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## Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco: her press strategies and the local press

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GOVERNOR KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO: THE LOCAL PRESS AND HER  
PRESS STRATEGIES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

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by

Brecke Megan Latham  
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For my mother,  
Who let me know when it was time to worry.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis focuses on Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco's press strategies. The first section of the paper provides the standard and documented description of the role and press strategy for a governor. The second section provides a background of the responsibility of the press within a democratic society in the context of the Social Responsibility Theory. The third section examines what elements define a press/politico relationship and what defines positive and negative aspects related to this type of relationship.

This research utilizes a qualitative research design, including in-depth interviews, participatory observation/field notes and case studies. Perceptions, derived from the governor's staff members inside the Blanco administration and one capitol bureau reporter, examine; 1). Governor Blanco's press strategy; 2.) Elements for a successful news story, and; 3). A description of the press/politico relationship.

There is a lack of research on gubernatorial press relations. Therefore, three topics from the Blanco administration are examined as case studies in this paper. The topics include the negotiations with the Saints, the Executive Order on non-discrimination against gays and lesbians and Union Tank Car. These were the most popular issues covered by the press in the governor's first year in office. Each followed a press strategy within the organization and provided valuable situations to evaluate with regard to the press and the strategies within an Executive level of government. From the thesis and out of the perceptions of the interviewees, a successful governor will manage a message to the media by first being successful in managing a message within the administration. If these messages are disseminated in an organized fashion, reporters are more apt to

objectively reporting the elements of a story. Interviewees also perceived that objective reporting is defined for how accurate the news stories are in relation to the information that was provided by their political source. It was also found through the interviews that for the governor to have a successful press strategy may mean that she will use discretion with accessibility to the media. Meaning, the governor is aware that speaking openly to the press on all occasions, may not guarantee success.

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

The governor is the elected official who maintains the greatest amount of power within state government. Citizens regard him or her as the most visible policy maker and place responsibility on the governor for their general welfare (Hanson, 2004, pp. 195). Maintaining the well-being of constituents is not an easy task and elected officials and governors need political support to be successful (Trammell & Osifchin, 1994). The press corps is the primary source of information for citizens. Therefore, as the most powerful entity of the state, a governor must maintain a press strategy to protect and reflect his or her administration's incentives.

The role of the governor, as the chief executive of the state, and those elements that define a successful press strategy are the first topics discussed in this paper. The definition for a successful press strategy is later compared to the press strategy defined within Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco's administration. Governor Blanco's press strategy is defined by members of her staff through personal interviews. This inside access allowed close and in-depth analysis for how the inside of the administration operates in regard to the press. One capitol press corps reporters' interview examined if Governor Blanco maintained a successful press strategy.

In the literature review, the role the press plays in democracy, the role politicians and reporters play in news making and the relationship between politicians and press members are examined. The information builds the argument for why politicians need press strategies, how news making is a complementary action between press and politicians and how a relationship between the press and their political sources could impact news making.



The inside view of the administration's press management provides a thorough understanding of how an executive administration routinely works with the press. The case studies provide an in-depth account of the press management that takes place around various policy issues. The evidence examined is largely from inside sources within the Blanco administration. While most of the interviews are from administrative sources, the study also considers the perceptions from one capitol bureau reporter.

All of this information leads to the analysis of three case studies. Three topics from Governor Blanco's administration were studied to determine how, in each case, her administration utilized a press strategy and how it proved to be successful or not. Each issue garnered a tremendous amount of press attention and followed a distinct press strategy. The topics were chosen because they represented a variety of media strategies from within the governor's administration and varied in their outcomes within the press. The perceptions of the individuals from within the organization provide a source of measurement of success for Governor Blanco's press strategies.

### **The Role of the Governor; the Structure of a Press Strategy**

*"The governor is not a pointless old fogey in uniform. Their role is in fact the 'pivot point,' and the keystone to the constitutional arch," - Anonymous*

This section of the paper identifies the importance of a press strategy within the office of the governor. Governors receive the greatest amount of publicity of any politician in the state. It is important for a governor and his or her administration to acknowledge the press as an entity and to maintain a strategy to work with the press. A governor's office can successfully use the media to transmit messages to constituents by mimicking the norms and routines of reporters. By manipulating the actions of reporters,

an administration can create an efficient routine with the press for news deliverance. It could lead to a more efficient routine for disseminating the governor's message to the media.

The governor acts as head of the executive branch, head of party, national figure, family member, ceremonial chief, and intergovernmental actor and policy leader. The governor is the only other official in the United States whose duties, power and publicity may be comparable to the executive office of the President (Gray, 2004). Behn (1991) said the most important role of the governor is to serve constituents. To maintain this power, a governor must manage a constant message within the press. A constant message emulated by the press makes the initiatives of the administration clear and recognizable for constituents. This raises the first research question: RQ1: What constitutes a successful press strategy as determined by members of the governor's staff?

In every state's governmental hierarchy, the governor sits at the top and personifies the state to the constituents (Gray, 2004). Even with the significance of the office, gubernatorial press relations have been understudied, except for a descriptive analysis of staff duties within its administration (Hanson, 2004). Governor John Ashcroft, the governor of Missouri from 1985-1991, recalled that the governor is a representative of the people first and that no person in the state is more a symbol for the government than that of the governor (Behn, 1991, pp.94).

In past centuries, a governor's role evolved from a small amount of power within the legislature to the most important officer in state government (Zimmerman, 1970). A governor's duties outlined in the first U.S. constitution were modeled from English institution as a "figurehead" role (Gray & Hanson, 2004). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century an

administrative reorganization movement in a constitutional amendment separated and increased the governor's power from legislature influence. The increase in responsibilities and duties created a necessity for a centralized staff that present day governors could not perform without (Gray, 2004).

Reconstruction, following the Civil War era, placed governors into an external relations role (Behn, 1991). This allowed governors to participate with federal level legislation and prompted citizens of each state to expect much from his or her governor. Presently, governors hold duties comparable to the national level of government where their office structure imitates a smaller Executive Office of the President (Gray & Hanson, 2004). Governors are the "primary key player" for government as a state and federal power. Therefore, governors must manage and be able to handle the abundance of media attention in order to present their messages to constituents, press and legislators (Behn, 1991).

Successful governors recognize the importance of the press. They know that access to communication channels operated by media organizations is the most effective method to distribute their message. Governors must communicate their message to constituents and legislators in order to demonstrate that he or she is fulfilling the role as head policy maker. So, successful governors need the press, not only to effectively communicate a message, but also to enhance constituency knowledge of their administration's agenda activities (Behn, 1991).

*Governors on Governing*, (1991) a handbook edited by The National Governors Association, set the standard for program promotion and message deliverance within a governor's administration. "To execute an effective press strategy, a governor must

always be accessible to the media, efficiently communicate strategies and policies to constituents and ensure that their story is accurately reported by the press,” (Behn, 1991, pp. 32). Executing an effective press strategy means successfully orchestrating a message to the press with the intent to inform. If there is no press strategy among cabinet secretaries and staff members, confusion may catapult negative press onto the governor, creating difficulties within the legislature and hindering an end result for policies (Behn, 1991).

### **The Responsibility and Role of the Press in a Democratic Society**

*“The Press has become the greatest power within Western countries, more powerful than the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. One would then like to ask: by what law has it been elected and to whom is it responsible?” -Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn*

The press is a vital piece of democracy. The more informed a society, the healthier democracy is within that society. To better serve those who elect public officials, journalists must provide objective, accurate and factual information. The following section of the paper provides a history of the press and explains the Social Responsibility theory. This emerging theory places more responsibility on the press where they must serve the interest of the general public to provide enlightenment through the distribution of objective news. Research from the interviews and case studies will determine if the press does or does not fulfill its duty to provide accurate and fair information on behalf of Governor Blanco. From the interviews (presented later) we will determine if successful news stories are produced from an effective press strategy.

So far, this paper has discussed why the governor and her administration utilize the press for message distribution. This section about social responsibility theory and the

role of the press in a democratic society has been included to provide a description for the demand for objective reporting. A governor develops and fosters a media strategy within his or her administration to protect the credibility of his or her message to the public via the press.

In a democratic society, the press protects the people's right to know about government and politics (Chittick, 1970). The responsibility of the press is to inform the public about governmental affairs in order to produce political public discourse and encourage participation in government. If the press does not provide objective and fair information, it makes it harder for constituents to form individual opinions on political issues. Irresponsible news content from the press could hinder the democratic process.

The press maintains an obligation to deliver objective information. This information acts as a tool for constituents to form ideas and express themselves through voting privileges. The press contributes to the collective well being of a democratic community (Swanson & Nimmo, 1990, pp. 149). John Locke stated that, "freedom was inherent and that man was a rational creature who could be governed with minimal interference with the faith that men work for a common good," (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963). The more informed the public is, the greater the possibility they will become involved in the political process. Therefore, how interested citizens are can be seen as a gauge to the health of democracy in a society (Beyle & Williams, 1972, pp. 58).

The press works as its own entity, managed by its own set of professional norms and routines and fueled by its role to deliver information. The Constitution adjusts to a press that is free from government influence. Known as the quasi-official Fourth Branch of Government, the press operates as a de facto, and is as important as the other three

branches (Cater, 1959, pp.13). As the Fourth Branch of government, in theory, the press acts as a watchdog for the three other branches that keeps an “eye” on government policies to prevent abuse (Jamieson, 2003, pp. 24). William Rivers (1982) in *The Other Government, Power and the Washington Media*, stated the American press truly is a check to the “adversarial government.” In *Presidents and the Press*, James Pollard (1973) stated Thomas Jefferson once wrote, “People are the only censors of their governors.” He stated that people must benefit from the information to make informed decisions about their elected officials. This can only be done through the circulation of newspapers (Cater, 1959).

The ability of citizens to participate in public affairs provides a self-development benefit for citizens in a democratic society. Political participation involves voting and electoral participation but also a general awareness for public affairs. Psychological involvement in public affairs will let good citizens form a good society (Beyle, 1972). Men and women can become concerned with their public welfare and involved in the affairs of politics (Byle, 1972).

At a time following World War II, two critical factors created a paradigm shift in political news content. The first was a monumental break in the mundane and non-personal relationship between presidents and press. By implementing semi-weekly press conferences in the White House, President Franklin D. Roosevelt permeated the press with his agenda activities and bucked the routine relationship from former presidents and their press corps (Pollard, 1973, pp. 7).

The Commission of the Freedom of the Press, after WWII, pushed a newer form of Libertarianism that would extend a moral responsibility for the Press. As the second

factor to the paradigm shift, this newer form was the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press. The theory is based on, “the power and near monopoly position of the media imposed on the public.” It maintains an obligation to be socially responsible, to see that all sides are fairly presented and that the public has enough information to make informed decisions about governmental affairs (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963).

After the world viewed the effects of a totalitarianism regime in the midst of WWII, The Commission of the Freedom of the Press formulated the Social Responsibility Theory to procure the foundation of democracy within America (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1963, pp. 75). By aiding publics, the press could play a crucial role in counteracting the drift toward mass society and totalitarianism, where the government possesses all control over press content and public opinion (Swanson & Nimmo, 1990, pp. 149).

The formulation of the Social Responsibility Theory of the Press gave responsibility to the press to ensure protection for the people’s right to know about their government by supplying objective facts. Citizens primarily want their governor to secure changes in governmental practices to better their lives while expecting constant information from the press as these changes take place (Weber, 1999, pp. 38). The theory protects the most important faculty of the press which safeguards democracy; a free-flow of accurate and balanced information.

### **Making News: The Role of Reporters**

*“The press is a set of political organizations. Rather than being neutral relaters of information or scandal, journalists act as ‘professional politicians’.” -Max Weber*

To provide accurate and balanced information on politics and government, journalists must heavily rely on their political sources, as sources equally rely on journalists. This creates a “co-independent” relationship between the two groups. Journalists cannot perform their daily function for political news making without access to interviews, policy-news and personal comments from political sources. The press acts as a bridge in the political arena for elite politicians and the general public. To find out if journalists are in fact serving the public through their role as objective informants, the news outcome must be evaluated. Individuals in Governor Blanco’s organization are asked for their perspective on the elements that define an objective news story. A perception of a definition is given where a successful news story is measured by its objective delivery of information. This leads to the second major research question: RQ2: What makes a successful news story from the administration’s perspective?

Later in the paper, the interviews shed light on what makes a news story successful within the context of the case studies. But first, this section outlines journalists’ norms and routines and the part these play in making political news content. Understanding the local newsroom norms and routines, while studying press strategies in the governor’s office, will point out any press constraints, and opportunities, the governor may encounter while attempting to fulfill her public role and to deliver her message.

Citizens rely on the press to address political issues without skepticism or biased nature; they depend on objective news stories. At the state level, Beyle and Muchmore (1983, pp. 66) found that the mass media and state legislators, though specifics may vary, have the same general intentions for the press with regard to policy making. In other



words, both maintain a purpose to make news and cannot independently work without the other. They work as “co-independents.”

Kaniss (1991) stated one main reason the press utilizes official government sources on a day-to-day basis are because it depends on government officials as a source for primary information. The overall importance in the use of officials is that it complies with the journalists' routines in the newsroom to fill the daily “news hole” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2001).

