

Stay Up to PAR

ANNUAL NEWSLETTER 2017



President's Letter

We are pleased to report to our members and donors that the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana in the past year has embarked on a new strategic plan with the full engagement and support of the board of directors. You will soon be seeing the fruits of that effort, with more member engagement and value added to your investment in PAR.

Our supporters are a group of citizens and establishments who believe we must continue to press for a responsible government that will make Louisiana a better place to live and do business. PAR promotes the case for government accountability, a more stable state fiscal system and a healthy environment for economic development.

Through a combination of innovative educational materials and member-only insights, in addition to impactful research and reports, PAR is connecting to a larger community of concerned citizens. Our new **PAR Basics** will provide a solid foundation of information and demystify major fiscal and policy challenges. **PAR Insights** and a new exclusive portal on our website will give members an inside view of evolving issues.

PAR is playing a central role in fostering a healthy and objective discussion about potential revisions to the state's constitution, including the prospects for a new convention or a rewrite of the fiscal portions of our state's fundamental law. We also have contributed substan-

tially to the public discussion on state fiscal issues – both taxes and spending – through our publications, commentary, meetings with officials and participation on several state task force groups.

We will continue to publish our popular and dependable resources for educational materials, including the **PAR Guide to the Constitutional Amendments**, which is an indispensable resource for the media and the public, and the PAR Guide to the Louisiana Legislature, available annually in paper form and updated regularly as a free app for your smart phone or pad. PAR is continuing its oversight project to keep track of the financial practices determining the billions of dollars allotted for coastal protection and restoration. **The New Louisiana Purchase: Building Trust with Sound Coastal Investment Policies** is a report available on PAR's web site that provides specific recommendations for greater accountability in coastal spending.

We thank you for your interest and support. If you haven't already, please download the PAR app. It contains a mobile version of the PAR guides to the Legislature and the constitutional amendments, in addition to other resources. And visit our website at parlouisiana.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. Your involvement is important and very much appreciated!

Robert Travis Scott

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Fiscal Oversight of Coastal Restoration Initiatives

Last year PAR released its coastal primer, *The New Louisiana Purchase: Building Trust with Sound Investment Policies*. The report serves as a guide to the state's coastal challenges while illustrating what is known and yet to be decided about how billions of dollars will be allocated and contracted in the name of coastal protection during the next few years. The report also provides guidance and specific recommendations for how state, federal and local leaders should proceed to safeguard precious finances and the public trust.



These recommendations urged the governor and his administration to emphasize the development of a Coastal Master Plan that relies on the best science and engineering data available and avoid politicizing the decision-making process. This would include any attempt to move away from the existing approval process for the Master and Annual Plan which allows for only an approval or disapproval vote from the legislature. PAR also called for the development of new models of stakeholder engagement that improve transparency and communication.

This past session the Louisiana Legislature approved the next iteration of the state's Coastal Master Plan. This plan improved upon previous plans both in the strength of its scientific modeling but also its public outreach. Most importantly, the Legislature did not deviate from the approval process. As additional federal dollars start to come to Louisiana there will be greater political pressure, but also an even greater need to resist that pressure. PAR will continue to serve as a watchdog over coastal funding and work with all stakeholders to ensure a rigorous decision-making process.

PAR Accomplishments

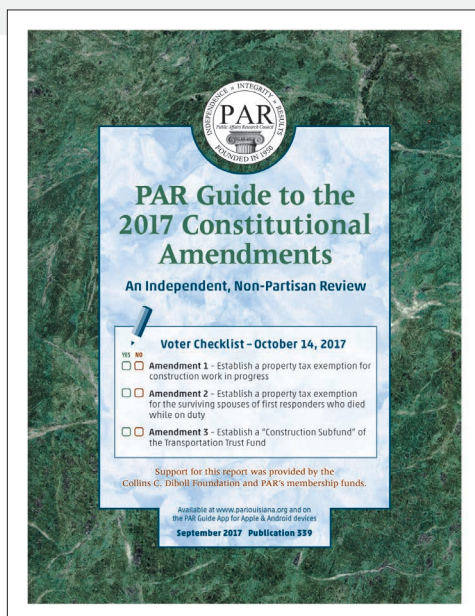
PAR is serving its role as an independent and objective voice for responsible government by producing in-depth research, timely commentary and informed views for policymakers, the media and the general public. Critical issues lie ahead for education, workforce development, open governance, health care and fiscal policy. Over the years, PAR has been behind major reforms, such as the state Constitutional Convention of 1974, an ethics enforcement system and new constructs that promoted fiscal accountability, including consensus revenue forecasting and legislative fiscal oversight bureaus. In recent times PAR research and collaboration have had significant impacts on public policy:

