

Newsletter of the LCHR

Louisiana Council on Human Relations

James D. Wilson, Jr., Editor

Volume 44, Issue 4
July, August, September, 2008

LCHR Board Actions July 2008

The Board of Directors met on July 19 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Navarre in Lafayette. Membership Chair Richard Haymaker distributed copies of a new brochure for LCHR, which listed the name and city of residence of each of the members of the Board of Directors and the names of the officers. It also identified the website of LCHR, www.lachr.com, and of the BRCHR, www.brchr.org. It stated LCHR's purpose: "Our aim is to counter prejudice and discrimination against racial and religious groups and promote better understanding among these groups." Haymaker had sent out dues notices recently. Leslie and Shirley Burris, longtime members of the Board of Directors, announced that they are moving to Mississippi and resigning from the Board.

Paul Burns distributed to each Board member a copy of his first draft of a new LCHR Position Paper on The War on Drugs. He recommended that the Board discuss this matter at its October 2008 meeting. His proposal states that the current War on Drugs, which seeks to eradicate illegal drugs from our society, has cost billions of dollars, wrecked countless lives, clogged our criminal justice system with non-violent offenders, and disproportionately targets people of color and low income. His proposed position paper lists twenty-five alternative policies.

Burns also called Board members' attention to a July 17, 2008 news item in the Baton Rouge *Advocate*, headlined "PSC Seeks To Help Poor, Elderly With Electricity." Below the headline was a statement: "Companies that sell electricity and natural gas are expecting dramatic increases in monthly bills." Also Public Service Commission member Foster Campbell, Bossier Parish, asked his four colleagues to join him in pressing Gov. Bobby Jindal to set aside part of the state's \$1 billion surplus to help fund the program.

Burns asked each Board member to write his or her commissioner asking for help for the state's poor and elderly residents. The PSC website is www.lpsc.org. Louisiana's five Public Service Commissioners and their districts are: Foster Campbell for most of north Louisiana; James M. "Jimmy" Field for parts of Baton Rouge, the Feleiana Parishes, and most of south central Louisiana; Jack A. "Jay" Blossman, Jr. for the eastern Florida Parishes, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and parts of Jefferson Parish; Lambert C. Boissiere, II for Orleans Parish and the Mississippi River Parishes through parts of Baton Rouge; and C. Dale Sittig for most of southwestern and central Louisiana.

LCHR's by-laws require that the Board elect officers at the next Board meeting after the annual meeting. At the July Board meeting the 2007-2008 officers were re-elected to another one-year term: Joseph Dennis (Lafayette), President; Thelma Deamer (Baton Rouge), Vice President; Patricia Rickels (Lafayette), Corresponding Secretary; Richard Haymaker (Baton Rouge), Membership Secretary; John Mikell (Lafayette), Treasurer. Others elected were James D. Wilson, Jr. (Lafayette), Newsletter Editor; and Paul Burns (Baton Rouge), Historian and Assistant Treasurer.

The Board agreed to hold its next quarterly meeting on Saturday, October 18, at the home of Board member James E. Cross in Baker.

BRCHR FALL FORUM

**Topic: Mass Transit and Other
Overlooked Issues in the
BR Bond Proposal**

**Thursday, October 16; 6-7:45pm
Delmont Gardens Branch Library
3351 Lorraine Street**

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ACLU Report on Racial Justice in Louisiana

The summer, 2008 issue of *Louisiana Liberties*, the newsletter of the Louisiana Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, carries a report from its Racial Justice Fellow, Liza Grote, who has spent nearly a year investigating racial profiling and criminal justice issues in our state. She analyzed arrest data from several parishes, met with law enforcement officials, and spoke with profiling victims. Bottom line: In many parishes people of color were more than twice as likely to be arrested as whites.

The most biased location was Bunkie (in Avoyelles Parish, 35 miles southeast of Alexandria), where people of color were over three times as likely to be arrested as whites. None of the Bunkie criminal defendants is represented by counsel, because the court has no defense attorneys. Liza assisted in formation of a Bunkie Community Coalition to improve the situation.

