

JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON TOURISM

Minutes of Meeting
1997 Interim
January 14, 15, 16, 1997

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative John Travis, Co-chairman and Senator Ken Hollis, Co-chairman of the Joint Subcommittee on Tourism, called the meeting to order at 9:25 a.m. Thursday, January 16, 1997, at the University Center, Louisiana Room, Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative John Travis,
Co-chairman
Representative Bob Barton
Representative Mickey Frith
Representative Butch Gautreaux
Representative Arthur Morrell
Representative Edwin Murray
Representative Gil Pinac
Representative Billy Montgomery
Representative B. L. Shaw

Senator Ken Hollis,
Co-chairman
Senator Wilson Fields
Senator Mike Smith

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Sydnie M. Durand
Representative Dan Flavin
Representative Herman Hill
Representative Michael Michot
Representative Tank Powell
Representative Pete Schneider
Representative Sharon Weston
Representative Steve Scalise

Senator Mike Branch
Senator Francis Heitmeier
Senator Louis Lambert
Senator Michael Robichaux

III. STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

T. Michael White, Attorney
Cindy Mancuso, Attorney
Sandy Painting, Secretary
Danny Leming, Sergeant at Arms
Stephen Holliday, Senate Attorney
Dwan Boeneke, Senate Secretary

IV. DISCUSSION

Mr. Vincent J. Marsala, Chancellor, Louisiana State University in Shreveport, One University Place, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115, (318) 797-5234, welcomed the committee to the university and thanked the members for coming to their campus.

Ms. Arlene Acree, president, Shreveport Chamber of Commerce, 324 Fort St., Shreveport, Louisiana, (318) 226-9675, appeared before the committee and stated that tourism in the Shreveport area has helped stabilize and diversify local and rural economy, created jobs and income from business expansion and new business start-ups, and attracted additional industry by creating a large business base. She stated that the chamber had recently appointed an entertainment tourism task force to promote, market, and recruit tourism and the entertainment industry in the Shreveport area.

Mr. Robert W. "Bo" Williams, mayor, City of Shreveport, P. O. Box 31109, Shreveport, Louisiana 71130 (318) 673-5050, thanked the committee for their efforts in reviewing the tourism industry in the Shreveport-Bossier area. He stated that the tourism industry is now more than a \$500 million industry in Caddo and Bossier parishes and the number two tourism market in the state of Louisiana. He stated that, in 1995, 8,500 people were employed in the Shreveport area in the tourism industry alone. Mayor Williams asked the committee and the state to work on the cooperation between north Louisiana and south Louisiana in the exchange of tourism information.

Representative Murray inquired about the unemployment rate in the Shreveport area.

Mayor Williams stated that the unemployment rate was approximately 6.1%.

Representative Barton inquired about the exposition hall and how many people it could accommodate.

Mayor Williams stated that the exposition hall could accommodate approximately 4,000 - 5,000 people.

Representative Morrell asked if restaurants and hotels had increased since the gambling boats have been in the Shreveport area.

Mayor Williams stated that more restaurants have been established in the Shreveport area since the existence of the riverboats.

Mr. Gene Dickerson, Bossier Chamber of Commerce, KMRD, 3109 Alexander, Shreveport, Louisiana 71104, (318) 865-5173, appeared before the committee. He stated that it has only been in the recent years that the Shreveport-Bossier area has begun an economic comeback and that they are prepared to maximize their resources to become one of the state's premier tourist destinations. He stated that Shreveport-Bossier was the third largest gaming destination today. He spoke about the new construction of hotels in the next couple of years by the casinos. He stated that Bossier was the fastest growing city in the state of Louisiana for the last five years.

Representative Montgomery mentioned that Louisiana Downs had previously been the number one tourist attraction in the Shreveport-Bossier area.

Mr. George Dement, mayor, City of Bossier, P.O. Box 5337, Bossier City, Louisiana 71171-5337, (318) 741-8501, thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak at this meeting. He stated he had been in the hotel, motel, and restaurant business and knew the tourism industry well. He stated that the Bossier area had so much to offer to the tourism industry but felt that the awareness was not there. He stated that another mode of transportation to Shreveport, such as train service, would be helpful to the tourism industry.

