

State legislators reflect on session at luncheon

BY ANDREW CAULETTE
Staff writer

The St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce held its annual Legislative Wrap Up luncheon on June 21 at the Greystone near Mandeville, giving area legislators a chance to update local leaders on recent sessions at the Capitol.

State Sens. Sharon Hewitt, Patrick McMath and Beth Mizell attended, as did state Reps. Larry Frieman, Richard Nelson, Bob Owen and Mallinda White. Each spoke briefly about bills they introduced during the recent legislative session and the impacts locally. A brief question-and-answer session followed with the public.

Key takeaways from the event included McMath telling the crowd that St. Tammany received \$33 million for spending this year on infrastructure projects, including widening of La. 1077, creating connections between U.S. 90 and La. 59, a roundabout in the Madisonville area and the new U.S. 190 overpass at the Bogue Falaya River and Claborne Hill in Covington.

“An investment in infrastructure is an investment in the economy,” McMath said.

Hewitt said the clash over a congressional redistricting map approved by the Republican-majority legislature, which led to a suit by a group of Black voters because it only included one majority-Black district, likely won't be settled soon.

“I probably won't be resolved this week, this month. It may be years before these cases get resolved. But I feel

and now we'll wait and see how it plays out in court.”

Mizell urged St. Tammany leaders to lend expertise and attention to problems that plague less prosperous parts of the state, mentioning the ongoing struggle to bring broadband access to rural areas of Louisiana among the issues.

“You're the best Louisiana is doing,” she said. “I'm laying the burden on you all, because somebody is going to have to take notice and really get engaged in what they think are other people's problems.”

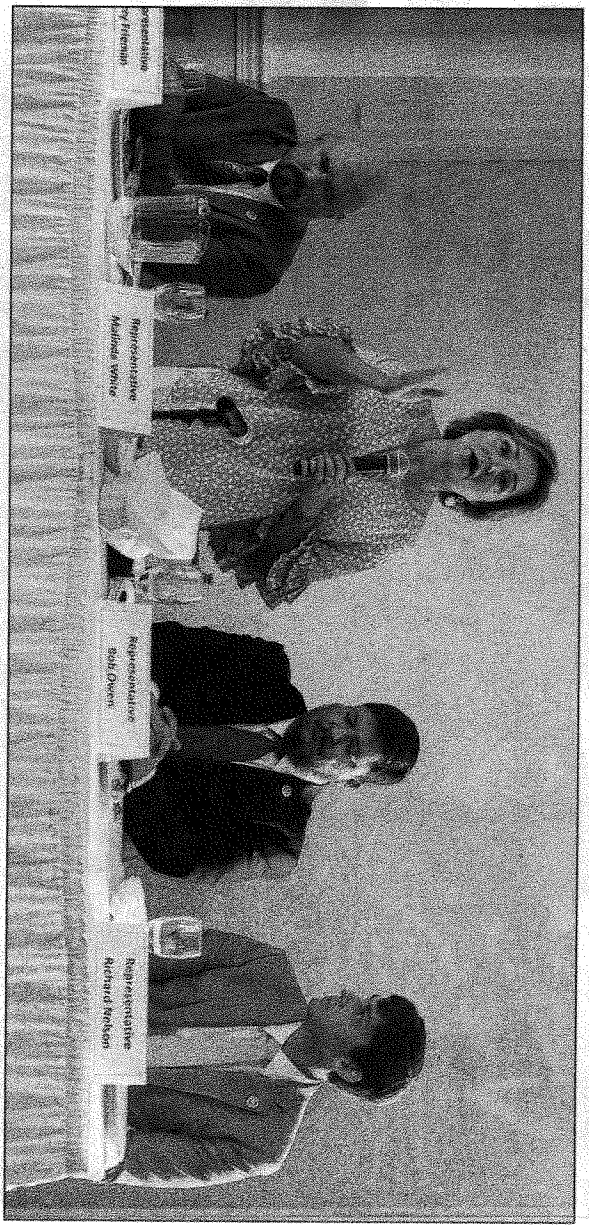
Frieman said District 74, which he represents, is expected to be entirely within St. Tammany Parish in this round of redistricting, which he said is a plus for the parish.

Nelson said legislators passed a bill requiring schools to use a phonics-based curriculum for children to teach reading. He said about 25% of schools don't use such a program now, which has severely hampered reading skills among some state youth.

Owen said fund acquisitions were made this session for water-sector upgrades in parts of his Stidell-area district. He noted the parish-owned Tammany Utilities system that has been problematic for thousands of customers east of the city and the urgent need for an overhaul to the antiquated utility.

White, who represents a sliver of St. Tammany in the Sun area, announced she recently joined the Republican Party after a year with a No Party affiliation.

White left the Democratic Party last year. Her shift to Republican ensured the GOP cur-



PHOTOS BY GRANT THERKILDSEN
State Rep. Mallinda White answers a question while fellow state Reps. Larry Frieman, Bob Owen and Richard Nelson listen at the Chamber of Commerce Legislative Wrap Up, held at The Greystone near Mandeville on June 21.

