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A historical perspective of Governor Mike Foster's "Live Mike" radio program

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A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF GOVERNOR MIKE FOSTER'S
"LIVE MIKE" RADIO PROGRAM

A Thesis

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

in

Mananship School of Mass Communication

By
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B.A., Louisiana Tech University, 1993
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Abstract

Louisiana Governor Mike Foster took to the airwaves on August 10, 2000 with the launch of “Live Mike,” his weekly radio program that would air for 41 weeks during Foster’s second term. Foster, a Republican, served as Governor of Louisiana from January 1996 until January 2004.

This study historically chronicles Governor Mike Foster’s weekly radio program, “Live Mike” during and prior to its four years on the air. This historical narrative illustrates how Foster intermingled radio, politics and his personal life to create a weekly radio program that he attempted to use during his second term to relay his message to listeners.

By examining the 41 weeks of the show through newspaper accounts, personal interviews and experience, and Governor’s Office records and call logs, the study found some evidence that Foster was able to take his message directly to the people at times without the filter of the media. In doing so, the show caused Foster to leave his introverted tendencies for an hour each week. The show brought Foster down to a human level for the public, but also opened the Governor’s vulnerability to be seen by listeners.

The study also shows that while some saw the 8 p.m. time slot as an advantage for Foster by not providing reporters enough time to recheck facts or obtain opposing views before going to print, the late time of the show eventually led to a decreased audience and a lack of news coverage of the program. While the desired audience and impact was not what Foster first envisioned for the 8 p.m. show, it served as a training ground for the governor that allowed him, at the launch of the 2 p.m. show, to portray confidence from behind the microphone and be more effective in reaching out to his listeners.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Louisiana Governor Mike Foster took to the airwaves on August 10, 2000 with the launch of “Live Mike,” his weekly radio program that was broadcast over a network of 17 stations in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Foster, a Republican who served as Governor of Louisiana from January 1996 until January 2004, had created the show in hopes of taking his message directly to the people and bypassing the filter of the media. The program would run for 41 weeks – Thursday at 8 p.m. for the first eight months and moving to 2 p.m. Thursday for the remaining time.

This is a study in radio history that chronicles Governor Mike Foster’s weekly radio program, “Live Mike” during its four years on the air. This historical narrative illustrates how Foster intermingled radio, politics and his personal life to create a weekly radio program that he attempted to use during his second term to try and relay his message to listeners.

The historical narrative method of research employed in this study follows the tradition employed by other authors. In his book, *Gordon McLendon: The Maverick of Radio*, Dr. Ronald Garay historically documents the radio career of Gordon McLendon, and examines how McLendon’s life integrated his career in radio, politics and the motion picture industry.¹

In Angie Delcambre’s study of filmmaker Robert Flaherty’s making of *Louisiana Story*, Delcambre examines the film as a historical document and explores the importance of the work in securing Flaherty’s place in film history.²

This study will adopt an approach similar to Garay's and Delcambre's works. The study will be an interpretive narrative derived from a variety of documents and sources, including personal interviews, newspaper articles about Foster and the "Live Mike" program, internal documents from the Governor's office, personal files and observations by the author, books written about past politicians' use of the radio, and a limited number of actual program recordings.

Since the creation of radio in the early 1900s, elected officials, like Foster, have turned to the radio in order to share their message and agenda with a vast number of people in a very short time period.

Chapter one examines this history of the radio and how politicians have tried to use the medium over the years to deliver their message directly to the people without the filter of the media. Specifically, the chapter looks into greater detail of the radio activities of former U.S. Senator and Louisiana Governor Huey Long and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

While both were effective at use of the radio, Long and Roosevelt used different styles in connecting with the listener. This chapter will briefly look the differences between Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats" and Long's more energetic delivery, and examines how the speaker on radio has an advantage in connecting with the listener based on his style and delivery of their words.

The chapter also examines how Foster, even through radio, was able to maintain a consistent image with the public and how the radio program allowed the audience to humanize Foster, even though most only knew him through the media image that had

been presented in the past. It also explores how Foster was able to connect with listeners one-on-one even though he was addressing a large following of listeners.

It is only by examining how politicians have used the medium of radio in the past, along with their delivery and style, can we analyze Foster's program in a historical setting.

Chapter two examines the life of Mike Foster, as a businessman, state senator and finally as governor. In 1986, Foster decided to enter the political fray by running for state senator from his area. He was elected and it was a decision that would lead him to the governor's mansion 10 years later.

This chapter chronicles how the little known senator from St. Mary Parish used grassroots campaigning and the radio to build name recognition and support that ultimately resulted in him getting elected governor in November 1995. By examining Foster's early use of radio and the broadcasting foundation it provided him, this study will show how Foster continued to build upon his radio experience during his first five years as Governor to help him create his weekly radio program in 2000.

Chapter three looks at events during the first few months of his second term that led the governor to decide and create a weekly radio program, "Live Mike." The chapter outlines in chronological order the details, problems and solutions of creating the statewide program in less than a month time span. The chapter examines how a network of affiliates were established, where the program got its name, how a station who didn't even air the program influenced Foster to change the time and day of the broadcast, and the reasons for Foster moving the program to 2 p.m. on Thursday. The chapter also

details problems that Foster and the program experienced in creating the show that had an impact on the “Live Mike” program throughout its run on the air.

The fourth chapter chronicles the governor’s 8 p.m. program on Thursday nights. This chapter will chronicle individual shows during the 8 p.m. show and will look at a small sample of individuals calling the program and will recount memorable events that occurred during the show.

This chapter also chronicles how the program, after a strong start, soon began to fade after four months on the air. The audience dwindled, calls were less frequent and planted calls started to become more common. In addition, in March 2001, Foster’s co-host David Tyree told the governor that he soon would stop hosting the show due to the commute from New Orleans each Thursday night.

This chapter looks at the events that led Foster to move the program to 2 p.m. on Thursday and the negotiations behind the scenes to try and save the network of affiliates when the change occurred. It also analyzes how Foster used the 8 p.m. show to refine the format of the program and how he used a small listening audience to try new delivery techniques that he hoped would help him become more masterful with the microphone.

Chapter five examines the show in its new time slot of 2 p.m. on Thursday. The chapter chronicles Foster and his program from the move in 2001 until the end of the program in 2003. The chapter shows how Foster tried to use his previous radio experience to connect with listeners. Foster also saw the program as a tool to speak with the public one-on-one and allowed him to try and comfort the state during September 11, 2001, share emergency information during hurricanes, try to convince voters to support a controversial tax package and try to influence the 2003 governor’s election.

Chapter six will examine the main points of each of the previous chapters to historically review Foster's "Live Mike" program and try to analyze how the program was a result of Foster combining his years of personal and radio experience with his political life to create a unique radio program during his second term in office. The program provided both a venue for Foster and the public to express their opinions and the current events of Louisiana between 2000 and 2004.

Endnotes

¹Garay, Ronald, Gordon McLendon: The Maverick of Radio. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992)

² Delcambre, Angie, Explorations of Time and Place: Robert Flaherty's Louisiana Story. (Baton Rouge: Master's Thesis, 1998)

Chapter 2 Radio and Politics

On November 2, 1920, at 8 p.m. EST, from a small garage in Pittsburgh, radio station KDKA broadcast updated results of the Warren Harding-James Cox Presidential election thus becoming the first station in American history to broadcast a pre-advertised radio program.¹

It also was the first time in American history that the world of politics and radio melded. Over the years, politicians would learn to master the art of radio to share their political philosophy, garner and maintain support, and bypass other media outlets to talk directly to the people.

Eighty years after the KDKA broadcast, Louisiana Governor Mike Foster, a two-term Republican governor from 1996 until 2004, would also mix politics and the radio by honing his speaking skills to host a weekly talk show. As discussed later in Chapter 4, Foster created the program in hopes of relaying his political message directly to the people without the filter of the media.²

Two years after the initial radio broadcast, in 1922, the radio industry had started to gain momentum. Since radio sets required little home assembly, more consumers began buying the new product and in turn more broadcast stations were maneuvering to get on the air. From just six stations broadcasting in 1921, there were 556 stations broadcasting just two years later.³

For the next eighteen months the idea that the radio had a purpose in the political realm did not surface. On March 30, 1922, Indiana Senator Harry S. New changed the way the radio would be used in politics forever when he delivered a speech over the radio from his office in Washington, D.C., back to his constituents in Indiana more than 600

miles away. New spoke for half-an-hour appealing to farmers and urban voters for their support for re-election over ex-senator Albert J. Beveridge.

New's speech led the way for other politicians to follow. Political pundits of the time predicted that campaigning by radio would no longer be a novelty. And days later, their predictions started to become realized when Representative Alice Robertson from Oklahoma addressed her home state by radio.⁴

Shortly after New and Robertson's addresses, President Harding, who ironically had been the subject of the first radio broadcast in 1920, realized the growing use and potential of the radio and ordered a radio be placed in the Executive Mansion. It was said that when Harding turned on the radio in the White House it marked the first time in history a man, "unsolicited, unannounced and unknown, spoke directly to the President of the United States." Harding is said to have heard George Muldaur, who was representing fire insurance writers, on the radio thanking Harding for refusing to allow candles to be placed in the windows of the White House at Christmas.⁵

Harding also became the first President to address an audience over the radio during a 1922 Memorial Day speech in Arlington, Va. Even though the number of stations in the country was still few and radios in homes were still in the hundreds, the impact of the moment was comprehended by those in the industry.

Later that summer, Harding, traveling by Presidential train equipped with a radio, stopped in St. Louis and became the first president to broadcast over a radio network – KSD in St. Louis, WJZ in New York and WCAP in Washington.

Observers at the speech noted though that Harding missed the "display of oratory" while giving his speech. By broadcasting over the radio, Harding was locked in front of

the microphone, reading from a prepared script and unable to work the crowd that was physically in front of him.⁶

The New York Times on June 27, 1923 reported that Harding's speeches had its drawbacks as well as advantages:

It gives him an immense distant audience, but hampers him before his immediate hearers. It carries his message far, but cripples his oratory near by. At Kansas City and elsewhere he was thought to be occasionally moved to depart from his written address and to introduce some extempore remarks prompted by the occasion; but each time he checked himself and went back to his steady reading into the amplifier. The effect upon the listeners must have been that the orator was not thinking of them so much as of the listeners-in at Duluth, Seattle, Boston and Atlanta.⁷

Harding continued West toward San Francisco where he was scheduled to make the first transcontinental broadcast, but the broadcast never occurred. Harding took ill during a trip to Alaska and died shortly thereafter in a San Francisco hotel room.⁸

While Harding was the first President to broadcast to a radio audience, he was not the first President to approach a microphone for broadcast. President Woodrow Wilson holds that honor, even though he did not know that a microphone was present at the time. In 1919, during a trip from France on the U.S.S. Washington, there was an attempt to broadcast a speech back to shore of President Wilson addressing the crew. Wilson's doctor, Rear Admiral Gary T. Grayson, was worried that the microphone being visible would make Wilson nervous and did not agree to the idea. Grayson later agreed to allow the broadcast to be attempted as long as the microphone was hidden and out of sight of Wilson.

Preliminary tests showed that as long as Wilson was no more than 6 feet from the microphone, the broadcast would work. The microphone was stationed behind an

American flag on the B deck, where Wilson was scheduled to deliver the address.

However, Wilson addressed the troops from the C deck, almost 20 feet away from the microphone and with his back to the microphone. Wilson was too far for the microphone to pick up his voice and the broadcast failed.⁹

While Harding had difficulty connecting with his radio audience, Calvin Coolidge did not have that problem and was the first president to use the radio effectively.¹⁰

Contrary to some historians, Coolidge was better on the radio than in person. Coolidge was not known as an orator. Charles Michelson of the New York World, said that the radio was Coolidge's salvation and was perfected just in time for the President. One reason for Michelson saying this was the difficulty of determining Coolidge's mood in person. His facial expression never changed, while on the radio his expression did not matter and the President's voice came across as soft and clear.¹¹

That clearness came across when Coolidge, known as "Silent Cal," addressed Congress on December 6, 1923 with six stations broadcasting the speech to over half the nation. The broadcast was so clear that half-way through operators at KSD in St. Louis phoned the Capitol to ask, "What's the grating noise?" It turned out to be Coolidge's rustling of paper. Coolidge had become, because of the speech, the most widely heard President throughout the land at the time.¹²

The first true inroads made by radio into the political process occurred with the political party's national nominating conventions in 1924. Months before the conventions, the broadcasting industry began preparing for the special event that executives thought would be a perfect live news event for radio and one that could move the young industry forward.

The Republican Convention in Cleveland was held first with President Coolidge being nominated for re-election as expected in an anti-climatic mood for radio listeners. The Democratic Convention was another story.

The coverage of the conventions would not have been such a success had it not been for the long 16-day battle in New York at the Democratic Convention. The turmoil was so drawn out and uncertain that listeners were glued to their radio sets waiting for the mystery of who would be nominated to be revealed.

In the end, the wait proved to be a success for radio and helped set the method of political broadcasting for years to come. The dark-horse candidate John Davis was nominated on the 103rd ballot and was later defeated by Coolidge in the general election.¹³

William Jennings Bryan said of the use of radio after the convention:

I regard radio as the most wonderful of all the mysteries that man has unraveled or deals with. I have no doubts that it will play an increasing part in our campaigns. Local candidates will address the people in their territory, and Presidential candidates will talk to the entire nation. I have no doubt that arrangements will be made for impartial treatment of candidates, and this will give Democrats a much greater relative advantage than they have when they rely upon the press, which is largely Republican in the contested States. The possibilities of radio are unlimited and none is able to estimate with accuracy the use that may be made of it.¹⁴

But as the popularity of radio grew, so did the battle for airwaves. President Coolidge addressed in a December 1926 speech to Congress the need for new regulatory legislation over the radio industry to help eliminate licensing pirates and gain control of the growing requests for broadcasting licenses. Coolidge told Congress “the whole service of this most important public function has drifted into such chaos as seems likely, if not remedied, to destroy its great value.”

In February of 1927, Coolidge signed the Radio Act of 1927 and created a bipartisan Federal Radio Commission which was charged with assigning frequencies, classifying radio stations, determining operations of the stations and making any rules relating to broadcasting.¹⁵

Franklin Roosevelt

No other politician's success is more closely related to his use of the radio than that of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt, like Louisiana Governor Mike Foster, got his start in radio before ever being elected to the office where he used radio to communicate with voters.

Roosevelt first demonstrated his grasp of the radio during the 16-day long 1924 Democratic National Convention in New York. Listeners got a glimpse at his radio ability when he nominated New York governor Alfred Smith over the air. But it wasn't until the 1928 convention, when he nominated Smith once again, did listeners first hear Roosevelt during a nationwide broadcast. Roosevelt acknowledged the listeners at home during his speech and had adapted the speech more for the radio listeners than those actually at the convention. His performance signaled what many believed to be the death of the old-fashioned political campaign oratory.¹⁶

As Governor of New York, Roosevelt used the radio's abilities more than 75 times to reach those rural listeners and overcome the power of the private lobbies and motivate legislators into voting for his legislation. Roosevelt delivered the status of happenings in Albany directly to the people using "simple, direct and chatty" language to explain his initiatives. The results were floods of letters from listeners hitting the doors of legislators asking them to support the Governor's legislation.¹⁷

On July 2, 1932, Roosevelt became the first presidential candidate to accept his party's nomination over a coast-to-coast radio hookup. In the following months, Roosevelt would deliver numerous nationwide radio broadcasts – four in the month of September alone. The assault by Roosevelt in using the radio was too much for Republican candidate Herbert Hoover to overcome. Roosevelt obtained 472 electoral votes to Hoover's 59.

In a letter to Herbert L. Pettey, Secretary of the Federal Radio Commission, Roosevelt expressed his thoughts on the importance of radio. He wrote that “Amid many developments of civilization which lead away from direct government by the people, radio is one which tends on the other hand to restore contacts between the masses and their chose leaders.”

Roosevelt also felt that the medium was the “greatest force for molding public opinion and was of great importance in helping promote policies and campaigning.”¹⁸ As further examined in Chapter 3, Governor Foster also felt that radio provided an important tool for communicating with the public and his thoughts were one of the main reasons Foster later created his weekly radio program.

Roosevelt needed that force to help mold public opinion as he laid out his plan to pull the United States out of the Great Depression. The networks – NBC, CBS and the Mutual Broadcasting Company – offered Roosevelt airtime “on-demand” and upon any wavelength the President wanted to lay out his New Deal. The networks also adopted a “right of way” policy in which local affiliates had to break into local programming to carry the President's address.¹⁹

A few days after his inauguration – March 12, 1933 – Roosevelt went on the air for his first “fireside chat” to talk about the collapse of the banking system. He felt he needed to address the nation to calm any fears that at the time was leading thousands of Americans across the country to withdraw their complete savings from banks.²⁰

An estimated 40 million people²¹ listened to Roosevelt on more than 150 stations across America that broadcast the speech. The response from listeners was overwhelming. Listeners phoned, telegraphed and sent mail expressing their support for Roosevelt’s message. But more importantly, Roosevelt had convinced Americans to deposit their money back into their banks.²²

As later discussed in Chapter 5, Foster also took to the radio to reassure the state’s citizens after a tragic event – September 11, 2001 and help restore calm.

Between FDR’s first and second radio addresses, Harry Butcher, a CBS official in Washington, coined the term of Roosevelt’s speeches as “fireside chats.” Even though the term was never officially adopted by the President, he used it never the less. The term caught on with listeners and provided a visual image of the President as he was addressing them.

It was Roosevelt’s way of explaining complex issues in simple terms and following the simple formula in broadcasting, “Be natural, be yourself,” that helped him earn the listeners trust. The President’s speeches were very sincere, heart-to-heart chats with people in their own homes.²³ Roosevelt realized that he wasn’t talking to a microphone, but talking to the people one-on-one. Those who studied Roosevelt’s fireside chats observed that Roosevelt made listeners feel, even though they were hundreds or thousands of miles away that he was talking to them, instead of at them.²⁴

One reason for Roosevelt's success over the radio was his hands-on approach in preparing for the broadcast. In a letter to a listener who had urged Roosevelt to be on the radio more, FDR said, "I suppose you know that every time I talk over the air it means four or five days of long, overtime work in the preparation of what I say."

FDR would usually take a draft of the speech submitted by an aide, look at supporting research and then dictate his own draft. He would sometimes go through six or seven drafts of the same speech. Eleanor Roosevelt said that it wasn't uncommon for Roosevelt to take a speech almost completed, tear it up and dictate a new one from the beginning because he felt that the previous version had not made his point clear enough for the common person to understand.

Roosevelt's attention to the speech was equaled by his attention to his delivery. FDR would often read a draft aloud to see if any words or phrases would be difficult to deliver. He would also ask the radio technicians at the end of a broadcast: "Was I all right?" "Did I slur over that word?" "Did I go too fast?"²⁵

Delivering a speech too fast was a main concern for Roosevelt. He knew that the radio was not a place to talk fast.²⁶ Delivering the speech in a slow, clear manor allowed listeners to grasp his message. Roosevelt would speak around 100 to 120 words per minute, almost 30 percent slower than other radio announcers.

Roosevelt also was careful in his word selection. Study of his speeches have revealed that FDR made up the bulk of his speech, between 70 and 80 percent, with vocabulary from the one thousand most common words in the English language.²⁷ This way, Roosevelt was speaking to the people on their level, and not intellectually over their heads.

Distinguishing a fireside chat from a radio address was tricky. Fireside chats would usually be delivered by Roosevelt in the Diplomatic Reception Room or the special studio in the basement of the White House. Roosevelt favored the fireside chat concept and said that it was his favorite speaking format. So, it could also be said that Roosevelt spoke somewhat differently in fireside chats, such as in simple, one-on-one conversation.

Most of FDR's fireside chats were given at 10 p.m. on Sunday, Monday or Tuesday evenings, with Sunday being the favorite. This was considered the perfect time since people on the East Coast were not yet in bed and listeners from the West Coast had arrived home, eaten dinner and were starting to gather around the radio for the evening. It was also believed that at this time most people were "relaxed and in a benevolent mood." Most of his speeches lasted between 20-30 minutes to make sure he kept the attention of listeners.²⁸ Seventy years later, the late radio timeslot of 8 p.m. would end up costing Foster an audience and eventually led to his moving the program to an earlier time slot.

Fireside Chats were also dangerous as they were powerful. Political enemies and friends would "hang on" every word he said and would take those words and analyze them over and over again.

One of those friends that turned into an enemy for Roosevelt was Louisiana Governor and U.S. Senator Huey P. Long. "The Kingfish" as he was known, had also turned to the radio to build his political career and get his nickname.

Huey P. Long

At around the same time Roosevelt was using the radio to broadcast to the 1924 Democratic Convention, Long was using the radio in his campaign for Louisiana Governor. By using the radio, Long became one of the first politicians in Louisiana to use the new medium.

On the eve of the 1924 election, Long delivered a speech over WCAG in New Orleans. The station's general manager told Long that there were only 8,000 radio sets in all of New Orleans. Long saw that as an opportunity. Long figured that if only half of the radio sets were turned on, with 5 people listening to each set, he could reach an audience of 20,000 with his broadcast. Long lost the election but realized the power of the radio, its ability to reach large crowds immediately and its impact on the future of politics.²⁹

Long kicked his second campaign for governor off at Bolton High School in Alexandria to a crowd of three thousand. But the number was even greater because of listeners tuning into the broadcast of KWKH, which aired Long's speech.

The use and access to radio had grown since Long's first governor's race. While only the wealthiest could afford a radio in 1924, even the poorest households were able to afford a cheap battery radio in 1928. Long's strong voice could even be heard over some static and he began to utilize the medium even more.³⁰

Like Foster, one reason Long turned to the radio more often was to bypass the newspapers, who Long thought were not giving him or his administration the type of positive coverage he deserved. Long was so obsessed with destroying the press that he

started his own newspaper, the Louisiana Progress, in order to attack the credibility of his opponents and promote Long's issues.³¹

Long was also able to turn to the radio due to his supporter William K. Henderson, who owned KWKH. Henderson gave Long an unlimited amount of time to broadcast his opinions. By using this time, Long was able to experiment and master the art of the microphone. Long would often speak for at least an hour, usually by remote from his bedroom or hotel room in New Orleans. This also allowed Long to develop his own radio style of ad-libbing and rambling to keep people's attention.³²

Long's first national radio address as U.S. Senator came over a year after he was sworn into office. Long had introduced "the Long plan" legislation to help redistribute the wealth of the nation. The three bills would impose a capital levy beginning at \$1 million, raise income-tax rates so no individual could earn more than a million dollars in any year and prevent individuals from inheriting more than \$5 million.

