

Rep. Mary Dubuisson speaking at the Chamber sponsored legislative wrapup.

# Rapid Fire Wrapup

## Chamber hosts legislative roundup from parish lawmakers

By KEVIN CHIRI  
Slidell news bureau

SLIDELL — St. Tammany business leaders from the east side of the parish to the west got a lot of interesting and important information in a short period of time when over 150 turned out for the St. Tammany Chamber sponsored "Legislative Wrapup Luncheon."

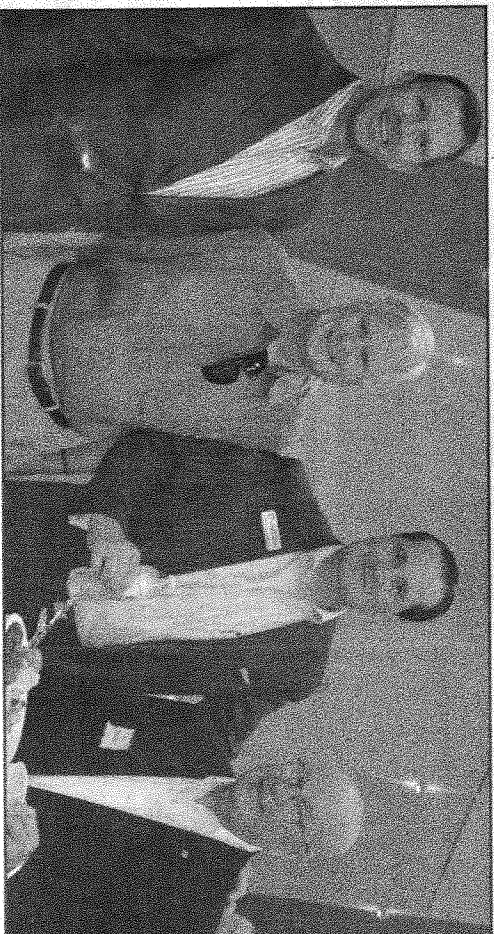
The luncheon is the annual event hosted by the Chamber to provide a capsule of info to business leaders about just what got accomplished, or not accomplished, by St. Tammany delegates to the Louisiana legislature.

The session concluded only two weeks ago with La. Gov. John Bel Edwards signing most of the bills by this week, not signing those he disagreed with. State law says that if a bill is not vetoed by the governor, or not signed within 10 days of being put on his desk, it automatically becomes law.

While the Rep. Mary Dubuisson sponsored "casino bill" has gotten more attention than anything in eastern St. Tammany since the session opened, she had little to say about it other than acknowledging what everyone was already aware of—that it had passed and recently was signed by Edwards.

That means the St. Tammany Parish Council now faces the question of calling an election this November that would allow or not allow a casino to be built in eastern St. Tammany. The vote will be parishwide even though the bill only calls for allowing a casino in Slidell, not anywhere else in the parish.

Dubuisson also touted the fact "all five of my bills passed" in her first year as a state lawmaker, including bills involving the state in-



Businessmen and public officials were part of the big crowd at the Chamber sponsored legislative wrap-up. (From left) Mandeville Councilman Rick Danielson, District Attorney Warren Montgomery, St. Tammany Corporation CEO Chris Masingill, and Bill Newton.

cluding work to lower tax rates, end the enhanced federal unemployment benefits and his own bill to establish a state kidney foundation.

She was also part of a Foster Promise Program to assist students getting funding for a two-year school without an ACT score, but she seemed most pleased with legislative action to improve election integrity.

"We got dead people off the rolls, will have voter ID needed for absentee ballots, more audits, more poll watchers and no ballot drop boxes," she said. "Polls show voters have lost confidence in the integrity of elections so we're happy to get some improvements made."

Hewitt said they are also moving to "shift Louisiana elections from electronic back to paper since it can be audited, it is more secure and the system is not connected to the Internet where problems can occur. Without this we won't build public confidence back."

Rep. Bob Owen, the third Slidell-area lawmaker who is still in his first term, noted some of his work that was related to other bills, in-

cluding work to lower tax rates, end the enhanced federal unemployment benefits and his own bill to establish a state kidney foundation.

"Louisiana is way behind in kidney transplant surgery and the foundation will help that improve," he noted. "The bill also helps during disasters like hurricanes when people on dialysis need to mobilize for services."

Western St. Tammany delegates talked about issues such as the decriminalization of marijuana, rural broadband, bills to add strength to Title IX, the equal opportunities in sports for women, a bill to balance the power of the governor vs. the legislature during situations like COVID, and firearms protection bills.

"The governor had way too much power during the pandemic," said Rep. Larry Freeman. "If we get this bill through and the governor ever calls a mask mandate again, we can veto it."

However, he said he is not optimistic the governor will sign the bill. Rep. Richard Nelson from Mandeville was among those who supported the successful decriminalization of marijuana bill, mainly

due to the financial aspect that is "costing Louisiana money on taxes."

He noted that in Colorado, where pot is legal, "the state gets \$20 million a year in sales tax money," rather than those funds staying with illegal dealers.

Nelson also said the legal aspect of it has cost residents thousands of dollars since "we have over 19,000 arrests for pot each year and it costs the average person about \$5,000 to fight it in court." He supported decriminalization since the former status of the law "was keeping people from getting into college or getting a job they want."



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