The ACLU also received many racial profiling complaints from St. Tammany and DeSoto Parishes. In these two parishes blacks were more than twice as likely to be arrested as whites. Grote reported that St. Tammany's sheriff told her that he has increased the number of black officers in his department from three in 1996 to 60 in 2008. Ms. Grote's discovered that the law passed in 2001 to prohibit racial profiling by Louisiana law enforcement agencies is not working.

Racism continues to characterize Louisiana's criminal justice system. The ACLU had a grant for this project which lasted only one year. However, Louisiana ACLU plans to monitor racial justice issues and address those problems.

The ACLU also has a new Prison Litigation worker, Barry Gerharz, who was scheduled to begin work last July to help improve the terrible conditions in our state's prisons. Funded by a two-year grant from the ACLU national office, Gerharz's work is greatly needed. Louisiana has the highest incarceration rate in the U.S., which has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Louisiana's 13 state prisons and 108 local jails are horrible places. Prison complaints received by Louisiana ACLU include allegations of abuse, squalid living conditions, inadequate medical care, and denial of first-amendment freedoms.

Housing Prejudice in New Orleans

Since Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005 there have been many cases of housing discrimination in this area. The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center has been an advocacy group leading the struggle against post-Katrina housing discrimination. The Center sent black and white “testers” to apply for 40 rental properties in Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany parishes. Black and white prospective renters received different treatment in access to appointments to view rental units, information regarding availability of units, access to applications, and response to voice messages. “Linguistic profiling” resulted in some housing providers not returning phone calls from black testers but returning white tester calls the same day. Also blacks and whites were sometimes quoted different monthly rental amounts for the same apartment. Testing is a legal and effective tool to study claims of housing discrimination.

Local governments have been creating new laws to prevent African-Americans from returning. Before Katrina African-Americans lived in low-cost or multi-family housing, and if this kind of housing is not permitted to be re-built, African-Americans or Latinos will not be able to return. For example, Latinos in Kenner (Jefferson Parish) before the storm lived in a 400-unit subsidized housing development, but after the storm the parish council passed a yearlong moratorium on the building of multifamily housing. In the New Orleans region historically white suburbs are passing laws which restrict, limit, or ban the building and renting of homes which traditionally benefit low-income people of color.

Jefferson Parish, home to ex-Klan member David Duke, located just west of New Orleans, was nearly 70 percent white before Katrina. There have been vigilante acts of intimidation. For example, a young African-American couple moved into the area last spring. They were welcomed with three crosses and the letters KKK burned into their lawn!

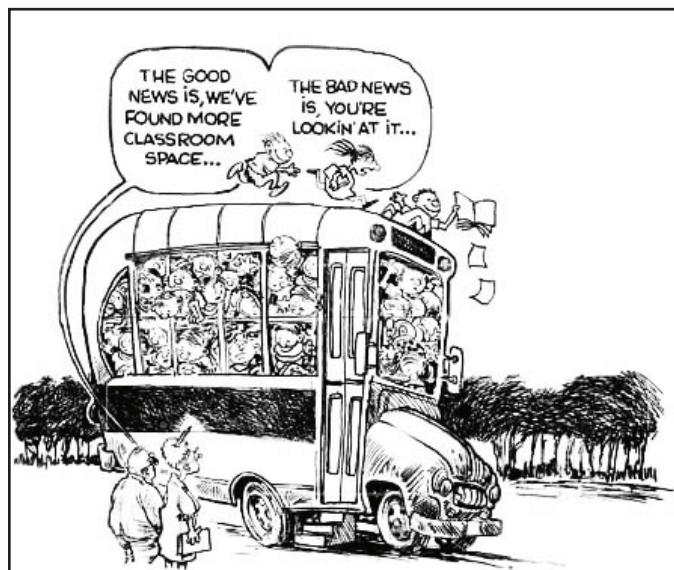
Among the first to take action against black families was St. Bernard Parish, adjacent to New Orleans, 84 percent white before Katrina. Its governing council passed a 12-month ban on the re-establishment and development of multi-family dwellings. It also

passed a “blood-relative” ordinance, close to being a new Jim Crow law. “Jim Crow law” is a term used to describe laws in the South which discriminated against blacks, such as requiring them to sit in the back of a city bus or forbidding them to play on a public golf course. Black renters have been harassed in a number of ways, such as being stopped by police as they drove to their homes in once-white neighborhoods, and having a black landlord’s property destroyed by arson.

