



Opinion Editorial

January 10, 2008

## City Council President & Councilmember-At-Large Fielkow: 2008 - A Pivotal Year

*In a recent Times Picayune opinion editorial, City Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow discussed his thoughts on the City of New Orleans in 2008:*

As the City Council convenes its first meeting of the new year, we do so with a renewed sense of hope and high expectations for New Orleans' future.

We enter the third year of a project unprecedented in modern American history -- the rebuilding of a great city devastated by the worst man-made disaster ever seen on this continent. While it is appropriate that we are preoccupied with all that remains to be done, I think we should pause for a moment to acknowledge all that has been done.

Signs of our rebuilding abound everywhere. The just-completed BCS Championship, Sugar Bowl and New Orleans Bowl, together with the upcoming Mardi Gras season and NBA All-Star Game, represent an unprecedented nearly \$1 billion economic impact to our community. Fans wearing LSU's purple and gold, Ohio State's scarlet and gray, Hawaii's green and white and Georgia's red and black provided a much-needed shot in the arm to our small businesses and for that, we are most appreciative.

Our friends at the Convention and Visitors Bureau expect 9 million visitors in 2008. More than 400,000 conventioners and exhibitors will check into the Morial Convention Center during 2008. Passenger volume at the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport topped 7.5 million in 2007 and is expected to rise above 8 million in 2008.

Demographers tell us that our population jumped 13 percent in 2007, more than they had expected, with high hopes that our population might reach 330,000 by the end of 2008. There are plenty of jobs available in the economy, enough for everyone who wants to work.

We enter the new year hopeful that this will finally be the year when we indeed see hundreds of cranes in the sky. All of those who are working so hard to bring the LSU-Veterans Hospital complex, with a potential of 10,000 jobs, to downtown New Orleans deserve our commendation and assistance. We look forward to other projects beginning to drive piles in 2008, including the Trump Tower. A good example of the restoration of downtown New Orleans is seen in the recently completed renovation of the old Western Union Building on Baronne Street, vacant for 15 years but now converted to apartments with a bank on the ground floor.

It seems to me that the real heroes of the recovery, however, are the thousands of men and women who came back to the city to rebuild their homes and businesses before they got their Road Home money, before their neighbors returned and before their customers returned.

They are my heroes, and I salute them for their love of this city, their commitment, their courage and their indomitable spirit.

Speaking of the Road Home, it will soon have a \$5 billion impact on our economy, with \$5 billion more to come during the remainder of 2008. It is high time that all applicants receive the funds due them so that they can make the necessary repairs to their homes and businesses and bring vitality back to all New Orleans neighborhoods.

Regional approaches to solving our metropolitan area's issues need to continue to be encouraged and pursued. Whether it be curbside recycling, joint lobbying or new flood protection efforts like Pump to the River, we would be well-served to put regionalism into action.

All that we have accomplished, however, will go for naught if our streets are not safe and parents do not feel that their children have a secure future. Accountability for those involved in the criminal justice system must be a top priority. Those in leadership should be objectively measured by whether a sizable reduction occurs in our murder rate and other violent crimes.

We need long-term criminal justice reforms to continue, but, at the same time, it is crucial that 2008 be a year when citizens have regained confidence that public safety is restored to our neighborhoods.

All indications are that 2008 is a year when we will turn the corner on the recovery. I know this is our shared wish.

With unity, commitment, caring and hard work, it is within us to rebuild a city that will be a shining example of what Americans can do, even in the wake of a terrible tragedy that might have permanently overwhelmed a less resilient people.

#### **New Orleans City Council**

The New Orleans City Council is the legislative branch of New Orleans city government. The Council considers and enacts all local laws that govern the City of New Orleans. The Council also approves the operating and capital budgets for the City, as recommended by the mayor, and continually monitors revenues and expenditures for local government operations. The City Council is also the regulatory body for public utilities. It also reviews and has final say on many land use and zoning matters, as well as considers major economic development projects for the City. As a Board of Review for Orleans Parish, the Council examines appeals of property tax assessments for real estate taxes, and certifies tax rolls to the Louisiana Tax Commission. Other responsibilities of the Council include overseeing the operation of the public access television in Orleans Parish.

The City Council is comprised of five districts and two councilmembers-at-large. Council President and Councilmember-at-Large Arnie Fielkow; Council Vice-President and Councilmember-at-Large Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson; District "A" Councilmember Shelley Midura; District "B" Councilmember Stacy S. Head; District "C" Councilmember James Carter; District "D" Councilmember Cynthia Hedge-Morrell; and District "E" Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis.