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Scalise loses bid to lead House GOP



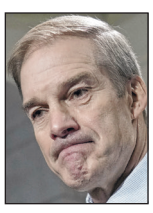
ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO BY JACQUELYN MARTIN

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, talks with reporters after a House GOP leadership candidate forum and before elections for the 120th Congress on Tuesday.

Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan elected minority leader

BY MARK BALLARD
Staff writer

WASHINGTON – House Majority Leader Steve Scalise lost his bid to lead Republicans when they assume the minority next year, ending a historic three-year period when the two top leaders in the lower chamber were both from Louisiana.



Jordan

House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, will become House minority leader after winning a secret 106-73 vote. He will be the highest-ranking Republican official come Jan. 3, when the 120th Congress takes office.

Scalise, R-Jefferson, is now set to return to the rank and file in the next Congress.

"I look forward to supporting my colleagues and continuing to fight for the American people," Scalise wrote on X Tuesday evening, congratulating the new leadership.

"I look forward to supporting my colleagues and continuing to fight for the American people."

REP. STEVE SCALISE,
in a post on X

Senate Republicans, who also lost the majority in last week's midterm elections, were more forgiving of their leadership. GOP senators reelected Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., as their chief.

Scalise's fellow LSU alum, Speaker Mike Johnson, R-Benton, bowed out of leadership for the next Congress after voters repudiated President Donald Trump and Republican governing priorities in the elections last week. Johnson has led the House since October 2023, with Scalise as his top lieutenant — it is the first time in history the institution's two top leaders are from the same state.

Johnson refused to say who he voted for but noted that Jordan had been a mentor when he arrived in 2017. He also rejected the notion that a majority of House Republicans were angered at the election results. Democrats went from 214 House seats — 218 are needed to win the majority — to at least 256 seats in the next Congress with a couple dozen races still to be decided.

"The election of Jim Jordan is a sign of the members' confidence for him," Johnson said. "The signal being sent here is we are ready for the fight. … Jim Jordan knows how to do this."

Jordan said at the same news conference that the Republican minority will oppose Democrats in committee, on the floor and on the stump "every single day." "Over the next

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STAFF FILE PHOTO BY BRAD KEMP

Borden Dairy has operated a plant on Bertrand Drive in Lafayette for 60 years.

Borden Dairy to close Lafayette facility

150 jobs to be eliminated when plant is shuttered

BY ADAM DAIGLE
Acadiana business editor

Borden Dairy will close its 60-year-old Bertrand Drive plant in Lafayette, eliminating 150 jobs.

Company officials announced the closure to employees on Tuesday and confirmed the closure later in the day, Acadiana News First reported. The plant will cease operations Jan. 9.

In a statement provided to employees on Tuesday and obtained by ANF, owner New Dairy/Borden said it made the decision to permanently close the plant.

"We understand the profound impact this news has on our employees and their families," the statement read. "We are fully committed to managing these transitions with the utmost respect, dignity and support for our employees. We are actively coordinating with our customers and suppliers and will communicate operational adjustments directly as they occur."

The number of employees had decreased from recent years. Data from the Lafayette Economic Development Authority had the employee count at 235 in its 2024-25 report.

It is believed to be the first plant closure for Borden since 2022, records show.

Borden filed for bankruptcy in 2020, and in 2021 it was sold to Capitol Peak Partners for $340 million.

Before its bankruptcy, Borden had 12 manufacturing facilities across the United States and more than 75 distribution centers. It was the only purchaser of milk for 259 independent family

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Hilliard Art Museum hires new curator

Move amid major expansion, renovation

BY KRISTIN ASKELSON
Staff writer

The Hilliard Art Museum at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette has named architect and exhibition designer Jonathan Boelkins as its new curator, bringing an experienced designer to the museum as it expands its programming, renovates a historic building and works to make its permanent collection more accessible.



Boelkins

Boelkins, who joined the museum this fall, will oversee its exhibitions and permanent collection, which includes works ranging from ancient Egyptian artifacts to contemporary art by Louisiana artists.

