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## **A tale of two Southern cities speaks to Tallahassee**

By Bob Crowley  
MY VIEW

I moved to Tallahassee in February from Baton Rouge after a long career organizing the Louisiana Federation of Teachers.

Moving has made me consider the similarities and differences between my former and new towns and what one could teach the other.

Both cities are state capitals and college towns, but there the similarities end.

Baton Rouge is bigger than Tallahassee. It's larger because of the economic impact of the oil industry and the port of Baton Rouge. But it's not better. With very few exceptions, Tallahassee is a better place.

Tallahassee should lend its traffic engineers to Baton Rouge. I haven't been caught here in traffic yet. Not a single moment has been spent waiting for an accident to clear, a tanker truck to be righted or for cattle that have spilled out of a cattle hauler to be rounded up. Traffic courses through this town like water down a river.

The environment here is regarded with reverence. Not so in Baton Rouge, where it's regarded as something to be exploited for profit. Sure, there's an environmental movement there, but it's weak and usually loses when Big Oil wants something.

Tallahassee and the nearby Forgotten Coast should resist the continued blandishments of Big Oil to drill offshore. Drilling would degrade the coast, harm wildlife and produce a lobbying corps that would make sure such activities continue throughout Florida.

Tallahassee has a lot to say to Baton Rouge about getting along. Louisiana and Baton Rouge have come a long way from the days of bus boycotts and resistance to school integration, but not nearly far enough.

Tallahassee is blessed with fine public schools, due mainly to cooperative efforts between the races to make schools better. For a long time, Baton Rouge had the most recalcitrant school districts in the South regarding integration. Integration resulted in white flight to private schools and the suburban parishes. From the late 1950s until very recently, not one new public school was built in Baton Rouge.

It used to be common to see Confederate battle flags at tail-gating stations throughout the Louisiana State campus before football games, with the flag's field changed from red to yellow and the St. Andrew's cross changed to purple. Aside from debasing this symbol of the Old South, it was an egregious slap at the many black football players who give LSU a stellar team. LSU began to discourage the displays when a young LSU black student led marches on game days and burned the ridiculously colorful symbol.

But there are some weaknesses that Baton Rouge could speak to.

Its downtown, in particular the Capitol and its environs, speaks volumes to Tallahassee. For a long time, Huey Long's masterpiece of an art deco-styled Capitol stood alone amid downtown decay and 1970s buildings that cried out for demolition. A renaissance, fueled by the state building in a style congruent with the Capitol, has transformed downtown Baton Rouge into a lovely town on the river, thriving with shops, restaurants and markets.

Much of Tallahassee's downtown retains its 19th-century flavor. But the buildings around its charming Old Capitol display nothing but an urge to build. The skyscraper and the two domes that now sit behind the Old Capitol add nothing to the town.

Much of the progress in Tallahassee is attributable to public education done right. Plans to cut the education budget by \$2 billion in the coming years would move Tallahassee and the rest of the state in the wrong direction.

In the early 1990s, Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards, who's now in prison, cut education funding. The cuts led to a massive teacher and school employee uprising, which resulted in the passage of a constitutional amendment requiring a two-thirds vote to cut education funding. Funding has not been cut since.

A progressive state shouldn't engage in education cuts, and a progressive town shouldn't either. Education is Florida's best hope. You don't pare your hopes because of economic difficulty. You redouble the effort to achieve those hopes. Kids are worth it. So is the state, and so is Tallahassee.

Tallahassee's fortunes are inextricably bound up with those of the state of Florida. Hopes and dreams can be realized with a determined spirit and constructive work. Tallahassee seems to have been working on its dreams. Keep up the good work.