Mr. Phillip Jones, secretary, Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism, P.O. Box 94361, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804, (504) 342-8117, appeared before the committee to provide an update of the successes in 1996 and the new programs planned for 1997. He stated that 1996 has been the best year yet for tourism in that the state will have over 23.1 million visitors. He stated that traffic at our airports in the state is up by 7% and our hotel occupancy rate is the fourth highest in the country. He stated that our ad campaign generated more than 1 million inquiries for information on Louisiana. He also stated that our tour guide won an award by the Southeast Tourism Society as the best example of a public/private partnership. Mr. Jones spoke about the recent Dateline television story regarding the harassment by law officials of out-of-state visitors and the seizure of their assets. He stated that due to this story, Louisiana has lost approximately \$150 million in tourism revenues due to cancellations of hotels, air flights, etc. by potential visitors. He asked the committee for its help in making the forfeiture law issue a priority this Special Session and also for additional revenues to defend this matter.

Mr. George Graham, Peter Mayer Advertising & Partners, Box 51145, Lafayette, Louisiana 70505, (318) 232-8214, appeared before the committee and presented a slide show on the new Louisiana web site; i.e., louisianatravel.com. He demonstrated how to travel through Louisiana via the web page.

Mr. Anthony Sanfilippo, Harrah's Casino, 315 Clyde Fant Pkwy., Shreveport, Louisiana 71106, (318) 424-5600, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of the casino. He stated that over 1,500 people are employed by the casino, 61% of the workforce being minority, and 59% are women. He also stated that the casino provided an employment program for its employees to help them move forward and grow in their employment. Mr. Sanfilippo stated that in 1996 almost \$5.5 million went to the city of Shreveport, approximately \$1 million went to Caddo Parish as well as to the school board, and \$318,000 went to the Greater Shreveport Economic Development Foundation, with \$159,000 going to the town of Vivian. He stated that approximately 82% of the casino's customers are out-of-state visitors and this is tracked by the player card.

Representative Morrell asked if the Shreveport boats offer complimentary hotel rooms for gamblers of certain levels.

Mr. Sanfilippo stated that the casinos do have complimentary rooms for players who play above a certain level.

Mr. Frank Williams, president, Louisiana Riverboat Association, Horseshoe Riverboat Casino, P.O. Box 71111, Bossier City, Louisiana 71171-1111, (318) 741-7751, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of the association. He stated that the association is comprised of twelve licensed casino investors, employs over 13,000 individuals, paid the state of Louisiana over \$88 million in taxes in 1996, and has entertained approximately 15 million visitors.

Mr. Ivory Samuel, owner, By All Means Travel and president, Shreveport Negro Chamber of Commerce, 1610 Milam St., Shreveport, Louisiana 71103 (318) 747-3276, appeared before the committee and stated that the black culture and history existed in the Shreveport area but financial assistance was needed in order to develop attractions.

Mr. Preston Friedley, president, Shreveport-Bossier Convention and Tourist Bureau, P.O. Box 1761, Shreveport, Louisiana 71166, (318) 222-9391, appeared before the committee and spoke of the strategic marketing plan and riverfront plan for Shreveport-Bossier and stated that \$15 million has been spent on infrastructure just in the downtown riverfront components of this community. He stated that both communities' convention centers had plans for enlargement. He stated that for the year 1995 the gross hotel sales were \$60 million and that Shreveport had the highest hotel occupancy rate of any city in Louisiana. He stated that regionalization was very important for promotion of tourism and that they want to see gaming main streamed into the overall attraction base of this market.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

The committee toured several attractions on Tuesday, January 14, and Wednesday, January 15, before the meeting, such as Fairfield Place Bed & Breakfast, American Rose Gardens, The Strand Theatre, Harrah's Riverboat Casino, Horseshoe Riverboat Casino, Eighth Air Force Museum, Glenwood Tea Room, R.W. Norton Art Gallery, and Sci-Port Discovery Center. The committee attended the opening ceremony of the 1996 Louisiana Travel and Tourism Summit and the ground breaking ceremony of the Greenwood Welcome Center.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Travis, Co-Chairman

Date Approved: _____