

On behalf of the residents of Lafourche Parish, Louisiana, I would like to formally welcome you today to Port Fourchon, the hub of Louisiana's offshore oil and gas industry and a portal to much of the nation's oil imports.

Port Fourchon is at the tail end of Lafourche Parish, yet we're eager to report that this tail is wagging the dog.

Lafourche has been supporting and encouraging the exploration for oil and gas for over 60 years. The economy of the parish has been and continues to be dependent on oil and gas revenues. A majority of the top taxpayers in the parish are involved in the petrochemical industry, both directly and in service-related businesses. Oil royalties from onshore operations comprise five to ten percent of our revenues and provide funding for capital improvement projects - roads, bridges, and drainage projects. Royalty revenues recently provided collateral for a \$15 million dollar road improvement program in the central and northern parts of Lafourche.

These revenues allow us to maintain the infrastructure of our communities and supplement basic operations such as the detention center, our court system and the district attorney's office. The funds are also used to partner with the state and federal governments to stabilize and protect Louisiana Highway 1 - the only link to Grand Isle and Port Fourchon.

Forty-five years ago Act 222 of the Louisiana Legislature created the Greater Lafourche Port Commission. The men who comprised the commission over the years developed Port Fourchon into the focal point of the Gulf of Mexico's domestic deepwater oil and gas production, changing the economy of Lafourche. Unskilled laborers were able to secure good paying jobs and comfortably retire years later. Fishing boats were converted into oilfield service vessels, creating companies that are now supporting the third generation of family members and employing thousands.

As a testament to our prowess in the industry, Lafourche mariners were integral to the successful development of oilfields in the North Sea. The experience in the industry allowed many local residents to prosper when the North Sea was flourishing.

The construction of the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port in 1979 is an important milestone in our parish's history. LOOP is a consortium of private energy firms operating the offshore terminal for offloading imported oil, conducting business from a facility located in Galliano and maintaining an east-west LOCAP pipeline network. For many years, LOOP was the top taxpayer in Lafourche Parish. They were removed from the top spot by a marine service company. Pipeline companies are also among the top ad valorem taxpayers.

Lafourche Parish starts nearly 90 miles to our north, in the sugar cane fields along our namesake Bayou Lafourche. The economic engines providing for our citizens include agriculture, seafood, shipbuilding and the oil and gas industry. Thus our motto "Feeding and Fueling America".

While oil and gas is often described as a cyclical industry, nothing is more unpredictable than the agriculture and fishing industries. Both succeed and fail at the hands of Mother Nature. Our founding fathers were fishermen and farmers, for we are rich in resources, yet we have come to rely on the more stable oil and gas industry for our economic sustenance.

The shipbuilding industry has also flourished in conjunction with the oil and gas industry. Large and small shipyards dot Bayou Lafourche and the Intracoastal Waterway, building the vessels which work here and throughout the world.

The energy industry does not only support our residents and Lafourche companies. Workers from throughout the region, the state and many other states travel here for shift work, bringing home better pay checks than they could have earned where they live. And perhaps finding a good-paying job here when none were available back home. They also leave behind precious sales taxes which pay for our schools and police department. The parking lots at Port Fourchon and at the offices of the boat companies contain many vehicles with out-of-state license plates. The trucking companies which traverse our highways bring products from many different parts of the United States, providing jobs in the very important support industry.

Pipelines buried deep under sugar cane fields and cattle pastures far north of here in Lafourche provide the property taxes for recreation centers.

I would be most remiss if I failed to mention the philanthropic aspect of our partnership with oil and gas. Major companies have provided a generator for an evacuation center, sponsorship for BeachSweep here at Port Fourchon, the underwriting of special projects at recreation centers, and renovations to our churches. No fundraising effort is complete without generous donations from oil and gas-related companies.

On a personal note, I am an avid fisher. It's the best opportunity to escape close to home – sometimes we go far enough out into the Gulf where my cell phone doesn't work! And I have to endure the admonishments of my husband for casting toward

the porpoises – there may be no fish there, but watching them play is so peaceful. Also nearby are the trawlers, harvesting the wonderful shrimp.

And everywhere you look, there are oil and gas structures and commercial marine vessels. We coexist happily.