

**A Community Meeting on Race
Relations in Baker, Louisiana
June 24, 1997**

**A work product of the Central Regional Office on behalf of the
Louisiana Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights
February 1999**

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A community meeting convened by the Central Regional Office on behalf of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The meeting was held on June 24, 1997, at 6:00 p.m., St. Paul's Baptist Free Church, 2024 Groom Road, Baker, Louisiana, with Louisiana Advisory Committee Chairperson William Quigley presiding. Also attending the meeting were Advisory Committee member Dr. Laurabeth Hicks; Commission Chairperson Dr. Mary Frances Berry; and Central Regional Director Melvin L. Jenkins.

PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Quigley. My name is Bill Quigley, and I am the Chair of the Louisiana Advisory Committee for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and we are here in Baker this evening, almost exactly a year from the time that we were here I think it was July 8 and 9 of 1996, and here as a dialogue and a conversation on what has happened on a couple of issues in terms of the churches, in terms of dialogue between the different racial groups, and in terms of assessing where we are, in terms of whether we've made some progress, or whatever, to make a report.

Here is another representative of the Advisory Committee, Dr. Laurabeth Hicks, who is from Baker, so we're excited that she could be here.

And we have two representatives from the national office, Melvin Jenkins, who is the Regional Director of Kansas City Office of the Civil Rights Commission, and then Dr. Mary Frances Berry, who is the Chair of the Commission. I'm going to ask Dr. Berry to get started.

Commissioner Berry. All right. Thank you very much, Bill.

First, I think it would be in order to introduce Melvin Jenkins. I don't know if you know Melvin, the Regional Director, who helped put all this together. He's been down here laboring in the vineyard, not forever, but for a long time in this region, and then point out that we're in Baker, which is Mayor Bobby Simpson's town. Maybe he would like to, just by way of opening, say a few words for us.

Mayor Simpson. I would welcome you back. We appreciate the open forum you had a year ago, and it's been a while since we've read the comments, but we appreciate you

being back. Welcome to our town, and if there's anything we can do to assist you, be glad to do it.

Commissioner Berry. Thank you. And then we have one councilman here, Councilman Jack Waldrom. Would you like to say a word or two? All right. We'll just acknowledge your presence here.

And then because it is Rev. Pierre Briscoe's church and we want to say how much we appreciate your letting us meet in your church, we would like to see if there is anything you would like to say by way of opening, and then we're just going to have some discussion here.

I want to say a word about why we're here. Since last year, according to the National Church Arson Task Force report that just came out recently, in their first year report to the President of the United States, they report on how the church fire investigations are going.

And one of the things that's striking is that only about 65 percent of the fires that they're investigating—only 35 percent have they in fact identified a suspect. Sixty-five percent, their record—in other words, although they say the record is about as good as most arson investigations, the record is not very good.

If you haven't solved 65 percent and you've solved 35 percent, and the rest are still open, and in particular if you look at Louisiana, because in Louisiana they have a list of about 14 church fires, and they say they've only in fact made an arrest in one.

So the record in Louisiana, their own record, the BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the law enforcement agencies is worse than it is in other of the States

that they report on. Only one, and this church, of course, is one of churches that they have listed with no arrest made.

The other thing that I wanted to point out is that National Arson Task Force report indicates that there are two sources of funds in addition to whatever other money is available for church rebuilding. The National Council of Churches has a fund to which they invite churches to apply for funds to rebuild. The other is the Department of Housing and Urban Development has a loan guarantee, a low interest rate program, to give money to the churches to rebuild, so that the ones that need to have some rebuilding done can get some funds from both of those sources.

That's, of course, good news and some churches have obviously been rebuilt, and others are using these funds. But the main focus of our attention last year, and when we came to the South, was we noticed how in race relations, it seems to us that there was a great deal of polarization, such as exists around the country.

And in the comments that we made after the reports were done and in our press conference in Washington, with the State Advisory Committee Chairs present, we asked that there be continuing dialogue on race relations in the communities where these burnings are taking place, because we were concerned about any underlying problems or tensions that may have led some people to believe that it was okay to burn churches.

Since last year, the President has recently called for a national conversation or dialogue about race relations. The Commission, we've been saying for years, including emphasizing it last year, and I've said it to the President, that there should be a series of local conversations as well as a big national conversation about this issue.

So one of the reasons why we're making this visit here this year, and in the other States, is to find out what if anything has happened since last year, to sort of try to take the temperature of the community to find out what has happened on the racial front, on race relations.

Our SAC has met with the Governor of Louisiana, and we have requested meetings

repeatedly with the Governors of Mississippi and Alabama, and we're going to meet with the Governor of Mississippi tomorrow on this subject.

So we are here. One of the things we're mostly interested in is to get some conversation going about what people perceive as the race relations here in this community and what's being done. Last year we had testimony from various witnesses who talked about the lack of dialogue in the community, and the need for dialogue across racial lines.

There were some people who talked about the lack of involvement of local community on a biracial basis or multiracial basis in building the churches, and that there were people from out of town who came in. There were also witnesses who talked about the fact that they thought race relations here were pretty good, and that putting the spotlight on the church burnings made it appear that they were worse than they were.

So we had all that testimony, and we dutifully reported this, because we report what we hear.

So this year we're back again to see and hear what is going on. What we'd like to know from any of you is what is going on here in Baker and how are race relations today and would there be anybody around here today who would think that it was okay to go burn churches or do anything like that, because they thought that there was some kind of an issue of this kind. So that's what we're really here to find out, if anybody cares to tell us.

Reverend Briscoe, what do you think? What's going on on the racial front here in Baker?

Rev. Briscoe. I don't live in Baker. There's not too much I can say about what's going on.

Commissioner Berry. Okay. Well, what's going on generally around here?

Rev. Briscoe. I can't see anything that's going—generally in order.

Commissioner Berry. From what you can see.

Rev. Briscoe. But I can—from my members that talk about—that things is doing well, it's on a racial base or whatever on that. Like I say, I can't directly say exactly because I don't

live in Baker.

Commissioner Berry. Where do you live?

Rev. Briscoe. I live in Plaquemine.

Commissioner Berry. Well, how are things there?

Rev. Briscoe. I could tell you about Plaquemine now.

Commissioner Berry. Oh, you can?

Rev. Briscoe. Yes, I can talk about Plaquemine. I live there.

Commissioner Berry. I apologize.

Rev. Briscoe. That's 30 miles.

Commissioner Berry. And so everything is good there?

Rev. Briscoe. No, it's not good. It's not good, but we're getting by.

Commissioner Berry. You're getting by.

Rev. Briscoe. There are a lot of things that could be improved and a lot of things we are getting improved, and we are in the business of doing it now, because we got unity. Together you can do things, but really not no—in Plaquemine, like other places, we have our ups and we have our downs.

Commissioner Berry. So what do you hear from your members about the situation?

Rev. Briscoe. The situation here in Baker? I guess they report that Baker is all right. I have some members here that live here. They can tell you more about Baker than I can.

Commissioner Berry. Okay. We will ask them. Maybe they can help us. Whenever you get up to say something, if you could identify yourselves, that would be very useful. Just say who you are when you stand up.

Mr. Sept. I live in Baker.

Commissioner Berry. What is your name, sir?

Mr. Sept. Major Sept.

Commissioner Berry. Go ahead.

Mr. Sept. And I live in Baker. I was born and raised in Baker.

Commissioner Berry. You were born and raised here?

Mr. Sept. Yes, all my life.

Commissioner Berry. Lived here all your life.

Mr. Sept. All my life.

Commissioner Berry. Well, what do you

think about what was going on last year at the time we were here and how things have been since then, and has there been any dialogue across racial lines in the white and black community, to talk about racial issues here in Baker?

Mr. Sept. I think one of the—some of the head people in Baker, the mayor—they're very nice, very cooperative, but on their thinking, this problem that we had, I really don't think it came from Baker. I really don't. I think it was just somebody going through and found the church, because this church here has been here over 60 years. We don't have problems in Baker.

I mean, we been treated real nice from the town—we need this church—go to school—any kind of—whatsoever. We have no problem, and the mayor and everybody out there told us many times that we want to use anything, anything from Baker, you know, to help us, we're welcome, and we have asked for different things and we got them with no problem.

Commissioner Berry. So you think these are some people from outside—

Mr. Sept. I think so too. Because like I say, any part of the State you go to, you might find a few people—you can't—but I'm talking about the ones that we have dealt with in Baker. We have no problem.

Commissioner Berry. So do you think there's any need for any kind of organized discussions about race relations between the white and black community in Baker?

Mr. Sept. I couldn't say yes, because I see no reason, you know. I've never seen no reason.

Commissioner Berry. Okay.

Mr. Sept. I have seen no reason. And my grandmother and my mother, and all—we never had any problem, and if you see—it happen all over.

Commissioner Berry. All over the State?

Mr. Sept. Yes, you know, different places, you know, this burning here, wasn't just here in Baker.

Commissioner Berry. You think maybe somebody who just happened on these places.

Mr. Sept. I don't believe we have no problem with, you know, Baker, you know, like that.

Commissioner Berry. You might want to say something later, depending on who else has something to say. Did you get his name? Rep. Kip Holden has arrived, State Rep. Kip Holden has arrived, State representative in the Louisiana House, want to acknowledge his presence. Is this your district?

Rep. Holden. Yes.

Commissioner Berry. Okay. Well, then that makes sense. So, basically what we have heard so far is that there's no need for any dialogue on race relations in Baker, because everything is fine and has been fine forever, and therefore whoever these people were last year who told us that there were some problems, they didn't know what they were talking about.

Mayor Simpson. I remember who you're talking about. That was from the church on Sunshine, which is outside the city limits of Baker, and their particular comments were from outside of Baker.

They were talking about with elected officials and things from outside our city, so when you say city, you're talking to the folks who live here in St. Paul's. They live in the city of Baker.

The people from the other communities, like Reverend Pierre, they live outside of our area, and they have their church there, because he came up to me afterwards and said, "We're not talking to you; we're talking about some people that we've had some problem with in Baton Rouge." Who that is, I don't know.

Rep. Holden. Let me say this, and the mayor and I, we work together, although he said we never come to visit—but I would tend to think that it is always helpful to have dialogue on race.

And the reason why is because without communications it's just like in a marriage, if you don't communicate, you can't really understand what is going on in somebody's head or mind, and I tell my children the same thing. If they don't tell me what's going on, then I cannot really tell what the problem is or how we try to reach a solution.

So I would not say that dialogue should not continue. I think we need to maybe spread the dialogue out a little bit where we have elected

officials talking to each other, which we do. But then somewhere down the line it has to go through churches talking to each other and let me give credit, because I did get up and the first time I did any painting in I don't know when, I was here helping to paint this church, and was proud of myself. I wish we had a picture so my wife could see I could do manual labor.

But you know, there were a number of church people who came together to help rebuild the church at the moment. But I think also you need to find where it's not just in a moment of crisis or in a moment of rebuilding.

We have to start also laying that foundation so you have congregations worshipping more together. You have people doing more together, not just in an incident where we have a church that was burned, but overall.

The last point, the mayor and I talked about this, because I had to address a group of citizens in Baker before we started the legislative session, and there was some dialogue about the Baker school situation. At that meeting, I suggested to the people at this meeting, that again there needs to be dialogue between the white community and the black community about the Baker school system because I have been hearing some things on the negative side, and obviously they may not have been hearing them. But because simply I'm an African American legislator, and a lot of people felt comfortable in telling me some of the concerns.

The mayor and I talked about that as well as about opening up the lines of communication there, to see what the problems were before we moved forward with trying to take care of some things.

Now, legislatively, again let me give them credit. They have come to us. They talked to us. They've pushed pieces of legislation in terms of trying to do things in Baker, but overall I think if you had to put the pluses and the minuses and the good and the bad, the pluses outweigh the minuses and the good outweighs the bad.

Commissioner Berry. It was my impression from listening to the people last time that they were not so much—no one was complaining about the mayor. I mean, nobody got

up and said—so it was not government officials aren't doing their job. That wasn't the point anybody was making.

The point, as I understood it was, they were talking about people to people communication, congregation to congregation communication, and they were talking about the need for more of that kind of discussion, not to say we don't like this public official or that public official, but what about people sharing and talking?

And that's what—when we say conversation on race or dialogue about race, that's what we mean. We don't mean, you know, two elected officials talking to each other about the issue of—

Mayor Simpson. Kip and I think we do a pretty good job. I guess all I can tell you is about my own personal experience about that outside of the government, talk to you as Bobby Simpson, Bakerite.

