



## AFGE supports repeal of unfair Social Security rules

By AFGE Leadership

AFGE is asking lawmakers to repeal two controversial rules that have caused public servants to lose two-thirds or even the entire amount of their Social Security benefits.

The government pension offset and the windfall elimination provision, which have been in place since 1983, were the topic of discussion at a recent hearing held by the House Ways and Means Committee's subcommittee on Social Security.

These two provisions should be repealed because:

GPO penalizes public servants who receive a government pension and are also eligible for Social Security benefits of their spouse.

This provision reduces survivors' benefits for spouses, widows, and widowers.

WEP penalizes those who

have paid into Social Security at work but also receive a pension or a disability benefit from a prior employer that did not withhold Social Security payroll taxes, such as older federal retirees working under the Civil Service Retirement System, state and local government employees including teachers.

Social Security benefits are modest to begin with – the average is currently about \$1,780 a month, not enough to meet the basic needs in many areas. Benefits are also lower than those in many developed nations. Social Security benefits need to be expanded, not cut.

And one way to do that is to eliminate the GPO and WEP so that working families receive the fair benefits they have paid into. AFGE is submitting our written testimony for the record.

## Sharon Kornegay wins run-off for VP At-Large

By DON MONCRIEF

Editor, The Union Advocate  
don.moncrief@afgelocal987.org

Sharon Kornegay completed the field for AFGE Local 987's newly-elected officers with a run-off win over Matthew "Hawk" Hawkins April 19.

She earned the honor of the Vice President At-Large position by garnering 100 votes exactly (54.35 percent) to Hawkins' 84 (45.65 percent).

The completed team then - the rest were elected April 4 - is as follows: Marion Williams was re-elected President. Greg Collins moved from his Vice President of Maintenance position to that of Executive Vice President.

Jeanette McElhaney was re-elected Treasurer. Jerry Galloway was elected - "by acclamation" (no one ran against him - Secretary. James Watson, who was serving as a Full-time Steward, will now be the Vice President of Maintenance. Gwen King was elected Vice



A member prepares to cast his vote. (AFGE Local 987 photos/Don Moncrief)

President of DLA, Bromiekus "Brodie" King was chosen by

the members to be Sergeant-of-Arms. Teresa Freeman, Tommy

Gibson and Curtis McCants will all serve as Trustees.

**MONTH**  
*Save the date* **2**

**Membership meeting**

**Local 987 will have a membership meeting May 16 at 5 p.m. (Doors open at 4 p.m., with refreshments/available.) It will be held at Union Hall, located at 1764 Watson Blvd. (It will also be on Zoom.) As always, membership will be verified before admittance into the meeting. You can make updates to your contact information - address, phone, email - by calling Union Hall at 478-922-5758 or by emailing Linda Baxter at linda@afgelocal987.org or Jeanette McElhaney at jmac@afgelocal987.org.**



Jim Davis, left, and Local 987 President Marion Williams wait out the voting cycle in the Local's parking lot.



Members of the election committee wait for voters.

## As we age - taking care of loved ones, yourself

DON MONCRIEF

Editor, The Union Advocate  
don.moncrief@afgelocal987.org

Elder care.

That was the topic of a special "informational and educational" online workshop presented by AFGE's Women's and Fair Practices Departments April 24.

Kaiser Permanente Internal Medicine Physician Dr. Deb Friesen was the guest speaker. Her agenda consisted of: What to expect as loved ones age, physical and mental changes with aging, senior planning, care setting for aging loved

ones and resources available. (Note: This article will cover the first two in this issue and the latter three in the next – May 20.)

Friesen started with there being a lot of stages to aging, "for our loved ones and also for us. Aging together. Our goal is to be fully independent to passing in our sleep one night. We tend to go through other stages on our way to death and passing."

What to do expect, "I'm sure you're familiar," she said. "They don't think they need help but they really do. Maybe you're checking on them a lot more often. You're coming over to see how things are, how the house looks."

It may be even just starts with mowing the lawn, she continued. Things get different. "Oh you want me to take you to your doctor's? You don't feel good driving anymore?" So they may not realize they need help but you're kind of starting to see it. And then it progresses into, "Oh, I know I need some help. I can't do that anymore. I don't feel confident doing that anymore." Maybe an event happens that makes it very clear to them and others."

It can really progress to more than that, she said. To them needing help daily. Sometimes that

### ELDER



### CARE

actually looks fairly simple, she said. "I had a patient. Just delightful. And she was ending up in the emergency room probably every three or four weeks with congestive heart failure. And they'd

tune her up. They'd get all that fluid off of her she had accumulated. She'd go home.

"She had a plan. Seemed like she was in on it, and then it would happen again. Well, she had a grandson who loved her very much. He couldn't live with her and could not take care of her. Well, it turned out the help she needed was a phone call every morning. 'Grandma did you take your medicine today?' 'Oh yeah, I took my medicine.' 'Well, I want you to check right now and I'm going to stay on the phone.' 'Oh honey you don't need to do that.'"

"But he did. He stayed on the phone. She'd take out her medicine and do you know, she didn't have another hospitalization until she passed."

On the other hand, she continued, it could progress to needing full-time help. "Because there's too many changes that go on physically or mentally. And they just need more. It might mean more help inside the home. It might mean more help outside the home. And again, the caregiver

See AGE, page 3

### Sanford Bishop golf classic

Right: District 5 National Vice President Tatishka Thomas, left, AFGE Local 987 Treasurer Jeanette McElhaney, second from left and 5th District Legislative Political Organizer Johnathan Mungo present Bishop with a sponsorship. Far Right: AFGE won third place out of 32 teams at the 26th Annual Sanford Bishop Golf Classic held April 22 at the Green Island Country Club in Columbus. Team members were (not in order in the photo) Raphael Wilkins, Henry Brown (AFGE Local 987), Willie Jenkins and Jerome Leeks. (Contributed photo)



# Robins AFB TAP office guides airmen at career crossroads

By KISHA FOSTER JOHNSON  
78th Air Base Wing  
Public Affairs Office

To stay, or not to stay in the Air Force, is the question that brings Airmen to the Transition Assistance Program office at Robins Air Force Base, Georgia. The Military and Family Readiness Center oversees the program. TAP is mandatory for all service members who have at least 180 continuous days or more on active duty, including the National Guard and Reserve.