As soon as his bills were filed, Long took the unprecedented step of purchasing airtime from NBC to address the nation and build support for his legislation. While Senators and other politicians had used the radio to communicate with constituents back in their home districts, no Senator had addressed the nation as a whole.³³

Long was placing himself on the same level as President Roosevelt, who had already addressed the nation with his fireside chats. But Long was unlike most politicians and had gained a vast amount of experience of speaking over the radio during campaigns back in Louisiana.³⁴

Long increased his criticism of Roosevelt during his next national broadcast on April 24th. Long stated that while Roosevelt was not his enemy, he felt the President was

not keeping his campaign promises. He said that whenever he thought the administration was wrong, he would oppose Roosevelt.³⁵

Roosevelt knew that Long was dangerous and had to be dealt with. Roosevelt had told his advisers, “It’s all very well for us to laugh over Huey. But actually we have to remember all the time that he really is one of the two most dangerous men in the country.” The other was General Douglas MacArthur.

In February 1934, Long decided to try and publicize his redistribution of wealth platform. The plan grew in popularity and Long took again to the national airwaves. The National Broadcasting Company offered Long a half-an-hour of airtime on February 23, 1934 to address the nation. In the address, the Louisiana Senator used the opportunity to share with the nation his “Share Our Wealth” plan, which would redistribute the nation’s wealth.

The speech was a success and tens of thousands of letters arrived in Long’s Senate office because of the broadcast. Long wanted every letter answered and hired forty-eight secretaries and typists to accomplish the task.³⁶

Beginning in January 1935, Long delivered eight national broadcasts in seven months. This led to Long’s national respect and reputation as an effective radio broadcaster. Between March 1933 and July 1935, Long delivered eleven national broadcasts.³⁷

Long’s broadcasts at the local and national levels were different from each other in several ways. At the local level, Long would rant and rave, throwing his arms up in the air, cursing over the air and almost screaming at times. His national broadcasts were more refined with little or no cursing.³⁸

Long's national broadcasts were more subdued, casual and intimate than his speeches on the Senate floor. Long would rarely use written speeches during his broadcasts and would use notes or an outline on very rare occasions.

Scholars today believe that the radio was the main reason for Long rising into the state and national spotlight. Without the medium, Long would not have been able to reach the vast number of voters and build a constituency so quickly.

Politicians since Roosevelt and Long have continued to use the radio. As television became the new medium that listeners would gather around for their entertainment and news, politicians were adapting their delivery to the visual image. Even with television, the radio still played a role in politics.

At the Presidential level, John Kennedy was deemed the winner of a debate with Richard Nixon in the 1960s by those who watched the event on television. However, those listening on the radio believed by a 2-to-1 margin that Nixon had won the debate.

Perhaps the President who used the radio to his greatest advantage was Ronald Reagan. Reagan was well known for being the "Great Communicator" because of his use of television, but many don't realize the contribution to radio that still exists today.

On April 3, 1982, Reagan delivered the first of ten short, live radio addresses from the Oval Office. In his addresses Reagan discussed issues facing America at the time. Reagan said of the addresses, "I thought a weekly radio address would give me an opportunity to explain my decisions and help clarify

the picture.” The talks were a success and helped Reagan dominate the weekend news cycles with coverage of his address.

Reagan decided to continue the addresses again beginning in August and every President since then has continued the tradition.³⁹

At the local level, politicians have continually relied on the radio as a cheaper mean of campaigning and delivering their message. It also allowed a medium for instant feedback.

In 1949 and perhaps the first call-in radio broadcast, Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon answered questions for an hour-and-a-half from listeners who phoned in their questions. In 1952, Judge Francis Cherry also answered questions – 5,000 of them – during a day long broadcast where Cherry took calls from potential voters. Cherry won the Democratic nomination for Arkansas Governor in an upset and held twenty more talk-a-thons, lasting at least three hours each, before the end of the campaign.⁴⁰

More recently former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura took to the airwaves in 1999 to host an hour long weekly show from 11 a.m. until Noon. Called “Lunch with the Governor,” Ventura would also take the program on the road by broadcasting from remote locations, even broadcasting during a trade mission to Tokyo and a trip to Havana, Cuba.

Ventura, who is often outspoken, would frequently target legislators and reporters, and occasionally be critical of unflattering callers. Ventura relied on his experience as a radio talk show host before being elected Governor. Ventura hosted his own program from 1994 to 1996 and then again from 1997 until he ran

for Governor. Ventura ended his program when his term was over in January 2003.

While Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle doesn't necessarily have her own program, she does make weekly hour-long appearances on a local radio program. Lingle, who appears each Monday from 7-8 a.m., said her appearance is "solely a public service so folks have access to questions and answers with the governor once a week."

Lingle said she got the idea after hearing Governors at a National Governor's Association meeting talk about their programs. Before being elected Governor, Lingle had appeared weekly on the same program when she served as chairwoman of the Republican Party of Hawaii.

Other Governors use the radio to talk with voters but not on a weekly basis. Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns hosts a call-in radio program once a month from alternating locations in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska.

Beginning in August 2000, Louisiana Governor Mike Foster started a weekly call-in radio program, unlike any other in the country. Foster's program, "Live Mike," aired on Thursday evenings at 8 p.m. In April 2001, Foster moved the program to 2 p.m. on Thursdays.

Style and Delivery

Before the advent of the radio, the main form of communicating with the public for politicians was to give impassioned oratory speeches to different crowds in different cities. Politicians could alter their speeches depending on

their audience without the spotlight of the media and with little likelihood that the differences in the speeches would become widely known.

With the launch of radio, the large crowds in the town square were replaced with a family of two or three sitting in their living room around the radio. The result was an intimate setting in the privacy of listeners' houses, instead of among the crowds that had been worked into a frenzy. Instead, the speaker had to connect on a one-on-one basis through the radio to get his message across and had to get the listener to use their imagination to picture the speaker addressing them.⁴¹

Philip Harwood, an associate professor of communications at the University of Dayton in Ohio, said that the radio became a companion for many in the 1930s as families sat around the radio during the evening. "It was something very much like a friend, and people had a warm place in their hearts," he said.⁴²

According to Harwood, the power of the radio also allowed the public to get to know, or at least believe they know, the announcers as genuine human beings instead of an unapproachable celebrity figure.⁴³

One such figure who used the radio to connect with listeners was Roosevelt. The president had the ability to "create a feeling of intimacy between himself and listeners," and explain things in simple terms so that the "man on the street"...had "a full mastery of them," writes Edward Chester in Radio, Television and American Politics.⁴⁴

Two more recent politicians who connected to listeners were Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. During their weekly radio address, each would begin by saying, “Today I want to talk to you about...” or words to that effect, which were spoken very casually and in a conversational tone rather than as if they were starting a speech.⁴⁵

Despite Reagan’s position as the most powerful man in the world, Reagan’s tone and delivery in his radio addresses sounded as if he was just an average fellow American carrying on a conversation. It allowed the listener to feel as if they knew Reagan well, and allowed the listener to feel comfortable with sitting for a few minutes to hear this “conversation” between Reagan and the listener.⁴⁶

Long was also known for his casual conversational tone. Paul Hutchinson in a 1935 article in *Christian Century*, writes that Long would sometimes start his broadcasts with, “Friends, this is Huey P. Long speaking. I have some important revelations to make, but before I make them I want you to go to the phone and call up five of your friends and tell them to listen in.”

This technique helped build an audience and also set the casual, friendly atmosphere of the broadcast.⁴⁷

Reagan, Clinton, Long and Roosevelt connected with listeners because they were able to read a prepared radio script without sounding insincere. Their delivery allowed the listener to feel that their words were coming from their heart and helped paint a picture in the listeners mind. Many politicians did not use prepared scripts, such as Foster and Long, and spoke impromptu.

An effective delivery of words, along with expertise in the English language, is crucial in radio commentators being able to describe over the radio a vivid mental picture for the listener to imagine.

Author Ronald Garay in his book, Gordon McLendon: The Maverick of Radio said that McLendon believed that, “no canvas is as large as the imagination” and followed the principle of “painting a word picture in the listener’s mind” while broadcasting. McLendon named the principle “imagery transfer,”⁴⁸ and utilized it when announcing baseball games over the radio where he would have to recreate the game based on the symbols on a ticker tape.

McLendon wanted listeners to believe they were listening to a live game and said that the announcer’s use of inflection, along with his enthusiasm was critical in painting the mental image for the listener.⁴⁹

The radio also allowed people, no matter their race, class, ethnicity or location, to experience the same live event all at the same time.⁵⁰

Radio also helped politicians to exert their power and importance to the public. According to Wayne Parent in his book, Inside the Carnival, “Louisiana governors are legendary.” But Parent says that the office of Governor itself is not really any more powerful than other states, but that the “power exerted” from those who hold the office has been “short of spectacular.” Two of the governors who used the radio to exert that power were Long and Foster.⁵¹

One reason Long and Foster were able to exert that power was because of their celebrity status. According to a study by D. Horton and R. Wohl, an “illusion of intimacy” is created between the media personality and the audience.⁵² Over time the

audience relates to the personality, like a friend, and looks forward to regular encounter of tuning into the program.⁵³

According to Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby, Foster's program opened the door for listeners to see a different side of the governor than they usually see and helped humanize him for listeners that had only known him through the image of the media.⁵⁴

Foster had the advantage of actually getting to speak with a number of listeners personally when they called into the program. This helped reaffirm to listeners that Foster was accessible to the public and that anyone could call the state's highest official to speak with him one-on-one. As R.K. Avery wrote in 1978, Foster helped reaffirm "interpersonal attraction" by providing "positive reinforcement" and appearing to be "receptive and responsive" to caller's needs and comments.⁵⁵

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Chapter 3

Mike Foster: Businessman, Senator and Governor

Murphy James “Mike” Foster, Jr. was born during the time of Huey Long’s Louisiana governorship on July 11, 1930 in Shreveport, Louisiana to Olive Roberts and Murphy James Foster. Foster was the grandson of former Louisiana Governor Murphy J. Foster, who served in the state’s top post from 1892 until 1900.

Foster Jr.’s father was an oilman and fled Louisiana for South America while Long was in power. When Long was killed in 1935, the elder Foster returned to the Centerville area, located just south of Franklin, and purchased 3,000 acres of sugarcane fields with a group of partners. The elder Foster built Maryland, a large sugarcane mill outside of Franklin. The sugar business was a “boom or bust business.” The mill was unsuccessful, but did introduce the future governor to work.¹

Foster attended public school all of his life. He started school at Centerville Elementary School, where he would often walk or ride the bus to school and usually brought his own lunch. He was an average student whose favorite subject was math.²

Foster spent his childhood days busy in extracurricular activities including football, track and the Boy Scouts. As a Boy Scout, he attained the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest rank in scouting.

Graduating from Frankin High School in 1948, the future governor enrolled at Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Va., where he played football. Foster left VMI after only one semester to transfer to Louisiana State University.³

Foster, who did not have a car due in part to his father’s sugar mill failure, hitchhiked to Baton Rouge to attend LSU, where he was an average student in the College of Engineering. It was at LSU where Foster had his first brush with political

office. Eating all his meals on campus in the cafeteria, Foster ran for student council president on the one-issue, populist platform of improving the cafeteria's meals. Foster lost the election.

"I lost, probably because the College of Engineering went on a field trip election day," Foster said in a 1995 Times Picayune article. Foster wouldn't seek office after that defeat for nearly 40 years.⁴

At LSU, he was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity and the National Order of the Scabbard and Blade.⁵ To help pay his way at LSU, Foster worked during the summers for Humble Oil Company as an oil field roughneck.⁶ "My father wasn't wealthy. We had a roof over our head and ate well but I had to work. I worked in the oil fields," Foster said in a 1995 interview with the Associated Press.⁷

Foster graduated from Louisiana's flagship university in 1952 with a degree in chemistry, which he never used.

After graduation, Foster joined the United States Air Force and was stationed in southern Georgia, where he met his first wife. Foster later served in the Korean War. While he was overseas, his first son, Murphy III, was born.⁸

After serving in Korea, Foster returned to Franklin, becoming a sugar cane tenant farmer. He made around \$300 a month⁹ for several years and took a small bank loan to finance his venture. "I wasn't one of those gentlemen farmers. I fixed my own tractors," Foster said.¹⁰

Foster worked for a while in Port Barre for International Paper Company as a pulpwood dealer. "That's one thing I didn't do well," Foster said. "I was lucky to get out of that one with my hide intact."¹¹

After 18 years of farming, Foster had numerous cane fields and had several dedicated employees. To keep his farming crew together, Foster ventured into the contracting business and started small with projects such as clearing right of ways. The company, Bayou Sale (pronounced Sally) Contractors grew into a heavy construction business grossing \$10 million to \$12 million a year and employing around 200 workers in 1995.¹² Foster sold the business in 2001 after he was unable to dedicate the time needed while he was governor.

Foster left the politics in the family to his only sibling, Pres Foster. Pres was president of the St. Mary School Board, was St. Mary Parish president and served on the LSU Board of Supervisors. Pres died in 1998.

“My brother spent his whole life in public service. He was literally in office from the time he was out of school until five years ago. The parish is a better place for it,” Foster said when his brother died.¹³

Foster however was involved in the community. He served as a board member of several local banks in the Franklin area, was a junior warden of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, the president of the St. Mary Parish Farm Bureau and a member of the American Legion.¹⁴

During this time, Foster divorced his first wife, whom he also had a daughter with – Ramelle Townley. Foster’s love for the outdoors and playing tennis brought Foster to meet his second and current wife – Alice Cosner, a Virginia native who moved to Louisiana in the late 1970s.¹⁵ Foster met her on the tennis courts in downtown Franklin and liked her so much he hired her as a secretary for his business. Ms. Alice, as she is

affectionately known around Louisiana as, was also divorced with two children when she met Foster. Foster and Ms. Alice got married just two years after they met.¹⁶

Around 1986, Foster bought Ms. Alice her dream home -- Oaklawn Manor, a pre-Civil war mansion that was built in 1837¹⁷ and sits on the outskirts of town on the banks of Bayou Teche. The Fosters were living in nearby Franklin when Foster came home and told his wife that he had purchased the plantation in a bankruptcy auction.

“He walked in and said: ‘I bought Oaklawn today.’ I said, ‘You did what?’ He said, ‘I bought Oaklawn,’” Ms. Alice said in a 1996 interview.¹⁸

Ms. Alice refurnished the aging house and opened the house to the public for tours.

Also in 1986, Foster, a Democrat, decided to enter the political fray by running for state senator from his area. It was a decision that would lead him to the governor’s mansion 10 years later. But Foster didn’t enter politics because he wanted to or had lofty goals of being governor. As a businessman, Foster had called his state senator at the time Tony Guarisco about an issue affecting his company. Guarisco however never returned Foster’s calls. So Foster decided to run for Guarisco’s senate seat. “I ran because he wouldn’t return my phone calls,” Foster said.¹⁹

Foster launched a grassroots campaign, driving across the Senate district in a pickup truck, attending church meetings and meeting people one-on-one. Foster, running more as a populist than a Democrat, wrote a series of editorials on his political philosophy and placed them in local newspapers as paid advertisements. Campaign signs were put in all of his hunting and fishing friends yards and he term limited himself in the office to two terms.

Guarisco fought back, portraying Foster as an aristocrat acting like a common man. But Foster's plain speech, casual ways and personal campaign style continued to help him win over voters. Foster supporters even claimed that Guarisco's campaign was spreading rumors that Foster was racist and quietly said that black people were beaten regularly behind the gates of his antebellum mansion.

Foster won overwhelmingly with 65 percent of the vote, in large part to the support from the black community.²⁰

But Foster didn't go to the State Capital with the polished image presented by his grandfather when he was governor. Foster's grandfather never appeared at a dining room table without a coat and tie.²¹ Foster was known for his casual, average attire and easy manner.

According to Bernie Boudreaux, Foster's longtime friend, Foster stood out on his first day on the job in the Senate. "There was a 57-year-old coming into the Senate for the first time. Mike showed up in his casual clothes. The legislators were laughing at the bumbling country boy. I told them, 'You better watch that country boy. When he sets his agenda, he usually accomplishes it,'" Boudreaux said.

Foster hit the floor running by setting his agenda to help the small businessman. His first major piece of legislation hoped to fix the worker's compensation crisis. Worker's compensation is the insurance program that pays for injuries that occur on the job. "Insurance companies were leaving the state. Businesses were closing. Rates going up, up, up. Mike went around the country...to see what was working in other states. He wanted to form the Louisiana Workers' Compensation Association, and he needed a constitutional amendment," Boudreaux said.²²

The bill passed, but didn't make Foster a household name around the state. In a 1995 *Times-Picayune* article, the author Iris Kelso stated that "few people, including senators, understood the issue" and that it didn't make for good television or newspaper stories.

As a state senator, Foster's voting record was pro-business and somewhat conservative. In 1995, the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) gave Foster a 82 percent rating on voting with the special interest group and an overall record since 1991 of 79 percent. Foster was also a frequent critic of trial lawyers, a group that was at the opposite end of the political spectrum of LABI.²³

Foster bases his political philosophy on his experience as a businessman who worked side-by-side his employees in the field or at a construction site. "I run a business," Foster said. "What's good for business is good for everybody. Small business is the backbone of the whole state."

"You know what I say in my talks? The average small businessperson gets to work earlier than anyone else in his company, leaves later. He usually can do anything his people can do and he's usually in debt the first 10 years," Foster said back in 1995. "It's hard. It's extremely hard, and the state can make it much harder when they regulate you to death. Nobody knows like a small business person when there's an unnecessary regulation, and the state is paying for that."²⁴

Foster credited his experience in business and the over burdensome regulations for his active involvement as state senator to change how the Legislature met and limited their ability to change general laws. After the change, the Legislature alternates between a fiscal session one year and a general session the next. In the past, the Legislature had a

general session every year. “It doesn’t give them the opportunity to get involved in your business on a daily basis,” Foster said.²⁵

Foster did go against business and LABI on rare occasions. In 1991, Foster backed Senate President Samuel Nunez, D-Chalmette, in a bid to regain the presidency over business friendly and business backed Senator Allan Bares, D-Lafayette. Nunez had lost the post in 1988 when incoming Governor Buddy Roemer decided not to support Nunez, an Edwards ally. Foster said at the time that he felt Bares was an ineffective leader and that the Senate should chose its own leadership rather than letting it be imposed by then-Governor Buddy Roemer.

Foster also had a mixed record on gambling. He voted for both the lottery and the New Orleans casino and opposed an amendment that would have given residents the right to vote on the casino. Foster has later said that he regrets having opposed the amendment and now says he strongly believes in local-option decisions when it comes to gambling. Foster opposed riverboat gambling, but ultimately voted in favor of its final passage. He also voted in support of other forms of riverboat gambling before it was approved in 1991, including gambling cruises on the Mississippi River from the Arkansas state line to the Gulf of Mexico. He also supported cruise-ships-to-nowhere gambling as a freshman senator. Foster did however oppose video poker gambling.²⁶

Overall, Foster, the Democrat, voted in a conservative manner as a state senator. Foster consistently voted pro-life, and voted for sales tax increases on food and utilities. He believed that sales taxes affect everybody equally according to how much they purchase and are more popular with voters than other taxes. Foster also favored the death penalty, including the sentence for drug dealers who involved children in their deals.²⁷

Foster also served as chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and served on the Judiciary; Transportation; Highways and Public Works; Insurance; and Economic Development committees.

Running for Governor

In the summer of 1994, Governor Edwin Edwards announced that he would not seek re-election. Foster, a little known senator from St. Mary Parish, started eyeing the office his grandfather once held. But most discounted Foster as someone who would not have a chance at mounting a successful campaign.²⁸

On October 10, 1994, over a year before the election, Foster entered the Governor's Race with a rally close to home at the Municipal Auditorium in Franklin surrounded by his close friends and family members.

The next day, the New Orleans *Times Picayune* had a twelve paragraph story on page B1 about the announcement.

Foster declared in his announcement that he was going to run on a platform of voter initiative and referendum, where laws can be passed by citizen petition and bypass the legislature. "The only way to change our state is to take the power out of the hands of the politicians and give you the tools and the power to change it," Foster said.²⁹

He also drew a line in the sand and became the first gubernatorial candidate to vow not to accept political contributions from gambling interests. "Right now, our people feel that the gambling interest is unbridled in its influence and power in our state," Foster said.

Foster also promised to fight for lower insurance rates and to be tough on criminals. He said he would be "the toughest governor criminals have ever had to face in

the history of Louisiana...No longer should (imprisoned) criminals be allowed to watch soap operas and football games...Criminals should be put to work to pay for their keep and to repay the victim.”³⁰

Foster attacked the campaign from two fronts. On one side was a low-key, grassroots campaign that relied on a small staff and volunteers to get his message to voters. Campaign headquarters, or “Command Center” as Foster liked to call it, was located in Franklin at his Bayou Sale business. Instead of a main street headquarters with windows, Foster used a couple of blue-and-white trailers at Bayou Sale staffed with four women – Ann Perry, Carla Dartez, Susan Afeman and Debbie Broussard³¹ -- known as the “trailer girls.” The “trailer girls” used a group of computers and a network of volunteers to distribute signs and send literature. Volunteers were paid with t-shirts and “Foster for Governor” ball caps.

