



**Carmage Walls**  
**Commentary Prize**

**2019 Entry Form**

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**Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)**

For years, various members of the Lafourche Parish (the Louisiana version of a county) have tried to reduce the size of the board from 15 to nine members. Lafourche Parish is a relatively rural and poor parish, and having so many board members leads to a high the cost of board members' pay, benefits, per diems and other taxpayer expenses. Estimates have said that reducing the board by six members could save \$100,000 or more per year.

Efforts to defeat the reduction through the years have focused on the argument that fewer members will lead to less representation for some areas of the parish. And under the former board, the effort to reduce failed by a 7-7 vote.

The Parish Council, which is the legislative branch of local government, has for nearly two decades had just nine members. A reduction of the school board allow the board to align its districts with the council, simplifying matters for voters and further reducing expenses by splitting the cost of redistricting every 10 years.

The Courier and Daily Comet, through tireless news reporting and careful attention to this subject on their editorial pages, illuminated the issue for local voters. Leading up to School Board elections in 2018, news stories and charts broke down each candidate's stated position

on this issue and gave readers a running tally of where it stood as each race was settled. Some ended when just one candidate ran. Others ended after the primary election, and still others required runoffs. At the end of the elections, an overwhelming majority of the new board favored reduction, and it was one of the first items the new board tackled.

Our columns, editorials and stories on the issue were cited by members of the board who saw them as instrumental in explaining it to voters and advocating change. The new board did pass a measure reducing its size, a move that will mean six will have to leave office. The process of implementing the reduction will likely continue with a bill before the state Legislature, which will have the ultimate say.

DAILY COMET

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MICHAEL GORMAN | Editorial Editor

OUR VIEW

Good luck to Nicholls hoops teams

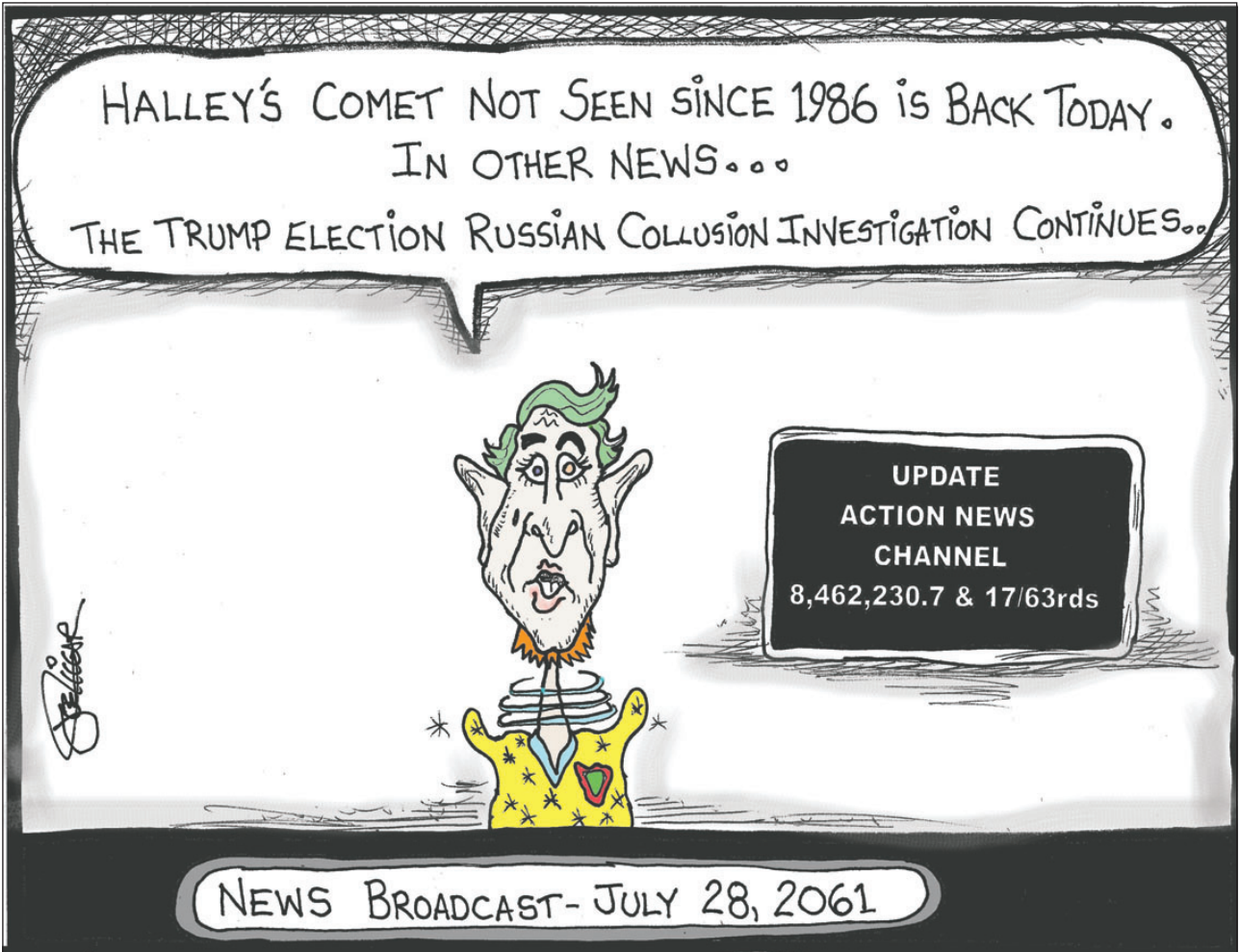
This is a good time to be a fan of Nicholls State basketball. The Lady Colonels and the Colonels have enjoyed successful seasons to this point. And both teams hope to keep them going when they begin conference tournament play today in Katy, Texas. The Lady Colonels tip off at 11 a.m., and the men tip off their first game at 7:30 p.m. For the Lady Colonels, the trip is nothing new. In fact, it is the team's seventh consecutive trip to the conference tournament. "There is a bench mark now for our program that I've been very humbled about," women's coach DoBee Plaisance said. "Again, I give all the glory to god, but we've had some great players that helped pave the way to put us in this position. We know now where the bar is, and we are just trying to take the next step and win this thing." They come into the tournament sporting a winning overall record, 16-13, and a winning conference record, 11-7. No matter how the tournament goes from here, the Lady Colonels have enjoyed a great season. The men's team, too, has had a great year. They seemed headed to a regular season conference tournament, which would have given them the top seed in the tournament. Unfortunately, though, they lost a tough game to close out the regular season. And, the team lost one of its primary contributors late in the year when senior guard Tevon Saddler went down with a knee injury, ending his season. "This is just another hurdle we have to overcome," said men's coach Richie Riley, named the Southland Conference's Coach of the Year on Monday. "I told my guys that you don't see many movies where there's not a tough part in it. I asked them how we are going to end our movie. We want to end our movie with a happy ending and win it for Saddler." Perhaps the injury to Saddler – as unfortunate as it is for this young student-athlete and his teammates – will provide an extra bit of motivation for a team that has done well throughout the season. Just like the women's team, the Colonels have done well regardless of what happens tonight. Good luck to both of Nicholls State's teams. They have worked so diligently to get here. Let's hope they continue to bring the students and fans many more memories this season.

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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Friday, March 9, the 68th day of 2018. There are 297 days left in the year.  
  
On March 9, 1862, during the Civil War, the ironclads USS Monitor and CSS Virginia (formerly USS Merrimack) clashed for five hours to a draw at Hampton Roads, Virginia.  
In 1661, Cardinal Jules Mazarin, the chief minister of France, died, leaving King Louis XIV in full control.  
In 1796, the future emperor of the French, Napoleon Bonaparte, married Josephine de Beauharnais. (The couple later divorced.)

ANOTHER VIEW



Are we serving the students or the politicians?



