracy would degenerate into what he called “mobocratic” rule.

Isn't that what this country experienced on Jan. 6 when the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., was stormed by a mob during a riot and violent attack against the U.S. Congress? Is that why we see so many violent protests?

The Center for American Progress reported that, as of 2018, only nine states and the District of Columbia required a full year of civics or government studies. The members of Congress who are trying to improve on that reality said 31 states only offer a half-year of studies and 10 states have no civics requirements at all.

No wonder the country in which we are living today has become so divided and contentious. More emphasis on American history and civics is the best way to help students become responsible citizens.

**Jim Beam**, the retired editor of the *American Press*, has covered people and politics for more than five decades. Contact him at 337-515-8871 or jbeam@americanpress.com.

### OTHER VIEWS

## LNG gas La.'s liquid gold — let's share the wealth

**By U.S. Sen. John Kennedy**  
Special to the American Press

There is a growing global hunger for liquefied natural gas (LNG) — an appetite that Louisiana can help satisfy.

In 2019, America became the third-largest LNG exporter in the world. According to some estimates, we're on the path to first place. American LNG exports broke several records last year and are still increasing, despite a global pandemic. Louisiana has contributed greatly to this energy renaissance: Our state produces most of the LNG that America sells to other countries.

The global appetite for LNG keeps expanding because the fuel is cheap,

### GUEST COMMENTARY

plentiful, supports job growth, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. No wonder the world wants more of this energy resource.

This LNG boom is not just good for America — it's great for Louisiana. Before the pandemic, LNG companies were expected to invest \$60 billion in our state over a decade, which could create 20,000 construction jobs for workers who build new and expand existing LNG terminals, as well as 1,500 permanent jobs for Louisianians who would operate

these terminals full-time.

As Louisiana continues recovering from the pandemic and planning for a strong future, we should keep investing in the LNG projects that utilize our skilled workers and support their families. That's why I successfully passed legislation to bring an LNG Center of Excellence to our state. As the only member of our state's congressional delegation who sits on an appropriations committee, I advocated for this investment to be made in a Louisiana community. This center will train students in the skills they need to run Louisiana's LNG terminals, equipping the next generation to supply the market's growing demand.

The Center of Excellence will also

collaborate with our academic institutions to bring together experts, industry leaders, and relevant federal agencies from around the country for promoting LNG and LNG industry safety.

At the same time, Congress needs to get rid of bureaucratic hurdles that make it harder to export America's LNG to the countries that are lining up to buy it. To meet that challenge, I helped introduce the Natural Gas Export Expansion Act this spring. The bill would remove burdensome regulations that sometimes leave applicants waiting years just to get LNG exporting permits. That would, in turn, boost LNG exports and ensure Louisiana workers can keep meeting the worldwide demand

for clean-burning fuel.

Democrats in Congress should take note of how Louisiana produces affordable energy while caring for our environment and coastline. While some claim their goal is fighting climate change, their anti-energy policies often seem better at killing jobs than saving the planet.

In reality, increasing natural gas production and LNG exports will not only cut down on greenhouse gases, it will also reduce America's dependence on foreign energy while creating jobs here at home. At a time when Louisiana is still rebuilding an economy hammered by the coronavirus, I'll keep fighting for the workers who produce smart, affordable, and reliable energy.