

CN Morning Rundown: Reporter Says 'Joel Osteen Didn't Lie'

Here's a quick summary of the top stories on :

'Joel Osteen Didn't Lie': After Breaking Story, Reporter Defends Lakewood's Acceptance of PPP Loans

Joel Osteen's Lakewood church, Houston, Texas, has come under massive social media attack after the *Houston Chronicle* broke a story saying the megachurch had received \$4.4 million in federal Payroll Protection Program loans, but the reporter who wrote the story is now defending the megachurch.

Social media mavens took the story and ran with it, and before long, posters were saying Osteen had lied about accepting such funds.

The Osteens and Lakewood Church responded via spokesman Donald Iloff, saying the church did not initially accept help but, as the pandemic continued, applied for the aid to support its employees while in-person service were suspended, reports. Here's the full statement from Lakewood Church:

Lakewood Church, our 368 full and part time employees and their families are grateful for the Payroll Protection Program during these uncertain economic times caused by the COVID 19 pandemic.

Lakewood suspended its in-person services for more than seven months (March 15th through October 18, 2020), impacting its ability to collect substantial donations during those services. Believing the shutdown would only last a few weeks, Lakewood did not initially accept PPP assistance during the first half of the program. However, as the shutdown persisted month after month, given the economic uncertainty, Lakewood finally applied for the PPP loan and has been able to provide

full salaries and benefits including health insurance coverage to all of its employees and their families.

It is important to note that, since 2004, Pastors Joel and Victoria Osteen have not received salaries from Lakewood Church, and the PPP funds do not provide any personal financial benefit to them, whatsoever.

‘More Help Is on the Way’: Congress Agrees on \$900 Billion Relief Package

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., announced Sunday evening on the Senate floor that lawmakers have finalized an agreement on a coronavirus relief bill to be voted on later today by both House and Senate. Lawmakers also passed a bill to avoid a government shutdown at midnight Sunday.

“We can finally report what our nation has needed to hear for a very long time: More help is on the way,” McConnell said.

While the plan is roughly half the size of the \$2.2 trillion stimulus law enacted in March, it is one of the largest relief packages in modern history, *The New York Times* reported.

“As our citizens continue battling this coronavirus this holiday season, they will not be fighting alone,” McConnell said in his statement, which also explained the terms of the bill. Congressional leaders said the bill would establish temporary \$300 per week supplemental unemployment benefits and \$600 direct stimulus payments to most Americans, per Fox News.

Museum of the Bible Welcomes Christmas With ‘Follow the Star’

It’s Christmas at the Museum of the Bible, though things are a little different this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The moment you walk in, you receive a warm welcome with the breathtaking “Follow the Star” exhibit in the museum’s Grand Hall. Intricate light sculptures, digital displays and music

all come together in a beautiful retelling of the Christmas story. A giant Star of David is at the center of this exhibit.

Also back by popular demand this year is renowned sculptor Tim Schmalz, whose sculpture "The Nativity" was just unveiled.

The sculpture reveals "Mary, Joseph, and Jesus together in a way that though they're distinct individual figures, they complement and harmonize together," explained Schmalz. "A scene of absolute joy and love." {eoa}