School Bus Problems in Lafayette

In late August thirty-one middle school children were removed from a school bus which was so overcrowded that the children were forced to stand in the aisle. State Representative Ricky Hardy, a former member of the Lafayette Parish School Board, reported that ninety students had been loaded on a bus designed to transport no more than sixty. “One time that bus stops for an emergency,” he said, “and those kids are going through the windshield.”

Because of safety issues, financial constraints, and concerns that students do not get enough exercise, some communities (not in Louisiana, of course) are experimenting with having students walk to school in groups with one or more supervising adults to ensure safety. Initial reports are that the system seems to be working. Long-time LCHR board member Pat Rickels points out, “this comes as no surprise to me — we didn’t know there was any other way to get to school other than walking and I went to school in Montana and Nome, Alaska.”



Racial Disparity Found in School Paddlings

Paddlings, swats, licks. A quarter of a million schoolchildren got them in 2006-2007 and blacks, American Indians, and children with disabilities got a disproportionate share of the punishment, according to a recent study. Completed by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union, the study used Education Department data to show that, while paddling has been declining, racial disparity persists.

Researchers also interviewed students, parents, and school personnel in Texas and Mississippi, states that account for 40 percent of the 223,190 children who were paddled at least once in the 2006-2007 school year.

A majority of states have outlawed it, but corporal punishment remains widespread across the South. Behind Texas and Mississippi were Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Florida, and Missouri.

A teacher interviewed by Human Rights Watch, Tiffany Bartlett, said that when she taught in the Mississippi Delta, the policy was to lock the classroom doors when the bell rang, leaving stragglers to be paddled by an administrator patrolling the hallways. Bartlett now is a school teacher in Austin, Texas.

And even if schools make a mistake, they are unlikely to face lawsuits. In places where corporal punishment is allowed, teachers and principals generally have legal immunity from assault laws, the study said.

“One of the things we’ve seen over and over again is that parents have difficulty getting redress, if a child is paddled and severely injured, or paddled in violation of parents’ wishes,” said Alice Farmer, the study’s author.

The study found:

- African American students are more than twice as likely to be paddled. The disparity persists even in places with large black populations, the study found. Similarly, Native

Americans were more than twice as likely to be paddled, the study found.

- In states where paddling is most common, black girls were paddled more than twice as often as white girls.
- Boys are three times as likely to be paddled as girls.
- Special education students were more likely to be paddled.

More than 100 countries worldwide have banned paddling in schools, including all of Europe, Farmer said. “International human rights law puts a pretty strong prohibition on corporal punishment,” she said.

In many American schools that allow corporal punishment, youths can avoid a paddling if they accept suspension or detention, or for younger children, if they skip recess. But often, a child opts for the short-term sting of the paddle.

And sometimes teachers don’t have the option of after-school detention, because there are no buses to take students home later.

Campaign Objects to Doctors Participating in Executions

The Moratorium Campaign, spearheaded by Sr. Helen Prejean, SCJ, has launched a new professional ethics initiative to dissuade medical doctors from participating in executions. The Moratorium Campaign’s office is now located on the Southern University campus, Catholic Student Center, 586 Hardin Blvd. Baton Rouge 70807. The organization’s Director is the Rev. George F. Lundy, S.J., who is collecting signatures on a petition to dissuade doctors from participating in executions. Petition signers affirm the American Medical Association’s Ethical Opinion 2.06, which states that physicians should not participate in legally authorized executions.

Contact Fr. Lundy, a member of LCHR, if you wish to sign the petition. Fr. Lundy’s phone: 225-223-4919, Fax: 225-775-2702, Email: info@MoratoriumCampaign.org, Website: www.MoratoriumCampaign.org.

Fees and Surcharges Now Imposed on Criminal Offenders

Texas has arrest fees, Colorado has booking fees, New York has DNA bank fees, and Michigan has fees for court-appointed lawyers. It seems weird to sentence someone to 10 years of prison, then tell him, “Oh, by the way, you also owe \$1,000.” However, throughout the country in addition to prison sentences or alternatives such as drug programs, this is often being done. For example, Bobby, age 26, recently served eighteen and a half months in Virginia. He is now out and working part time but owes \$9,000 in court fees and \$10,000 in accrued interest and penalties. He believes he can never get out of debt, thinking, “I might as well live it up until I get locked up again!”

