

Thursday, November 30th, 2006
New Orleans, Louisiana

By Jim Brown

IT'S ALL ABOUT LEADERSHIP!

A new survey out indicates that nearly one third of the greater New Orleans population is considering bailing out. We are talking about some 200,000 people that are considering moving to a different part of the country. And when you add up what it will take to calm their fears and change their minds, it simply comes down to one thing. Leadership.

I opened up the phone lines on my radio show this week, and had caller after caller expressed their concerns. You would have thought that the threat of future hurricanes with much more flooding would be at the top of their list of worries. But that wasn't the case. Not one caller expressed a desire to pick up their stakes and move away to protect them and their families from future natural disasters. No, it was not the quirks of Mother Nature. Man-made problems and the lack of effective problem solving were the front burner concerns being expressed in call after call.

Crime was obviously at the top of the list. And for good reason. New Orleans seems to be a city under siege, with the Louisiana State police stationed up and down Canal Street, and 300 national guardsmen patrolling less populated neighborhoods. And remember that the population of the city is less than 40% of what it was pre - Katrina. Yet the number of police officers is about the same as it was before the storm. Little wonder as to why tourists are shying away for New Orleans, and why many around the country look on the Big Easy as a war zone.

Some \$30 million in state money has been spent for state police and National Guard protection in New Orleans during the past six months. Yet just this week, New Orleans police Superintendent Warren Riley has asked the governor to keep the state militia in force through the coming year.

In adjoining Jefferson Parish, the crime rate is up some 87% over last year, with almost 60 murders having been committed so far this year. So the crime problem is regional, and it's at the top of the list of reasons given by those who are thinking of bailing out.

A close second is the problem of affordable insurance. The president's recovery Czar, Donald Powell, has said repeatedly that the high cost of insurance is the single biggest impediment to the recovery of the greater New Orleans area. Yet so far, not proposal is on the table as a special session of the Louisiana Legislature is only days away. (For a starting point, a whole litany of ideas appeared in last week's column.)

Put the pay raises and other discretionary spending proposals are on the back burner, Governor and Legislators. There's trouble in River City with a capital T (and it rimes with E and that stands for ENOUGH!)

A summit on crime with local and state officials standing by the Governor? A serious review of a whole list of insurance reforms that are floating around? Mortgage and banking representatives, with real estate brokers brought into the mix to offer ideas? Hey, the average Joes out there know there is no quick fix. But they want action, they want ideas on the table, and they want leadership.

Statewide elections are less than 11 months away. It's "crunch time" for those in public office who want to be around to govern come 2008. My callers perceive, with good reason, a leadership vacuum at all levels of government. From the bungling in Iraq to crime on the streets. Some 200,000 people along the Louisiana gulf coast are weighing their options. They want hope that change is in the works. Who is going to lead?

Jim Brown is now live on thenew995fm.com each weekday from 8 to 11 am. You can hear him on the worldwide web at <http://www.thenew995fm.com>.

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