



CHILDREN'S COALITION OF GREATER BATON ROUGE
LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATE FORUMS HELD OCTOBER 4, 2011 AND OCTOBER 14, 2011

1. **Research has proven that early childhood education is essential for our children. There are currently 3500 children in pre-k enrollment and we need room for 1200 more students, approximately 30% more in pre-k programs. What would you do to increase the number of programs in our schools?**
 - a. **Regina Ashford Barrow** - We need to increase funding. We need to provide facilities that are accessible for parents, whether on campuses of existing schools or in other parts of the community.
 - b. **Larry Thomas** - We need to put more into historic programs. The state does not direct much funding to early levels of education.
 - c. **Edmond Jordan** - Funding is important, but we also need money in LA3, LA4 and LA2 as well. Earlier we can get the kids, the more impact we can have. This is more than just legislative action. We need to ensure parents are fulfilling their duties to kids. We need to put funding in teaching parents as well. Many teen and young parents are without basic skills. To have a successful outcome we must teach them things such as the need to read to their children, and ensure they get to bed on time. If we teach the parents as well as fund early childhood education, both components, we will have more success.
 - d. **Rick Ward** - We must protect what is there as well as alternate funding. Look at examples of early intervention programs in West Baton Rouge and Pointe Coupee. The children that enter the justice system have struggled with school since the beginning. They don't have the home atmosphere. We need to get them on track at an early age.
 - e. **Michael Jackson**- We need to increase availability of infrastructure for at many levels. Head Start, public and private early childhood development centers all have a role, because problems are so vast. High rate of poverty in state, city and District 14. The city's poverty rate is higher than the state's. Little conversation about this. Poverty has an impact on everything that we do. Penetrates a lot of different areas. Should be a holistic effort.
 - f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** - We need to look at budget and see where dollars can be found. Providing early childhood education is beneficial, by addressing crime, increasing strength of workforce, there is a connection between education and well being of community.
 - g. **Alfred C. Williams** - We need to look at parents and realize they lack skills to help their children. We need to have component to address parental skills. How can we partner together. Look at city and state budgets. Crime will not reduce, jobs not created without Early Childhood education. Utilize cigarette tax. Remove tax exemptions for businesses.

- h. **Dalton Honore** - Recognize importance of pre-K. Need to have resources to expand anything, would look at different ways to increase funding.
 - i. **Hillery Johnson** – We could create a tax break program. Retired teachers or professionals could come into classroom and receive tax breaks. Teacher makes \$30 hour and works 10 hours/month. That dollar amount would go towards tax break assistance for those individuals. You could have several teachers in each classroom.
 - j. **Ronald Rodgers** – We need to protect what we have now and increase with funding. Currently use 3rd grade literacy to predict prison numbers. If we invest on the front end with education, we won't have to pay on the back end to fund prisons. Look at budget and find ways to fund this, it is highest priority. Educated work force is better. Eliminate programs that do not have proven record.
 - k. **Patricia Haynes Smith** - Put pre-K into the MFP formula. This will allow for more children to be involved in pre-K programs. LA4 was cut in the past because not typically in the formula. Another reason there are not enough spots is because LA4 cannot expand due to lack of availability of appropriately sized and qualified facilities. If you expand facilities to include nontraditional places such as daycare centers, then you can touch more students. Infuse more Head Start into programs on existing school campuses. Put programs together so they are not working against each other but with each other.
 - l. **Barry Elkins** – This election includes an amendment to use non recurring funds for TOPS. Maybe use some of these funds. Not typically in favor of using these funds to supplement the budget, but this might prove an instance when the expenditure would be appropriate.
 - m. **Yvonne Dorsey** - There is money available in the budget now. It must be shifted to this area. Will make a priority to do so, and to find additional dollars to fund the 1200 children. If dollars are not there, will look for other funding sources.
 - n. **Lorri Burgess** - Would work with federal delegation to see if there are additional monies to bring into the state. Research existing opportunities and see if there are other funding sources to expand what is already in place.
 - o. **Barbara Thomas** –Would work with the legislature to affect positive change for families. Feel that strengthening community organizations will have a positive effect.
2. **Current statistics show that 1 in 8 middle and high school students suffer from some form of depression. These numbers identify the need for more mental health staff in schools. Would you support funding more mental health staff in our schools? How would you fund this?**
- a. **Regina Ashford-Barrow** - Yes. We must look at dedicated funding streams to make sure money is guaranteed to mental health. Apply for grants that apply to this population of students to subsidize the federal and state dollars.
 - b. **Larry Thomas** – Yes. We must do more than say we need mental health people. Fund through executive branch by eliminating excess personnel in the administration. We should evaluate the NGOs and make sure they provide needed services. Millions of dollars go to NGOs that contribute nothing. We must fund budget with education and health care before we fund NGO's. Put them on priority basis. Money is there, must be reallocated.
 - c. **Edmond Jordan** – Yes. We should look for federal funds from federal acts that might cover kids in these areas (Section 504 and IDEA), in addition to increased funding from the state. We need to look at why kids are suffering from depression. We should look into what is causing depression, and act legislatively i.e. anti bullying, from poverty.

