

From the President of the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury:

I would like to take this opportunity to explain some of the functions of the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury to the citizens who may not be aware of the Jury's responsibilities. In the past two years, many of you have heard and read about the Police Jury having financial problems. This is true! Due to all the unfunded mandates that have been placed on the Jury, the General Fund can no longer bail out the funds that are having difficulties meeting their budgets.

First I would like to explain **unfunded mandates**. **Unfunded mandates** are laws that are passed by the federal and state government agencies requiring local governments to be responsible for services without giving them funding to manage. For instance, **the Police Jury is the ONLY governing authority in Natchitoches mandated by the State to provide services (unfunded mandates) to the Judges, District Attorney, Sheriff, Clerk of Court, Tax Assessor, Registrar of Voters and the Natchitoches Parish Hospital at no cost.** The Natchitoches Parish Police Jury is also responsible for many other aspects of your Parish Government. Our main responsibility consists of Road Maintenance, Planning and Zoning, Natchitoches Parish Library, Natchitoches Parish Health Unit, Natchitoches Parish Office of Emergency Preparedness, Office of Community Services/Head Start, Rural Fire Protection Districts, Veterans Service Office, LSU Extension office and a few others.

The Natchitoches Parish Police Jury is not structured like the City of Natchitoches that has a range of revenues in their General Fund from taxes. In 2008, we had a ¼% tax on the ballot that failed. If passed, this money would have helped with the enormous debt that is steadily climbing from our Criminal Courts, Prisoners cost & Coroner cost. At the present time, the Criminal Court fund consists of the District Attorney, Six Assistant District Attorneys, District Attorney Staff, Judges' staff, Prisoner and Coroner's cost. The Criminal Court fund must be funded by the Jury's General Fund when there is a shortfall. This shortfall has been occurring for the last several years and unfortunately General Fund does not have the revenue to bail it out this year.

As you may be aware, the Jury provides services that affect the well being of all the Parish citizens. The eleven elected members, the Parish Administrator and Parish Treasurer are always trying to work with the State legislators, the Congressional Delegation and others to find better ways to serve our parish.

In order to give you a better understanding of the function of the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury, I have listed some information to share with the public.

The **General Fund has a total revenue budget for 2010 of \$1,339,152**, less than it had in 2005. The Criminal Court Fund has **55%** of this revenue budgeted to pay for "**unfunded mandates**" such as; prisoners cost, Coroner cost, District Attorney and Court Cost.

The only Parish Sales Tax in place is for the Solid Waste/Road Maintenance Department. This does not include any businesses within the City Limits. **In the past year, the Jury was fortunate enough to have FEMA's help on approving a Hazard Mitigation Plan to help repair some roads that were damaged in several floods. With the Jury only having approximately 20 employees in the Parish Highway Department, down from 80 in past years, they are trying to do the best with what they have.** Even with fewer employees, the Jury and staff are currently working on ways to try and accumulate funds to better our finance problems.

In the months to come, we will be asking for your help on matters that will help improve the safety and well being of our citizens and Parish. We ask that you disregard the negative comments and help up to restructure our Parish into one that will make us all proud. We are also very much aware that there are potholes in the roads, bridges needing replacements, drainage problems that need culverts, trash and grass on side of the roads, etc. but we ask for your patience and understanding as we try to work through them. Just to let you know, currently, we are working with Senator Long and Representative Nowlin to lobby for our needs.

As President of the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury, I would like you to know that without the support and assistance of the citizens of Natchitoches Parish, we cannot provide adequate services to our citizens. This is our Parish so let's take care of it by supporting it the right way. The next time you hear someone complaining about the Natchitoches Parish Police Jury or this Parish, please explain to them what I have tried to put forth in this letter. Let's take our Parish back by making it one of the best Parish in the State of Louisiana. **We Need Your Help!**

Finally, we would like to hear from you! Should you have any comments, questions or recommendations please send them to the address listed below so that I may answer them in my next article.

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Thanks,
Parish President Fred Jacobs