

EDITORIAL

Thoughts from the Publisher Honesty & Transparency

By Dale Benoit

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We work hard every week to keep the public informed of the happenings in the parish. That covers the gambit of social, civic and government endeavors. We do our best to be factual and complete in our reporting, so readers have a good understanding of what is taking place in our parish.

I have commented before that the Plaquemines Port Harbor and Terminal District leadership has been less than cooperative in releasing information, which we believe is a public record. We are at that juncture once again.

Executive Director Charles Tillotson's employment contract ends in early December. Tillotson is the highest paid public official in Plaquemines Parish. According to the 2023 legislative audit, Tillotson's salary and benefits totaled \$300,976. Knowing the contract end date, and having months to get the renewal going, the port commission waited until the very end to start this renewal process.

A resolution was introduced at the

last port commission meeting. It did not include a copy of the proposed contract. In my opinion, introducing a resolution authorizing a contract does not provide the public with any information. It does not share with the public how their funds are being spent.

When we received no response to our public records request for a copy of the contract, I called Port Chairman Brian Champagne. He told me the contract is not complete and he is not releasing it. He said it would be discussed at the meeting and released after it was signed. We subsequently obtained a copy of the proposed contract and Champagne did respond to a couple of questions, but he was only willing to speak after he knew we had the contract.

Last week I applauded the council for having the integrity and character to pass a referendum allowing voters to decide if port governance should be changed to a board of appointed individuals who have the experience to make important decisions a port commission must face. I pointed out most had campaigned on a commit-

ment to explore the option of an independent board. I believe many of them also campaigned on honesty and transparency.

The prior port administration and the council members who supported them were often criticized for not making available to the public information regarding contracts and backroom deals until after they were signed. Withholding this contract from public view makes me question if anything has changed.

If this proceeds as in the past, the public will hear a few verbal details of this contract at their meeting in Pointe a la Hache. If you happen to be in the room, you can offer your opinion. This is skirting the intent of the state's open meeting laws and the parish charter. To honor the letter of the law and the voters who elected them, the commission should present the contract at this week's meeting and defer approval until their following meeting, so their constituents have an opportunity to offer either their support or object to this new contract. They should live up to their commitment of honesty and transparency.

Plaquemines Drop-Offs for Operation Christmas Child for Nov. 18-25



Volunteers are preparing to collect Operation Christmas Child shoebox gifts during National Collection Week, Nov. 18 - 25. More than 4,700 drop-off locations will open across the country in November, and shoebox packers can find their local drop-off locations nearest them.

Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has been collecting and delivering gift-filled shoeboxes to children including many who are suffering from war, poverty, disease and disaster. Operation Christmas Child hopes to reach another 12 million children in 2024 with the hope of Jesus.

Shoebox packing is fun for individuals, families and groups! Find a step-by-step guide on the How to Pack a Shoebox webpage. The project partners with local churches across the globe to deliver these tangible expressions of God's love to children in need. Participants can donate \$10 per shoebox gift online through "Follow Your Box" and receive a tracking label to discover its destination.

"Children need hope, and they need to know that they are not alone and God loves them," said Franklin Graham, president of Samaritan's Purse. "Gift-filled shoeboxes open the door for us to share the hope of the Gospel with boys and girls around the world. Please pray that these simple gifts have an eternal impact."

The Plaquemines drop-off location will be The CrossRoads Church at 308 Avenue J, Belle Chasse, LA 70037.

Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, seeks to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world and, together with the local church worldwide, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 220 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 170 countries and territories.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thoughts of the Mid-Barataria Diversion

Dear Editor,

My ancestors lived along bayou Terrebonne and Lafourche, distributaries off of the Mississippi River since the 1700's. I've built a successful business booking charter boats out of Plaquemines Parish. Many of my guides fish across the river out of Neptune Pass and downriver out of Venice.

Most of the Anglers and guides, who fish Plaquemines Parish fish out of Venice, a place known as perhaps the best fishing destination in the world. There's a fleet of shrimp, offshore and commercial fishing boats that fish out of Venice. They get to their fishing spots by traveling on North America's largest distributar-

ies. Baptiste Collette, Pass A Loutre, South Pass, Main Pass, Octave Pass, Southwest Pass, Grand Pass, Tiger Pass are a few of the many distributaries that they use.

