

Opinions

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The culture of government in Catahoula Parish

By: Leo Chappelle

The Town of Jonesville demonstrates that not even a good system of government guarantees good outcomes when a polity is related to a larger, failing community.

The present disaster in the Mayor's Office and the Town's budget debacle are exhibits "A" and "B". The Town is too weak to be the economic spark plug for the parish and the entire region of the Lower Mississippi River Valley has been shedding population and growth faster than the Mississippi River sheds water.

The Town of Jonesville has an independently elected executive in the mayor's office, and I have thought for a long time that the Catahoula Parish Police Jury should be replaced with a similar arrangement. As of now, the de facto chief executive of the parish is the Police Jury secretary-treasurer. That is the way Police Juries are frequently run in Louisiana and the way we have operated under previous secretary-treasurers and Police Juries in Catahoula, probably as long as anyone remembers.

I think what this demonstrates rather clearly is a sort of natural necessity for a competent chief executive with certain independent authority or else our own miniature version of a "deep state",

that is, a corps of professional bureaucrats.

We have chosen the latter, but I believe, as I have said previously, we need the former, an independently elected chief executive.

The reason is that an elected representative in the executive position would have clear, elected authority as a counterweight to the council (Police Jury). The secretary-treasurer is a de facto chief executive in partnership with the hand puppet of a Police Jury president. The council (Police Jury) would be a check and balance over against any tendency to excess on the part of an independently elected chief executive officer.

As it is now, the Police Jury picks its own president who is really just a committee chairman, but in practice he, or she, tends to do more of the rubber stamping of the work accomplished under the secretary-treasurer's watchful eye who still steers the helm.

Police Jury meetings are mostly a formality at which only one or two of the Jurors barely mumble "aye" whenever there is a vote. I was once told under a previous Jury president that only one member of the Jury needed to vote on a question.

No doubt that was because a culvert or load of pit run only goes into one Juror's ward. But that is still the stupidest thing I have ever heard in government. If only one Juror needs to vote, then why do we need a quorum to have a meeting?

The Town of Jonesville has an outstanding potential leader in Bruce Lofton and Bennie Vault, Sr., Josie Bullitts, Catina Branch, and Loria Hollins have been faithful representatives of their constituents for a long time. Still, the saving grace of the Town of Jonesville government is that normally its chief executive is dependent

on the people for his job, not the other members of the Town Council. On the Police Jury, the Jury president is dependent on the other members of the Police Jury for his executive status, not the voters. Yes, he has to get re-elected (though no one even bothered to run against the current president in the last election).

So, with such an inattentive electorate, it should be obvious who any would-be Police Jury president has to keep happy. And it's not the people.



JEB Tales

By John Ed Bartmess, Jr.

Working Together

In an old old western movie, I saw many years ago, an outlaw who was running from the law, came up on a dead preacher and exchanged clothes with him. When the outlaw went into the next town the church people thought the outlaw was the preacher. Since the outlaw was tired of running, he took the job.

Later when a rough bunch of outlaws took over the town. The make-believe preacher told the folks, "The Bible says in Matthew 29:30 that the Lord helps those who help themselves". When an old deacon told him there was no Matthew 29:30, the preacher outlaw said, "Well there ought to be".

I do not believe anything should be added or taken away from God's Holy Word. However, I do believe people should try to help themselves. I saw a good example of this last Saturday when twenty-plus people showed up for a fire department training and clean-up day. However, I must change my old saying, "If you want something done ask a busy man" to "If you want something done ask a busy person", because half of the twenty-plus people who showed up were females. I must also add that when the boys thought some area was good enough, the girls would then re-do some of the area until they were really really clean.

Sherie Wiley took the lead and covered many of the topics that would have to be done to help us get the fire rating down. Deborah McCormack

had prepared a nice meal. Enterprise Fire Chief Earnie Sandidge had the fire trucks running and ready to demonstrate how to use them. Curtis Roark came and explained many of the finer points of running a fire department.

Robert Wiley was there working very hard. Cleve and Deb Ainsworth were busy as bees. Neal, Dawn and Amber Sanson were helping in several areas. R.E. and Lois McGuffee helped where they could. Jay Townsend worked hard. Deniece and Raelynn Roark did their share. Dewayne and Gerry Cassels were there and very helpful.

Dewayne brought his tractor and helped punch-up the fire to burn some of the trees that had been cut down around the firehouse. Neal Sanson also cut up an old pecan tree that had fallen by the old Enterprise post office. Gerry Cassels and Deborah McCormack helped pick up limbs around the old post office. Nathan Roark was his usual helpful self. Paul Berk and Josh Griggs stopped and helped.

Now I would like to list the young man that probably worked hardest of anyone, Seven-year-old Tristen, Robert Wiley's grandson, who cleaned chairs.

Like I said, "It is amazing what a community working together can accomplish when they work together."

Also remember, it's not in the Bible, but I truly believe that "The Lord helps those who help themselves."



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