

Thursday, May 4th, 2006
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**LOUISIANA SHOULD SHOW WAR'S COST
FOR ALL TO SEE**

A 21-year-old Louisiana soldier was killed in Iraq last week. He is the 54th service man from Louisiana who has died since the combat began in March 2003. And you would have a hard time reading about this young man's death. It was buried in the back pages of his hometown newspaper.

Have we become so numbed by the deaths of these young men that we make so little effort to even acknowledge their loss?

The young soldier in question, Lance Corporal Derrick J. Cothran was a graduate of John Curtis Christian High School in New Orleans. He is the second Curtis graduate to be killed in Iraq. The first was a young sergeant named Huey Fassbender who was killed last year. The sergeant was a member of the Louisiana Army National Guard 256th Infantry Brigade. That's the same unit I belonged to back during the Vietnam War.

We've lost too many of these young men. And you know what? The State could do much more in honoring these heroic soldiers. And here's an idea to consider.

Whenever a Louisiana soldier is killed while serving his country, Governor Blanco should issue an order for the flags flown at the State Capitol in Baton Rouge to be lowered to half-staff. The flags flying above the Capitol should remain lowered for 72 hours after each death. What should become a tradition and even put into law is we create a public pause. And however brief, we should send messages to relatives of those killed in action that the value of their loved one will not be lost in the crowd of our daily lives.

We're talking about the Governor acknowledging that the soldier lost – someone's son, someone's brother, someone's uncle – is all part of the healing process in some small way. This is a gesture of appreciation for the type of public service we all should view with utmost admiration.

The cost of such public display is negligible, although that should not make any difference. There has to be someone sitting around the Capitol who can take the time to lower and raise these flags whenever a young Louisiana soldier is lost. It's a busy time around the Capitol right now; the Governor, Legislators, and a cross section of lobbyists and average citizens are at the Capitol everyday. Hopefully, someone will take a moment to pause and send this idea up the chain of command. It's an important salute that needs to be undertaken. So Governor, give the order.

THE CHEERS AND BOOS DEPARTMENT

It's time to single out those to praise and those to heckle.

First of all, three cheers for Baton Rouge State Judge Mike Erwin, who quashed a request in a recent criminal trial to pick jurors behind closed doors and keep their identity secret. Judge Erwin made no bones about his feelings on secret juries. He sighted the Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees a speedy and public trial.

"As long as I'm sitting in this seat, there will be no such thing as an anonymous jury," Erwin said. "A public trial to me means a public trial. That means the public can come in here and watch if they so desire, and they can know who the jurors are."

Erwin dubbed "reprehensible" the decision to seat an anonymous jury in the federal racketeering trial of former Governor Edwin Edwards, but said he knows it was done "because the federal government was afraid they couldn't convict Edwin Edwards without it."

Judge Erwin showed courage and appreciation of constitutional law when he made his ruling. It's a shame for Louisiana citizens that federal judges within the Fifth Circuit don't take to heart both the comments of Judge Erwin and his reference to the Constitution. Secrecy has no place in the courtroom, but you wouldn't know that by a number of recent Fifth Circuit rulings. But three cheers go to Mike Erwin.

How about the three boos? Hands down, the winner is New Orleans District Attorney Eddie Jordan. Following Katrina, a number of prisoners have sat in jail for over eight months simply waiting for a chance to plead guilty or innocent. One defendant was charged with public drunkenness. Another defendant, who speaks no English, was charged with unauthorized entry. Both sat in jail for months, no lawyer, no chance to make bail, and no chance to even state their innocence. Jordan has fought off any attempt to have suspects, even those accused of minor crimes, released. There has been one embarrassment after another in this office since Jordan was elected. A New Orleans jury found Jordan guilty recently of discriminating against certain employees in his office, and awarded damages of well over one million dollars. He certainly deserves this week's three boos.

Is McGruff, the crime dog back in action? We're talking now about seriously taking a bite out of crime.

The Justice Department, never shy about pulling any punches to get their way, really pulled a doozie last week out in Tacoma, Washington. Lawyers for the Justice Department tried to confiscate gold tooth caps (known as "grills") from a fellow convicted of a crime, because according to these diligent crime fighters, the dental work qualified as "seizable assets."

That's right! They wanted to pull a guy's teeth out as a way of getting compensation back. The Justice Department had the poor fellow in a vehicle headed to a dental clinic when a federal judge said, "Hey, enough is enough."

Here is what his lawyer had to say, “It’s shocking that this kind of action by the federal government could be sought and accomplished in secret, without anyone being notified,” said Peter Olbertz, who represents Lewis. “It reminds me of the secret detentions in terrorist cases.”

Now the Justice Department has certainly had precedent to use in pulling the teeth out of this fellow’s mouth. Such action was referred to by the past president of the Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. “It sounds like Nazi Germany when they were removing the gold teeth from the bodies, but at least then they waited until they were dead.”

LSU basketball coach, John Brady is up for a well-deserved increase in his salary. Look for the coach who made the Final Four to top the million dollar mark plus a number of other perks with his new contract. Besides the money, which Brady is asking the University to commit a number of new improvements in the Pete Maravich Assembly Center including renovating the locker rooms, and making a number of other improvements.

Now I am a big LSU basketball fan, and go to all the home games. Coach, let me make a suggestion. Add one thing to your contract demands. Get the big bucks, all the perks, new brick and mortar, but there’s one other thing I want you to demand from the University. Good hot dogs.

Simply put, the hot dogs served at LSU sporting events are terrible. What you get for your three bucks is a weenie that is served cold, on a stale white bun that has never been heated. And I know something about good hot dogs. I have had them from Yankee Stadium to most of the SEC athletic venues. And hands down, the worst hot dogs I’ve ever eaten are served at LSU.

So, Coach Brady, do all of us fans a big favor. Insist on grilled hot dogs with heated buns. Quite frankly, even if you lose a number of games, I’ll still be there pulling for you. As long as I can eat a good hot dog.

“Some people wanted [champagne](#) and [caviar](#) when they should have had [beer](#) and [hot dogs](#).”

- Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969)

Peace and justice.

Jim Brown

Jim Brown's weekly column appears each Thursday here at Politicsla.com, and in a number of newspapers throughout the State of Louisiana. You can read Jim's Blog, and take his weekly poll, plus read his columns going back to the fall of 2002 by going to his own website at <http://www.jimbrownla.com>.

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