



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

**2019 Entry Form**

**Name of Author(s):** Michael Gorman

**Author's Title (editor, columnist, etc.):** Editorial page editor

**Newspaper:** The Courier and Daily Comet

**Address:** 1629 St. Mary St.

**City:** Thibodaux

**State:** LA

**ZIP:** 70301

**Phone:** 985-859-8757

**Fax:** 985-448-7606

**E-Mail:**

mike.gorman@dailycomet.com

**Submitted by:**

**Title of Person Submitting:** Editorial page editor Mike Gorman

**Phone Number:** 985-859-8757

**E-mail Address:** mike.gorman@dailycomet.com

**What is the subject/title of the entry?** School Board

**Date(s) of publication?** March 9, 2018; April 13, 2018; July 6, 2018; July 27, 2018; Nov. 9, 2018; and Jan. 1, 2019.

**Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation?** Under 50,000

**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.









# 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.

*Editorials represent the opinion of the newspaper, not of any individual.*

### 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 1/2 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."

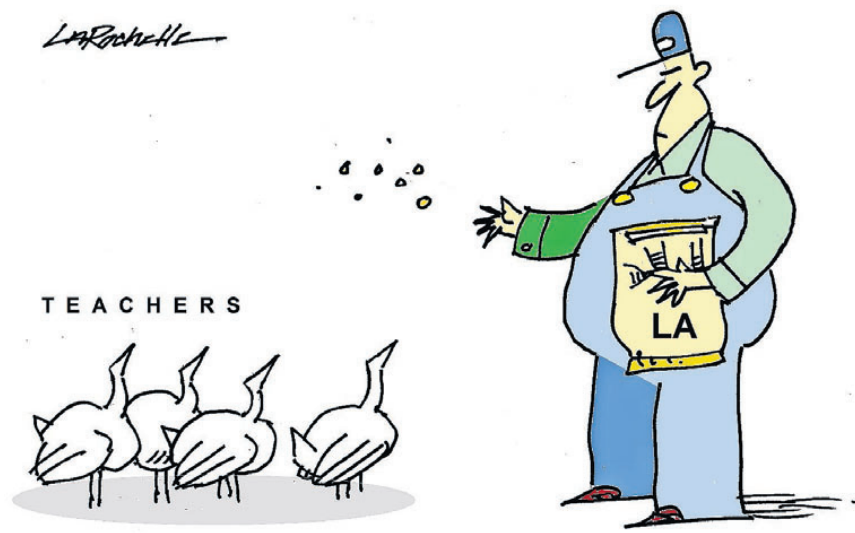
In 1986, Israel revealed it was holding Mordechai Vanunu, a former nuclear technician who'd vanished after providing information to a British newspaper about Israel's nuclear weapons program. (Vanunu was convicted of treason and served 18 years in prison.)

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.

*Editorial Page Editor Michael Gorman can be reached at 448-7612 or mike.gorman@dailycomet.com. Follow him on Twitter @mikegormanla.*

## 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 invests 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 cities 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  
 MICHAEL GORMAN | Editorial Editor

# 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.

*Editorials represent the opinion of the newspaper, not of any individual.*



## 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."

*Norma Pimentel, a sister of the Missionaries of Jesus, is director of Catholic Charities for the Rio Grande Valley.*