

JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON TOURISM

Minutes of Meeting
1998 Interim
October 22, 1998

I. CALL TO ORDER

Representative John Travis, Cochairman and Senator Ken Hollis, Cochairman of the Joint Subcommittee on Tourism, called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. in the City Council Chambers of the Monroe City Hall, Monroe, Louisiana.

II. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Representative John Travis,
Cochairman
Representative Jean Doerge
Representative Naomi Farve
Representative Mickey Frith
Representative Arthur Morrell
Representative Ed Murray
Representative Tank Powell
Representative Diane Winston

Senator Ken Hollis,
Cochairman

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Representative Bob Barton
Representative Dan Flavin
Representative Mike Michot
Representative Gil Pinac
Representative Pete Schneider
Representative Sharon Weston

Senator Mike Branch
Senator Wilson Fields
Senator Francis Heitmeier
Senator Louis Lambert
Senator Mike Robichaux
Senator Mike Smith

III. STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Cindy Mancuso, House Attorney
Billy Gothreaux, Research Analyst
Sandy Painting, House Secretary
Kevin Hayes, Senate Attorney
Betty Marsh, Senate Secretary
Danny Leming, House Sergeant at Arms
Shorty Baudoin, Senate Sergeant at Arms

IV. DISCUSSION

Mayor Abe Pierce, City of Monroe, opened the meeting by welcoming the committee to Monroe.

Mrs. Julia Trichell, Executive Director, Monroe-West Monroe Convention and Visitors Bureau, P.O. Box 6054, Monroe, Louisiana 71211, (318) 387-5691, appeared before the committee and provided a statement of the economic impact of travel on the Louisiana Parishes (see attached Exhibit "A"). She spoke of the current problems with Louisiana's interstate rest areas. She also reminded the committee of the long and ongoing problem of the lack of highway signs to inform travelers of the local tourist attractions.

Senator Hollis stated that he would author legislation to transfer the oversight of rest areas from the Department of Transportation and Development to the office of tourism.

Representative Travis stated that he would coauthor this legislation with Senator Hollis.

Mr. Ed Ghanami, Monroe-West Monroe Hotel Motel Association, 2001 Louisville Avenue, Monroe, Louisiana, (318) 325-0641, appeared before the committee and stated that the growth in tourism had increased the market for additional hotel rooms but had also created transportation problems. He stated that with more travelers in Louisiana an expansion to the local airport and improvements to our highways, along with additional signage, would be essential.

Mr. Dan O'Toole, President, Northeast Chapter, Louisiana Restaurant Association, 101 N. Trenton St., Ruston, Louisiana 71210, (318) 251-1900, appeared before the committee and commended the introduction of legislation to transfer the oversight of rest areas to the office of tourism. He recommended that tourism continue to be treated as an industry because it is an industry and one of the fastest growing ones.

Mr. Tom Nicholson, President, Ouachita Economic Development Corporation, 1900 North 18th Street, Suite 703, Monroe, Louisiana 71201, (318) 387-0787, appeared before the committee and stated that tourism represented one of the purest forms of economic development. He reiterated the issues previously brought out regarding the condition of the roads, the improvements needed to the rest areas, and the airport expansion issues.

Ms. Martha Ryan and Ms. Melissa Saye, The Northeast Louisiana Children's Museum, 323 Walnut, Monroe, Louisiana 71201, (318) 361-9611, appeared before the committee and provided a brief overview of the facility which has only been open for 51 days. They displayed some of the items which are on display in the museum and explained that the

museum offered hands-on learning for children. They provided the committee with a handout containing a calendar of events and general information on the museum (see attached Exhibit "B").

Mr. Wayne Keele, Chairman, Antique Alley Association, 312 Trenton St., West Monroe, Louisiana 71291, (318) 325-0103, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of how the association began. He stated that the association started with only three antique businesses in downtown West Monroe and has grown tremendously due to advertising by billboards and brochures. He asked the committee to remove the cap for advertising.