Mike Gorman

It's official: Most of the Lafourche Parish School Board members love their own jobs more than they care for the employees of the school system and more than the kids they are supposed to be educating. If you've read this column in recent months, it might seem like I'm beating a dead horse with a broken record. And I might be. But the arrogance of power that's at play here is just maddening. The School Board is facing a budget gap brought on by falling tax revenue. It has to cut about \$6 million out of next year's budget just to keep its books balanced. It's the same sort of thing that's supposed to happen at the state level but, somehow, doesn't. Anyway, our local board this week gave its final stamp of approval to Superintendent Jo Ann Matthews's plan to cut the money by eliminating a host of jobs and not filling some vacancies as they occur. Some of the lowlights of the plan include laying off more than 20 percent of the system's bus drivers, getting rid of a handful of specialized educators and leaving open a number of non-teacher jobs as employees resign or retire. I don't envy Matthews or the board members. These are tough decisions that affect people's lives. Most importantly, they affect the quality

of service and education we deliver to our children – children who already attend school in a middling district in the worst state in the nation for education. (Lafourche did receive an A last year from the state – the same state that awarded itself a B. Tell that to the people in any other state, and they will laugh at you or cry for you.) Now, these students will have to contend with fewer bus routes – a condition that could mean longer commutes each way, each day. And they will have teachers who are stretched ever thinner and who will have fewer and fewer staff members helping them. Wasn't there anything else that could have been cut? Well, now that we mention it, there was. The board could have looked to save money itself by simply reducing its own size from 15 to nine members. Fifteen is the most members a school board can have – and only three across Louisiana have so many members. Parishes with many times our student population get by with fewer board members. The Lafourche Parish Council somehow represents all the people of the parish (granted, with varying degrees of success) with but nine members. These self-important politicians continue to insist that we somehow need 15 of them to oversee our school system. We don't, and people have said as much. The majority on the board stubbornly refuses to do what is right and what makes good, common sense. These folks would rather lay off bus drivers than whittle their own number down to the same size as the Parish Council.

It would be shocking if it weren't simply more of the same. Again and again, the board has refused to look inward for significant savings. Reducing the size of the board wouldn't make the difference in a \$6 million budget hole, but it would save around \$60,000 a year. It also would send an important message to the public: We care more about our employees and our students than we care about keeping our own jobs. Sadly, the board's consistent majority continues to send the opposite message to the people who vote. And that's why those voters don't trust this crowd. How can they? They are reminded regularly that the board would rather waste money on itself than funnel a modest savings into the education system of the parish. When you're walking your daughter to the bus stop earlier next year or meeting your son later after school, won't you be comforted by the fact that there are so many board members? How often have you silently given thanks that your board member is one of 15 rather than one of nine? I often talk to my wife about the comfort we provide ourselves by shelling out so much money to allow more politicians to have jobs. Make sure you call your board member – if you know who yours is – and thank him or her for getting the system's priorities in line for the good of the students. You can do it sarcastically if yours is in the majority or genuinely if yours has fought for this much-needed reform. Editorial Page Editor Michael Gorman can be reached at 448-7612 or by e-mail at mike.gorman@dailycomet.com.

Rediscovering America: A quiz for St. Patrick's Day



Patrick Maloney

St. Patrick's Day, March 17, has become a favorite day of celebration for millions of Americans, both Irish-Americans and the non-Irish alike. Sure and begorrah. There are parades and parties, displays of shamrocks and green everywhere, meals of corned beef and cabbage and, of course, ample spirits. Perhaps that's because there were many waves of immigration to the United States from Ireland and now approximately 32 million – or 10 percent of the U.S. population – claim Irish ancestry, according to the Census Bureau's most recent statistics. An estimated 3 million more identify as Scots-Irish. The quiz below, from the Ashbrook Center at Ashland University in Ohio, provides an opportunity for you to test your knowledge of immigration broadly, the migration of the Irish to America and the impact they have had on U.S. history and culture.

1. An early wave of Irish immigrants came to the United States in the 1820s for what purpose?  
A. Escape famine in Ireland.  
B. Build the Erie Canal.  
C. Flee religious persecution.  
D. Pursue educational opportunities.
2. Who was the first U.S. president of documented Irish ancestry?  
A. Andrew Jackson.  
B. John F. Kennedy.  
C. James Buchanan.

- D. William McKinley.
3. How many signatories of the Declaration of Independence were of Irish descent?  
A. Three.  
B. Twenty-three.  
C. Eight.  
D. Eighteen.
4. The American Party rose to prominence in the 1850s based on a growing anti-immigrant sentiment, especially toward the Irish and Germans. The party also was known by what name?  
A. Know-nothings.  
B. Order of the Star-Spangled Banner.  
C. Whigs.  
D. Democrats.
5. Because of the Great Hunger in Ireland, when blight destroyed the country's potato crop, more than 1.5 million Irish immigrated to the United States. When did this mass migration occur?  
A. Between 1845 and 1855.

- B. Between 1825 and 1835.  
C. Between 1910 and 1920.  
D. Between 1890 and 1900.
6. Immigrants comprise what percentage of the current U.S. population?  
A. 20 percent.  
B. 7.5 percent.  
C. 33 percent.  
D. 13.5 percent.
7. Five Civil War regiments made up what was known as the Union Army's Irish Brigade. Who was the brigade's leader?  
A. Brig. Gen. James Shields.  
B. Maj. Gen. Patrick Cleburne.  
C. Brig. Gen. Thomas Meagher.  
D. Brig. Gen. Michael Corcoran.
8. The first federal immigration law was passed in 1790. What was it called?  
A. Naturalization Act.  
B. Chinese Exclusion Act.

- C. McCarran-Walter Act.  
D. Immigration Reform Act.
  9. What famous businessman was the son of an Irish father who came to the United States during the Great Hunger?  
A. Marshall Field.  
B. Henry Ford.  
C. John Jacob Astor.  
D. Andrew Carnegie.
  10. Irish-born architect James Hoban designed what famous U.S. building?  
A. U.S. Capitol.  
B. Empire State Building.  
C. The White House.  
D. St. Patrick's Cathedral.
- Answers: 1-B, 2-A, 3-C, 4-A, 5-A, 6-D, 7-C, 8-A, 9-B, 10-C
- Patrick Maloney is chief operating officer of the Ashbrook Center at Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio. He wrote this for InsideSources.com.



DAILY COMET

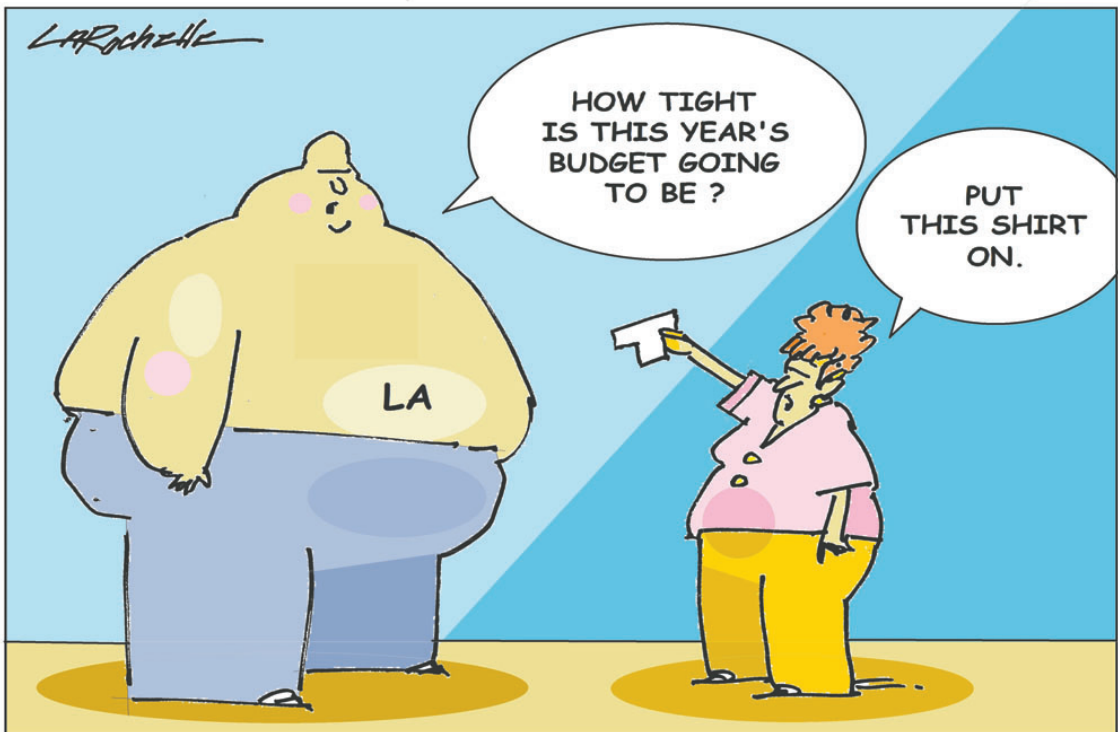
Math, reading scores going in the wrong direction