There is one daily routine problem Beyle and Muchmore (1983, pp. 63) suggest governors have with state-media filling the daily “news hole.” The news bureaus are normally “disgracefully understaffed” and do not possess enough press members in the capitol to cover every issue. They must heavily rely on wire services for information about the governor in order to fill their daily “news hole.” The lack of staff may contribute to the newspaper not fulfilling its primary function of “public watchdog” because it does not have enough members of the press utilizing political sources (Beyle & Muchmore, 1983, pp. 64). This may prevent objective reporting or the inability to gather the governor’s position on an issue.

Michael Schudson reports in *The Sociology of News* (2003) that news sources ‘thirst’ for information from readily available news outlets, such as the governor’s office. The press substantially relies on routine government sources to fulfill their ‘news net’ needs. Reporters write to attract their geographical audiences and accomplish this by reporting on the daily activities of public officials (Bennett, 1971). A reporter’s duty is to act as a filter for the audience in an effort to make sense of the political world.

To a large extent, how a governor handles the making of news contributes to what role the press plays (Behn, 1991, pp. 95). The press plays a role in publicizing positions or programs, but if a governor is not careful, press stories can quickly become damaging instead of helpful (Behn, 1991, pp. 80). Later, the case studies will examine how Governor Blanco uses the press and to what extent she relies on press coverage.

News content matters in three various ways: 1). It forms a public through media cues; 2). It impacts the attention people give to issues, and; 3). It supplies readers enough information to form political opinions. In an effort to deliver accurate news to the public, the professional norms and routines of news organization requires editors and reporters to sort through “objects of interest” (Tuchman, 1971). As Reese and Ballinger (2001, pp. 641) explain, this process is defined as a “hierarchy of influences.” This incorporates the influences of individual reporters in cooperation with organizational routines to develop objective news content.

In *The Press Effect*, Kathleen Hall Jamieson stated that journalists help to “mold public understanding and opinion by deciding what is important and what may be ignored,” (Jamieson, 2003, pp. 1-2). News production within the organizational framework of newsrooms happens through journalistic norms and routines. Gaye Tuchman in her study, *Making News by Doing Work; Routinizing the Unexpected*, explained that the routines in the news process are put in place as an anchor for the production process. The daily routines for news stories are built everyday from editors’ developing guidelines (Kaniss, 1991, pp. 73).

Gate keeping and framing stories are two routines of the newsroom that lead to the development of political news content. Timothy Cook (1989) stated in *Making Laws*

*and Making News*, that any method by which the press frames issues is as important as whether or not the issue is covered. Studies demonstrate that journalists and other news workers do not merely select and combine information; rather they can be seen to literally “produce” the news in the context of organizational and other social frameworks (Iorio, 2004, pp. 78).

Lance Bennett in *News: the Politics of Illusion* (1983) stated that news content is built daily from the unending interactions between the individual reporter, politicians and citizen-consumers. Reporters routinely interact and visit with political sources to maintain themselves as an available source to those politicians in the case of a story. Cater (1959) suggested that journalists’ roles are to record government workings; in this effect, they participate in them as well. Reporters exercise their professionalism not only by telling stories but also by interacting with government officials and other public figures within news interviews and press conferences. William Faulkner discussed that the role of journalists is not just to stand on the sidelines; copybook in hand, and jotting down the ‘news’ of what is going on. He stated that they are playing a part in the business of American government.

Cook (1998) stated that reporters and politicians are constantly negotiating and renegotiating the process by which news is made; this event in turn permits the making of news an integral part of the legislative process. Reporters hold a responsibility to create objective news and must rely on their sources to do this. Political sources must equally rely on the press to carry fourth a message. How each group utilizes the other, and how these groups feed a “co-independent” relationship greatly impacts the news making process.

## **Making News: The Role of Policy Makers**

*“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.” - Abraham Lincoln.*

Policy makers understand that they cannot operate without the assistance of the press and various media outlets. It is evident that the press plays an important role in the political scene and can make or break policies or political agendas. In this section, we will discover the role that policy makers play in making news. It is important to understand how and why politicians use the media and compare this to the manner in which Governor Blanco’s administration uses the media.

Today’s technology grants the modern governor the ability to reach all constituents with one message. For a governor to keep pace with the needs of the media, it is imperative to maintain communication with the press and the citizens of the state on a daily basis (Weber, 1999, pp. 53). A governor must do this because the “news hole” must be filled and if it is not filled by the administration’s message, political effectiveness may be jeopardized. The governor is responsible for performing official duties, but foremost must manage the publicity they receive (Gray, 2004).

Through his or her leadership role, a governor can focus the attention of the people toward an issue; explain what it is, and then move the state toward an equitable solution. A governor’s leadership role involves serving the public by meeting constituency needs. Much of a governor’s activities are not visible to the general public, therefore, the manner in which a governor responds to certain issues in the press will influence how constituents adjust and perceive a governor’s overall performance level (Gray, 2004, pp. 194).

A former governor stated, “Image, which is filtered through or created by the media, is all important- not only in reelection but in the ability to govern,” (Beyle & Williams, 1972, pp. 62). Within past decades, governors have been found to hold regular press conferences and to have an open door policy for the press. In *Being Governor, the View from the Office*, Beyle and Muchmore stated governors need to build a solid relationship with the press corps so that their objectives and policies can be brought before the people of the state. The press may be a governor’s strongest ally or harshest critic when he or she must inform the public, good or bad, about important state government issues (Beyle & Williams, 1972, pp. 285).

The press depends on repetitive key sources in local politics, and this dependency gives policy-makers an opportunity to manipulate the press. Kaniss (1991) stated that manipulating the press could become very “agreeable” for a policy-maker’s agenda. The press understands that policy-makers hold a “monopoly” over newsworthy and pertinent information. By setting the tone and coordinating the effort, governors may crystallize the public’s attention to a problem and then obtain their acceptance of a solution (Behn, 1991, pp. 35). From a human relations standpoint, journalists manipulate sources and in turn sources manipulate journalists; these “co-independents” fulfill their need to make news and affect policy.

As a leader, the governor acts as a salesperson, and launches visible, statewide campaigns for support whenever agenda needs need to be met. The political aspect of governing makes communications important because every policy endeavor a governor pursues could be seen as a politically motivated scheme. Economic conditions, constitutional limits, and the intergovernmental system often constrain a governor’s

resources and powers to produce results. Within these constraints, it is sometimes difficult for a governor to have an opportunity to deliver those public services that the citizens most want and need (Behn, 1991, pp. 31). Governors may also be constrained by the expectations the public holds for the power the governor holds. Key initiatives a governor will try to pass may become overshadowed by an agenda constituents would prefer them to follow.

The governor is also the one who maintains the resources and capabilities to deliver a message statewide that may represent current policies to constituents (Behn, 1991, pp. 82). This involves the technological developments that a governor can take advantage of to reach his or her constituents. As a state and federal power, if the governor chooses to be consistently accessible to the media, press coverage can provide the governor an exceptionally valuable platform to shape public opinion and set the state's agenda (Weber, 1999, pp. 53).

Kaniss (1991, pp. 161) stated that local public officials are the most avid consumers of local news. In support of this fact, news coverage on policy issues will impact fellow legislators and the public. Political opposition understands that skillfully crafted policy plans will be useless if press coverage fails. Governors must be able to provide all answers for their constituents upon demand, but unless they communicate effectively to the press and public, they cannot be successful (Behn, pp. 91).

In an effort to gain popularity for projects or ideas, policy-makers learn success within the local news media. Kaniss (1998) stated most political personnel do not possess the potential for media savvy and this may hinder the public from learning about their political initiatives. A saturation of press coverage on issues can entice the public to

respond negatively or positively on a politician's policy implementation. Political actors compete with each other for access to news channels and for bias coverage in their favor. Politicians structure their tactics in an effort to draw attention away from their political contenders.

Public appearances and specialized leaks are strategies used by politicians to place "hints" to the media about a specific issue or to foster a positive political image for themselves and/or their agenda. Known as "trial balloons," this press strategy can play a tremendous role to foster positive affects for policy-makers. With the right amount of positive press coverage, a public official may experience success with policy agendas. "Trial balloons" garner feedback from the public and other officials and serve as an indication to the politician to retract or go forward with policy initiatives.

### **The Press/Politico Relationship**

*"I am inclined to think that almost, if not quite, the most important profession is that of newspapermen." - Theodore Roosevelt.*

The process for informing and addressing citizens is a need for both reporters and politicians. To be successful as two separate entities, press members and politicians must foster some type of relationship with each other. This leads us to the third research question: RQ3: How do administration officials characterize their relationship with the press? The research identifies if the relationship between the two groups helps to foster more successful news stories, or hinders this activity.

This section reveals that Franklin D. Roosevelt, around 1931, set the politico-press precedence by his personal interaction with his press corps. Seeing that the press and policy makers must work as one to produce news, it is questionable how they do this.

The following section explores the history of the relationship between government leaders and press personnel. This background will allow us to analyze if Governor Blanco fosters a relationship with her press corps, and if she does, what extent it assists her press strategy.

The press cannot function or relay political and governmental information to the people if there is no cooperation from their political sources. Individuals, who hold the power in federal and state executive branches, also hold the power of the information conveyed to the press. It is important to realize that changes made from Washington will trickle down and impact the decisions that governors will make (Behn, pp. 90). Studying presidents' interactions with the press to implement policies provides an understanding for this working relationship. The executive branch of federal government is the most consequential comparison to that of the executive branch of state government.

The development of the Social Responsibility Theory shifted the moral responsibility of the press to favor the public's right to know. Therefore, the barrier separating the press and political sources gradually fell. During Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, the tides of isolation between press and politicians ebbed. Pollard (1973) stated Roosevelt's personal communication with journalists set a precedent for personal relationships between the two groups. This change let political sources openly provide accessible information to the press and left little room for accusations or false information from the press.

Leading up to this change, before Roosevelt's first presidency in 1932, journalists were tepid about retrieving information from presidents. Journalists were shielded from immediate contact with presidents and the only interaction was ceremonial question and



answer sessions where the president dominated the angle of questioning. Their hesitations grew from their frustration with press strategies during the presidencies of Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover. Woodrow Wilson dropped press conferences altogether to evade embarrassing questions when America entered WWI, and Herbert Hoover abandoned the press to avoid worsening already strained relationships. Franklin D. Roosevelt revamped the relationship between the president and the press following his predecessors' failed news management. His semi-weekly press conferences allowed the press corps more frequent and concentrated personal interaction.

This began the concept of “personal journalism,” where journalists began to receive hands-on and one-on-one attention from presidents (Pollard, 1973). Roosevelt defined a “give and take” between a president and his press correspondents. The novelty behind “personal journalism” is a historical landmark for both journalists and policy-makers and is still employed in the news making process today (Juergens, 1981).

One president used his relationship with reporter Turner Catledge, the executive editor of the *Times*, to accompany his press strategy. President John F. Kennedy, a former reporter for Hearst's International News Service, persuaded Catledge to postpone publication about a story on the Bay of Pigs until after landing in Cuba. Kennedy's strategy proved to be unsuccessful timing; for he admitted later that if the information would have been published sooner, the invasion would have been vetoed. The event did mark a success for the press as it proved it was an institution for accountability and credibility. Especially, since several times thereafter, Kennedy expressed apologies to Catledge and said, “If you had printed more about the operation sooner, you would have saved us from a colossal mistake,” (Rivers, 1982, pp.12).

Juergens (1996) explained Lyndon B. Johnson's interaction with the media was sporadic and manipulative, and inevitably led to his failure with the press. He closed the channels of communications with the press corps without developing an open relationship with them. Tired of jumping through Johnson's obstacles to permit the "free flow" of information, the press regarded Johnson's news strategies as lies. Johnson intentionally did not allow information about his administration to pass by the press so that his decisions would pass legislation without public debate or controversy. Pollard (1973) stated that Johnson's failed press relations might have been a pivotal element that cost him a second term as president.

Many conscientious governors have failed to realize the leadership potential they possess with successful news stories. Times have changed, but the governor used to be the only legislator in the state exposed to the probable tools of management the press can provide for a successful office term (Zimmerman, 1970, pp. 119). Governor John Carlin, Governor of Kansas from 1979-1987, stated that in carrying out the duties of governor, an individual primarily serves two roles: administrator and leader. Both of these roles require the ability of the governor and the staff to set priorities, to make decisions quickly and to create a press plan for carrying them out.

Governor Carlin states that in his experience as governor, a key factor in being successful is the ability to communicate and to make effective use of information supplied by others. This means a governor must possess qualities and desires to expose their messages through the press medium. Effectively using communication strategies as governor can fulfill the role as governor (Behn, 1991, pp.79). If every one staff member in the governor's office is consistent with their responses to the press and to concerned

citizens, the likelihood is greater that a governor will win the public's confidence in the decision and the problem will more likely be addressed effectively (Behn, 1991). This is because the message stays relatively consistent in the organization and is easily transmitted to the public.

## **CHAPTER 2 METHODS**

This paper examines the inner workings of Governor Blanco's press management strategies. This research utilizes in-depth studies of a journalists' perspective of Governor Blanco's press strategies in relation to the perspectives from the political sources within the governor's organization. This paper will use a qualitative research design, including in-depth interviews, participant observation and case studies. The qualitative research design is a method communication researchers use to understand how procedures within the organization develop, and how, in practice, things could be changed for the better (Iorio, 2004, pp. 79).

The thesis will examine Governor Blanco's press strategies through qualitative research methods to form a better understanding of press strategies. The interviews and observations describe, in detail, a behind-the-scenes look into a governor's press strategies. This type of qualitative research provides the advantage of an in-depth investigation to better understand processes based on a relatively small number of interviews and case studies.

Qualitative Research is a type of methodology that delivers an analysis of an organization by studying it from the inside. The in-depth interviews were conducted with local media sources and key policy makers within the Executive Branch of the Louisiana government. Data from the in-depth interviews came from a natural setting within the Office of the Governor. The research supplements the three case studies and recognizes phenomena within everyday contexts (interaction between policy-makers and media), and uncovers structural interrelations with other phenomena and contexts (a definition of a successful press strategy and news story).

Over a period of five months, research was collected for this study from in-depth interviews with Governor Blanco's staff members and with press corps members. The research was conducted, at the time, when I held a position as an intern in the Governor's Press Office. Leading up to and during the period of interviews, approximately nine months of participatory observation was conducted within the governor's administration. Included in the observations were events the governor attended such as bill signings, press conferences, budget meetings, committee meetings and photo opportunities.

The interviews and observations in the case studies will be used to define the success of Governor Blanco's press strategies. The in-depth interviews uncover what the governor's administration and press members define as a successful media strategy. The research will also find how the press self-defines success as they report on Governor Blanco's activities. The case studies will reveal which of the governor's issues the press were involved with and which ones they were not, and most importantly, how they were involved.

### **Case Studies**

Case Studies are defined as qualitative research because of the rich details they provide. To produce a case study is to arrive at a definition and discover a type of system, which can be applied or related to a larger system, such as; studying the routines inside the Blanco administration, analyzing them and then applying them to a larger situation. This analysis from this thesis comes out of studying the natural routines within the governor's office and discovering a summary and conclusion from the analysis. A case

study performs not only an ‘analysis,’ of a system or event, but also provides analysis of an outcome.

Each of the case study outcomes varied depending on what type of press strategy was utilized. The outcomes also varied by how much information was given to the press through the governor’s administration. The issues, for example Union Tank Car, were studied because of the tremendous amount of press each generated. Therefore, the amount of publicity was taken into consideration by the administration as they followed through with various press strategies. An outcome is a general reinterpretation of the issue using evidence from research on the subject. This type of qualitative study is a structured analysis where its elements, procedures and research steps are open, recorded and easily argued. The press strategies that the administration used reflected and defended the administration’s initiatives in regard to the high volume of press coverage.

## **Interviews**

The types of interviews used for in-depth research are ‘non-structured’ and ‘purposive’ interviews. ‘Non-structured’ interviews are impromptu conversations that have no set appointment with the interviewee and are casual conversations at any location within the Louisiana capital building. ‘Purposive’ interviews are the most thought-out and time-sensitive interviews, were pre-arranged and followed a set of interview questions. Both of the types of interviews were conducted with members of the governor’s staff and members of the press corps.

The interview questions were sent to each interviewee prior to the interview date to prepare them for the questions. This was not originally part of the interview protocol, but after several requests made by interviewees early on in the research process, it was

implemented into the interview protocol. The questionnaire contained seven questions regarding a definition for the governor's press strategy, a definition for a successful news story, an analysis of issues and a definition for a press/politico relationship. The questions followed an open-ended question format. However, the questions were not asked in the same order for each interview. Random questioning order helped the interviewees describe in detail each response to each question. The routine of questioning also allowed them greater freedom to pursue any type of topic they wanted to discuss. It provided richer detail for events and definitions because they did not feel compelled to stick to a specific format of questions. However, the same questions were asked in each interview to ensure consistency in the research.

The first part of this section asks the members of the governor's office and press corps to define Governor Blanco's press strategy, and what makes a strategy successful or unsuccessful. The research conclusions compare the analysis of governor's press strategy to the press strategy defined by this paper's literature review. Conclusions developed from the perceptions of individuals within the administration identify that the governor's press strategies create successful or unsuccessful local press coverage.

The interviewee's perceptions' about how reporters use information that is supplied from the governors office identifies if they believe reporters fulfill their duty to objective reporting. The findings give future political journalists an understanding of the expectations of accurate news coverage within an executive branch of government. From finding what the administration looks for in news stories, the conclusions may assist journalists in their norms and routines for political news coverage.

Lastly, administration and press subjects were asked to describe their relationships with each other, and whether the relationship helps or hurts the everyday process of making news and making policy. This is an area that has been understudied and serves as exploration for future research. The cases used in this section are different from one another in the manner the administration did or did not utilize the press. The Saints negotiation and Union Tanks Car case studies analyze the governor's proactive use of the media while the Executive Order for non-discrimination against gays and lesbians examine the administration's reactive press strategy. The conclusions compare when the governor pursues the press to when she does not. The outcome provides a look into how a governor can choose to use the media as part of their press strategy and when they choose not to.

Research was conducted primarily inside the administration to present a focused analysis for the governor's press strategies. The in-depth interviews and participatory observation in the governor's office took place from June 2004 to March 2005.

### **Selection of Respondents**

The main interviewees for the research are Louisiana Executive State officials in the Governor's Office. These interviewees, within the governor's staff, were chosen as wide representations for the many departments within the governor's office. They are classified as the Senior Staff and staff members and include the Communications Director, the Policy Speech Writer, the Governor's Executive Assistant, the Governor's Scheduler, the Assistant Press Secretary, and a Policy Analyst. Bob Mann, the Communications Director for the governor, was chosen for his inside access to the daily press strategies. Paine Gowen, the Governor's Executive Assistant, was interviewed for



her close, personal interaction with the governor on a daily basis. Erin Mosely was chosen to interview for her responsibility over the governor's daily schedule and personal interaction with the governor. Megan Bel, a Policy Analyst in the governor's office, was chosen as an individual who does not have daily contact with the governor's press strategies, but maintains detailed knowledge about how press operations function within the governor's office. Melissa McCormick, the Assistant Press Secretary, uncovered insider information for each issue and resolved step-by-step actions involved with the press strategies.

Chris Frink worked for the *Advocate* for nine years and covered the Blanco administration as a reporter for nine months. He was then hired as the governor's policy speechwriter. His interviews gave a realistic measurement for how successful the governor's press strategies were within the press. His interviews also assisted in analyzing the governor's press strategies from a reporter's position when he covered the governor's issues as a reporter.

The one reporter interviewed was John Hill, a reporter for *Gannett News*. Hill was interviewed because of the close and personal affiliation he maintains with the governor. His comments provide a detailed view of how the press conveys the governor's issues to the public. Because of the position many of his columns take on the governor, he may be seen as pro-administration.

Different types of interviews were used depending on the interviewee and their availability to interview. For instance, Frink's schedule changed on a daily basis. To accommodate his schedule, he was interviewed under the more casual terms of the 'non-structured' interviews. This flexibility allowed a 20-30 minute walk-in

conversation/interview. The difference is that the ‘purposive’ interviews were scheduled three to six weeks prior to the interview date. Bob Mann’s interview was scheduled approximately four weeks prior to the interview, but lasted close to 100 minutes.

### **Participatory Observation/Field Notes**

Participatory Observation allows an individual outside a natural setting to enter and observe the setting without interrupting natural occurrences. The primary purpose for this type of observation is to analyze an environment and develop conclusions for how it can be made better or more efficient. It places the researcher inside the organization so they may draw conclusions from the environment without disrupting the natural routines.

This type of observation is a process of making the unfamiliar familiar, and vice versa, from researching the social environment to ‘uncover’ or ‘unmask’ hidden forces at work in the situation. “Having been there” is what truly distinguishes the difference between qualitative and quantitative research findings (Yin, 1994). This research acted as secondary data to the interviews and was personal observation of the daily interactions between the press and the governor’s press office. This was a very important part of the research because it allowed for research observation in an environment without disrupting a natural routine. Observation in this environment granted information that would not otherwise have been collected.

The purpose of fieldwork within a qualitative frame is to produce a first person account of research experiences. This type of research is set in a natural setting where the researcher is the primary tool for investigation. Field notes are intended to invite the researcher to examine issues from the field to reflect on the relationship between theory and research methods. As a researcher using field notes, every experience on a daily or

weekly basis that highlighted the main aspects of the office experience was recorded. It includes the details of the daily interactions between the press and the governor's press office.

Daily field notes account for specific activities within the governor's office such as inner-office discussions concerning press issues, the formation of responses made from the governor and crisis management issues. Also, the activities of the governor at specific meetings, press conferences, press events and photo ops were recorded as research. Brief notes detail each event and provide background for specific issues that are discussed in each case study. Observation within the governor's office gave the opportunity to gather an abundance of inside information that a researcher who was not in the office would have not gained.

The strategies and techniques observed and recorded provided explicit data for the case studies. They provided a hands-on understanding on the important press issues that happen on a daily basis within an executive branch of government. This type of detail gave familiarity to each issue and made it easy to define when a press strategy was used for certain situations.

### **Recording Interviews**

To record the interviews, the researcher set up a hand-held voice recorder directly next to the interviewee. During each interview, the researcher and the interviewee were positioned between one to five feet from one another, usually in chairs. Once the interview began, the recorder was turned to record mode and the interviewer asked questions from the seven protocol questions. Throughout each interview, extensive and thorough notes were taken to supplement and later compared to the voice recordings.

Each interview was a one-on-one interview conducted in a closed location between the interviewee and researcher. The notes during each interview were written on the prepared questionnaire or blank sheet of paper. After each interview was complete, the notes were transferred to typed form as soon as possible.

### **Researching Newspapers**

The sole purpose for researching newspaper content for this study was to provide an accurate background for the issues discussed in each case study. A few of the issues took place before the participatory observation. To gain information on the actual accounts for each issue, newspaper clips were screened. Newspapers screened were newspapers from all over the state of Louisiana and included all weeklies within every parish. This was not for content analysis, it was to gain information about the details of each issue and then summarize the details in the case studies. This also assisted for background research on the specific issues that provided preparation for the interviewer before each interview, including question preparation.

The news clips used to research were distributed by The Metro News Clipping Bureau, which provided 20-90 daily news clips to the press office. The articles chosen to research pertained to the case study issues regarding The Saints negotiation, the Executive Order on non-discrimination and Union Tank Car. The news clips provided a time-line for information needed for the case studies and ample objective information. This was a thorough method to account for the background for the case studies.

The clips are scanned and archived into the Press Office Intern computer by their respective categories. The categories relate to their date, subject and newspaper title. The articles are saved on the computer desktop in separate “folders” for the months they were

published. After the user has clicked into a monthly folder, they will see a newspaper code (or abbreviation), the date the article was published and the headline of the article. For instance, an article placed in The Alexandria Town Talk on March 13, 2004 with a headline that reads, “Who is the most powerful man in Louisiana,” will be displayed as: “ATT-031304- Who is the most powerful man in La?” The user can click on the article and read a scanned version or print out a tangible copy. This was an organized and resourceful routine established while background research was collected for each case study.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH- GOVERNOR KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO**

In January 2004, Kathleen Babineaux Blanco became the first woman inaugurated as the Governor of Louisiana. She highlighted economic development, healthcare, education and ethics in her inaugural address as the focus for her administration. Reporters and the administration regarded events within these core issues as “hot-button” issues. These issues produced a high amount of attention from capitol bureau reporters within the governor’s first year in office. Three of these events were researched to examine the success of Governor Blanco’s press strategies. These were; The NFL Saints issue, the Executive Order on non-discrimination against gays and lesbians and the Union Tank Car (UTC) development.

The Union Tank Car and NFL Saints negotiation case studies were chosen for the insurmountable press attention the governor received on them in one year. For instance, the success of Union Tank Car is continuously repeated in most of the governor’s speeches and touted by reporters in most economic development news stories. The UTC deal was the governor’s first big economic endeavor in office and delivers continuous positive press for her and her administration. The Saints negotiation was chosen to represent how successful a governor can be when negotiating an economic initiative.

The second case study, the governor’s Executive Order on non-discrimination, is an example of a defensive press strategy on the executive level. It was implemented as part of the governor’s policy agenda but demonstrated how press coverage can become negative in light of political opposition. The Blanco administration sought limited coverage when the Executive Order was released. The order triggered a negative response in news stories which prompted the administration to utilize a press strategy in

order to defend their initiatives. The defense grew from accusations from the governor's political opponent who used the press to inspire opposition to the Executive Order.

For each case, a detailed background is provided as a time-line for when and how the press entered as a factor in the issue. Case background was researched through field notes conducted from participatory observation. Each case study is different from the next with regard to when the media was used, how often, or if at all. Research responses include how the press utilizes the governor's information and how the governor's office coordinates with the press.

The results for the case studies demonstrate that the Union Tank Car initiative was covered positively because reporters who cover economic development stories continuously tout the governor's achievements in this area. Union Tank Car is an example of the press portraying the governor implementing successful economic initiatives and bringing a higher standard of business into the state of Louisiana.

The Executive Order on non-discrimination was an issue that formed negative political attention to a policy endeavor. The Blanco administration did not demonstrate an efficient press strategy in two ways; 1). When the order was released, the governor was inaccessible to the media which suggested the administration wanted distance from the issue; 2). The governor delivered little publicly about the issue to avoid supporting either side, making it appear she may not have been confident in her decision.