- d. **Rick Ward** – Yes. Understands the value it has, and that it will assist the child’s learning ability. Not sure where the money will come from. If funds available he will fund it.
- e. **Michael Jackson** - Yes. One of the good things we have done over last ten years is Health Care Centers in Schools. In addition to HCCS, the state is starting to see the benefit and importance of primary clinics across the state. Preventative and primary care is the first dual way of dealing with a lot of issues people face. People without insurance do not have access to health care. If HCCS does not get it there should be safety nets. Advocate primary preventative care. Fund to make sure the dollars are there. For HCCS the budget was cut due lack of funds because of a lack of emphasis or priority for organizations such as it. Goal is to make it more of a priority. Not saying to raise taxes to fund it. The state needs to prioritize. There are things in the legislature that can be done to free up dollars. Responsible for Act 350, that required health and welfare committee and senate revenue fiscal affairs committee to do a study of our \$7 billion tax budget to look at some inadequacies and to find opportunities to save money. EX. We give money to corporations if they file their taxes on time.
- f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** – Yes. Most of the families of the children that need these services do not have resources to take them somewhere for assessment. Partnerships will be important to making things happen because there are not enough dollars for social workers in each school. Find federal and grant dollars, HCCS critical piece, Truancy Center will all be crucial to helping. Children with these types of issues are not ready to learn. Partner with medical community to provide evaluation for these kids.
- g. **Alfred C. Williams** – Yes. Social workers should be in every school to identify and intervene. Middle school is big transition period. Parents do not have skills to help, but social workers can bridge this gap. Have to prioritize. There are funds in school system that can be shifted to bring more social workers in to the schools.
- h. **Dalton Honore** – Yes. Appreciate needs of special needs children and will find ways to support them. Find ways to eliminate duplication positions, find way of funding without raising taxes.
- i. **Hillery Johnson** - Yes. Find ways to teach kids a trade or get them involved in something afterschool and that will help with depression.
- j. **Ronald Rodgers** - Yes. Children face different challenges that we did. Poverty, single parents, etc. Part of solution to be focus on learning environment. Lack of parental environment in the home. Must build stronger school support system. Cut spending but increase revenue, even if increase in taxes. We currently allow 431 tax incentives and breaks within state for corporations. These must be reviewed and revised. Still want to keep/create environment that is attractive to businesses. Find funds to support education.
- k. **Patricia Haynes Smith** – Yes. Would like to see social workers in schools. We cannot rely on school counselors to provide the types of counseling that children need. We need to have referral systems that allow nonprofits to come into schools to help children. With Capital Area Human Services, we need to look at how DHH can supply more Medicaid dollars if necessary, or how we can make sure those dollars are available. We need to revamp staffing to ensure the children are receiving the services they need.
- l. **Barry Elkins** – Yes. Funding for social workers should be included in budget that goes to schools as an additional item they receive. Possibly in how health and welfare funding is provided.

