PAR’s 2008 conference breaks record

PAR’s 2008 Annual Conference and Luncheon attracted a record crowd of more than 600 attendees to review top issues in the 2008 legislative session. The April 25 conference at the Holiday Inn Select in Baton Rouge was co-chaired by board members Louis Freeman and Sean Reilly.

The event was sponsored by AllStar Automotive Group, Chevron Corporation, Cox Communications and the Doré Family Foundation. More than 70 other individuals and organizations served as gold and silver table sponsors for the event.

Chief Washington Correspondent for CNBC and Political Writer for The New York Times John Harwood was the keynote speaker at the luncheon delivering his address “What Makes the 2008 Presidential Election so Different?”

The morning panel session, entitled “Review of the 2008 Legislative Session,” was moderated by Robyn Ekings of LPB and featured Capitol Editor for The Advocate Mark Ballard, Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Economic Development Stephen Moret, Capital Bureau Chief for the Times-Picayune Robert Travis Scott and PAR President Jim Brandt.

ABOVE: Guest speaker John Harwood is pictured with the co-chairs and sponsors of the event. Standing (left to right) are Board Chairman David Eustis, journalist John Harwood, event co-chair Louis M. Freeman, and sponsor Bill Lockwood of Allstar Automotive Group. Seated (left to right) are PAR President Jim Brandt, sponsor Sharon O. Kleinpeter of Cox Communications and event co-chair Sean Reilly.
PAR welcomes five new members to 2008 Board of Directors

David Eustis, senior vice president of Whitney National Bank, was re-elected chairman of the Public Affairs Research Council (PAR) Board of Directors at the organization’s annual conference in Baton Rouge on Friday, April 25. This will be his second year of service as PAR board chairman.

The PAR Board also re-elected Donna Saurage of Baton Rouge as vice chairman; Gordon A. Pugh, senior partner of Breazeale, Sachse & Wilson in Baton Rouge as secretary; and R. Hunter Pierson of Pierson Investments in New Orleans as treasurer.

In addition to the election of PAR officers, the membership also elected to the Board Allan Bissinger, president of Electrical Sales Corporation in Metairie; Dr. James A. Caillier, executive director of The Patrick F. Taylor Foundation in New Orleans; C. Paul Hilliard, president of Badger Oil in Lafayette; Sharon O. Kleinpeter, vice president of government & public affairs for Cox Communications in Baton Rouge; and Luis C. Zervigon, president of Family of the South in New Orleans.

Re-elected members of the Board include: Donna Carville, public affairs manager for Dow Chemical Company in Plaquemine; Beth Courtney, president/CEO of Louisiana Public Broadcasting in Baton Rouge; E. Renae Conley, president/CEO of Entergy Louisiana in Baton Rouge; O. Fred Loy, executive director of Committee of 100 for Economic Development in Baton Rouge; Richard O. Mohring, plant manager-polyolefins of ExxonMobil Chemical Company in Baton Rouge; William A. Oliver, president of AT&T in New Orleans; and George H. Wilson, Jr., president/CEO of Barriere Construction in New Orleans.

ABOVE: Chief Washington Correspondent for CNBC and Political Writer for The New York Times John Harwood delivered the keynote speech at PAR’s annual luncheon. He discussed the presidential election and how Louisiana fits into candidates’ campaign agendas.

ABOVE: Board Chairman David Eustis announces the election of new Board members. Also shown (left to right) are PAR Board officers R. Hunter Pierson, Gordon A. Pugh and Donna Saurage.

LEFT: Moderator Robin Ekings with LPB led the morning panel discussion on the top issues of the legislative session that was underway. Panelists (left to right) are journalist Robert Travis Scott of the Times-Picayune, Secretary Stephen Moret of the Louisiana Department of Economic Development, President Jim Brandt of PAR, and journalist Mark Ballard of The Advocate.
PAR chairman David Eustis introduced at PAR’s Annual Luncheon a resolution naming the Joe Dorsey and Bertie Deming Smith Education Policy Research Chair. The resolution was approved at the PAR Board of Directors meeting prior to the luncheon.