Louisiana has once again found itself at or near the bottom of important lists of academic achievement. The news is doubly bad because the latest reading and math measures for the state’s fourth- and eighth-graders actually showed decreases in our students’ scores. As Louisiana struggles to keep pace and even improve compared to other states, our education system has repeatedly been a disappointment. Even when we have gained some ground from one year to the next, we haven’t seemed to gain on other states with any consistency. And now, it appears, we have taken a step back. Our scores are tallied along with those of the other 49 states and Washington, D.C. These are some of the latest numbers: Our eighth-graders placed 50th in math and 48th in reading. Our fourth-graders placed 51st in math – dead last – and 49th in reading. The scores themselves showed little or no improvement. Eighth-grade reading scores did go up by 1 point. But eighth-grade math scores were 2 points lower than they were in 2015. The fourth-grade level, though, told an even more alarming story: Fourth-graders math scores went down by 5 points in each category. These scores took place as other states were able to achieve varying degrees of improvement in their scores. State Education Superintendent John White this week took issue with the testing process. This year, for the first time, the tests were administered online. The lack of our students’ ability to test using computers versus written answers might account for some of the dip, he said. If that’s true, though, it exposes yet another weakness in our education system. Why can’t our students keep pace with the technological abilities of their counterparts across the nation? The scores and the rankings are concerning. Everyone here would like to see our students perform favorably in everything they attempt. But we have to remember that when they stumble, it is generally because we have failed to challenge or prepare them correctly. These latest numbers aren’t catastrophic. And they are further evidence that we are continuing to monitor our students’ successes and opportunities for improvement. At the same time, though, we have to be looking at other states and trying to figure out how we can model our system to the systems that seem to be returning better results. We know our children can do better, but it’s up to us to ensure they have every opportunity to do so.

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ANOTHER VIEW

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Change could be coming, like it or not



Mike Gorman

State Sen. Norby Chabert deserves a lot of credit. He has proposed a bill that would do what our local representatives to the School Board have so far refused to do. It has become unfortunately and abundantly clear that the Lafourche Parish School Board – a majority of the members, anyway – has no intention of imposing any sort of fiscal discipline on itself. Rather than decrease its size to save the taxpayers the needless cost of propping up local political careers, the board’s majority has voted time and again to keep its number at a ridiculously large 15 members. For the record, there are but two other school boards in Louisiana that have such bloated memberships, and both oversee much larger districts than Lafourche’s. Also for the record, much, much larger districts are overseen with far fewer school board members. And why not? Have you ever thought for even a second, “Wow, I wish there were more School Board members so things would get better at my kid’s school?” I’m comfortable in believing that that has never happened in the

history of political thought. Have you ever thought, “I sure am glad my School Board member lives a mile closer to me than he or she might if we had larger board districts”? Again, I’m comfortable thinking no. The majority on the board, the folks who keep voting against common sense and financial responsibility, clearly suffer from an artificially inflated sense of self-importance. “No one can get by without me. Surely.” Or, “I am so important as one-15th of this board that I am clearly outdoing whatever one could achieve as one of nine members.” Really? And what exactly are those achievements? I’m curious about how the Lafourche Parish Council members can adequately tend to their constituents with just nine of them to go around. Are the council members so much better at their jobs that it takes six fewer of them to get them done? From what I can tell, that’s exactly what the board members think. And they have been able to defeat every attempt to reduce the board’s size. They apparently think more of their own political futures than they do for the taxpayers’ scarce resources. Here, I should mention that the board members who have continued to fight for the reduction also deserve a lot of credit for their patience in the face of intransigence. They need reinforcement, though, and that could be coming from Baton Rouge.

Chabert, R-Houma, has proposed a bill that would cut the board’s size to nine members, and the new districts would be drawn after the 2020 federal census. The first elections under the new configuration would take place in 2022. Chabert said earlier that he tried to gauge the public’s sentiment on the issue. He received a number of comments from the people of Lafourche. Some board members registered their opposition to decreasing their own numbers. And the spouse of one of them did the same. Aside from those self-interested commenters, though, the comments were universally in favor of reducing the size of the board. The smartest way to do this would be to link up with the Parish Council after each census and redraw both political bodies’ districts at the same time – a potential streamlining action that will be possible after they have the same number of members. That might reduce the cost and make approval from the federal Justice Department a bit easier. Whatever our school officials do, they seem to be motivated by a number of factors – none of which are smart, cheap or easy. Let’s hope Chabert’s bills can bring them around to the side of the people they are supposed to be representing.

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LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor should be 400 words or less and include your name, address and daytime phone number. Address letters to: The Courier, 3030 Barrow St., Houma, LA, 70360. Email: news@houmatoday.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't go back on educational improvements

*(Editor's note: This is an open letter to Louisiana's lawmakers.)* My name is Tommy Thibodeaux, and I am the Student Government Association president at Nicholls State University. I would like to begin by thanking you for your dedicated service to the people of Louisiana. Now, more than ever, the fate and longevity of our great state are in your hands. Over the past decade, Louisiana’s colleges and universities have absorbed more funding cuts than any other state in the nation. As a result, student tuition and fees now primarily fund our respective university and college budgets. After a year hiatus, the state is faced with the option to cut higher education to help balance the budget. The proposed cuts, if left unresolved, will undoubtedly hinder the success that Louisiana higher education has seen in the previous fiscal year. The universities and colleges of Louisiana undeniably

contribute to Louisiana’s economy, having an estimated \$10 billion impact. Regionally, Nicholls alone is responsible for:

- 80 percent of the area’s nurses.
- 80 percent of the area’s teachers.
- Over 4,000 first-generation college students.
- The state’s only four-year culinary program.
- \$275 million annual economic impact.
- 3,000 direct jobs to the community.
- Over 6,000 voters.

If the state does not resolve the budget shortfall, hundreds of thousands of current and future college students will see their dreams vanish. The students at Nicholls, as well as students from around Louisiana, urge legislators to keep the TOPS promise, fully fund Go Grants and abstain from any further reduction to the budget for higher education. The Louisiana Legislature has the opportunity to help produce the most-educated generation in our state’s history and to build a stronger Louisiana for

generations to come. Initiating an era of reinvestment in higher education with a focus on long-term sustainability can accomplish this goal. Benjamin Franklin put it succinctly, “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.”

**Tommy Thibodeaux**  
President, Student Government Association  
Nicholls State University

Don't take away the rights of landowners

House Bill 391 in the Louisiana Legislature is a bill that will diminish landowners’ constitutional rights to own and control private property. This is a very dangerous law. Anyone who owns property along the Intracoastal Canal, the ship channel, any bayou or lake is facing erosion problems. The landowners in the basin and the marsh management areas will be greatly impacted. This bill, if passed, will cost the state millions of dollars in lawsuits. There are millions of acres of state waters and wildlife management

areas to hunt and fish. I sympathize with Bobby Breaux and hope he can get another lease so he can pass his lifelong business to his successors, but it’s a risk you take when you rent land. How would you respond if you owned the land and people wanted access to it for their own benefit? I advise my legislators to let this die in committee or risk their elected positions in the next elections. Maybe you should run for the communist or socialist party next term if you agree with this government taking.

**Herdis Neil, Montegut**

Tax day this year is a cause for celebration

Tax day is this weekend. While millions of Americans scramble to fill out their tax returns, we should also find time to celebrate the new tax law. Because of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, more than 500 U.S. employers have publicly announced wage increases, bonuses and other employee benefits. And over 4 million

working Americans have reaped these benefits. My employees are on the list. As the founder and president of Guy Chemical in Pennsylvania, I’m putting my tax savings to work by distributing bonuses and investing in expansion opportunities. We’re even considering a second manufacturing plant, which would bring jobs to rural Pennsylvania. For years, I paid nearly 50 percent of my business income to the government – federal, state and local. I’ve had to take out bank loans and mortgage my house just to pay my taxes. Fortunately, those days are behind us. Instead of bankrolling Uncle Sam, job creators are now growing their businesses and rewarding their employees. That’s plenty to celebrate this tax day. And next year, there will be even more to celebrate once Americans see savings in their entirety under the new tax code.