- m. **Yvonne Dorsey** – Yes. Understand the financial restrictions on having a counselor and a social worker in schools. The counselors should have additional training to assist in a role more along the lines of what counselors did many years ago (more than just class selection). DHH would have to be a part of this and agencies such as NASW would need to assist with information to help draft legislation.
 - n. **Lorri Burgess** – Yes. We have great resources in LSU School of Social Work and Southern University School of Social Work. Propose to collaborate with deans of respective schools and utilize their interns and externs. Use them in various capacities within the educational system. Start children in Head Start when they are six months old so they are reaping the benefit early. Would like to work with DHH to determine what Medicaid and Medicare dollars are available. Start in stages but ensure the children in middle school are addressed. Must be comprehensive and strategic in approach.
 - o. **Barbara Thomas** – Yes. Would like to be involved with the development of policy. Would need to be in the system to understand the funding situation, and would work with legislature to designate additional funding.
3. **The legislature is famous for passing unfunded mandates. How would you change things to that if an issue is important enough to be passed into law, that funding is guaranteed?**
- a. **Regina Ashford-Barrow** - Against. Fiscal notes should be attached to bills. Legislature is not supposed to pass legislation if there is no funding. Will push measures to ensure that if something is worthy enough to pass that measures exist to fund. Not against taxes if necessary to fund something important enough to pass through.
 - b. **Larry Thomas** – Against. Money should be allocated before legislation is passed.
 - c. **Edmond Jordon** – Against. Should not be passed if we do not have funding. Balance budget first. If legislation is passed, find dedicated funding streams by shifting government, reformation of tax codes or working with NGOs. Block grants are also a possibility. Will not vote for any legislation is not funded.
 - d. **Rick Ward** - Against. Unfunded mandates are feel good legislation. Someone wants to pass something that will give them a good headline. The public does not see the money isn't there.
 - e. **Michael Jackson** - Against. The only way you guarantee things in the state budget is to make it part of the constitution. It is a question of leadership. Role as a state senator is to help craft priority and help address the needs of the state and Baton Rouge, which is the largest metropolitan area in the state, and to fight for adequate funding to deal with the high rate of poverty and access to health care. Look at it as part of role as a state senator, to help prioritize what is needed for Baton Rouge.
 - f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** – Against. Don not pass unfunded mandates. No value.
 - g. **Alfred C. Williams** – Against. About show. Fund with sin tax and put those dollars in health care and education.
 - h. **Dalton Honore** – Against. Serves no purpose.
 - i. **Hillery Johnson** – Against. Use rainy day fund. Consider levying 5 cent tax per ton of river traffic on Mississippi, Atchafalaya and Sabine. We have great top soil and natural resource of Mississippi River, solar energy. Look at some of these options to fund education especially.

- j. **Ronald Rodgers** – Against. Must approach with a bi-partisan attitude. Must reach out to both sides and collaborate to push legislation through. Would not use rainy day fund. Find balanced approach by cutting spending in frivolous areas and creating revenue (i.e. sin tax), but being responsible in our creation.
 - k. **Patricia Haynes Smith** – Against. Some mandates are been passed with funding, but then vetoed out of the budget and the funding stripped. Does more harm than good.
 - l. **Barry Elkins** – Against. Will not vote to pass legislation unless it is tied to funding.
 - m. **Yvonne Dorsey** – Against. The Senate has adopted a new policy. If legislation is started on that side that gets out of committee but is not funded, then it goes to finance committee. If the starting committee does not have money for it, it dies in finance.
 - n. **Lorri Burgess** – Against. Long range planning is necessary. Do not pass mandates unless they will be implemented and funded.
 - o. **Barbara Thomas** – Against. Would work with legislature to ensure that if a project is deemed worthy, to ensure that it is funded.
4. **With cuts in funding streams to nonprofits that serve our youth, will you consider protecting the funding for those entities that serve children (i.e. services that provide children with a place to go after school, rather than to an empty home?) How would you recommend doing if so?**
- a. **Regina Ashford-Barrow** - Yes. These service providers have nominal costs compared to some of the contracts with the state agencies. Scrutiny and accountability is good, but it must be across the board, not just directed at NGOs. Look for dedicated funding streams and being a mouthpiece for these organizations and letting people know the value they bring to the community.
 - b. **Larry Thomas** - Yes. Create revenue by cutting NGO's that don't provide services, and cronyism. Get rid of out of state tax credits (i.e. Film tax credits.) Could use this money to put people to work and fund education. Remove duplication of jobs and administrative positions from top to bottom of government.
 - c. **Edmond Jordan** - Yes. On larger scale we reform of tax codes so we can see where money is being spent on a local level and see tax dollars at work. On smaller scale, look at organizations such as coalitions. Coalitions that provide duplication of services could be combined or eliminated. Streamline and coordinate services so that money can be freed up for other services. It is not about the individual nonprofit. It becomes more about the survival of the nonprofit instead of the kids. Need to find dedicated funding streams, but first make sure there is no duplication of effort.
 - d. **Rick Ward** - Yes. Recognize that these affect child and the family. If you take away funding for after school care, parent might lose their job because child has nowhere to go. These families could wind up on welfare because they cannot afford daycare. Finding the funding is the difficult part.
 - e. **Michael Jackson** - Yes. Many ways to fund. Some are not popular. Include ways in appropriations bill or cash capital outlay bill. There is money to be used for these organizations but to utilize the process to get what we need. Being in the senate gives you much more leverage to prioritize things that are important, and have history on the house side in getting funding for NGO's over the years.