But recidivism is not talked about—unfortunately there is little meaningful thought on the implications of the entire surcharge/fee system.

Having a Black President a Good Thing for White Supremacists?

Authors of an article in the Fall 2008 Intelligence Report of the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that a growing number of white supremacists think that a black man in the Oval Office would shock white America, possibly drive millions to their cause, and perhaps even set off a race war that, they hope, would ultimately end in Aryan victory. Neo-Nazi David Duke, for example sees clear advantages in an Obama victory this fall. “Obama will be a signal, a clear signal for millions of our people,” Duke wrote in an essay entitled “A Black Flag for White America” posted to his website this summer.

Black and Hispanic Drivers Arrested More Often

Although black, Hispanic, and white drivers are equally likely to be “pulled over” by police in the U.S., according to a study by the U.S. Justice Department, what happens to drivers after the stop differs, according to the director of the ACLU racial justice project. After the stop, blacks and Hispanic motorists are much more likely to be searched than white motorists. Black motorists (4.5 percent) are more than twice as likely as white motorists (2.1 percent) to be arrested. Hispanic drivers are arrested 3.1 percent of the time. Force is used by the police against blacks 4.4 percent of the time, whites 1.2 percent of the time, Hispanics 2.3 percent of the time.

“Shackles of Memory” Trans-Atlantic Slave Exhibit Installed

The city of St. Martinville recently hosted a delegation from Nantes, France, members of an association dedicated to researching the transatlantic slave trade. The group delivered a new, permanent exhibit to the St. Martinville Cultural Center’s African American Museum. The fourteen-panel exhibit, titled “The Shackles of Memory,” recounts the story of the slave trade and the chain of events that took place in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The African American Museum of St. Martinville is located at 125 New Market Street, near the Evangeline Oak. For more information on the museum or the new exhibit, please visit their website: <http://www.dssnet.net/africanamerican/>



**Stories or ideas for the newsletter
may be sent to the editor at:**

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Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations

Volume 43, Issue 4

Baton Rouge Council Plans Meeting on Mass Transit

The Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations for many years has tried to get the Parish Council to provide better public transportation, particularly for low-income residents. The local bus system is woefully inadequate.

At its August 14 Board meeting the Baton Rouge Council decided to have a FALL FORUM on “Overlooked Issues” (particularly mass transit) relative to Mayor-President Melvin “Kip” Holden’s \$989 million capital improvements bond proposal, to be voted on by East Baton Rouge Parish residents on November 4. The forum, open to the public, will be held Thursday, October 16. The Board plans to send mailed invitations to members and friends with more information.

The 2008-09 Program Committee members are Cynthia DeMarcus Manson (Chair), Gloria Hall, Valerie Jackson Jones, MiJa Thompson, Eileen Shieber, and Erick Gilmore. The Publicity Committee members are Glorious Wright (Chair), Nathan Gottfried, Bobby Thompson, and any other interested volunteer.

Guest Editorial

Does the Mayor's Plan Cover Mass Transportation?

I asked this question on July 26 in letters to the Mayor-President and to MetroCouncil members Mickey Skyring and Byron Sharper, but have yet to receive any response.

The Baton Rouge *Advocate's* reports on the \$989 million plan and the plan description on the MetroCouncil's website are silent on mass transportation and bus system improvement. Apparently, the plan

does not cover mass transportation and bus system improvement.

In 1992 a plan named the “Horizon Plan” was adopted by the MetroCouncil “as the comprehensive land use and development plan for E.B.R. Parish.” Information Bulletin No. 25 of the Baton Rouge City-Parish Planning Commission was issued to the public in January 2008. One of the seven Horizon Plan “elements” was Transportation. For this element the overall goal was stated as “to provide a transportation system that will accommodate present and future needs for mobility of all people and goods travelling within and through the parish. The transportation system should be safe, efficient, and economically feasible, and should promote efficient land use and development.” Goal T2 of the Horizon Plan stated that all feasible and applicable travel modes should be utilized, and all segments of the population should be served. Goal T5 stated that the transportation system should include integrated mass transit, carpools, bicycles, and pedestrians. Goal T8 called for bikeways and hiking trails.