"We provide counsel for those who know what they want to do or who are on the fence," said Tiffany Franklin, Robins TAP manager. "However, if they press the proverbial button to retire or separate, then that generates a checklist for them to start virtually outprocessing, and our office is on that checklist."

"It's a by-law requirement for all service members who are separating or retiring from the military," she continued. "Years ago, there was a high rate of suicide and unemployment, high bankruptcy and homelessness among veterans. Congress said this must stop and created TAP to help all aspects of getting out of the military. We offer resources and classes that will help the service member and family members."

In 1991, the National Defense Authorization Act established TAP to reduce any hardships of service members transitioning from military to civilian life.

"I wanted to gain knowledge regarding benefits and career assistance to ensure I had a smooth transition to the Air Force Reserves," said Tech. Sgt. Ashley Scott, noncommissioned officer in charge, 78th Medical Group Clinical Dentistry and Dental Logistics.

After nine years of service, Scott is ready for a new personal mission.

"My goals are to further my education after my upcoming completion of my master's degree. Additionally, I am seeking to secure a career in the field of management," she said. "It feels great. I'll be transitioning



**Charles Johnson, Veteran Affairs Benefits and Services advisor, teaches a Transition Assistance Program class at Robins Air Force Base March 12. TAP participants take a variety of classes, like financial planning for transition, which is required before separation or retirement. (U.S. Air Force photo by Kisha Foster Johnson)**

to the reserves, so it will be nice balancing my military and civilian life."

According to Franklin, service members must initiate TAP between 18 and 24 months from the date of separation or retirement.

The TAP components include:  
**Step 1:** Initial Counseling - This first step is an individual appointment where members' goals and transition needs are discussed and assessed.

**Step 2:** Pre-Separation Counseling/Briefing - Provides information on entitlements and benefits members may be eligible for and reviews the transition process.

**Step 3:** Transition Workshop - All members complete at minimum, the 3-day Core Curriculum, which includes: DoD Day — Managing Your Transition, Military Occupational Code Crosswalk, Financial Planning for Transition.

**Step 4:** Capstone - The Capstone is an individual

appointment where members' career readiness standards are reviewed and documented.

"Transitioning out of the military can be extremely stressful for the service member and their family," said Franklin. "We have people who are trying to decide if they want to get out. There are a lot of things individuals must consider before making the leap. For instance, do they need to obtain certifications and experience to gain a new job outside the military? This is the type of introspection needed before parting ways."

Scott said the TAP office has been very valuable.

"I would say weigh your options, make sure you have a plan, visit the in-service recruiters, and visit the Military and Family Readiness Center for guidance," said Scott. "The MFRC has been extremely helpful during my transition. Their entire staff is amazing at what they do."

For more information on TAP, call 478-926-1256.

# BBB tip: What to know before booking a vacation package

Between booking flights, hotels, a rental car, and things to do, planning a vacation can get stressful. It's one reason many travelers turn to vacation packages, which bundle multiple aspects of your trip. Vacation packages are simpler to purchase and can save you money too.

To get the best deal and to avoid unpleasant surprises, BBB recommends the following tips when booking a vacation package.

Tips for finding and booking a vacation package:

■ **Count the cost.** The best way to know if you're getting a good deal on a vacation package is to check the price for booking each part of the vacation separately.

If a vacation package costs more than purchasing hotels, flights, rental cars, etc., separately, you might want to make your bookings instead.

■ **Be flexible to get the best deal.** Getting a better value for your vacation package is easier if you can be flexible with your dates. This is also true if you're flexible with your destination. Is your heart set on Cancun, but it's outside your budget? Why not consider a travel package that takes you to a lesser-known beach in Mexico?

The same goes for airport choices. Being open to departing from any nearby airport might save you hundreds of dollars.

■ **Know that you can extend travel dates (usually).** If you're offered a package with pre-established dates, know that most packages allow you to extend your trip or modify the dates as you see fit. You'll pay more for different dates, but it can be done. However, if you can't extend your trip for the package you're interested in, you can always find your way home.

Taking advantage of the travel package and adding your travel plans to the end of your trip is still an option.

■ **Book early or last minute.** You can also get a good deal by booking your trip early or scoring a last-minute deal. If last-minute travel plans sound stressful, consider blocking off the time earlier in the year and hunting up your travel package the week before.



**Kelvin Collins**

■ **Read the fine print.** Always read and re-read the fine print when booking a vacation package to ensure you know exactly what is included and what isn't. Airfare and your hotel might be included in the price, but what about land transfers, tips, activities, amenities, and food?

The last thing you want is to assume your package is all-inclusive, only to discover you'll need to pay for more than you expected after arriving at your destination.

■ **Check the refund and cancellation policies.** Get to know how cancellations and refunds are handled if your trip is interrupted by illness, bad weather, or other unforeseen events. You'll find this information in the fine print as well.

■ **Think about loyalty points and travel rewards.** If you travel regularly, you might want to earn points through a loyalty program you use or redeem travel rewards for your next trip. This isn't always possible when booking vacation packages.

However, it might be if you book a vacation package through the company you get rewards from. For example, if you have plenty of sky miles saved up through your favorite airline's loyalty program, try booking a vacation package through them.

■ **Watch out for scams.** As always, you'll need to watch for bad actors when searching for a good vacation package. Book through reputable vendors and be wary of travel companies you haven't heard of before. Research to ensure they have a good business reputation before booking a trip. Read plenty of reviews, keeping a close eye out for complaints and reports of scams.

For more tips and tricks to get the most out of your next family vacation, see the BBB Tip: Planning your next family vacation or trip at [www.bbb.org/all/travel-leisure](http://www.bbb.org/all/travel-leisure). You can also take some time to learn more about travel insurance and travel agents too.

## Medal of Honor spotlight

# Army Sgt. Peter Lemon

By KATIE LANGE  
DoD News

Army Sgt. Peter Charles Lemon was injured several times during a lopsided attack in Vietnam, but he took out several enemy soldiers and refused to quit fighting until he lost consciousness.

His courage to defend his base and his fellow soldiers earned him the Medal of Honor.

Lemon was born on June 5, 1950, in Toronto, to Charles and Geraldine Lemon. He has a sister, Judy, and a brother, Richard.

