



CONVERSATIONS

SUNDAY 5/6/12 • SECTION C

Happy birthday to you, Louisiana!

Louisiana celebrated a bi-centennial milestone this past week. It became the 18th state on April 30, 1812, after becoming a territory in 1803 through the Louisiana Purchase.

It seems I've been hearing talk of this celebration for years. Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne, who is one of the state's greatest promoters, was talking about this anniversary back when he was secretary of state. Each time I've seen him over the past few years, he would mention our 200th birthday. Last year, Louisiana native Lt. Gen. Russel Honoré, U.S. Army (retired),

passed the hat at a Louisiana Press Association luncheon for the 200th year bash.

As with any birthday, it triggers reflections of years gone by, so there I went reminiscing of what the state offers and what I remember in the years growing up in south Louisiana. Magnolia trees came to mind and then thoughts of bayous and riverboats; good food and fun festivals; street cars and



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Mississippi River. Billy Carter, the late brother of former President Jimmy Carter, got off at a dock in St. James Parish and started passing out Billy Beer. I thought, "Only in Louisiana."

I've lived in a few states, and there's no place like Louisiana. We have a diverse culture of people seasoned with Cajuns and Creoles who are the roux for the place we call home.

Happy birthday, Louisiana!

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DANA MILBANK: GINGRICH KNOWS REALM OF CHAOS WELL, Page 4

Look at our natural gas opportunities

As gasoline prices rise, it is wise to ask what our country can do to lower gas prices. Some things are obvious. We can lower gas prices by increasing the supply of domestic oil. This can be achieved by quickening the pace of offshore permits being issued, building the entire Keystone pipeline, and opening new areas to drilling in the Arctic and along the Mid-Atlantic coast. What gets less attention is that now is the time to examine how America fuels our cars and trucks. For long term stability in fuel costs, as well as a jobs program to put the unemployed back to work and replenish state and federal government treasuries with royalty payments, we should look at the opportunity provided by natural gas.



Bill Cassidy
Guest Columnist

The recent natural gas boom in the United States has been so wide-spread and profound that it has dropped natural gas prices to historical lows. These prices are so low that producers have begun to scale back operations as extraction has almost become uneconomical. We should be focused on exploring new commercial markets for natural gas to take advantage of such a low-cost energy source. Because technology and supply is currently available to sell the natural gas equivalent for about \$1.50 a gallon compared with the current price of gasoline, it would seem natural for consumers to begin making the switch to compressed natural gas CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) vehicles.

So if the technology is already available and we have at least a 100-year supply of natural gas right here in America, why aren't we all driving CNG cars?

Unfortunately, the main obstacle is a lack of natural gas fuel infrastructure in our country. Currently in the United States, there are only 449 CNG fueling stations accessible to the public, which is dwarfed by the more than 157,000 gasoline stations.

There are a number of proposals to spur natural gas infrastructure development in Washington. Not surprisingly, when it comes to Congress, the most talked about option involves subsidies for both natural gas vehicles and for the actual CNG fuel itself. While we should be using all of our available natural resources to aid in lowering the costs of transportation, the reality is that our country has neither the money to subsidize development nor the expertise to pick winners and losers in the energy and transportation sectors.

As opposed to subsidies, I believe that a simple change to our tax code would help those companies that develop natural gas look at domestic retail infrastructure development as a serious option. For background purposes, it is important to understand the dif-

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FACEBOOK VS. FACETOFACE

Web offers substitutes for real-life connections

WHAT EXPLAINS the spectacular success of Facebook? Does it represent the desire of people to go online to connect with each other, with brands and with information? Or does the rise of this social networking platform actually reflect a more fundamental human need — to connect in real life?

It is easy to see Facebook's success as a sign of dramatic change — in technology and in human relations. But a deeper look suggests that Facebook's rise is merely Exhibit A of a much larger truth: Our modern society is not providing people

with the human connections they crave, and online social networking is a rather poor substitute.

Statistics show that more people than ever live alone in the USA. According to the Census, about 31 million Americans live alone, representing 28 percent of the nation's households.

Online talk unsatisfying

Until recently, our cities were losing popula-

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Ed Keller



Brad Fay

Guest Columnists

Ed Keller and Brad Fay are co-authors of "The Face-to-Face Book: Why Real Relationships Rule in a Digital Marketplace," to be published this month. They are also principals of the Keller Fay Group, a market research and consulting firm.