Members of the administration and the one reporter's perceptions on the NFL Saints case study represent how constituents can support an agenda issue whenever a governor successfully manages their message to the press. The governor does not utilize the press during confidential meetings between her administration and the Saints, but

does, however, use the press after meetings to explain her steadfast position on the issue. Reporters who cover the Saints and those who cover the governor began covering the issue in favor of the governor's initiatives. This coverage produced perceptions from the governor's staff that there was favorable public opinion toward the governor's incentives in the Saints deal.

### **Definition of Governor Blanco's Press Strategy**

The following definition on Governor Blanco's press strategy derived out of perceptions from her staff members. Many staff members were interviewed to gather a broad perception on the way a press strategy is formed and how it is used. Speaking to not only the individuals that deal with the press but to those who view the process from the inside maintained a balanced view about the governor's strategies. It developed a clear picture on where a press strategy is developed in the Executive Branch.

Bob Mann, the Communications Director for the governor, described a protocol for the governor's senior staff meetings. Whenever the staff anticipates there will be press coverage about a high profile issue, Mann said that the governor encourages all of her staff members to inject their opinions. "She really believes in keeping it very open for anyone to say anything. Even when someone is not highly involved in a certain area that is being discussed, she always wants to hear what we have to say about it." Mann describes the governor's style with her staff for press consultation as "very open."

Senior Staff meetings include the governor and meet about once a week and may meet additional days if an issue is of high importance. Mann said, "We will spend about two hours or more in senior staff meetings and during this time we all discuss what we believe should happen with the press." Mann explained this is so that everyone may



anticipate how things are going to sound and look in the press. “These meetings are important because the governor always wants to know what is going on in every department; she likes to be completely informed about everything.”

The governor utilizes the function of the meetings to keep her entire staff on the same page with every issue. The NGA handbook stated that in order for a governor’s press strategy to be effective, it must be successful first within the administration. The members of senior staff meet often to formulate a specific message about each issue and how the issue will be translated to the press. Governor Blanco keeps her staff members informed on the administration’s position for every issue, clarifying within the administration the message before it is exposed to the media.

Gowen, the governor’s Executive Assistant, said that it is very important the governor’s office reaches out to the press whenever there is policy implementation. This is so that the governor and her administration can keep reporters abreast of her issues. When asked if the governor was opposed to using the media when she wanted to get her message out, Gowen said no. She said the governor advocates the use of the media, and agrees with the way that her press department handles the media.

Erin Mosely, the governor’s Executive Scheduler said, “The governor likes the way that her press office works. She is trying to change Louisiana and believes the press plays a big role in getting her message out to her constituents.” Mosely stated that the governor agrees with how her press department works by the immediate attention they devote to the press. Mosely’s perception for why the governor continuously keeps the media in mind is because the governor understands the importance reporters have to policy and issues within her agenda.

Several interviewees commented Governor Blanco's savvy in using the media is that she understands when and when not to use the press. The NGA handbook for governors noted that a successful governor recognizes the importance of the press. These governors know that the press can help communicate a message and also enhance constituents understanding of their policies (Behn, 1991). "She is very smart when it comes to the press, she knows there are certain times she does not need media attention to try to get her message out," said Gowen.

Chris Frink, a former Advocate journalist and the present Policy Speech Writer for the governor, believes that it is very important to predict how events will be portrayed within the media. He commented how staff meetings help create a consistent message within the organization. The better and more constant the message inside the organization the easier it is for the reporters to get the information and keep with a message consistent with that of the governor.

Frink explained that the administration, to maintain a successful press strategy, should predict possible press spins for issues, meaning ways reporters may misinterpret a story. In order to counteract a negative spin in a reporter's story, all aspects of the issue must be considered. Frink stated, "The best understanding about a press strategy within the governor's administration is to understand that, we can not manage the media, we can only manage the message." Managing the message within the administration and to the press means dictating clearly and consistently to the press the position the administration has for each issue. If questions to issues are predicted ahead of time through a press strategy, questions from reporters may be anticipated, which allows the governor's staff to manipulate the press outcome.

The case studies in this paper display several different scenarios how Governor Blanco's administration managed a specific message in the media. Such as in UTC the message was that the state is open for business and in the Saints issue the message was that the administration cannot be bullied and would not give more of taxpayer's money to the Saints. Each of the issues was different by topic and outcome, but each was analyzed to examine in detail the governor's press strategy. The press strategies, defined by staff perception, outlined the messages that were translated to the press. By studying these different messages, accuracy within news content was determined.

Frink explained that Bob Mann works very hard in the administration to make sure that everyone in every area of the governor's administration is saying the same thing. "Bob Mann has all the communication folks in the governor's office together working with the same message within the administration," said Frink. Mann advocates a "team message" within the governor's administration. A non-existent press strategy among the cabinet secretaries and staff members can lead to confusion. Messages may become re-interpreted into the media if not clearly explained, and results in a failed press strategy. If the messages become misinterpreted by reporters, the governor's initiatives are misreported to the public and will sink policy intentions.

Megan Bel, Policy Analysts for the governor, perceived that the governor's Press Office plays a big role in delivering the governor's message. "A politically savvy press team is important for a public official because good press people can frame issues as well as they want in the manner that voters in Louisiana understand them," said Bel. She explained a successful press strategy explicitly and routinely defines issues the governor is involved with. "Constituents can't understand their importance or potential impact

these issues may present to their lives. So, it is important that the governor's press office use the press to manipulate the governor's message to the people."

John Hill, a capital bureau reporter for the Gannett, supplied his position when he receives a message as a member of the press. He thought that it helped the press to maintain consistency with their news stories whenever the administration stuck with the same message. Hill said, "Her administration is controlling her message, they are scripting everything for her. The overall control is a tool and it is good for her. When she is following a text, she never stammers. So, it results in a good speech."

Frink recalled when he was a bureau reporter that Governor Blanco would let her staff relay her message if she was not absolutely clear on it. "When I would cover press events, other reporters and I would 'mug' the governor immediately after she finished a public event. When we would ask her about something totally off the subject, if she didn't know the answer she would automatically turn to someone in her administration to get us the answer."

Frink explained, as a reporter, message consistency within the staff did make it easier to report issues. Governor Blanco manages her message by successfully managing her staff. Mann said that the governor manages her staff by letting the senior staff in on all the issues. "She finds the best person and then lets them do their job. She believes in giving them the freedom and authority to do their job," he said.

As the governor's state powers have grown over the past few decades, so has their need to manage the media. Governors are in charge of an enormous bureaucracy, which makes it necessary for them to employ a large staff. Managing the message within a large staff can cause confusion, and is hard to do. Governor Blanco has successfully managed

her staff so that they are aware how effective the press is to her policies and initiatives. Having the ability to manage a message within a staff is a part of managing a media strategy. This too, imparts, assists the governor so that she also is aware of the messages surrounding each issue.

The governor is a highly visible actor in the state system; few other politicians draw comparable media attention. Therefore, from the high volume of attention from reporters, the governor must be as accessible as possible for public events. Frink said the governor's press events can provide two or sometimes three stories if reporters attend. Public events are efficient for governors to transmit several messages all at once to the media on a range of topics. The events are a special accessibility for the governor to shape public opinion and set an agenda, utilizing statewide media coverage. The governor and her staff can use the public event as a forum for press questioning. If the governor has several staff members accompanying her to the event, a range of issues can be dealt with. Certain staff members are specialized in different areas, such as policy or economic development, and may provide clarification for journalists' questions.

Hill explained, as a reporter, Governor Blanco's administration holds an abundant amount of control over her accessibility, and that sometimes the press must attend her events just to get access to her. "A lot of times, the press will have to go to events to get information about other stories. We have to do this because at times it is so hard to get approval for our media requests." Hill said in regard to Governor Blanco's press strategy, "Her administration controls access to her from the media more than any other governor I've ever seen."

However, staff members who are closely involved in the governor's every day routines believe that the press maintains most of the governor's time. The governor's Executive Assistant perceives that the press receives, at times, too much accessibility to the governor. "The governor is always accessible to the press. The more that we give them time with her, the more that they want, so it is kind a like a catch 22." Gowen said.

The governor, as a state power, if she chooses to be accessible to the media, can, and will, gain very effective public relations for her agenda. Governor Blanco chooses to use the press in her everyday governing routine. Mosely said that the administration makes a real effort for the governor to be accessible to journalists all the time. She is certain that nine times out of ten, the media gets their interview requests with the governor.

Mosely said, "We know we are spoiling them, we think they get too much access to her (the governor). For instance a reporter from one of the major newspapers called the other week asking for the governor's public schedule. When we told her she had an event on one day she said, 'She's only scheduled for one event this week, that's it?'"

When asked if too much accessibility may have a negative effect, Gowen said that too much makes the media want her more and more. She said, "It's like the old saying, you can never get too much of a good thing. We spoil reporters so much and if they don't get as much attention from the governor, it may lead into bad coverage for her."

When asked specifically what kind of bad coverage the governor may receive, Gowen explained how she can always tell when a reporter is frustrated. "If they didn't get what they wanted from her, her time or her comment, you can tell in the tone of their news story. For the general people who maybe don't pay attention all the time to that

specific reporter's writing style, they may not catch it. But for us on the inside, we know." What reporters don't get at times is a comment or a statement on an issue. To combat the void, the press office will supply another member of the administration to the reporter for a comment or a statement.

The press cannot function or relay the governor's plans without using her as a political source. The NGA handbook stated that it is a successful measure to be overly accessible for the media's needs because providing too much information can never be enough. It is perceived by her administration that Governor Blanco's over-accessibility displays that she understands the power her administration holds and the power the press holds for her message.

The governor's constant interaction with the media serves her agenda. Gowen said, "The more the public perceives that she's doing a good job or even a bad job, they know that she is out there working, or that at least she's trying. The more we reach out to the press, the better it will reflect on her," said Gowen.

Melissa McCormick, Assistant Press Secretary for the governor, said that the press office uses the media to reinforce the governor's message. "One of the biggest platform issues that the governor talked about in her gubernatorial speeches was economic development, economic development. Now, all you ever see in headlines in newspapers is how the governor wants to bring our children home to jobs here. She's touting her achievements for bringing more jobs to Louisiana by displaying her successful economic developments. It is reinforcing her message every time the press reports it; it's over redundant, and that's good."

The political aspect of governing makes it important to communicate intentions clearly because it is easy for initiatives to become misconstrued. Gowen said that a successful press strategy should be over-redundant to accentuate the governor's issues. She said, "We need to highlight the governor and her administration as much as possible. Anytime she does something good, we need to get that out as fast as possible to the press." This helps the governor's agenda by reinforcing the impact she has on the state.

McCormick cited an example for when the governor's Press Office used the media to disseminate a successful policy initiative. During the governor's first legislative session in 2004, she passed a law eliminating business taxes. Immediately, the press office made personal telephone calls to the press to "leak" out what the administration accomplished and what the intent would be for the law. McCormick said, "We don't intentionally leak in our press office or administration, but we use our resources to let the press know about things."

In another example, in March 2005, after the governor made a trip to Cuba to support trade incentives with the communist country, local media were personally notified when the governor would arrive back in the states. Security in Cuba made the governor unattainable to the Louisiana press. When Denise Bottcher, the governor's Press Secretary, was five hours away from New Orleans with the governor, she called the governor's press office. Bottcher instructed the governor's Deputy Press Secretary and Assistant Press Secretary to immediately notify the local press the time and place the governor would arrive in the states. Bottcher wanted to give the press access to the governor as soon as possible to signify the governor was open for comment about her trip to Cuba.



The data from the interviews prove that individuals throughout the governor's administration are aware of Governor Blanco's press strategies. Senior staff members are involved with creating the message that is carried to the press within a press strategy. The governor maintains an internal openness with her staff members about her message. Open communication is a successful tool the administration uses when informing media about the governor's endeavors. Reporters complied that it is easier and effective to produce objective and factual news stories whenever there is a consistent message about each topic.

The consistency in the message from the administration to the press is a big part of the governor's press strategy. Frink commented that if he were covering a press event as a reporter, he would get one message about a specific issue. If the governor could not answer a press question, she would turn to one or two of her staff members who would be prepared with the same answer. Staff members must maintain a consistent message to carry out a successful press strategy. If the governor's staff is consistent in their responses to the press and the public, the governor may win credibility from the press.

To summarize this section, Governor Blanco maintains a high level of daily contact with the media. She maintains a status of "easy accessibility" within her staff and proactively pursues this status. The governor maintains her messages to the press in that; 1). She favors open communication with the press by keeping the lines of communication consistently open; 2). She strategizes and determines situations where press utilization is vital to the policy process and situations where press involvement is not necessary until a final decision by her administration has been met. The press can be a strong ally or a big source of frustration for a governor. The manner the governor handles the making of

news contributes greatly to the role that the press plays. She overextends her availability to the press because she is aware the power the press has on her message, but the governor also controls the development of her message to reporters by directing her position about a policy to the press.

### **Inside the Administration: What Is a Successful News Story?**

It is important to define what makes a news story successful from the governor's administration's perspective. When the expectation for a successful news story is recognized, the governor's staff understands how to construct their message in line with media format. McCormick said, "There are several ways that you can tell if the press is successfully reporting the governor's message. One really good example that they are successful is that right now, the governor's approval ratings in office are the highest a governor in Louisiana has ever gotten." Even though at times the ratings are affected by other factors, McCormick explained that the numbers signify that the governor's constituents are very impressed with how she is doing.

