

Senator Sharon Weston Broome
Chairwoman



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Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family
MINUTES OF MEETING
February 15, 2011
10am Claiborne Building, Marbois Room

I. CALL TO ORDER

Sharon Weston Broome called the meeting to order at 10:09AM

II. ROLL CALL

The Secretary called the roll with the following results

MEMBERS PRESENT

Lisa Andry
Neil Bernard
Sharon Broome
Heather Doss
Peggy Gehbauer
David Helveston
Daniel Kirk
Gene Mills
Sue Morrill
Linda Ruffin (Paul Pastorek)
Audrey Pugh
Katherine Spaht
Dorothy Wallis

MEMBERS ABSENT

Gordon Atwell
A.G. Crowe
Penny Dastugue
Wayne DuBose
Frank Hoffman
J. Michael Johnson
Fred Lowery
Tony Perkins
Jonathan Perry
Fred Selby
Tiffany Simpson
Murphy Toerner

OTHERS PRESENT

Robbie Endris

III. BUSINESS CONSIDERED

Senator Broome stated that with only thirteen (13) members present that the Louisiana Commission on Marriage and Family (LCMF) was absent of a quorum and would not be able to vote on any items. She said that the minutes would be adopted globally at the next meeting date.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

Sen. Broome stated that the goal of the Commission should be to have a quorum at every meeting. She charged Robbie Endris to look into the possibility of video or tele-conferencing capabilities at the Department of Children and Family Services. She went on to thank Katherine Spaht for leading the discussion at the last LCMF meeting. Sen. Broome asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes from the past meeting and there was none.

Audrey Pugh of the Family Issues Subcommittee gave an overview of the last meeting and stated that the Commission looked at data and discussed putting it into a manageable format organized by parish. She stated that on the primary factor in the handout was dropout rate. She discussed the top five (5) parishes which are Tensas, Morehouse, Franklin, Red River and Point Coupe. The suggested factors were 1) lowest graduation rate, 2) births where the mother was less than 15 years old, 3) births where the mother was 15-19 years old, 4) live births to unmarried mother, 5) marriages, 6) divorces. She went on to say that determinations can be made by looking at other factors that are needed for appropriate intervention.

Robbie Endris asked if the factors were based on the parishes where the birth occurred because that is not necessarily the same parish where the mother or child resides; noting that there is not a birthing center in every parish.

Gene Mills stated that the presence of a birthing center in a particular parish impacts the number of births that occur in that respective parish.

Lisa Andry suggested that it would be beneficial to add the parish of the mother's residency instead of where the birth occurred.

It was recommended that a statistician accompany Ms. Pugh to the LCMF meetings for purposes of obtaining the goals and objectives. A letter from Sen. Broome would be needed to accomplish this.

Dr. Spaht spoke about tax payer's burdens due to divorce and unwed mothers. She stated that in the report it is broken down by state. Dr. Spaht went on to discuss the welfare reform legislation that included promoting marriages. She stated that the Smart Marriages Conference was discontinued.

Dorothy Wallis affirmed that as a result of the past meetings, Section 2 A of the Executive Order of the LCMF is being accomplished.

Heather Doss gave a report of the Pre-Marital and Post Marriage Education Initiatives Subcommittee stating its goal of identifying opportunities for couples who are considering marriage and how the Commission could track this information.

Gene Mills offered a report on the Louisiana Family Forum's Longest Married Couple event which took place February 14 at the Governor's Mansion. Ralph and Dottie Richards of Slidell

were honored for their nearly 81 years of marriage, he said. The Louisiana Family Forum received over 500 calls regarding the longest married couple, which promotes lasting marriages, Mr. Mills added.

Daniel Kirk offered that it would benefit the Marriage Commission to revisit the idea of hosting a statewide longest married couple event.

Mr. Mills suggested that the LCMF develop ways to incorporate other challenges or messages concerning the state as an opportunity to promote marriages and celebrate lasting marriages.

Sen. Broome referenced “winning the future” from President Obama’s State of the Union Address. She stated that one of her goals for the Commission is to create an op-ed piece to incorporate the objectives of the Marriage Commission. She affirmed that the brochure on how divorce causes tax-payer burdens is a great opportunity and perspective. She went on to say that citizens need to be encouraged to seek marriage.

Sue Morrill stated that marriage is better for businesses.

Mr. Mills stated that it can be challenging to come up with proactive steps to tell the story. He went on to say that the longest married couple can be a vehicle for promoting other issues concerning the state of Louisiana.

Ms. Doss asked how the Marriage Commission could follow up with the Family Forum longest married couple event. It was suggested that the LCMF host an anniversary celebration for the longest married couple.

Sen. Broome stated that she would like to see the Marriage Commission produce a 30 minute program on Louisiana Public Broadcasting with Karen Wheaton.