“We just decided to dispense with the ‘coffeepot in every town strategy,” Susan Afeman, one of the trailer girls who worked for Foster in the Governor’s Mansion after he was elected. Instead, the campaign used an 800-number.³²

On the other side was a media campaign that portrayed Foster as a family man, farmer, welder, hunter, and businessman. The strategy was to make people comfortable with him and continue to increase the media campaign as Election Day got closer. One technique Foster brought with him from his first campaign as State Senator was editorial columns to run in local newspapers. Foster would personally write the columns, purchase the space from the newspapers for them to run and include the campaign’s 800-number at the bottom of each column. Foster wrote on topics such as voter initiative, anti-affirmative action and anti-gun control.³³

Foster also turned to the radio, airing his first spot shortly after he announced for Governor in October 1994. The spot was biographical and let the audience get to know Foster as the Eagle Scout, sugar cane farmer and self-made businessman.³⁴

With a 30-second television ad in February 1995, Foster started relaying those images to the television set. In the ad, Foster portrayed himself as a non-politician businessman who would change the way government would work. He also emphasized his “experience as a farmer and small businessman, his belief in God and his love for hunting and fishing.”³⁵

Foster was trying to get his name recognition up with the columns, radio spots and television, but with very slow success. Even a controversial legislative bill sponsored by Foster didn’t seem to help his name recognition. In Foster’s last year in the State Senate and as he campaigned, he authored a bill that would have made it easier for citizens to carry concealed weapons. The bill passed overwhelmingly, but then Governor Edwin Edwards threatened to veto the bill.³⁶

In what would be the first of many instances during his political career of Foster turning to the airwaves to share his view on an issue, Foster fought back using the radio to get his message across to citizens around the state. In the radio ad, Foster urges voters to call Governor Edwards and tell him not to veto the concealed weapons bill. The 60-second spot also lets listeners know that Texas Governor George W. Bush and Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating had signed similar bills in recent days.³⁷ Edwards vetoed the bill.

Foster once again turned to the radio after Edwards vetoed the bill to appeal to voters to call their legislators in support of a veto override session, but with little success. The legislature did not go back in session.³⁸

Foster was having trouble in his gubernatorial campaign with name recognition. Most people in Louisiana did not know who Foster was or that he was running for Governor. In a *Baton Rouge Advocate* article in June 1995 about Foster seeking the public's input on Governor Edwards vetoing his concealed weapons bill, the only mention in the article that Foster was seeking higher office was one sentence with six words – “Foster, D-Franklin, is running for Governor.”³⁹

Polls also seemed to confirm Foster's anonymity. In a poll released June 27, 1995, by the University of New Orleans, Foster only garnered 3.5 percent and trailed everyone except state Rep. Quentin Dastugue and former Education Secretary Tom Clausen. UNO political science Professor Susan Howell didn't even mention Foster in an interview with the *Baton Rouge Advocate* about the poll she had taken. Results of the poll were:

Governor Buddy Roemer	22.6 percent
Lt. Governor Melinda Schwegmann	11.9 percent
State Treasurer Mary Landrieu	8.0 percent
U.S. Representative Cleo Fields	7.8 percent
Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee	6.8 percent
Former Governor David Treen	6.1 percent
U.S. Representative William Jefferson	5.6 percent
Former State Representative David Duke	4.2 percent
Foster	3.5 percent
State Representative Quentin Dastugue	1.2 percent
Undecided	20 percent ⁴⁰

Just one month after the first televised debate, candidates began to drop out of the race prior to qualifying and Foster began to pick up some of those endorsements. Harry

Lee dropped out at the end of August and gave his support to Foster, bolstering Foster's network of supporters in Jefferson Parish. Lee said of his endorsement that Foster would do a "tough job of fighting crime in Louisiana. Unlike others in the governor's race, Mike Foster truly listens to people. He doesn't just talk about listening."⁴¹ Former Governor David Treen also decided not to run, but decided not to endorse anyone at the time.

With Lee's endorsement helping Foster gain support, Foster was still lagging behind, but showing movement, leading up to qualifying. A poll released by Southern Media & Opinion Research Inc. a week before qualifying showed Foster with 6.5 percent. Foster had moved past Jefferson, Baton Rouge lawyer Phil Preis and State Representative Robert Adley, but was still 19 points behind Roemer, who was the front runner.⁴²

According to the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, "seismic shifts hit the Governor's race,"⁴³ on September 6, 1995, when Foster qualified for governor – as a Republican. Foster switched parties the same day that Dastugue, the state GOP's official nominee decided not to seek the Governor's Mansion. Foster said he switched parties because his political philosophy was more with Republicans rather than Democrats.

"The more I looked at being a Democrat and running as a Democrat, I became more and more uncomfortable. So, a couple of days ago, I sat down and did a little praying and sat down with my wife and decided without a whole lot of consultation that I wanted to be where my philosophy was," Foster said.

Asked whether he thought the switch would help his campaign, Foster said, "I did not do this for political gain or loss," Foster said. "I've been agonizing over this for about

a week. I have no more idea than a jack rabbit. I'm sure I'm going to get a few of my old yellow dog Democrat friends upset with me. The one thing I will promise you, you are not going to find I have made any deals."

Foster also said that news at the time tying fellow state senators to improper gambling deals also led him to switch. "I didn't think any of that was going on in the Senate. I knew it was difficult to get 20 votes on the (anti) gambling issues in the last few years, but I didn't know why," Foster said.⁴⁴

While Foster was trying to walk in the footsteps of his grandfather as governor, Foster's grandfather would not have been happy with Foster's switch. The elder Foster despised the Republican Party and "worked all his life to crush it." The elder Foster was a great orator and staunch segregationist who pushed to kill the Louisiana Lottery in the 1890s. As a state senator, the younger Foster voted in favor of the lottery.⁴⁵

Foster's grandfather would have agreed with political consultants who saw the move to the right by Foster as a mistake and one that wouldn't help his campaign. Gus Weill said Foster "took a very calculated political risk" by switching and questioned his timing in moving to the GOP. Weill said that despite money, Foster had not shown well in polls and would need to "get the Christian right and draw a certain amount of the David Duke vote" to make it to the runoff.

Pollster Bernie Pinsonat said that Foster didn't have any name recognition despite the large amount of advertising.⁴⁶ During the primary, Foster spent more than \$1 million in television, radio and newspaper advertising, with more than \$750,000 of that for television.⁴⁷ Pollster Ed Renwick called Foster a "wild card" and said Foster made a

mistake by switching parties since there were already conservative candidates in the race.⁴⁸

One of the pieces that Weill said needed to occur for Foster occurred on September 20, 1995, when former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard and former state representative David Duke endorsed Foster for governor. Duke had decided not to run for governor, but instead run for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by J. Bennett Johnston.

Duke gave the endorsement during a broadcast on a New Orleans radio station saying that Foster's conservative views closely mirrored his own. Asked whether he would denounce the endorsement, Foster said, "No, I'm not repudiating it. Why would I repudiate it? The guy got 40 percent of the vote last time (in an unsuccessful 1991 run for governor.) It's a free country."⁴⁹

Once elected, Foster would survive a political scandal that involved newspapers uncovering that Foster had purchased David Duke's mailing list to use in the campaign.

Duke's support and Foster's grassroots efforts helped Foster's campaign gain traction in the month of September. By the time the month ended a poll done for Insurance Commissioner Jim Brown by The Kitchens Group of Orlando, Fla., showed that Foster had tripled⁵⁰ his support in a one-month time and had drawn up into a tie for second place with Landrieu. The poll showed Roemer with 24 percent, with Landrieu at 18 percent and Foster with 17 percent. The margin of error was plus or minus 4 percent.

According to the Kitchens poll, Foster's switch to the Republican Party played a roll in Foster's popularity, but Foster also was crossing party lines by picking up support from white Democrats.

In a sign of growing strength to the Foster campaign, the front runner Roemer recognized Foster's growing strength commenting that Foster was moving up because of "his message." Roemer had made a similar comment about Duke back in 1991.

As polls on the Governor's race were starting to be released on a regular basis leading up to the primary, Foster's numbers were hit-and-miss. A similar Mason-Dixon poll released days after the Kennedy Poll only had Foster with 9 percent in fourth behind Roemer, Landrieu, and Fields.⁵¹ But while the numbers were inconsistent, they all showed that Foster was gaining momentum faster than any candidate in the race.

As October arrived, WBRZ-TV in Baton Rouge was the first to release a poll showing Foster overtaking Landrieu for the second position in the race behind Roemer, whose numbers continued to fall. The poll showed Foster with 14 percent, Landrieu with 13 percent, Fields with 11 and Schwegmann with 10 percent. The poll had a margin of error of 3.5 percent, putting four candidates in place to capture the runoff spot with Roemer.

With just weeks until the primary, the undecided vote in the race was still significant. "This is absolutely going to come down to the wire. We have never seen the undecided this high, this close to an election," John Boston, president of Survey Communications who conducted the WBRZ poll, said.

The poll showed that Foster was shaving some of Roemer's base away from him and Foster went on the offensive to capture more of that base. In a news release issued by Foster's campaign headquarters, Foster said, "I'm the one who has been fighting against voter fraud, against federal intrusion into states' rights, against the gambling which Buddy Roemer let into this state. I led the reform of worker's compensation,

which will save the state billions in the long run, and passed the law overturning the business-busting Billot decision. I can brag about my record. All Buddy Roemer can do is apologize for his.”⁵²

Foster’s rise in the polls surprised the candidate as much as the media. “Sure it surprises me,” Foster told Christopher Cooper with the (New Orleans) *Times-Picayune*.⁵³

In Cooper’s article, he asks, “For Foster, the how and why of his newfound popularity is something of a puzzle. Is it his switch to the Republican Party? Is it a smart television campaign or the collapse of several other conservative candidates? Are his country mannerisms just starting to stick? Did he get a bump two weeks ago after right-winger David Duke issued kind words about his platform? It may be all of the above.”

Pollsters had their own opinions. Baton Rouge pollster Bernie Pinsonat said Foster was doing well with the Reagan Democrats and was doing surprisingly as good or better as Roemer in the rural areas. “Mike Foster is the only candidate who’s just being himself. What you see is what you get,” Pinsonat said.

Several political pundits saw Foster’s popularity and momentum only gaining strength in the days before the primary. Ed Renwick said that Foster would likely benefit from the bandwagon effect, or as more and more start believing that Foster could win, more and more undecided voters would also begin supporting Foster.

One former gubernatorial candidate that jumped on the bandwagon was Treen. On October 4, 1995, Treen endorsed Foster saying that he shared his views on reducing crime, and eliminating video poker and riverboat gambling. “I think Mike Foster combines, more than any other candidate, the traits needed to move this state forward,” Treen said. Foster said the endorsement was the single most important event that

occurred up to that point in the race.⁵⁴ Foster also picked up the endorsement of three former state GOP chairmen Dud Lastrapes, William Nungesser and Donald Bollinger.

Foster, who had gone unnoticed by other campaigns negative attacks, started to become the target of those attacks as his poll numbers grew. The Louisiana Democratic Party, whose main target had been Roemer, turned their attention to Foster and his voting record on gambling. Foster, who was running on an anti-gambling platform, had voted in support of gambling nine times while a state senator, according to the Democratic Party.

“We don’t have a problem with him voting for gambling legislation. We have a problem with him misleading voters, telling them he is against everything that is evil and he has voted for most of that stuff when it came through,” Democratic Party executive director Jim Nickel said in a *Baton Rouge Advocate* article.

Foster responded that the votes highlighted by the Democrats are “pretty well public knowledge” and was not a surprise due to his recent poll numbers. Foster said that the Democrat’s worst nightmare was having two Republicans in the runoff – Roemer and Foster.⁵⁵

Roemer too turned to attacking Foster. Foster had gained the endorsement of Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Lee, who was a close friend of Gov. Edwin Edwards. After Lee endorsed Foster, Lee arranged a private meeting with a large group of possible supporters, which included several of Edwards’ allies in attendance. Roemer ran a statewide ad bringing to light the meeting and trying to tie Foster to Edwards.

But Roemer and other candidates’ jabs at Foster did not catch on with voters. As the primary approached, Roemer continued to lose support while Foster only got stronger. On October 21, 1995, Foster, who started the race a year earlier little known,

finished ahead of the field with around 100,000 more votes than his nearest challenger. Foster garnered 26 percent of the vote, with Fields coming in second with 19 percent. Roemer, favored throughout most of the race, finished behind Landrieu in fourth place.

According to polls, nearly one-third of the voters were undecided in the weeks before the election and a large number were still undecided going into election week. Most of those undecided were black voters, which helped push Fields into a runoff with Foster.⁵⁶

Both Foster and Fields pledged to refrain from personal attacks during the runoff and instead focus on the issues. While many in the state saw the November election as a black and white racial decision, both candidates reiterated that issues were more important than race.

Appearing on WWL Radio with host David Tyree days after the primary, Foster and Fields discussed their positions on education, abortion, carrying concealed weapons, welfare reform and affirmative action. On the show, Foster pledged if elected not to accept his salary of \$95,000 after his second year in office until teachers salaries were raised to the Southern average.⁵⁷ One reporter stated that the candidates sticking to the issues instead of name calling was “fascinating.”⁵⁸

During the runoff, Foster tried to keep the low-key, grassroots strategy that worked for him during the primary. Foster continued to buy advertisements and run columns in newspapers around the state, air “down home” commercials of Foster on a tractor or in a welding mask, and keeping appearances at forums and debates at a minimum. “We have been overwhelmed in the last four or five days with requests for

appearances. I prefer the type of campaigning where I go out and meet people at shipyards and at shift changes,” Foster said.⁵⁹

Baton Rouge pollster Bernie Pinsonat told the Baton Rouge Press Club that if the candidates continued to be nice to each other that nobody may vote. Pinsonat stated that Foster had the election wrapped up and should receive between 60 to 68 percent on Election Day. He said that Foster’s switching to the Republican Party is what propelled Foster from the bottom of the pack to front runner.⁶⁰

Soon after Pinsonat’s prediction, Foster threw a racial hand grenade into the race. During a debate sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons, Foster referred to New Orleans as a “jungle.” In attempting to compare Jefferson Parish’s crime rate with that of New Orleans, Foster said, “It is right next to the jungle in New Orleans and it has a very low crime rate.”

Fields, who was sitting next to Foster at the time turned to Foster and said, “You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

Later in the day, as the fallout over the remarks intensified, Foster’s camp issued an apology. John Zmirak, press secretary for the campaign, said, “He didn’t mean it to be a racial word. He probably just shot his mouth off. We’re sorry if anyone imparted a racial meaning to it. We don’t apologize for implying New Orleans is a crime-ridden and dangerous place.”

Fields jumped on the opportunity to attack his opponent stating that Foster’s campaign was slipping in the closing days of the race. Fields also noted Foster’s absence from several public forums to discuss issues.⁶¹

The attacks continued as the Democratic Party began running television advertisements in New Orleans, Lake Charles, Baton Rouge and Lafayette claiming that Foster wanted to force women to give birth to the children of rapists and put more concealed weapons on the street.

Foster responded on television and on the radio where Foster claimed Fields was a “liberal’s liberal” and calling Fields “cut’em loose Cleo” because of his congressional votes against stricter sentencing laws.⁶²

With polls showing Foster up by 15 to 20 percent days before the election, Foster decided not to make any public appearances in the final days and instead campaign over the radio waves. Foster addressed listeners of several talk radio shows around the state and met with television crews that showed up unannounced at his construction company in Franklin during the last days of the race. Foster said that he was more comfortable on the radio shows and could get his message out while receiving feedback from voters at the same time.⁶³

While no records could be found detailing which radio programs Foster appeared on, it is known that Foster turned to friend, supporter and New Orleans radio host Robert Namer. Namer, who was later given the honorary title of special assistant to the governor, was a controversial figure who Foster would later distance himself from during his first term in office. Foster appeared on Namer’s program in Jefferson Parish, with Foster crediting his radio appearance in the New Orleans area for his strong showing during the election.⁶⁴

On election eve, Foster hit the airwaves again, traveling to Lafayette to participate in an hour-long radio program before stopping at a local café to shake hands with voters.

Fields continued his runoff strategy of traveling the state in the waning hours of the campaign. But Field's travels couldn't compete with Foster's down-home persona.⁶⁵

In a lopsided victory, Foster became only the second Republican elected to the office of Governor in the 20th century and followed in his grandfather's steps, who held the office more than 100 years earlier. Foster, who limited his public appearances with Fields and instead concentrated on using the radio to get his message out, gathered 64 percent of the vote, compared to Fields' 36 percent. Foster's win was the most lopsided Governor's race victory since Louisiana switched to the open primary system in 1975.⁶⁶

Foster called his victory part of a Republican, conservative revolution that was sweeping Louisiana and the rest of the country. "I think there is a new South. We are going to look different in the future," Foster said.⁶⁷

On January 8, 1996 in 40 degree weather, Foster was sworn in becoming the 53rd governor of the State of Louisiana.⁶⁸ Foster was re-elected to office in October 1999, and began his second term of office on January 10, 2000.

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Chapter 4

The Creation of “Live Mike”

On a stormy night on August 10, 2000, Governor Mike Foster sat in a dark 10' x 12' studio that was hot with no air conditioning and launched the first show of his weekly radio talk show, “Live Mike.”

The show, broadcast live from the WJBO studios in the Xerox Building on Hilton Avenue in Baton Rouge, aired from 8-9 p.m. every Thursday night on a network of around 20 stations across Louisiana and Mississippi.

Foster was not an amateur behind the microphone, but the little experience he did have did not make him completely comfortable in his radio show venture. Foster had been on the radio numerous times as Governor and as a candidate. During his campaign, Foster appeared on numerous different talk radio programs across the state. The last few weeks of his initial campaign for Governor, Foster had turned to talk radio more.

Once elected Governor, Foster had provided a weekly radio and television address to networks across the state, with the Louisiana Radio Network using the audio for their newscasts. The video was picked up occasionally by local television stations to use on the evening news and was aired on cable stations across the state by the Hometown Network. The address was taped in advance, with questions prearranged for the Governor by his press office staff.¹

Foster also appeared on a few talk radio shows as a guest during his first term, but usually limited his appearances to 10-15 minutes and rarely took questions from callers.

But an appearance by Foster on two different radio talk shows in the spring and summer of 2000 would be the motivation that led Foster to launch his own show and follow in the radio steps of another populist Louisiana governor – Huey Long.²

During the 2000 budget battle in the legislature, Foster was invited and accepted an invitation to appear on WJBO's David Tyree Show. The show aired in Baton Rouge from 9-11 a.m. each week day.

"We asked him to come in and do the show about what was going on during the time," Tyree said. He recalled that Foster entered the offices in the Xerox building and passed by General Manager Chris Sweggman's office. Sweggman stopped Foster, introduced himself and asked if he could talk with the governor after the show.³

Foster, appearing on the program Thursday, May 18, was campaigning for a plan that would restructure business taxes by cutting \$635 million in some business taxes, cutting \$330 in sales taxes, and adding \$1.72 billion a year in other taxes.⁴

Foster was faced on the program with some tough questions, one being from Tyree. "Why should they (citizens) support what many people say is simply a huge tax increase?" he asked.

Foster responded, "Well, it's not. It's a big tax decrease - \$900 million tax decrease. The rest of it is just about equalizing a big tax break that's been given to some people and not others. It's closing a loophole."⁵

After the show, WJBO general manager Chris Sweggman was impressed with Foster's radio appearance and approached the governor about doing a radio program. Sweggman asked the Governor, "Have you ever considered doing a show? We've got a slot for you on Saturday mornings." The Governor, known among the press and his staff for not doing official state business on the weekends, dismissed the idea but said that maybe something could be worked out.⁶

“Chris put the bug in his ear by asking him, ‘Would you be interested if we gave you an hour a week to do a show?’” Tyree said.⁷

Foster next appeared on “Cleo Live!” on June 25, 2000. The show, hosted by State Senator Cleo Fields, is an hour-long radio program at 6 p.m. every Sunday that is broadcast throughout the state on several Urban radio stations.⁸ Fields started the program in January 2000.

While no articles appeared in the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, *New Orleans Times Picayune*, or *Associated Press* on what the Governor said or was asked on the program, Foster was intrigued by Field’s radio network and the potential political benefits a weekly show could have on sharing information with the public.

Of his appearance, Foster said, “I got to thinking, ‘Gosh, what an opportunity.’ That was the first time I had ever seen someone doing it on a consistent basis. I thought it had great, great possibilities if it was done right.”⁹

Foster placed a call the day after his appearance on “Cleo Live!” to Trey Williams, his deputy press secretary. Marsanne Golsby, the Governor’s Press Secretary, was in Washington at the time for two weeks as part of a Louisiana delegation informing legislators about Louisiana’s coastal erosion problem.

During the phone conversation, Foster said he was interested in doing a weekly radio show and wanted Williams to look into details about setting such a program up.

Foster wanted to join a movement among political conservatives that was started in the 1980s by Rush Limbaugh of bypassing the so-called filter of the media and taking their message directly to the people. A 1996 study by the

Annenberg Public Policy Center showed that political talk radio listeners were more critical of the mainstream media than non-listeners.¹⁰ Foster wanted to reach this group through his own radio program where he would have a regular studio guest – such as a cabinet secretary - to speak about a current topic of interest and answer questions from callers. Foster figured that by having a guest in the studio, it would control the show's topic and calls. While Foster might have to answer an occasional question from a caller, he felt most of the calls would go to his guest.¹¹

After hanging up the phone with the Governor, Williams was concerned with the idea, but figured that the Governor was floating a trial balloon and wasn't too serious with his suggestion. Williams thought the program could be a good idea, but questioned how long Foster would be committed to such a project. When Foster called Williams again later that afternoon wanting an update on the show, Williams knew the Governor was serious about moving forward.

Williams called Golsby, who was also concerned about the idea, but thought it had potential. She told Williams to move forward in setting it up. Golsby had spoken to Foster briefly after his earlier appearance on WJBO about such a program, but had not pursued the idea lately with Foster.¹²

The first step in creating the show was determining how stations would air the program, which stations would carry the show, how much such a program would cost, and potential times for the program to air. Williams' first call was to Louisiana Network affiliation relations director David Austin to ask his advice.

“I thought it was a good idea. I saw it as money for the network. We had talked to other state networks about their ‘Ask the Governor’ shows, but none had a money making project that was consistent,” Austin said.