"I think that it is a good news story when it's all factual," Mosely said she can identify, what she perceives to be, a successful news story if the reporter delivered the truth. Factual news interpretation means reporters have accurately utilized the information from the administration. Interviewees in the governor's office perceived a news story is successful when it is unbiased and maintains no personal perspective within the content. Factual news stories are a product of objective reporting where reporters fulfill their duty as the Fourth Branch of Government. Delivering objective news does not mean reporters must report word for word what the administration reports to them.

Mann explained this further by saying, “I expect them (the press) to act as conduit for public opinion. But, they have the right to see it another way, and that is the right that the press has. They are free to deliver the information in whatever way they see fit.”

When the administration performs the duties necessary to facilitate media demands, the press strategy is a success. No matter the tone of the story, positive or negative, if the facts the administration provided are reported accurately, both sides are successful. The perception of individuals within the administration for a successful news story is one fueled by objectivity and accurate facts. Reporters are successful when they provide accurate information, thus making the governor successful with her media strategies.

If the governor or her staff unknowingly provides inaccurate or questionable information to the press, the administration falters. Inaccurate information causes a chain reaction within the administration and ultimately makes the administration, as a whole, appear distrustful. If and when the press reports the inaccuracy, with consideration for their obligation to report the facts, staff members perceive reporters are correct.

Reporters rely on their political sources for accurate information. Whenever this information is wrong, it is a reporter’s duty to report it as it was told to them. A word for word documented news story is a success for journalists; this holds true even when their source was inaccurate. Even as reporters report inaccurate facts to the public that were quoted from sources, they perform the function as the Fourth Branch of Government.

Frink detailed several examples when reporters believe they have delivered a successful news story. For instance, he explained, that *The Advocate* insists on talking to the principal lead in the story, they don’t settle for the spokesperson. Principal sources quoted in the story makes the reporter appear to readers as more credible because they

have gone to the primary source for information. This method helps build the paper and the reporter's credibility. "Our administration keeps her (the governor) out in the public eye so much that *The Advocate* can always get her and not a spokesperson. This keeps them happy because they are doing their jobs properly, plus it effectively gets our message out there." This is a positive standard for reporters because they gain factual information when it is provided directly from a source. Successful governors understand that reporters must fill the everyday 'news net' and know that they must be available to facilitate this need.

The way a reporter can be successful in writing a story is to first determine what facts will provide to constituents. Hill said, "Right off the bat, before a reporter writes a story, they must think why this would be an interesting story. We have a very hard job because we have to take the information our sources give to us, analyze it and then spit it back out into the press." A reporter's primary role is to act as a filter between the source and the audience to make sense of the political world. Citizens must rely on journalists to deliver objective and factual political news stories in order to foster individual's political opinions.

Bel expressed that journalists play a specific role in news making in that she expects a successful news story to be accurate, balanced and fair. "It is such a big deal, especially for government and policy information such as this, for the media to get it right. The media is the only outlet that the public reads or has access to for correct information about the government. This is their responsibility to voters." Stating correct information is information on where an issues stands within the governor's agenda and

the intentions the administration has for the issue. Journalists help to mold public opinion and are responsible for doing so with an objective tone.

“A good reporter will feel like they have successfully done their job as a reporter whenever they deliver accurate, organized and well-delivered information,” said Frink. He said that reporters can monitor the success of their stories by the feedback that they receive. “If reporters do a good job reporting the details correctly as the administration has delivered it to journalists, Denise the Press Secretary, sometimes will mention it to them.” This tactic is incorporated into a successful press strategy. The administration must follow the governor’s story line everyday in the press and report inaccuracies that concern the governor’s initiatives.

Mann said in order for the press to be successful in their coverage, the governor’s administration has to work hard to make the statement simple. “I have no complaints how the press covers the governor-I think that they do very well. But for them to continue to do well, we as an administration must make sure that there is no manipulation to a story or no possible way the press could get it misconstrued.” In that effect, for an administration to defend itself against falsification in print press, staff members must strive to deliver a consistent message.

“Our office is really good about making sure that the press prints factual information on a daily basis. If they don’t do this, we call them out on it,” Gowen explained. The governor’s office pays a good amount of attention to what reporters say about Governor Blanco and her issues. “If she (the governor) looks at an article, and the reporter got it wrong and she feels very strongly about it, she will do something.” Gowen described one situation where the governor was so frustrated with an article that she

picked up the phone and called the reporter to tell them how she felt. “But, at the same time, she also told the reporter that when they needed information in the future, she would do whatever she could for them,” said Gowen.

Mosely said, “There have been times when I am standing right next to the governor when she gives a statement or an interview to a press member. I know what I have heard the governor say to the reporter, but when the story comes out, they have gotten the facts or other things wrong.” Mosely said that this is one way reporters are unsuccessful with their jobs. Stories that are misreported can be very damaging within an administration, so precautions must be taken to make sure public facts reported correctly by the press. Misreported information may damage the public’s perception of an initiative and may cause public disfavor to the administration.

The governor and her administration routinely check newspapers for inaccuracies as a way to manage the message that goes out to constituents. This is a very proactive and positive way to maintain consistency in the press. When managing the message, the last but most important step is to ensure accuracy in the final news story. Most of the work from the administration to deliver accuracy to reporters is done while the story is being developed by the reporter. Checking the final product ensures that reporters have relayed the general facts about the issue in an objective tone. NGA stated checking on the accuracy of news articles is an important step in a governor’s media strategy.

Mosely explained that there is a difference between negative news and incorrect news. “I’m very critical about what the governor says. If I am at an event with her and I hear her say something incorrect, I’ll think, ‘oh that’s not good because it will get reported like that.’ That, I don’t get mad at; reporters are just doing what they are

supposed to be doing. It will be wrong on the governor's part, but they are doing their job as reporters. But if they report on things incorrectly and deliver a wrong fact, that's a disservice to constituents."

"Some reporters think that they have to be successful or they are doing a good job reporting a story if they get a 'gotcha' story," said Frink. But from his experience writing news, he understands that every reporter doesn't need to go searching for the 'gotcha story' to become a bigger reporter or more respected in his field. He did comment, although, that when a 'gotcha story' comes to a reporter it is because they are a successful reporter.

Bel said that she gets weary of news stories that maintain this 'gotcha' tone and reading articles that do not equally represent both sides of an issue. "I tend to ignore articles that do not have both sides of the issue represented. If the press is ignoring both sides in the article, do not have a balance of facts and opinions or multiple sources, they have already lost credibility for me. I will stop reading the article," she said.

There has not been much research on capitol bureau reporting. What has been found is usually they are so understaffed that there are not enough reporters to cover all the events. This may lead to negative news reporting because editors may have to fill in information to supply their "news hole." They may be supplied with the information about the governor's daily activities, but if there are not enough reporters to get sources for every story, the news coverage may be lacking.

Reading negative news coverage over several years by working on the inside of politics made Gowen skeptical of media. She said, "If the press gets the administration's position on an issue, I feel like they do it on purpose." When asked why they might do

this purposively, she replied, “I think that they will do it to meet their own agenda; they make it a bigger story than it is in order to sell more newspapers. Of course, when they do this, I don’t think they are doing their job. I just don’t like it when they put a sensational spin on a story. It is so obvious; you can really tell when the reporter will put their personal attitude into a story.”

To conclude this section, the governor’s administration believes the press should serve as a bridge between political actors and the public. It is determined from the interviews that the press and governor’s staff expects factual information from one another in order to efficiently perform their roles. Governor Blanco’s administration perceives that an objective news story will form from accurate facts.

The press perspective for a successful story is how well they have reported the information from their source, no matter if the source was inaccurate.

### **The Press/Politico Relationship**

A governor has a strong need to build a solid relationship with his or her press corps. Several interviewees in the governor’s office declare that Governor Blanco has a very interactive relationship with members of the press. Hill stated their relationship is “friendly if not friends,” and began in 1984. Since then, Hill covered Governor Blanco when she was Lt. Governor and now as she is governor. Perhaps it was the reliance of his past work that the governor picked him, the only reporter in Louisiana, to accompany her on her overseas trip to Iraq in spring 2004.

The preceding example is very different than the press/politico relationship that existed in the U.S. several decades ago. Reporters and presidents, until about 70 years ago, kept a very short and tight lipped relationship. Meaning, the relationship was a



formal and did not permit face-to-face casual conversations between the president and his press corps. The office of the president is the closest comparison to the office of the governor; therefore, we compare the governor's relationship to her press by the precedent set by past presidents. Osifchn and Trammell (1994) stated that in the past, the more open presidents were to their corps reporters, the less the reporters fabricated or embellished political news stories. The previous research found that Governor Blanco maintained a successful open relationship with her staff and accessibility to the press for successful news coverage. We now discover the relationship the governor has with her press corps.

Gowen said, "In regard to the governor's relationship to press members, she works very hard." From staff perceptions, Governor Blanco is known on the capitol bureau press row to maintain open communication lines at all times with reporters. "Especially when dealing with a very serious topic, the governor is very gracious with her time with those reporters. She takes as long as they need with her," Gowen said. Even though Gowen believes the governor becomes, at times, maybe too accessible with the press, "she always gives them an opportunity in the bigger issues to come face to face with her. She does this to be as accessible as she can for them."

"The governor provides much availability to the press because she likes to talk to them," Mann said. He explained that she does not avoid interacting with them at all because she is very relaxed with them. "Reporters do not have any hostility or weariness around the governor whenever they ask her about things because they sense that she is open with them. The language that she uses to communicate with the press is un-political, and at times, this catches reporters unaware," said Mann. Mann developed this perception from the daily contact he has with the governor and the press.

President Lyndon B. Johnson's relationship with the press was a strained one. He would call on reporters onto his turf only on his time. He did not develop an open relationship with them, so, the press began to report his initiatives with a definitively negative tone. From the perceptions of her employees, the governor talks with the press at all times, and takes every opportunity to patiently answer all of their questions.

Mann explained that the governor's mannerism with the press creates a unique type of relationship with reporters. He said, "The governor is unguarded and un-political about her issues and this is not how press members expect an official to respond or act, so they have really taken to her." Mann's identification of the governor's relationship with the press is evidence of perception from the inside of the administration how the governor establishes herself with the press.

As the governor tries to maintain the balance of a professional relationship with reporters, the reporters try hard with their sources as well. "Good reporters are only as good as their sources," said Frink. For example, Frink explained *The Advocate* reporter, Marsha Schuler, has cultivated her own sources for years, "She goes out and finds her sources, when she makes a connection she maintains it. There are days that all she does is go and chat with sources for leads. Therefore, she always gets the most credible stories."

Mann explained that the capitol bureau reporters might have better opportunities to meet and speak with the governor because they are geographically more accessible to the governor than most other reporters around the state. "These reporters have a prime position and are very accessible to the governor because of their location," said Mann. On a daily basis, capitol bureau reporters will walk up to the governor's press office and visit casually.

There are good reasons to be friends with people in the press. Frink explained, “It’s good to cozy up to a reporter. You can’t bribe the reporters; you just need to be nice and friendly to them.” It is a benefit to any politician to foster some kind of relationship with a reporter. “If you just call and chat with them, and at times feed them off the record, it may help,” Frink said. A reporter will gain credibility for a story and at the same time can foster accountability to the politician who was quoted in the story.

McCormick experiences daily casual conversations with bureau reporters and believes that it is possible to maintain a personal and a professional relationship with reporters. “I would say that I have a professional relationship with several reporters, but in addition I feel I have a personal one with them as well.” McCormick offered the existence of a relationship can happen between sources and reporters as long as there is delineation between the two. A definitive line must be drawn professionally between the two entities so that the boundary is not crossed by either party.

“There is a fine line between reporters and their sources, it is a very delicate condition,” said Frink. The only way of maintaining a good relationship with the press is to keep it straight with them. “It is really not good to make up things to tell members of the press just to get into the paper. And it is very important that a politician does not use his ability as a source to spread negatives.” It is very easy for a politician to gather a squad of reporters to preach a position. Frink doesn’t encourage this because at some point it will reflect poorly on the politician.

When asked if either party may profit business-wise from the relationship, McCormick answered, “That’s fine if there is a relationship between a reporter and the governor, but the relationship in no way results in positive news for the governor. If this

were true, the journalist could not be an ethical reporter. “We are colleagues, we play on separate teams, but we’re also colleagues. And as long as none of that gets in the way, it’s possible to maintain personal contact.”

To conclude, the governor, from the administration’s perspective, is a successful communicator with reporters because she is consistently gracious and generous with the time she devotes to reporters. She uses a comfortable tone with the press, one that, the administration contends, is an unexpected form of communication from a politician. Her staff perceives that the governor maintains a very straight relationship with the press in that she never delivers false information or unreliable facts to the press. This interaction could be defined as a positive press/politico relationship—two entities that work as “co-independents.”