The family immigrated to the U.S. when Lemon was 2 and set up their new lives in Tawas City, Michigan. About a decade later, he became a naturalized citizen.

Lemon graduated from Tawas Area High School in 1968 and started working in a factory in nearby Saginaw, according to a 1971 article in the Escanaba Daily Press of Escanaba, Michigan. By then, however, the Vietnam War was raging, so Lemon enlisted in the Army in February 1969.

After basic training, Lemon



Photo courtesy defense.gov  
**Army Sgt. Peter Lemon**

received advanced infantry training. He was sent to Vietnam in late July 1969, where he went to Recondo School, which teaches select troops about long-range reconnaissance techniques and small-unit tactics. The training earned him the coveted title of Army Ranger.

By the spring of 1970, then-Spc. 4 Lemon was serving as an assistant machine gunner at Fire Support Base Illingworth, which was 5 miles from the Cambodian border and overlooked a heavily used North Vietnamese Army route. Several units were stationed

there at the time, including Lemon's — Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

The enemy obviously didn't want them there, so on April 1, the NVA launched a massive barrage of fire toward the base before sending in about 400 soldiers, who chose the perimeter defended by Lemon's platoon as their point of attack.

The fight that ensued was too close for U.S. forces to use artillery. Soldiers also reported that dust from the large NVA contingent's movement was so thick that it jammed their machine guns and rifles.

Lemon, 19, was one of those whose weapons were affected. When his machine gun and rifle eventually malfunctioned, he used hand grenades to fend off the intensifying attack.

After taking out a few enemy soldiers in his vicinity, Lemon chased down another and killed him in hand-to-hand combat. Lemon suffered fragmentation wounds from an exploding grenade but made it back to his defensive position so he could carry a more seriously wounded soldier to an aid station. Shortly afterward, Lemon was wounded a second time by enemy fire.

Ignoring his injuries, the young specialist moved back to his position through a hail of gunfire and grenades. Quickly, he realized that their defensive sector was dangerously close to being overrun by the enemy.

**See HONOR, page 3**

# Anxiety, struggles where money is concerned

(StatePoint) A new survey suggests that while consumers are decreasing their spending to get by in the current economy, they harbor some anxieties and are struggling to improve their approach to money management.

The inaugural "Wells Fargo Money Study" surveyed American adults and teens to uncover candid truths about their current finances, money stories, personal goals and other issues related to their attitudes toward money.

One overarching theme to the findings is that complicated emotions and money often go hand-in-hand. Americans are worried about money and for many, these concerns began at a young age. More than two-thirds of adults worry about money and over half of teens do.

What's more, many people reported feeling embarrassed, judged and overfocused on the subject. Some even admitted



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) JackF / iStock via Getty Images Plus

that money created tension in their family and relationships. At the same time, money is a subject that most Americans attempt to avoid.

Up to two-thirds are reluctant to talk about money, four out of five regard it as a private topic, and most Americans say it's harder to talk about than religion, politics or death.

Up to one-third of all those surveyed say they have lied about their money. And among teens, half confess they have lied about how much they spend.

The good news? While money anxieties, and some not so positive habits are common, Americans remain

**See MONEY, page 3**

# 5 things you should know about asthma, summer heat

(StatePoint) Nearly 25 million people of all ages in the United States are living with asthma, a lifelong chronic disease that makes it harder to move air in and out of the lungs.

Here's what the American Lung Association wants everyone to know during summer, when extreme heat can make asthma harder to manage.

1. **New challenges are emerging.**

Beyond traditional asthma triggers like respiratory infections, secondhand smoke and pets, new challenges are emerging.

The effects of climate change include extreme heat, poor air quality, increased allergens, extreme weather events, and more frequent and intense wildfires, all of which are making asthma more difficult to manage.

Excessive heat and humidity

increase the risk of asthma exacerbations, asthma-related hospitalization and asthma-related death, especially for children and women. Patients should limit time outdoors during heat waves, seek access to air conditioning and take steps to improve indoor air quality, as humidity allows dust mites and mold to thrive.

2. **City dwellers are particularly vulnerable.**

**See ASTHMA, page 4**

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Please submit articles, photos, etc to [don.moncrief@afge-local987.org](mailto:don.moncrief@afge-local987.org). For questions about story content, to pass on story ideas or to request coverage, please contact the aforementioned.

AGE

From page 1

a lot of times becomes the loved one.”

She reminded all to remember this is not true for everybody, but it's true for so many who go through the aging process itself. Aging, she went on, can be a little difficult to accept. "I'm turning 60 next week. I'll tell you it hits differently. I'm starting to think what's ahead of me versus what's behind me. Gosh knows my body doesn't do the things it did when I was young. I have a family history of osteoporosis. I'm a little worried about breaking bones.

"Things hurt. They ache. Out of nowhere. Something I used to be able to do and I'll feel that a few days afterwards. I've got my readers on. Almost everybody, no matter what sight you start with. Our vision becomes impaired. We do need readers for things that are close to us.

"Our hair turns silver or white and sometimes it just falls out all together. Our ears and our noses actually stretch with age and our height goes down. We get a little shorter. We lose disc height, the things that hold our vertebrae apart. I like to tell my patients. 'You know we're still a car that drives, but we're that model of a thunderbird than a Tesla. So, we're maintained. We're that classic car. We still function but we're not a new car off the lot that has all the bells and whistles associated with it.'"

As far as those physical affects, she continued, organ systems can be affected. All of them, she said, can be affected because they're all aging.

"I remember I had patients who would say, 'I don't feel old,' but I would say, 'but your brain is 87 years old.' They'd say, 'Gosh. That is old.' My heart (Friesen's, as she just celebrated a birthday the week after the workshop) is almost 60 years old. That's done a lot of beating for me. And this can show up in any of our organ systems with time."

There are also psychological effects, she continued. "Man, there's so much anti-aging

things out there. Why is there? Because there's such a stigma against aging. We don't want to think about the fact we're getting wrinkles. That we're getting sagging in places or putting on weight that is really difficult to get off.

"So sometimes we see that show up with anxiety, with stress and mental health just may decline over time."

Some theories center around the neurotransmitters that are important in keeping people happy, she said. That dopamine just isn't made the same as we get older. "So that may affect our mental health."