I go to the Bethany World Prayer Center. I guess our congregation must be at least 40 percent black. We have cell group theory [phonetic] all over this area. In fact, it goes all the way to Mississippi and all the way down to Plaquemine, and there's quite a bit of interaction there.

Now, so far as just this church and another church. I'm not sure—we'd have to throw that back to the pastors to know how they feel there.

I know there's a ministerial alliance here that most of our churches are a part of, and they meet—we had National Day of Prayer, which is proclaimed. And a few years ago we had that at a city office. Fourteen pastors from all over the city, both black and white, attended that.

So from a government, yes, I can tell you that, and from my own personal spiritual life, I know that we're very inclusive in our church of everyone, but so far as the rest of them, I couldn't speak.

Commissioner Berry. And what about any tensions around the school desegregation issue? Anybody know anything about that at all?

Mayor Simpson. We've had hearings. We've had a lot of hearings and I guess kind of just like the legislative that started in 1995—

is that when the constitutional amendment went through—no one paid any attention in 1995 to the constitutional amendment.

It went through both House and the Senate unopposed. No one took this seriously until it. I guess, got to a point where it look like it was going to happen. We had been having council meetings. We had a school education commission meeting.

We just had all kind of public meetings on this, and it didn't get to the point where all of a sudden it looked like, "Hey, they're going to do this thing." Then it appeared that some people felt like they had been left out.

But this process had been going on for quite for a while. It started in 1992, but it got serious after the election of 1995. There was a State constitutional amendment that 65 percent of the people in the State, along with this parish, some 80 percent in Baker said go for it.

And then that went along for another year before it really got to the point where it looked like the city of Baker might be able to have—and that's when all of a sudden when it got to the forefront that, "Hey, they may succeed in this," then we started having some folks that felt like they had been left out of the process, or at least that was our understanding of it.

Commissioner Berry. And what's happening on it now?

Mr. Gibson. When he's finished, I'd like to say something.

Commissioner Berry. Okay. Go right ahead.

Mr. Gibson. My name is Everett Gibson, and this is my wife Trini, and we live in Baker on Francis Drive.

And we represent—opposite, and we—this school district that Baker is trying to get into. Just because they have authorization to go from a State and the other body, that doesn't mean they have to go. And I'm concerned along two or three lines. Number one is that it seems as though that the powers to be just want to move on this regardless. They are not putting out any definitive cost, what this is going to do.

We're concerned about what this is really going to cost the citizens of Baker to get a quality school district. Did have Professor Miller do a study, and he indicated that within

certain parameters of the State average, but that does not include any start-up costs, which we think going to be considerable.

Don't have any buildings, don't have any equipment, and all this would have to be negotiated and you're saying that you're going to do a district and you don't have any cost out there.

I mean to me, as I—I'm not saying anything here that I have not said up in the public meeting and Bill knows that. I made these points very clear in the last two or three meetings that we've had.

So that's the main thing, so you have to do this without knowing exactly—or pretty close. You may not know exactly, you have a pretty good idea to what the cost's going to be, because if you're going to tax the system too much, that's going to run the property taxes up. That will inhibit growth in the city of Baker if we have to pay an extraordinary amount of taxes. We're already paying about 44, 45 mills now. So if you go up to where you've got to pay three or four, five times what you're paying now, I don't think most people would be willing to trade \$1,400 or \$1,500 for property tax, just so that Baker has an independent school district.

So we are real concerned about that. The other concern expressed in the last public meeting they had, was that some wanted Baker to have a public school district so the students in Baker, live in Baker, can go to school in Baker. Okay. So we put it back to them, what guarantee do we have that once you get this system started, that you won't make any balancing system to go to a private school and take the money with them to private school, and we're left with no school at all?

We can always get outvoted four to one, so we have some great concerns about that, and from a historical point of view, because before 1967, before desegregation, Baker had no public school for its black citizens. They had to go to Zachary. They had to go to Zachary or Scotlandville to do that. Baker was the only city I know around here that did not provide any school at all in history for its blacks. So we have some concerns about that.

So we put those things on the table out

front so everything knows that we have concerns about those kinds of things. You ask for guarantees—we ask the city attorney, because he give us assurance by State law that they have to provide public education, and he—the senator said, "No, I cannot guarantee you that." That's the way he sums it up. "I cannot guarantee you that we will have a public education system for all of its citizens."

So those are two of the main concerns that we have, and the people that we represent, we did not vote for, in the district where we vote, we are solidly against it.

Commissioner Berry. And what's the racial makeup of the district you live in?

Mr. Gibson. Makeup of what?

Commissioner Berry. What's the racial makeup of the district you're in?

Mr. Gibson. Basically it's this, Dr. Davis' district, so I'd say about 60–40.

Commissioner Berry. Do you see any advantages to having a separate school; independent school?

Mr. Gibson. Well, I expressed the concern is, Can you avoid it?

Commissioner Berry. No, I mean, what do you think about the arguments on the other side, that—well, maybe we better have the arguments on the other side. What is the argument that it's advantageous to do this?

Mayor Simpson. Well—

Commissioner Berry. We just heard the arguments. Let's put them side by side.

Mayor Simpson. I guess you're addressing that to me. And you have to go through the progression of this. In 1992, the first time I had ever been involved in any type of election, the number one question on everybody's mind, the doors that I knocked on, were, What can you do about our kids?

In the city of Baker, and to address his second point, the city of Baker has never been responsible for the education of its kids. That's been a parish function ever since the inception of public education in this area. So the very group that you're supporting is the one that excluded you in Baker in the early 1950s and 1940s and 1960s here. That's a parish function.

So we've always been at the beck and call of the parish for the education of our children.

So in 1992 after everybody said "Look, what can you do?" we were under a—and you may know this, but we're under the longest running desegregation suit in America, and since 1982 the judge has been in charge of the assignment plan, because our school board would not do anything.

So he put his own system together. In Baker's case, because our whites and our blacks are so close together, because of North Baton Rouge and Baker, he did a clustering system. He took the white kids from Baker, and moved them to Scotlandville. He took the black kids from Scotlandville and moved them to Baker, and they would go 2 years each place.

At the middle school level the kids in Baker had no choice but to go in to Scotlandville to school.

What's happening is by the time kids got to high school, both black and white, those who could afford it, they put their kids in private school.

So it got to a point where it was killing us on any—if you called our City Hall and said, "I'm moving on Johnson Street, where will my kids go to school?" We would say, "We can't tell you. It depends on your race, it depends on your address, it depends on a number of—the age of the child."

They put it in a computer and it spits out where the child will go to school. So we started our process with public hearings. We started going to the school board and saying, "Listen, all we want is for a kid that lives in Baker to be able to go to the five schools in Baker. We don't care if you're having to bring other people in to Baker to take care of problems that you're having outside of Baker." Just allow—because we're a community.

There's not but three of us in Baton Rouge Parish. It's us, Zachary and the city of Baton Rouge. Everybody else is part of the parish.

People move to Baker because they want to be a part of it. It's the hub of our community, and it really was. On Friday nights the football stadium was the place to be.

So it's a big dilemma. Everything has been one. We're down, dropped from a 5-A, the largest classification in the State, to a 4-A. We've seen a lot of transition in our city from

people that own houses, to a rental type situation here in Baker.

So we kept going to the school board. They kept saying, "We're going to do a bond issue: we're going to tie it to a big megaschools." Well, that got beat 65 percent in the parish.

The next concept was what we have at the school board now, was a CATE [phonetic] proposal. CATE would come in and try to have this system declared unitary by the Federal judge.

So we went in. When the new board, which was 1994, I guess the new board went into effect, the new school board, present sitting school board. We asked them again, "We're not worried about what you're having to bring to our city, just let our kids go to school."

Again, the new board said, "No. When we correct it, it's going to be parishwide. We can't tweak any lines and make sure that kids live in Baker go to Baker."

So that was the session of 1995, I think, or the election was 1995. It might have been—it might have 1995. Probably February of 1995. I had two of the highest ranking legislators seniority-wise in the State. They came to me and said, "What's the biggest issue in Baker?"

I said, "The school system." They said, "Well, basically there's nothing we can do about the school system."

Then they got to looking around and they said, "Yes, this is what it takes. It takes a State constitutional amendment because the constitution of the State of Louisiana says education shall be by the parish," except in the cities of Bogalusa and the cities of West Monroe, which were already incorporated school districts, prior to the last constitutional amendment of the State of Louisiana, which was—oh, it was 1970s—but these two systems had been in since the 1930s.

So this had never been done. So it took a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate to get it on a ballot. It passed both the House and the Senate unanimously.

Basically, I don't think anybody thought we would ever get further than that. So that got it on the ballot, the ballot of November of 1995.

The State passed the 65 percent. The parish passed the 65 percent, and we were in excess of 75 percent in Baker.

So we rock along there for a little while. We had the constitutional amendment. The school board immediately began to fight us. The buildings, there was nothing in the enabling legislation that did anything with the buildings or any transitional costs. Some of the things that Dr. Gibson has brought up, none of that was included in the legislation.

So it was just we'll start forward and the school board start—so as recently as June the 16th, we were scheduled to be before Judge Parker because the school board had sued the State of Louisiana on the constitutionality of the constitutional amendment.

Okay. So that got the State—they wouldn't sue us, because we're not a school board, and if they sue the city of Baker, then we become an entity in the Federal desegregation suit, which is what they fought all along to allow us—anyway, complication, complication.

So all of a sudden the school board then wanted to proceed with a bond issue for this whole parish, which that causes a problem because they're fighting us legally and their bond attorneys won't give them a clean finish.

So they came to us. We've since negotiated a settlement. The settlement involves giving the parish another year to come forward in unitary with the whole system, us included, in a bond issue.

If the bond issue passes, we remain part of the system for a while, until 2002. If the bond issue fails, all the questions that Dr. Gibson has asked, answered.

Commissioner Berry. Well, what do the people who want the independent school district, what do you expect to get if Baker had its own schools?

Mayor Simpson. Sense of community, a sense of community. I think we've been bused and moved. I went to school with Major's children. We still know each other 30 years later by first name.

In the city of Baker in 1992, our 2,500 children went to 62 different schools. The sense of community had been destroyed. One of the largest 5-A schools in this State could not field a football team, because they had to get kids on buses to get them out of the city when the school bell rang.

If the coaching staff had not taken kids

home, we wouldn't even have had a football—you're talking about one of the most prestigious high schools in the State, whether you look academically or any other way. We lost all that.

Commissioner Berry. Is it a race issue?

Mayor Simpson. No. I don't think so.

Commissioner Berry. Is there a racial polarization around whether people approve or disprove of this idea?

Mayor Simpson. Most of the people that I'm talking to approve. I mean, I'm talking city workers that live here.

Commissioner Berry. Let me ask—

Mayor Simpson. And I'll tell you that Dr. Gibson—

Commissioner Berry. —Dr. Gibson the same question.

Mayor Simpson. —does not, but if—

Commissioner Berry. He doesn't live in Baker?

Mayor Simpson. And I think if you'll ask some of the other folks that are here—

Commissioner Berry. I will. I'll ask them too. I just want to find out whether—I'm just asking.

Mayor Simpson. Yes.

Commissioner Berry. I'm trying to find out if there are any racial tensions, and if there are, what people are doing about them, and this obviously seems to be a hot issue. I don't know if it's a race issue, but it's a hot issue.

Mr. Gibson. Could I follow up just a moment? You know, you have to understand the issues and that's one of the problems we have, if you don't understand the issues, you may not be for or against until you have an education process.

And that's what it's going to take as far as we are concerned, but the people that we are around in our neighborhoods and other places around where we vote, they have indicated that this could be a real problem, you know, because we don't have any surety of what's going to happen in the future.

So I don't want to call it a race issue, but we don't see the advantages of it, especially when we don't know the cost, and the cost is one of the big things too. If there was some definitive costs that you could afford a quality,

not just a school system. but a quality school system.

The mayor did a little study about the finances and he came up with like \$7 million to do the whole district. That does not include any start-up costs or anything like that, and food service, buses, buildings, equipment, and, you know, it's going to take a lot of money.

Commissioner Berry. So if the financial questions were answered, you'd be for it?

Mr. Gibson. Well, I'd still have some reservations, you know. I've still got some reservation, but that would allow a whole lot of the concerns, especially some of the other people that we are talking to.

Commissioner Berry. Okay. Sure, I appreciate it. I appreciate that. Thank you for coming.

Mayor Simpson. We're sorry, but we do have a council meeting at 7:00.

