

Thursday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
New Orleans, Louisiana

### **WHERE'S THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IN NEW ORLEANS?**

Could the entire federal, state and local justice system operating in New Orleans be more dysfunctional? It's hard to imagine how things can get much worse. From federal and state judges to a police department that seems to have lost any set of priorities, there seems to be almost unanimous consensus that the present system is broken with few options on the table that can change the ongoing ineffective downward spiral.

And hey folks. Katrina happened almost a year ago. It's time to quite using the storm as the scapegoat for the mirage of problems that besets the entire system. It was a mess pre-Katrina, and using this tragedy as an excuse was passé' months ago.

We are looking at a city with half the population that existed before Katrina, yet almost the entire police force has been restored. Yet crime rates are growing at record proportions. Just last week, figures we released showing that New Orleans has the highest murder rate per capita in the nation.

The Governor has sent in 300 National Guardsmen and a 60 state troopers.. And Senator Mary Landrieu just last week called on the feds for federal help. Really a solid signal to potential tourists that New Orleans is on the rebound and a safe place to visit. Landrieu could not have said it better: "The New Orleans criminal justice system needs to be immediately fixed....violent crime is on a dangerous rise and it threatens the very foundation of our rebuilding efforts."

This was an easy conclusion to reach once the Senator and anyone else read over the statistics:

- \*80 murders so far this year.
- \*Some 6000 criminal cases backlogged in the court system.
- \*Only 7% of those arrested spend any time in jail
- \*Over 1000 indigent defendants sit in jail, many arrested pre-Katrina, without any hope of getting any type of hearing.

So what are New Orleans judges doing about this crisis? Well, several of the judges headed for Jamaica recently for a week to get some "legal education." The cost per judge was \$4500. With the New Orleans court system in freefall, who could blame them for a little R and R.

And the police department? Just last week, some 39 pre-storm internal investigations were dismissed because the Assistant Chief in charge failed to meet listed time limits. Certain police officers were charged with a variety of infractions including filing false reports, police brutality, and a host of other charges. All the Department had to do was ask for a time extension, but they failed to do so. The Department's reaction? Assistant Chief Michael Defillo was quoted as saying that none of the charges were so strong that they could "taint an officer." Comforting to know that if an arresting officer beats you up, or falsifies information against you, the man in blue is not "tainted."

The court house is only open from 9 am until 5 pm because of “safety and security” concerns. So it’s supposedly not safe to be in the vicinity at 8 am or 6:30 pm. I know it’s nice to have banker’s hours, but when you have 1000 prisoners who have sat in jail for a year, perhaps it’s time to work a little overtime like practically everyone else in New Orleans has been doing. Put a few national guardsmen in the hallways, and keep the courts going from dawn till dusk or later. Pre-Katrina, night court didn’t even begin until late evening. Any protest that 8 hours a day is all the system can handle is lame.

The District Attorney (who is still reeling from a \$3.58 million judgment against him for discrimination), is accused by the Police Chief of being unprepared in court, and the Attorney General comes in unannounced to file charges against local doctors and nurses. Is this system completely out of control or what?

In to the fray comes, a “white knight” whose role is to bring some levity to this chaotic demise. Former Attorney General Richard Ieyoub has been asked by Mayor Ray Nagin to intercede and try to bring all the conflicting sides together. With no one putting any semblance of a plan on the table, Ieyoub has his work cut out for him. There is presently little public confidence in the entire criminal justice system, but at least Ieyoub has the opportunity to start from square one.

This might not be all that bad of an idea. And if the former candidate for governor succeeds, who knows where in the public spotlight he may end up. Qualifications for the 2007 gubernatorial election are a year away.

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“Justice is open to everyone in the same way as the Ritz Hotel. ‘ ~Judge Sturgess

”People who love sausage and people who believe in justice should never watch either of them being made. “ ~Otto Bismark

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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