We've all seen the brain affect our mental health, she continued. Intelligence is one area, she said. "People may not be as smart as they used to be. Personality changes can happen. Some people get sweeter. People seem to get meaner.

"Memory skills can be affected. And talk about dementia and some of those things that can happen. Which by the way, is a very broad term. TIAs (Transient Ischemic Attacks) which is a mini stroke. Symptoms that can last 24 hours but they can be accumulative. So, you can have a lot of TIAs that just add up over time or lead to a stroke."

She continued by pointing out that people's brains don't lose their neuroplasticity. That they can still learn, and it matters if you do, she said. That matters and keeping your body moving matters, she said.

"So, it's not all is lost, this is the end. We still have a lot of living left to do and a lot of life left to give."

Things you might notice in your loved one, she went on, is perhaps going to their house and things look different.

"Sometimes they're cleaning house. They'll rearrange. Maybe they're boxing things up or giving things away. Maybe they're having more problems navigating their living space. I've had many a conversation with people about canes and walkers. 'Oh, I don't need that.' And I talk about how they can't get down the hall without it. 'Oh, I do fine in my house.' And

they do because they've got all the touch points memorized. The back of the couch as they move into the kitchen. The back of the kitchen chair until they get to the counter.

"So, watch for those kinds of things."

Also look for mobility, she said. The fact they just can't get around as much as they used to. Or they might not want to. "They're afraid of falling."

Or, she said, it may be handling their own finances or their working daily routines.

"Mom, you've worn that shirt for the fourth day in a row. 'Have I?' 'Yeah, you have.' And so we need to think about how we can help them with their hygiene.

Their appetite also changes, she continued. They're just not as hungry for food anymore as they used to be.

"You know how it is when you've had that big dinner and they bring out dessert. Oh, you just can't have another bite because you're so full. Well, people get full. And so, conversations around food can be a little bit stressing to them as well.

"So lots of things are going to be happening around that."

From there Friesen went a "little bit" deeper into what dementia itself looked like. Not everything that is dementia is Alzheimer's, she said. There's a lot that starts around cognitive impairment and in fact, she said, you'll see cognitive impairment on a lot of problem lists as "we start to get older. And it's really that stage as we're really not that sharp in our cognitive decline as we used to be and the more serious decline of dementia.

"And it's usually characterized by changes in memory, language, thinking and judgment. So just not making good decisions anymore."

She continued with: "Let's talk about Alzheimer's versus dementia. They're related but they're distinct. And dementia is really just a general term. It's a set of symptoms that affects the cognitive or thinking abilities. It affects memory and behavior and it's not a specific disease, but it's really just an

umbrella term for a lot of things.

"And then Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia and it's a progressive neurodegenerative disorder that again primarily affects memory and cognitive functions. So Alzheimer's is a special type of dementia characterized by a memory loss and dementia is a general term.

"So if a doctor says you have dementia or your loved one has dementia it's really not a diagnosis. It's a description. That's really more like saying you have baldness or your hair is thinning. The real question is what's causing this? Because there are a lot of things. Maybe your loved one has a B-12 deficiency. Maybe they need their thyroid checked. Maybe their oxygen is off.

"We've also see, it's called the great masquerader: depression. Depression can really look like dementia, so don't stop at a diagnosis, which really isn't a diagnosis. Figure out what's causing that, so we can get a little deeper."

What does the diagnostic process look like, she continued. Well, it's an evaluation by a medical doctor, she said, but it's also a medical history, symptoms, progression, the rate of progression, any medical conditions, such as they're on thyroid medication and they stopped it.

"It's getting those kinds of things going. It's a physical exam. And then they do something specific, which is called cognitive or neurological testing. Also do lab tests and brain imaging as well."

Once that diagnosis is made, she continued, the question might be: Who's going to care for your loved one? It could be their primary care physician, she said, "if they feel they're competent to do that. They feel this is something they're able to do that. Maybe a neurologist. That's going to be a consultation. It could be a geriatrician, someone who specializes in care of older adults. Sometimes a neuropsychologist will be an ongoing thing. And then sometimes psychiatry also gets involved."

*Continued next issue.*

HONOR

From page 2

Without hesitation, Lemon pressed his counterattack, throwing hand grenades and engaging in hand-to-hand combat with enemy soldiers. He was injured a third time during the melee but still managed to successfully drive the enemy back.

Then, after finding a machine gun that worked, Lemon stood on top of an embankment and, despite being in full view of the enemy, fired until he collapsed from his wounds and exhaustion. Lemon was taken to an aid station where he regained consciousness, but even then, he refused to leave the area until his more seriously injured comrades were evacuated.

When the nearly three-hour battle was over, 24 U.S. soldiers were dead and more

than 50 were wounded. Lemon was hospitalized for more than a month after the attack. He was also promoted to sergeant.

Lemon came home from Vietnam later that year. On June 15, 1971, he received the Medal of Honor from President Richard M. Nixon during a ceremony at the White House. The young soldier dedicated it to three of his closest friends who died in the battle — Sgt. Casey Waller, Cpl. Nathan Mann and Sgt. Brent Street.

Lemon left the Army the following year and returned to academics. He got a bachelor's degree from Colorado State University in 1979, then received his master's degree in business administration from the University of Northern Colorado two years later.

He and his wife, Diane, whom he married a few months before he received the Medal of Honor, have three children.

Lemon went on to have a successful career with various corporations and as a professional speaker. He also volunteered much of his time to schools, veterans' groups and other organizations.

In 1978, Lemon received the Certificate of Outstanding Achievement from President Jimmy Carter for his community efforts. In May 2009, he was presented with the Outstanding American by Choice award by President Barack Obama.

Lemon, who settled in Colorado Springs, Colorado, continues to receive accolades for his work and valor.

He was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame in 1994. In 2020, a portion of a highway in Michigan going through his hometown was named in his honor. Reports show Lemon also donated his Medal of Honor to his former high school in 2005 to serve as an inspiration to students.

MONEY

From page 2

optimistic about where their money stories are heading and believe there are solutions to helping them make improvements. Large majorities of respondents say they would value help from their bank in being more intentional and thoughtful about their spending, and in aligning their choices with their values.