Commissioner Berry. Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

Mayor Simpson. Be glad to follow up and I think you're aware that—

Commissioner Berry. We will. We'll see what everybody here has to say. We appreciate—

Mayor Simpson. And if there's something that you need to follow, we'll probably be up there until 8:30 tonight. You know where City Hall is. Come on. If not, just have Kip come by and deliver the message to me.

Commissioner Berry. Glad you raised the schools issue. Seems to be a hot point.

Mayor Simpson. It is but, Kip, I don't know—there was a 20-page amendment in this year's legislation. We have entered into a binding agreement that we're trying to get made part of the consent decree, that answers every question that you have, every question that has to be answered publicly before we are allowed to go forward.

The enabling legislation didn't allow it, we could have been cut off, had the education of kids without buildings or anything else. This has all been taken care of in this document, and hopefully—

Commissioner Berry. We'll take a look at it. Thank you.

Mr. Gibson. One other point, Dr. Berry, if you don't mind—

Commissioner Berry. Okay. Well, then I want to see if anybody else here has a comment on—

Mr. Gibson. Yes, very briefly, just one brief on that point. You see, the whole thing before we got to where we are now is they act as though Baker was not a part of East Baton Rouge Parish, so what they ask them to do something special for Baker. All the other local areas could ask the same thing, but you see, you're part of a parish, then you have to do it in a unified manner rather than just doing something just to satisfy one entity within the parish.

That's all I wanted to say.

Mr. Quigley. Just to call a couple of the names of the people that are here that feel like saying anything, that if you—suggest you were going to say something earlier.

Mr. Porche. I took the low side, you know because he's my elder. Always giving respect.

Commissioner Berry. I see. Okay. All right. Well, now if you want to, why don't you now?

Mr. Porche. Give me something, pertaining to what?

Commissioner Berry. The schools issue, what do you think about that? Identify yourself first.

Mr. Porche. My name is Sullivan Porche. I'm a Baker resident. I've been here about 15 years.

Saying something about the new school system that Mr. Simpson is trying to implement and he had a good suggestion about the cost.

Commissioner Berry. Dr. Gibson?

Mr. Porche. Yes. And I agree with him totally, but also I agree with our mayor too, because to me he said—he answered him—seems to me like he answered him, yet he was going to answer all of the questions later on before it comes to a complete vote.

My recollection might not have been right. It seems like that's what he's saying, so in essence further down the road, that's when everything will be cleared up.

I would like all my grandchildren to go to Baker, because all of them live in Baker, and to say Baker be independent or part of the city, I feel it doesn't matter as long as they're

getting a quality education. If the education is quality, the teacher is quality, I wouldn't care what type of system they have, long as the education is quality, my kids are going to learn. That's the bottom line to me.

Commissioner Berry. Well, how many—if anybody knows this, what percentage of students here do in fact go to private academies or private schools, when they go to high school? The mayor mentioned that large numbers do—

Rep. Holden. You mean in the city of Baker, in—

Commissioner Berry. In the area—

Mr. Gibson. An article in today's paper, there are 19,000 parochial and private school students in the East Baton Rouge Parish, and public schools runs about 54,000, 55,000. So that's roughly about twice, three times.

Commissioner Berry. And are most of the private schools desegregated?

Mr. Gibson. Yes, a lot of parochial, because there are heavy parochial—historically here in East Baton Rouge Parish, Catholic schools too, but most of them—

Commissioner Berry. Are there private academies too?

Mr. Gibson. And you have private academies, quite a few of them. I think most of them are desegregated, but if they're like—give scholarships and things to come over and—

Commissioner Berry. I see.

Mr. Gibson. —play football.

Commissioner Berry. The other thing I wanted to ask is—I won't ask you, representative, because you didn't say anything about the schools, so I assume you don't want to say anything about—

Rep. Holden. I think there's probably a question as to whether or not if the school system was taken over, they may move back to somewhat of a segregated system, and maybe that's what nobody really wants to talk about here.

And there are some concerns there, to make sure that there is still equal access for all children and not in a system where you—a lead system, then the people you may not want, they are cut out of the district and forced to go somewhere else.

So I think that is going to be a very big question to afford equal access to all schools regardless of race.

Commissioner Berry. Well, one of the things that we've discovered in doing hearings in the South—we just did one in the Mississippi Delta recently, and these forums is that very often people will not speak directly about race. You can spend 3 hours with people, just like we're doing here at this forum, and if you didn't know any better, because like if you hadn't been anywhere around here, and I have, so I know better, like if all you knew was the discussion that you heard in the room, you'd think well, my goodness, there's a place where they never even heard of race relations or racism or anything.

Why is it this sort of tiptoeing around, even talking about the school issue, when everybody knows that there's a segregation issue involved in it, which is about race? Why is it that no one wants to discuss it directly and have it, you know, act as if it's everything else in the world, and we don't want to talk about that?

Rep. Holden. I think a lot of times, you know, people don't want to then get the label of being called a racist because—or a trouble maker in the community, or you know, rebel rouser, or whatever label they put on them, and then you also talk about a small town. And when you talk about a small town, although it's the East Baton Rouge Parish, you can create a lot of different factions in this whole thing, so it's not like to make it explosive, because there are some blacks who side with the mayor on this issue, and there are some who don't.

So that could be a dividing line, and there are some who will probably say, "Well, you know that guy that lives over there, he shouldn't be saying that about the mayor and this proposal."

And so it creates all kind of division in the process.

But it goes back to the original point I had. There needs to be dialogue, and that dialogue is not there, in my opinion, to the degree that it should be, and I think the concerns voiced by Dr. Gibson should be addressed, and you know, like the mayor brought out the point

about, "Well, we got all of it through the legislative process with the constitutional amendment, and then people began to react."

But at the same time if we get all the way through this school process and people find out on the back end what has happened, then they may not have time to react, and before you know it, you got a school system in place and many of the concerns expressed may have been talked about but never addressed.

Commissioner Berry. Well, you hit on something else that I think is very important generally. Some people would argue that to ask for a dialogue about race means that you are creating racial tensions, just by saying people should talk about it. And at that point you shouldn't talk about it, and people said that about the President's initiative and said it. When we ask for local conversations about race, and that even though everybody knows there's a race issue, maybe we just don't talk about it, because there will be people divided because it's not even that people are divided in terms of all blacks believe in this and all whites believe in that, but there is a racial dimension to whatever the issue is.

And so the argument is don't talk about it, maybe it will somehow be better if you don't, and then other people say, well, if you don't, and you're never going to deal with it, because how can you and how can you vote—I don't know the answer.

Mr. Gibson. I think someone mentioned, asked the question, I think you did, Dr. Berry, if in fact that was a race issue in terms of the school system.

I don't know specifically the number of blacks at Baker High School, but basically the majority are black. They are black. We know that Bethany Christian Church, that he is a member of, has a lot of blacks who go there, but basically we're looking at the issue—Baker High is mostly basically black, and I think that is really the source right there, it appears.

Commissioner Berry. So what would happen to the school under the plan? Does anybody know?

Mr. Gibson. It's—they're projecting it would be 50–50.

Commissioner Berry. Oh, I see.

Mr. Gibson. That's the projection.

Mr. Jenkins. In other words, it would reduce the number of blacks? It would bring in more white students—

Mr. Gibson. Yes.

Mr. Jenkins. — into the school system?

Mr. Gibson. Yes. Predict some of them going to parochial schools would also come back, the whites that fled.

Mr. Quigley. We also have Mr. and Mrs. Stewart that are here that are teachers. I don't know if they have—Dr. Stewart.

Dr. Stewart. A member of our organization.

Commissioner Berry. Right, retired teachers.

Dr. Stewart. I've been here since 1978 and I retired in 1983, and I retired from Louisiana in 1972, so I've been around a long time and I've been in education most of that time, and it's interesting to me, as I hear people talk and emotionalize, and it's based on generally you and me—what I've been hearing all this while, even when I was teaching, the you-me question, and mine and yours, and my attempt to get for mine what mine should have.

And I don't think that's what education is all about. I believe in good leadership and leadership tends to bring the population to an awareness of what is good for you and the things that are not so good, and then they draw the leadership together and agree.

And once we have agreed, we tend to promote based on that. I can't help but go back to Thomas Jefferson when he said anyone who expects to be free and ignorant, expect what never was, never will be.

We tried everything in the book from the beginning of our education movement when we came from England, we tried everything—the school, this kind of school, we've tried everything.

None of it worked. And I hear this noise right now about some of those same things that we tried back then, and it didn't work. I'm just as convinced now that they won't work as I was when I read what they did back then that didn't work.

You need people working together for a common school. You need people who understand what the word education truly means.

We had the seventh order principals [phonetic] to serve as our guide at first.

Number one, the command is on the principals [phonetic], but now listen what we do. We put all of our education on reading, writing, and arithmetic, and we call that quality education, and it's not.

That's one of the tools that enhance the possibility for getting a true education, but a true education is understanding the total world of society, bringing to the awareness of people what the outside world is and what we need to do in order to live in it.

When I was a child, the world was a big thing, definition for education grew out of the big concept of what it was. But today the world is so small, I can jump almost to the other side, and to sit here and try to isolate myself and pretend I can create a self-contained education without involving the other members of our society is ridiculous.

That is down right ridiculous. And I hate to see people keep talking that kind of language, and I wish somebody—I bet somebody just—our definition for education needs to be revised.

Commissioner Berry. Dr. Stewart?

Dr. Stewart. Yes.

Commissioner Berry. I agree with just about everything you said. As a matter of fact, I agree with all of it. I agree with everything you said, but I wanted to ask, Do you have any views on the desegregation plan?

Dr. Stewart. I have views.

Commissioner Berry. That you wish to share?

Dr. Stewart. But it's going to be on that same basis. I don't believe whites and blacks can operate separately and have a strong education system.

Commissioner Berry. So we should have desegregation?

Dr. Stewart. I don't believe that's possible. You've got a fight on your hand that you can't win. I don't believe any war has ever been won. We win a battle and conquer someone, but the war is still on. And it's going to be the same thing in your education system. You're not going to win this until we see education as it is and promote it just like Thomas Jefferson said, until every child is educated,

we will not have a democracy.

Commissioner Berry. Okay. We're going to hold that point and we'll come back to you in just a minute. If you'll just hold that point.

Mr. Quigley. Mr. Montgomery.

Mr. Montgomery. I don't have anything.

Commissioner Berry. You don't have any views you wish to share?

Mr. Montgomery. No, I don't. I came in late—

Commissioner Berry. We have some other folks sitting there. The school plan or anything else that's going on? Anything else you feel like saying? Schools—

Dr. Septs. My name is Dr. Ernest Septs, and I too live here in Baker, and prior to Dr. Gibson's comments, that was one of my major concerns before it was discussed as a result was just being in groups about Baker getting its own school system, because many of us were concerned about the additional taxes or the expenses that were somewhat under cover, that other people really didn't know about.

As of now, we still know—and we find that many people in the area are not aware of the possibility of having to pay additional taxes. They just feel that we might get an independent or a school system in Baker alone.

However, I have always been concerned about a quality education, but I sat and I listened and I heard various individuals speak and some of the concerns were why people don't say certain things, but there are various reasons why people don't say the things.

And I learned from my experiences, many times when you speak, people feel that you are focused, you're rebellious, and many times you don't speak just to speak, when you can justify by what you say and it has merit, but then when it comes to promotions and other things of this nature, you are out. You don't worry about it. I don't care what you know—in many cases we use the term, it's not what you know, it's who you know, because you're just going to be left on the back burner, and I'm serious about this, and many times now even myself and maybe it's not a good policy, think that I used to share order.

Commissioner Berry. I've got your point.

Dr. Septs. I just sit back and let them slide on by, because in many instances, you know, it's going to come back to haunt you in some form or fashion.

But in terms of schools here—again, some of the things were mentioned—it is true and I, for an example, am one of the ones, even though he said that it was the school system—I was bused from Baker to Zachary. I went to Northwestern. See, we passed Baker High over here, and we went to Northwestern in Zachary.

Of course, had Zachary High, because we got to pass Zachary High before we got to pass Zachary High before we got to Northwestern High, and these are facts.

But I do pray to God and put God in the lead that things will work out.

Commissioner Berry. Let me ask you a question, doctor, before you sit down. I like the points that you made and I understood your points, but as you were talking I was trying to figure out how the President is going to have—President Clinton—how he and his task force are going to have national town meetings where people engage—those communities where people engage in open dialogue about race, when our experience has been because of constraints—I mean, not everybody is as free or as crazy as I am.

So especially when people live in small towns, you can't expect people to get up and say all kinds of stuff that's going to be in the paper and TV, and the radio or whatever, because they have to live in the town after you're gone. The town meeting is over.

