



# Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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### ***The Louisiana Weekly***

#### **You must exercise your vote!**

October 30, 2006

For the 82 year history of The Louisiana Weekly, this newspaper has stood as an alternative for reform. Whether the issue was in favor of civil rights or in opposition to political corruption, no media source has as consistently stood at the bulwark of growing this state into a society of which all could be proud, regardless of skin color or economic status.

That is why we view the November 7, 2006 election as so critical to the future of the state. From the hotly contested Second Congressional Race to the critical constitutional amendments on the ballot, our editorial board urges the voters, where ever they live, to go to the polls or find some alternative absentee method to vote. Tragically, many of the residents of New Orleans in particular consider next Tuesday as only another weekday. We pray they will not.

#### **OUR ENDORSEMENTS**

Second Congressional District: Karen Carter

The fundamental truth that a man remains innocent until proven guilty has guided the social policy of this newspaper for decades. Despite the videotape and other accusations, we refuse to convict Bill Jefferson before the U.S. Attorney has even brought charges. However, an election is not a trial of guilt or innocence. It is a public choice of which candidate can best represent the general welfare of his or her district in Washington. There is absolutely no doubt in the minds of our editorial board members that Bill Jefferson no longer has the trust of his fellow Representatives, and his re-election would only further exacerbate New Orleans' already stained reputation nationally. The cloud that now hangs over Mr. Jefferson comes at a time when we so desperately need the good will of our fellow Americans to receive the oil revenues necessary to repair our collapsing levees and dwindling wetlands. We cannot afford the luxury of political charity when our very survival is at stake.

We equally lack the luxury of time. Whomever joins the 110th Congress must have established relationships in Washington from retired senior statesmen to leaders of his or her own party. He or she must have a working knowledge of public policy initiatives and a knack for the legislative process to get things done. Karen Carter, who has served in various national Democratic party positions since her nineteenth birthday, would hit the ground running in Washington where personal relationships are so critical. Moreover, where most candidates stumble through issues, engaging Karen Carter on policy is like stumbling into a Brookings Institution symposium on political reform.

Congressman Jefferson argues that he possesses the relationships and the seniority to help the state already, yet not one of this newspaper's contacts on Capitol Hill believe that Nancy Pelosi will risk the ire of the press by restoring his Ways and Means assignment. Nor is the old adage that if you want a friend in politics, get a dog, out of place. Few in the Democratic caucus want to stand beside Bill Jefferson on any issue, no matter how popular.

Third Congressional District: Charlie Melancon

We have grown into great fans of the moderate Democrat from Napoleonville. Two years ago, we supported his opponent Billy Tauzin III, believing that Melancon lacked the contacts to achieve the quick influence necessary to a small and poor state like Louisiana. Needless to say, we were wrong. Congressman Melancon has achieved influence in Washington far beyond anyone's expectations.

Both parties court the centrist legislator, and with the Democrats on the brink of control of the House of Representatives, someone liked and respected in their caucus is doubly important. Melancon, thanks his willingness to work across party lines, nearly brokered a deal that would have brought one billion dollars per year, for five years, to fight coastal erosion. In the event of a narrow Democratic victory in the House, Melancon plans to use his influence with the Blue Dog (conservative) Democrats to provide the offshore revenues we need. He may very well receive Bill Jefferson's seat on Ways and Means as well.

State Senator Craig Romero would have none of these assets if elected.

First Congressional District: Bobby Jindal

Though he lacks a competitive race, this newspaper wanted to use our endorsement to reiterate our longstanding confidence in Mr. Jindal. Within days of his election to the House, the new Congressman was voted as the new President of the GOP Freshman Class. Not surprisingly, the contacts that he made as a Bush Administration staffer advanced him quickly in Washington, and proved very helpful as Jindal sought White House support to give Louisiana the offshore royalties that this state deserves.

After Katrina, Bobby Jindal was one of the first people back on the ground. He organized relief efforts when too many other politicians were busy with press conferences or mutual accusations. As the recovery began, Jindal held town meetings to help Louisianans, not only in his district, but across the state-and particularly in the city. When no other politician outside the city would come to New Orleans East, St. Bernard, or the Ninth Ward, Bobby Jindal not only met with the residents, but got them national attention, particularly in the fight to stop the large landfill that would have made much of Village d'East toxic.