Joe D. Smith, Jr., was a founding member of the Public Affairs Research Council and stayed active in public service throughout his life. Along with his wife, Bertie Deming Smith, Joe D. supported and exhibited integrity, independence and accuracy, all qualities of the organization he helped found.

Along with being a co-founder and president of PAR, Joe D. Smith, Jr., was also an inductee into the Manship School Hall of Fame as well as being on the boards for both the Tulane University Health Sciences Center and the Louisiana Board of Regents.

“He was steadfast in his belief that the dissemination of facts would contribute to more informed decision making in state government. He played a critical leadership role and served as PAR’s youngest president. Joe D., along with his wife, Bertie Deming Smith, remained supportive of PAR’s work throughout his life,” Eustis said.

Bertie Deming Smith accepted the resolution at the luncheon attended by members of both the Deming and Smith families.

Joe Dorsey Smith, Jr., passed away on March 20, 2008.
Annual Conference and Luncheon Presenting Sponsors

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Please remember PAR in your will or estate planning.

For more information, contact Susan Mintz Kantrow at (225) 926-8414.
2007—2008 Highlights

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana is an independent voice, offering solutions to critical public issues in Louisiana through accurate, objective research and focusing public attention on those solutions.
PAR published a number of significant research studies on state government issues in the past year.

**Questioning Candidates Beyond the Platitudes**  This report outlines the major issues facing the state in the areas of health care, state finance, education and the economy—relative to the legislative and statewide elections of 2007. The report distills these problems into the basic facts and explains the political challenges inherent in each solution. Beyond the elections, this document will continue to serve as a useful reference for citizens and policymakers to evaluate solutions as they are proposed.

**GulfGov Reports: Spending Federal Disaster Aid**  This GulfGov Reports analysis examines two major types of aid being used for reconstruction and economic recovery: FEMA Public Assistance (PA) grants and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The report demonstrates many of the intergovernmental challenges and problems federal, state and local officials face as they navigate through the stops and starts of the recovery effort toward long-term stability for the region. This is the second special topic report in the GulfGov project, a joint effort with the Rockefeller Institute of Government in New York.

**Higher Education Tuition and Fees: Louisiana’s Options for Keeping Pace**  This report recommends several policy changes that would allow higher education institutions in this state more flexibility to raise tuition and fees within certain limits. The policies recommended in this report would provide sufficient flexibility for reasonable, annual adjustments that would keep charges affordable by tying tuition and fee growth to rates at peer institutions and to growth in the state’s family income level. Better outcomes also would be encouraged by tying increases to the achievement of institutional performance standards.

**Strengthening the Standards: A Case Study of Disaster-Related Contracting Practices in Louisiana**  State contracts with private entities are the citizens’ window into how taxpayer dollars for goods and services are spent. This analysis examines the state’s policies regarding post-disaster contracts for professional, social and consulting services – negotiated contracts with subjective selection criteria, which often raise taxpayer suspicion. This report makes recommendations that would increase citizen access to contract documents and require adoption of emergency contracting best practices to decrease the potential for misspending in expedited negotiations.

**GulfGov Reports: Response, Recovery, and the Role of the Nonprofit Community in the Two Years Since Katrina and Rita**  This report examines the role of the nonprofit sector in the recovery, what impact hurricanes Katrina and Rita have had on the work of these organizations, and what changes they already have made to handle the next disaster that strikes. In contrast to the criticism that seems to accompany almost every aspect of the governmental recovery effort, the consensus among local officials, residents, and outside observers is that the nonprofit sector has responded to the rebuilding challenge beyond all expectation.

**Higher Education Performance Funding: Louisiana’s Options**  Colleges and universities in Louisiana lag behind their peers in other states on a variety of performance indicators. This analysis recommends a funding approach that would reward significant improvement but would not grant blanket rewards for mediocre performance or success in hitting easy targets. This report makes recommendations for revisions to the state’s funding formula for higher education, establishment of institutional performance measures and design of a performance funding initiative.