Dr. Septs. That's true.

Commissioner Berry. They're still there, so I was just sitting there trying to figure out how, when you were talking, I was thinking, you know, the President thinks, you know, we're going to have all these great town meetings, and everybody is going to get up and say anything they think about—

Dr. Septs. And that's so true.

Commissioner Berry. And I'm just wondering and I think that probably what is going to happen is the same thing that happens—the only time we get people protected is the Commission itself has subpoena power, not the State Advisory Committees, but the actual

full Commission, when I'm sitting with them like we did over in Mississippi Delta, and we subpoena people, and when we subpoena them, they are under order of paying a penalty to swear to tell whatever they want to tell, and also what they say is investigated.

So under that kind of compunction some people feel protected by the subpoena, and other people respond when they're needed, but in the absence of that, to go someplace and expect people to stand up in public and say what is on their minds and hearts, ultimately I guess it depends on who it is and where it is, so I don't expect you to say anything about that.

I just wondered why—stand up and tell you that I was just trying to figure out how to convey that to the President.

Dr. Septs. Well, I appreciate that but many people have not been as forceful as you, because you succeed in a lot of us—

Commissioner Berry. Right, I understand.

Dr. Septs. We haven't had that extent—but seriously, not necessarily here in Baker, but I'm speaking, you know, parishwide, and in other areas, and groups in our area, I'm sure they can attest to many of the things that I am saying.

Many times when it comes to promotions and things, it's not what you know, it's who you know. You know, if you're on buddy-buddy and many times—so I just come as a result of—he's not going to agree with certain things—it's not that I'm disagreeing just to disagree, but if the sun is not shining and somebody says the sun's shining, I don't think the sun is shining. I mean, it's just that simple.

Dr. Stewart. I agree.

Dr. Septs. Thank you.

Commissioner Berry. Yes.

Dr. Stewart. I know you're not ready to do this—because we pretty well been ready to go—a program. And I'm convinced that unless we do something else a little different, it looks like it won't work well, put it that way.

We should take some cognizance of what people in the parish get—they organize conferences and committees to study for—and those committees work, even—one time for 8-

year study to bring out the educational needs of youth, and that was considered one of the top studies of our nation for education.

But since we are moving so fast, we don't have time for that, but we could hold conferences, work conferences for leadership, not for the ordinary people, but for the leadership, to come together on what this thing is we're talking about.

I keep hearing the word quality education, but I don't hear anybody tell me what that is. They had definitions back then, and you could define what they meant when they said education, so we just use the word quality education. I don't know that that is, unless you tell me.

I know what I would mean. Why don't we look at the total individual and bring somebody together, the top people and decide what it is we're going to do here in quality education

Mr. Quigley. I would like to make just a brief report on what has happened on the State level. We did say since the last time we were here, we did meet with the Governor, Mr. Jenkins and the Louisiana Advisory Committee, for lunch and he was very, very nice and very polite to everybody.

You know, I'm honestly not that sure that he understands the ideas of civil rights issues and dialogue, and that, because his ideas about dialogue are a little bit different I think than most of the people on the Commission. But he was polite and open to that, and he helped, you know, raise some money for some rewards for some of this. I do know at the State Legislature that they increased the penalties for hate crimes and for arson of churches and that so that's some real progress.

I do know in New Orleans and other places around the State they have had some community forums on the church burnings and the like. I think there has been a little bit of awareness raised by the efforts of the Civil Rights Commission and the Black Caucus and various other civil rights groups around.

I think as a member of the Advisory Committee it's surprising how far we still have to go, that people—in our conversation with the Governor in particular, he seemed very nice

and very sensitive, but in all honesty very unaware of an awful lot of the issues. I think we can see these coming up in our State now in terms of these mothers and children getting cut off of welfare, in particular, in some of the issues of jobs and education and the local issues, as well.

So that there has been a few things that have happened in the interim, but I think the Commission needs to take notice of—but I think the fundamental issues—I would like to hear what you think—I think the fundamental issues are not all that much different than they were a year ago.

Commissioner Berry. That's a good question. How much, if anything, has changed since last year?

Mr. Porche. Can I say something else?

Commissioner Berry. Yes.

Mr. Porche. I was talking about the school system, but getting back to church issue—

Commissioner Berry. Yes.

Mr. Porche. I didn't say nothing about that.

Commissioner Berry. Yes, getting back to that.

Mr. Porche. What I want to say is—a lot of these faces—I don't know a lot of these faces. Maybe this meeting brought them here, you know, but we have a saying about, in our church, Who is a good neighbor? A good neighbor don't be white or black. It don't have no color. And, you know, it's good to have new faces here. It's good to have them here.

But when our church got burned, I mean, some people might have some negative things to say about our mayor—I haven't been knowing him like maybe some of you-all, 20, 30 years, I haven't been knowing him that long.

But see, to me, I judge a person's merit on how he treats you, and when our church got burned, like all these new faces I see here now, I didn't see them back then.

Mayor Simpson, regardless what they say about him, I got to say positive, because that's how I received him, positive. He came—we didn't ask him to come to our church. He came to our church and didn't come by himself. He brought the policemen, the head policeman,

fire department, different people to our church to help us, and we didn't ask for that.

Donate—how much he donate, a thousand or how much—donate—we didn't ask for a dime, but he did that out of kindness. Now, maybe he did it for some—for merit or whatever. I don't know what he did it for, but I'm saying he did it because he wanted to help the black community; he wasn't going to tolerate racism or whatever in this town.

And that's how I received it. Maybe a lot of people might not receive it like that, but you know I received it just how he give it to me. That's how I received it.

And he didn't just offer help. They brought help, just like he said, they came in and painted. I mean, a lot of them come in to help. I mean, didn't ask for a dime, and just recently—this year and last year people still sending us money to help take care of our church and everything.

And I'm not going to tell you that racism is not bad in Baker, okay? Racism is bad everywhere. I mean, just—it's not just here, it's everywhere, and I'm not going to tell you all whites is racist, just like I'm not going to tell you all blacks is racist.

You have it on both sides; I don't care how you look at it. That's how I see it, and to straighten out all this mess, we're in the right place right now to straighten it out, but we know for a fact it's not going to be straightened out till our Savior comes back.

See we got to live here the best that we can and abide by what I have right here. Nobody don't think this here can help solve any problems, but for me and being a deacon of this church, I know for a fact we can solve problems in my family, and I believe that's where the problem starts, in your own family.

Then it spreads abroad. How can you talk about straightening out something in Baker community, if you can't even straighten it out in your family? That's where it starts. It starts in your family. Charity starts at home, and it spreads abroad.

And to say the school system—I don't know if the school system ought to change, whatever, all them—I don't know all them figures, you know, like you all were shooting out there. I don't even know a bunch of scripture to shoot

out there, but I state the scripture that the Holy Ghost bring to my remembrance, that's how I say the scripture and that's how I speak.

But now, you're going to have something bad to say about me probably too, you know. I am on nobody's side. The only side I'm on is the good Lord's side, and that's how I try to treat everybody equal. I don't look at black or white because I got some white friends treats me way better than my own color, and I guess you can say vice versa.

So you can't really say about racism that, you know, all white people are racists or going back in circles, but I believe you see my point.

Thank you.

Commissioner Berry. Let me ask a question. Is there a Human Rights Commission in Baker? We talked before about whether there was one and whether the city had set up one, and whether there was any intention to do so. Has there been any discussion, insofar as any of you know who live here in the city, about setting up a Human Rights Commission to look at human rights issues in the town?

Ms. Gibson. No, not that I'm aware of. I know I had mentioned it when you were here before, and the mayor said that we do not need any commission to do this, and I would like to also react to what the gentleman has stated.

We are looking at issues as they are, and I think that's what we have skirted so long, you know, bypassing the real issues. In order to solve any problems, we must head the issue on and attack it and try to work it out, because denying what is not, is not going to solve any problem. We must accept this as a fact and we need to work on it.

As soon as we accept that we do have problems, then we can do something about it, but not before. We are looking at issues in general. I think that's the way it is. We are looking at the issues in general, what's going to affect all of us, you, me, and everybody else in Baker.

We're trying to make you aware of the situation. That's all it is, so that when it does come up, no one indicates this to me—but you must be aware of something before you can solve it, go about solving the problem.

Mr. Quigley. I guess we promised everybody we would try and end around 8:00, but we'll try to bring the conversation back again to the idea, not whether Representative Holden is doing a good job or the mayor or school board or anybody, but in terms of how is the community served, and come back to that question again. In the last year have things gotten better? Have things gotten better? Have things gotten worse? Have things, you know, stayed pretty much the same? I guess that's really the question where we are.

Mr. Gibson. In Baker the issue has been around the school desegregation problem, and as representative—I have been to all of the public meetings and I have spoken out just like I'm speaking, said the same things there as I said here, and so that they will know that we put these issues on the table up front, and not after it's gone by, and I think what the sentiment on the other side is that we want to even now, when hear the mayor and other people about we are going to do it, but they have already predestined that they are predestined that they are going to do this; it's just a matter of when.

You know, 1998 or 2002, whichever—but the idea is we're going to do it without, you know—then when the people find out exactly what is—going out there too far, you see, and before you really know what it's going to cost, and then you're out there saying you're going to do it, now you feel obligated to do it, because you say you're going to do it, and so that's where we are; so our job is to educate the people. I know we need to do a better job of that, because we've got some studies also of what it will cost, and our figures are way different from what he has indicated it might cost.

Ms. Gibson. That's one of the things that we've tried to do. We were initially not informed.

Commissioner Berry. Well, let me ask a question. In any of the public meetings that have taken place, has there been any discussion of the segregation or race issue in the public meetings, or has it all been about how much is this going to cost and that going to cost, and is that going to be—I mean, I'm just trying to find out how open the discussion has

been about the issue of segregation as it relates to this question.

Mr. Gibson. None except what I bring up.

Commissioner Berry. But by and large it's not been a topic of discussion on the agenda every time in a public meeting where people openly debating what they think is likely to happen in terms of segregation or not, or the impact on the racial makeup of the schools or anything else in—

Mr. Gibson. Well, they satisfy themselves—if there's a racial—you know, "This is what we want. We want to get Baker like it was back in 1920. My grandfather went to Baker, my father went to Baker—"

Commissioner Berry. How was Baker in 1920?

Mr. Gibson. How was Baker in 1920 originally?

Mr. Gibson. Well, it was a one-way street, but I'm saying that's the attitude that—at the public meetings and we want—"I finished there and I want my children to finish there, my grandchildren to; we want it back like it was." That's the message I hear when I'm at the meetings.

Mr. Jenkins. Is there a conscious effort in any of the discussions about to stay away from the race issue?

Commissioner Berry. In the public meeting.

Mr. Jenkins. In the public meetings.

Mr. Gibson. Yes. If I didn't bring it up, it would never be mentioned.

Mr. Jenkins. But is there an underlying issue on race?

Commissioner Berry. Well, we have the State representative say there was, but—

Mr. Gibson. It won't be—I would think so but it's not mentioned.

Commissioner Berry. Well, why do you think—

Mr. Gibson. I think—

Commissioner Berry. Why do you think the people who are arguing for and against it in the public meetings do not routinely discuss it in terms of the racial issue? If that's a factor, at least mention it or say something about it

Mr. Gibson. People are uncomfortable talking about race.

Mr. Porche. It's probably being mentioned but like, the way he's saying it, like an undercover way of doing it. They're not doing it openly.

Commissioner Berry. Oh.

Mr. Porche. That's how I perceive it.

Commissioner Berry. But does everybody who is in the room get the point? I mean, does everybody who is in the room know that that's what it's about, just like we're not talking about it? Is that the point?

Mr. Porche. Sure.

Commissioner Berry. Now I understand. So it's like everybody knows, but we're just not talking about it. Okay. All right. Now, I understand.

Ms. Hicks. For the first time I saw this racial that we were talking about, the large number of blacks attending school in Baker, I didn't know until I saw it in the paper that there were 70 percent blacks in Baker High School, but I say symptoms that talked about how there was a shift in the number of persons attending the schools in Baker and why was it that all these students from Scotlandville and I know are there, I mean initially, were coming here.

Why did we send them back to Scotlandville? When I saw that racial for the first time, because I thought it was at least a 50-50. I really thought it was less. Then I knew where the problem was.

And yet that's the kind of thing that nobody will come out openly and say, "Oh, you know, I know why the problem is. You want to send these black kids back over there where they were, the school where they were," so that means that getting those people in there is a very different kind of thing.