While some states did have a program, none resembled the model that Foster was envisioning. Other states had programs where “you could not talk directly to the Governor on any of them. They called an answering machine” and left a message with their questions. The staffs would listen to the messages and determine which questions would make it to air. Most programs aired on a monthly, not weekly, basis.¹³

Williams and Austin discussed the cost of the program and the role the Louisiana Network would play in acquiring affiliates that would air the hour long show. The regular cost, based on other shows, for satellite time would cost the Governor \$150 an hour. For \$300 per show, Louisiana Network would provide the satellite time, handle all commercial sales and would be responsible for lining up stations to carry the program.¹⁴

Austin said for the program to be successful and gain the trust of listeners, it was important that calls would not be stacked for the Governor and that Foster’s Press Office would not screen the calls.

During the conversation, Austin also expressed interest in having the show originate from the Louisiana Network studios on North Third Street in Baton Rouge, with himself or Jim Engster hosting the program. Austin sent Williams a letter on June 30 confirming the details of their conversation.

The letter said, “As per our discussion, our prices for one hour of broadcasting are 150-dollars for a self-contained show and 300-dollars for a show we produce. The 150-dollar price only includes satellite time. The higher quote includes a producer and broadcast engineer, fully produced intros and outros for the show, complete with bumper music, a full-time staff to sign up affiliates, and studio time.”¹⁵

Foster ended up agreeing to pay Louisiana Network \$350 per show that included an extra \$50 to pay for someone to staff Louisiana Network after hours to ensure that the satellite feed was working properly. Foster would pay the \$18,000 yearly cost out of his campaign account.¹⁶ Golsby said that by not using state funds to pay for the program, Foster would be allowed to be more open politically during the program.¹⁷

While Austin wanted Foster to broadcast from the Louisiana Network studios, Foster envisioned broadcasting from either the WJBO studios or his office at the Governor’s Mansion. Williams called WJBO Program Manager Matt Kennedy to let him know of the Governor’s interest in a show, based on Sweggman’s idea, and to determine what time slots were available during the week for a show.

While a show during the day would have been preferred, most stations, including WJBO, had fixed national programming that could not be altered. Williams and Kennedy looked for an early evening time slot, with Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights as options. A suggestion of Mondays at 7 p.m. was made by Kennedy. Being on Monday, the show would lead right into

Monday Night Football, helping draw an audience for the Governor's show.

Kennedy and Williams decided to arrange a meeting with Foster to discuss the details.¹⁸

At the same time as negotiations over a timeslot were being determined, a co-host for the show had to be secured. While Foster had pretty much decided on Tyree, Williams also suggested to Golsby other possibilities such as WJBO personality Ed Buggs and former radio host Bob Furlow. Golsby agreed with Foster on the selection of Tyree, and Foster called and asked him to host the show.

"I was flattered and then I was concerned," Tyree said of Foster selecting him. Tyree said serving as host was going to put him in an awkward position because he didn't want to be accused of throwing softball questions toward the Governor, but also didn't want to go after the Governor since it was his show.

"As it was presented, it was his show and I'm only there to be a traffic cop – to do the technical stuff," Tyree said. "I thought it was a good opportunity for him, a good opportunity for radio by having the exclusivity that newspapers and TV didn't have, and I really thought it was a good opportunity for the public to be able to talk directly to the Governor."¹⁹

Golsby credited Tyree with being the most informed radio talk show host around. "He understood it was the Governor's radio program. He knew how to thread the needle between working for a news organization and hosting the program. When he was going to ask the Governor a question that was tough, he always gave us a heads up."²⁰

The selection of Tyree also would help with negotiations with WJBO, since Tyree was an employee of the station. To finalize details, a meeting was held at the AMFM, Inc. offices, in the glass-enclosed conference room directly behind the receptionist's desk. Sitting in the meeting were Foster, Kennedy, Tyree and Williams.

"I remember the meeting we sat in on," Kennedy said, recalling the event in 2003. "I remember I was awestruck that I was sitting there with the Governor of Louisiana. And he was like, what ever you can work out. He was so non-chalant. I told him we couldn't do weekdays. Looking back at it, we should have started the show at 2 p.m. and say, 'Talk to the Governor after Rush (Limbaugh).'"²¹

In the meeting Foster asked Kennedy about the option of broadcasting from a remote location, such as the Governor's mansion. Kennedy said that it could be accomplished, but equipment would need to be installed. Foster had planned on being in-studio on occasion, but also broadcast from the comfort of his home when possible. Foster considered buying the equipment for installation, but never made the purchase. In the years during the program, Foster would broadcast a majority of the time from the studio, with only the occasional remote call-in.²²

Based on conversations with Kennedy and Austin, Williams sent a memo to Foster detailing the program. The memo stated:

- The show would air on Monday nights from 7-8 p.m. from the studios of WJBO. A feed would be provided to the Louisiana

Radio Network, who will arrange for stations to carry the show, at \$300 per show.

- Twenty-four preliminary stations were interested in carrying the show and would allow the show to be heard throughout the state in all major radio markets.
- David Tyree would help the Governor host the show. Tyree would help move the callers along, but would play “a minimal role” in the show.
- WJBO would provide an 800 number that could be used statewide for listeners to participate
- WJBO would find a sponsor for the show and sell ads. However, ads had to be run past the Governor and no casinos or gambling interests could advertise during the show.²³

Foster signed a 52-week contract with Louisiana Network to do the program, with the option to renew through the end of his term in 2004.²⁴ No contract was signed with WJBO.

While details of the show were coming together, Foster’s staff still didn’t have a name for the program. Some of the names presented to Foster in a memo for consideration included “Ask the Governor,” “Mike Talk,” “The Governor Mike Foster Show,” “The Mike Foster Show,” and “The Governor’s Show.” But none seemed to provide the unique name that Foster and his staff were hoping for the program.²⁵

The person who came up with the eventual name of the program, “Live Mike,” was not Foster, nor his staff, but a reporter with *New Orleans Times Picayune*. Ed Anderson, a member of the Capitol Press Corp, had come to the 4th floor of the Capitol to grab his daily cup of coffee outside of the Governor’s Press Conference Room and then to the Governor’s Press Office to ask a question. Williams proceeded to tell Anderson about the show and Anderson jokingly said, “What are you going to call the show...Live Mike?” The name didn’t resonate with Williams at first, but eventually it was the name Golsby and Williams presented to the Governor as the name of the program.²⁶

Now that the show had a name, WJBO and Foster’s staff talked once again and decided that a tentative launch date of the program would be July 17, 2000.

The first news of the show appeared in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* on Sunday, July 9 in the Politics column. Williams had told *Advocate* reporter Carl Redman about the show, even though details were still not finalized. The five sentence announcement told readers that the show would air on Mondays, from 7-8 p.m., beginning July 17 on stations across the state.²⁷

But as the article appeared, details behind the scenes were still not firm and changes were beginning to be considered. In the coming days, the show would be derailed from its Monday slot, moved to a later time slot, and pushed back to an August debut.

Foster was pleased with the number of stations that had agreed to air the program, but saw one large omission from the list –WWL in New Orleans. Foster

said that having one WWL broadcast the show was probably better than all the other stations combined.²⁸ WWL is one of the more powerful stations in the nation, especially in the evening hours when other AM stations lower their signal, but WWL continues to broadcast at 50,000 watts because of its clear channel status.²⁹ It was also the station that broadcasts many of Huey Long's radio broadcasts.

Williams and Austin had been in contact with WWL about picking up the program, but Monday nights at 7 p.m. were already booked with set programming. WWL program director Diane Newman told Austin and Williams that the only day they had available to even consider a show was Thursday evenings at 8 p.m.³⁰

Even without a commitment to pick up the show by WWL, Foster moved the show from Monday at 7 p.m. to Thursday at 8 p.m. in hopes of picking up WWL as an affiliate. The move had Foster's show competing with one of the more popular nights on television, against shows such as Frasier and Survivor.³¹

The move would eventually not pay off, as WWL never picked up the Governor's Show, instead deciding to host Saints Running Back Rickey Williams' weekly show during the time slot.³²

As the move to the Thursday night slot was being discussed internally, Foster's staff had to stop WJBO from issuing a press release announcing the show at the Monday time. On the evening of July 11, WJBO proceeded to write up a press release announcing the show would begin on July 17 from 7 until 8 p.m.

with David Tyree hosting. Kennedy had faxed the release to the Governor's Press Office for approval.³³

Another obstacle that also appeared at the time involved politics. Foster was scheduled to attend the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia from July 31 until August 3. Foster was concerned about doing one or two shows and then taking a break because of the convention. Foster suggested beginning the program in August after the convention. A new launch date and time was set – August 10 at 8 p.m.³⁴

The Baton Rouge Advocate had an article on July 15, 2000, announcing the show at the new time and launch date. Instead of the five sentence article that had appeared the week before, the July 15 article was on page 1B of the Metro section and went into greater detail about the show.

Louisiana Network promoted the fact to stations that calls would not be screened and anyone would have a chance to talk to the governor.

“...callers won't be screened by the press office,” Williams said in the July 15 Advocate article. “There will be no attempt to stack the calls and weed out the bad ones. Everybody will have a chance to talk to the governor.”³⁵

To also help entice radio stations to pick up the show and become an affiliate, it was decided that there would be no network breaks during the program and three 3-minute local breaks where stations could sell local advertising and keep all the profits.³⁶

But some stations, like WJBO, found it difficult to sell advertising because businesses were concerned with being associated to a politician, even if he was Governor,

through advertising. While WJBO had hoped to have a major sponsor for the program, it never materialized.³⁷

The remaining details for the show – an 800 call-in number and music for the show – were not finalized until the day of the show.

WJBO had told Foster's staff that they were unable to pay for an 800 number to provide for the show. Williams then turned to Eatel, a local phone company located in Gonzales, Louisiana, just days before the show to see if they were interested in donating an 800 number in return for advertising on the show.

Williams contacted Mike Nicktakis with the company, who referred him to Eatel's Corporate Communications Manager Lisa Froman. Froman agreed to provide three 800 numbers for the program that would be tied into WJBO's main call-in line. In return, Eatel would receive free advertising by having Tyree or Foster tell listeners to "Call toll free on the Eatel line at..." While it was requested that the number be 1-800-ASK-MIKE, the number was unavailable. Froman suggested that 1-866-GOV-MIKE was available, and Eatel tied the lines into the WJBO studios less than 48 hours before the first show went on the air.

While WJBO has six lines into their talk studios, only three of the lines would be equipped with the 800 numbers for callers from around the state to call. On occasion, during busy call periods on the show, local callers in the Baton Rouge area familiar with WJBO would bypass the busy signal by calling one of WJBO's two remaining regular talk numbers, providing five call lines into the show. The sixth open line was the "hotline" that would be given to special guests calling into the show.³⁸

Just hours before the first show, Golsby and Williams still had not convinced Foster on the opening theme music. Foster wanted a patriotic flair in the opening, and suggested Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." as an option. Foster stated that on his earlier show during the campaign that he had used that music and wanted to use it again. Foster's Press staff thought the music should reflect Louisiana, through either Jazz, Cajun or Zydeco

Foster's previous program had been hosted by controversial talk show host Robert Namer, who had assisted Foster in getting elected. Namer, who hosted a daily talk show program in New Orleans, had used the Greenwood music for Foster because it was also the opening music for his program. After Foster's election, Namer had become a public relations liability for Foster because of comments that the talk show host had made. Foster began distancing himself publicly from Namer.

As Foster arrived at the studio for the show amid a downpour of rain outside, he asked about the music. Foster was told by his staff of the Namer connection to the Greenwood music and the potential negative press opportunity using the music might provide. Foster relented. Minutes before the show opened, WJBO technician Jack Savoie cued up some Cajun music located in WJBO's computer music archives. The style of music would stay with Foster and "Live Mike" throughout the show's 41-month run.³⁹

As rain continued to pour outside, and seconds before the show was to go live, the electricity in the building went out. With backup generators running, Governor Foster took to the airwaves. "Live Mike" was on the air.⁴⁰

Endnotes

¹ Personal experience of author

² Marsanne Golsby, personal interview, February 2003.

³ David Tyree, personal interview, April 2002.

⁴ “Foster tells listeners plan not a tax increase,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 19 May 2000: 6A.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Matt Kennedy, personal interview, April 2002.

⁷ Tyree interview.

⁸ “Politics,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 25 June 2000: 1B.

⁹ Governor Mike Foster, personal interview, February 2002.

¹⁰ <http://www.tvrundown.com/views/talkrad2.html>, Accessed July 5, 2004.

¹¹ Personal experience of author.

¹² Marsanne Golsby, personal interview, May 2004.

¹³ David Austin, personal interview, April 2002.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Letter from David Austin to Trey Williams on June 30, 2000, personal files of author.

¹⁶ Redman, Carl, “Foster to answer public’s questions on weekly show,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 15 July 2000: 1B.

¹⁷ Golsby interview, 2003.

¹⁸ Kennedy interview.

¹⁹ Tyree interview.

²⁰ Golsby interview, 2004

²¹ Kennedy interview.

²² Personal experience of the author

- ²³ Proposal for Weekly Radio Show with Gov. Mike Foster, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ²⁴ Redman, July 15, 2000, 1B.
- ²⁵ Proposal for Weekly Radio Show with Gov. Mike Foster, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ²⁶ Personal experience of the author
- ²⁷ “Politics: Live Mike update,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 9 July 2000: 1B.
- ²⁸ Foster interview.
- ²⁹ <http://www.wvl.com/stationinfo.asp>
- ³⁰ Austin interview.
- ³¹ Tyree interview.
- ³² Personal recollection of author.
- ³³ Governor’s Office Press release, “Gov. Foster to begin weekly live radio show,” personal files of Trey Williams.
- ³⁴ Personal experience of author.
- ³⁵ Redman, July 15, 2000, 1B.
- ³⁶ Flyer from Louisiana Network to affiliates outlining the program, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ³⁷ Kennedy interview.
- ³⁸ Personal experience of author.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Deslatte, “Governor completes first call-in show,” Associated Press, Baton Rouge, August 10, 2000, wire story.

Chapter 5

Live Mike – Thursday at 8 p.m.

Governor Mike Foster took to the radio airwaves on August 10, 2000, over a radio network of 17 stations¹ throughout Louisiana and Mississippi.²

Foster had first approached the idea of a statewide show back in June and had hopes of hitting the airwaves during the month of July. But scheduling conflicts and the Governor's planned trip to the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia moved the opening show to early August.

The show originated from the studios of WJBO in Baton Rouge and was transmitted around the state via satellite by the Louisiana Network.

Foster's staff had set up the program in different segments to allow Foster to share his views on policy matters that the Governor wanted to publicize, along with some background on the past week, during the first segment of the show.

The show was divided into three segments, with three minute breaks between segments. The breaks were hard breaks, meaning that Foster had no flexibility on when to take a break and had to hit the break at the specified times. The hard breaks were important because many local affiliates were computerized during the evening broadcast, with no physical human monitoring the show. If Foster was early for the break, dead air would fill that station's airwaves until the designated break time. If Foster broke late, the ad would cut into Foster's program and leave possible dead air at the back end of the break.

David Austin, former affiliate relations director for Louisiana Network, said that breaks during the first few weeks of broadcasts were not as exact as needed, but once

Foster and co-host David Tyree got comfortable with the format a few weeks later the problem was solved.³

Foster would usually deliver his opening monologue from a single sheet of paper of bullet points that had been prepared by his staff earlier in the day. Each bullet point was usually one line and would provide the Governor with an outline for the first five minutes of the show. Foster would often scribble his own comments on the sheet before the broadcast. Foster never read from a script and like some political radio broadcasters before him, often ad-libbed his monologue.

On a typical evening broadcast, Foster would arrive early; sometimes well before his own staff. On average, Foster would arrive around 7:15-7:30 p.m. and would usually wait in the small kitchen area down the hall from the studio. Foster would usually use this time to chat with Tyree, his staff or press to fill the time. He would usually glance at his bullet points, but would ask for no additional input from others.

At around the top of the hour, Foster would move into the studio, request a glass of water to drink from during the show and wait for 8:06 p.m. Foster was usually accompanied into the studio by Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby, with Deputy Press Secretary Trey Williams standing in the adjoining room where calls were answered. A member of the Governor's Office of Constituent Services also waited in the adjoining room if follow-up was needed on a call.⁴

Early in the show's history, callers would begin calling before the show was on the air, while towards the later history of the show there would be no calls received during the first few minutes of the show.⁵

Once a call was answered, the caller was asked by Jack Savoie, the board operator for WJBO, for the caller's name, hometown and topic. That information would be typed into the computer, waiting for their turn to talk to the governor.

Foster shared the booth with Golsby and Tyree, with all wearing headphones to listen to the callers. Foster often had a blank piece of white paper in front of him to write down the caller's name. As calls were taken, Foster would doodle on the page. By the end of the program, the page was full of names, squares, swirls and circles that Foster had drawn during the hour.⁶

After the show, Foster would usually leave immediately to return to the Governor's Mansion, or on occasion be driven back to his home in Franklin, arriving there around 10:30 p.m.

The lateness of the show was out of character for Foster, who usually goes to bed early around 9-10 p.m. Foster was not a fan of the late show, but thought it important to get his message to voters without the filter of the press.

Carl Redman, a reporter for the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, said in an August 23, 2000, column that the 8 p.m. timing of Foster's show would not allow reporters to recheck the facts of what Foster was saying or get opposing views before going to print.

Redman said:

Despite his claims of political naiveté, Foster understands enough about the media to know that the timing of his show – from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. on a weeknight – will make it difficult to put much context around anything he says on the air. If Foster makes news, such as announcing a major policy initiative, the mainstream media won't have much time to put it in context or seek opposing points of view and still meet Thursday night deadlines.⁷

But the 8 p.m. advantage that Redman saw early on would actually be a disadvantage for Foster in having news coverage of the show in the next day's newspapers. An archive search of the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, *New Orleans Times Picayune* and *Associated Press* found that a total of 18 articles appeared between August 10, 2000, and April 1, 2001, about the Governor and his radio program. Of these, only 8 articles, mostly from the *Associated Press*, appeared in the paper after the 8 p.m. Thursday show during the next news cycle (the following day) and only 2 articles appeared on Saturday. A majority of the coverage was in Sunday's papers as a small paragraph in each newspaper's political tidbits section.

Further analysis of the articles appearing later that evening or on Friday shows that the coverage of the actual program was even less. Three of the articles – one each from the *Baton Rouge Advocate*, *Times Picayune* and *Associated Press* -- appeared in the news cycle right after Foster's initial program. Of the remaining five articles, four of the articles were written by the *Associated Press* for the newswire, with one of those stories being run by the *Advocate* on March 9, 2000.

The final Friday article appeared in the *Times Picayune* on March 30, 2001, and announced that Foster's radio program was moving to a new earlier time slot of 2 p.m. every Thursday.

Matt Kennedy, program director for WJBO, said that the 8 p.m. show had trouble making news because it didn't give newspaper reporters enough time to meet their deadline and it also pushed television stations for the 10 p.m. news because of a lack of time to edit the video and write a story.⁸

But while the 8 p.m. time slot was a disadvantage, it also was an advantage in other ways. By having a lack of news coverage, Foster was able to express his views to the public without being questioned or filtered by the news media. This was one of Foster's goals in creating the show. Foster said, "It will give me the opportunity to get an unfiltered word out there and get some conversation going."⁹

During Foster's first show he elaborated further:

It's very frustrating in this job sometimes to be here in Baton Rouge and there's this big disconnect with everybody around the state. You think that you're getting the word out on what's happening, and you'll talk to people and it's not out there. You just don't have the ability to go direct to the people.¹⁰

It also allowed Foster to float political trial balloons. Dr. David Perlmutter, associate professor at LSU, said that with the call-in format Foster could mention an idea, and based on the response, decide how to proceed. If the balloon didn't fly, Foster could take political cover by saying that it was an "off-the-cuff remark" meant for discussion and not as a policy statement.¹¹

The 8 p.m. timeslot also provided a disadvantage for advertising. Many advertisers were hesitant to advertise at the late hour, and especially attached to a politician's program. WJBO had trouble selling the time and resorted to "house" ads or national ad buys to fill the open slots.¹²

"We tried to find sponsors, but found a difficult time," Kennedy said. "It's funny...they advertise on Rush (Limbaugh) but were afraid to tie themselves to the governor or candidate."¹³

The national ad buys were usually bought in bulk and could air on WJBO throughout the day. One such ad was a health minute by a national doctor selling a line of

health products. This ad played during one of Foster's Thursday programs and proceeded to talk about impotence. Foster's staff contacted WJBO about their disapproval of the ad, and was assured that the ad would not run again during Foster's program.¹⁴

The Broadcasts

With WJBO using emergency power and Foster sitting in a hot and dark studio, "Live Mike" went on the air at 8:06 p.m. on August 10, 2000, with David Tyree serving as co-host. Tyree started the program by welcoming the state to the show and explaining the show's format. After about two minutes, Tyree turned to Foster and said, "Welcome to the hot seat, literally. In radio, you want to have a good, stormy night to have your premiere." Foster then explained to listeners why he wanted to have the show and also updated listeners about his activities the previous week.

Foster's first show focused on education and the Baton Rouge desegregation case. Foster would find that a majority of the questions during the next 30 shows would focus on education. Foster told the statewide audience that Louisiana still had a long way to go to fix things and that the business community did not want to step to the plate in supporting taxes to improve education. He also told listeners that he was considering getting involved in the negotiations in Baton Rouge and was thinking of assembling a team of lawyers to challenge the federal government's control of the East Baton Rouge school system.

John from Baton Rouge, one of several callers during the hour, told Foster that he and his family had moved out of East Baton Rouge Parish because of the desegregation case. Foster responded that if nothing was done, the parish would be in the same situation 15 years down the line.

Gambling was another favorite among callers. A caller from Gonzales called the first show about the Harrah's casino in New Orleans and whether they would get a lower tax rate or a better deal from the state. Harrah's had signed a contract with the state requiring a \$100 million payment every year to operate in New Orleans. But Harrah's officials later said the amount was too high and was asking the Governor and legislature to reduce the amount. Foster said that Harrah's would have to make a case for such a deal. In the month to follow, Foster would use the radio program to discuss Harrah's further and argue to lower the payment amount.