- f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** – Yes, but we must also hold people accountable. There are NGO's that have not been responsible and have given those that do provide a valuable service a bad name. There should be a way to make sure there is good return on investment dollars. There should not be across the board negative impact to organizations that follow the rules and provide essential services due to a few people not behaving appropriately. Big Buddy, churches, etc, are critical.
- g. **Alfred C. Williams** - Yes to those that fill gaps that parents and schools do not fill. Develop relationships with administration and convey to them the importance and the role that the organizations have in the lives of children.
- h. **Dalton Honore** – Yes. Use money given in tax incentives across state to business. Corporate America is not paying their fair share. Eliminate these taxes. Set guidelines and use this funding to protect funding.
- i. **Hillery Johnson** - Yes. Create tax break incentives for volunteers in these programs. Natural resources can be used to support education. Create surpluses.
- j. **Ronald Rodgers** - Yes. We must be balanced in approach of how we create revenue. Re-negotiate oil revenue sharing. Utilize sin tax. If we cut spending in education we should fund other services that assist children. Revisit budget and cut where necessary to generate revenue for nonprofits that provide these services.
- k. **Patricia Haynes Smith** –Yes. Support entities that place children in viable afterschool programs. The governor has control of discretionary funds that he can use at will. We need to advocate to the governor that putting money towards children is the only way that Louisiana will survive. You can not keep cutting programs like these and expect to see a different outcome with poverty etc.
- l. **Barry Elkins** – Yes. A family with a single parent needs options for their children in afternoon. Committed to find ways to fund childcare. NGO's play a large part in helping families. For a program to be viable, there must be oversight to see that programs are operated fairly, money is spent appropriately. These organizations do work that is desperately needed.
- m. **Yvonne Dorsey** – Yes. As funding has been cut, the crime goes up. Will vote and advocate for these types of programs because they provide a place and service for kids.
- n. **Lorri Burgess** – Yes. There must be comprehensive planning. A children's code must have money allocated for these purposes. Solicit for private donors as well. We need a comprehensive plan that would be inclusive of afterschool tutorial programs, mental health component, and medical issues. Cannot continue piecemeal approach. If there are discretionary funds to handle, then support it.
- o. **Barbara Thomas** – Yes. Would not cut funding to organizations that provide services to children.

The following questions were submitted and answered in writing:

- 5. **Given current HIV/Aids rates, teen pregnancy and low birth weight baby statistics, would you consider plans to fund sex education programs? If no, why? If yes, how?**
 - a. **Regina Ashford-Barrow** – Yes, as a former director of a non-profit organization, one of our major focuses was teen pregnancy and HIV prevention. Funding for these programs are critical to our state. There is an old saying “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I call this a

preventative tool that is needed in our city and state. Too many children are suffering because of a lack of knowledge.