But it takes a while to get there. This person was talking from the heart and got this person going. That's the kind of thing that happens, but it takes a while to really get down there where you say the President wants you to get down there to finally say, "Well, look, it's race." Whatever you want to call it, it finally gets there.

So it takes a long time.

Commissioner Berry. It takes a lot of pulling of teeth and a lot of talking around the issue and dancing around it and never men-

tioning it, until finally somebody will say, "Wait."

Ms. Hicks. And some people don't understand because we're so busy sometimes searching yourself and saying, you know, Am I really the racist—am I really—am I the only person seeing that?" And the light comes on and you don't share it.

Commissioner Berry. And then if you can talk about it, then you can discuss it and try to resolve it. If you don't ever talk about it, just go away from the meeting and it's never discussed.

Ms. Hicks. Right.

Commissioner Berry. And it just goes on and on and on. That's the problem. Wow, I'm feeling better, that at least we're trying to get some issues out here. That's what this process does.

Yes, ma'am. Anything? You don't have to stand up, if you want, sit on back down. Sit down.

Ms. Stewart. I'm Iona J. Stewart, and I don't think we would be discussing this secession from the parish if it had not been opened up to the State. There were people who voted for this who are not living here to work out whatever problem they say we have.

My thoughts are that we should improve every school, make each school a magnet school, and see that all children who attend, attend and do what they are coming there to do.

Now, it may mean that we might need to encourage some social—of people to work with some children to give them what we call group citizenship qualities, traits of whatever, but that's one thing that to me has not been imparted in the schools, citizenship.

And that would cover all—most what the ills are, if a child knows he's supposed to be doing, and not infringe on the other person's rights, and spend his time developing himself.

And so I think our leadership should work on improving that of the school and it won't matter who is in it. Need to have a little competition—if a child is bright, put him in better—if a kid is having difficulty, give him some special work where he can be fed into the mainstream.

There's no way people can be self-sufficient

if they have not learned what to do to be self-sufficient. You'll always have what they call the under-whatever, but if we bring this situation up, equalize it, we won't have a problem.

Mr. Gibson. I would like to make a statement on that too.

Mr. Quigley. Before you do, we have a couple people that haven't talked yet, just to give them a chance, see if they want to talk. We have two gentlemen that came in and a woman in the back. If you have anything to say?

Mr. Burton. My name is Jessie Burton. I'm a citizen or a resident of Baker since 1976.

And I've been listening to the comments that have been made since I've been here, and I tend to agree with Dr. Hicks here. I think as far as the school system is concerned, I think that maybe the problem is that the majority—the percentage of black in relation to white and the proportion—so I think the major problem is that black students from Scotlandville are coming into Baker to go to school, and I think that this is the major concern.

I don't think the city is receptive to that. And I also find that—I have a child to go to Baker, and I think that there is a lack of concern, a lack of genuine concern for the educational growth and development of these children because of the background of environment that they come from.

They are not accepted by this community. And I think that the logic behind it is that if we can send these children back to their environment, then we can have the kind of school system that we want.

I also think that there is a lack of concern for cultural differences in this town, and the education leadership are not willing to put forth the effort to bring about the kind of racial cultural sensitivity necessary to provide the children that attend—I know high school kids—the kind of training.

I don't think that the commitment—the commitment is not there to provide them with the kind of education that they need to really function in a global society, you know, so I agree that I think the primary problems hinges on acceptance of the school population that is the schools in Baker now.

Commissioner Berry. Well, I just want

to interject this, that now that we're getting down to here the rubber meets the road on the school issue, this is not unique. Across the country you have people that are opposed to desegregation and tired of it as an issue.

First of all you have black folk who are tired of all the stress and strain of it and how it turned out. You have white folks who are tired of it and you talk about having a sense of community again, and having things go back the way they were.

So it's not surprising that this would be an issue here with your longstanding in the parish school desegregation suit, and people who have tried to get the courts to declare the school district desegregated so they could get rid of the court order, so there's nothing unusual about it.

I mean, there are all these contentions here. But on the side of folks who worry about—I mean, is it a valid worry for people, and I'll use the mayor as an example, because he was talking about it while he was here—somebody else had of, I'd point to them—wanting a sense of community, wanting to say well, if these people are from Scotlandville, is that—or wherever they're from, they shouldn't be coming into Baker and we should have a sense of community here, that there are all kinds of values to be preserved.

And one of those is that's the value—

Rep. Holden. There is something that's happened in the school system in East Baton Rouge Parish. When you look at the schools that were closed, primarily those with schools in the black community, so whereas there's a community concept, in many cases we don't have a community school to come back to. The same thing with Scotlandville High, I graduated from Scotlandville High.

But we ask for a sense of community, because when they took over the school, they changed the school colors, tore everything down, got rid of the trophies, so I sent them a letter saying, "Look, if you go back to a community school, can we at least be known as the Scotlandville Hornets again, and have our colors, black and gold?" And you would have thought I had blasphemed God, when you saw the answer I got back from the school.

Commissioner Berry. Well, I see your

point. You're saying that it's all right to be for community, but if you're going to say these are the values we hold dear, maybe we should put together everything's community the way it was in 1920.

Rep. Holden. Right.

Commissioner Berry. Or with some equalization of funding, but I see your point and I understand.

Mr. Gibson. That's not going to happen. Now, see, either you're a part—each little community is trying to isolate themselves. That's not going to work now. You know, there are at least 12 or 15 different communities could demand the same thing Baker is demanding.

How are you going to desegregate, everybody staying in their own neighborhood, and then students in Scotlandville got to be bused 15 and 20 miles out to Central just get an ordinary education?

So when you close most of the schools in the black community and everybody—we want our community schools, but the black—schools to go back to—

Commissioner Berry. Well, his point was why not create them, if I understood it, if you're going to do this, why not create community schools in the black community again, as the price of doing this, if that's what you really want to do. Was that the point or did I misunderstand?

Rep. Holden. Well, I think it's a combination. I think it's picking up both of them, yes, but again, yes, we can create them, but they're not going to spend that money to build a bunch of schools again in the black community, because if you look at the series of articles in the paper over the last week or so, they're talking about how much it's going to cost to refurbish the existing schools.

I mean, a lot of them are in very poor condition, so they won't come back and build a number of schools, so we don't really have anything to go back to. But on the other hand it creates a quasi-community concept by letting part of the school become magnet and the other part community, and they say this is a community school concept, but they really won't let you go back to the community school concept like you knew it, where you had the

school's colors and all of those things that mean a lot to a lot of people, just like the people at Baker said, "Well, all of my children and grandchildren graduated from Baker; they're the Baker Buffalos," they would never let us go back to the right now without a fight.

Commissioner Berry. I understand. So it's a lose-lose situation?

Rep. Holden. Right.

Dr. Stewart. We have argued that—people not performing well at the other—we want to separate. But I'm convinced—I've taught some of the worst students you could ever think of—those students end up making honor roll—I'm convinced you're going to have 2 percent of our population who can't do his work when he's assigned to it and taught how.

The only reason a child falls behind is when somebody neglects him, and then when we castigate him, and we shove him to the side, but if you bring them in and make them a part of this total society, they will see it just like everybody else sees it, and they will begin to operate within that life situation, just like everybody else.

So what has happened in the past, and I wish we'd quit arguing that point, that certain students can't perform. We draw the bell curves and we show them and we just do everything to crush their little minds. We tell them they've got a problem.

I told a psychologist once—I said, "When did he find out he had a problem? When you told him. He didn't know he had a problem."

So if our nation as a whole, if I state under the umbrella of the nation, would operate to achieve common goals—everybody is given the same leadership to the same group of people and that they were one of them.

Mr. Furgeson. I was just going to comment, and I think that there's a lot of substance to what has been said, but too in reference to what Representative Holden said here, I think what our school—what Baker school system wants is what they had, you know, a long time ago when they wanted Baker children to go to Baker school, and when they had that opportunity—and it wasn't accepted to him, because students—and I understand that black students in Baker went to Scotlandville, went to Zachary and all the other places. They

couldn't go to school in Baker.

So why, you know, all of a sudden that now, you know, Baker is the place for all of its children. I think that there's a question of control here too, you know, you want to control, you know, the destiny of education here in Baker.

You know, if you can get these people out and our children in, we think that we would have a sense of control, and I think the other thing—that if the lack of genuine concern for the educational growth and development of all children regardless of who they are and where they come from, I think that if that attitude wasn't embraced by the current administration and officials that are here now, I don't think that we would have this problem.

Mr. Quigley. According to the records there's still two people, a Mr. Carpenter and Ms. Braxton, that if you—we invite you to say something if you want, but you don't have to say anything.

Mr. Carpenter. Just trying to—I understand you're talking about the school system—

Commissioner Berry. Right. We started out talking about—we're trying to figure out whether race relations in Baker are the same as they were last year, different, better, you know, anybody notice any change? Are there any issues—we first had discussions about there weren't any issues.

And then finally we got the school issue. Then we got schools aren't really an issue of race. Then we got, yes, there is a race issue.

So we're just going along here, bubbling along, trying to figure this thing out. So it could be about anything. But our main question is, you know, is it like last year, better, same, what's going on?

Mr. Furgeson. Baker is basically like the other speaker says, following the trend of the Nation in education and everybody is focusing in on its own community—with the Supreme Court decision just the other day—impact of the schools.

You're going to see more and more of that kind of thing, focusing in on what you have, and to make—those who may be different from what you are—you're going to see more and more—and the leaders, especially in black communities, to try to bring these things into

focus and make an impact as they made an impact for community-based schools—we have to make an impact with our own kids.

We somehow join—and I came up in the civil rights movement, participated in some of the activities that were to get us just to sit at a lunch counter—but it seems as though somehow we left—we forgot about that. There's a continuance process and we are much to blame as other people that we just forgot about that this is a continuing process, and that we should continue on and push toward getting what we should get, getting our fair share, and so in the 1980s, late 1970s and 1980s, and early 1990s we just relaxed, and this is where it's happening here and now, that because we relaxed we didn't keep the country to the fire. We lost ground.

And it's up to us to speak out and demand that our children receive the same kind of quality education as everybody else.

If you look at on the line—you might refer to another line—efforts of many group discussion in Baker as a racial type thing—you know, your public meetings and say that this is a racial issue because of the way those things are put before the public. And they're not put in a racial issue—in the 1960s the things were put out there, I knew the difference in whether it was a race issue or not.

I knew the difference in whether I could go and sit—go in the front door or the back door—that's not a question now.

The question—the issue you can go in the front door, but what impact can you have inside there? And if you can't change, make it better for your children inside there, it doesn't do you any good to be in there. You have to be able to make a difference.

As great politicians talk to us about Scotlandville magnet, not only should we bring our students who are in Scotlandville to Scotlandville magnet, but we have to assure that they are going to get the same kind of quality education as the magnet schools do.

And, of course, I speak from a point that my son goes to Scotlandville magnet out of the Baker community and will likely continue and graduate from Scotlandville magnet next year.

That's because of the kind of education we have in that school—so if—our concern—we

have expressed our concerns and also getting—and work with whatever the situation is. I say it's in Baker. Whatever Baker is going to do, get in there and make it look the way we want it to look. That's the way we have to deal with education across the country now.

And in any situation—we've got to make it look the way we want it to look. As we sit back and we let look—let it take on another different format, then we're going to lose out, because we have to make it look the way we want it to look.

Mr. Quigley. I might just make a couple of observations.

One is—do white people live in Baker? I just wonder in terms of you know, the turnout of the meeting here tonight, you know, I'm sure they have some white pastors and I'm sure they have some white teachers, and I'm sure they have some white community citizens and, you know, the mayor has come out. I'm not talking about the mayor or the councilmen, but one of the things I know for our Commission that's always troubling is that civil rights and racial justice is never a white issue.

You know, it's not just in Baker. I mean, it's everywhere, and I think that was one of the things that we saw at the hearing a year ago, and that's one of the things that hasn't changed is that, you know, burning of a church or you know, using code words when we talk about race things, or fighting about different things you know, that is not a thing that by and large white people will talk about honestly, openly.

Certainly won't talk about it in a mixed group like this, of people they don't know. I don't know—I'm sure not everybody in this room knows everybody else in this room, so I think in terms of where we are and again, I'm not singling out Baker, because I think that's the same thing all around our State, but I think that is a disturbing thing and a sad thing, and I think if we're going to have a national dialogue, that one of the things—why do we have to—if the national dialogue is about where do black people fit in society, that's not a dialogue.

The question is, When are white people going to talk about civil rights and when are

white people going to talk about what segregation has done to white people, and when are white people going to talk about what does it mean to white people to have a black church bombed, and when are white people going to talk about what does 150 years of segregation mean to white people?