**Guy Berkebile**  
Guy Chemical Company  
Somerset, Pa.



DAILY COMET

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Safety first  
in backyard  
swimming  
pools

School is out, the temperatures are hot, and people throughout south Louisiana are looking for ways to stay cool. Many of us – adults and kids alike – use backyard pools to beat the heat and have some fun on these long, summer days. As fun as pools are, they can represent danger, particularly if we aren’t consistently adhering to well-accepted safety practices. According the American Red Cross, here are some of the best ways to keep yourself and your kids safe in and around swimming pools:

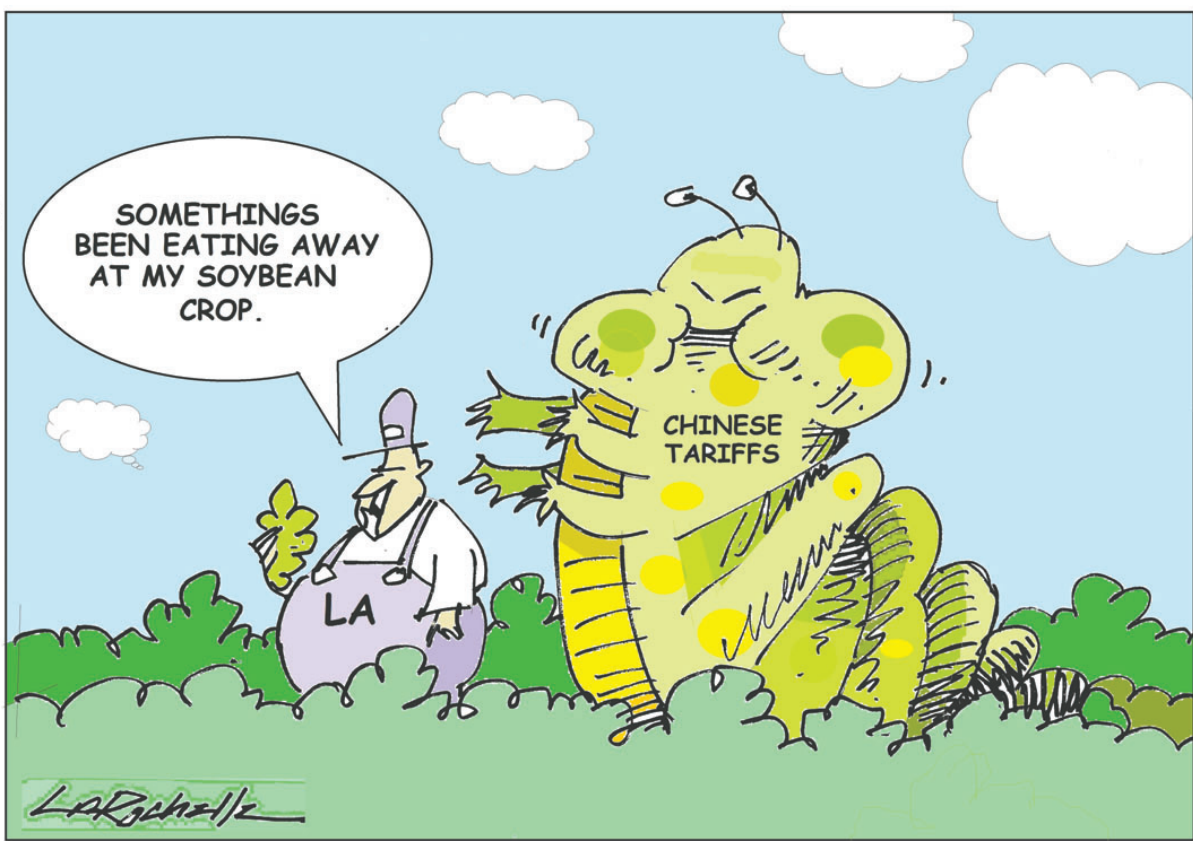
- Surround your pool with a 4-foot high fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate. Place a safety cover over the pool and remove any ladders or steps when it’s not in use. Consider installing a pool alarm.
- Keep children under active supervision at all times.
- Ensure everyone in the home knows how to swim well.
- Keep your pool water clean and clear.
- Establish and enforce rules and safe behavior.
- Ensure everyone in the home knows how to respond to emergencies.

These are just basic rules, but they are good, common sense guides to keeping your pool safe and your summer fun. In addition to these, there is another that will help you and your guests of all ages: Don’t overindulge in alcoholic beverages when you and your kids are around water. The mixture can be deadly. By relaxing the drinker, alcohol can make us less observant and more prone to risk-taking. We endure the ravages each year of infamously hot weather. We long for time, such as the time we spend in the pool, when we can forget about the temperatures and just have fun with our friends and family. We can do that in elaborate in-ground pools or in the most basic plastic pools that can be filled up with water in just minutes. But large or small, pools demand the most of adults who are in charge of supervising children around them. They can be deadly, and the worst can happen in just a few seconds. Across the nation, backyard swimming pools are the sights of hundreds of drownings each year. The backyard pool is an incredible oasis during the hottest of Mother Nature’s offerings. But it requires that we know and embrace these best practices. Give these rules some serious thought, and make sure you stay safe and have fun throughout the summer.

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ANOTHER VIEW

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Here’s a chance to have your say



Mike Gorman

We’re gearing up for elections later this year, and local voters should be studying the issues and getting ready to ask tough questions of the candidates who want to represent them. For Lafourche Parish voters, one place to start will be asking prospective School Board members whether the board is too small – or is the size, like Goldilocks’ porridge, just right? The latter is a tough sell. So is the notion that we don’t have enough board members. At 15, we have the most board members in the state. Only two other school boards have 15 members, and each of them has many more residents and students than Lafourche Parish. In fact, when state Sen. Norby Chabert, R-Houma, floated the idea of a state law requiring a reduction in the board’s size, he said he heard from several board members and the spouse of one who were opposed to reduction. Everyone else who responded was in favor of it. Really, that should surprise no one. We don’t need 15 board members. We need enough of them so their various constituencies

are adequately represented.

The Lafourche Parish Council, with but nine members, gives local voters all the representation they could desire. At times, with the fractious parochialism of the council, even nine has seemed too many. But nine would have some benefits. First, nine would amount to 60 percent of the current, bloated board, which needlessly costs the taxpayers in salaries, benefits and perks. Cutting back their own numbers would be an excellent way for the board members to show the long-suffering public that they can endure the same cuts they expect teachers, administrators and staff members to abide. And nine would allow the board to align its districts with those of the council, cutting the cost of redistricting. An alignment would also cut down on the confusion that parish voters face when they try to determine which council members and board members represent them. Here are the facts, as defiantly as a majority of board members continues to reject them: The board has too many members. Nearly half of those members think so, and so does just about anyone who pays the taxes to keep all these folks occupying government offices. Unfortunately, a consistent majority has blocked every common sense effort to reform this wasteful spending. And the board appears unlikely to agree

to a reduction. Ah, but board members can change. And this year’s elections will give voters a chance to impose change on those who refuse to embrace it. The board members all face the potential for challengers to take their places. If no one opposes them, of course, all will return to office and continue to resist the kind of responsible change that is needed. For any member who does face a challenge, there will be questions about whether he or she supports a sensibly sized board. The public will want to know. And if you have a chance to meet with your board member, ask whether the board is best when it is smallest or when it is the largest in the state. Ask why your board member has voted time and again to save your tax dollars or to waste them. If your representative has done the latter, ask why he or she has squandered money on board members rather than directing scarce public resources toward educating our young people. This issue isn’t standing in the way of a good education for our kids. But our politicians’ dedication to their own interests is a good indication of larger defects within our system. Do what you can to find out where your board member stands.

