

DEFENDING THE ROLE OF THE ENGINEER

By Deborah Ducote Keller, P.E.

The ASCE Louisiana Infrastructure Report Card 2017 received unexpected publicity in March 2018. It began with WVUE-FOX8 television in New Orleans contacting national ASCE for a local contact to interview about the condition of the Louisiana's infrastructure, which garnered a D+ overall on the 2017 report card. The hitch was that the on-camera interview had to be taped locally by 7 p.m., since the story was airing on the 10 p.m. newscast that same night.

National ASCE contacted Kirk Lowery, past-president of the Louisiana Section, who served on the 2017 report card review committee. It was impossible for him to be in New Orleans that evening so he called me. I had chaired the Ports and the Inland Waterways categories and knew the process and effort that produced the report card under the direction of chair, Dr. Kam Movassaghi and his co-chair, Jan Evans, neither of whom live in New Orleans.

The reporter, Ryan Naquin, surprised me by having read the entire Louisiana Infrastructure Report Card 2017 report. He asked valid questions on and off camera, and was sincere in his concern for our roads and bridges, especially. It was free publicity for our state report card and everyone was happy. However, this story didn't end with the broadcast, which was an excellent combination of video and comments from other sources supporting the ASCE findings on roads and bridges.

You can imagine our surprise when columnist, Dan Fagan, wrote his article two days later for The Advocate New Orleans edition. The headline was, "Beware of Warnings of Roads 'Crisis'". He accused both ASCE and the Louisiana Good Roads and Transportation Association as standing to benefit financially if the state gas tax increases passes. He insulted the integrity and professionalism of ASCE stating, "But what else would you expect from an

organization representing companies standing to make millions from raising a gas tax?"

While most of our ASCE leadership does not receive the New Orleans edition of The Advocate, I do. With the assistance of ASCE national and several of those who worked on the 2017 report card committee, we spent our day emailing versions of a response letter that Dr. Movassaghi could sign and submit to the editor of The Advocate.

Likewise, Perret, President of the Louisiana Good Roads and Transportation Association, also defended ASCE and the work of the integrity of the report card committee members.

Fagan's article was an affront to our profession, but our honor and professionalism and commitment to public safety shined through his yellow journalism. Apparently, he did no research and merely wrote his own biased opinion in reaction to an excellent news story by Ryan Naquin.

Below are four links to see the video, read the Fagan article and see the letters to the editor signed by Movassaghi and Perret so that you, too, can inform any mis-informed people who may ask you about the ASCE Louisiana Infrastructure Report Card 2017.

LINK FOR VIDEO RYAN NAQUIN WVUE FOX 8

<http://www.fox8live.com/story/37761523/gas-tax-increase-a-possible-fix-for-louisianas-poor-ranking-infrastructure>

LINK FOR DAN FAGAN ARTICLE

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/article_7e3df8e2-2c61-11e8-a9c1-abbe7e2601b3.html

LINK FOR KAM MOVASSAGHI LETTER TO EDITOR

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/letters/article_9e36a9dc-2dfb-11e8-a1f5-2bea1a964673.html

LINK FOR KENNETH PERRET LETTER TO EDITOR

http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/letters/article_ac506d18-2df7-11e8-8e9c-63f01a4a8475.html