I mean, that's part of the dialogue that we haven't started. And all these other things we're talking about are nice, and that's important, and if we're really going to talk about dialogue—if you look at this church, it's a black town.

Commissioner Berry. It's 71.7 percent white, and 27.6 percent black.

Mr. Quigley. I don't mean to—

Ms. Gibson. When you were asking about attendance, I have a question about the communication. When did you all send your communication out to various churches? For example, the reason why I'm asking, we just got ours Sunday, and it was dated June 18, and we just received it Sunday.

You know, many times—gotten a prior notice. I'm not trying to justify—

Mr. Quigley. I understand.

Ms. Gibson. Get it on Sunday, and something is on, Tuesday, you know, prior commitments—

Commissioner Berry. Well, that may be the case but last year they were sent out well in advance and the turnout was pretty much the same in terms of the folks who showed up. So I think that Chairperson Quigley is right on point there, and I do think that he is on point again, when we ask if we're going to have a national conversation or a local conversation about race, who is going to be in the conversation? And how can you do something about the issue when only one group of people—

Dr. Septs. That's the only way it's going to be addressed is to talk about it.

Commissioner Berry. So it's going to be one of the really tough problems, trying to figure out how to get everybody to talk about it. Maybe the President can do it better than—he seems to be able to—go ahead now.

Mr. Jenkins. One quick question. In terms of race relations in Baker, quickly can you tell me what you think should be done to

make Baker a model community in terms of race relations for the State? If you had the wherewithal in an executive order, what would you do in terms of race relations?

Ms. Gibson. First we're going to have to have dialogue.

Mr. Jenkins. Okay.

Ms. Gibson. That's number one. And whatever unfolds from that, that's going to be the answer. Dialogue is number one.

Mr. Jenkins. Which follows up with a question. Are you comfortable with the level of dialogue concerning the independent school district thing or what should be done to increase the dialogue?

Mr. Gibson. People, they're saying what they want heard, and they're getting an echo back from the white community, you know, this is what—but the true facts about the things that I mentioned, especially about cost and other things like that, that's not being addressed as it should.

And but it just—saying what they want to hear. They don't ever say that, "We are going to do this if we are"—they always put in the declarative form, "We are going to do this." So their mind is already made up. This is what they're going to do, regardless of what the cost may be, you know. So—

Mr. Jenkins. In terms of race relations would it be helpful to the community if there were a body put in place to be a conduit for dialogue on—not only on race relations, community relations?

Rep. Holden. Let me go back to one point. It's almost like the tobacco agreement that the attorneys reached and other things.

I think what you really have to do is put a representative group together in a room and maybe four off this negotiating team and four off this negotiating team, in terms of the differences—I'm just going to address that school system now.

And let them get in there maybe with the media to try to see what things can be hammered out and worked out together, which may begin to address some of the concerns that's been brought up, but as long as it's, "Well, we'll let you know" on the back end what's in the process, then you know, you're going to constantly have questions about what

is really taking place, or you know with this issue of the Baker school district.

And it's like, "Okay, we finished today. If we didn't work out everything today, we'll be back tomorrow and try to hammer out and see what things we can work out in commonality, then there may be some things we may not be able to agree on, but at least it will bring you closer to a point versus where you are today."

Ms. Gibson. Now, the next thing, who is going to select these individuals? That's another question. You've got to be council—I'm not speaking in terms of—

Rep. Holden. No, but—

Ms. Gibson. —looking at dialogue.

Rep. Holden. No, but I'll throw it back out here if Group X is—has a position that they're concerned about who is going to be in this negotiating, then let the group that has opposition select four people as representative of the body and the position, and then the people who are for the Baker school system will select the four people they want at the table.

But I mean, that's just a suggestion that I can see that might be able to at least get some talk going on the issue.

Commissioner Berry. Could I ask just one more question? That's a good suggestion to consider, but in—your point about who gets the control is important, but it's a good suggestion in terms of a way to get something going. There's always a question about who gets involved and who controls who gets involved.

But let me ask you one final question here on this, and we'll think about all these matters. Would you say that it's the case that there is a distinct lack of interest in who perpetrated the church fires this year at this time? In other words, I told you there are 14 that took place in Louisiana, and the ones that have took place in this area too, and as we go around—that's the other thing I'm sort of interested in tangentially. Is it like one of those issues that happened and now it's over and now we've moved onto another issue?

Or people just assume that whoever did it was somebody who did it for the reason that they did it and if it's the word we don't speak, race, then maybe that was it too, but we've

moved on and now we're not interested in discussing that any more?

What's the sense about that? Is that an old issue that's over now or what?

Rep. Holden. Again, and in this business you find out a lot of times it's management by crisis, and once it happens everybody rushes in and wants it done and everybody can go out and deal with their own thing, and I think that's happening here.

And we still have not gotten past—well, what are some of the root causes? Why would somebody be perpetrating these wrongs upon a church, and then why isn't again the dialogue broad enough so to address some of the concerns of those sick minds that's out there?

None of that is going to happen. Even at the legislative end, they've passed bills on hate crime and that got through. The only opposition was somebody concerned about sexual orientation, you know. But they didn't mention race at all.

But on the other hand, when the bill came through dealing with increasing the penalties for arson for a church, there was virtually no discussion, and it passed and that was it. But again, there was no dialogue about it. Everybody just probably felt, "Well, as long as we don't say anything, nobody would figure out that we have an ulterior motive or call us whatever they want to call us."

So I don't know what to say, and maybe some others—I don't know how we keep this as a front burner issue. And then let me also add that this is an issue, but you've got other issues out there—people just concerned. How do I make my day-to-day living?

Commissioner Berry. Sure. Sure.

Rep. Holden. And so now they're going through a balancing act, but they're going to make their day-to-day living based on people with a better attitude about race and those things, which will foster other promotion that's going to give them that better living that they are trying to seek.

But the dialogue still is not as full as it should be, and I don't really know what it's going to take to spark it, and unfortunately the same thing with—Governor Foster signed that order to take away affirmative action. We marched massively, largest march on the

State capitol in history, and then all of a sudden it just sort of faded in the background. And I don't know how to keep that going and going and going, unless there are organizations out there that get a lot more involved in the process and start enumerating things that we need to address in order to move beyond where we are now.

Mr. Furgeson. I would just like to comment on the question and saying that—and I think somebody said earlier, before you could solve a problem, you have to accept the fact that there is a problem, and I think that what happened in those instances that the powers that be, you know, came forward and say, as the representative said, that that was just an isolated incident and these were just a few sick people who did this, rather than come out and say that there's a real problem, you know, we're going to put forth—we're going to put forth some goodwill to show you that there's not really a problem, that this was just an isolated incident, and, you know, and we're going to go on with the things as usual.

Mr. Burton. What has happened is that we do not have a handle on what prompted—we do not know, we do not have in our arsenal an understanding of what might cause the problem. So we can't continue to fight what, the unknown. I'll just refer back to the civil rights when we knew that there were certain things you could and couldn't do, so then the next step was to go and try to do that.

Right now it's a ghost type thing. We don't have anyone investigating it to the extent that we find out—we don't have the united groups that we had at one time to continue to fight.

The other thing on dialogue, at one time it was great therapy for white and black to dialogue about race relations. Now we try to steer away from it, black and white, they steer away, try to go the middle of the road type thing, rather than get deep in this side and that side. We have got to the point that we negotiate now—negotiate—stood up and for right or wrong and we negotiate.

So on the issue of the churches, it's still a phantom type thing. It's a ghost type thing, and until we can say that this is racially motivated and we can get behind it, then this is going to be put on the back burner until we

decide—we have to create the emphasis on the issues, or we have to find the truth of the issue and work hard to resolve it.

I'm just baffled that across the country this happened and we haven't had—the President made some statements about it. Even our mayor says I'm going to see that we get the church built back and that kind of thing, but I suppose that we accepted that—that's goodwill from the other side of the tracks.

And we have to move on.

Mr. Gibson. And that creates in one's mind a situation—whatever the points are that we would want to talk about that are utmost in people's minds, that would come to a point where you will not be stepping on rotten eggs.

Mr. Quigley. On behalf of the Louisiana Advisory Committee, I would like to thank you all for coming. I'd like to thank our Chairperson, Dr. Berry. I'd like to thank Mr. Jenkins, and we'd very much like to thank the people at the church here for hosting us, and if anybody has any thoughts afterwards, there's ways that you can supplement this. We can give you the address if anybody would like to submit anything to Washington to talk about it, and would you like to close up, reverend?

[The proceedings concluded at 8 p.m.]

Appendix A



**UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON
CIVIL RIGHTS**

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December 16, 1998

Honorable Mike Foster
Governor
State of Louisiana
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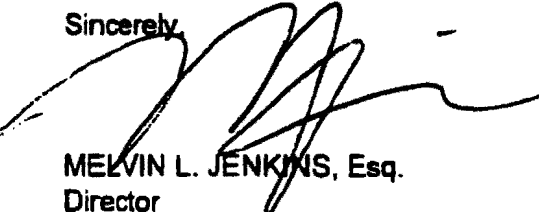
Dear Governor Foster:

Pursuant to the rules and regulations governing State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "if a report of a State Advisory Committee tends to defame, degrade or incriminate any person, then the report shall be delivered to such person thirty days before the report shall be made public in order that such person may make a timely answer to the report." Each person so defamed, degraded or incriminated in a report may file an answer to the report not later than twenty days after receiving said report. Please review the enclosed pages of the Louisiana Advisory Committee's transcript of a community forum held on June 24, 1997 in Baker, Louisiana.

We ask that you provide your timely response. However upon showing good cause an extension may be granted to you. Your response shall plainly and concisely state the facts and law constituting your reply to the allegations contained in the report. Your answer shall be published as an appendix to the report.

Thank you for your cooperation in this undertaking. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,


MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.
Director

Enclosure

year study to bring out the educational needs of youth, and that was considered one of the top studies of our nation for education.

But since we are moving so fast, we don't have time for that, but we could hold conferences, work conferences for leadership, not for the ordinary people, but for the leadership, to come together on what this thing is we're talking about.

I keep hearing the word quality education, but I don't hear anybody tell me what that is. They had definitions back then, and you could define what they meant when they said education, so we just use the word quality education. I don't know that that is, unless you tell me.

I know what I would mean. Why don't we look at the total individual and bring somebody together, the top people and discuss what it is we're going to do here in quality education.

Mr. Guilfoyle. I would like to make just a brief report on what has happened on the State level. We did say since the last time we were here, we did meet with the Governor, Mr. Jenkins and the Louisiana Advisory Committee, for lunch and he was very, very nice and very polite to everybody.

You know, I'm honestly not that sure that he understands the ideas of civil rights issues and dialogue, and that, because his ideas about dialogue were a little bit different. I think than most of the people on the Commission. But he was polite and open to that, and he helped, you know, raise some money for some research for some of this. I do know at the State Legislature that they increased the penalties for hate crimes and for arson of churches and that so that's some real progress.

I do know in New Orleans and other places around the State they have had some community forums on the church burnings and the like. I think there has been a little bit of awareness raised by the efforts of the Civil Rights Commission and the Black Caucus and various other civil rights groups around.

I think as a member of the Advisory Committee it's surprising how far we still have to go, that people—in our conversation with the Governor in particular, he seemed very nice

and very sensitive, but in all honesty very unaware of an awful lot of the issues. I think we can see these coming up in our State now in terms of these mothers and children getting cut off of welfare, in particular, in some of the issues of jobs and education and the local issues, so well.

So that there has been a few things that have happened in the interim, but I think the Commission needs to take notice of—but I think the fundamental issues—I would like to hear what you think—I think the fundamental issues are not all that much different than they were a year ago.

Commissioner Berry. That's a good question. How much, if anything, has changed since last year?

Mr. Percha. Can I say something else? Commissioner Berry. Yes.

Mr. Percha. I was talking about the school system, but getting back to church issues—

Commissioner Berry. Yes.

Mr. Percha. I didn't say nothing about that.

Commissioner Berry. Yes, getting back to that.

Mr. Percha. What I want to say is—a lot of these faces—I don't know a lot of these faces. Maybe this meeting brought them here, you know, but we have a saying about, in our church, Who is a good neighbor? A good neighbor don't be white or black. It don't have no color. And, you know, it's good to have some here. It's good to have them here.

But when our church got burned, I mean, some people might have some negative things to say about our mayor—I haven't been knowing him like maybe some of you—all 30, 30 years, I haven't been knowing him that long.