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Quotes to live by



Stephen Waguespack

Sure, we’ve got some challenges here in America. One quick scroll through your Twitter and Facebook feeds, and you’re bombarded by opinions on just what the ol’ red, white and blue has to fix. Every day, it seems, somebody is newly offended by somebody else, and they are compelled to publicly vent, whine and torment others to make their point. This then triggers an equally emphatic response by the other guy, and next thing you know, the gripe-fest is off and running. Too many Americans are starting to miss the point and falling into the trap of viewing freedom as nothing more than a litany of guarantees. The guarantee to not be offended or overly bothered much, guaranteed immunity to complain about anything without consequence or appreciation of the other person’s opinion, the guarantee that the American dream should come gift-wrapped on a silver platter

compliments of the hard work of somebody else. I don’t think it used to be this way. My appreciation is that generations ago, Americans knew this was a land of opportunity, not one of guaranteed outcomes and comfort. They knew what it felt like to fight hard for their freedom, what life would be like without it, how hard it was to attain it, the sacrifice it takes to keep it, the respect owed to those who delivered it and the appreciation of being blessed to live in a country that treasures it so dearly. What happened to that understanding, humility and respect? How can we get it back? When it comes to true civil discourse, let’s start with the basics. As Ronald Reagan once said, “If we love our country, we should also love our countrymen.” But do we still? Alexis de Tocqueville opined that “the greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.” But can we still? America’s stability and strength is not the product of any one person, one political party or any one movement. Rather, it is a product

of that ol’ melting pot clearly based in one singular foundation set many years ago. A foundation that begins with: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” The freedom that comes with being an American is much more than the right to acquire as much stuff as you can. The freedom of speech guaranteed by our Constitution is much more sacred than just a blank check to criticize others without prosecution. The duty to treat all men and women equally applies not just to those with whom we agree but also to those we vehemently oppose. The motto “In God we trust” is not merely a suggestion, it is the core belief behind what drove the birth of this nation. Teddy Roosevelt warned that “the things that will destroy America are prosperity-at-any-price, peace-at-any-price, safety-first instead of duty-first, the love

of soft living and the get-rich-quick theory of life.” Benjamin Franklin reminded us that “the U.S. Constitution doesn’t guarantee happiness, only the pursuit of it. You have to catch up with it yourself.” That means we as Americans may be blessed with freedom, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but the duty is ours to maximize that opportunity through our actions and words. Are we as a society doing that today? Are you as an individual? This week we celebrated Independence Day. Fireworks were popped and hot dogs served. It is a great week to have fun with the family. But it is also an important week to rekindle a love and pride in this nation that sometimes gets lost in the shuffle of today’s finger-pointing world. Calvin Coolidge said, “Patriotism is easy to understand in America. It means looking out for yourself by looking out for your country.” George Washington warned that we should always “guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism.” Do we truly understand what it means to be patriotic? Do we practice it daily? Are we doing our part to help fulfill the aspiration of

Abraham Lincoln when he said, “My dream is of a place and a time where America will once again be seen as the last best hope of earth.” Do we see ourselves that way today? We should. We are viewed around the world as that shining city on a hill much more than we give ourselves credit. Martin Luther King said, “The time is always right to do what is right.” Ronald Reagan zeroed in on the best place to start doing that when he said, “All great change in America begins at the dinner table.” As we remember this Fourth of July, set the right tone of change at the dinner table. Begin with a prayer to give thanks to our creator, dine while having a robust discussion of what makes this nation great, depart the table with a newfound commitment to being patriotic. While America may have its challenges, it also is still unquestionably the greatest nation the world has ever seen. That is, of course, why “these colors don’t run.” Yep, you can quote me on that.

*Stephen Waguespack is president of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry.*



DAILY COMET

LEE BACHLET | Publisher  
KEITH MAGILL | Executive Editor  
MICHAEL GORMAN | Editorial Editor

Special legislative sessions were a waste of money

State lawmakers late last month were able to cobble together a compromise that keeps some of a state sales tax and avoids some of the deep budget cuts that could have been made necessary had they failed to act.

The problem is that it took three special sessions of the Louisiana Legislature to get a deal in place to keep the government operational for the next year without hurting some of our most-vulnerable people.

Those sessions came at a cost: \$1.5 million. Special sessions were called in February, May and June to address these lingering fiscal problems. Any one of them could have seen lawmakers willing to work together for the good of the state rather than rigidly adhering to party dogma and refusing to do what they knew would eventually have to happen.

On one side, legislators favored keeping the entire 1 percent sales tax that was enacted two years ago and would have expired at the end of June. On the other, lawmakers wanted cuts in spending that would allow the temporary tax to expire completely.

The result was a plan that keeps in place a 0.45 percent sales tax in place of the 1 percent tax. Officials estimated that the necessary cuts will be limited, so health care and higher education should not be forced to absorb yet another round of cuts.

Ironically, though, in the midst of a fiscal crisis, the Legislature wasted \$1.5 million in precious public resources meeting again and again while failing until the last minute to resolve the impasse.

Human nature makes us want to get our way. We tend to hold up our own beliefs and vilify those who disagree with them. But when the good of the entire state is on the line, we should have been able to expect better from those who are supposed to represent our interests in Baton Rouge.

It is easy to share the concerns of those who were concerned for our schools and hospitals. And it is just as easy to commiserate with those who want to reform a system that imposes one of the highest sales taxes in the nation.

Over the course of months, though, it is difficult to understand how such a pressing issue couldn't be resolved without such an enormous waste of money.

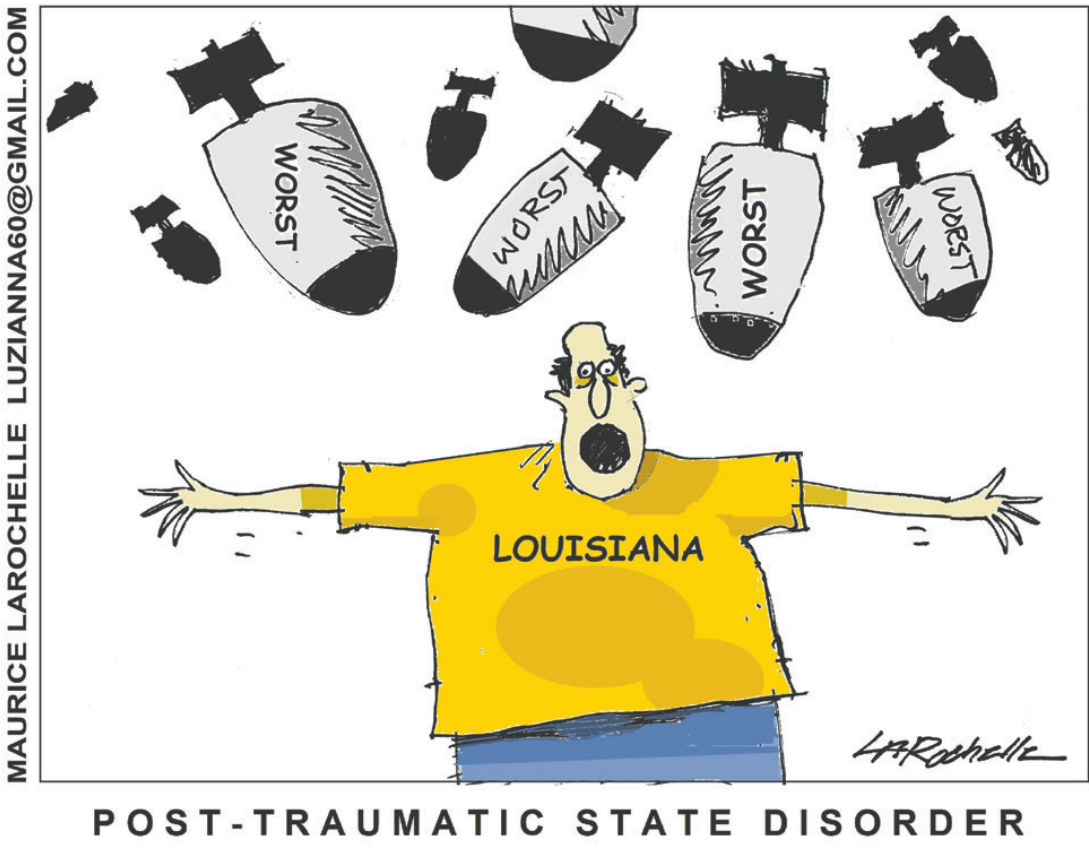
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ANOTHER VIEW



POST-TRAUMATIC STATE DISORDER

The numbers tell a promising tale



Mike Gorman

It looks like there will soon be fewer politicians in office.