When I'm told that the Mid-Barataria diversion, (distributary) is going to ruin our fishing I ask how can that be? If the water was so bad then how can we have such an abundance of flora and fauna downriver where so many distributaries exist? It's comical. Decision makers should be more familiar with the make up of our delta, it's history, culture and future.

The rock, known as Alcatraz, 2.5 acres is over 100,000,000 years old, the peninsula of Plaquemines Parish is 1000 years old. It was made up of plant life and decay, cypress forests,

Oak ridges along distributaries, cheniers, oyster reefs, clam bottoms, salt and Sulphur domes, etc.. We had salt water bayous, like Grand Bayou that moved the tides in and out of our estuary and fresh water bayous which are distributaries that trees grew along. Plaquemines Parish is the newest land in North America. It is rich, fertile and fragile and it needs are help.

The Mid-Barataria diversion is a critical project for our survival. Let's not let special interest groups determine the future of Plaquemines Parish.

Sincerely,
Foster Creppel, Innkeeper
Woodland Plantation, circa 1834

Endorsement from the Republican Parish Executive Committee

Dear Editor,

The Republican Executive Committee of Plaquemines Parish is proud to endorse Donald J. Trump for President of the United States and Steve Scalise for U. S. Representative, 1st Congressional District of Louisiana. Election Day is November 5, 2024, and Early Voting runs from October 18, 2024 through October 29 (except Sundays). We ask all voters to join us in

supporting these candidates as we strive to save our country.

These men, along with a Republican Majority we hope to elect in both Houses of Congress, will help restore our economy, our borders, our sense of freedom and security here at home, our military, and our position of respect and leadership in the world. All of them have been under assault from our enemies around the world and those at home who want to fundamen-

tally change our country. Enough is enough. Those of us who believe in traditional American ideals must take our country back using prayer and the ballot box, and now is the time. Vote Trump! Vote Scalise! Vote to renew America! God bless.

Sincerely,
Mike Mariana
Chairman of Republican Parish Executive Committee for Plaquemines Parish

Lawmakers Must Support Cassidy's Fight for Affordable Flood Insurance

Dear Editor,

This hurricane season has given Senator Bill Cassidy's fight to rein in flood insurance costs a new sense of urgency not only for our state but for the nation. From small business owners who could see their facilities damaged to hardworking families who could lose their homes, every American should have a sense of security that they will not lose their livelihood because of something entirely out of their control.

Earlier in the summer, Hurricane Beryl left a trail of damage that placed Louisiana in a state of emergency. Now, our country is grappling with the devastating human and financial toll of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. The severe damage caused by these storms risks exhausting National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) funds—a

lifeline for families that need to rebuild after a storm-and calling into question the program's long-term sustainability. Reforms are needed now.

Senator Cassidy has been at the forefront of this issue in Congress, leading conversations to ensure the health of the NFIP and rising premiums are not ignored in Washington. This summer, Senator Cassidy delivered a speech on the U.S. Senate floor urging his colleagues to address NFIP affordability. In doing this, Cassidy stood up for Louisianans already struggling with President Biden's inflation to ensure that their lives were not financially destroyed by a storm.

The new risk assessment program for the NFIP, Risk Rating 2.0, actively works against this goal. It is making the program unafford-

able for many, and the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that it could force 900,000 people to drop out. And with a smaller group of policyholders, the likelihood that the program collapses will only go up.

Lawmakers should support Senator Cassidy's work to mitigate the adverse impacts of Risk Rating 2.0 and other barriers to flood insurance access. Those who reside in flood-prone areas should have affordable insurance without skyrocketing premiums. Insurance is meant to save users from financial ruin, not contribute to it. As Cassidy put it, lawmakers owe it to their constituents to "find a solution to a system that isn't working."

Sincerely,
Jerome "Zee" Zeringue
State Representative District 52

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EARLY VOTING
OCTOBER 18 - 29
8:30 A.M. - 6:00 P.M.
(EXCEPT SUNDAYS, OCTOBER 20 & 27)

EARLY VOTING LOCATIONS
Registrar of Voters Office - 28028 Hwy. 23, Port Sulphur
Annex Building - 301 Main St., Belle Chasse
Percy Griffin Community Center - 15535 Hwy. 15, Braithwaite (Saturdays only)

ELECTION DAY: NOVEMBER 5, 2024
VISIT WWW.SOS.LA.GOV TO VIEW YOUR BALLOT