

Opinions

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A mayor for Jonesville

The people of Jonesville want change. But they may be more resigned to not getting it than their words suggest.

At the town meeting on Monday, June 28, 2021, former Mayor Hiram Evans was chosen by a 3-2 vote of the Town Council to finish out the roughly year and a half remaining in disgraced Mayor Milton Ceasar's administration. Ceasar cut a deal to resign that kept him out of prison on charges of sexual misconduct with a minor child as reported in last week's Booster.

Councilwoman Loria Hollins' bid for the office went down in flames last Monday so the council met again this week to try to finish the job after Councilman Bruce Lofton said he couldn't take the post as a full-time position because it would conflict with his regular employment.

Nonetheless, Hollins' name came up again but she declined on the grounds that her candidacy lacked support from the council. This left the way open to consider ex-Mayor Evans for the job. Thus, after lengthy discussion by the citizens in attendance the question went to a vote of the council.

Curiously, despite several declarations of support for Evans, there was a burst of applause in favor of Hollins when she voted against Evans and again for Branch when she voted with Hollins. This still left Benny Vault, Sr., Josie Bullitts, and Bruce Lofton voting in favor of

Evans giving him the necessary majority to take the position.

Some will remember that around his second day in office, Milton Ceasar argued for and got himself a big raise from \$19,000 to \$30,000 per year. But that was what Congress would call a "spending cut" because he had wanted \$40,000. Supposedly, this was so he could afford to give the job his full-time attention that the Town needed and deserved. Perhaps he was unaware that under other Town Councils when Jonesville was actually quite a bit bigger than it is now, the leadership had worked full-time but without pay because the Town was in a crisis.

Well, never mind all that now. The problem today is that since the mayor's office got that raise, no one but Bruce Lofton wants to reduce the pay to change the status of the job to part-time again – even though in the past, that seems not to have affected how much time anyone actually spent on the job. But that raise and status has become something of a poison pill in the position since it has kept Mr. Lofton from accepting the job on a "part time" basis.

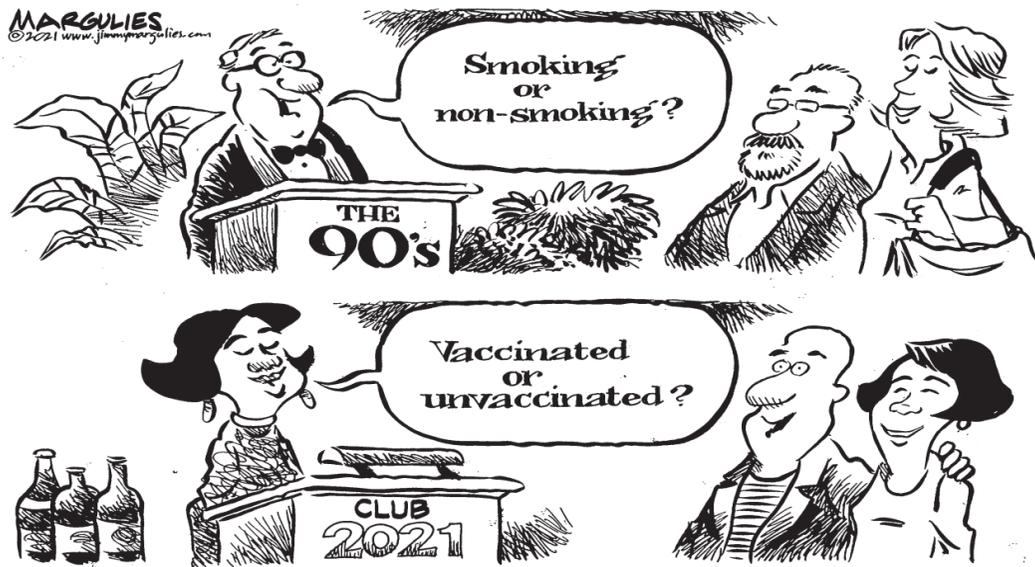
One idea that had traction with some members of the audience was for the town to submit itself to the financial management of the state. Others, however, were staunchly opposed to that suggestion on the grounds

that under such a regime the town would be ineligible for grant money and it would almost certainly entail significant tax increases.

It was a lively meeting with what worried diplomats in the old Cold War era called "frank exchanges of opinion." That's a great advantage that the Town of Jonesville has: the people show up and they participate. The rest of the parish could stand some of that as well. And we may get our chance.

On Monday at 6:00 PM, July 12, 2021 in room 104, the regular meeting room of the Police Jury in the Harrisonburg Courthouse, we will meet to consider amending the ordinance the Jury passed last year. That ordinance charges citizens in the unincorporated areas of the parish an extra \$12 monthly tax for garbage collection. This, you will recall, is in addition to the sales tax and the voter authorized transfer of money from the Health Unit Fund. The idea is that since the use of Health Unit money is limited by the voter referendum that authorized it, the \$12 per month tax is intended to replace that cash and even build a reserve.