- b. **Larry Thomas** – Yes. By finding funds in areas that should be limited in other programs such as non-essential NGO's.
- c. **Edmond Jordan** – I would consider plans to fund sex education/abstinence programs. These programs could be funded with grants currently provided to NGO's.
- d. **Rick Ward** – I would consider funding of sex education that did not include information of any education of abortion. I think that simply offers a person the wrong idea of what should be done. I think that it should be limited to the risk involved and how to best protect ones' self from becoming pregnant and/or catching any STD.
- e. **Michael Jackson** – Yes. Teen pregnancy prevention, HIV/Aids testing and sex education should be funded through primary care delivery systems. Increase funding for Health Care Centers in Schools, federally qualified health centers and charity hospital primary care clinics. There are also advocacy organizations that can assist should be funded.
- f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** – I think sex education programs geared towards prevention are needed. I do not promote sex education that provides condoms to our young people.
- g. **Alfred C. Williams** – Sex education is important in preventing HIV/Aids, teen pregnancy and low birth weight babies. I would support funding to provide sex education to our children. Particularly to those in middle school. Raising a 13 year old has really shown me the important of sex education during the past year.
- h. **Dalton Honore** – Yes. Use some of money found at every legislative session (hard to read).
- i. **Hillery G. Johnson** – Yes. Give companies and individuals tax breaks. Also tobacco and alcohol tax revenue.
- j. **Ronald Rodgers** – I would definitely consider funding sex education programs as well as programs such as planned parenthood. I would do this because we live in a society where there is a huge lack of parental involvement. So we must continue to educate our children despite what they may not be getting at home. We have to serve all children and not just some.
- k. **Patricia Haynes Smith** – Yes. I introduced a bill last session (2010) to request BESE to revamp its curriculum on sex education based on the statistics across the state. It is my intention to reintroduce that bill. Insuring that we seek all monies available on the federal level would also help fund these programs. I am working with a group of individuals, called The Talk to plan on developing legislation as well as how to address this issue outside of the school curriculum. I strongly support this program being in school as a comprehensive approach inclusive of abstinence.
- l. **Barry Elkins** - I personally feel that sex education should be taught by parents in the home. However depending on the program proposed, the limits set on the program and the cost to the state I may be in favor of additional sex education programs.
- m. **Yvonne Dorsey** – HIV, teen pregnancy and low birth weight are issues that cost the taxpayers of the state millions of dollars. Preventative care such as sex education programs are not only necessary, but they are vital. It not only saves the state dollars but more important, people are healthier and thus it affords people the opportunity to become productive citizens. Yes I would consider plans to fund sex education programs.

- n. **Lorri Burgess** – Yes. Age appropriate educational tools with parental permission. Funding proposal would come from DHH or determination of funding source that will provide recurring funds.
 - o. **Barbara Thomas** – Depends on what kind of sex education and where the training is located. For instance I am for Abstinence Education and it should include HIV/AIDS prevention. Education with an emphasis on abstinence before marriage. In schools, I would teach abstinence before marriage and character more often!
6. **According to 2005-2007 data, 84% of children, ages 10-24 were killed with fire arms. It is the second highest cause of death in this age group. Considering the amount of youth violence we have in this city, what will you do about it?**
- a. **Regina Ashford-Barrow** – I've already started working with several local organizations especially in my neighborhood to address the crime issue. I live in north Baton Rouge and there were a rush of crimes at the first of the year. We activated the neighborhood association and worked with law enforcement to address those issues. At this point, the activity is very minimal. But the problem is bigger than that. I believe that education is very important and providing opportunities for employment is the other key. Currently I'm working with that association and several businesses to identify those young people who need either more educational assistance or employment.
 - b. **Larry Thomas** – Make parents accountable.
 - c. **Edmond Jordan** – Provide more funding for education. There is an inverse correlation between educational achievement and crime. We must also hold parents more accountable for the actions of their minor children. Lastly we must develop programs that bring fathers back into the homes.
 - d. **Rick Ward** – I think children should be education on the consequences of handling a firearm. I feel often times children look at these weapons as a toy because they have become so immune to the violence they see on television. Education of Consequences is the key.
 - e. **Michael Jackson** - Give local and state law enforcement the tools to fight crime. Secondly, ensure that we have juvenile and ex offender intervention and training (job) to help recidivism. We must ensure that mothers and fathers who become a part of our criminal system have tools to become productive citizens and participate in the educational lives of their children.
 - f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** – Continue working with local and state law enforcement to collaborate on ways to address reasons to why these deaths are occurring. Again, early education of our young people is essential in addressing this issue. I also think churches must play a role in this area. Collaboration between all elected officials, community leaders, businesses, must take place to address these issues and find solutions. I will be an advocate working with the community, law enforcement and others to come up with reasonable and workable solutions to address this problem with our community and our state.
 - g. **Alfred C. Williams** – We need to develop programs to remove guns from the homes of individuals who are participating in crimes. There is a program called "Adopt A Block" that will allow organizations to work with families within a certain block to identify social and economic issues in those homes and will educate the young and old about removing guns from the home.
 - h. **Dalton Honore** – Properly fund law enforcement and expand community policing and better train officers to handle their problems. As a retired law enforcement officer I feel these things can be done.

