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Article published Jul 8, 2005

## PAR head gives report on legislative session

**By Elizabeth Fitch**

[efitch@thenewsstar.com](mailto:efitch@thenewsstar.com) Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana president Jim Brandt returned to Monroe on Thursday to deliver a report card on the recently completed legislative session to the Monroe Rotary Club.

Brandt chose not to speak on local issues and legislation affecting northeastern Louisiana. Instead, he addressed PAR's overall view.

Brandt told the audience it was a mediocre session, giving it a grade of "C."

"In most cases, the status quo really prevailed," Brandt said.

At the end of June, PAR released its assessment of the legislative session entitled "The 2005 Session: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" which analyzed both what went right and what went wrong. Brandt addressed the highlights during his speech, particularly focusing on the failures to cap the "rainy day" fund and to alter the Stelly Plan as positives and the failure to reduce the state's \$11 billion unfunded accrued liability as a negative.

PAR is a private, non-profit research organization that both analyzes governmental issues and serves as a government watchdog.

Brandt also emphasized that the Legislature did nothing to reign in the power of the state agricultural department, saying Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom's "empire is still in tact."

He briefly touched on the so-called "glass pockets" reform PAR supports. He addressed it more specifically during the question and answer session. Currently, Louisiana legislators only have to show earnings of more than \$250 from state or local government entities or gambling enterprises without much elaboration.

When asked if he thought the rationale that more specific laws would discourage people from running for office, Brandt said it was a possibility. However, he did say the taxpayers need the information stricter laws would provide.

"It does give the public some opportunity to say, are there conflicts of interest?" Brandt said.

Brandt's last public appearance in Monroe was at a Monroe Chamber of Commerce meeting early in the legislative session.

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