In case the entrenched and intransigent members of the Lafourche Parish School Board do so before this fall's elections, they might have to reduce the board's size after them.

That is the briefest synopsis I can give you of an excellent analysis of the issue that appeared in our papers earlier this week.

After the sign-up period ended last week, staff writer Julia Arenstam interviewed all but one candidate for seats on the School Board to get their opinions on the question of reduction. You can read the analysis at [dailycomet.com](http://dailycomet.com) or [houmatoday.com](http://houmatoday.com).

The results are startling and clear.

No matter what happens in the elections, seven members of the new board will favor going from 15 members down to nine. In seven districts, either a pro-reduction board member was elected without opposition or every-one running for the seat favors reduction.

And no matter how the elections end, two members of the new board will be opposed to the reduction. Those two are members who have voted against reduction and were elected with no opposition.

That leaves six votes in play – six people who will determine whether we can rid ourselves for

good of the needless bloat that afflicts this public body.

In six districts, there are races where the question will likely be an issue for voters. In those, the candidates will have to explain why we need or don't need six extra politicians overseeing the school system.

That isn't just a rhetorical question.

Why do we need a cumbersome, confusing system of districts with different boundaries for the nine Parish Council members and the 15 School Board members? Why do we have to foot the bill for keeping the board so large – particularly at a time when essential school employees are being laid off due to budget difficulties?

The people who are dedicated to keeping the board one of the three largest in the state will tell you that we need 15 board members to ensure that every part of the parish has a say in the board's business. But that's just nonsense. Under that logic, we should have 90,000 board members to make sure each of us has a say in each decision.

The real question is whether a configuration of nine districts can be drawn in such a way that every geographical area is represented. Clearly, that is the case.

The Parish Council has at times brought Lafourche to a standstill and made it a laughingstock. It has been rife with petty backbiting and personal attacks.

But since its size was reduced from 15 to nine members, an improvement that took place nearly 20 years ago, I haven't heard anyone say the council fails to represent every part of the parish.

Would the people in Daniel Lorraine's district say that they

aren't well-represented on the council? They might disagree with Lorraine's policy decisions, but they'd be foolish to argue that they're somehow disenfranchised by the boundaries of their districts or the fact that Lorraine is one of but nine council members.

If each district is drawn proportionately, everyone has an equal say. It's a simple mathematical principle but one that continues to elude the stubborn opponents of reduction.

When the matter last arose, at a meeting July 11, the board failed to pass a request for the Legislature to call a referendum on it. The vote that night was 7-7. A great cry went up from the defenders of the status quo because Donald Johnson – appointed to fill out the term of late Board Member Louis Thibodaux – couldn't yet cast a vote as he was waiting for the state to OK his appointment. Johnson himself complained that he was being unfairly prevented from representing his district with a vote on the issue.

Now, Johnson says he is undecided. So, why did he care whether he could vote if he didn't even know how he would vote? For that matter, how can anyone who has followed the board not have an opinion on this?

So the fall elections will be here soon. They will take place Nov. 6 with runoffs, where needed, held Dec. 8. After that, if not before, this matter is likely to be settled. And the numbers are looking increasingly favorable to those who root for responsible government.

Editorial Page Editor Michael Gorman can be reached at 448-7612 or by e-mail at [mike.gorman@dailycomet.com](mailto:mike.gorman@dailycomet.com).

Public safety, not partisan politics



Jeff Landry

Over recent months, congressional Democrats have played politics with a humanitarian and national security crisis. Instead of seeking constructive dialogue to solve the problems at our southern border, the left has used the situation to attack President Trump. This failure to work with Republicans has escalated recently into complete disregard for the rule of law and those who protect and serve.

To address the problem, we must understand how it arose. The Obama catch-and-release policy, which allowed criminals to be freed from detention while they are involved in removal proceedings, gave notice to all potential illegal

aliens that kids would provide get-out-of-jail-free cards. After being released from custody, the large majority disappear throughout our county and never return to court, unless they are arrested again for committing another crime.

Making matters worse were the numerous state and local jurisdictions that, in contravention of federal law, provided sanctuary to criminal illegals despite the fact that it has been settled since 1819 that a state cannot actively undermine the execution of federal law or discriminate against the federal government.

These two factors played critical roles in establishing the chaos that President Trump and Attorney General Sessions inherited. In keeping with campaign promises to enforce our nation's immigration laws, the Trump administration directed the U.S. attorneys along our border to adopt a zero-tolerance policy for all criminal offenses referred for illegal entry and reentry.

While the media may proclaim this as controversial, federal law is clear: Illegal aliens caught are to be "expeditiously removed" from our country. Enforcing immigration law may not be politically prudent, but it is the right thing to do. Not only does it reduce the strain on our limited Border Patrol resources, but it also discourages potential border crossers.

Despite the left's hysteria, President Trump has actually done what he legally can to avoid the separation of illegal alien families. While he clearly wants to do more for them, his hands have been tied by congressional inaction, the provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 and the Flores settlement agreement.

But instead of supporting the DOJ's efforts to amend the Flores settlement agreement or introducing bills to address the problem, congressional Democrats have called for the abolishment of Immigration

and Customs Enforcement. You read that correctly. The left wants to do away with an agency that, in just the 2017 fiscal year, arrested more than 127,000 illegal aliens with criminal charges or convictions and seized almost 1 million pounds of narcotics – including thousands of pounds of the deadly drugs fueling our opioid crisis.

In their pursuit of open borders – the left wants to eliminate a government agency that goes after those who have participated in war crimes, genocide, torture or violations of religious freedoms. In fact, it was ICE's Homeland Security Investigations section that led the investigation and ultimate conviction of Chucky Taylor, son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who used torture and committed numerous war crimes to keep his father in power. This ICE special unit has done tremendous work in removing some of the world's most notorious human-rights violators and

apprehending thousands of the world's most dangerous gang members.

Additionally, ICE's Child Exploitation Investigations Unit has targeted and detained thousands of predators who produce and distribute child pornography and engage in child sex trafficking. What's more: ICE's Bulk Cash Smuggling Center has halted smuggling activities around the world. And its Foreign Corruption Investigations division has gone after foreign officials who seek to use the American financial system to steal from their government coffers.

Both the president's efforts to secure our borders and ICE's work to apprehend criminals are critical to our nation's public safety. So the next time you hear a congressional Democrat trash the president's immigration policy or call for the end of ICE, dismiss it for what it is: irresponsible politics.

Jeff Landry is Louisiana's attorney general.



# OPINION

## DAILY COMET

LEE BACHLET | Publisher  
KEITH MAGILL | Executive Editor  
MICHAEL GORMAN | Editorial Editor

# Work left to do on voter turnout

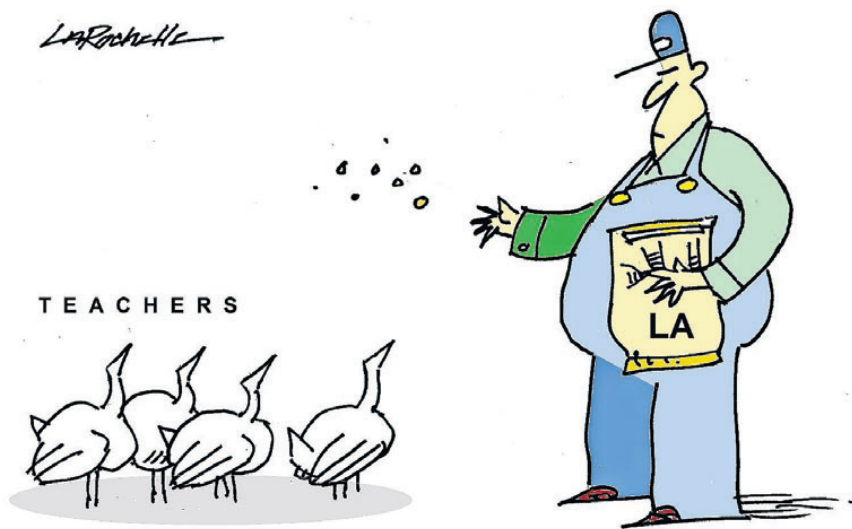
The local voter numbers for Tuesday’s elections were encouraging. Across Terrebonne and Lafourche, we flirted with hitting 50 percent of registered voters turning out to participate in the elections. In some districts and races, the numbers were closer to 60 percent. Those figures are much higher than some elections in the past, lending some credence to the belief that voter education and participation efforts are working. They certainly appear to be. With that said, though, enthusiasm over the “high” participation must be tempered with a realistic look at the whole picture. First, it’s almost incredible to think that nearly 50 percent turnout in a set of elections is a good thing. People in other nations around the world would fight and die for the chance to go to the polls to help determine their own government. Here, where we are born with that right, so many of us fail or refuse to use it. Second, turnout percentages compare the number of people who voted with the number of people who are registered to vote. They don’t tell us how many people aren’t registered to vote in the first place. According to numbers from the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2016, only about 70 percent of people who are eligible to vote are actually registered. That number holds true for Louisiana as well. Now the 50 percent looks more like 34 percent, or roughly one-third, of the people who can take part in our elections chose to do so. And only a majority of those is required for a candidate or issue to win. Imagine a room with 100 local people who are eligible to vote. About 70 would be registered, and around 34 of those would have participated in Tuesday’s election. So, of those 100 people, around 18 would have been enough to make up a winning majority in the average race. Clearly, more work remains to be done so that our election issues and winning candidates are chosen by representative majorities, not just half of the small percentage of people who can and do vote. Our brave and selfless military members have fought around the globe to protect our rights as Americans. Our forefathers fought wars to win and maintain our independence. The least we can do is participate in the government they left us.