His first exhibition, featuring works from the collection, is scheduled to open in the spring.

The appointment comes as

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ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

An oil platform stands in the Gulf off the Louisiana coast near Grand Isle.

Shallow water drilling off La. coast gets boost

Energy Department loans $480M to Texas firm

BY JONAH MEADOWS
Staff writer

The Trump administration is investing nearly $500 million in a new program to modernize offshore drilling platforms and old pipelines in the shallow waters of the Gulf off the coast of Louisiana, a move the administration says will stimulate domestic oil and gas production and create new jobs.

At an event in Luling on Tuesday, U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright announced that the Department of Energy has loaned $480 million to Texas-based Arena Energy, an offshore oil and gas producer, to modernize 22 platforms, build or refurbish 450 miles of pipelines and allow Arena to operate a second drilling rig.

The loan will cover 80% of Project Elkhorn, as the initiative is called. Once completed, it is expected to more than double the company's rate of oil production and significantly increase its natural gas production in an area called Southern Eugene Island about 170

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SHALLOW

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miles southwest of New Orleans.

"This is an area of the shelf that we call the tenderloin," Arena Energy CEO Mike Minarovic said. "It has the best prospects, the best opportunities to continue the shelf for as long as possible."

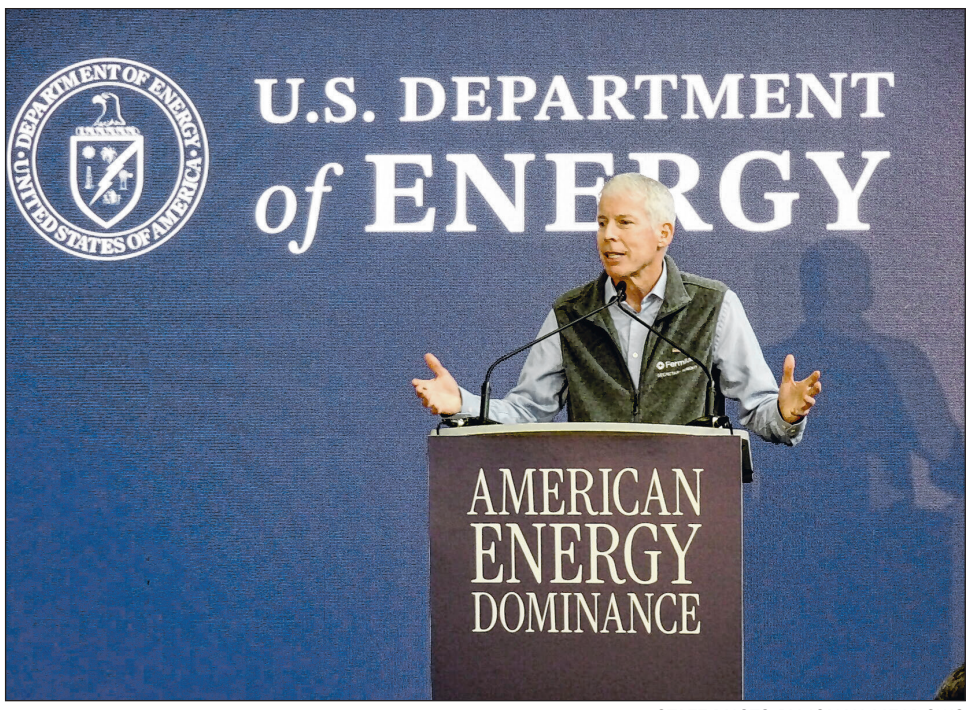
Wright along with other federal and state officials joined staff of Arena and its affiliated companies, White Fleet Drilling and Rosefield Pipeline, at the announcement of the new infrastructure project. Company officials said it would bring 2,400 construction jobs and 400 permanent operations roles to the Gulf, where Arena already has nearly 400 contractors.

The project signals a return to shallow water drilling in the coast, once the mainstay of the state's energy industry. Over the past two decades, many major oil companies sold off their shallow-water Gulf platforms, as fields became depleted, and moved into deeper water, which offered far greater returns on their investment.