- Statutory improvements on governor's records law and champion of better public records and open meetings practices
- Reform of cost-of-living adjustments that will save hundreds of millions of dollars for the state pension systems
- Actuarially sound funding and forecasting for the state retirement systems
- Research-backed proposals for comprehensive tax reform by state task force groups and private organizations
- Major ethics reforms, including stronger disclosures by public officials and greater transparency in lobbying, followed by additional reforms to upgrade and streamline the enforcement system
- New campaign finance reporting disclosures to discourage personal use of campaign funds
- PAR recommendations implemented by Board of Regents to improve higher education research and development
- Watchdog state budget maneuvers to prevent inappropriate diversions from the state coastal fund
- Trimming state programs or reallocating priorities to reduce spending or better leverage state revenue

Guide to the 2017 Constitutional Amendments

Once again, PAR's annual guide to constitutional ballot items was a success. The *PAR Guide to the 2017 Constitutional Amendments* explained the potential impact of the three constitutional amendments that the public considered on the October 14 ballot statewide. This objective review helped voters understand the issues and the potential changes so they could develop their own positions on each proposition.

Amendments 1 and 2 on this year's ballot were particularly significant because they provide a property tax exemption for specific conditions. Amendment 3 establishes a "Construction Subfund" within the Transportation Trust Fund. Voters approved all three of the proposed amendments. After numerous print and broadcast media interviews and public presentations by PAR staff, we know our work played a truly indispensable role in assisting the media and providing objective education for the public on these issues.



PAR's Voice Being Heard

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana is playing a leadership role in helping determine the future direction of the state on critical issues concerning government budgets, taxes and economic development. PAR's participation on several key task force initiatives has made an important contribution toward shaping the discussion and building consensus for meaningful recommendations for positive, long-term change. These advisory groups include:

Task Force on Structural Changes in Budget and Tax Policy

PAR had a seat on the Task Force on Structural Changes in Budget and Tax Policy, an advisory panel created by House Concurrent Resolution 11 in the 2016 first special session. The committee began meeting during the 2016 regular session and delivered its recommendations to the state Legislature that Fall, followed by a full report in January 2017. The charge given was extensive and weighty. PAR President Robert Travis Scott, in conjunction with other task force members, played a major role with developing the final report and recommendations. The committee made numerous recommendations, including solutions to lower rates and broaden the base of state taxes, to address spending and fiscal problems with significant constitutional restructuring, and transparency tools to better inform the public about state and local spending.



MFP Task Force

Each year, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education determines costs associated with educating public school students in Louisiana and develops a formula to distribute funding to school districts. This process is known as the Minimum Foundation Program (MFP). The MFP Task Force was created by BESE in 2013 to engage educators, districts, policy experts and communities in an advisory capacity. The task force offers guidance to BESE on how best to improve the formula to fund schools and student education equitably and effectively.

Ad Valorem Task Force

PAR participated in the Ad Valorem Task Force, which was created to study state and local taxation laws with respect to local government funding from ad valorem taxes on inventory, ad valorem taxes on vessels in Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act Waters, and the state associated tax credits to identify state and

local government funding sources that will fully fund local and state government and retain and improve the state's business competitiveness.

Sales Tax Streamlining Task Force

The Louisiana Sales Tax Streamlining and Modernization Commission was established by Act 405 of the 2015 Regular Session of the Legislature. The purpose of the commission is to conduct a study of Louisiana's state and local sales and use tax systems. Louisiana is highly unusual because it has a non-centralized collection system, significant non-uniformity in local and state taxes, a large number of exclusions and exemptions and the highest overall state and local sales tax rate. The commission is tasked with developing recommendations for legislative consideration regarding revision of procedures, law or the Louisiana Constitution.

Commission on Civic Education

PAR has a seat on the Commission on Civic Education. The purpose of the commission is to educate citizens in the community as well as students in schools on the importance of citizen involvement in a representative democracy. The commission oversees appointments to the Legislative Youth Advisory Council. It promotes communication and collaboration among organizations in the state that conduct civic education programs.

Transportation Task Force

Governor John Bel Edwards created the Governor's Task Force on Transportation Infrastructure Investment. The group was charged with studying Louisiana's transportation needs and producing recommendations to address those issues. PAR held a seat on this task force, which followed PAR's participation on the Transportation Policy Committee that met in 2014-15.

Public Records Task Force

PAR has worked with representatives from the media, local government, state government and other stakeholders in informal group meetings to explore potential updates to the state's public records law. This work is ongoing.





PAR's 2017 Annual Conference and Luncheon

The Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana held the largest and most successful annual conference in its 67 year history on April 21 at the Crowne Plaza in Baton Rouge.



Left to right: Commissioner Jay Dardenne, Rep. Chris Broadwater, Ryan, LLC Principal Jason DeCuir, Sen. Sharon Hewitt, PAR President Robert Travis Scott participated on PAR's morning panel at the 2017 Annual Conference.

The luncheon was attended by more than 700 people who gathered to support PAR and to hear one of the nation's leading independent and non-partisan authorities on American politics and U.S. elections, Charlie Cook. Charlie is Editor and Publisher of the *Cook Political Report*, a political columnist for National Journal Group and a political analyst for NBC News. His speech at the PAR luncheon was titled "Unconventional: The New Era of the American Presidency," which addressed the current state of national politics and how President Trump's victory has created an unconventional landscape.