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### TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Friday, Nov. 9, the 313th day of 2018. There are 52 days left in the year. On Nov. 9, 1938, Nazis looted and burned synagogues as well as Jewish-owned stores and houses in Germany and Austria in a pogrom or deliberate persecution that became known as “Kristallnacht.” In 1620, the passengers and crew of the Mayflower sighted Cape Cod. In 1918, it was announced that Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm II would abdicate; he then fled to the Netherlands. In 1961, U.S. Air Force Maj. Robert M. White became the first pilot to fly an X-15 rocket plane at six times the speed of sound. The Beatles’ future manager, Brian Epstein, first saw the group perform at The Cavern Club in Liverpool, England. In 1965, the great Northeast blackout began as a series of power failures lasting up to 13 ½ hours left 30 million people in seven states and part of Canada without electricity. In 1967, a Saturn V rocket carrying an unmanned Apollo spacecraft blasted off from Cape Kennedy on a successful test flight. In 1970, former French President Charles de Gaulle died at age 79. In 1976, the U.N. General Assembly approved resolutions condemning apartheid in South Africa, including one characterizing the white-ruled government as “illegitimate.” In 1986, Israel revealed it was holding Mordechai Vanunu, a former nuclear technician who’d vanished after providing information to a British newspaper about Israel’s nuclear weapons program. (Vanunu was convicted of treason and served 18 years in prison.) In 1989, communist East Germany threw open its borders, allowing citizens to travel freely to the West; joyous Germans danced atop the Berlin Wall. In 1999, with fireworks, concerts and a huge party at the landmark Brandenburg Gate, Germany celebrated the 10th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 2000, George W. Bush’s lead over Al Gore in all-or-nothing Florida slipped beneath 300 votes in a suspense-filled recount, as Democrats threw the presidential election to the courts, claiming “an injustice unparalleled in our history.”

### ANOTHER VIEW



## Tuesday held lessons for those who will listen



Michael Gorman

If you want to know what people around here think of their government, you don’t have to look much farther than Tuesday’s election results. Election Day gave local voters a good chance to weigh in on several important referenda. The most important local issues, perhaps, were two proposed sales tax increases – one in Terrebonne that would have paid for deputies and police officers to be stationed at all schools and one in Lafourche that would have helped pay for garbage collection. Both were soundly defeated. In Terrebonne, there seems to have been a general sentiment that with one of the highest sales tax rates in the state and therefore the nation, the government is getting enough money from us. It just has to learn to make better, more efficient use of it. The matter was complicated when the School Board got involved in politicking for the tax. The public doesn’t really like it when government agencies use the public’s own resources and property to tell people how to vote. School officials can quibble over whether what they did was a violation of state law, but it was certainly a violation of the school system’s own policy, which states unequivocally, “No School Board property shall be used for political activity of any kind.” But officials used school signs to post messages such as, “School resource

officers save lives. November 6. Yes vote -- SRO in every school.” Now, in the strictest sense, perhaps that doesn’t explicitly tell people which way to vote. But it does make a one-sided argument in favor of the tax. Voters weren’t buying it, though. Now, Sheriff Jerry Larpen-ter said, there will be cuts to his office’s services. He was going to use the extra money not needed for the school resource officer plan to make up a deficit in his department’s budget. At least he had a what-if plan. Not so in Lafourche, where Parish President Jimmy Cantrelle said this week he just doesn’t know how the parish is going to continue paying for garbage collection without the extra tax money. It’s a shame Cantrelle and the other actors in the Lafourche government sideshow weren’t thinking about their general credibility when they were engaging in political bickering instead of seeing to the people’s business. The problem now is that Lafourche voters have for so long seen their government embody dysfunction that even a measured, well-reasoned argument for a slight tax hike to pay for a vital service falls on deaf ears. That is understandable. People get tired of living in a parish that’s best known in some circles for a political circus filling the role that elsewhere is played by leadership. And speaking of leadership, the voters took the lead in imposing what the Lafourche School Board should have done itself. For years, the 15-member board has refused to reduce its size, a move that would have by now saved the taxpayers a significant amount of money and greatly simplified a needlessly

convoluted political system. Well, if public servants insist on serving themselves instead of the public, sometimes the public resolves the situation itself. And it looks like local voters have done just that. Several of the anti-reduction board members didn’t run for re-election, but several of those who did were trounced at the polls Tuesday. And the new School Board has a solid majority of members who favor being good stewards of the public’s resources. There is no reason for Lafourche to continue being one of three parishes in the state with a 15-member board. All the neighboring parishes have much smaller boards, and they seem to be getting along just fine. Unless you’re in the business of creating jobs for politicians, there is just no reason at all to keep 15 of them employed as board members. Finally, the public got a chance to have its say, and it did so loudly and clearly. Now, perhaps, the common sense reform that could and should have been accomplished so long ago can finally take place. So where does all of this leave us? We have some incredibly disappointed – some might even say sulking – public officials who likely fail to understand why the people won’t unquestioningly fork over more money to them. The wiser of them, though, just might take this for the message it can be: What our officials do and say matters, and the people will sooner or later hold them accountable for it.

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## Congress must help rebuild America’s infrastructure



Jerome Zeringue

In the bayou region, we have so much to be thankful for, our bountiful resources, unique culture and most importantly an indomitable spirit with a zest for life. We are committed to this region and are willing to demonstrate that commitment by providing local and state funding to do our part to ensure our coastal communities will survive. Is it too much to ask that the federal government provide its share to help preserve the nation’s most productive coastal ecosystem and protect the communities that provide energy and fisheries resources utilized by the entire United States? Across the country, cities and towns are repairing roads and bridges, upgrading water treatment systems, expanding broadband access and addressing the critical infrastructure

needs of the future. But because we’re restricted in how we pay for these projects, there are limits to what we can accomplish alone. We need a strong partner in the federal government because local and state money is insufficient to complete these projects. More alarming, Congress is considering reducing the money Louisiana receives from the Gulf of Mexico Energy Securities Act, which would only exacerbate our problems and limit our attempts to protect and restore our coast. Although Congress invested in infrastructure in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 and continues to move legislation forward that will provide small fixes, any additional money won’t come close to meeting the \$2 trillion needed nationally and allow the federal government to provide its fair share of our Morganza-to-the-Gulf hurricane protection system. We need Congress to prioritize an infrastructure plan that will protect our coastal communities, wetlands and transportation infrastructure and investments in our nation’s workforce. As a member of the Louisiana

House of Representatives I’m standing strong together with more than 19,000 leaders across our country to ensure that the federal government understands the infrastructure needs of our cities. Also, we object to any reallocation of federal mineral revenues unless the reallocation also increases the GOMESA revenue shared with Gulf Coast states. That’s why I’m calling on Congress to work with us to develop an infrastructure plan that invests in our vision to protect and restore our coast and our coastal communities. Our country is greatest when we invest in building great things and support working families. America’s infrastructure problems cannot wait. It’s time for Congress to work with citizens to rebuild and re-imagine America’s infrastructure. I appreciate all the hard work that our congressional delegation has previously undertaken to help in this regard; however, much more needs to be done so that we can rebuild to protect our future.

