

GUEST COLUMN

For the Sunday, February 27, 2010 Edition

From: Mayor James E. "Jamie" Mayo

DC Connections

Our most recent federal lobbying trip to Washington, D.C. was unlike any other. To be frank, the political landscape has changed and we are being proactive in our approach to securing future federal funding for important local projects. Monroe City Council Chairman Jay Marx and I, along with representatives from the Monroe Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Ouachita Port, Angus Chemical, Southside Economic Development District, Iberia Bank, and Strauss Interests were in our nation's capital February 7-11. We had an opportunity to meet with our Federal delegation to promote and ask for continued support for vital local projects. For the City of Monroe, the priority projects we discussed were: Kansas Lane Connector; Kansas Garrett Interchange; 4th Street Underpass; Wastewater Plant improvements; and the Millhaven Road Widening Project.

We also had an opportunity to meet with our Federal Lobbyist, Patton Boggs, to discuss the new political landscape. The new Congress is taking a stance against what some have termed as "wasteful earmarks". An earmark is simply when a legislator seeks to direct a specific amount of money to help fund a designated project or program in his/her home district. Most earmarks fund good and needed projects and initiatives all over the country. However, it appears that, for the time being, there will be a new process for securing federal funding for local projects.

In meetings with our federal lobbyist we discussed their plans for implementing a new approach that would help us secure federal funding for current and future local projects. Thankfully, Patton Boggs will be utilizing their over 600 employees to work in teams

assigned to various federal agencies. They will build stronger relationships within those agencies, make us aware of available funding, and we will work together to go after funds needed for our local projects. We feel certain that future federal funding will come our way with our team efforts and the support of our federal legislators.

While in D.C., we also had an opportunity to meet with members of Valerie Jarrett's staff, from the White House Office of Public Engagement. We were able to discuss the Monroe metropolitan area and the impact of securing the Department of Energy Loan for Next Autoworks. Just a few days later, I was back in Washington, D.C. by special invitation from Vice President Joe Biden. I was honored to join more than 50 other African-American elected officials from across the country to attend a special Black History Program at the home of Vice President Joe and Dr. Jill Biden.

Following the Black History Program, we had an opportunity to take group and individual pictures with the Vice President. During that time, I took advantage of an opportunity to share the Next Autoworks project with him. I told him how important such a project would mean for our city, parish and entire region. He encouraged me to send some information to his office. So, in two consecutive weeks, we were able to share this important information with individuals from the Office of the President and with the Vice President of the United States. I am not sure what effect it will have...but you never know what type of help you will receive—until you ask.

In the meantime, let us keep praying and hoping for the best. Together, we are stronger. Monroe is one city, with one future!