But see, to me, I judge a person's merit on how he treats you, and when our church got burned, like all these new faces I see here now, I didn't see them back then.

Mayor Simpson, regardless what they say about him, I got to say positive, because that's how I received him, positive. He came—we didn't ask him to come to our church. He came to our church and didn't come by himself. He brought the policemen, the head policeman,



State of Louisiana

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

M. J. "MIKE" FOSTER, JR.
GOVERNOR

CHENEY C. JOSEPH, JR.
EXECUTIVE COUNSEL

January 19, 1999




Melvin L. Jenkins, Esq.
Director
United States Commission on Civil Rights
Central Regional Office
Gateway Tower II
400 State Avenue, Suite 908
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406

Dear Mr. Jenkins:

Thank you for inviting Governor Foster to respond to Mr. Quigley's comment.

Mr. Quigley is a fine man and an active advocate for positions which are not always consistent with Governor Foster's positions. The Governor respects Mr. Quigley's right to disagree vigorously with the Governor's views regarding "welfare reform."

Very truly yours,


Cheney C. Joseph, Jr.
Executive Counsel

tpv

Appendix B



**UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON
CIVIL RIGHTS**

**Central Regional Office
Gateway Tower II
400 State Avenue, Suite 908
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406
(913) 551-1400
(913) 551-1413 FAX**

December 16, 1998

**Honorable Bobby Simpson
Mayor
City of Baker
P.O. Box 707
Baker, LA 70714**

Dear Mayor Simpson:

Pursuant to the rules and regulations governing State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "if a report of a State Advisory Committee tends to defame, degrade or incriminate any person, then the report shall be delivered to such person thirty days before the report shall be made public in order that such person may make a timely answer to the report." Each person so defamed, degraded or incriminated in a report may file an answer to the report not later than twenty days after receiving said report. Please review the enclosed pages of the Louisiana Advisory Committee's transcript of a community forum held on June 24, 1997 in Baker, Louisiana.

We ask that you provide your timely response. However upon showing good cause an extension may be granted to you. Your response shall plainly and concisely state the facts and law constituting your reply to the allegations contained in the report. Your answer shall be published an appendix to the report.

Thank you for your cooperation in this undertaking. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melvin L. Jenkins".

**MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.
Director**

Enclosure

certain parameters of the State average, but that does not include any start-up costs, which we think going to be considerable.

Don't have any buildings, don't have any equipment, and all this would have to be negotiated and you're saying that you're going to do a district and you don't have any cost out there.

I mean to me, as I—I'm not saying anything here that I have not said up in the public meeting and Bill knows that. I made these points very clear in the last two or three meetings that we've had.

So that's the main thing, so you have to do this without knowing exactly—or pretty close. You may not know exactly, you have a pretty good idea to what the costs going to be, because if you're going to tax the system too much, that's going to run the property taxes up. That will inhibit growth in the city of Baker if we have to pay an extraordinary amount of taxes. We're already paying about 44, 46 mills now. So if you go up to, where you've got to pay three or four, five times what you're paying now, I don't think most people would be willing to trade \$1,400 or \$1,500 for property tax, just so that Baker has an independent school district.

So we are real concerned about that. The other concern expressed in the last public meeting they had, was that some wanted Baker to have a public-school-district—like the students in Baker, live in Baker, can go to school in Baker, Okay. So we put it back to them, what guarantees do we have that once you get this system started, that you won't make any balancing system to go to a private school and take the money with them to private school, and we're left with no school at all?

We can always get outvoted four to one, so we have some great concerns about that, and from a historical point of view, because before 1967, before desegregation, Baker had no public school for its black citizens. They had to go to Zachary. They had to go to Zachary or Scotlandville to do that. Baker was the only city I know around here that did not provide any school at all in history for its blacks. So we have some concerns about that.

So we put those things on the table out

front so everything knows that we have concerns about those kinds of things. You ask for guarantees—we ask the city attorney, because he give us assurances by State law that they have to provide public education, and he—the senator said, "No, I cannot guarantee you that." That's the way he sums it up. "I cannot guarantee you that we will have a public education system for all of its citizens."

So those are two of the main concerns that we have, and the people that we represent, we did not vote for, in the district where we vote, we are solidly against it.

Commissioner Berry. And what's the racial makeup of the district you live in?

Mr. Gibson. Makeup of what?

Commissioner Berry. What's the racial makeup of the district you're in?

Mr. Gibson. Basically it's this, Dr. Davis' district, as I say about 60-40.

Commissioner Berry. Do you see any advantages to having a separate school, independent school?

Mr. Gibson. Well, I expressed the concern in. Can you avoid it?

Commissioner Berry. No, I mean, what do you think about the arguments on the other side, that—well, maybe we better have the arguments on the other side. What is the argument that it's advantageous to do this?

Mayor Simpson. Well—

Commissioner Berry. We just heard the arguments. Let's put them aside by side.

Mayor Simpson. I guess you're addressing that to me. And you have to go through the progression of this. In 1992, the first time I had ever been involved in any type of election, the number one question on everybody's mind, the doors that I knocked on, were, "What can you do about our kids?"

In the city of Baker, and to address his second point, the city of Baker has never been responsible for the education of its kids. That's been a parish function ever since the inception of public education in this area. So the very group that you're supporting is the one that excluded you in Baker in the early 1960s and 1940s and 1900s here. That's a parish function.

So we've always been at the beck and call of the parish for the education of our children.

So in 1992 after everybody said "Look, what can you do?" we were under a—and you may know this, but we're under the longest running desegregation suit in America, and since 1983 the judge has been in charge of the assignment plan, because our school board would not do anything.

So he put his own system together. In Baker's case, because our whites and our blacks are so close together, because of North Baton Rouge and Baker, he did a clustering system. He took the white kids from Baker, and moved them to Scottsdaleville. He took the black kids from Scottsdaleville and moved them to Baker, and they would go 3 years each place.

At the middle school level the kids in Baker had no choice but to go in to Scottsdaleville to school.

That's happening to by the time kids get to high school, both black and white, those who could afford it, they put their kids in private school.

So it got to a point where it was killing us on any—if you called our City Hall and said, "I'm moving on Johnson Street, where will my kids go to school?" We would say, "We can't tell you. It depends on your race. It depends on your address. It depends on a number of—the age of the child."

They put it in a computer and it spit out where the child will go to school. So we started our process with public hearings. We started going to the school board and saying, "Listen, all we want is for a kid that lives in Baker to be able to go to the five schools in Baker. We don't care if you're having to bring other people in to Baker to take care of problems that you're having outside of Baker." Just allow—because we're a community.

There's not but three of us in Baton Rouge Parish. It's us, Zachary and the city of Baton Rouge. Everybody else is part of the parish.

People move to Baker because they want to be a part of it. It's the hub of our community, and it really was. On Friday nights the football stadium was the place to be.

So it's a big dilemma. Everything has been one. We're down, dropped from a 3-4, the largest classification in the State, to a 4-4. We've seen a lot of transition in our city from

people that own houses, to a rental type situation here in Baker.

So we kept going to the school board. They kept saying, "We're going to do a bond issue; we're going to tie it to a big magnet school. Well, that got best 65 percent in the parish.

The next concept was what we have at the school board now, was a CATF (phonetic) proposal. CATF would come in and try to have this system declared unitary by the Federal judge.

So we went in. When the new board, which was 1994, I guess the new board went into effect, the new school board, present sitting school board. We asked them again, "We're not worried about what you're having to bring to our city, just let our kids go to school."

Again, the new board said, "No. When we cannot it, it's going to be parishwide. We can't touch any lines and walls, sure that kids live in Baker go to Baker."

So that was the session of 1996, I think, or the session was 1998. It might have been—it might have 1996. Probably February of 1998. I had two of the highest ranking legislators seniority-wise in the State. They came to me and said, "What's the latest thing in Baker?"

I said, "The school system." They said, "Well, basically, there's nothing we can do about the school system."

Then they got to looking around and they said, "Yes, this is what it takes. It takes a State constitutional amendment because the constitution of the State of Louisiana says education shall be by the parish, except in the cities of Bogalusa and the cities of West Monroe, which were already incorporated school districts, prior to the last constitutional amendment of the State of Louisiana, which was—oh, it was 1970s—but these two systems had been in since the 1930s.

So this had never been done. So it took a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate to get it on a ballot. It passed both the House and the Senate unanimously.

Basically, I don't think anybody thought we would ever get further than that. So that got it on the ballot, the ballot of November of 1998.

The State passed the 65 percent. The parish passed the 65 percent, and we were in excess of 75 percent in Baker.

So we took along there for a little while. We had the constitutional amendment. The school board immediately began to fight us. The buildings, there was nothing in the enabling legislation that did anything with the buildings or any transitional costs. Some of the things that Dr. Gibson has brought up, some of that was included in the legislation.

So it was just we'll start forward and the school board start—so as recently as June the 16th, we were scheduled to be before Judge Parker because the school board had sued the State of Louisiana on the constitutionality of the constitutional amendment.

Okay. So that got the State—they wouldn't sue us, because we're not a school board, and if they sue the city of Baker, then we become an entity in the Federal desegregation suit, which is what they thought all along to allow us—anyway, complication, complication.

So all of a sudden the school board then wanted to proceed with a bond issue for this whole parish, which, that equates a problem because they're fighting us legally and their bond attorneys won't give them a clean finish.

So they came to us. We've since negotiated a settlement. The settlement, I'm just giving the parish another year to come forward in unison with the whole system, us included, in a bond issue.

If the bond issue passes, we remain part of the system—far as whether until 1993. If the bond issue fails, all the questions that Dr. Gibson has asked, answered.

Commissioner Berry. Well, what do the people who want the independent school district, what do you expect to get if Baker had its own schools?

Mayor Simpson. Sense of community, a sense of community. I think we've been bused and moved. I want to school with Major's children. We still know each other 30 years later by first name.

In the city of Baker in 1982, our 2,600 children went to 63 different schools. The sense of community had been destroyed. One of the largest 5-4 schools in this State could not field a football team, because they had to get kids on buses to get them out of the city when the school bell rang.

If the enabling act had not taken kids

home, we wouldn't even have had a football—you're talking about one of the most prestigious high schools in the State, whether you look academically or any other way. We lost all that.

Commissioner Berry. Is it a race issue?

Mayor Simpson. No. I don't think so.

Commissioner Berry. Is there a racial polarization around whether people approve or disapprove of this idea?

Mayor Simpson. Most of the people that I'm talking to approve. I mean, I'm talking city workers that live here.

Commissioner Berry. Let me ask—

Mayor Simpson. And I'll tell you that Dr.

Gibson—

Commissioner Berry. —Dr. Gibson the same question.

Mayor Simpson. —does not, but if—

Commissioner Berry. He doesn't live in Baker?

Mayor Simpson. And I think if you'll ask some of the other folks that are here—

Commissioner Berry. I will. I'll ask them too. I just want to find out whether—I'm just asking.

Mayor Simpson. Yes.

Commissioner Berry. I'm trying to find out if there are any racial tensions, and if there are, what people are doing about them, and this obviously seems to be a hot issue. I don't know if it's a race issue, but it's a hot issue.

Mr. Gibson. Could I follow up just a moment? You know, you have to understand the issues and that's one of the problems we have, if you don't understand the issue, you may not be for or against until you have an education process.

And that's what it's going to take as far as we are concerned, but the people that we are around in our neighborhoods and other places around where we vote, they have indicated that this could be a real problem, you know, because we don't have any surety of what's going to happen in the future.

So I don't want to call it a race issue, but we don't see the advantages of it, especially when we don't know the cost, and the cost is one of the big things too. If there was some definitive costs that you could afford a quality,

No response was received from Mayor Simpson.

Appendix C



UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON
CIVIL RIGHTS

Central Regional Office
Gateway Tower II
400 State Avenue, Suite 908
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406
(913) 551-1400
(913) 551-1413 FAX

December 16, 1998

Mr. Eugene Young, Superintendent
BREC
P.O. Box 15887
Baton Rouge, LA 70895

Dear Mr. Young:

Pursuant to the rules and regulations governing State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "if a report of a State Advisory Committee tends to defame, degrade or incriminate any person, then the report shall be delivered to such person thirty days before the report shall be made public in order that such person may make a timely answer to the report." Each person so defamed, degraded or incriminated in a report may file an answer to the report not later than twenty days after receiving said report. Please review the enclosed pages of the Louisiana Advisory Committee's transcript of a community forum held on June 24, 1987 in Baker, Louisiana.

We ask that you provide your timely response. However upon shoring good cause an extension may be granted to you. Your response shall plainly and concisely state the facts and law constituting your reply to the allegations contained in the report. Your answer shall be published an appendix to the report.