In the years since, they have sold their assets to newer, smaller companies like Arena, which was founded in 1999 and bought its Eugene Island assets from Chevron in 2016. Since then, it has drilled 26 wells in depths of 110 to 180 feet.

Greg Upton, executive director of LSU Energy Institute, said higher oil prices and new technology make drilling in mature fields on the continental shelf more profitable and efficient, especially in places where production can come online relatively quickly.

"Investment in the Gulf has increasingly shifted toward deepwater projects, which tend to favor larger companies with the capital to undertake major developments," Upton said. "This investment focuses instead on extending the productive life of existing shelf infrastructure."



STAFF PHOTO BY JONAH MEADOWS

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright announces the Energy Department's first loan to an oil and gas producer through the Energy Dominance Financing Program, a $480 million loan to Texas-based Arena Energy, at an event Tuesday in Luling.

First time

Wright said the project was only possible with government assistance, pointing to a lack of private financing for offshore drilling in shallower waters of the continental shelf, despite plenty of available capital for on-shore and deepwater projects.

"This is a loan that leads to development that otherwise would not happen or would happen at a much slower pace," Wright said. "It's like if you had to build a home without a mortgage, you would build your home very slowly."

It's the first time an oil or gas company has been the recipient of a loan from the Office of Energy Dominance Financing, which was known as the Office of Loan Financing when it was created two decades earlier.

Last year, the Trump administration rebranded the program after Congress eliminated a requirement for its loans to support energy infrastructure projects like wind and solar that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

"President Trump got elected to reverse policies that were making it harder to do that in our country, standing in the way of energy production and celebrating the closure of coal plants or large manufacturing facilities, pushing industry outside of our country," Wright said. "That just makes no sense."

Wright said his department isn't feeling any time pressure to get the money out the door before shifts in the political climate.

The loan, he said, will "quite easily" get paid back from the cash flow of the new wells as they are developed, plus the federal government will get an estimated $1.5 billion in additional royalties.

Minarovic said his company will put up about $120 million as part of Project Elkhorn over the next five years, with another $2.5 billion of private investment to pay for the drilling.

"A simple way to look at this is that the landowner — the federal government in this case — owns a significant royalty interest, and the landowner wants to encourage development by offering an infrastructure loan to the company that is willing to develop that acreage and commit to significant drilling capital," Minarovic said.

Banks are not interested in investing in these aging oil and gas assets, Minarovic said. Arena has already spent about $30 million on some of the decaying platforms to bring them back online after they were shuttered by their previous operator.

"So we stepped into their shoes and purchased those properties, usually for abandonment obligations, because they had a significant abandonment obligation," he said. "Then we had to invest in the infrastructure to get these things up and running again, because there was corrosion and there were a lot of issues."

Dustin Davidson, secretary of the Louisiana Department of Conservation and Energy, said the project will also preserve opportunities for recreational fishing, with Arena committing to the "rigs to reefs" program to preserve the marine habitats that have developed on platforms over decades.

"Arena has taken steps to make sure that that habitat stays in place and also worked very hard to ensure that the federal government recognizes that habitat just as much as we do here in Louisiana," Davidson said.

Davidson suggested Project Elkhorn would also help pay for the state's coastal restoration efforts.

But because Gulf Coast states' share of federal offshore oil and gas royalties awarded under the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act reaches its maximum amount every year, more drilling revenue is not expected to translate to more revenue for the state, according to Upton.

"We project that eligible revenues will continue to reach the cap for the foreseeable future," he said. "As long as the cap remains binding, additional federal royalties will not translate into larger GOMESA payments to Louisiana or its coastal parishes."

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BORDEN

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farms across the country, records show. Its customers included Walmart, Starbucks, Food Lion and independent school districts.

Following its Chapter 11 bankruptcy and subsequent acquisition, Borden Dairy scaled back and consolidated its footprint.

