

SLIDELL BUSINESS News and Notes

Waguespack speaks at Chamber luncheon

Future of state elections discussed

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MANDEVILLE — When Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) President Stephen Waguespack spoke to a luncheon meeting hosted by the St. Tammany Chamber, he talked about the future of Louisiana as if he was running for governor.

While Waguespack did not confirm his intentions that day to jump into the already crowded race for Louisiana governor, his evaluation for future success in the state certainly sounded like he was a candidate—something he formally announced publicly later that day as he resigned from his 10-year stint as the LABI leader.

Whether he was a candidate for governor or not, Waguespack is highly respected in the state for his knowledge of economic and business matters, and he laid out a clear plan for what he thinks the state needs to do in the coming years.

Waguespack believes the next few years will be critical for Louisiana political leaders if the state is to become one of the economic leaders in the south, something that Texas and Florida have now taken the lead on.

"We have so many term-limited elections coming up this fall," he

said. "That is why 2023 is such a big year—it will be an opportunity for an entire new group of political leaders to take over, and that's why it will be so important for the public to elect the right people."

Waguespack clearly believes he is one of those people after serving on the staff with former Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, then taking over LABI for the past 10 years and working with Louisiana legislative leaders on business friendly policies.

"Coming out of the COVID lockdowns this is a perfect time for the state to be better," he noted, pointing out that the population for many states in the south has exploded in recent years as Americans have fled from states like Michigan, California and New York.

"So many people are moving south," he said. "But you know which state is not growing in population? Louisiana is the number two state in the country for losing people to other states."

He said that 50 percent of the people moving out of Louisiana are doing so for a job, while many others are heading into retirement for states like Florida that do not have any state income tax.

Looking ahead, he believes the key areas

Louisiana must address are education reform, revamping the tax code, and simplifying business taxes.

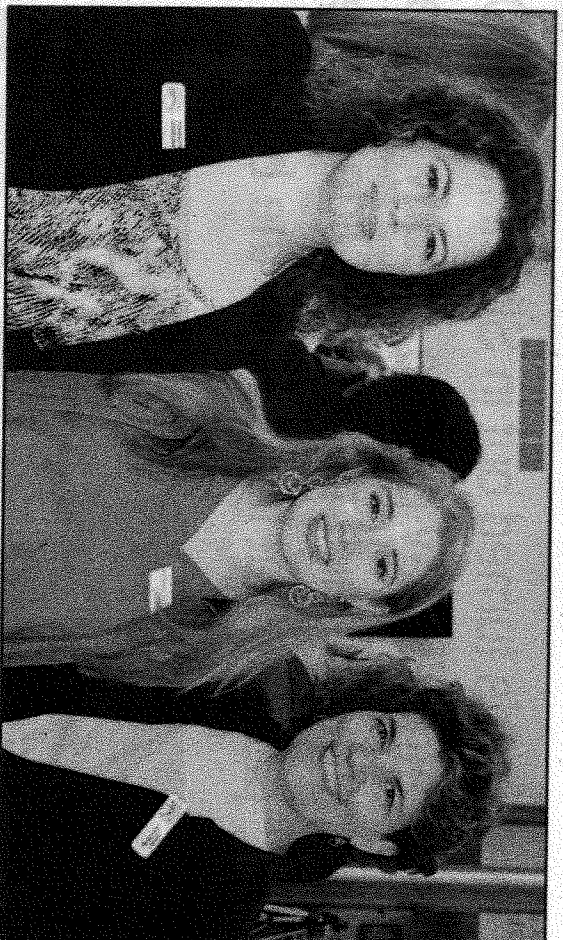
"The biggest problem we have in our educational system is that too many kids are not showing up for school," he said. "Truancy is a major problem, as well as the fact many of our third and fourth graders cannot read or write, but are being passed anyway, which sets them up for a future of failure."

One other candidate for governor, Slidell's Sharon Hewitt, already addressed one of those problems in last year's state session when she authored a bill that mandates third graders be able to read before they can pass.

As for the business tax situation in Louisiana, Waguespack said it is so full of exemptions and incentives that it is too complicated, hence, many businesses go to different states to set up shop.

"We need a low, flat fair rate," he said. "And we need to lower the rates, but do so with a growing economy."

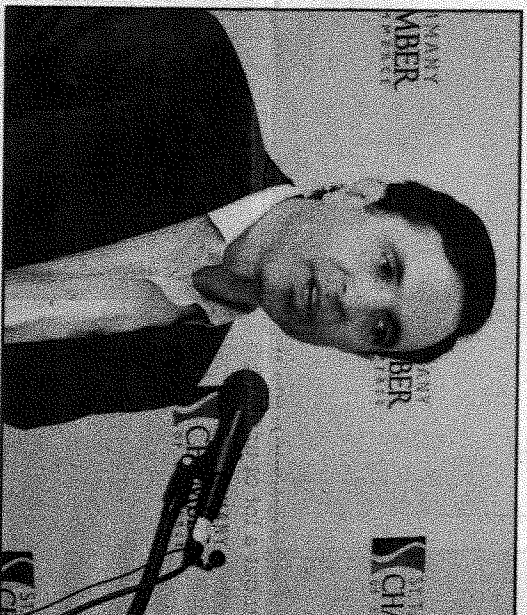
He added a third issue of crime, stating, "it's one of the biggest issues. We need to give our local enforcers the power to punish people who need punishing."



Among business leaders at the event were Christie Gardiner (left) and Winn Whitner (right) from Middendorf's in Slidell, along with Emily Rebert with Jefferson Financial. (Staff photo by Kevin Chiri.)



Slidell Mayor Greg Cromer (left) is seen with Douglass Schmidt at the St. Tammany Chamber where former LABI President Stephen Waguespack talked about the future for the state with elections coming up this October. Cromer has been seen making his own rounds across the parish after announcing his plans to run for parish president. (Staff photo by Kevin Chiri.)



Stephen Waguespack had some insightful comments about the future of Louisiana when he addressed the business luncheon hosted by the St. Tammany Chamber, held at Beau Chene last week. Later in the day he confirmed he is joining the field for governor, set for an October election. (Staff photo by Kevin Chiri.)



A packed crowd at Beau Chene for the St. Tammany Chamber business luncheon listened to Stephen Waguespack describe the scenario for Louisiana's future success. (Staff photo by Kevin Chiri.)