Thank you for your cooperation in this undertaking. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.
Director

Enclosure

certain parameters of the State average, but that does not include any start-up costs, which we think going to be considerable.

Don't have any buildings, don't have any equipment, and all this would have to be negotiated and you're saying that you're going to do a district and you don't have any cost out there.

I mean to me, as I—I'm not saying anything here that I have not said up in the public meeting and Bill knows that. I made these points very clear in the last two or three meetings that we've had.

So that's the main thing, so you have to do this without knowing exactly—or pretty close. You may not know exactly, you have a pretty good idea to what the cost's going to be, because if you're going to tax the system too much, that's going to run the property taxes up. That will inhibit growth in the city of Baker if we have to pay an extraordinary amount of taxes. We're already paying about 44, 45 mills now. So if you go up to, say, you've got to pay three or four, five times what you're paying now, I don't think most people would be willing to trade \$1,400 or \$1,500 for property tax, just so that Baker has an independent school district.

So we are real concerned about that. The other concerns expressed in the last public meeting they had, was that some wanted Baker to have a public school district—the students in Baker, live in Baker, can go to school in Baker. Okay. So we put it back to them, what guarantees do we have that once you get this system started, that you won't make any balancing system to go to a private school and take the money with them to private school, and we're left with no school at all?

We can always get outvoted four to one, so we have some great concerns about that, and from a historical point of view, because before 1867, before desegregation, Baker had no public school for its black citizens. They had to go to Zachary. They had to go to Zachary or Scotlandville to do that. Baker was the only city I know around here that did not provide any school at all in history for its blacks. So we have some concerns about that.

So we put those things on the table out

front so everything knows that we have concerns about those kinds of things. You ask for guarantees—we ask the city attorney, because he give us assurance by State law that they have to provide public education, and he—the senator said, "No, I cannot guarantee you that." That's the way he sums it up. "I cannot guarantee you that we will have a public education system for all of its citizens."

So those are two of the main concerns that we have, and the people that we represent, we did not vote for, in the district where we vote, we are solidly against it.

Commissioner Berry. And what's the racial makeup of the district you live in?

Mr. Gibson. Makeup of what?

Commissioner Berry. What's the racial makeup of the district you're in?

Mr. Gibson. Basically it's this, Dr. Davis' district, so I'd say about 60-40.

Commissioner Berry. Do you see any advantages to having a separate school, independent school?

Mr. Gibson. Well, I expressed the concern in. Can you avoid it?

Commissioner Berry. No, I mean, what do you think about the arguments on the other side, that—well, maybe we better have the arguments on the other side. What is the argument that it's advantageous to do this?

Mayor Simpson. Well—

Commissioner Berry. We just heard the argument. Let's put them side by side.

Mayor Simpson. I guess you're addressing that to me. And you have to go through the progression of this. In 1992, the first time I had ever been involved in any type of election, the number one question on everybody's mind, the doors that I knocked on, were, "What can you do about our kids?"

In the city of Baker, and to address his second point, the city of Baker has never been responsible for the education of its kids. That's been a parish function ever since the inception of public education in this area. So the very group that you're supporting is the one that excluded you in Baker in the early 1960s and 1940s and 1980s here. That's a parish function.

So we've always been at the back and call of the parish for the education of our children.

No response was received from Superintendent Young.

Appendix D



**UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON
CIVIL RIGHTS**

**Central Regional Office
Gateway Tower II
400 State Avenue, Suite 908
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406
(913) 551-1400
(913) 551-1413 FAX**

December 16, 1998

**Mr. George Buttram
Assistant Agent-in-Charge
Federal Bureau of Investigation
1250 Poydras Street, Suite 2200
New Orleans, LA 70112**


Dear Mr. Buttram:

Pursuant to the rules and regulations governing State Advisory Committees to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "if a report of a State Advisory Committee tends to defame, degrade or incriminate any person, then the report shall be delivered to such person thirty days before the report shall be made public in order that such person may make a timely answer to the report." Each person so defamed, degraded or incriminated in a report may file an answer to the report not later than twenty days after receiving said report. Please review the enclosed pages of the Louisiana Advisory Committee's transcript of a community forum held on June 24, 1997 in Baker, Louisiana.

We ask that you provide your timely response. However upon shoring good cause an extension may be granted to you. Your response shall plainly and concisely state the facts and law constituting your reply to the allegations contained in the report. Your answer shall be published an appendix to the report.

Thank you for your cooperation in this undertaking. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,


**MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.
Director**

Enclosure

A community meeting convened by the Central Regional Office on behalf of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The meeting was held on June 24, 1967, at 8:00 p.m., St. Paul's Baptist Free Church, 2024 Groves Road, Baker, Louisiana, with Louisiana Advisory Committee Chairperson William Guidry presiding. Also attending the meeting were Advisory Committee member Dr. Laurence R. Rucker, Commission Chairperson Dr. Mary Frances Berry, and Central Regional Director Melvin L. Jenkins.

PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Guidry. My name is Bill Guidry, and I am the Chair of the Louisiana Advisory Committee for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and we are here in Baker this evening, almost exactly a year from the time that we were here I think it was July 8 and 9 of 1966, and here in a dialogue and a conversation on what has happened in a couple of years in terms of the churches, in terms of dialogue between the different church groups, and in terms of assessing where we are, in terms of whether we've made some progress, or whatever, to make a report.

Here is another representative of the Advisory Committee—Dr. Laurence Rucker, who is from Baker, so we're excited that she could be here.

And we have two representatives from the national office, Melvin Jenkins, who is the Regional Director of Kansas City Office of the Civil Rights Commission, and then Dr. Mary Frances Berry, who is the Chair of the Commission. I'm going to ask Dr. Berry to get started.

Commissioner Berry. All right. Thank you very much, Bill.

First, I think it would be in order to introduce Melvin Jenkins. I don't know if you know Melvin, the Regional Director, who helped put all this together. He's been down here laboring in the vineyard, not forever, but for a long time in this region, and then point out that we're in Baker, which is Mayor Bobby Simpson's town. Maybe he would like to, just by way of opening, say a few words for us.

Mayor Simpson. I would welcome you back. We appreciate the open forum you had a year ago, and it's been a while since we've had the commission, but we appreciate you

being back. Welcome to our town, and if there's anything we can do to assist you, be glad to do it.

Commissioner Berry. Thank you. And then we have our counselman here, Counselman Jack Waldman. Would you like to say a word or two? All right. We'll just acknowledge your presence here.

And then because it is Rev. Pierre Brice's church and we want to say how much we appreciate your letting us meet in your church, we would like to see if there is anything you would like to say by way of opening, and then we're just going to have some discussion here.

I want to say a word about why we're here. Since last year, according to the National Church Arson Task Force report that just came out recently, in their first year report to the President of the United States, they report on how the church fire investigations are going.

And one of the things that's striking is that only about 65 percent of the fires that they're investigating—only 35 percent have they in fact identified a suspect. Sixty-five percent their record—in other words, although they say the record is about as good as most arson investigations, the record is not very good.

If you haven't solved 65 percent and you've solved 65 percent, and the rest are still open, and in particular if you look at Louisiana, because in Louisiana they have a list of about 14 church fires, and they say they've only in fact made an arrest in one.

So the record in Louisiana, their own record, the BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the law enforcement agencies is worse than it is in other of the States

No response was received from Agent Buttram.

Appendix E



**UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON
CIVIL RIGHTS**

**Central Regional Office
Gateway Tower II
400 State Avenue, Suite 908
Kansas City, KS 66101-2406
(813) 551-1400
(813) 551-1413 FAX**

December 16, 1998

**Mr. Hamilton Bobb
Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge
U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms
111 Veterans Boulevard
Metairie, LA 70005**

Dear Mr. Bobb:

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Sincerely,

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**MELVIN L. JENKINS, Esq.
Director**

Enclosure

A community meeting convened by the Central Regional Office on behalf of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The meeting was held on June 24, 1967, at 6:00 p.m., St. Paul's Baptist Free Church, 3024 Green Road, Baker, Louisiana, with Louisiana Advisory Committee Chairperson William Quigley presiding. Also attending the meeting were Advisory Committee member Dr. Laurebeth Hickey, Commission Chairperson Dr. Mary Frances Barry, and Central Regional Director Melvin L. Jenkins.

PROCEEDINGS

Mr. Quigley. My name is Bill Quigley, and I am the Chair of the Louisiana Advisory Committee for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and we are here in Baker this evening, almost exactly a year from the time that we were here I think it was July 8 and 9 of 1966, and here as a dialogue and a conversation on what has happened on a couple of issues in terms of the church, in terms of dialogue between the different racial groups, and in terms of something where we are, in terms of whether we've made some progress, or what, over, to make a report.

Here is another representative of the Advisory Committee—Dr. Laurebeth Hickey, who is from Baker, so we're excited that she could be here.

And we have two representatives from the national office, Melvin Jenkins, who is the Regional Director of Kansas City Office of the Civil Rights Commission, and then Dr. Mary Frances Barry, who is the Chair of the Commission. I'm going to ask Dr. Barry to get started.

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If you haven't solved 65 percent and you've solved 35 percent, and the rest are still open, and in particular if you look at Louisiana, because in Louisiana they have a list of about 14 church fires, and they say they've only in fact made an arrest in one.

So the record in Louisiana, their own record, the BATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms] and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the law enforcement agencies in words that it is in shame of the States

certain parameters of the State average, but that does not include any start-up costs, which we think going to be considerable.

Don't have any buildings, don't have any equipment, and all this would have to be negotiated and you're saying that you're going to do a district and you don't have any cost out there.

I mean to me, as I—I'm not saying anything here that I have not said up in the public meeting and Bill knows that. I made those points very clear in the last two or three meetings that we've had.

So that's the main thing, so you have to do this without knowing exactly—or pretty close. You may not know exactly, you have a pretty good idea to what the cost's going to be, because if you're going to tax the system too much, that's going to run the property taxes up. That will inhibit growth in the city of Baker if we have to pay an extraordinary amount of taxes. We're already paying about 44, 45 mills now. So if you go up to, say, you've got to pay three or four, five times what you're paying now, I don't think most people would be willing to trade \$1,400 or \$1,500 for property tax just so that Baker has an independent school district.

So we are real concerned about that. The other concern expressed in the last public meeting they had, was that some wanted Baker to have a public school elsewhere—the students in Baker, live in Baker, can go to school in Baker. Okay. So we put it back to them, what guarantee do we have that once you get this system started, that you won't make any balancing system to go to a private school and take the money with them to private school, and we're left with no school at all?

We can always get outvoted four to one, so we have some great concerns about that, and from a historical point of view, because before 1967, before desegregation, Baker had no public school for the black citizens. They had to go to Zachary. They had to go to Zachary or Goodlandville to do that. Baker was the only city I know around here that did not provide any school at all in history for the blacks. So we have some concerns about that.

So we put those things on the table out

front so everything knows that we have concerns about those kinds of things. You ask for guarantees—we ask the city attorney, because he give us assurance by State law that they have to provide public education, and he—the senator said, "No, I cannot guarantee you that." That's the way he sums it up. "I cannot guarantee you that we will have a public education system for all of its citizens."

So those are two of the main concerns that we have, and the people that we represent, we did not vote for, in the district where we vote, we are solidly against it.

Commissioner Berry. And what's the racial makeup of the district you live in?

Mr. Gibson. Makeup of what?

Commissioner Berry. What's the racial makeup of the district you're in?

Mr. Gibson. Basically it's this, Dr. Davis' district, so I'd say about 60-40.

Commissioner Berry. Do you see any advantages to having a separate school, independent school?

Mr. Gibson. Well, I expressed the concern in, Can you avoid it?

Commissioner Berry. No, I mean, what do you think about the argument on the other side, that—well, maybe we better have the arguments on the other side. What is the argument that it's advantageous to do this?

Mayor Simpson. Well—

Commissioner Berry.—We just heard the arguments. Let's put them aside by side.

Mayor Simpson. I guess you're addressing that to me. And you have to go through the progression of this. In 1992, the first time I had ever been involved in any type of election, the number one question on everybody's mind, the door that I knocked on, were, What can you do about our kids?

In the city of Baker, and to address his second point, the city of Baker has never been responsible for the education of its kids. That's been a parish function ever since the inception of public education in this area. So the very group that you're supporting is the one that excluded you in Baker in the early 1960s and 1940s and 1900s here. That's a parish function.

So we've always been at the back and call of the parish for the education of our children.

No response was received from Agent Bobb.

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