
Bienville House Center for Peace and Justice

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Summer 2008

Primary Candidates' Forum

By Irvin Peckham

The Bienville House Center for Peace and Social Justice, the LSU English Department, the Reilly Center for Media and Public Affairs, the College Democrats at LSU, the LSU Law Democrats, the Baton Rouge Progressive Network, and the Society for Political Interests and Networking sponsored a forum on March 4th at the D. Jenson Holliday Forum for LSU students, faculty and the community to hear from all District 6 candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives. The seat is being vacated by Richard Baker, who resigned “to take a lucrative job in the private sector representing investors he has spent a career regulating” (Walsh).¹ All candidates for this position, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents were invited to present their views and respond to questions, either oral or written, from the audience. The protocol for the forum was designed to guarantee that all candidates would be given equal time to respond and that no candidate would be favored by questions asked or submitted from the audience. Nevertheless, no Republican and only two Independents, Joe Delatte and Ashley Casey, agreed to participate in the forum. All four democratic candidates—Don Cazayoux, Jason DeCuir, Michael Jackson, and Andy Kopplin—participated.

All sponsoring groups worked to publicize the forum, which was well-attended, with standing room only at the D. Jenson

Holliday Forum. The questions, submitted from the audience, focused on important policy issues on which the elected official will be expected to vote, ranging from the war in Iraq, No Child Left Behind, the looming deficit, immigration policy, and taxes—whether to extend the Bush administration’s tax breaks for the wealthy or finding some other way to transform the trickle-down and gusher-up to gusher-down and trickle-up ideology, a counter-intuitive policy since the people who control the legislation largely are connected to or are themselves the wealthy.

Notable in the exchanges was the degree of civility among the various candidates. On the whole, they provided succinct responses to specific questions, focused on clarifying their stances rather than engaging in negative politics—they avoided defining themselves by belittling their opponents. Also notable were the incisive questions asked by members of the audience. On the whole, the response to the forum was positive, with citizens welcoming the chance to hear extemporaneous explanations of where each candidate stood on important issues—although it was later reported by one of Woody Jenkins’ office staff that the forum had been unregulated and unduly “rowdy.”

¹ Bill Walsh. “Richard Baker to Leave Congress by Feb. 6.” *The Times Picayune*. January 15, 2008. 12 May 2008.
http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2008/01/richard_baker_to_leave_congres.html.

Bringing *The Complete Persepolis* to Baton Rouge

By Fareed Aboul-Ela

LSU has chosen a book for its summer reading program with a Middle Eastern setting. It is a graphic novel, *The Complete Persepolis*, by an Iranian-born French writer and graphic artist, Marjane Satrapi. The book deals with many themes that have relevance to our country's involvement in peace and war. The central character in this autobiographical novel grows up in Iran during the period of the revolution that over-threw the Shah, the war with Iraq, and the political and social turmoil that accompanied these events. Parts of the novel also take place in Europe where the heroine struggles with many cultural and social issues, including the negative perception of her countrymen. More information is available at <http://www.lsu.edu/srp/>.

We have Bienville House members who, as LSU faculty and students, have the chance to suggest events through the year surrounding the novel. LSU encourages linking

such events with the larger community in Baton Rouge. In this spirit, BH member Julie Sukkar will be reviewing the book and leading a discussion at the July 9th meeting of the American Association of University Women's Book Group.

We will have a meeting on Tuesday, June 17th, at the Wesley Foundation (upstairs, 333 E. Chimes St.), to discuss plans to take advantage of the summer reading program's choice of *Persepolis* to educate ourselves and our community on such issues as relations between the West and the Middle East, perceptions of Islam and of the Middle East, the experience of civilians in war zones, cultural and religious diversity and tolerance, and many other relevant issues which this novel highlights. Everyone is welcome to join us and contribute ideas of how to help make this experience benefit our community.

Fundraiser for Malawi Orphanage

By Fareed Aboul-Ela

Bienville House recently sponsored the Baton Rouge chapter of REVO. REVO, which began in Hilo, Hawaii, has stretched across the Pacific Ocean to several states, and has now made its way to Baton Rouge. The goal of REVO is to encourage and inspire young members of the Baton Rouge community to take action against the many injustices in the world. REVObr was launched recently by Bienville House member Matt Bruce.

On Saturday, May 10, REVObr held an Art Show and fundraiser for the Grace of God Orphanage in Malawi. Over 600 mostly young people viewed the work of more than twenty

local artists, enjoyed a fashion show, and listened to the music of Black Sound Parade and Apple Butter. The art show included about 50 art pieces on display 10 of which were sold, as well as 100 drawings by the Grace of God children, of which over half were sold. Funds were also raised from auctions of a custom REVO bicycle and skateboard, donated by Mid-City Bikes and Urban 9 Skateboards respectively. The event took place in the Ephemeral Gallery on Main Street in Baton Rouge. Altogether over \$6500 was raised for the Orphanage.

Baton Rouge Protests Bush Visit

by Ward Reilly

Baton Rougeans gathered near the intersection of Perkins and Highland Roads in the afternoon of April 22nd, to protest the presence of President Bush, and his illegal and immoral occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush was in town for a \$2000-per-plate fundraiser for John Kennedy, who is opposing Mary Landrieu for her Senate seat. We all thought it was ironic that he could find time for the Republican party, after failing to find time for Katrina relief in the very-democratic city of New Orleans.

The demonstration was covered by both Channel 2 (WBRZ-ABC) and Channel 9 (WAFB-CBS), as well as an indy media film crew. Jessica Ketchum-Weber and I were interviewed for the 6pm and 10pm news. The Advocate also included our protest in their feature newspaper story about Bush's visit, along with a photo of our group.

The indy film crew, led by Flux Rostrum, put together a nice YouTube video of our attempt to perform a "citizen's arrest" of Bush, a film that also highlighted the fact that the entire interstate, as well as the Mississippi River bridge, were shut down during rush hour. The highway closure caused hot tempers and

several accidents, as drivers scrambled to find their way home via another route, because of the inconvenience. The shut-down was also costly to the many truck drivers who were forced to turn around—no easy task on Highland and Perkins roads—while having to pay more than \$4.00 a gallon for their diesel fuel. I had brought a copy of the "Citizen's Arrest Warrant" that Veterans For Peace had issued for the March 19th protests in Washington D.C., and I tried to convince several law officers to help me arrest the war criminal.

You can view the video on the YouTube website:

<http://youtube.com/watch?v=K2vJ63jwI8o>

Local police and sheriff representatives ordered our group of 25 protesters to leave the corner that we had picked for the action, but after we refused to do so they changed their minds, and seemed confused that someone had actually stood up to them and exercised our right to be there.

All in all, it was a great action, with extremely good media coverage, especially when you consider that it was held at midday on a work day

Member News

Best wishes for a speedy recovery to Paula Henderson and Irvin Peckham. Paula has been ill for several weeks but is on the mend, and Irvin broke his collarbone while biking. We hope to see them back in full swing before too long.

BH sends a hearty welcome back to Doc Reich who suffered a fall a couple of months ago. After spending some time at Sage Rehabilitation Center, he came back stronger than ever – we can hardly keep up with him!

Bon Voyage to Jessica Eberhard and her family. Jessica and her husband, Kyle Harms, and their two boys will be doing a lot of traveling this summer and fall – first to Costa Rica and Iowa to visit parents and then off to Australia where Kyle is spending his sabbatical. BH will miss them – a lot!