U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy and Governor John Bel Edwards delivered introductory remarks. Senator Cassidy brought a sense of humor and insights about Washington politics while also discussing his healthcare initiative and Trump's plans for the nation's infrastructure. Gov. Edwards addressed the state's Medicaid expansion and tax and budget issues. "There are no solutions to our problems that are painless," Edwards

said. "We have to work together if we are going to be successful in Louisiana. It is really a partnership."

The presenting sponsors of the event were **Business First Bank, Cleco, Cox Communications, Eagle Cove Investments, Jones Walker, LCMC Health, LWCC, Pierson Investments, Ratcliff Companies, Turner Industries, Verizon** and **WBRZ**. Over 70 organizations, companies and individuals served as gold and silver table sponsors.

The morning panel—comprised of Representative Chris Broadwater, Senator Sharon Hewitt, Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne and Jason DeCuir, a Principal with Ryan LLC — addressed the looming questions and concerns surrounding the state's budget crisis and the 2017 legislative session. The discussion was moderated by PAR President Robert Travis Scott and Associated Press reporter Melinda Deslatte.

Special thanks to the conference co-chairs J.J. Buquet III and Charles A. Landry, both board members of PAR.

PAR Elects New Board Members

The PAR board has elected the following officers to serve a term of one year: Chairman of the board is **Allan Bissinger** of New Orleans; Vice Chairman is **Scott Hensgens** of Baton Rouge; Secretary is **Kristin Wall** of Baton Rouge; and Treasurer is **S. Dennis Blunt** of Baton Rouge. Officers may serve two terms.

The PAR membership has elected three new directors to serve a three-year term ending in 2020: **Julia Callis** is General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer of Cleco, located in Alexandria. Previously, she was a judicial law clerk for the Western District of Louisiana and an attorney for American Airlines. **Buster Kantrow** is Vice President of Business Development at Lamar Advertising in Baton Rouge. He is a former journalist with Dow Jones & Co. **Valerie Sholes** is a Realtor with Keller Williams Realty in New Orleans. Previously, she was an executive with BellSouth Corp. and Cingular Wireless.

The PAR membership re-elected the following directors to serve another three-year term ending in 2020. They are: **Stephanie Cargile**, Public & Government Affairs Manager for ExxonMobil Baton Rouge; **Beth Courtney**, President/CEO Louisiana Public Broadcasting, Baton Rouge; **Fred Loy**, President, Government Corporate Consultants, Baton Rouge; **Freddie Pitcher**, Attorney, Phelps Dunbar, Baton Rouge; **Nancy Tower**, Retired, Ragley; **Don Washington**, Partner, Jones Walker, Lafayette.



Left to right: Valerie Sholes, Julia Callis, Buster Kantrow

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SAVE THE DATE: 2018 PAR CONFERENCE AND LUNCHEON, APRIL 6, 2018





EXERCISE YOUR WILLPOWER

By making a bequest or other planned gift, you can continue to help PAR make an important difference in our state. There are a number of options to include PAR in your will or estate plans.

- **Wills** – You can include PAR in your will with a specific dollar amount or percentage. Others prefer to gift a percentage of the “residue” or whatever remains after paying all inheritance, debts and costs. (If you have already included PAR in your will, please let us know.)
- **Contingency Beneficiary** – Listing PAR as a contingency beneficiary allows you to leave a portion of your estate to PAR if your named beneficiary is unable to receive these gifts, and one or more of your specific bequests cannot be fulfilled.

Leaving a gift to PAR in your will may reduce the estate tax burden on your heirs significantly. You should consult with a financial advisor or attorney to learn how giving may actually benefit your family while fulfilling your philanthropic goals and dreams.

Guide to the Louisiana Legislature

The *PAR Guide to the Legislature* is the indispensable booklet for anyone dealing with state government. Whether you are a veteran lobbyist or a political novice, the Guide provides valuable information to make you better informed about state legislators, other elected officials, the congressional delegation and state agencies. The Guide includes sources of income for legislators, committee assignments, contact information and much more.



Copies are \$10 apiece plus tax and shipping and can be purchased online at www.parlouisiana.org, or at the PAR office. PAR members receive a free copy annually.

The PAR Guide mobile app can now be downloaded for **FREE on Apple and Android devices** and provides additional access to important PAR reports and resources.

PAR thanks Entergy, Fishman Haygood, Ochsner Health System and Verizon for their underwriting support of the Guide.

Additional Guide resources are available for desktop and mobile devices. The 2017 E-Guide can be purchased for \$45 online or by contacting the PAR office. This database is a valuable resource for nonprofits, businesses, and other grassroots organizations that interact with elected officials frequently.

The 2018 Regular Legislative Session begins March 12, 2018. The 2018 PAR Guide to the Legislature will be available in March.

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