*State Rep. Jerome Zeringue is a Republican from Houma.*



DAILY COMET

CLARICE TOUHEY | Publisher  
KEITH MAGILL | Executive Editor  
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Carnival time is nearly upon us

Local people have just barely had a chance to catch their breath after the festive holiday season, a time marked by gatherings of family members and friends. But Carnival is just around the corner. In fact, Epiphany, observed on Sunday, marks the day the three wise men reached the infant Jesus and serves as the beginning of the Carnival season. Our season, of course, culminates in Mardi Gras, which this year will arrive on March 5. Between now and then, we will likely enjoy numerous plates of king cake of nearly every flavor imaginable. They have already begun to appear on store shelves around south Louisiana, tempting even the most vigilant keeper of weight-related resolutions made to ring in the new year. This is one of the things that makes our corner of the world unique. South Louisiana embraces the party-oriented traditions of Mardi Gras like no other place. And while people who live elsewhere are more familiar with the loud, risqué scenes from New Orleans, most of us enjoy the more family-oriented approach embraced in Houma-Thibodaux. Our parades and other festivities are family affairs. They are places to meet with family and friends, catch up on what has happened since last we met and, between friendly conversations, catch some beads and trinkets with the youngsters. The parades bring us together in communities up and down the local bayous. Houma and Thibodaux host some of the large events, but there are also incredible parades in smaller towns – happenings that draw thousands to line the streets, tap their feet to the sounds of marching bands and beg for throws from the generous float riders. None of it would be possible without the hard work and endless preparation on the part of the police and other emergency workers who are present on the parade routes in case bad things happen and to keep them from happening in the first place. For the krewe members who have spent all year hoarding beads or saving up to buy them between now and their parades, thank you for making this one of the best times of the year – anticipating the fun of catching so many beads, cups, toys and other throws. We will look forward to yet another great Carnival this year. But all we can do for the next several weeks is wait and anticipate.

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Picture this: fewer people spending your money



Mike Gorman

The newly sworn-in Lafourche Parish School Board members crowded together Wednesday night for a group picture. With any luck, the next time a board is sworn into office, it'll be a lot easier to fit all the members into the photograph. The board at its first meeting went ahead with an idea that for years the former board refused to embrace: reducing its size from 15 to nine members, saving the taxpayers money, making things easier for local voters and sending a powerful message to the public these folks are obviously eager to represent. It's not a done deal yet. The resolution the board passed Wednesday is really just a request to the Louisiana Legislature to take this long-needed action. And a similar effort last year by state Sen. Norby Chabert, R-Houma, failed (though that was likely because it lacked the backing of the intransigent former board). Now, we can all watch as an idea whose time came long ago is finally realized in a parish that is in dire need of some common sense from its political representatives.

Sadly, even as this reform moved forward Wednesday, several members of the board continued to cling to the tired and discredited excuses the old board had for remaining one of the three largest boards in the entire state. "This is the first item that we will agree to disagree," board member Al Archer said. "I feel that if we reduce from 15 to nine that representation will be in jeopardy. I feel we should keep it at 15." By that logic, we should just go ahead and have 30 or 100 or 90,000 people on the board. I mean, if 15 is better than nine, 90,000 is way better than 15, right? The point is – and it has always been the central point of this debate – that no one needs more school board members. As long as each vote on the board represents a roughly equal number of voters, the representation will be fair. I haven't heard anyone in south Lafourche arguing that the area is poorly represented on the Lafourche Parish Council because Daniel Lorraine is one of but nine council members. Archer had enough like-minded defenders of the status quo on the old board to stave off change, but the new board seems to be filled with reform-minded, action-oriented people who want to work for the teachers, the students and the public. Well done. Of course, the years of foot-dragging and waste wasn't enough for one newcomer.

Board member Valerie Bourgeois just took her seat on the board, and apparently she didn't have enough time during her campaign to study the most controversial and debated issue to face the board in years. "I'm sad and disappointed that this item is on the agenda of our first meeting as a new board that hasn't yet gotten its feet wet," Bourgeois said. "My disappointment has nothing to do with whether I'm in favor of it or not. This controversial issue has pitted our teachers against the board. It has pitted the public against the board and has pitted board members against board members." Another way to look at it is that an obstinate voting bloc on the old board pitted itself against the teachers, the public and the other members of the board by favoring job security for elected officials over responsible stewardship of the public's scarce resources. That time is likely nearing an end. Things like this don't just happen. They take the hard work, dedication and tenacity of people who enjoy the strength of their conviction. Congratulations to the board members, old and new, who just wouldn't let a good idea go away without a fight. Editorial Page Editor Michael Gorman can be reached at 448-7612 or mike.gorman@dailycomet.com. Follow him on Twitter @mikegormanla.

Welcome to the border, Mr. President



Sister Norma Pimentel.

Dear Mr. President, We welcome you to our community here in South Texas along the Rio Grande, which connects the United States to Mexico. I wish you could visit us. Our downtown Humanitarian Respite Center has been welcoming newcomers for the past four years. When families cross the border, they are typically apprehended by authorities, held for a few days and released with a court date to consider their request for asylum. After they are released, we receive them at our respite center. By the time they find their way to our doors, most adults are wearing Border Patrol-supplied ankle bracelets and carrying bulky chargers to keep those devices powered up. Helping these families has been our work since 2014, when tens of thousands

of people, primarily from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, crossed into the United States through the Rio Grande Valley Sector, creating a humanitarian emergency in our community. Before the respite center opened, dozens of immigrant families, hungry, scared and in a foreign land, huddled at the bus station with only the clothes on their back, nothing to eat or drink, and nowhere to shower or sleep. They waited hours and sometimes overnight for their buses. Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley first opened the center at Sacred Heart Church in McAllen and worked collaboratively with city officials and other faith denominations and non-profits, such as the Salvation Army and the Food Bank, to provide newly arrived immigrants with some basic necessities. We have moved to a bigger facility since. Every day of the year, from morning to evening, families coming over the border are welcomed at our center with smiles, a warm bowl of soup, a shower and a place to rest. Most families are

exhausted and afraid, carrying little more than a few belongings in a plastic bag. They come in all forms and at all ages. Few speak any English. Most are in great need of help. Some days, we see 20 people. Other days, it's closer to 300. In recent weeks, it has been very busy. Some stay a few hours, but many spend the night before heading on to new destinations. Since we opened, more than 100,000 have come through our doors. We work closely with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Rio Grande Valley Sector, and our team has cultivated a culture of mutual respect and dialogue. Our center staff, in communication with the Border Patrol, prepares to receive groups of immigrants who have been released. We try to meet the need. It is vital that we keep our country safe, and I appreciate the work of the men and women in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection who are vigilant as to who enters our country. I pray for them daily. Mr. President, if you come early in the morning, here is what you will see: The

families who have spent the night are tidying up their sleeping spaces. Some are sweeping, some are helping prepare breakfast, and some are getting ready for their bus departure to other places in the United States. You will see volunteers arriving to offer a hand either preparing hygiene packets, making sandwiches, cutting vegetables, preparing the soup for the day or sorting through donated clothing. Others may assist with the intake or help a mother or father contact family living in the United States. People come from all over the state and beyond to help. Later in the day, you will meet some of the children who are playing in our small play yard and the mothers and fathers who are watching over them. Some will be resting, as for many of them this is the first place since they left their home countries where they feel safe. In the evening, another group of volunteers arrives to cook and serve a simple dinner of pizza or tacos, beans and rice. Sometimes local restaurants donate the dinner. Either way, the families

who will remain for the night have a meal and prepare to sleep. In the morning, we send them on their way, a little better off but armed with a sign (that we give them) that reads: "PLEASE HELP ME. I DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH. WHAT BUS DO I TAKE? THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!" I am energized each day by the families I meet, especially the children. I am energized as well by the volunteers. They come from our local communities but also from across the United States. We witness daily how, working together, people of all faiths can focus on helping the person in front of us. Regardless of who we are and where we came from, we remain part of the human family and are called to live in solidarity with one another. As the Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, bishop of our diocese, says, "We must put human dignity first."

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