Most of those surveyed also see their bank as a potential source of education on financial subjects.

For additional survey insights, visit [sites.wf.com/wfmoney-study](https://www.wf.com/wfmoney-study).

"The data tells us that Americans — no matter who they are — are uncertain about the sustainability of their financial lives. However, making small, incremental changes can help you accomplish your financial goals, and become more open and honest about your money habits," says Michael Liersch, head of Advice and Planning for Wells Fargo.

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**AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO**

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Actions/decisions:

Chili's Grill and Bar to settle EEOC sexual harassment lawsuit

DALLAS – Brinker International Payroll Company L.P., doing business as Chili's Grill & Bar Restaurant in Prosper, Texas, has settled a sexual harassment lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency announced recently. Under the terms of a court-approved consent decree resolving the case, the employer will pay \$75,000 to two female teenage employees and is required to take specific steps to ensure a safer workplace environment by implementing more effective processes to prevent and respond to concerns about sexual harassment.

According to the EEOC's suit, Chili's violated federal law when it allowed for the female employees to be subjected to a sexually hostile environment at its restaurant. The EEOC described the primary harasser as a 36-year-old male employee who frequently made vulgar sexual comments to a 16-year-old female coworker before he ultimately groped and kissed her while at work. When the female employee complained about the sexually offensive conduct, management failed or refused to take appropriate action.

The EEOC charged that instead of conducting a meaningful onsite investigation, Chili's simply relied on a telephonic, offsite "Team Member Relations" inquiry and then took no effective action to address the harasser or the environment. The lawsuit also charged that other adult male employees repeatedly and openly made sexual remarks to the younger female employees in the presence of managers without consequences. The EEOC also alleged that employees had not been trained on the company's anti-harassment policy, and that managers had not monitored the worksite to observe and deter the unlawful conduct.

The consent decree settling the suit, entered by U.S. District Judge Ada Brown on November 14, 2023, prohibits future discrimination and retaliation and, in addition to the monetary relief, requires the employer to ensure that employees are regularly trained. It further requires Chili's to provide annual training to management on discriminatory conduct in the workplace and effective responses to observed, reported, or known sexual harassment.

The employer must now provide periodic reports to the EEOC with information regarding any complaints of sexual harassment at the Prosper location. Reporting to the agency will include information about each sex harassment complaint, the identities and positions of both the complainant and the harasser, date and description of each incident, and information as to the company's human resources personnel involved, and an accounting of the remedial actions taken.

Citizens Bank, N.A. to pay \$100,000 to settle EEOC disability discrimination lawsuit

NEW YORK – Citizens Bank, N.A., will implement company-wide policy changes and pay \$100,000 to a former employee of its Cranston, Rhode Island call center to resolve a disability discrimination lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency announced recently.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, Citizens Bank refused to accommodate a call center employee after he developed an anxiety disorder and requested to be reassigned to a position that did not require him to field calls with aggravated customers over the phone.

Despite having hundreds of nearby job openings, Citizens Bank refused to reassign the employee or discuss alternative accommodations until he returned to his job at the call center, the same position his disability prevented him from performing. As a result, the employee was forced to resign, the EEOC said.

In addition to the monetary relief, the 30-month consent decree requires Citizens Bank to provide noncompetitive reassignment as a potential reasonable accommodation for all employees with disabilities. The decree also requires Citizens Bank to revise its reasonable accommodation policy; train its employees that noncompetitive reassignment can be a reasonable accommodation; provide specialized training to members of its human resources department; and appoint an internal monitor to ensure Citizens Bank's compliance with the decree.

Cloudbeds to pay \$150,000 to resolve EEOC disability discrimination lawsuit

BOSTON – Remote-first global technology company Digital Arbitrage, Inc., doing business as Cloudbeds, will pay \$150,000 to resolve a disability discrimination lawsuit filed by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency announced recently.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, during their hiring process Cloudbeds failed to provide an accommodation to Peter St. John, a well-qualified candidate in IT administration who is deaf and uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate. Cloudbeds terminated his candidacy on the basis that verbal communication and hearing were job requirements for the position in a remote setting.

The alleged conduct violated the American with Disabilities Act, which requires employers to engage with applicants to identify and provide reasonable accommodations, and prohibits employers from discriminating against qualified applicants based on their disability. The EEOC filed suit in U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts (EEOC v. Digital Arbitrage, Inc. d/b/a Cloudbeds, Civ. A No. 1:23-cv-11856-RGS) after first attempting to reach a pre-litigation settlement through its conciliation process.

Under the terms of the three-year consent decree, Cloudbeds will pay \$150,000 in damages to St. John and will provide significant non-monetary relief designed to ensure equal employment opportunities for the deaf and hard of hearing in its remote-first workplace. In addition to updates to the company's reasonable accommodation policy and annual training for management and human resource employees about discrimination law, Cloudbeds will issue an annual executive video message on the company's commitment to ensuring that people who are deaf and hard of hearing are provided reasonable accommodations.

The company's human resource personnel will also complete an online training focused on integrating deaf employees into the workplace, and Cloudbeds will designate one human resources team member to complete additional training on assistive technologies that deaf or hard of hearing employees or applicants may use to communicate in the workplace.

# 4 Trends Showing Mental Health is a Continued Challenge for Americans

FAMILY FEATURES

People with outward appearances of success, productivity and happiness often still deal with internal struggles. Mental health challenges continue to affect Americans, with nearly 3 of 4 (73%) U.S. adults reporting struggles with mental health in 2023.

These findings come from a mental health survey commissioned by RedBox Rx, a telehealth and online pharmacy provider, and conducted by Morning Consult.

“Mental health remains a struggle for many Americans,” said Dr. Daniel Fick, RedBox Rx’s chief medical officer. “The findings from this study demonstrate more resources and support are needed to help individuals manage their mental health, especially younger adults. We are focused on fulfilling this need by offering easy-to-access, affordable, discreet and convenient telehealth care and treatment for those struggling with mental health.”

In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, consider these mental health trends identified in the survey:

## 1. Younger Generations are More Likely to Report Mental Health Struggles, Worsening Mental Health

Gen Zers and Millennials are more likely to report having mental health struggles and more likely to say those struggles worsened in the past year. In fact, 41% of Gen Zers and 36% of Millennials reported more mental health struggles in the past year compared with 21% of adults ages 45 and older.