Other callers included Coy from Alexandria who asked the Governor about restrictions on casket sales, Al from Shreveport asked about the state's low bid contract system and Karen from Opelousas spoke about children with disabilities.¹⁵

Sixteen callers from across the state called the inaugural show,¹⁶ but no record exists of which individuals called the show since a call list was not generated by Foster's staff. Beginning with the August 17 show, the staff compiled a list that included the callers first and last name, hometown and issue they were calling about. The list could be cross-referenced with a compiled list of known chronic callers and letter writers to the Governor's office. The master list was updated weekly to also prevent previous callers from getting back on the air with the Governor about the same topic. Even repeat callers who wanted to talk to the Governor about a different subject were rarely let back on the air.¹⁷

The structure of the second show was very much like the first, with Foster starting the program with personal tidbits about his activities during the week. The second show did introduce listeners to a new selection of theme and bumper music for

the show. Foster's first show had used a limited amount of Cajun music housed in WJBO's files. Prior to the second show, Foster's staff provided control board operator Jack Savoie with a number of Bruce Daigrepoint CDs. There was not any special reason for using Daigrepoint's music other than the staffer had just completed a class in Cajun dance at LSU and had the CDs available. It was the Cajun music that later inspired Foster's standard beginning of each show with the sound of the Governor yelling "oooooooooh haaaaaaaaa (who hah)" into the microphone.

Foster's second show on August 17 also had the Governor fielding a number of calls – 21 in total – on a wide range of issues. A majority of the calls were on constituent related issues where Foster did not have an answer. Many of the individual problems callers were asking help with included disability insurance, business loans, land disputes, and college courses not transferring to other colleges in the state. In organizing the show, calls like these had been a concern for Foster and his staff and was one reason a call list was compiled.

To answer these types of calls, Foster would tell the caller that he didn't know the answer, but would try to find out. He encouraged the caller to hold on the line while a staff member would take their name and number down so they could be contacted later to follow-up on their question. Foster would sometimes give the answer so often during a show that it became a running joke among members of the press and in fact was the focus cartoonist Greg Peters' Suspect Device comic that appeared in a number of papers around the state. It would be a problem that dogged Foster through the end of his show in 2003.

One caller, Coy from Alexandria, who had asked the Governor a question on the air during the first week called again about the same issue. He wanted the Governor to

introduce a bill to allow anyone, not just funeral homes, to sell caskets. When call screeners recognized Coy from the week before, they refused to allow him back on the air.

Later in the show, Foster took a call from Deanna from Alexandria. However the topic and question she had told the call screener she wanted to ask the Governor wasn't the same once she got on the air. Deanna proceeded to confront Foster about the casket issue once again and informed Foster that his staff would not let her husband Coy through to talk to him. Deanna had used a different last name to get past call screeners.¹⁸

A review of calls for the second week showed that 26 calls were answered by the screener. Four of those calls were repeat callers from the week before and were not allowed on the air, and two callers remained on hold because of a lack of time. In all, Foster talked to 21 callers, including the one repeat caller who talked to Foster again. Callers were geographically diverse with most coming from Baton Rouge with seven calls, Shreveport and Alexandria with three each, New Orleans with two calls and the remaining calls coming from smaller cities and towns.¹⁹

The third show on August 24, 2000, had Foster starting to hit his stride with answering questions callers were presenting him. Unlike the week before where Foster deferred most questions, the Governor was able to answer the concerns of all 13 callers. The number of callers making it to the air to speak with Foster marked a 38 percent decrease from the previous week.

A review of the third week shows that 19 calls were answered by the screener, with four repeat callers and two callers not getting on the air because of a lack of time. The total number of calls coming into the show marked a 27 percent decrease from the

previous week. Calls continued to be centered from around the major cities with Baton Rouge and Shreveport making up 11 of the total calls.²⁰

But it wasn't until the week of August 31 that Foster truly relaxed and started having some fun with the show. Others listening might have thought that Foster had joined the ranks of a previous Louisiana Governor Earl K. Long and had gone "just plain crazy."²¹

At the beginning of the show during his monologue, Foster stated that he had a guest in studio – Mr. Theofield Boudin – who would appear from time to time and answer any questions that Foster couldn't answer. Boudin then spoke saying that it was a pleasure to be there and he would try and help the Governor out if possible. Boudin though, in actuality, was Foster role playing the part by doing a Cajun accent. Callers didn't bite on the gag and didn't ask Boudin a simple question. One caller did comment that "Mr. Boudin's voice sounds a lot like Governor (Edwin) Edwards." Boudin delivered the Governor's standard closing words for the evening by saying, "God Bless America, God Bless Louisiana, and Miss Alice says don't litter."²²

After the broadcast, Foster heard from his press office staff that several of the Capitol reporters were critical of the Governor doing the improvisation. In response, Foster called the reporters as Boudin and stated his case. Foster, acting as Boudin, said:

Dat's the bes' I can do, yeah. You don't think I got a good accent for down on the bayou. It ain't 'xactly right, but it's the bes' I can do. Man, I been around some people in my lifetime, and it's not too bad.

Foster then introduced another friend of his that he planned to introduce on the show later – Miss Effie Bumbadier. Foster, in an older ladies voice, told the reporter:

It sounds like ‘bombardier,’ but it’s really not. It’s Bumbadier with a ‘u.’ B-u-m-b-a-d-i-e-r. I’m a retired schoolteacher and sort of like advising the governor.

Foster told reporters he wanted to have a good time with the radio program. Foster said, “If you can’t have fun, why do it? You know, I hate it when people take themselves too damned seriously.”²³

Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby said the Governor probably got the idea of the different characters from Walton and Johnson, two radio deejays that use different voices and dialects to play the role of several people. Foster had stated in the past that he and his wife Alice were fans of the show. Golsby also said that Foster might have gotten the name for Bumbadier from the Bombardier Sea-Doo jet ski that Foster owned.²⁴

Foster introduced Bumbadier to listeners on his September 28 program. Bumbadier, Foster in disguise, told listeners that as a teacher she wants to move out of the state but can’t afford the moving expenses because of her low salary. Foster also used Bumbadier to promote a constitutional amendment that would fund teacher salaries.²⁵

Golsby credits the characters to Foster’s lighthearted practical joker side that she says many people don’t see and the glass of wine that the governor often had before going on the air at 8 p.m. “I think it (wine) helped him drop his inhibitions,” Golsby said.²⁶

The September 7, 2000, show also had another light moment and also marked the first time Foster used the radio program to rally support behind him over a news story from earlier in the day.

On the lighter side, Trey from Baton Rouge called into the show and asked Foster why he wasn't at home studying for law school. Trey identified himself as a classmate of Foster's at Southern University Law Center. Foster was in his first semester of law school and had only started classes two weeks earlier. Foster and Trey talked about an assignment that was due, with Trey suggesting that the Governor form a study group at the Governor's mansion. Foster said, "Sure, come on over. Maybe we'll have a party."²⁷ Foster later ended up forming a study group at the mansion.

But the main topic of the evening was a letter the Governor had received from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) claiming that Foster was unconstitutional when he had issued a proclamation the week before asking for citizens to pray for rain. Louisiana at the time was undergoing a drought and 41 parishes had requested emergency assistance due to the dry conditions.

Joe Cook, of the ACLU, said that Foster promoting religion had crossed the line on separation of church and state. Foster responded that evening by asking callers what they thought of the ACLU's claim. Every person who called to talk about the issue sided with the Governor. Foster said that prayer must work since it had rained just that afternoon.²⁸

The next morning a story appeared both in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* and the *Times Picayune* about the ACLU letter and comments that Foster had made earlier in the day. There was no mention of the radio program and no quotes from listeners who had called the show. This is another example of Foster by-passing the media with the show and the media by-passing coverage of the show.²⁹

The show had 24 total calls, with 19 of those speaking to the Governor on the air. Of the five calls that didn't get on the air, four were previous callers and one didn't get on the air because of a lack of time. Most of the calls originated from the Baton Rouge area by almost a 3-to-1 ratio over other cities.³⁰

In hopes of taking some of the heat off of the Governor and help add diversity to the show, Foster and his staff decided to include guests on the show every once in a while. The first guest on the show, which was broadcast on September 14, 2000, was Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Secretary Jimmy Jenkins.

Foster had received numerous calls in previous weeks over the fee increase in non-resident fishing and hunting licenses. The Louisiana legislature had more than doubled the fees in the previous legislative session. Mississippi was considering a similar action in retaliation to Louisiana's move.³¹

Foster took a record number of calls during the night, talking to 24 individuals. Seven callers stayed on topic and asked Jenkins questions concerning Wildlife and Fisheries policy. While Foster had hoped more would call and talk to Jenkins, he was initially pleased with the experiment and felt that guests would be helpful in future broadcasts. Foster would later discover that listeners didn't want to speak to other guests on the program and would discontinue having guests on the show.

"We learned quickly that when someone calls the Governor's show they want to speak to the Governor, not a guest," Golsby said. "You aren't going to call the governor's show to talk to someone else."³²

Based on the success of Foster's first program guest, the Governor decided to try the programming move again. Foster would have guests on the program for three of the

five weeks between September 28 and October 26 and two of the three weeks worth of shows broadcast between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Andy Kopplin, Foster's then director of policy, appeared on the September 28th show to answer any policy questions listeners may have. Listeners had none. Kopplin did help Foster answer one question on where the lottery and gaming money had been spent. Otherwise, Foster handled all the calls. Kopplin sat to the left of Foster pretty much silent for the whole hour.³³

Foster and the guest's luck was better two weeks later when Secretary of Corrections Richard Stalder sat in for October 12 broadcast. Stalder answered questions from four of the fourteen callers during the show. Questions for Stalder included how to get a pardon, disagreeing with prison policy, information about obtaining a GED in prison and a compliment on the inmate labor used to clean Louisiana's highways.³⁴

In a different turn of events for that night, Foster received only one call from Baton Rouge during the program, while six calls originated from the Shreveport area, three from Monroe and two from Alexandria.³⁵

Foster's guests on October 26 and November 30 both centered around education. Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Member Leslie Jacobs phoned in as a guest on the October show to discuss Louisiana's accountability system results that had been released the prior week. Foster has often referred to Jacobs as an irresistible force that moves immovable objects. Foster said, "When she decides she wants to do something, she's pretty well going to do it and knock you over trying."³⁶

And Jacobs did that on Foster's radio program. Almost 65 percent of the calls to the show that night were for Jacobs and her comments about education. Topics ranged

from drop out rates and teacher salaries to accountability and higher education. And in a complete reversal of the October 12 program, nine of the 14 calls were from Baton Rouge.³⁷

Foster also had turned up the heat on his broadcast the week before urging listeners to support the Stelly Bill, a proposed amendment on the November ballot that would eliminate the temporary sales tax on food and utilities while raising income taxes on most citizens to provide a raise for public school teachers. Foster pushed for the amendment weekly on his program from October 5 until November 5, and did so again with Jacobs saying that if the amendment failed he wasn't sure if teachers would strike or not.

After the Stelly amendment was defeated by voters, Foster lashed out at voters during a news conference election night which was carried on WWL in New Orleans. Foster said that the people of the state didn't care about education. Foster said:

The people of the state basically just said they really don't care about the educational community. If the people of this state sent a message that they don't care about (teachers)...that's not a good message. I don't believe that. I don't believe that's what they (voters) meant to do.³⁸

On "Live Mike" the next week, Charlie from Denham Springs called in to tell the Governor he was rude in his election night comments. Foster said he didn't recall the remarks at first and then clarified his earlier statement saying, "What I really meant was that it sent that message, but I don't believe it. I think people just said they didn't want to pay any more income taxes, and I understand that."³⁹

Foster then continued by calling his critics who questioned how the Foster administration spent money on education as "nuts." Charlie responded to Foster by

saying that he didn't think it was proper as governor to call someone a "nut" if they disagreed with him.

Foster agreed saying:

Charlie, can I tell you something? I would have to apologize for doing that. Sometimes I get a little frustrated, and when I see people defeat an idea by using numbers I know are wrong, I'm positive are wrong. Maybe I could call them just misinformed and I'd probably be better.⁴⁰

Foster apologetic tone only lasted for a few minutes. Later in the program, after Charlie was off the phone, Foster called those same critics "liars." This was one of the first recorded instances of Foster "calling names" on the radio. It was a trait that he would use often, and would often receive criticism over the remarks.

Foster also said on the same program that the state was going to be forced to look elsewhere to raise revenue for education. One area he predicted where taxes might be increased was gambling. Foster said on the show that if gambling taxes were raised they would be "dedicated to education if old Uncle Mike has anything to say about it."⁴¹

Shortly after the Stelly amendment failed, Carol Davis, president of the Louisiana Association of Educator's, was Foster's special guest. Talk in the news since the election had focused on the possibility of teachers going on strike unless legislators went into a special session and found a way to increase teacher pay. Foster had been quoted as saying that he couldn't blame teachers if they did walk out and form a picket line.⁴²

Every call, except one, on the November 30th show was concerning the results of the failed election and what Foster would do to raise teacher pay.⁴³ Based on the tone of the calls, Foster's staff figured that the Louisiana Association of Educators had informed members of Davis' appearance and encouraged them to call into the show.

Foster's last guest on his show for 2000 was State Police Superintendent Terry Landry. Landry had become the State Police's first black leader back in July 2000. With the holidays approaching, Foster and his staff thought that the program could focus on the efforts of State Police during the holiday season on making the roads safe. Five of the fifteen callers for the December 14 show had questions for Landry that ranged from road rage to someone who had received a ticket from State Police.

The December 14 show marked one of the lowest total number of calls received for the show. Based on call logs obtained from the Governor's Office of Constituent Services, the Governor averaged sixteen calls per show from August to December 2000. The list of callers who had called previously had grown to more than eight pages.⁴⁴

The December 14 show marked Foster's last show for 2000 due to the upcoming Christmas and New Year's holidays. Foster would not have his first show of 2001 until January 11th, leaving almost a month void on Thursday nights. During the hiatus, local stations either filled the time with another program or aired taped shows that Louisiana Network provided on the satellite. The taped shows were repeats of the previous few broadcasts.⁴⁵ The one month absence would affect the program in numerous ways, including the number of callers on future broadcasts, the loss of listeners in certain parts of the state and the departure of co-host David Tyree from WJBO, which would eventually lead the show to a new time slot in spring 2001.

Tyree departed WJBO later that December after he was offered an afternoon show on WWL in New Orleans. Tyree had previously worked at WWL and welcomed a return back to New Orleans to a more powerful radio station.

Tyree continued to co-host “Live Mike” every Thursday by commuting from New Orleans. Tyree would finish his program in New Orleans around 5 p.m., drive to Baton Rouge for the 8 p.m. statewide broadcast, do the show until 9 p.m. and then return to New Orleans often arriving around 10:30 or 11 p.m. That schedule, along with added mileage on his lease car, would eventually have Tyree talk to the Governor about his continued roll on the show.⁴⁶

But the most immediate impact of the month hiatus was the lack of callers in the first few months of 2001. Foster had Revenue and Taxation Secretary Cynthia Bridges as a guest on the January 11 program. Only 12 people called during the hour, with three of the questions directed towards Bridges. A majority of the calls came from Baton Rouge and Lafayette with no calls coming from the Shreveport area.

The lack of calls continued in the coming weeks. The January 18 program only had 11 total callers with as many callers calling from the small city of Winnfield as from Baton Rouge. The following week was even worse. The January 25 broadcast also had 11 total callers, but only seven making it to the air. Four calls were screened and not allowed on the air. Geographically, callers were from Baton Rouge (4), Lafayette (3), New Iberia (2), New Orleans (1) and Monroe (1).

But the January 25 show should have generated more interest. Foster had invited Harrah’s Entertainment Chairman Phil Satre as a guest to explain the company’s request to the state to lower their mandatory \$100 million yearly payment to the state.

Foster had discussed the payments on previous “Live Mike” broadcasts. During earlier broadcasts Foster had stated that Harrah’s must stick with the contract it had

signed earlier with the state. If it couldn't meet its obligations, then it didn't bother Foster to see the casino close its doors.

On the September 23, 2000, broadcast Foster had softened his stance. Foster stated that he was looking for a "wide consensus" from legislators on what to do and added that it was up to legislators "whether they want 4,000 jobs to go away and a little bit (of Harrah's payment) is better than nothing at all." Foster also said that he was concerned about the state's legal situation if the casino was to declare bankruptcy again like in 1995. He said that if that occurred small businesses, such as vendors and contractors, wouldn't be paid for their services and would be left holding the bag.⁴⁷

Foster asked Satre a series of questions during the January 25th broadcast to help listeners understand Foster and Harrah's position of lowering the tax burden to \$60 million. While Satre's appearance was mentioned in a related story the day before the broadcast, no articles appeared immediately following his appearance.

The only article appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Baton Rouge Advocate*. The political blurb pointed out that Baton Rouge Representative William "Bill" Daniel called into the show to voice his support for a new Harrah's deal. Daniel had identified himself to the call screener as Bill Estay. Daniel denied the claim saying he only identified himself by his first name and was calling in as an ordinary citizen, not as an elected official.

Foster stated he didn't recognize Daniel's voice and was informed after the show that his staff thought Daniel had called.⁴⁸

Harrah's and teacher pay continued to be a popular topic through the end of the 8 p.m. show in March. Foster, on the March 8 show and on the doorsteps of a special

session, discussed Harrah's at length. Foster said that he wasn't sure where else the state could get money for teacher pay other than raising gambling taxes. Foster warned that if lawmakers voted against the tax package that legislators could face recall elections and would risk their political futures.⁴⁹

"People who vote against this better go find something else to do other than politics,"⁵⁰ Foster said. While many legislators discounted Foster's prediction, the plan passed and Foster signed the bill into law.

As listeners' interest for the show continued to fade, so did the frequency of calls during the one-hour show. The show has become what Daniel Boorstin called a "pseudo-event," a staged and scripted event that portrayed a false sense of actual events.⁵¹ Foster's staff became so worried about the lack of callers that they resorted to calling colleagues, friends and even family to call into the show with contrived questions. Foster's staff, standing by the call screener, would scroll through their Palm Pilots looking for people to call. Once they found someone to go on the air they would keep the number handy if it was needed for future episodes. Staffers would usually tell the person who was going to call to thank the Governor for his investments in education.

In an interview with Savoie and Tyree, Savoie recalled how he got to know several relatives of the Governor's staff very well.⁵² A lot of the calls in the last months of the 8 p.m. were planted by staff as there would be five and ten minute periods when no calls were received.⁵³

But the fact that planted calls were making it to the air was unknown by Foster and Tyree. Tyree knew that there were several times where he would have to fill the time waiting for a call. Tyree would have prepared questions ready to ask the governor.⁵⁴

The planted calls were first evident in the call logs provided by the Governor's Office during the February 1, 2001 broadcast. Williams had his mother, who was a teacher, call into show to thank Foster for the pay increases she had received since Foster had been in office. This was again evident during the February 22 broadcast when an employee in the Division of Administration called. But the most outrageous example was Foster's final 8 p.m. program on March 29th. One-third of the calls received that night were either Foster employees or friends and relatives of Foster staffers. Every planted call, except one, was focused on education. While there could be additional examples, planted callers would often use fictitious names, preventing the true number of planted calls from ever being determined.

After the February 1 broadcast, the remaining seven shows did not stand out from any other shows, but did have their unique moments. On the February 8 show, Foster had Major General Bennett Landreneau as a guest. The night had only nine calls reach the air and only two calls for Landreneau. But the phone board was lighting up the first few minutes of the show. Foster's staff had received word prior to the show that a call campaign was being organized by Office of Family Services (OFS) staff within the Department of Social Services.

The OFS staff was upset that they had not received a pay increase while other co-workers had seen a bump in pay. Foster's staff had briefed the Governor beforehand about the possible calls and what response should be given. Foster explained that the restructuring of the department was bringing everyone to the same pay level scale. Other calls about the topic came in during the evening, but were stopped by the screener and never made it to the air.⁵⁵

The February 15, 2001, broadcast had Foster calling into the show remotely from his Franklin home of Oaklawn. On the phone with Foster was John LeBlanc, who had headed Foster's security detail and had been promoted to lieutenant colonel and appointed deputy superintendent of patrol of the State Police the previous year. The show began with phone trouble in trying to get both LeBlanc and Foster on the phone. When that was unsuccessful, Foster and LeBlanc took turns handing the phone to each other to answer questions. Just as the phone situation had been resolved, the smoke alarm was sounded at Foster's Oaklawn home. Foster dismissed the alarm, which could be heard for several minutes over the air, and blamed his wife's smoking for the alarm sounding.

In a departure from the trend of shows since January, 16 callers talked to the Governor, with four of the callers also speaking to LeBlanc. Eight of the calls originated from Baton Rouge, with no other city providing more than one caller.⁵⁶

The February 22 show had Foster taking a break from broadcasting, but the show continued without him. Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby filled in for Foster, with special guest Jim DuBose, who was the state's chief information technology person. Only eight calls came into the switchboard during the hour-long show, with one of those being a planted call. Every call except one originated from Baton Rouge.

From January until March the show averaged 13 callers a program, down an average of three callers since December. The geographic makeup of calls also changed. Prior to December, the number of callers from the Shreveport area would follow closely behind the number of Baton Rouge callers. During the three months of January to

March, only one call was logged from the Shreveport area and that call occurred on the Foster's last 8 p.m. program.⁵⁷

One possible reason for this decline was the Shreveport station (KEEL) that carried the Governor's show was also obligated to carry the Louisiana Tech basketball games. A review of both men's and women's basketball schedules for the 2000-01 season show the first possible conflict occurred the evening of the December 7, 2000 program when Louisiana Tech had games scheduled. KEEL management had informed Foster's staff of their commitment and had stated that they would not be able to carry the show that night and possible other nights in the future. As a result, there were no calls received from the Shreveport area that evening.⁵⁸

In the following months, a Louisiana Tech basketball game was scheduled for every Thursday evening during the Governor's broadcast except on February 22, March 15 and March 29. However, no calls were received from the Shreveport area until the March 29 broadcast.⁵⁹

Another problem Foster was facing was the possible departure of his co-host David Tyree. As March rolled around, Tyree approached the Governor and stated that he would be unable to continue driving back and forth from New Orleans to do the show. "I told the Governor that I will do this a little while longer – I don't want to leave you in a lurch – but you've got to find someone else."⁶⁰

With Tyree at WWL and planning on leaving the Governor's Show, Foster was determined to add WWL as a network affiliate before Tyree's departure. Throughout the eight months of broadcasting at 8 p.m., Foster had inquired or commented that adding WWL as an affiliate should be a top priority. Foster thought that WWL was critical for

the continued success of the show and had said that one WWL was worth more than probably all the other stations combined.⁶¹

Tyree said, “We had talked to Diane Newman (program manager for WWL) a number of times, and then it just happened. Once I told the Governor I was leaving, he got on the phone with Diane. That made all the difference.”⁶²

But Foster was still looking for WWL picking up the current show at the current time. WWL didn’t have that slot available. To solve the problem, Tyree offered to give up an hour of his afternoon radio show every Thursday for the Governor’s show. Newman and Foster agreed and the show moved to the new 2 p.m. time slot on April 5, 2001.⁶³

While WWL was on board, the other network affiliates had not agreed to pick up the show. And the move upset WJBO who had created the show and now had WWL stealing the show, right after the station had stolen one of WJBO talk show hosts.