Mr. Jake Yelverton, Director, Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo, 1405 Bernstein Park Drive, Monroe, Louisiana 71202, (318) 329-2400, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of the zoo. He stated that this zoo was the only zoo in the world that exhibits its animals on islands or natural habitats. He reiterated the testimony of previous witnesses regarding the improvements needed to the roads and the lack of signage problem. He stated that a survey had been prepared reflecting that in order to reach their attendance goal, road improvements and accessibility to the zoo were essential. He asked the committee for its help.

Mr. Clark Cooper, D.V.M., West Monroe Equestrian Pavilion, 5234 Cypress St., West Monroe, Louisiana 71291, (318) 396-8099, appeared before the committee and stated that economic impact studies show that the horse industry ranks number 12 among Louisiana industries. He stated that in addition to horse racing being a large part of the tourism industry, national champion show horses were another part of the horse industry which bring in tourism revenue. He stated that the West Monroe Equestrian Pavilion will have approximately 711 stalls and that surveys show that approximately seven people come with each horse to the shows, therefore creating more need for hotels and restaurant services which generate additional tourism dollars for the community.

Mr. Tommy Usrey, Executive Director, Northeast Louisiana Arts Council, 2305 N. 7th St., West Monroe, Louisiana 71291, (318) 396-9520, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of the arts organization which includes culture, little theater, ballet, and art galleries. He stated that the increased funding by the state has helped small rural communities develop in the arts and that additional funding is needed for marketing this growth.

Mr. George Mouk, Friends of Black Bayou, Inc., P.O. Box 1761, Monroe, Louisiana 71210, (318) 322-0588, appeared before the committee and displayed a diagram of the future 6,000-acre wildlife refuge which will provide for bird watching, fishing, boating, and hiking. He provided the committee with a handout regarding an overview of Black Bayou Lake and opportunities for Friends of Black Bayou, Inc. (see attached Exhibit "C"). He stated that this facility will provide family entertainment and generate tourism dollars.

Mr. Joe Saunders, Archaeologist, Department of Geosciences, Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe, Louisiana 71209, (318) 342-1899, appeared before the committee and stated that northeast Louisiana has some of the oldest and most unique archaeology history in the country, such as the mounds at Poverty Point. He stated that state parks were currently working on developing mound trails which

should increase tourism.

Ms. Nancy Johnson, Director, Northeast Louisiana Delta African-American Heritage Museum, 503 Phene St., Monroe, Louisiana 71202, (318) 323-1167, appeared before the committee and gave a brief overview of the museum which houses collections by African- American artists, artifacts from the region including tools used in cotton farming and furniture used in old slave cabins, and archives of the Ouachita Parish African-American heritage. She reiterated the same problems previously mentioned regarding the lack of signs and asked for the committee's assistance.

Mr. Danny Young, Executive Director, Louisiana Travel Promotion Association, P.O. Box 3988, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70821, (504) 346-1857, appeared before the committee and recapped some of the issues discussed such as the rest area problems and the need for the removal of the cap on tourism funding. He asked the committee to support the removal of the cap on tourism funding.

Representative Travis stated that the governor supported the removal of the cap on tourism funding.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

The committee attended a press conference at the Holiday Inn in Monroe the previous day, October 21, 1998, and toured Poverty Point, P.O. Box 276, Epps, Louisiana 71237-9019, 1-888-926-5492 and Odell Pottery, 2305 S. Service Road West, Ruston, Louisiana 71270, (318) 251-1707. The committee also attended the Rural Tourism Conference at Lincoln Parish Park in Ruston.

VI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m. The committee continued on a tour of the Emy-Lou Biedenharn Foundation, 2006 Riverside Drive, Louisiana 71201, 1-800-362-0983.

Respectfully submitted,

John Travis, Cochairman

Date Approved: _____