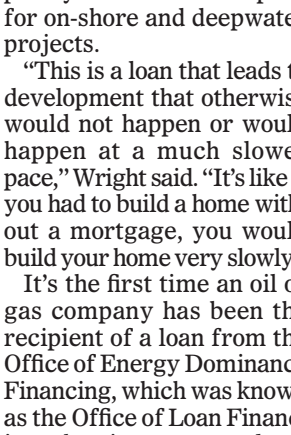
By late 2022, after closing plants in Alabama, Mississippi, Illinois and Wisconsin, the Lafayette facility was one of just five fluid milk plants Borden still operated nationwide alongside sites in Ohio, Kentucky, Georgia and Florida.

The Borden Company officially opened the facility at 1308 Bertrand Drive in late April 1966 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Lafayette Mayor J. Rayburn Bertrand. The 33,400-square-foot facility featured modern equipment and processing procedures at the time, archives show.

In its early years, the plant was a vital economic anchor for local agriculture. By 1967, the center employed 92 people with an annual payroll of $711,839. During 1967 alone, Borden spent more than $2.11 million buying fluid milk from dairy farmers within Lafayette Parish and a 25-mile radius, distributing products across eight Acadiana parishes.

When Borden closed its Baton Rouge facility on Plank Road in 2013, it consolidated those Louisiana bottling operations into the Lafayette plant.





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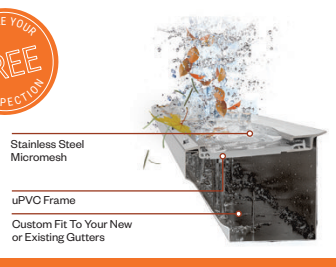


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SCALISE

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two years House Republicans will fight for American families," he said.

Democrats are expected to select House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., as the first Black speaker of the House in January.

'Battle-tested'

Scalise faced Republican members wanting a clean sweep after such a staggering loss for the GOP last week.

Scalise's pitch Tuesday morning leaned into his mastery of Congress's sometimes bewildering rules, coupled with his deep knowledge of the wants and needs of the often-fractured House Republican Conference. He also reminded colleagues of tens of millions of dollars he has raised and distributed to his colleagues, along with tireless campaigning in their districts.

Jordan, 62, said he was "battle-tested." He argued that he would "spotlight how radical" the Democrats are while presenting alternatives and connecting directly with voters. He was first elected in 2007 and was a co-founder of the ultra-conservative House Freedom Caucus.



STAFF PHOTO BY ALLISON ROBBERT

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, center, heads to the House GOP leadership forum at the Capitol on Tuesday.

House Republican members also reelected Rep. Tom Emmer, R-Minn., as the House Minority Whip, which is second-in-command for the party out of power, for the next two years. He defeated Rep. August Pfluger, R-Texas.

Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., was chosen as chair of the Republican Conference, and Rep. Brian Jack, R-Ga., was elected to chair the congressional GOP's campaign arm.

All Republican members who will serve next year, including representatives new to Congress, were allowed to vote, as were GOP candidates whose runoffs are still pending. That includes state Sen. Blake Miguez, R-New Iberia, who is in a December runoff in Louisiana's 6th Congressional District, and state Rep. Gabe Firment, R-Pollock, who is in a runoff for the 5th Congressional District. Both Miguez and Firment were in Washington to attend briefings for new members.

After serving in the Louisiana Legislature for a dozen years, Scalise came to the House in May 2008 to replace Bobby Jindal, who had been elected governor. He won reelection last week to his district, which includes a handful of precincts in uptown New Orleans but mostly covers the heavily GOP suburbs of Jefferson and southeast parishes, along with the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

He rose from chair of the Republican Study Committee to become the GOP whip in both the majority and minority from 2014 to 2023, when Scalise's bid to replace Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., as House speaker came up short, as did Jordan's effort for the post. After three weeks of disarray, Scalise endorsed elevating Johnson from the back bench to speaker and he was elected House Majority Leader.

He was nearly killed in 2017 when a gunman opened fire on GOP players practicing for the annual congressional baseball game against Democratic members to benefit charity. In 2023, Scalise had to take off a few weeks to successfully treat a blood cancer.