- i. **Hillery Johnson** – Invest in school and after school activities, mentor programs.
- j. **Ronald Rodgers** – Considering this data, we need to revisit our gun laws and make them more stringent and monitor who we allow to carry fire arms. Considering this age group, it also tells me that they have too much time on their hands. So we need to look into continual funding for after school programs and tax incentives for employers who provide jobs for the youth. If our youth is being productive, then they are not getting into trouble.
- k. **Patricia Haynes Smith** – We as legislators must work closely with our local officials to attack this problem. We must have more programs for our youth that have positive influences and begin to hold parents accountable for their children’s behavior. We must begin to reduce the access to guns and provide more mentors. Willing to do whatever it takes to sponsor programs and support programs to curb the violence.
- l. **Barry Elkins** – I am a firm supporter of the second amendment. I would resist any effort to undermine this right of every American to bear arms. This being said, I support the tough enforcement of laws now on the book to deter criminals and prevent further deaths from firearms.
- m. **Yvonne Dorsey** – I believe education (safety) at an early age is necessary. Many youth in my district are exposed to guns whether we like it or not. So education on gun safety is paramount. It should be a part of our education in schools much like the programs we do to teach our youth about health. Obviously, parents or other family members who have firearms are not teaching youth, therefore in an effort to save their lives we must teach it in our schools at an early age. There is a non-profit organization that teaches our youth about gun safety through gun safety videos and play acting. If funding is a problem we could integrate the educational proponent into our classrooms in that manner.
- n. **Lorri Burgess** – Expansion of afterschool programs (inclusive of DARE). Expansion of mental health, counseling and conflict remediation programs. Creation/expansion of commission/taskforce to provide solutions to violent crimes committed and done to children.
- o. **Barbara Thomas** – Create policies that ensure the safety of children in the home and out, and enforce them.

7. When did you register to vote in Louisiana and how often have you voted?

- a. **Regina Ashford-Barrow** – when I turned 18 and I vote all the time. I think I missed once and it was because I was sick.
- b. **Larry Thomas** – 1970. Every election.
- c. **Edmond Jordan** – I registered to vote in 1989 at the age of 18. I have voted in excess of 95% of all elections.
- d. **Rick Ward** – 2000. Every election.
- e. **Michael Jackson** – I registered upon graduation from high school and I vote in almost every election.
- f. **Donna Collins-Lewis** – at age 18. I vote each time there is an election.
- g. **Alfred C. Williams** – I registered to vote in college back in 1969 or 1970. I have voted every election with the exception of maybe two. Voting a real right for me. Even ran for office in my senior year of college (city council).

- h. Dalton Honore** – April 16, 1964. Every time the polls open.
- i. Hillery G. Johnson** – I live in Louisiana age (0-18 years). Register at 18 years old and I vote every chance I could when I'm in town (A lot of time I worked on projects out of state in the past.)
- j. Ronald Rodgers** – I registered to vote at age 18 and I have made a conscious effort to vote in every election, even though I have missed a few. I have not always been politically engaged, but I definitely am now and I'm looking forward to the future.
- k. Patricia Haynes Smith** – vote every election. Registered in Louisiana in 1980 when I returned from Ohio.
- l. Barry Elkins** – I registered to vote in my early 20's. According to published data I have seen, I have voted 4 out of the last 5 elections.
- m. Yvonne Dorsey** – 1976. I vote every election unless there is an unforeseen emergency with my family or myself.
- n. Lorri Burgess** – I registered after I graduation from high school - June 1981.
- o. Barbara Thomas** – Registered to vote at 18. Voting each time the voting booths open.