## 2. Specific Life Events Affect People Differently

Some life events appear to affect people differently. For example, getting divorced or separated and becoming pregnant or having a child are linked with both worsening and improving mental health. Getting engaged or married and using a dating app are equally likely to be linked with both positive and negative impacts on mental health.

## 3. Younger Generations Endure Life Events Linked with Worsening Mental Health

Gen Zers and Millennials more frequently experience life events having the strongest links to worsening mental health. They more

commonly report loneliness and a failure to achieve life goals, stressors also linked to worsening mental health. For example, 53% of Gen Zers reported feelings of loneliness and 52% shared feelings of failure to achieve life goals, compared with 39% and 34%, respectively, of all adults sampled.

The research also found recent life experiences, whether relational or personal, are linked to the state of one’s mental health. Those suffering from worsening mental health were more likely to have experienced:

- Being a victim of verbal or emotional abuse
- Being a victim of physical violence
- The lack of a healthy home environment
- The lack of a healthy work environment
- Attending college or university
- The breakdown in a relationship with a close family member

According to the study, if you’ve experienced verbal or emotional abuse – which is 12% more prevalent among Gen Zers – you are more than twice as likely to report worsening mental health.

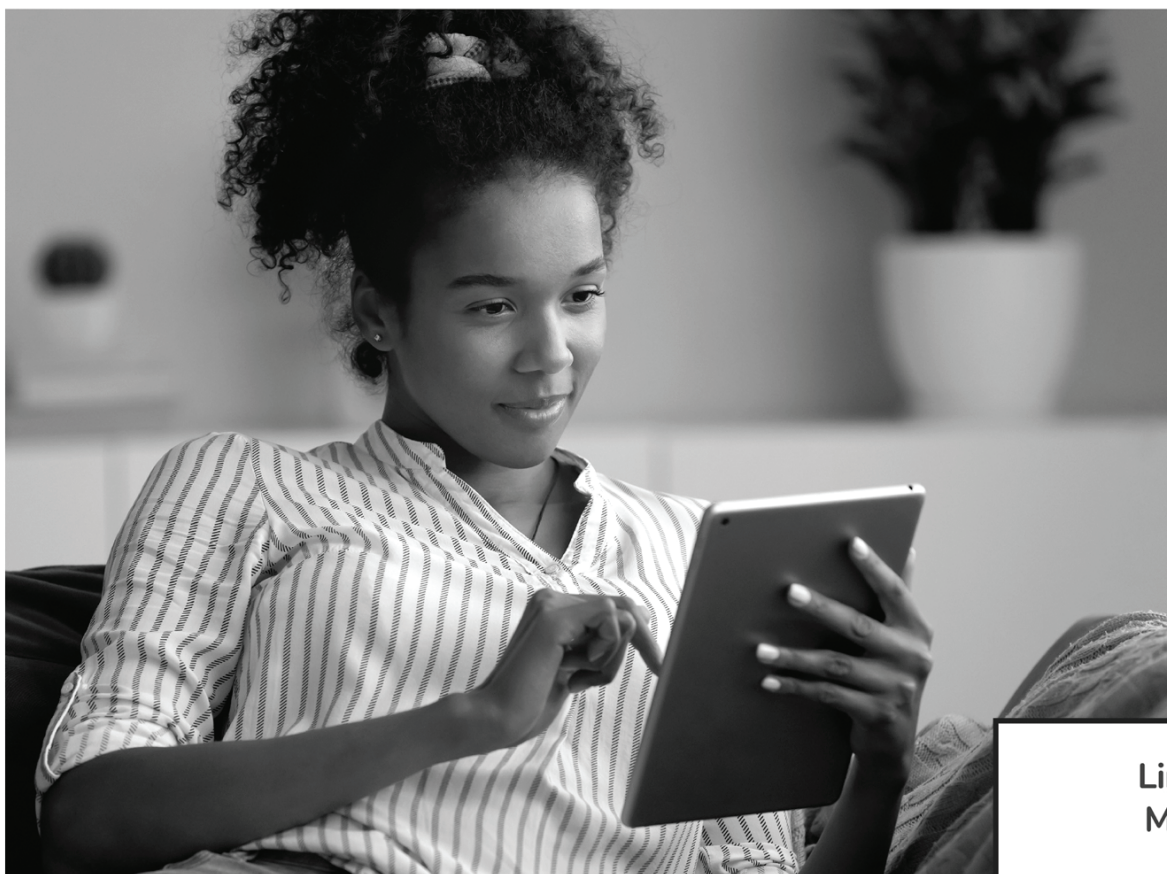


Photo courtesy of Shutterstock

## 4. Despite Mental Health Struggles, Most Americans Aren’t Seeking Professional Care

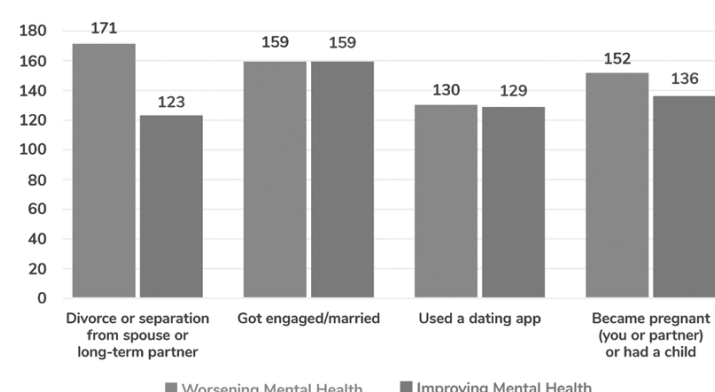
Even though mental health struggles are widespread among American adults, more than 6 out of 10 (63%) with consistent or worsening mental health struggles have not sought professional care, such as therapy or medications, in the past year.

Those not seeking care tend to downplay their situations or cite the cost of care as a barrier. Through its discreet, low-cost service model, RedBox Rx’s online platform makes it easy for patients to quickly schedule telehealth visits and privately meet with licensed medical providers to get help with treating a variety of mental health conditions including anxiety and depression, adult ADHD and insomnia.

“Telehealth offers an effective and convenient way for patients to easily access care for mental health conditions,” Fick said.