Are our community leaders, such as the Mayor-President, the Metro-Council, the Chamber of Commerce, and Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and other endorsers to this year’s plan, paying any attention to the Horizon Plan?

-Paul Burns

“One Baton Rouge” Group Fosters Tolerance and Inclusion

In 2007 some Baton Rouge leaders pushed for a public statement that the community welcomes diverse populations, it eventually became known as the “One Baton Rouge” resolution. While a few members of the MetroCouncil supported the resolution, as did Mayor-President Holden, it failed to get the seven votes needed for passage. Several of the members that voted against the resolution indicated that they

could not support a measure that favored tolerance of gay citizens.

Wendy Hirschman, leader of the “One Baton Rouge” group, indicates that supporters are in the process of organizing an educational campaign to make Baton Rouge a more welcoming community. Welcoming diverse populations in a community is good for attracting new business, but even more importantly, it is the right thing to do.

Conditions at Shreveport Area Hurricane Shelters Criticized

As thousands of Hurricane Gustav evacuees lived amid conditions described as deplorable, Louisiana officials are left to explain why out-of-state absentee landlords received at least \$1 million in lease payments for facilities that didn’t have the most-basic necessities.

Officials readily admit there were visible “gaps” in the state’s response to Gustav evacuees, but maintain the overriding goal — to provide for the safety of some two million south Louisiana residents — was achieved.

Conditions at two state-run Shreveport area facilities, under the authority of the Department of Social Services, had some officials wondering if lessons learned as a result of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were forgotten. “Three years later, we should at least have (a designated shelter in Shreveport) on some sort of planning board,” said state Rep. Roy Burrell, D-Shreveport. Burrell was among Shreveport leaders decrying conditions at state-run shelters that found some 5,300 evacuees — the state’s poorest citizens, the handicapped and the elderly — without adequate restrooms and showers. One state-run Shreveport shelter didn’t have air conditioning, and its electrical and plumbing capacity was not up to the demands of a 24-hour shelter.

As a result, evacuees such as Paula Garrison, of Jeanerette, were left to bathe, brush their teeth and tend to other hygienic needs in a few portable toilets described as “filthy.” “We’re not asking for much; we’re just asking for hot running water,” said Garrison, who joined a small group of shelter protesters.

Eventually, more portable toilets and makeshift showers were brought in for Garrison and evacuees — only after local officials shocked by the conditions and worried about evacuees’ health contacted state authorities.

“It was an eye-opener,” said state Rep. Patrick Williams, D-Shreveport, who described the smell of urine, filthy, limited restroom facilities and evacuees lying on cots suffering in hot, stagnant rooms at one shelter. “When you walk in expecting one thing and then you see what you see — that’s really what got us. (Evacuees) understood this was an emergency, but if they could get clean and be comfortable, I think it would have been a lot more comfortable (at the shelters).”

Conditions at state-run shelters not only were criticized by local Shreveport officials but also by faith-based groups and a New Orleans advocacy group that led the Thursday protest. The group maintained DSS policy of sending critical transportation needs evacuees to state-run shelters was differential and prejudicial. “Across Louisiana, the poor people, who are still suffering, were evacuated to disgusting, inhumane conditions like this,” said Saket Soni, New Orleans Workers’ Center for Racial Justice spokesman. “You do not place income above the lives and safety of our fellow Louisiana residents,” said Shreveport Mayor Cedric Glover.

State officials pledged to evaluate successes and shortcomings and fix problems but hoped evacuees and citizens would give them credit for doing what was necessary during an emergency situation. As one state official admitted, “we have a lot to improve on and we’ll do that.”

For Garrison and other evacuees, those changes could mean the difference between life and death. Some said conditions at state-run shelters would cause them to think twice about heeding an evacuation order for subsequent hurricanes. But others, such as Tammy Hawkins, of Houma, said although conditions were “bad” she would again evacuate, if necessary. “I will go wherever they send me,” said Hawkins, who was holding a bar of Irish Spring soap and preparing to take her first shower in four days. “I’d rather be safe than sorry.”

Membership Information
(for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2008)

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