Ms. Doss acknowledged that the LCMF would benefit from a Facebook page, a website and an IT person. Sen. Broome charged Daniel Kirk of the Public Awareness Subcommittee to complete this task. Ms. Morrill said that her daughter is a web designer and could possibly design a web site for the Commission.

Ms. Doss requested that the Marriage Commission survey business owners to find out what is important to them and find out how broken marriages and families impact the productivity. She suggested that the Commission host a luncheon for the business community.

It was suggested that Rolfe McCollister could produce a Business Report article regarding how marriages affect business productivity.

Dr. Spaht acclaimed J. Michael Johnson’s appointment as the Dean of The Louisiana College School of Law. She said that he has committed to attending the next meeting of the LCMF. Sen. Broome offered that elevating awareness and education is the best way to get the message across regarding the importance of marriage.

Neil Bernard stated that there is no educational training in schools regarding marriage. He asked if it were possible to offer legislation that would substitute marriage training for Home Economics courses.

Mr. Kirk spoke about Louisiana's abstinence education initiative and preliminary couples training program in Title 17 and the "Choosing the Best" curriculum.

Ms. Doss asked how the LCMF can encourage students to take the marriage and/or abstinence training. She stated that Penny Dastugue of BESE would be a good contact regarding health relationships training in schools.

Sen. Broome offered that churches could be another resource that could be used to encourage marriage in the community. She recalled that legislation must come from an outside source, because legislation cannot be drafted or offered by a Commission. Support can come from members as individuals, she said.

Mr. Mills stated that research shows that often times when couples breakup, the children leave the faith of their parents. He went on to offer that the leading cause of poverty and unwed pregnancies is unwed people. Mr. Mill referenced a Times Picayune article regarding the health benefits of marriage.

Mr. Bernard added that the Commission must look towards the long term and it may take 5 to 10 years to see results. Society must turn towards the trend of children seeking marriage as a goal, he said.

Ms. Pugh shared that her son attended a Smart Marriages conference as a volunteer. He provides the clients at his barber shop with the information that he received from the conference to encourage the institution of marriage. She suggested that the material must be age specific to reach the intended audience.

Sen. Broome added that there must be diverse age groups represented to assist in strengthening families.

Mr. Bernard asked if there were funds available in the abstinence initiative to promote marriage.

Sen. Broome suggested that the LCMF develop a pilot strengthening marriage program for state government employees. The program could be similar to the Lighten Up Louisiana program.

Mr. Mills offered that Mike McManus, an expert on marriage, would be a great resource for the Marriage Commission. He suggested that the Commission set up a video conference or Skype with him.

Sen. Broome committed to sending out a letter to members encouraging them to attend meetings. She announced that the next meeting date would be Tuesday, March 15 at 10am and the location is to be determined.

She asked were there any other matter to come before the committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:27AM.



2011

Louisiana's Longest Married Ralph & Dottie Richards



**Ralph & Dottie Richards
81 Wonderful years!**

In 1929, a young woman riding the "flying horses" in City Park caught the eye of a New Orleans lad. Once her carousel ride was over, he approached her and implored that she stay on for one more ride with him, as he had already bought her another ticket. The young girl would later recall, with a wry grin: "At a nickel a ride, I thought to myself, 'I had better hang onto this guy because he's a big spender!'"

She did! Today, Louisiana Family Forum (LFF) celebrates Ralph and Dorothy Richards as Louisiana's Longest Married Couple at a special Valentine's Day reception at the Governor's Mansion.

On February 28, 1930, with the Great Depression in its infancy, Ralph Richards and Dottie Renz, both at the tender age of 17, were married. Through the years, Ralph and Dottie shared many things, namely a strong love for and dedication to each other. They found joy in the little things too, like a love of Louisiana seafood (especially oysters), a favorite song ("Let Me Call You Sweetheart") and an occasional martini at dinner time.

From their union came two children: a daughter, Dorothy, followed by a son, Ralph Jr. Times were tough during the early years of the marriage, but Ralph, despite having to quit school after the sixth grade due to a family hardship, managed to build a successful coffee brokerage firm. Dottie kept the household running smoothly and occasionally, the couple would step out and travel to exotic locales like Cuba and South America on business trips.

After their children were grown, the family soon branched out, and the brood eventually included eight grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. Today, after nearly 81 years of marriage, the couple lives in Slidell. Amazingly, both Ralph and Dottie enjoy near-perfect health without the benefit of health club memberships, Pilates classes or personal trainers!

With the recent assistance of a live-in caregiver and frequent visits from their children and grandchildren, Ralph and Dottie still share their love, humor and wisdom, and today, Valentines 2011, they will enjoy the company of the First Family, Friends and Relatives as they are crowned the reigning King and Queen of Louisiana Family Forum's Longest Married.

Gene Mills, president of LFF, said, "Congratulations to Ralph and Dottie Richards for your incredible 81 – year 'ride.' You inspire us, and we celebrate you today."

More pictures of Ralph & Dottie may be viewed here: <http://www.lafamilyforum.org/2011LMCpics>