To view the full report, access infographics from the study and find more information about mental health therapy and medical treatments, visit RedBoxRx.com.

## Linkage Between Life Events and Mental Health (Indexed to 100 Scale)



Some life events appear to affect people differently. For example, getting engaged or married is equally likely to be linked with improving or worsening mental health.

Source: RedBox Rx Mental Health Survey – Conducted by Morning Consult (December 2023)

RedBox Rx

## ASTHMA

From page 2

Two-thirds of the average U.S. city is made up of roads, parking spaces, sidewalks and roofs. Since these surfaces are typically dark and non-porous, they contribute to flooding, increased air pollution, poor health and what is known as “urban heat,” a phenomenon in which cities experience warmer temperatures than surrounding areas.

Urban heat, combined with pollutants from power plants, motor vehicles and other pollution sources, creates ozone pollution, also known as smog. Those with asthma can experience symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing and coughing from both ground-level ozone and particle pollution, as well as from the impacts of extreme weather and airborne allergens.

Sadly, these issues disproportionately impact certain communities. Due to a history of discriminatory practices like systematic denial of mortgages, insurance loans, and other financial



PHOTO SOURCE: (c) JackF / iStock via Getty Images Plus

services on the basis of race and ethnicity, Black and Indigenous people, and other people of color, are more likely to be living in areas impacted by urban heat and poor air quality.

**3.** Increased severe storms due to climate change results in more flooding, which can harm lung health. Chemicals, sewage, oil, gas and other

dangerous substances found in floodwaters can pose health risks, and mold, associated with asthma attacks, can grow anywhere there is water or dampness.

**4.** Advocacy efforts are underway.

The Smart Surfaces Coalition is made up of 40 national and international organizations committed to

making Smart Surfaces the global urban design standard. Smart Surfaces encompass a suite of cutting-edge technologies, including reflective (cool) roofs and pavements, green roofs, trees, solar panels and rain gardens.

Designed to mitigate urban heat, enhance air quality and improve health, these transformative urban features can cool cities by 5 degrees F, reduce flooding, provide economic benefits and potentially advance environmental justice.

The American Lung Association, an active member of the Smart Surfaces Coalition, encourages cities to take these actions:

- Install light-colored roads, parking lots and driveways to reflect sunlight and reduce heat.
- Install solar panels to convert sunlight into electricity and provide shade for roofs.
- Plant trees to increase shade.
- Select porous surfaces to collect polluted stormwater, soak it into the ground, and filter out pollution.

Other strategies to reduce urban heat, air pollution and ozone levels

include using public transportation, carpooling, increasing green spaces and installing cooling centers in extreme conditions.

**5.** Resources are available. Educational programming can help people better manage the disease in summer and year-round. Patients can check out the self-management education programs, information and tools available at Lung.org/asthma or call the American Lung Association’s Lung Helpline at 1-800-LUNGUSA.

Living with an illness, or being the caretaker to someone who is, can take a physical and emotional toll. Patients can get support and knowledge, and connect with others by joining the Lung Association’s Patient & Caregiver Network.

For the 24.8 million Americans living with asthma, extreme summer temperatures and emerging environmental threats can make life more difficult.

Fortunately, new educational resources and expanded programming can help patients navigate new and old challenges alike.

# Why you should avoid DIY dental trends

(StatePoint) DIY activities, like swapping a lighting fixture or painting your living room, are popular ways to accomplish your to-do list.

But as anyone who has tackled too big of a project knows, some jobs are best left to the professionals. That includes your dental health.

You may have already seen DIY dentistry products, such as at-home whitening kits, mouthguards or teeth aligners.

These often guarantee fast, easy ways to solve your oral health issues without the involvement of a dentist or an orthodontist (a dentist who specializes in the bite and alignment of your teeth).

“Dental products are never one-size-fits-all,” said American Dental Association president, Linda Edgar, D.D.S. “No two mouths are alike, which is why it’s important to work directly with an ADA dentist or orthodontist to determine the precise care that your body needs.”

Skipping the dentist chair and “fixing” your teeth at home can lead to bigger, sometimes

irreversible problems. For some people with more complex dental health needs, using an at-home aligner may cause bone loss, lost teeth, receding gums, bite problems, jaw pain and other damaging and permanent issues.

You might also not be aware of other dental issues that should be addressed before you start moving teeth.

“Patients are understandably drawn to these DIY treatments because they might struggle to fit a dentist appointment into their schedule or they assume at-home care will cost less,” Dr. Edgar said. “But when these products cause major issues, patients end up spending more time and more money trying to reverse that damage. Instead, trained ADA dentists and orthodontists can talk through patients’ budget concerns and offer them a wider variety of dependable, approved treatment options.”

In between dental checkups, look for products with the ADA Seal of Acceptance. These have been independently evaluated by experts and recognized

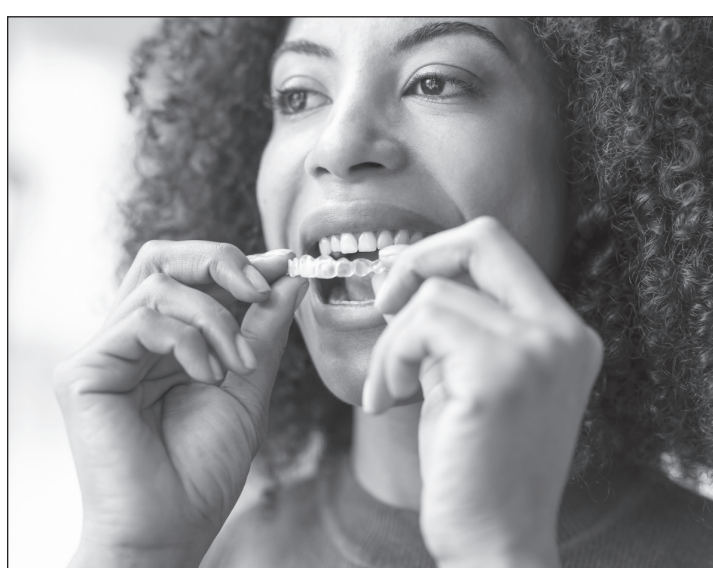


PHOTO SOURCE: (c) nensuria / iStock via Getty Images

to be both safe and effective. When you choose one of these options, you can be assured that your care is backed by evidence-based research and generations of scientific knowledge.