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CASE STUDIES**

#### **Case 1: Union Tank Car**

Economic development was a top issue during Governor Blanco's campaign for governor and was part of her long-term vision for the state. During the first week in March 2004, Louisiana lost about 1,200 jobs during the month of March and national surveys predicted that Louisiana would add jobs at a slower rate than the national economy. State newspapers reported that the severity of employment opportunities became a somber issue in the eyes of the citizens in Louisiana. One of the governor's main topics in her agenda package was to begin the 'economic engine' to bring good paying jobs to Louisiana in an effort to bring students back to Louisiana. "Her biggest message with economic development is to 'bring our children home,' and she has continued to stay on that message," said Frink.

During her campaign, Governor Blanco pledged to the voters of Louisiana that she would travel not just around the United States, but other countries, to bring in businesses to Louisiana. Hill said that Governor Blanco once said to him that, "We (her administration) have a huge message here that I will travel." Hill said, "she wanted people to see that she was a working governor and that she would go anywhere for state business."

During the governor's first legislative session in spring 2004, she emphasized a proposed economic incentive to phase out the corporate franchise tax that she said would eventually set up the "stage" for a stronger Louisiana economy. "The governor didn't have much in her first legislative package, so what she did have they (her administration) carried forth and made it bigger than it was," Hill said. The legislation made it so that in

the next eight years, Louisiana will eliminate more than \$1 billion in taxes that companies and economic developers would have to pay. Newspapers reported that the incentive made it tempting for businesses in and out of the state of Louisiana to consider relocating or investing their businesses in Louisiana. “Her message about economic development was out there,” said Hill.

In spring of 2004, Union Tank Car, a 110-year-old Chicago-based company, referred to by news sources as the premier tank/rail car supplier in its business, began to search for a location for its newest plant. It was estimated the \$100 million facility would bring in 850 or more jobs directly to the area. The managers of UTC first had to establish a ‘market value’ for the plant and present it to the open incentive market. In this effort, they had had to discover what states were willing to give to UTC with regard to incentives in their effort to attract it as a manufacturing expansion.

Bob Zwart, the Director of Taxes for the Union Tank Car Company, and managers of UTC searched the Southeastern states for a location for their new tank car plant. When the value of the UTC project in the open incentive market was determined, the managers of UTC decided only to negotiate with the state of Texas. Louisiana, the only other state in the running, put about \$65 million in incentives on the table, including the phase-out of the corporate franchise tax to garner UTC’s attention to the state. Dissuaded by the temptation of less tax incentives, the UTC project managers entered into exclusive negotiations with Texas.

When UTC announced it would began exclusive negotiations with Texas for a 30 day period, Governor Blanco and her administration felt that Louisiana had lost its bid. Her administration was disappointed when they heard the news, but regained hope when

UTC informed Governor Blanco that they would be ready to negotiate whenever the 30 day negotiations between them and Texas were through. Upon hearing that information, Governor Blanco marked on her calendar privately to call UTC's Chief Executive Officer the afternoon the negotiations had ended or failed with Texas. The governor did not indicate to the press that she intended to call UTC the last day of negotiations with Texas. The evidence surfaced later when the UTC deal became secure in Louisiana.

Governor Blanco continued to keep the lines of communications open with UTC project managers. Frink said after negotiations were up, "when there wasn't even a firm deal made yet with Union Tank and Texas, the governor said, 'I just picked up the phone and called these guys'." Frink said that with economic development deals like this, the press is generally always cynical about the governor trying to create jobs. "But they (the press) really took to the fact that she got on the phone with the Union Tank Car CEO after the 30 days of exclusive negotiations with Texas."

Frink said, "UTC said we're going to Texas to officially negotiate, but when the time was up their deal was not done. That's when the governor got up and did something to try to get them to come over to us." He explained that the preceding administration did set up a lot of other initiatives that helped get them over here. But the difference in their leadership styles was that Foster never reached out to a company with as much aggressiveness, and the governor did."

Within 30 days, UTC's negotiation time elapsed with Texas and the project managers decided to come back and exclusively negotiate with Louisiana. UTC and Governor Blanco signed a compact which was from then on known as "Project U." Hill commented how the governor's effort got a lot of attention from the media. "They (the

press) knew that she was devoting her attention to this. It began a very clear message she had on economic development,” said Hill.

As the nation’s largest rail car manufacturer, when the Blanco administration secured the deal, UTC became the largest construction Louisiana had seen in over a decade. The Daily Town Talk newspaper in Alexandria, where the plant is breaking ground, reported, “Blanco’s success in winning over Chicago-based Union Tank Car may be the object lesson that other Louisiana governors failed to learn: that dealing honestly and aggressively with business leaders pays off.”

Bob Zwart, the Director of taxes for the Union Tank Car Company, said that from the first time that they talked to Governor Blanco about the proposal, she seemed very eager to get UTC to locate in Louisiana. He said that the governor’s openness and willingness to improve economic development was one reason they were convinced on Louisiana and decided to sign with them. “From what I understand of the situation is that we got the deal because she was so persistent and she honestly and whole heartedly wanted them to end up in Louisiana for economic development reasons,” Gowen said, “I think that they knew from initial talks with her and could tell from her sincerity at the very beginning that she really was serious about bringing more jobs to Louisiana.”

The UTC managers said that they chose Louisiana from the tax incentives that the legislature made available to the Department of Economic Development, and also from the attitude the governor had on changing the economic situation in the state. Paine noted that the governor “makes a sea of phone calls” to CEO’s around the United States. “We set aside time for her to make these calls around the U.S. She takes the time to give them a one-on-one visit with her and she really cares, and it comes through because I’ve sat in



on a lot of her phone calls. I think that this had a lot to do with the reason that the UTC managers chose Louisiana to come to,” Gowen said.

This case study demonstrates a leadership ability the governor has within her administration that concerns her agenda. The press was not highly used until “Project U” was established. Interviewees were asked why the governor did not proactively seek press attention during the compromise. Several responses indicated that there are specific times the governor knows when to use the media, and this was a time she decided against it.

Gowen said, “She made this deal because first she cares about Louisiana. She wasn’t concerned with the way it was going to make her look. This was the first big economic development score since she got into office, so it was definitely a big public relations deal for her image.” Gowen’s perception of this deal was that it built up the governor’s credibility for economic development endeavors.

“She (the governor) is very smart with how to use the press,” said Frink. The most important part of a press strategy is that the media does not always have to be a utilized component. The governor manages her message by using a strategic press strategy. She uses the media and is open with them when the situation calls for it, but is closed whenever she needs to be.

Gowen’s overall perception about the deal was during the governor’s campaign, “she touted economic development so much, so it automatically made her look good because she worked so hard for this one deal. That’s the kind of good public relations that her early administration needed. This is also an example where good press comes from. This wasn’t forced in the media at all, it’s not like she went out for this deal looking for

good press coverage, and it was just legislation for the state. No one, reporters or any one had to spin this to make it look like a better story than it already was.”

State media and local newspapers such as *Alexandria Town Talk*, *The Advocate* and *The Times Picayune*, gave Louisiana Economic Development Secretary Michael J. Olivier and his staff credit, but gave Governor Blanco and her administration credit for the victory. “Project U” is the largest new manufacturing plant Louisiana has brought into the state in more than 20 years. Frink said, “Because it was such a big deal, she has the right to take all the credit for it, the newspapers gave her a lot of rah-rah for it.”

The deal was ceremoniously announced to the press when Governor Blanco stood on a flatbed in Alexandria and stated that the project was “a new testament to the new Louisiana.” At this press conference the governor also declared that the development of “Project U” put Louisiana back into economic competition with the nation and the world. The plan was given so much credit from state newspapers because it will bring a new measure of prosperity to central Louisiana.

Melissa McCormick, Assistant Press Secretary for the Governor, said that UTC was a huge economic development win for Louisiana and an example with proven results. “We had a huge press conference to announce the deal where KBB stood in front of a rail tank car. This press conference exposed the cooperative agreement to the press of the deal Union Tank and the governor had made.”

Mann understands that it is very important for the governor to support her image as a representative of the people by, “getting her out of the press room so that the people can see her.” Mann said, “Getting the governor out of the press room breaks the politicians’ general routine for only being available for media interaction when there are

just things that she is doing as part of her routine as a policy-maker.” Mann added that for the governor’s message to be adopted by the press and then the public, “the public needs to see the image of her out with the people.”

McCormick said months later at the groundbreaking ceremony and at each event after that, the governor continued to emphasize her aggressive efforts for economic development. “The administration has been really good at touting the Union Tank message in all her speeches whenever she goes all over the state because we just really believe firmly to stay on the message,” said McCormick.

Mann said, “The press room interactions and events are great for the press to access what the governor is doing. This is a way they may accurately report her goings on, but it is better if she goes out into the public.” “Getting her word out through the message is really so much more than just talking with the media,” said Frink.

Mosely said that with the UTC deal, that the press gave their fair share of “kudos” for her about this issue. Mosely said, “The issue as a whole gave her an enormous amount of credibility in the state, especially coming right out of a pretty successful first legislative session. It was a precedent event that displayed to the citizens that she will follow through with the things she said she was going to do.”

McCormick said that even after the project was announced, the message to constituents about the impact of the deal continues. “A key component to a good communication strategy within the governor’s office is to sell the message even when it is over redundant. In newspapers and all media there is always something about how Louisiana is open for business, it’s always the same message. Every time someone talks

about it over a period of time, people who have never heard it are still hearing about it now.”

This case study finds that the perceptions of the governor’s staff and the one reporter suggest that Governor Blanco successfully utilizes the press to deliver messages to the press. In this case study, the governor’s press strategy held little significance while the agreement with UTC was being secured. Her staff credits the governor’s ability to discern when media should be used and when it should not. Governor Blanco did not feel that using the press during negotiations would benefit the deal and instead christened the announcement with a public press conference.

As one employee stated, the governor has to be very aware in a circumstance as confidential and time sensitive such as this example, how much she can utilize the press. If information gets out to other states during negotiations, the deal between the company and the governor may be jeopardized. In this example, the governor was aware of the capabilities the press had, but makes a conscious and strategic decision not to use press to maintain negotiations. This case is important to exemplify a press strategy within the governor’s administration; the governor utilized the media strategically when she believed it would assist her economic agenda.

The press conference in Alexandria when the governor stood on the flatbed of a railway car started a consistent message from the Blanco administration touting its aggressiveness toward economic development. This case study serves as an example that by keeping a clear message in the press may dictate how the press will cover an issue. Of course, circumstances may prove different outcomes, but for this example, newspapers,

staff members and one local reporter all concur that the governor was successful in her message.

This exemplifies how the governor continues to receive due credit for the UTC initiative because she remains constant with the same message for economic development in all of her public speeches. Her normal press strategy does not include limited access to the media, but specifically in this case, her administration chose this method. This was not only a successful initiative in the state; it also proved to set a positive standard for the governor in the press.

The important conclusion from this issue is that it represents an event episode and highlights a continuous theme within the administration. From the abundance of positive press coverage, there is little room for an alternative perspective on the outcome of the case. From analysis, it is unlikely that anyone will be critical about this issue.

## **Case 2: Executive Order**

Governor Blanco issued an Executive Order that prohibited discrimination within government employment. The order banned various sorts of harassment and discrimination by race, sexual orientation and political affiliation-in all state offices. Much of the language of the bill is covered under federal law and by previous state laws; the only language that changed was the ban on discrimination. Governor Blanco's administration said that the order mirrored an anti-discrimination order issued in 1992 by then-Governor Edwin Edwards. The difference with the new order is that it adds the ban on sexual harassment. Denise Bottcher, Press Secretary for the governor said, "The governor felt it was important for her to re-establish state policy regarding equal treatment in the workplace."

In recent years the legislature has declined to approve several proposals aimed at ensuring equal legal protections for gays and lesbians. The order bans harassment and discrimination of the part of supervisors in their dealings with state workers. It also applies to state employees in their dealings with residents seeking benefits or services from the state.

The governor was criticized by religious conservatives for her executive order banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. There was much disagreement with the order because many opposition party members thought it was raising sexual orientation into a protected class for employment. They believed illegal discrimination must include discrimination against race, sex and religion but should not protect a personal lifestyle.

The Louisiana Family Forum was another critic of the Executive Order and presented the idea that sexual discrimination included into the order was, overall, too broad. At the same time, gay-rights group hailed the bill an accomplishment as the fulfillment of a promise the governor made during her gubernatorial campaign. Hill said, “The governor insisted that she hadn’t made a promise to the group, but actually, she had.” The governor denied making any campaign pledge, but said the new rule was meant to address complaints she had heard from state managers.

Under the Executive Order, state officials must not discriminate when awarding contracts to private companies, and even the companies that get contracts to do state work must comply in its dealings with its own employees and subcontracts. This leaves a potential window for a precedent for future legal battles. Private contractors are held to the order and they are worried about lawsuits. Gowen said that the legislation was the

same as when it was passed in the Edwin Edwards administration. “But Governor Blanco changed it,” said Gowen, “to accommodate against sexual discrimination. The order was something that the governor had very good intentions for doing.”

“The Executive Order to ban sexual discrimination was an example of the governor demonstrating leadership from the top. The Executive Order didn’t have any legal implications, because the intent of the order focused on Governor Blanco’s administration goals that they would not accept any discrimination of any shape or form,” said McCormick.

Soon after the governor issued the bill, State Representative Bobby Jindal issued a letter to the media about his objection to the bill. The question was raised why Rep. Jindal publicly announced his distress for the bill and did not just call the governor to ask her. Hill recalled that Governor Blanco gave the press a heads up about issuing the order before she actually did it. The press was prepared for the logistics of the order, but no one anticipated that a member of the opposition party would raise a flag on it.