Williams turned to David Austin with Louisiana Network once again to try and recruit stations. Not as many stations were needed as at night since most stations ran at greater wattage during the day, allowing the signal to travel farther.

Williams also contacted Kennedy at WJBO about picking up the show. The station at the time was carrying Dr. Laura Schlessinger during the 2 p.m. hour. Kennedy told Williams that they were interested in the show, but would have to get permission from Schlessinger not to air the program for an hour. Kennedy said that he also could help bring KEEL and KPEL on board since both were about to be acquired by the same company. (KPEL was not later acquired by Clear Channel Communications.)

Foster had instructed Williams that whatever happens, he did not want to upset WJBO since they had given him his first shot at a show.⁶⁴ With the old show WJBO could brag that the Governor's show originated from their studios. With the new 2 p.m. time they could not boast that claim.

WWL and Foster had agreed that the governor would come into the studio on occasion, but would broadcast the remaining shows from remotes locations over the phone. To help pacify WJBO and get them onboard, Williams proposed to WJBO that Foster would still come to their studio to broadcast the show, while Tyree would do the show from the WWL studios. WJBO agreed.⁶⁵

"That (having Foster in studio) absolutely saved it. We felt that even though David was doing the show, as long as the Governor was sitting in our studio we still had some ownership of the show," Kennedy said.

Kennedy also admitted that the Dr. Laura angle wasn't completely accurate. "That was an excuse. We did not want to feel like WWL had taken it away from us," Kennedy said.⁶⁶

As the date for the new show approached, Foster attended the Louisiana Association of Broadcasters convention to thank stations for carrying the show in the past and drum up support for the new 2 p.m. show.⁶⁷

As the 2 p.m. show began on April 5, 2001, all of the major radio markets in the state – Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria, Lake Charles, Lafayette, Baton Rouge and New Orleans -- were carrying the show. With his first show, Foster would probably reach more people in that one hour than he had in the months of his evening program.

Endnotes

¹ Stations for the initial broadcast included KEZP 104.3 FM (Alexandria/Bunkie), WJBO 1150 AM (Baton Rouge), WBOX 920 AM (Bogalusa), WBOX 92.9 FM (Bogalusa), KGGM 93.5 FM (Delhi), KJEF 92.9 FM (Jennings/Lake Charles), KPEL 105.1 FM (Lafayette), KASO 1240 AM (Minden), KMLB 1440 AM (Monroe), WANT 1450 AM (Natchez, MS), KANE 1240 AM (New Iberia), KWCL 96.7 FM (Oak Grove), KTJC 92.3 FM (Rayville), KEEL 710 AM (Shreveport), WSLA 1560 AM (Slidell), KBYO 1360 AM (Tallulah), KTIB 690 AM (Thibodaux). Stations KVPI 1050 AM (Ville Platte) and KVPI 93.5 FM (Ville Platte) were added after the first show.

² Deslatte, Melinda, "Governor completes first call-in show," Associated Press, 10 August 2000: news wire.

³ David Austin, personal interview, February 2003.

⁴ Personal recollections of the author

⁵ Jack Savoie, personal interview, April 2002.

⁶ Frink, Chris, "Foster enjoys work in the booth," Baton Rouge Advocate, 27 January 2002: 1B.

⁷ Redman, Carl, "Radio show lets Foster test ideas with public," Baton Rouge Advocate, 23 August 2000: 7B.

⁸ Matt Kennedy, personal interview, February 2003.

⁹ Anderson, Ed, "It was a dark and stormy night for Foster's radio show debut," Times-Picayune (New Orleans) 11 August 2000: A2.

¹⁰ Redman 7B.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kennedy interview, 2003.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Personal recollections of the author

¹⁵ Deslatte, Associated Press, wire.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Chris Stelly, personal interview, January 2003.

- ¹⁸ Personal recollections of author
- ¹⁹ “Live Mike” call log for 17 August 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ²⁰ “Live Mike” call log for 24 August 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ²¹ Kurtz, Michael, and Peoples, Morgan, Earl K. Long: The saga of Uncle Earl and Louisiana Politics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990) 211.
- ²² “Briefing Book: News and Views from the Louisiana Capitol,” Times-Picayune (New Orleans) 23 September 2000: A4.
- ²³ “Politics,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 10 September 2000: 1B.
- ²⁴ Marsanne Golsby, personal interview, February 2003.
- ²⁵ “Miss Effie makes her appearance,” Associated Press, 28 September 2000: wire.
- ²⁶ Golsby interview.
- ²⁷ “Politics,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 10 September 2000: 1B.
- ²⁸ “Live Mike” call log for 7 September 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ²⁹ Dyer, Scott, “ACLU says Governor’s Request for rain illegal,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 8 September 2000: 2B.
- ³⁰ “Live Mike” call log for 7 September 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ³¹ “Louisiana, Mississippi officials meet,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 20 August 2000: 20C.
- ³² Golsby interview.
- ³³ “Live Mike” call log for 28 September 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ³⁴ “Live Mike” call log for 12 October 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Thevenot, Brian, “Jacobs stirs up system and dishes out results: BESE member is behind schools' accountability,” Times-Picayune (New Orleans) 23 October 2000: A1.
- ³⁷ “Live Mike” call log for 26 October 2000, personal files of Trey Williams
- ³⁸ “Politics,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 12 November 2000: 1B.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Redman, Carl, "Foster needs tax answers," Baton Rouge Advocate, 12 November 2000: 13B.

⁴² Gill, James, "Grumpy Foster whips up the teachers," Times Picayune (New Orleans) 12 November 2000: B7.

⁴³ "Live Mike" call log for 30 November 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.

⁴⁴ 2000 "Live Mike" call logs, personal files of Trey Williams

⁴⁵ Austin interview

⁴⁶ David Tyree, personal interview, April 2002.

⁴⁷ Redman, Carl, "It's time to deal a new hand," Baton Rouge Advocate, 24 September 2000: 15B.

⁴⁸ "Politics," Baton Rouge Advocate, 28 January 2001: 1B.

⁴⁹ Redman, Carl, "Plan tying raises to gambling questioned," Baton Rouge Advocate, 10 March 2001:1A.

⁵⁰ "Special session kicks off tonight: Foster will roll dice on 2 casino proposals," Times Picayune (New Orleans) 11 March 2001: 1A.

⁵¹ Internet article, <http://www.transparencynow.com/boor.htm> located on June 1, 2004

⁵² Jack Savoie and David Tyree, personal interview, April 2002.

⁵³ Personal recollections of author.

⁵⁴ Tyree interview.

⁵⁵ "Live Mike" call log for 8 February 2001, personal files of Trey Williams.

⁵⁶ "Live Mike" call log for 15 February 2001, personal files of Trey Williams.

⁵⁷ "Live Mike" call logs for December 2000-March 2001, personal files of Trey Williams.

⁵⁸ “Live Mike” call log for 7 December 7 2000, personal files of Trey Williams.

⁵⁹ <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/basketball/college/men/schedules/2000/team/lap>

⁶⁰ <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/basketball/college/men/schedules/2000/team/lap>

⁶¹ Mike Foster, personal interview, February 2002.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Tyree interview.

⁶⁴ Foster interview.

⁶⁵ Kennedy interview.

⁶⁶ Kennedy interview.

⁶⁷ Austin interview.

Chapter 6

Live Mike – Thursday at 2 p.m.

On April 5, 2001, Foster entered the small studio at the WJBO studios waiting for the show to begin. But unlike the previous week, it was daylight outside and co-host David Tyree was not sitting in the same studio with Foster, but 76 miles down the interstate in the studios of WWL in New Orleans.

Days leading up to the Thursday broadcast engineers from WJBO, WWL and Louisiana Network had tested the ISDN connection and did a trial run to see if the connection formula they derived would indeed allow Foster to hear Tyree and callers over his headphones, while allowing Tyree to hear Foster. The tests worked and engineers now waited only to see if there were hidden problems come that Thursday.

As the studio clock moved from 2:05 p.m. to 2:06 p.m., Foster's "Live Mike" opening music that he had used during his 8 p.m. broadcast went across the airwaves, with Foster giving his normal opening greeting of "oooooooooh haaaaaaaaa ." The show was without a hitch and Foster's goal eight months earlier of having a powerful radio program across the state, especially on WWL, had been fulfilled.

A majority of the calls to the show during the first broadcast originated from New Orleans, a change from the earlier show which had a majority of the calls from Baton Rouge.

Additional details about the first show and other 2 p.m. broadcasts in 2001 are sketchy. No records were kept by Foster's staff on what calls were coming into the program since the calls were coming into the studios of WWL in New Orleans. The move to 2 p.m. gave Foster a bigger audience, but also prevented a staff member from being physically present to help screen calls. That task would now be up to Jack Savoie,

who had answered calls and run the sound board during the 8 p.m. show and had moved with Tyree to WWL in January.

The only details from shows during this time are newspaper reports and a list of callers from the shows that needed additional follow-up. Even this list is limited and no records past July 2001 until 2002 exist.

News coverage by newspapers was also slow in taking off with the new program. As the program matured, reporters began to rely on the program for news each Thursday. Matt Kennedy, program director for WJBO, said that as the show matured, Foster drove the news every Thursday.¹

News and Issues – 2001

Foster soon saw the power that having a statewide radio program could have. On Foster's June 7, 2001, show, the Governor encouraged listeners to pick up their phones and call their state senators to voice support for a technology fund that Senator Don Cravins had targeted. Cravins wanted to take money from the fund to provide additional money for school support workers. Foster gave the Senate switchboard number over the air and caused the phones to jump to life with callers. After two hours of debate and numerous messages from constituents, the proposal failed.²

Like the evening program, reporters were slow in using the program each Thursday for news. A search of articles in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* and the *Times Picayune* shows that 19 articles appeared in newspapers during the first 6 months of the show. From those articles, 9 were located among political briefs, 3 were one time stories, 2 were the result of the September 11 attacks, and 5 resulted because of negotiations between the New Orleans Saints and the state of Louisiana.

Negotiations with the Saints to help the National Football League team become more financially secure became the first major news story focused around the 2 p.m. show. Between mid-June and the middle of August, media and listeners would tune into the program to hear the latest negotiation update from Foster.

The first article as a result of what Foster said about the Saints negotiations on his Thursday program appeared in the *Times Picayune* on June 29, 2001. Foster used the June 28 show to help ease the tension that had erupted earlier in the week between the Saints and the state. Talks became tense when Foster Chief-of-Staff Stephen Perry held a news conference and stated that the top Saints management was negotiating in “bad faith.”³

Foster announced on the show that he and Tom Benson, owner of the Saints, would meet face-to-face on July 9 at the Governor’s Mansion. Benson had complained previously that he was tired of meeting with lower-ranking aides and threatened to move the team to Mississippi after Perry’s news conference.

Foster said on the June 28, 2001, program, “I’ll be there. The two gorillas are going to sit down and try to keep it straight.” But Foster sounded a pessimistic note when he responded to a caller by saying, “I want to keep the Saints, but we can not give away the store to do it.”⁴

Foster also answered criticism that he was not in Baton Rouge during the breakdown of talks, but was instead in Franklin taking care of personal business. Foster told listeners that he was involved in the Saints situation at all times, despite being away from Baton Rouge. He said, “I wasn’t fishing.”⁵

Foster had also appeared on David Tyree's program on WWL-AM in New Orleans for an hour the previous day to answer criticism of his absence.⁶

Foster used the next week's show on July 5 to lay out the state's position before his meeting with Benson. Foster stated he believed that Benson wanted to keep the Saints in Louisiana but that the New Orleans area wouldn't be able to offer the same amount of money that bigger cities might offer.

"The truth is the state is going every bit as far as we possibly can to help the team stay here. But there is a point at which we cannot go past. We cannot build a half-billion-dollar stadium unless we are assured it is the kind of thing that will work," Foster said during the July 5 program.⁷

He continued by saying that the state can provide short-term money to help the team move into the top one-third of NFL clubs in net revenue but that we "can't guarantee him everything. We will make it as attractive to stay here as somewhere else. We are not going to give away the farm."⁸

Foster and Benson met at the Governor's Mansion on July 9, 2001, with television cameras, reporters and radio microphones outside waiting to go live with any developments. Foster and Benson emerged from the five-hour meeting with a tentative deal, with small details to be worked out in the coming weeks. Foster and Benson agreed to a deal that would provide the Saints with another \$12.5 million a year in subsidies for two more seasons while waiting on a state study to see if a new stadium was feasible.⁹

Foster continued to update program listeners over the following weeks about the progress between the state and Saints. Foster was conservative with his words and would

usually say that things were progressing. His words on the program during this time were so cautious that no stories appeared on his comments until July 27, 2001.

Commenting on his July 26 program, Foster spoke about a new 52-member task force that he had appointed the previous day to evaluate and make recommendations on whether the Superdome should be renovated or a new stadium be built for the Saints. Foster said on the program that he was confident that Benson would abide by any recommendation the task force proposed.

“He and I have looked each other in the eye and he has never told me he was going to leave if he doesn’t get a new stadium. We promised him we would give it a good, fair look,” Foster said in responding to a call on the subject.¹⁰

More than a month passed before the next article was written about Foster’s radio comments on the Saints. On his August 30 program, Foster made news by saying that Benson and Foster would meet again to iron out some small details in the negotiations. Foster said that he and Benson had spoke by phone but were waiting on some final details before meeting again.

“The minute they narrow this down to just one or two issues, Mr. Benson and I will sit down, and we’ll try to knock it out,” Foster said.¹¹

A month later a final deal was signed with the Saints, but no more stories appeared as a result of the radio program.

Most likely one reason for this was the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. After September 11th, the program took a different turn and served as a point for people in the state to rally and become a part of the recovery efforts in New York.

Foster use of the program on September 13 was one of a statesman. Foster Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby said that Foster reassured Louisiana's citizens during the program by providing security information to listeners. Golsby said that the show is the only one she can remember that was completely serious in nature, with no part of the show being funny.¹²

On Foster's September 20 show, a caller by the name of Ron Goldman gave Foster the suggestion of purchasing a fire truck with Louisiana taxpayer dollars to help replace the many fire trucks that had been destroyed in New York on September 11.¹³ The suggestion caught Foster's attention and the Bucks for Fire Trucks campaign was launched. It would be a topic that would dominate "Live Mike" for the rest of 2001.

But Goldman didn't just happen to get through to talk to the Governor. Foster had been informed before the show that Goldman was calling and what his idea entailed. Radio host David Tyree had received an email from Goldman before show with his idea and Tyree called the Governor to let him know that the call might be coming.

"To his credit, the Governor just grabbed a hold of it like a bull terrier, locked his teeth on it and did not let go,"¹⁴ Tyree said.

Goldman said he got the idea for donating the fire truck while he was watching President Bush on television addressing rescue workers while standing on the rubble of a fire truck. "It just clicked and went from there. I wanted to see if there was something we could do to start a campaign, to do something to show there is unity in 'United,'" Goldman said.¹⁵

Foster initially told Goldman that he was not sure if the state could purchase the vehicle for another government entity but would have his lawyers check into the matter.

The Attorney General's office cleared the way about two weeks later for the use of taxpayer funds¹⁶, but Foster decided to help raise private funds to buy the truck and launched the effort on his October 10 program.¹⁷

"It would be more fun to do it privately," Foster said on the program. "It will involve a lot more people. We may not have to look at public funds."¹⁸

Foster used the program each week to give updates on the fund-raising efforts and reported that more than \$30,000 had been raised during the first week and another \$20,000 to \$30,000 had been pledged. Foster also said that he would contact other Southern Governors and urge them to follow in Louisiana's footsteps.¹⁹

The state ended up raising \$1 million in donations, thanks in part to "Live Mike" and small, local newspapers that covered stories of local school groups giving to the cause.²⁰

Foster, along with Goldman and others, delivered the fire truck to New York right before Christmas 2001. Foster first stopped in Washington at The White House to show the truck to President George W. Bush during a South Lawn ceremony that was broadcast on CNN and Fox News.

Bush commented that he liked the story of a caller on the Governor's radio show coming up with the idea. "This is the kind of story that makes our country so unique and so different. It's a story that makes me so proud to be the president of such a great land," Bush said. "People from all walks of life, all political parties, people, some of whom probably have never been to New York City before, have said, 'What can I do to help?'"²¹

After delivering the trucks in New York on a Thursday, Foster was to do his radio program from New York. According to Golsby, there was thought of doing the show

from Ground Zero, but that idea later was rejected. Instead, Foster didn't do the show from New York or anywhere that afternoon. Foster decided to head back to Louisiana and was in route home when the show aired. Filling in for Foster was Golsby who said she almost missed doing the show. Golsby made it back from the fire station, after a two hour cab ride, to the hotel where she was staying only five minutes before the show went on the air.²²

While only eight articles appeared in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* and *Times Picayune* between September and December mentioning the radio program's part in the Bucks for Trucks campaign, there were numerous articles around the state in smaller papers that mentioned the campaign and the radio show.

According to Golsby, the Bucks for Trucks campaign was one of the most effective uses of the program. The campaign helped draw attention to the Governor's radio program around the state, helped increase Foster's profile on a national level by being interviewed on NBC's Today Show and made people in Louisiana feel a part of the New York recovery effort. There is probably a good possibility that without "Live Mike," the project would not have gotten off the ground.²³

After taking a few weeks off from the show for the Christmas and New Year holiday, Foster returned to the statewide program on January 10, 2002.

News and Issues -- 2002

While a large portion of the callers during Foster's 2 p.m. show were constituent related, the show also became more of a news maker during the year.

One of the first examples of this occurred in January 2002 when Foster declined to participate in an afternoon New Orleans news conference announcing the relocation of

the Charlotte Hornets to New Orleans and instead announced the move on that afternoon's "Live Mike" program.²⁴

The next week on his program, Foster again talked about the Hornets and made national news when he stated that NBA Commissioner David Stern's comments earlier were an encouraging sign that the NBA would officially approve the relocation of the Hornets to New Orleans and defended the state's 10-year multi-million dollar deal with the Hornets to bring them to New Orleans.²⁵

Foster once again made national news based on his on-air comments on February 21, 2003 when he said that he would not allow Mike Tyson to fight in Louisiana and then took a jab himself at U.S. Congressman David Vitter over his involvement in state matters.

Foster said on the program that he had sent word to the Louisiana Boxing Commission not to grant Tyson a license to fight Lennox Lewis in Louisiana for the heavyweight boxing title. Foster said if the Commission did grant the license that he would replace all of the members on the board.

The state would make a lot of money from the fight, Foster said, but said Tyson "is not a role image we want to work with. He's just not a role model for anybody. When the state of Nevada turns somebody down, I'm not real sure we should be the state to do it."²⁶

Foster revisited the Tyson issue on his show later in the year – August 15 – after Tyson's promoters said they were interested in fighting Louisiana fighter Clifford Etienne in New Orleans in the fall. Foster again reiterated his opposition to Tyson.

“My gut (instinct) is it is a bad thing to do...because of his offenses against women. I think the sport needs some people who at least are into being role models. Certainly this guy is no role model,” Foster said. “You know, money (generated by a possible fight) is not everything.”²⁷

Foster then took a swing from behind the microphone at Vitter, creating a news story that continued into the 2002 legislative session. On his show, Foster was critical of Vitter vocally coming out against a state agreement signed with the Jena band of Choctaw Indians. The agreement would have allowed them to open a casino in Calcasieu Parish. Foster said of Vitter, “I thought he worked in Washington. Now he’s down here messing around with stuff he doesn’t know much about...He may be an opponent that may take him out where he is if he doesn’t tend to his business.” Foster also accused Vitter, who was considering a run for Governor at the time, of working for the riverboats in Lake Charles.

Vitter responded that he was doing his job as a congressman by getting involved with an issue before the U.S. Secretary of Interior. Vitter also shot back saying that Foster was just trying to change the focus away from him.²⁸

The story created stories mentioning the radio program for the next three weeks and then again a month later. Vitter went on the attack again one week after Foster’s initial attack by stating he and Louisiana Attorney General Richard Ieyoub were meeting with the Interior Department to stop the approval of the casino. Representative Chris John also got involved by writing a letter to Foster and the tribe’s chief saying that no public input was sought in the process.

Foster struck back on his radio program that afternoon by saying that he could not unilaterally pull out of the agreement and that all the criticism was just political posturing. “You’re finding out now who the desperate candidates are for governor,” noting that Vitter, Ieyoub and John were all considering Louisiana’s top seat.²⁹

The Interior Department ultimately blocked the deal, but Foster took two last shots at Vitter. The first was a bill that was introduced into the legislative session that banned all federal elected officials from using their federal campaign funds for a state race in Louisiana. Dubbed the “Bitter Vitter” bill in political circles, Vitter and his supporters said the legislation was just a personal vendetta by Foster done to hurt Vitter’s chances of running for Governor.

The bill ultimately passed and was signed into law. Foster’s final shot at Vitter on his radio program came on April 4, 2002, when Foster accused Vitter of being against the Choctaw deal because Foster denied Vitter’s earlier request for an endorsement in the 2003 gubernatorial race. “It bent him out of shape,” Foster said.