What's next for Johnson?

Unlike recent Republican speakers who quit the House entirely after losing the party's majority and thus control of the legislative agenda, Johnson told reporters Monday that he plans to remain in office throughout the rest of the year.

But he did not commit to returning to Congress next year to continue representing people who live along the state's western border from the Arkansas line to Cameron Parish.

"I'm still in charge here until early January," Johnson told reporters Monday, according to a MSNOW video of the news conference. "We're going to do our duty. And after that, my commitment and my objective is to help my team ensure that the Republican Party has a very successful 120th Congress. We'll see how that develops."

Johnson will keep his security detail for two more years. Whether he receives other perks, like a hideaway office in the Capitol itself and more staff, will depend on the role he chooses in January.

Johnson added that he is close to both Scalise and Jordan. Trump praised both candidates.

Email Mark Ballard at mballard@theadvocate.com.

CURATOR

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Executive Director Molly Rowe works to strengthen the museum's connections to the university and the Acadiana community while expanding its presence in the national and international arts world.

A Lafayette native whose career has included arts consulting work in New York and internationally, Rowe outlined that vision when she was named executive director, emphasizing the museum's potential to connect the region's distinctive cultural traditions with broader artistic conversations.

Boelkins brings experience that aligns with those goals.

Most recently, he designed the exhibition for "PORCH: An Architecture of Generosity," the United States Pavilion presentation at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale in Italy.

He also designed "A South Forty," an exhibition examining contemporary architecture and design in the American South, now at the National Building Museum in Washington, D.C.

His career includes a decade teaching at the University of Arkansas Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design and UL Lafayette's School of Architecture and Design.

He also co-edited "Radical Practice: The Work of Marlon Blackwell Architects," which received a 2023 Pen-Craft Book Award.

"A university museum should be where a region's most important questions are asked in public," Rowe said in an announcement published by the museum. "Curators who think like scholars and build like designers are rare, and Jonathan is both."

Boelkins joins the Hilliard during a period of expansion and investment.

The museum is renovating its A. Hays Town building, a project expected to nearly double its capacity for community and educational programs.

For the first time, the museum also is photographing, digitizing and documenting every object in its permanent collection, an effort intended to make its holdings more accessible.

Attendance at public programs has doubled over the past 18 months, according to the museum, which also reports receiving international recognition for its digital programming.

Boelkins said the collection's range presents opportunities to introduce visitors to works they might otherwise never encounter.

"To me, the collection defies easy explanation or definition, and that is a great point in its favor," he said in an interview published by the museum.

He said digitization could help more people experience the collection while maintaining a connection to the artists who created the works.

"My hope for the digitization of the collection is that we communicate that same connection to an ever-wider audience, to share the beauty and wonder of work that spans millennia," he said.

Boelkins said his architectural background influences how he approaches exhibitions, particularly the relationship between artwork, natural light and the spaces in which art is displayed.

His approach also reflects the balance between local identity and international connections that Rowe has emphasized in her leadership of the museum.

Boelkins said he hopes the museum's exhibitions will help visitors explore the connections between south Louisiana's history, landscape and culture and the wider world.

"I hope the galleries will feel like portals into other times, places, and dimensions, opportunities to travel without leaving Lafayette," he told the museum.

The renovation of the A. Hays Town building also presents opportunities to connect the museum's indoor galleries with its outdoor spaces, including the plaza, porches and lawn, he said.

Boelkins grew up in North Dakota and Pennsylvania. His early interest in art was encouraged by his mother, an elementary school teacher, and an aunt who introduced him to art classes and the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh.

He holds a master's degree in advanced architectural design from Washington University in St. Louis and bachelor's degrees from the University of Arkansas and Geneva College.

For Boelkins, making the museum welcoming to students and visitors who may find art institutions intimidating is another priority.

"I also want students to know that the museum is a place where people are free to dream and to imagine how things might be otherwise, how they might be better," he said in the museum interview.