“This whole situation came off the coattails of whenever the governor opened her house to the congressional delegation. She commented to the delegation that the elections were over and that there should be no more partisanship. By doing this, she was trying to create a unity within both parties,” said McCormick.

Frink said that when the governor “offered up her house to legislators” to celebrate the end of elections, “she made a statement to both parties at the event that from then on, they should all work together.” The governor specifically made a point for everyone to work on a level playing field. “It just seems,” Frink said, “that the governor was betrayed politically by Rep. Jindal.” The administration perceived that by the

governor extending a gesture to close in bi-partisan gaps, both parties would begin to work together with the same initiative to improve Louisiana.

Politicians use the role of the media to talk to talk to each other. Hill explained that what Rep. Jindal was doing was supporting his political base, which is very right wing. Gowen also commented that Rep. Jindal's position on the issue turned the whole thing political. She said, "The entire issue just became so political, it was something that was very two sided. It happened that you were either on one side or you were on the other side." From the administration's perspective, the order was updated from a previous administration and bared no political initiative.

"All Bobby Jindal did was create a news story by feeding the media machine, and acting as a politician would to do it. His actions by first going to the press without discussing the details of the order with the governor first led to a demonstration of power he had as a politician," said McCormick. Hill believed that Rep. Jindal utilized the media to get the press to pay attention to something that they normally would not have. "It was very bizarre but also obvious that he was doing it for show and for impact," Hill said.

State and national media sources, print and broadcast, positioned the issue in their newscasts and newspapers immediately upon Rep. Jindal's public offensive. The governor's press office immediately received interview requests from reporters who wanted some type of comment from the governor about Rep. Jindal's public actions toward her order. "The political angle was that Bobby Jindal sent out the letter to the press questioning what Governor Blanco's intent was for the order. As a defense for the press, it seemed like they were doing their job," said Mosely.



“This situation was a reactive type of press strategy for the governor. Her press strategy had to come on the back end of the situation. The governor’s press office was in this situation, not proactive, but reactive, because we had to respond to questions that people from the news sources asked us about,” said McCormick. The administration had not anticipated that this would be a matter that they would have to defend.

The order was something that someone decided to make very political and seem a lot worse than what Governor Blanco was trying to do Gowen said. Frink also commented about the political tornado the issue became. “What happened is that the people paying attention to the publicity of the issue were either fringe left or right. This could have been why the press really got into covering it; it turned into a story.”

Gowen said, “Someone, especially the press, can rip you to shreds on any issue, but you have to accept that they can do that and move on, and that’s what the governor did because she felt like it was the right thing to do.” The governor did not comment to Rep. Jindal’s public letter and Frink commented that she did that because, “the people in the governor’s administration are skilled enough to know that there really wasn’t anything they could have done about the disagreement.” After this note, Frink commented on the governor’s strategy in his view as a former reporter. He said, “I don’t think that the administration handled it very well. Her press strategy regarding the issue was that she could not reward one group or the other by actively defending it. The less she said on the issue, the more heavily the press covered it.”

Hill had an alternative complaint about the release of the order. His complaint was not on the political side of the order, but its timing. The governor was up in Monroe attending her Poverty Summit the day the governor’s office released the Executive Order.

Hill said, “Why didn’t they anticipate that the press was going to have questions about the order. I think that it is a real talent for people to be able to understand how things are going to pan out, some people have it but some don’t. Governor Blanco’s administration has always been very good at doing this so I just didn’t know why on this day they decided to do this.”

Hill thought that the governor’s administration’s strategy for the Executive Order in regard to the press was politically geared. “Yes, I think the release of the order upstaged the Poverty Summit, but I also think that she was trying to distance herself from the bill because it was not the best year to talk about gay rights. I would surmise that on her administration’s part, this was a conscious press strategy move.”

The findings for this case study suggest from selective perceptions that the press strategy behind the governor’s Executive Order did not prove to be successful on several levels. First, the day chosen to release the order was the same day the governor attended her much prepared and orchestrated Poverty Summit in Monroe, Louisiana. The governor was out-of-town for the summit and was, therefore, inaccessible to the press for comment about the order. Second, the less the governor said about the issue, the more the reporters flocked to it, reeling it into a political argument.

The day the order was released the press recognized immediately the governor was out-of-town and unavailable for a comment. The press is not keen for being rejected access from their top official sources. According to the perceptions of the governor’s staff, the governor normally was overly accessible to the media and available for comments and interviews at almost any time. Governor Blanco maintains such a tremendous ability to be accessible for journalists, this incident proved a time where her

over accessibility fated ill-will. Press members had grown accustomed to her normal availability and felt restricted when they could not reach her for comment. This does not indicate that the governor is consistently open for a comment, but reporters were accustomed to having her available to give a “yes” or a “no” comment.

It was one indication, because she was not in town the day the order was released, that the issue immediately received a political tone. As soon as Rep. Jindal publicly expressed disfavor, the media clung to his comments. The key issue to this case is this presence of political opposition. Politicians enjoy using the media to spin an opponent’s message a certain direction in the media. The order quickly became an issue where the media was used as a device for Governor Blanco and Rep. Jindal to talk to each other.

The governor could not say very much in favor or against the order or it would mean she would be publicly advocating one group or the other. Therefore, the less that she said on the issue, the harder the reporters came at her. It was also an endeavor for the administration to keep the issue low-key. Governor Blanco failed to utilize her power as political source and denied accessibility to her reporters because she did not speak out about the order. The administration’s press strategy faltered as the issue became politically geared with no incentive to publicly make a comment on the order.

This is an example for when the governor chose not to utilize the press to position her on the issue. Part of a press strategy is managing the authority over when to use the press and when not to. The administration perceived that the governor made the decision not to be open for comment on this specific issue. It was not a lost opportunity to speak with the press, the governor just did not use the press opportunity to express her position on the issue.

### **Case 3: NFL Saints**

Former Governor Mike Foster and Saints owner Tom Benson signed a lease in 1994 contracting the NFL Saints team to play in New Orleans, Louisiana until 2010. The agreement included a \$180 million compensation from the state of Louisiana to the Saints, and as of spring 2004, Louisiana had compensated \$40 million of the lease amount. The Saints' existing lease will retire following the 2010 NFL season, but the team can drop out of the contract after the 2007 NFL season without paying any monetary penalty to the state. If there is a default by the state of Louisiana, at any time, the Saints can terminate their lease with no penalty. If the Saints leave before the agreed date, they will owe the state \$85 million for breaking the contract.

Governor Foster and Benson's Saints contract became an economic challenge when Governor Blanco stepped into office in January 2004. Blanco's administration, due to budget constraints, could not financially keep up with the \$15 million yearly payments Foster and Benson agreed on to keep the Saints under contract. Upon hearing there would be possible state revenue shortcomings, Benson threatened to move the NFL team to another city. The only condition under which Benson would stay in the state was if the Louisiana legislature would provide funding for a new football stadium.

In the 2004 legislative session, it was the governor's responsibility to negotiate the contract with Benson and find money to maintain the lease. Keeping the team in the state is beneficial to the governor's economic development agenda and the health of the states' economy, so she and her administration continue negotiations with Benson. Hill said, "She is delivering an example of her policy message every time she talks to the press upon meeting with Benson."

At the end of the session in June, hours after private negotiation between both groups, the Louisiana legislature met the \$15 million yearly obligation to the Saints. If the legislature did not deliver the agreed compensation, Benson maintained the right to break their contract. Governor Blanco borrowed \$8 million from the Louisiana Economic Development, to be paid back within eight years. McCormick said, “The negotiations between her (Governor Blanco) and Benson have been good. What she really is trying to get accomplished from the talks is that she is really hoping for a contract that will turn into a long-term goal for the future of the state.”

Hill said that after every negotiation, the governor would utilize the press and say to them, ‘We as a state cannot afford this’.” The governor reiterates that this debt is a burden to tax payers and is too expensive for the state to accommodate. Her position is to sign a new contract with the Saints that would place more responsibility for payments to be distributed from business taxes from within the city of New Orleans. Hill said that the governor repeats over and over to the press that the Saints issue was passed down from the previous administration and was left for her administration to deal with. Using the media reinforced her position to her constituents, and has gotten her message about her position on the Saints out. “Politicians use the press all the time to talk to each other. The governor and Benson are using the media to talk to one another about the Saints issue.”

By contrast, McCormick said that the governor’s press strategy for this issue was that the governor decided not to use the media to combat each group talking to each other. “You have to be very careful how you use the press. The media likes to sensationalize stories, and so far with accord of the Saints venue, there are times they get close to doing that. They are just very displeased because we, as an administration,

haven't used them very much during the talks," said McCormick. She said that she didn't think that the governor wanted to use the media because, "she (the governor) didn't want one group to push the other one in the corner, because then nothing would get accomplished."

Gowen said, "She (Governor Blanco) has gotten very good coverage on this issue, and everyone has been very pleasantly surprised with how she has been dealing with Benson. Everyone thought that she would cave into what Benson wanted, because he is used to always getting his way." But negotiations have continued throughout the 2004 year and are moving into Governor Blanco's second legislative session which will be in April 2005.

Bel, as an insider of the Blanco administration, when asked if she thought that the media was doing a good job covering the negotiations, said no, because reporters were not doing their homework on the issue. "I just don't feel like the media gets enough information about NFL teams in other cities. I think that the governor is getting great coverage, but everything you hear is always the same. I don't feel like the talks are moving anywhere, because the media is not doing a well enough job supplying new information." From Bel's perspective, reporting on numbers from other cities that fund an NFL team, Louisiana residents could form broader opinions. If reporters could demonstrate how other cities manage payments to their NFL teams, citizens could compare payments that are reasonable in number and ones that are not.

When asked if it is because maybe the media is not getting enough new information from Governor Blanco to report, she said, "No, it is not that they do not get enough accessibility to her, because they do. But every time I read about recent talks

between them, I never feel like they are advancing anywhere.” Bel said that she attributed this to the press not getting information from other states on their management of their NFL teams.

Finding the money helped to resume negotiations. Part of the negotiations that Benson and the governor agreed on during the session was the state would pay \$15 million to the Saints every fiscal year. Governor Blanco and her administration agreed but she notified the New Orleans City Council that was too much cash to give to a NFL team and requested that the New Orleans region find the money to supplement the team.

Talks for negotiation, as of March 2005, are still pending and compromise may come in the form of a renovated football stadium and a new contract. Governor Blanco wants to update and modernize the agreements, and, therefore, create a new contract. Her objectives for the new contract would take much of the economic responsibility away from the Legislature and place more of it on the state. The proposed resolution would raise state taxes in order to supplement the cost of the NFL team.

Her major objective is to renovate the Superdome in New Orleans which would include an upgrade to every facility within it. The Saints will solely benefit from the renovations because the change will give the Saints an opportunity to earn more stadium income. The renovation may also qualify the team for NFL funding and support, where the NFL has assisted other markets. In other NFL markets a hotel/motel tax, auto rental tax, ticket tax and concessions tax are a few of the sources used for funding sports teams.

The governor continues talks with the Saints and wants to simplify their contract with Benson in order to resolve any remaining disputes. Governor Blanco also proposed a long-term lease that would eliminate all “out” clauses for the state or the team. The long-

term contract would provide security and stability for the state to continue its investment into the state.

Governor Blanco insisted that the New Orleans Saints must come up with a substantial part of the money if the state decides to spend \$150 million to renovate the Louisiana Superdome. Louisiana newspapers have reported that a majority of taxpayers believe that Benson should use some of the annual payments from the state, which will average more than \$20 million a year through 2010, in an effort to help pay for upgrading the Superdome. Hill said, "In my mind, she (the governor) does all good stuff for the compromising and he (Benson) does all the wrong stuff for it." As a reporter on the outside of the administration Hill believed that her attitude toward the issue was getting a lot of attention. "She is very much standing up to Benson, and it shows," said Hill.

As a small measurement on public opinion about the Saints, Gowen commented that she sees that there is much evidence that, for the most part, citizens (taxpayers) agree to what the governor is doing regarding the Saints. "I've been to Saints games with her, (the governor), and die hard Saints fans with all their Saints paraphernalia on will walk up to her. They tell her again and again that they agree with how she is handling things with Benson. If these people, who obviously love the Saints, agree with her, you know she's doing something right." From those types of continuous encounters, the governor's administration finds that a good portion of the public supports the governor in her Saints endeavors.

The governor notified Benson that state taxpayers oppose the new stadium concept but she has at the same time indicated that she is willing to consider a multi-million dollar Superdome renovation only if the Saints pick up part of the tab. The overall



the outcome for the Saints have been very important to Governor Blanco's political future.

In the findings from the Saints study, the negotiations between Benson and Governor Blanco have, to date, occurred every month for the past 10 months. From the perceptions of employees in Blanco's administration, taxpayers are, for the majority, in agreement with the governor's decision to stand up to the Saints owner, Benson. Their perceptions exemplify how a press strategy can reflect success on the governor's initiatives. Unlike the Union Tank Car initiative with no critical argument, the Saints case study has Benson's side of the argument. But, the governor has done a successful job controlling the public's perception on her message to Benson about the Saints. The press backs the governor's initiative and for the most part, so does the public.