While Vitter acknowledged asking for Foster’s support, he denied it was behind his motivation to oppose the Indian casino.³⁰

Foster’s next attack almost a month later at other legislators had them bent out of shape also. Foster unveiled on his May 2 program a 10-year plan that would gradually eliminate most of the temporary taxes that had to be renewed every two years. He encouraged listeners to call their state senator and representative beginning the next Monday and then proceeded to give the House and Senate telephone numbers over the air.

Golsby said that Foster became really good at using the radio program to get his legislative package to the people without them hearing any opposition.³¹ In fact, the newspaper article in the *Times Picayune* covered Foster's proposal and did not have comments from anyone opposing the plan.

But opposition soon emerged and Foster's tax reform plan was in for a tough battle in the legislature. Foster lashed out at his opponents on his May 23 broadcast and blamed the failure of his proposal a day earlier in the House of Representatives on an "attack of the tooth fairies." Foster said "tooth fairies" were those legislators that vote against taxes and believe that revenue will just appear so services will not be cut.³²

Foster specifically named Reps. Diane Winston, Tony Perkins, Ernie Alexander, Kay Kellogg Katz, Michael Walsworth, Mike Futrell and Gary Beard. Foster claimed to his radio audience that these members were only "pandering" to their rich constituents by voting against the plan.

"It is really tough to stand up and say, 'I am not worried about the education system. I am worried about a few fat cats in my district who contributed to me. That's what we are dealing with. It is a small group from the wealthiest districts who want to trash the state,'" Foster said on the program.

Foster also stressed on the show that since that proposal had failed and the temporary taxes had yet to be renewed that a \$300 million budget hole was left and that education and health care would probably be cut.³³

Four of the callers into the show that day were staged by Foster's office -- LSU Chancellor Mark Emmert, University of Louisiana Head Sally Clausen, and two former university student government presidents. Of the nine total calls to the show, Foster was

able to address everyone's concerns and eight of the nine calls expressed their support for higher education.

When Foster spoke to Emmert, he told the LSU chancellor that it was sad when three legislators – Futrell, Perkins and Beard – are in LSU's backyard and voted against the bill. "I don't think they've ever voted for any revenues. It's sad when you don't get support right here in your hometown," Foster told Emmert.³⁴

Emmert responded on the air by saying, "It's an enormous challenge that we have before us. It's enormously frustrating."³⁵

Legislators who were under attack on the radio program attacked back on the front page of the next day's newspaper. Futrell said, "Calling people names is not the way to win friends and influence people. I learned that in first grade."

Perkins agreed with Futrell and said that the governor was telling fairy tales and that as long as legislators continue to pass additional taxes, Louisiana would never see a reform in spending.³⁶

Foster had told reporters after the show that he would campaign against the lawmakers who voted against his plan when they came up for re-election in 2003. He kept that promise when Foster announced on his June 14, 2002, program that he would be supporting U.S. Representative John Cooksey (R-Monroe) for the U.S. Senate, instead of the only other announced Republican candidate, state Representative Tony Perkins.

"He is sort of the leader of the tooth fairies," Foster said. "The last time I saw him, he was up at the microphone with a little stick with a star on it. I don't know if he is going to campaign with it."

Foster continued in a Huey Long fashion of name calling by saying that if Perkins did defeat sitting U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu that Perkins would be at home in Washington. "They print money up there. Maybe that's where tooth fairies do well," Foster said. "But down here, if there was a college depending on him or a pothole had to be fixed, the pothole would never get fixed and the college would go bust."³⁷

With that one verbal lashing, Foster had taken the image of Perkins as a Right-Wing, anti-tax conservative and changed it to an anti-education, anti-roads politician who did not have the little man in mind.

Foster was blasted by Perkins and other Republicans for criticizing a member of his own Republican party. "The governor's continued name-calling is harmful to Republican unity and for the state's efforts at economic development," Perkins said.³⁸

Foster rant against fellow-Republican Perkins began to show a pattern for Foster of attacking his enemies, whether Republican or Democrat, and labeling them with a catchy nickname that would stick with them for their political career. Foster would perfect this technique over the next year and use it to try and influence the 2003 Governor's race.

While Foster had been comfortable behind the microphone throwing jabs at his opponents, Foster was soon faced with being on the receiving end of those attacks beginning in July 2002. Golsby said that the period beginning in July 2002 until the beginning of 2003, marked one of Foster's and his staff's most difficult times in doing the radio program.³⁹

The first controversy surrounded a 71,000-acre freshwater marsh preserve that was donated to the state by BP Amoco with the requirement that a non-profit, private

organization run the reserve. Foster announced the donation stating that a private board, made up of Foster and several of his close allies, would manage the White Lake preserve.

Soon after that announcement, the Capitol Press Corp started researching the donation and uncovered two events that put Foster on the defensive about the donation. First, the *Baton Rouge Advocate* revealed that Foster had been instrumental in leading the fight by lobbying legislators in getting approval to end a tax on petroleum processors, saving BP Amoco tens of millions of dollars.⁴⁰

One day later the *Times Picayune* reported that at the same time negotiations were transpiring over the White Lake Preserve, BP Amoco and the state of Louisiana were reaching a private agreement that the state would pay \$36 million to the company to settle some 14 lawsuits.⁴¹

Critics, especially editorial writers, from across the state were questioning Foster's motives for serving on the board, accusing him of wanting the preserve for personal use during hunting season.

The Governor used his program on July 18 to answer critics and reassure the public that the land would strictly be used for the people of the state. Foster questioned why anyone would question the donation of \$40 million worth of land, \$1.25 million to help manage the property and more than \$500,000 worth of boats and equipment.⁴²

"I don't know why something so good has got some bad publicity. I get tired of people who can't ever see anything good in anything," Foster said on the program. He later responded to a caller's comment that Foster wanted the preserve for his own use by saying that he had never visited the White Lake preserve. "I have my own camp. I want to stay on the board long enough to make sure the public can use it," he said.⁴³

But critics weren't upset with the donation, just the arrangement that a non-profit organization, run by Foster and others, to manage the property.

Foster once again addressed the issue the following week on his July 25 program. Foster told listeners that the criticism over the White Lake property could prevent other corporations from donating land to the state. Foster continued by saying that there were only two or three legislators, though he didn't name them, which are opposed to everything he does. "They complain because I don't travel; they complain because I do travel. You name it and they will find something to complain about," Foster said.⁴⁴

The criticism proved too much for Foster and on the August 15 program – a full month after the controversy started -- the Governor made news by announcing over the air that he planned to step down from his position on the White Lake board. He told listeners that his presence on the board served as a "lightning rod" and didn't want the controversy to slow the project down and cause misinformation about the deal.⁴⁵

At the same time of the White Lake controversy, Foster was faced with another pest – the mosquito -- that was helping spread the West Nile Virus across the state. At the time, the Louisiana epidemic marked the second largest outbreak of West Nile since the disease entered the United States in 1999. Foster used his program on August 1 to declare a state of emergency around the state in hopes of obtaining additional federal funds to help fight the epidemic. By the time Foster had declared the emergency, the disease had infected 32 people in south Louisiana and had contributed to the first West-Nile related death, an 83-year-old woman in Baton Rouge.

"It is an emergency situation. This is the kind of thing that there ought to be some relief from the federal government," Foster told listeners.⁴⁶

Foster's declaration received coverage the next day by the *Associated Press*, the *Baton Rouge Advocate* and the *New Orleans Times Picayune*.

The following week, Foster continued talking about the West Nile Virus and revived an unsuccessful practice of his 8 p.m. show by having a guest in studio. Joining Foster was Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Julie Gerberding, who announced that at least \$3.4 million in federal aid was soon to arrive in Louisiana.

Gerberding said, "What we want you to do with that (money) is identify your highest priorities and use these dollars to go out and get the job done."⁴⁷

The guest got listeners attention, with 10 of the 16 calls making it on the air that afternoon asking Gerberding a question about the West Nile Virus. Gerberding used the radio appearance as one of her many stops across South Louisiana during the day.⁴⁸

One month later, Foster would use his show once again to update the state on another attack that had occurred the night before – the landfall of Hurricane Isidore on the coast of Louisiana.

Instead of broadcasting from WJBO studios on September 26, 2002, Foster used the state's Emergency Command Center to speak with listeners and answer their questions about the hurricane damage.

But the broadcast also was a reminder of the geographical diversity of the state. While callers from South Louisiana complained about flooded evacuation routes in New Orleans and state workers getting charged annual leave for staying home because of the storm, callers from North Louisiana not affected by the storm were asking about lowering car insurance rates and logging trucks being ticketed.⁴⁹

While Foster used the timing of the show to address the state, the state press corps only reported on the hurricane and didn't credit the radio program for Foster's comments about the storm. The only exception was an article in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* that recapped the day's events for Foster as Isidore came ashore.⁵⁰

Just one week later Foster was repeating the events of the week before when Hurricane Lily made landfall on Thursday morning. Foster once again took to the airwaves to reassure the public.

Foster's spirit didn't get any relief after the hurricanes due to the U.S. Senate race. Foster had initially jumped into the middle of the race back in June when he announced he was supporting Cooksey for the seat. But by August, even with the White Lake scandal around him, talk started, fueled by radio callers, for Foster to run for the U.S. Senate against Landrieu.

Cooksey had been unable to recover from the fallout of his comments shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks on Washington and New York where he said, "If I see someone (who) comes in that's got a diaper on his head and a fan belt wrapped around the diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over." As a result, no Republican candidate had emerged and Foster seemed the logical choice.⁵¹

For days leading up to the August 22 "Live Mike" broadcast, newspapers, possible opponents, politicians and political consultants speculated whether Foster would join the Senate race.

"The governor will probably get a call from President Bush," Congressman Billy Tauzin said. "He's serious about it. I think the chances are better than 50-50 that he will run."

With the President calling Foster, some began to think he would run, while some opponents thought otherwise, but were cautious with their comments. “There are no speckled trout or mallards in the Potomac,” Cooksey said, but also added that he thought Foster would be tough to beat if he entered the race.⁵²

Many thought that Foster would use his weekly radio program to make his decision known, but like a good political cliffhanger, left the listeners wanting more. Foster told his listeners that he had “absolutely, positively”⁵³ not made his mind up yet. “If I get convinced I can make a difference and change the balance of power in the Senate, then I ought to do it...It is as unpleasant a decision as I have ever had to deal with.”

When asked about his dislike for travel and the distance to Washington, he responded in true Foster fashion by saying, “It is two hours by car from here (Baton Rouge) to home (Franklin). It is two hours from there (Washington) to down here in a jet. Just got to save enough money to ride in jets, I guess.”⁵⁴

While Foster didn’t use his radio program to make his decision known, he did use it to add to the speculation. Even Foster’s staffers were kept in the dark until the announcement, with many daydreaming about moving to Washington.⁵⁵

One day after his program, Foster ended the debate by holding a press conference on the steps of the Governor’s Mansion that was covered “live” by television stations from around the state. Foster, who had summoned Cooksey to the Mansion earlier in the day to be part of the event, announced he would not run and would endorse Cooksey.

“The answer became more and more clear to me. I have a duty to this state. I have a duty to my staff. I have a duty to my friends. It’s my duty really to stay here and do what I was elected to do,” Foster said.⁵⁶

Six days after the announcement, Foster wasted little time in using his radio program to express his feelings about events in the Senate race, but failed to use it to dispel a national news article that said he had cussed the White House during a phone call on Wednesday.

Earlier in the week, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) announced, to the dislike of Foster, that they were supporting Elections Commissioner Suzanne Terrell in the race.

On the show, Foster questioned the action by the committee. “I don’t know why they did that. It surprised everybody down here. It’s not about personalities. We (the state party) tried not to take sides in the primary,” Foster said.⁵⁷

Later with reporters, Foster also tried to set the record straight about a Washington Times article that had appeared on Wednesday saying that Foster had told the White House, and specifically Bush strategist Karl Rove, to stay out of his party’s politics.

An anonymous source in the article claimed, “There is not a four-letter word the governor didn’t use when he heard about what the White House and the [National Republican Senatorial] Committee had done.”⁵⁸

Rove and Foster both denied that any such conversation ever occurred.

“He knows I didn’t call him and I know I didn’t call him. We’ve been trying to figure out what’s been going on,” Foster said of supposed calls to Karl Rove.⁵⁹

While Foster continued to use his radio program to promote Cooksey and distance himself from Terrell, his efforts failed as the Congressman lost in the November primary. Foster, upset over the loss, used “Live Mike” to release his frustration, thus creating a secondary news story to the heated Senate race between Terrell and Landrieu.

Foster told his November 7, 2002, radio audience --the first show after the primary – that he was not pleased with the negative campaign run by fellow Republican Terrell, and refused to immediately endorse her. By not endorsing Terrell and placing a label on her as a negative campaigner, Foster put a serious dent in the Election Commissioner’s campaign, allowing Landrieu to stay above the negative campaigning that Foster was doing. Those actions by Foster and the refusal not to endorse Terrell angered some callers to the program.

“The way you approach this, you sound like a Democrat. Are you a Democrat who took the Republican label to get elected as governor?” asked Robert, a caller to the program.

Foster responded, “I’m a Louisianian first. Party is fine, but I tell you what: if I have to sit through another negative campaign, I may throw up.”⁶⁰

A week later, the endorsement of a Senate candidate was the focus of the Governor’s radio program, but this time with callers evenly split with praise and anger over Foster’s actions. One newspaper even referred to that Thursday as “Day 9 of the long-running Gov. Foster senatorial endorsement soap opera.” Foster did not endorse a candidate on the program but said that one reason he had not endorsed a candidate was

because Foster felt the Bush administration was not moving fast enough in approving the state's educational accountability program.⁶¹

Foster ended the "soap opera" on a Sunday afternoon -- away from the radio and television cameras -- with a written release issued by his staff. Foster endorsed Terrell after a joint appearance by Terrell and Landrieu on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Foster's endorsement was in vain, with many in the Republican Party blaming Foster and his radio program for Terrell's defeat.⁶²

While Foster's use of the radio wasn't successful in helping Terrell, its use earlier that fall played a large part in the passage by voters of a constitutional amendment that replaced sales taxes with income taxes. The Stelly Plan, as it was often referred to because of its author Rep. Vic Stelly, was thought to be dead on arrival to the legislature back in June when Stelly introduced a modified version of his tax plan that had been defeated by voters two years earlier.

Stelly's 2002 version differed from his earlier version by giving a majority of voters a tax break, not a \$200 million tax hike as in 2000. Foster backed the plan in 2000 and again stated his support for the 2002 version, but called it "dead on arrival" in the legislature.⁶³

But as the legislation began to gain support and make its way through the State Capitol, Foster became more active in supporting the legislation and adopted it as part of his core package of bills before the legislature. On June 11, 2002, the Louisiana Senate passed the measure with the needed two-third vote to send it before voters in the November elections.⁶⁴

That next Thursday, Stelly and Foster took to the airwaves on the Governor's radio program to begin selling the plan to voters using the theme that a majority of voters would get a tax break under the Stelly Plan.⁶⁵

Calls coming into the program were favorable for Foster and Stelly. Foster took nine calls on the air –six of which were about the Stelly Plan – with only two callers opposed to the plan.⁶⁶

Based partly on the success of the program with Stelly, Foster began having his staff meet on a weekly basis to devise a campaign plan to convince voters to vote for the tax reform package.⁶⁷ Foster's radio program would be a major part of that campaign plan.

Foster and his staff decided to tackle promoting the Stelly Plan to the public from three different angles – group and individual endorsements, editorial and news coverage and radio publicity – all with one theme, that 76 percent of taxpayers would receive a tax cut.⁶⁸

The plan of action had individuals and groups endorsing the plan and speaking on its behalf beginning in September, with Foster talking on occasion about it from behind the microphone. Beginning in October and leading up until the election, Foster would increase the amount of time devoted to the Stelly Plan on his program each week.⁶⁹

Three weeks before the election Foster succeeded in focusing most of his radio program on the Stelly Plan. Of the 12 callers making it to the air, seven of them wanted to discuss the ballot measure. Foster even got into a debate with one caller over how much the caller would pay if the plan passed.

Shane from Shreveport, as he referred to himself, told Foster that he opposed the Stelly Plan because of the increase that he would pay. “I’m going to pay \$1,500 more a year in taxes going to a higher tax bracket,” said Shane. “We make roughly \$55,000. How am I going to get a tax break when my tax rate goes from four percent to six percent?”

Foster responded that no one would pay more than \$1,000 in additional taxes, even the millionaire Governor. “The trouble is, it is complex. All I can tell you is that every time it’s been calculated, most people get a tax break,” Foster said.

And then he offered Shane an offer over the air to drive home his point. “Shane, if it costs you any more, I’ll pay it for the first two years.” Shane didn’t take Foster up on the deal.⁷⁰

The last two weeks before the election, Foster spoke of the Stelly Plan during his opening monologue and reiterated the same tax break points as before. Callers to the show did not take the hook in the final weeks, as just a handful of the callers spoke about Stelly.

Two of the three calls on the October 24 show were planted by Foster and his staff. Renae Conley, CEO of Entergy, and Vic Stelly both called into the show in support of the bill. Both Conley and Stelly had been prepped by Foster’s staff to call into the show.⁷¹

Going into Election Day, the Governor and other political pundits thought the vote might be close, but expected the Stelly Plan to lose. On November 5, 2002, voters in Louisiana passed the Stelly Bill with 51 percent of the vote. Foster called it “the upset

of the century.”⁷² Foster saw the power of his radio program through the Stelly vote and would use the advantage “Live Mike” provided during the upcoming Governor’s race.

Issues and News -- 2003

The focus of “Live Mike” in 2003 mainly focused on the Governor’s race. While there were other issues discussed during the year, most of the shows beginning in April focused on the race.

It did not take Foster long into 2003 to turn the focus of his radio program to the Governor’s race. On the January 9, 2003, program -- the first of 2003 -- Foster told listeners that he planned to use the radio program over the next year to discuss the different views of each of the governor candidates.

Foster told listeners that he was in the process of polling the 10 potential gubernatorial candidates at the time on different issues that the governor deemed important to him and the future of Louisiana.⁷³

“A lot of people say I ought to butt out and go fishing. I care too much for the state. I may pick the wrong one (candidate) but I will pick someone who I think will do the best job. I’ve still got some money in the bank that I can use for that. I can’t help myself,” Foster told listeners.⁷⁴

And while Foster discounted reports to listeners that he was busy recruiting U.S. Department of Health and Hospitals Assistant Secretary Bobby Jindal to return to Louisiana to run for Governor, Foster was active in recruiting Jindal. Foster had put Jindal in touch with some of his supporters from around the state in the months of January and February so Jindal could explore his options on what to do. Jindal would eventually enter the race, with Foster’s support, at the end of February.⁷⁵

While the show began to focus on the Governor's race each week beginning in February, Foster still had to deal with constituent and other issues on the program, such as a request to pardon former Governor Edwin Edwards.

On the January 30, 2003 show, a caller named Irma from Slidell called Foster and talked about President George W. Bush before putting the governor in the hot seat. Irma told Foster, "I want you to talk to him (Bush) about releasing Governor Edwards."

Foster was caught off guard and finally told Irma that a decision like that was not a state decision and he doubted that a first term president would make such a controversial move. "I doubt seriously that's going to happen that early. I think later on some president might look at it."⁷⁶

Beginning on Foster's February 13 show, the governor asked listeners to e-mail questions to him that they wanted asked to the governor's candidates. Foster did not have much luck with his longer questionnaire that he had submitted to candidates in January. He hoped that by having voters submit questions it might make candidates more likely to answer. Foster also thought that by having candidates answer questions on specific, difficult issues, it might trap them with an unpopular answer among voters. Foster also felt that if they didn't answer the question, it would look to voters as if they were avoiding the issue all together.

Foster had as much luck with the weekly question as he did with the longer questionnaire. Only Bobby Jindal, Dave Treen and Alan Allgood answered on a regular basis, with others answering occasionally.

In a March 25 letter from the Governor's Press Office addressed to each candidate, Foster "promised to forward the best and most common questions to the candidates and read the answers on 'Live Mike.'"

Foster continued to send questions each week but it was not effective in finding each candidate's view because most were leery of Foster's motivations.

While Foster was not a candidate for governor, it did not keep him from jumping in on different issues during the campaign. On March 26, Jindal made national and international news by releasing a statement saying that if elected Governor he would withdraw the invitation to French President Jacques Chirac for the closing ceremonies of the Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial celebration in December.

Jindal made the comments after Rep. A.G. Crowe had introduced a resolution asking the state to rescind the invitation. Chirac had been vocally opposed to the U.S.-led military mission to get rid of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Foster, on his "Live Mike" program the next day, said, "People are really fed up with France. We have good relationships with the French people. They must have slipped up and elected somebody who doesn't like us."⁷⁷

Foster brought the Chirac topic up again on his program the next week. "We don't have a beef with the French people, but the president of France has not only not tried to help but has tried to hurt us," Foster said.

Foster had asked listeners their opinion on the Chirac issue through the show's weekly Internet poll the week before. Results showed that listeners were almost evenly split between rescinding the invitation and keeping it in place. Foster blamed the reason

for the close vote on fear of people concerned about losing French business investments in the state.⁷⁸

While the move by Foster to talk about Chirac followed in the shadow of Jindal, it was Foster who suggested to Jindal to jump on the issue. Foster had been told by one of his political allies, believed to be political consultant Roy Fletcher, that the Chirac issue would be a hot one that Jindal should jump on.⁷⁹

Foster brought the subject up again later in the year on his August 28 program. Foster told his listeners that while he still disapproves of Chirac, he would treat him fairly if the French President decided to visit Louisiana to take part in the December celebration. He said that Chirac had “gone off the deep end.”

“He’s the head of state so I’ll be nice to him. I still don’t like what he did to our troops,” Foster said.⁸⁰

One month later Foster once again visited the issue of Chirac, this time using harsh language in describing the foreign leader. Foster said Chirac was a “snake” because of his criticism of President Bush during the war and reiterated that France’s president should not be invited to the New Orleans ceremony.

“I don’t like the way they (French officials) have done us. We’ve got soldiers in harm’s risk (in Iraq). The old man who runs France still runs around trying to do us as much harm as he could,” Foster said.⁸¹

In the end, Chirac, nor Bush attended the December ceremony.