The Jury will consider an amendment to the ordinance creating an enforcement mechanism providing for a lien against any properties of those who do not pay. So, as the Ancients (from 1950) used to say, on July 12 "Be there or be square."



JEB Tales

Ivory Joe and the Young Giant

In the summer of 1962 while I was still a freshman in college at Northeast Louisiana State College in Monroe, Louisiana, thanks to Coach Joe Green and Coach Benny Hollis, I was hired to teach and coach girls' basketball at Saint Matthews High School.

I was only paid during the nine months of the school year. Therefore, I had to find employment during the summer months. The mother of one of the kids I taught at Saint Matthews ran a laundry route for Weil Cleaners. When they had a vacation planned for a couple of weeks in Arkansas, Mrs. Shannas asked me to run her route. I agreed. Shirley and Jackie would ride with me and tag and bag the clothes and help find the addresses. The route was on the North side of Monroe, the wealthiest part of town.

One of my customers was former Louisiana governor James A. Noe. Governor Noe was in poor health and his personal helper was a very sweet African American lady named Miss Mary. Miss Mary fell in love with our little Jackie. One day Miss Mary asked me if I would go to the southside of Monroe and pick up some laundry on Millhaven Road. I said yes. On the way to Millhaven Road I had to pass the college. On a hunch I decided to go see who did the laundry for NLSC. Wow! The head dean asked if we could clean the drapes in several of the administrative buildings and dormitories and have them back and installed by the end of the summer. We could and we did. I made more money for that job than I did the rest of the summer.

Now back to Millhaven Road, the house was old and beautiful. The yard was very well groomed. The old house was built about seven feet above the ground. This told me the house was built before Monroe got a levee on the Ouachita River. The house had been built with a hallway between the kitchen, living room, dining area and the bedrooms. That type of house was called a dog-trot house. The hallway was for ventilation. The hallway had been enclosed, probably after the house got electricity. There was a porch all the way across the front of the house. That beautiful old home reminded me of

the old McGuffee home in Aimwell which was the same style but much smaller.

I had been told to always go to the back door but one of the sweetest ladies I have met said, "Honey child come around to the front door." Sitting beside the front door was the biggest, tallest young man I had ever seen. He had to be at least six foot six inches tall and weigh around 270 pounds. I found out later that he played football at Grambling State College. I introduced myself as John Ed Bartmess. His middle name was Jedidiah. From then on, he called me "JEB" and I called him "JED".

When I asked the sweet lady what name to put on the ticket, she said "Joe Hunter". I still did not get it, but when the Weil's saw the name on my order sheet they went wild! "How did you get this? Don't you know who Joe Hunter is? This is Ivory Joe Hunter, the Ivory Joe Hunter!" I blurted out, "Do you mean "Since I Met You Baby" Ivory Joe Hunter?" Double wow! I had sung that song to Shirley many times and it had always worked.

Ivory Joe Hunter was born in Kirbyville, Texas in 1914. His father was a blues guitarist and itinerant preacher, and his mother was a gospel singer. When his parents died Ivory Joe was thirteen years old and his grandmother took him in. Ivory Joe had a forty plus year career as a blues legend and pianist and lived in Monroe for several decades.

"I Almost Lost My Mind" in 1950 was his first number one hit. It was later covered by Pat Boone, and it was Pat's first number one hit. Hank Snow, Sonny James, Freddy Fender and Conway Twitty also recorded "I Almost Lost My Mind". Pat Boone's version was always my favorite. "Empty Arms" in 1957 was also a number one hit for Ivory Joe.

Ivory Joe Hunter also did many country songs including, "Walking the Floor Over You", "T for Texas", and "San Antonio Rose". He also appeared on the Grand Old Opry several times. As a matter of fact, the last performance of his life was at the Grand Old Opry where he was carried in on a stretcher because he was too weak to walk. His last song was "Empty Arms".

By John Ed Bartmess, Jr.

When my two weeks were up, Mrs. Shannas had to go into the hospital and Mr. Weil asked me to fill in for her the rest of the summer. This allowed me to go the Hunter home about ten more times that summer. That allowed me to get to know the giant "JED" very well.

When I found out that "JED" was the guard at the front door of the club where Ivory Joe was playing that Saturday night I started begging. Big JED told me when and where Ivory Joe was playing. He did not tell me you had to have a coat and tie on to go into the building. I had a sports coat on but no tie. Bid Jedidiah would not let me in unless I had on a coat and tie. I went to my little blue fifty-six chevy and could not find a tie, but I did find my red and yellow jumper cables in the trunk. I decided to try one more time. I wrapped the jumper cables around my neck a couple of times and went to the door. Big "JED" said, "Okay "JEB" you can go in, but you better not start anything!"

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