Jindal is the living example that it matters not what party you join, but what kind of leader you are.

Constitutional Amendments

CA No. 1 (Act 511-2005): YES

Currently, the property tax assessments of senior citizens are frozen at the age of 65 (55 for the widowed). This would extend the benefit to include people with a military service-connected disability of over 50% of the body, soldiers missing in action, prisoners of war, spouses of military members killed in action, and any person that a state or federal administrative agency has declared totally disabled. In other words, the amendment protects those who have sacrificed for our country or have been disadvantaged by nature from having their fixed incomes eroded by inflation. It is just right to vote for this act.

CA No. 2 (Act 864-2006): YES

The state is supposed to give parishes 20% of the severance taxes collected in individual parishes. But, there is a cap of \$750,000 that has not increased since 1998. This amendment would jump that cap to \$850,000 and adjust the increases for inflation, so parishes would not have to go begging to the legislature every decade. It is in the interest of the state to have parishes with the sufficient resources to repair their own bridges and roads, and provide for their own capital expenses, rather than going to the legislature every year.

CA No. 3 (Act 510-2005): YES

The State Constitution is supposed to exclude property taxes from non-profit organizations, particularly hospitals. But should a non-profit hospital lease its equipment to a small, rural health care provider, it must pay taxes on the transaction. This discourages health care for the rural poor and makes no social sense.

CA No. 4 (Act 512-2005): YES

This bans the car tax in New Orleans once and for all.

It was supposed to happen after 2004's legislation, and would cost the city nothing since no property tax bill on automobiles has gone out in the last two years. Particularly, after Katrina, as many cars remain nonfunctional, hitting their often poor owners with yet another tax is no way to keep people from out-migrating. Besides, the state bans this tax for itself and for parishes. This just extends the uniformity of the code to municipalities.

CA No. 5 (Act 509-2005): YES

If someone has artwork in his home, he pays no property tax on it. However, if he would place it on consignment for sale at an art gallery, or an art gallery owner purchases it to sell, there is an often huge bill. This discourages the art galleries that make New Orleans such a cultural center. Equally unfair is that the tax is only levied in the French Quarter and the Warehouse District. Nowhere else in New Orleans or throughout the state are businesses so charged. Why penalize a company on Royal Street, but not tax one on Magazine or Oak? Considering the economic state of our arts community in the wake of the storm, it makes no sense to tax either. This amendment would stop this needless tax.

CA No. 6 (Act 862-2006): YES

This proposal would codify the power for the legislature to create new family or juvenile judgeships beginning next year. Currently, these judgeships are created through a legal fiction that might violate current random allotment rules that give access to any judge in dispute. This amendment would empower the legislature to create judgeships based on the recommendation of the Judicial Council of the Louisiana Supreme Court. With the consolidation of Civil and Criminal Courts in Orleans Parish in 2014, this amendment would allow the new court to continue to keep family court as a distinct entity.

CA No. 7 (Act 863-2006): YES

At long last, Orleans Parish would join the rest of the state by have a single property assessor. This could lead to a uniform and fair system of assessments, far better than the currently fractured and politically connected system. Voters statewide and in Orleans must

each approve this measure for it to pass. It would not take effect until the current incumbents leave office in 2010.

CA No. 8 (Act 861-2006): YES

Not every parish has one single school system. The city of Baker, for example, has a separate system from East Baton Rouge Parish Public School System. This would allow the Central Community School System in East Baton Rouge to have the same independence. We like this precedent, and would hope that other communities have the opportunity to take personal control of their school systems. The Central Community would include Bellingrath and Tanglewood elementary schools, Central Middle School, and Central High School. The design keeps the critical mass buying power of a district without losing the independence of a charter school. And, by creating a separate school board is accountable to the public. This may provide an answer for other parishes, including New Orleans' disfunction school system, a system that despite the hype, the state has done little to improve.

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