Foster was also critical of candidates for governor during 2003 and got into the habit of giving them nicknames that seemed to stick. The first candidate in the Governor’s crosshairs was Public Service Commission (PSC) Chairman Jay Blossman.

Blossman, a Republican, had latched onto the issue of voters being unhappy with the passage of the Stelly Bill. Blossman had been critical of Foster and questioned whether the Governor was truly a Republican.

Foster fought back using the radio. On his March 29 program, Foster said, “there’s a young rich guy from Mandeville running for governor (who) wants to raise taxes on poor people.”

The next week, April 3, Foster continued by asking listeners if they thought candidates should be barred from accepting donations from the industries that they regulate, specifically PSC members. Foster had done some research and knew that an auditor’s report due out in early May was critical of Blossman for accepting these types of donations. He made the issue his on-line question of the week.⁸²

“The PSC guys get all their money from the power companies,” Foster said. “The people running for insurance commissioner get their money from insurance companies...I think it is a bad system.”⁸³

Blossman continued attacking Foster and the governor responded once again on the April 10 program. Early in the show when Foster referred to Blossman, he acted like he forgot his name.

“I think his name's Blossberg,” Foster told co-host David Tyree.

“Blossberg?” asked Tyree. “I thought his name was Blossman.”

“I don't know,” Foster said. “It may be.”

Blossman responded shortly after the show by saying, “It seems that the governor doesn't want to admit that he misled the people on the Stelly Plan. Let's keep it on the

issues, not resort to name-calling. It's a shame that the governor of our state has resorted to such juvenile and inappropriate behavior.”⁸⁴

The name calling continued and intensified in early May after the legislative auditor released his report pointing out that PSC commissioners had accepted \$22,000 in gifts and donations from companies that they regulate. Included in that amount was \$564 accepted by Blossman for a spa treatment in Arizona.

On the May 1 program, Foster talked about the auditor's report and talked about the trip to the spa that Blossman, or Spa Boy as Foster dubbed him, took. It was a name that would plague Blossman for the rest of the campaign.

While the press did not cover the name calling in articles, one article by columnist James Gill was impressed with Foster's ability to give the perfect nickname to Blossman.⁸⁵

Foster next turned his attention to former legislative auditor Dan Kyle toward the end of May when Kyle, while campaigning, started blaming Foster for all the state's problems. On the May 22 program, Foster called Kyle “Furniture Man” claiming that Kyle had spent almost \$90,000 to decorate his state office.

He accused Kyle of having “the most expensive office in the state” and urged Kyle to “come clean with the people. If you're going to be a reformer, be one.”

When asked by co-host Tyree if Foster was participating in negative politics, the governor responded that he was just trying to add a little humor to the governor's race, but then ended by saying, “When you're a reformer, don't be hiding in a \$90,000 office.”⁸⁶

As summer began, Blossman again took center stage on Foster's radio program. Blossman, trailing in the polls, had launched a television commercial blaming elected state officials for not funding a DNA database that could have helped capture Baton Rouge Serial Killer Derrick Todd Lee sooner. Blossman claimed that by doing so, lives could have been saved.

On Foster's July 10 radio program, the governor talked about the ad and called Blossman "a sick little fellow" who had "bad taste" in creating campaign commercials.⁸⁷

"I don't think it's in good taste. I don't know many people who do," Foster said. But according to the calls coming into the show, most people disagreed with Foster.

Foster's question of the week to candidates also focused on Blossman. The question asked, "Do you think its fair for political candidates to exploit victims of heinous crimes in order to gain votes or political advantage?"

Blossman sent a letter to Foster on the day of the show in response to the question, but the governor failed to read it on the air. In the letter, Blossman said, "It comes as no surprise to me that you are upset that I am speaking out about the state's failure to fund the DNA database. Your decision on this issue is one of the greatest mistakes of your entire administration."⁸⁸

"He's calling me names and all that. The issue is serious. It's about how Baton Rouge and the governor's office spend our taxpayer dollars. I got out of calling people names in the third grade," Blossman said.

Blossman also received the help of serial killer victim Pam Kinamore's family on the issue. Kinamore's brother-in-law Ed White wrote a letter, released by Blossman, which was critical of Foster for posing an "inappropriate" and "offensive" question.

Kinamore's mother also weighed in by calling into the Governor's program. Lynne Marino told the Governor, "We had money to fund the Saints, we had money to get football players for LSU. Where are our priorities?"

When Foster tried to respond with an answer, she abruptly told the governor, "Don't pacify me." Foster was shocked at the outburst and was momentarily without words.⁸⁹

The publicity from the radio program was positive for Blossman. According to political columnist John Maginnis, the amount of news coverage that Foster created for Blossman equaled as much publicity as if Blossman had purchased twice the air time for the commercial. Maginnis said that Foster's criticism of Blossman was helping his name recognition and could help pull votes his way.⁹⁰

This was not the first time that Foster had spoken with Marino or dealt with the serial killer case over the radio. On his August 1, 2002 program, Marino called the program and asked that the governor help bring the FBI and other investigative agencies together to help catch the killer who was still on the loose at the time.

"I am asking you to call in all the agencies in the state to assist in searching for the killer. We have a serial killer. We need to call in the FBI, not just to do profiles, but to aid us in this investigation," she said.

Foster said that he would check to see what the FBI's role was and said that he had already asked State Police to help in the manhunt.⁹¹

U.S. Attorney David Dugas received a call from Foster's Executive Counsel Bernie Boudreaux the next day asking if the FBI was involved. Dugas told Boudreaux that the FBI had already been contacted, but that a multiagency task force had only been discussed up until then.

Foster Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby said that Marino's call moved Foster. "He was already concerned about this, but there is nothing like hearing from the mother of a murder victim. The emotional impact was seismic," she said.⁹²

After Marino was off the air, Foster reminded listeners that listeners could carry a gun if they got a permit. "Learn to use it," he said. And encourage listeners to learn how to use a gun when "fruitcakes" are loose.⁹³

Foster made national headlines with the comment and was criticized by editorials saying that Foster should have reassured the public of the investigation instead of encouraging them to take matters into their own hands.

Both Blossman and Kyle eventually dropped out of the governor's race due to poor poll numbers, probably due in part to Foster's comments on his radio program.

With Jindal and Blanco facing each other in the November runoff, Foster took aim at Blanco, or in this case, her husband Raymond Blanco.

On the October 16 program, Foster warned listeners that if Blanco was elected governor that her husband would be "the most powerful man in the state."

Blanco's husband disagreed. "It is hell to be a woman. When you have a person you can't say anything about, the next best think is to attack the husband. When they get done with me, they can start on our (dog), Scotch."⁹⁴

Golsby, who usually monitors the program in the studio with Foster, was instead sitting on the porch of her house listening to the show. “I couldn’t believe what he was saying. I just kept yelling to the governor, ‘Shut up, Shut up, Shut up.’ But Golsby said that the damage had been done.”⁹⁵

Blanco jumped at the opportunity. The next day she had a press conference on the steps of New Orleans City Hall saying that Foster’s comments the day before was an insult to the women of Louisiana.

“Yesterday and today’s attack on me and my husband by Governor Foster is nothing new. It is one of the oldest and most repugnant kinds of bigotry against women. It’s clear to me that the governor’s problems with me are not my ability, my experience or independence, but my gender.”

Foster turned to the radio to respond and called David Tyree’s daily program on WWL. Foster said, “I don’t feel I said anything disrespectful about Ms. Blanco. I never said she was incapable, that she was depending on her husband or her husband was going to run everything. I never said that, and if I did I’d be ashamed of myself.”⁹⁶

Also on the October 16 program, Foster disputed a “push” poll that was being done that showed Blanco in the lead over Foster’s supported candidate Jindal.

A “push” poll is taken using slanted questions favoring one candidate over the other, hoping to get respondents to answer in a certain way.

“It’s the biggest crock I ever saw and it steams me. It’s a negative turn in the campaign,” Foster said. The governor, who had heard of the poll through a friend, said tongue-in-check that the poll asked whether you would support someone who has been

“canonized by the pope...and never done anything wrong in 20 years” or “a little, funny-looking guy...whose name you can’t pronounce.”

The Associated Press noticed Foster’s increased attacks on candidates for governor and said that Foster was “lobbing some of the fiercest attacks in the governor’s race” and that his “Live Mike” radio program served as the launching ground for the attacks.

“Does he use it for politics? He’d be crazy not to,” Golsby said when asked about the political nature of the show.⁹⁷

Foster’s weekly attack on the opposing candidates was something that caused the Jindal campaign must stress every Thursday and sometimes took the campaign off message.

“There would be weeks when we would have a media plan in place for the week and would be executing it when Foster would derail it with one comment on Thursday,” Luke Letlow, assistant political director for Jindal said.

Jindal didn’t approve of the comments either. “I don’t think they were necessary. I don’t think they were constructive. I would say to the governor, ‘either stay positive or don’t talk about the governor’s race,’” Jindal said.

Foster didn’t like the criticism from his candidate. Foster replied, “I ain’t going to tell you what to say, you don’t tell me what to say, and we’ll get along.”⁹⁸

It became such a concern for Jindal’s campaign that Jindal’s staff would talk to Golsby and Foster’s Chief of Staff Andy Kopplin to try and get the governor “under control.” The tactic worked just two week before the election when Golsby diverted the

governor's attention away from the race with a study that had been released on the danger of not wearing motorcycle helmets, an issue that Foster was passionate about.

Foster talked about the issue on his weekly radio and television address, which drew a response from Highway Safety Commission Executive Director Jim Champagne.

"The bottom line is that the deaths keep on increasing. The bottom line is that motorcycles make up only 1.5 percent of the (almost 7 million) registered motor vehicles in the state but they are involved in 6.9 percent of all fatalities," Champagne said.⁹⁹

Champagne's comments fueled the fire for Foster and on his October 31 radio program the next day, Foster spoke only on the helmet issue and turned his target of naming calling toward Champagne.

"He ain't head of the state, and he is going out there trying to set policy without talking to anybody," Foster said referring to Champagne as "old man Champagne."

"There are a lot of nannies that like to tell people what to do and take away freedom of choice," Foster said.

Jindal's staff had managed to corral Foster with two weeks left in the campaign. Jindal's staff knew Foster would not be on the program the next week because both Jindal and Blanco were participating in a radio debate hosted on "Live Mike" but without the governor. Jindal's campaign only had to worry about one program left for Foster to speak before November – the show just two days before the election.

Foster had offered the two candidates use of his radio program before the election to debate the issues. While many thought that Foster would use the debate to unfairly promote his candidate, Foster excused himself from the radio booth on November 6 and left the moderating of the debate up to Tyree. Jindal, who had long confirmed to be on

the show, was in studio and Blanco, who had agreed just days before the event, was participating by phone from her home in Lafayette.

Jindal and Blanco went back and forth during the hour debate accusing each other of running a negative campaign and criticizing each other's record. After the debate Tyree said in an interview that if they were to do it over again, they would have required Blanco to be in studio.

Both Blanco and Jindal were asked during the debate whether they planned on continuing the format of a weekly call-in show for the governor. While Jindal said that he would have a show on a regular, but not weekly, basis, Blanco said that she thought her time could be used more effectively out recruiting business. But she did plan on communicating with voters in another way.¹⁰⁰

Foster was pretty much silent about the campaign during the November 13 show. Foster was caught off guard when Blanco's son, Ray Blanco Jr., called the show and asked Foster to quit saying negative things about his mother.¹⁰¹ On November 15, Blanco beat Jindal and marked the end date for the live, weekly governor's radio program.

But according to Golsby, Foster considered continuing the program even after he left office. "He thought about doing the show on occasion to be a watchdog on state government, but after some conversations with him, he decided against it and planned to end the show in December."

On December 19, 2003, Foster signed off from the microphone with the same words that he had used for the previous 41 months – "God bless America. God bless the great state of Louisiana. And remember what Miss Alice says...Keep those roads clean."

“It’s been a lot of fun. It is like a lot of other things in government. It is tough to have that scheduled every week where you have to do it, but I have gotten where I looked forward to it,” Foster said on the last show.

Foster was joined in studio by Golsby, his wife Alice, and her assistant Debbie Broussard. Foster and Miss Alice got into a debate in the final show on one of the Governor’s favorite topics – motorcycle helmet laws.

“If you are going to strap me into a car (with seat belts), I want you to wear a helmet when you ride a motorcycle. I don’t want anybody telling me I have to wear a seat belt or a helmet, but since the government is telling me I have to wear a seat belt, you should have to wear a helmet. What happens when you hit that concrete?” she asked.

Foster responded, “It’s a matter of choice.”

Miss Alice told the audience that she was afraid that it might take a good scare on a motorcycle before Foster put a helmet on riding.

As the clock reached 58 after the hour, Foster signed off and “Live Mike” was off the air.

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Summary

The Historical Influence of “Live Mike”

This study intended to historically chronicle Governor Mike Foster’s weekly radio program, “Live Mike” during and prior to its four years on the air. This historical narrative illustrates how Foster intermingled radio, politics and his personal life to create a weekly radio program that he attempted to use during his second term to try and relay his message to listeners.

Like politicians before him, Foster was able to use the radio to talk directly to the listener, using his own words and bypassing the filter of the media. While speaking to the audience in whole, Foster used his average person persona to connect with listeners one-on-one.

But unlike most politicians that were examined in Chapter 1 who used the warmth of radio and their message delivery to connect with listeners, Foster had the advantage of actually getting to speak with a number of listeners personally when they called into the program. This helped reaffirm to listeners that Foster was accessible to the public and that anyone could call the state’s highest official to speak with him one-on-one. As R.K. Avery wrote in 1978, Foster helped reaffirm “interpersonal attraction” by providing “positive reinforcement” and appearing to be “receptive and responsive” to caller’s needs and comments.¹

The program also allowed Foster to go in great detail about issues, answer any unanswered questions callers might have about the topic and repeat the key point numerous times during the show’s 50 minutes, all without the filter of the media.

After the show Foster lost that advantage. Topics that were important to Foster, where he hoped to bypass the media filter, were usually followed up after the show with a

news story on radio, newspaper or television. Constituents who had not listened to the program were receiving just a snapshot of the issue, and often missed Foster's main point he was trying to make. The media accounts also were unable to capture the tone of Foster's comments.

One good example of such an instance was toward the end of 2003 when Foster made comments about Gubernatorial candidate Kathleen Blanco's husband. The 10-second comment that Raymond Blanco would be "the most powerful man in the state" if his wife got elected was said in a joking manner on the program. Most callers after the comment did not even mention the comments by Foster. But the media picked the sound bite up and with Blanco's help turned the comments into a week long story.²

Foster could and did use the program to make news by waiting until Thursday's program to make a major announcement, such as the Charlotte Hornet's decision to move to New Orleans. By waiting until Thursday's show, Foster was able to make the announcement to the public without the press initially being involved. If he had made the announcement during a press conference, the public would generally get the news later in the day, if at all, during the evening news or the next day's paper.

While this study is unable to determine the impact Foster's program had on popular opinion, it is important to note some of the opinion trends during the time.

Poll numbers by Southern Media & Opinion Research examined during the 21 month period showed Foster with a 55 percent favorable rating in June 2000, its lowest point during his governorship and just two months before the launch of his evening "Live Mike" program. Southern Media pollster Bernie Pinsonet said Foster's low ratings were

in large part due to the governor pushing an unpopular tax increase on businesses to fund teacher pay raises.

In late April 2001, just weeks after the launch of the new 2 p.m. show, Foster's popularity began to rebound, with an approval rating of 62 percent.³ A year later in March 2002, Foster was once again receiving approval ratings in the low 70s. While part of Foster's success might be sentimental following the September 11, 2001 tragedy, part of the upswing could also be attributed to Foster's radio program.⁴

While no poll numbers by Southern Media were found after March 2002, Foster's staff was told that Foster's numbers remained strong until the summer of 2003 when they started moving down due to a number of gubernatorial candidates criticizing Foster.

Foster's program also could have contributed to the success and passage by the public of some controversial issues that Foster was supporting, such as the Stelly Plan, and could have helped shape public opinion on other issues such as gubernatorial candidates.

Most political pundits did not give the Stelly Plan a chance to pass in the fall of 2002. Foster's program provided an hour's worth of free advertising to constituents who were reminded throughout the program that the plan would probably mean a tax cut for them. Foster used the radio, like former Louisiana Governor Huey Long, to appeal to the average listener and encourage them to tell their friends what they had heard on the radio. While it is impossible with the given data to measure the impact that Foster's program played in the final vote, the governor's grassroots campaign over the radio is thought by both Foster's staff and newspaper editorial columnists as providing the few points needed for passage.⁵

The show also offered the governor an avenue to speak with and reassure citizens of the state during a time of crisis, such as during hurricanes and in the wake of September 11.

Foster twice broadcast his program either right after or on the day that two hurricanes hit the coast of Louisiana. Foster broadcast from the Office of Emergency Preparedness and was able to relate to listeners, many who did not have electricity but batteries for their radios, updates on flooding and damage in areas around the state and relay information on assistance that might be available for victims of the storm.

No greater time did Foster use the microphone to reassure Louisiana's citizens as its statesman than two days after September 11. Fear and shock had gripped the nation, with concerns over individual safety at the front of everyone's minds. Uncharacteristic of Foster's normal Thursday program, the governor was solemn in tone, reassured his listeners that security measures were being taken in Louisiana, and showed leadership during an uncertain time.

For an hour each Thursday Foster went against his introverted nature tendencies and opened himself to allow anyone with a telephone to speak one-on-one with the most powerful man in Louisiana. The show brought Foster down to a human level for people who had never met the Governor, but also opened the Governor's vulnerability to be seen by listeners.

The show allowed constituents to have their voice heard by the Governor about local issues, such as potholes. One such success story from the show came early in the 2 p.m. show's history. An older lady called the program concerned that a group of oak trees lining a highway near Grand Chenier were set to be destroyed by the Department of

Transportation and Development. Before the chainsaws were started, Foster put an end to the planned clearing.⁶

But that advantage for listeners provided a difficult situation for the governor. Foster often was faced with questions that he could not answer due to the constituent related matter of the call. Foster's lack of answers and his often used reply, "He didn't know, but someone would get back to them," became the source of jokes and criticism by Foster's opponents. His unable to answer questions about every topic, including whether La. Highway 7 in Red River Parish was scheduled to be widened, showed that he was vulnerable and Foster had to lower his wall of safety when taking constituent calls. It also sometimes led to the impression that Foster was out of touch with the business of the state.

Foster's image might have also been bruised by one of the advantages the program – Rush Limbaugh. The lead-in program for Foster's radio show in every major radio market was Rush Limbaugh's nation-wide radio program. Foster's easy going, non-scripted program was in sharp contrast to Limbaugh's program, which used monologues, skits and passionate arguments to get his point across. This contrast might have led listeners not to take Foster as seriously as a radio talk show host.

Foster and his staff sometimes used the show as a crutch. Foster's press staff would often limit interviews with the press during the week, telling the media they could grab Foster either before or after the program outside the studio. Foster, in turn, justified his one hour of interaction with the public more effective than traveling the state and meeting constituents face-to-face. This also added to a stereotype that Foster continues to

have out of office that he didn't like to travel except to go fishing, and that he was not an active governor during his second term.

While many will point to the 8 p.m. show as a complete failure, it did provide a purpose for Foster and the program. While the desired audience and impact was not what Foster first envisioned, the show served as a training ground for the governor that allowed him, at the launch of the 2 p.m. show, to start without a hitch and be portrayed as a confident host behind the microphone. Without the trial and error of the 8 p.m. show, Tyree and Foster would not have been able to be separated in different studios and in different cities. It also allowed a trial run of the format for the show before the larger 2 p.m. audience. The earlier show also allowed Foster to become comfortable in handling callers, especially ones with constituent related questions.

This study was limited in examining the content of each show individually because quality recordings of Foster's radio program are limited in number. At the end of Foster's term, the Louisiana State Archives acquired a number of cassette tapes of the program that was taped by Foster's press office over the radio. Most of the cassettes are not identified with the date of broadcast. Foster's Press Secretary Marsanne Golsby has a limited number of tapes in her possession and Foster's Deputy Press Secretary has a few digital copies of the show from early 2001. WWL and WJBO recorded the program for their news casts, but have since discarded any full versions of the show. No recordings of Foster's program on Thursday nights at 8 p.m. are known to exist. Future study could take these recordings and present them to a focus group for their reaction on the program.

The study was also unable to examine the demographics of callers to Foster's program. Future research might want to examine call sheets of the program, breaking

them down into categories, and find what core group was being impacted by Foster the most. Future research could also go back and examine ratings data for the periods of the show to determine the size of the “Live Mike” audience.

Endnotes

¹ Rubin, Alan M., and Step, Mary M., “Impact of Motivation, Attraction, and Parasocial Interaction on Talk Radio Listening,” Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, Fall 2000: 638.

² “News and notes from the campaign trail,” Associated Press, 17 October 2003: wire.

³ Wardlaw, Jack, “Foster falls to earth in poll,” Times Picayune (New Orleans) 2 May 2000: A1.

⁴ Wardlaw, Jack, “Foster wins back some support,” Times Picayune (New Orleans) 20 April 2001: A4.

⁵ Marsanne Golsby, personal interview, February 2003.

⁶ Frink, Chris, “Foster enjoys work in the booth,” Baton Rouge Advocate, 27 January 2002: 1B.

Vita

Wayne “Trey” Williams III, a native of Minden, Louisiana, was born on September 10, 1971. He attended Louisiana Tech University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism in 1993.

Upon graduation, Williams moved to Washington, D.C., where he served as assistant editor of *Space News* and then worked in the office of Congressman Jim McCrery as his legislative correspondent.

Williams moved back to Louisiana and served as Governor Mike Foster’s deputy press secretary from 1997 until 2001. During that time, Williams also served as Foster’s press secretary during his re-election campaign and as communications director in Louisiana for George W. Bush as part of Victory 2000.

Williams also served as communications director and press secretary in Bobby Jindal’s failed bid for governor in 2003. Williams currently serves as executive director of the Louisiana 4-H Foundation. He will be awarded the degree of Master of Mass Communication from Louisiana State University in August, 2004.