**Watchdog Issues**

PAR issued the following commentaries to provide a timely perspective on current public issues:

- 03/17/08  Special Session Set Stage for Growth, PAR Says
- 02/27/08  PAR Wraps Up the Special Session on Ethics
- 02/18/08  PAR Says Postpone Ethics Board Reorganization
- 06/29/07  PAR Wraps Up 2007 Session
- 06/26/07  PAR Says Financial Disclosure Bill Offers Historic Chance
- 06/07/07  PAR Says Health Care and Airports Need Sunshine, Too
- 06/01/07  PAR Says Help Fund Local Redevelopment and Road Home
**Citizen Education**

PAR’s citizen education efforts over the past year included updating recurring publications for reprinting and Web publication, making personal and media presentations, and answering requests for information.

*Guide to the 2008 Louisiana Legislature*  This handy, pocket-sized guide was completely updated to reflect elections through March 2008. The Guide provides helpful information about state legislators, statewide elected officials and the state’s congressional delegation, including biographical data, photos and contact information.

*Guide to the Constitutional Amendments*  This objective analysis explains the arguments for and against each constitutional amendment that voters must approve or deny. The 2007 guide analyzes the four amendments on the October 20 ballot.

*Speeches, Public Forums and Media Appearances*  In the past year, PAR staff presented more than 50 speeches to civic or professional associations throughout the state and frequently appeared on TV and radio interviews.

**www.la-par.org**  PAR’s Web site is often visited by citizens and media professionals around the state for useful information on Louisiana government. A companion site, the GulfGov Reports Web site (www.rockinst.org/gulfgov), provides information specific to the recovery.

**Research Studies Underway**

*Transportation Funding*  This study will evaluate the state’s options for increasing funding for transportation infrastructure, including tax and fee increases, budget adjustments and toll roads. This study would identify the lessons learned by other states that have embarked on public/private partnerships to develop transportation infrastructure.

*Higher Education Governance*  This report will examine the structure and function of the state’s higher education governance entities, including the Board of Regents and the four system boards. This analysis of budgetary and management authority will examine systems in other states to present Louisiana’s options for drawing clearer lines of accountability for spending and performance.

*GulfGov Reports: The Role of Community Rebuilding Plans in the Hurricane Recovery*  This is the third special topic report in the GulfGov Reports research series. This study will examine regional and community recovery and rebuilding plans in Louisiana and Mississippi. These plans provide the framework for the direction of the recovery and a glimpse into how the character of the affected communities is changing.

*Budgeting for Health Care Reform*  This report outlines the budgetary changes that would be necessary to transform Louisiana’s unorthodox health care system into a more efficient and accessible model. These reforms would better integrate care for the state’s uninsured citizens with care for paying patients, offer expanded access to health insurance and target funding toward programs of excellence.

*Electoral Redistricting*  This study will evaluate the state’s options for determining how electoral lines will be redrawn following the next full census. Using best practices from other states that have designed an independent method for electoral redistricting, the goal would be to design a method for Louisiana that minimizes the opportunity for political influence in the results.

*Economic Development Incentives*  This research project will evaluate Louisiana’s use of corporate incentive funds in comparison to best practices around the nation. Economic development efforts by the states to attract and retain businesses are rapidly deployed, interrelated and rarely scrutinized by the public because of their complexity. This analysis will put Louisiana’s economic development toolbox in a national context, identify barriers to progress and propose policies that maximize the effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and transparency of state spending to attract investment.
Participation on Boards and Commissions

PAR’s president and staff have represented PAR on the following boards and commissions:

- School and District Accountability Commission
- Blue Ribbon Commission for Educational Excellence
- High School Redesign Task Force
- Civil Service Comprehensive Public Training Program Advisory Committee
- Member of the Louisiana Recovery Authority Audit Task Force
- Louisiana Commission on Civic Education
- Louisiana Coalition for Open Government
- Levee District Authority Nominating Committee
- Louisiana Budget Project Advisory Committee (LANO)
- Gov.-Elect Jindal’s Government and Fiscal Reform Advisory Council
- Gov.-Elect Jindal’s Health Care Reform Advisory Council

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