To conclude, the governor has been successful in the eyes of the administration because she opened up to the press (and invariably to the public) when she had the opportunity to do so. The governor demonstrates the routine of a press strategy, which exemplifies when she cannot open to the press as much the press may desire. She is not as tight-lipped to the media as she was during the UTC deal, but she cannot reveal the details after she conducts meetings with Benson. This press strategy exemplifies how the governor and her administration know exactly how much information they should give to the media without it impeding in negotiations or interrupting with either agenda. Therefore, because of the positive response that follows the governor, the governor's administration believes her use of a press strategy to inform has served its purpose.

The most successful part about this strategy is that after every meeting with the Saints, the governor meets with the press to outline what the next move will be. She

makes herself accessible to the media for comment, which is one way to keep a consistent message. However, in this case the governor refuses to use the media to directly talk to Benson about the issue; she uses her ability to manage her message by not utilizing her accessibility to the press. Instead, she uses very positive and vague statements to ensure to the citizens that she is working hard for the taxpayer's interests. Her use of the media in this case has earned support for her economic initiatives, which also supports a continuous message carried from her administration.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

How a governor handles the making of news contributes to what role the press plays and inversely, how politics are played out by the press. The NGA handbook states that every governor who strives for a successful press strategy should maintain accessibility with the press and should operate with the press on a daily basis. For many years, governors have held an open door policy with the press. The most important findings from this research are that Governor Blanco accepts an open door policy, with the press and her staff, and delivers a constant message with the press.

The literature review in this paper from the NGA handbook stated that a successful press strategy for a governor includes three primary elements. Governors must stay consistently accessible to the media, must efficiently communicate their initiatives and policies to constituents and should ensure that the governor's message is accurately reported by the press. Overall perceptions through the thesis interviews recognized Governor Blanco successfully complies with these standards.

By the perspectives of the governor's staff, the first NGA standard where a governor needs to be accessible to the press has been met. Staff members perceived in several examples that the governor's accessibility to the media is so abundant that at times it may be too much. Members' perspectives also emphasizes the second standard is met, where a governor must effectively communicate initiatives to constituents using the press. Initiatives are driven by a constant message; a constant message delivers the governor's issues from the administration concisely. A concise, constant message delivered from the administration to the press, delivered to the public in turn better serves those who elect the governor. If and when the press is effective in reporting the

governor's message, they are active in their role for providing information to a public in order to generate political discourse.

This standard maintains that the press fulfills their role to deliver objective news under the Social Responsibility Theory. Effective and accurate news standards, according to the responsibility theory, must be met in order for participants of a democratic society to effectively participate in their news-making role.

From the perceptions of the members of the administration, the third element, actively monitoring press content on a daily basis, is met. Governor Blanco and her staff manage the media's messages daily by checking news content. One example given by Paine Gowen, the Executive Assistant for the Governor, examined how the governor proactively monitors the press. The research found a specific example when the governor called a reporter to question elements inserted into a news story. From Gowen's perspective, this was evidence supporting how hard the governor works to monitor how her message is portrayed within the press. Misreports can be very damaging for an administration; therefore, daily checks can ensure that an administration's messages are accurately reported.

Providing feedback for the reporters whenever they have successfully, or unsuccessfully, covered the governor's issues promotes open communications between the press and political sources. The NGA handbook stated that feedback monitors whether reporters fulfill their role in providing citizens with accurate, objective and balanced information. The findings for this thesis outline what politicians expect from reporters and may help assist journalists in their norms and routines for political news coverage. Reporters rely on their political sources for accurate information, and from the

perspective of the governor's administration, can be objective when they are given enough facts. The administration and one reporter suggest through interviews that whenever a story is objective, it is successful.

Governor Blanco has proven herself successful for using an open door policy with her staff and the press, and for carrying a consistent message to the press. This success is measured from the testimonies of her staff and with the evidence from the Saints and Union Tank Car case studies. The governor's administration suggest that the more that governors reach out to the press, not only to tout their accomplishments but also to provide accessibility, the better it reflects on their administration. NGA stated an open door policy for the press is a successful tool for a governor to utilize. Governor Blanco demonstrates successful accessibility from the amount of time she allows for the press.

The management of her staff also reflects Governor Blanco's success for an open door policy. Governor Blanco's message consistency within the administration is a big part of the governor's press strategy. She manages her staff in that every department within her administration carries a consistent message about each issue and policy. The NGA handbook stated that a consistent message within an organization is the sign of a successful governor.

A consistent message not only keeps the entire staff on track, but also allows the governor to understand what is being said about each policy issue. When the message is transmitted to the press, if it is disseminated in an organized fashion, the press has the ability to report it that way. This message is then interpreted by the public who then decides how to perceive it. When reporters provide objective information, under the Social Responsibility Theory, citizens interpret the information to form their individual

opinions. A constant message assists those who elect the governor and, in turn, assists the governor's level of support from constituents.

Message consistency within an administration is easier to report to the press and maintains accuracy on both ends of news making. When the governor cannot provide an answer, she turns the question over to the appropriate personnel in her administration to answer for her. This is evidence of message consistency and successful media management within the organization. This was justified from a comment by Bob Mann that the governor finds the best person for a specific job and then lets them do it.

The Executive Order on non-discrimination was the only case in this paper that demonstrated a situation when the governor was not accessible or open with the press. The issue turned into a politically geared argument and was a classic example for two sides of negotiations talking through the press. If the administration would have been more open about the issue, or available to discuss it, the sensational aspect of the story may not have developed. Negative news could have been avoided.

News coverage on political and governmental issues impact fellow legislators and the public as a whole. Learning the routines, roles and elements of success each group expects from one another, may foster more effective communication.

Sources and reporters feed off of one another in the event of news making. The governor's administration utilizes the press for message dissemination, vital for agenda initiatives. The press seeks out top political sources for comment and interviews to build credibility for themselves and their paper. This paper explored both groups' roles as they fill the daily "newshole." Learning the routines, roles and elements of success each group expects from one another, may foster more effective communication.

The case studies display that open communication between the administration and the press does not always mean that the administration will deliver a response to the press. An important element to a press strategy is to discern when and if the press should be utilized. In the Union Tank Car deal, the governor did not consistently provide answers to press questions while the deal was taking place. However, because she would not offer all answers did not indicate that she would not comment or communicate with the press. She remained accessible to the press by being available to reply, “I will comment later.” The press strategy the governor chose in this example was to not deliver information to the press until after the deal was agreed upon.

An example where the governor did not make herself available for any type of comment was the Executive Order case study. In this example, the governor did disappear from the grasp of the press by not going public with any response on her position. Neglecting press availability led the issue down a political turbulent path and in the end created an overall negative response from reporters and the media.

Governors in the past have failed to realize the leadership potential they possess from successful news stories. This thesis finds that not only does Governor Blanco understand this potential, but she also facilitates successful news stories from her leadership. The governor’s success and failures within her first year of office have much to do with the manner that she and her administration manage her message within the press. This thesis determines Governor Blanco successfully manages her message in the news by first managing the message within her administration.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

- 1. What is your job description or duties [within the Office of the Governor] or [as a Press Corps reporter]. Will you provide some background or history before this job and list a biography and your education?**

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- 2. Describe the press strategy within Governor Blanco's Executive Branch of Government?** This may include daily correspondence with the press, scheduling routine pseudo-events, making public appearances or sending routine send outs to press and media organizations.

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- 3. How do you think that the press is successful? What evidence would you provide that would indicate the source successful in its delivery of the Governor's policy? Can you cite an example?**

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- 4. Within Governor Blanco's previous, and initial, year as the Governor, which of her policies stand out as a remarkable success with the implementation and coordination of the press? Were there any of her policies that could have been unsuccessful when translated to the public? Why may have they been? Could you please explain if you thought the governor implemented a press strategy into the following issues; Union Tank Car Development, Executive Order and the NFL Saints?**

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5. As an employee of the Governor, when reading about Governor Blanco's policies and initiatives in the newspapers, do you predominantly feel the press successfully and accurately covers the story? Can you recall certain news stories that included content that may have undermined the Governor's initiatives? What was included in the content that made you think this way? Can you cite any issues or policies that may have failed due to poor or inaccurate coverage by the press?

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6. As a reporter for your news organization, do you believe that Governor Blanco's Office provides you at all times with the most accurate and pertinent information regarding a policy or issue. Can you recall an incident or situation where you did not believe this to be true or where you believed the Governor's administration failed in their role as a political source? What was it and could it be remedied?

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7. Who do you think leads the dance between politicians and the press? Why?
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- 8. What is your definition of a personal relationship in the working environment? Do you have a “personal” relationship with [an employee in Governor Blanco’s Office] or [a member of the press corps]? Does the relationship help or counteract your ability to perform your duties to provide an accurate supply of political information to the citizens of Louisiana? Does it provide methods for you to attain information where, if it were non-existent, you would otherwise not have access to the information? If you have no relationship, do you believe these relationships exist?**

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **SUBJECT BIOGRAPHIES**

#### **Assistant Press Secretary for the Governor - Melissa McCormick**

One semester in college McCormick attended a semester program in campaigns and elections. She then went back to Baton Rouge and was hired at Creative Communications where she maintained an internship while attending college at LSU full time. The internship turned into a salary position and while she worked there she worked on six different political races. She then worked as a freelance lobbyist for “One Louisiana” for DCI, where the issues she lobbied would reduce the cost of prescription drugs.

In December 2003, McCormick began working for the transition team as the Administrative Assistant in the press office and got a promotion of Assistant Press Secretary within six months. Her duties include coordinating with the press on a daily basis to schedule interview requests for the governor and to generally inform the press on the governor’s daily activities, whereabouts, or policy positions.

#### **Bureau Chief for Gannett News - John Hill**

His duties as a bureau chief are to report to five newspapers and to 32 editors. His political work involves reporting on the actions of the governor. He is also involved with collecting information on the governor’s legislation.

#### **Communications Director for Gov. Blanco - Bob Mann**

Mann joined the governor’s staff after 19 years as a Senate aide. Before his position in the governor’s office he was State Director to U.S. Senator John Breaux of Louisiana, and was also Breaux’s Washington Press Secretary. He was before that position the Press Secretary to U.S. Senator Russell Long of Louisiana and the Press Secretary for the 1990 re-election campaign of U.S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, and the 2003 Blanco campaign.

Presently he holds the Communication Director position within the Blanco administration. His duties are to oversee the communications departments in the Louisiana government relative to the governor’s office. Daily, two or three times, Mann will meet with the governor to prep her on communication and press activities. This includes upcoming speaking events and the status of public events.

#### **Director of Scheduling for the Governor - Erin Mosely**

Mosely has been the governor’s scheduler for about six years, even when the governor was Lt. Governor.

Presently, she is responsible for planning and implementation of the governor’s meetings and is also involved with the governor’s personal schedule.

#### **Executive Assistant to the Governor - Paine Gowen**

Gowen began work as an intern for Louisiana Culture Recreation and Tourism and then was a student worker for the Secretary of Department of Transportation and Development. Soon she was hired full-time as a scheduler for DOTD. She then worked as an event planner with FrancoFet, a celebration of French Tourism marketing

organization. She then moved to D.C. and worked for Mac and Dona McLarty where she handled their personal affairs. About two years later she was informed that Gov. Blanco decided to run for governor. She came back to Baton Rouge to help with the campaign. She worked in the campaign office and on the transition team and has been working for the Governor ever since.

She presently handles all the personal affairs for the governor on a daily basis.

#### **Policy Analyst for the Governor - Megan Bel**

Bel received a BA in Business at Louisiana State University and then went to Washington where she interned for a lobbyist firm, for Congressman Richard Baker. She then came back to Baton Rouge to work on her MPA at LSU while working for the Commissioner of Administration.

Bel's current duties as a Policy Analyst is that she assists policy advisors for the governor in issues such as economic development, education, natural resources and juvenile justice. She also attends meetings to represent the governor's office. At these meetings she works mainly with advisors and rarely is anywhere representing the governor alone.

#### **Policy Speech writer for Gov. Blanco - Chris Frink**

His previous experience was 22 years of reporting, with 16 of those years at *The Advocate* in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Frink covered the last year of the Foster administration while covering the 2003 Louisiana governor's race, where Kathleen Babineaux was candidate. After the gubernatorial race, Frink then covered the governor's first nine months in office before he was hired to work for her.

For the governor, Frink writes the governor's speeches and creates shorter remarks for her as well. He will write letters to constituents on controversial issues. He is also consulted on press matters dealing with the first Gentleman. He will occasionally write if the governor needs an op/ed piece in response to anything that a newspaper columnist has written about.

## **VITA**

**Brecke Latham is a graduate student in The Manship School of Mass Communication, at Louisiana State University. Brecke received her bachelor's degree in journalism with a public relations emphasis from Stephen F. Austin State University. Upon graduation, she worked as the Outreach Coordinator for Pineywoods HOME Team, Inc., where she managed all public relations for the non-profit organization. She then attended graduate school at Louisiana State University where she worked as a Graduate Assistant under the LSU Assistant Vice Chancellor. During her graduate career she took on two internships, the first was for the Media Relations Department for LSU University Relations and the other was in Governor Blanco's press office. Brecke Latham is currently a candidate for the degree of Master of Mass Communication for the Commencement of August 2005.**