Whether it’s teeth grinding or a toothache, talk to your dentist before trying to solve your dental problems on your own.

A dentist can help you find a personalized treatment plan

that’s right for you, monitor your progress and make recommendations on how to manage your oral health outside of the office.

To look for an ADA dentist in your area, visit findadentist.ada.org.

“The ADA’s primary concerns with DIY dentistry are, and always have been, patient safety and quality care,” Dr. Edgar said. “Our job as dentists is to put patient health first.”

UNION MEMBERSHIP is like a gym membership.

Dues are paid to be part of a group with similar interests and goals.

But, just like a gym, if we don't show up, invest our time – or participate, we do not get

STRONGER.

Unions are workers joining together to lift the standard of living for all.

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# Take Family Favorites Al Fresco



## Southwest Ranch Taco Salad

Total time: 25 minutes

- 1/2 head romaine lettuce
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 2 small avocados
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 pound ground beef (80/20 ground chuck)
- 2 teaspoons Newman's Own Mild Taco Seasoning
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 can (15 1/2 ounces) black beans
- 1 1/2 cups canned corn
- 1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, plus additional for serving (optional), divided

- 1 cup Newman's Own Southwest Ranch Dressing
- 6 ounces tortilla chips

Coarsely chop lettuce, halve cherry tomatoes and pit, peel and slice avocados. Set aside.

In large frying pan over medium-high heat, heat olive oil. Brown ground beef, stirring occasionally, 4-5 minutes. Add taco seasoning and water; cook according to package directions, 5-8 minutes, or until meat is thoroughly cooked.

Drain and rinse black beans. Set aside.

Divide lettuce among serving bowls or plates. Top with ground beef, tomatoes, avocados, black beans, corn, cheese and 2 tablespoons cilantro. Tuck in tortilla chips.

Drizzle with southwest ranch dressing and sprinkle with additional cilantro, if desired.



Advice for enjoying easy meals outdoors

### FAMILY FEATURES

Bright sunshine, warm patios and fresh foods go hand in hand. As warm weather and sunny days call you outdoors, bring the whole family along with favorite meals that blend perfectly with a soft breeze and the subtle sounds of nature.

Al fresco dining doesn't have to be difficult. Just gather a few supplies, whip up a favorite recipe or two and ask for a hand in heading outside. Take these tips into account to help ensure your backyard dining goes off without a hitch.

### Create a Cozy Spot

Dinner in the backyard means convenience and the comfort of your own patio furniture, but you can always enhance the experience with an umbrella to add a touch of shade or a small fan on those still, steamy evenings. If a busy day means a later dinner, hanging strings of soft lighting can help illuminate the table.

### Make It Fresh

Salad season means fresh ingredients from lettuce and veggies to favorite toppings and beyond. Add a crisp bite to your next al fresco occasion with this Southwest Ranch Taco Salad featuring Newman's Own's Southwest Ranch Dressing. The dressing is creamy and smoky with a kick of spice and features no artificial flavors, no colors from artificial sources and no MSG, making it a perfect companion for salads and dips. In fact, you can enjoy this seasonal salad even more knowing that 100% of profits from the sale of the dressing goes toward helping nourish and transform the lives of children facing adversity.

### Don't Forget the Essentials

No outdoor meal is complete without a few must-have utensils. Avoid trips back and forth from the house by writing a list of everything you need so you don't head to the deck without forks to share a salad or napkins to help clean up the mess. Bring the basics like plates, cups, utensils, napkins and a cloth to rest food on. Don't leave behind serving spoons, trash bags and other convenience items that make al fresco dining a breeze.

### Serve a Perfect Salad Partner

While a hearty salad alone is enough for a filling al fresco meal, you can take your backyard dining to the next level with the perfect partner for satisfying salads: crudites. Arranged neatly on a platter or board, a seasonal variety of sliced or whole raw vegetables such as snap peas, celery, carrots, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, mini bell peppers, broccoli and more can make for a perfect accompaniment to nearly any outdoor meal. Serve with a dip or two, such as Newman's Own's Southwest Ranch Dressing, to complete your al fresco appetizer.

To find more al fresco food options that give back, visit [NewmansOwn.com](http://NewmansOwn.com).

## Your Union Insurance Benefits

- Life:** Permanent, Portable, Cash Value, Living Benefits. A Much Better Plan than FEGLI.
- Dental & Vision:** 3 Plans to choose from, dependent children covered to age 26, extended family is eligible for their own plan.
- Aflac Accident:** Pays over fifty Benefits for on or off-the-job accidents.
- Aflac Hospital Indemnity:** Pays Benefits for on and off-the-job accidents and sickness/surgery/maternity.
- Aflac Critical Illness:** Pays Benefits up to \$30,000 upon the occurrence of cancer, heart attack, stroke, and many other Critical Illnesses.

### NEW AFLAC DISABILITY

- Pays benefits for off-job accidents, sickness (covid included), surgery, & maternity.
- No health questions asked to enroll.
- Benefit amounts up to \*\$6,000 per month.
- It can be used with leave, or independently.

\*Max Benefit of \$6,000 per month.



**Nick Wells**  
 Cell: (478) 538-1652  
 Email: [NWells@Benefitarchitects.com](mailto:NWells@Benefitarchitects.com)

## YOUNG

### Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation

The AFGE Young Organizing Unionists for the Next Generation program seeks to mobilize young union members to become leaders and activists for social change within AFGE and the Labor Movement.

AFGE members who are under the age of 40 and those mentors that are over 40 work together to include younger workers into

the union structure and keep them engaged in what's at stake for working class Americans. YOUNG intends to provide young members with networking opportunities and resources to engage in mobilizing other young workers into AFGE, union training to promote leadership skills, innovative social gatherings, AFGE conference meetings, and other engaging events. In doing so, partici-

pants work to build lasting labor solidarity, advance issues of social and economic justice, and find more inclusive ways to engage the current and future generations in the Labor Movement.

For more information, or to get involved at the Local 987 level, contact Brandon Respress at [brandon.respress@afgelo-cal987.org](mailto:brandon.respress@afgelo-cal987.org).