

2001 LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE SPECIAL SESSION:  
DO WE ALL READ THE SAME NEWS?

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## **DEDICATION**

This Master's degree is dedicated to my mom, my best friend, always.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study reviews the newspaper coverage given during the 2001 Louisiana special legislative session. It was convened to raise additional money to fund teacher pay raises through legislation impacting the state's gambling tax requirements. The seven markets include Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette, Lake Charles, Alexandria, Monroe and Shreveport.

The session was a "last resort effort" in response to persistent pleas from educators that had elevated into statewide teacher sickouts. In the fall of 2000 the public voted down new taxes to fund their pay raises. The governor charged his administration to come up with a plan to raise teacher's pay without further taxing the citizens of the state.

As a statewide issue this would suggest that the media coverage would be similar among the markets. On the other hand, the issue concerning taxes and riverboat/land-based casinos is limited to the cities catering to this entertainment. Harrah's casino in New Orleans and the "floating boats" are the specific targets of discussion. The researcher looked to see influences on reporting between the markets in the state with and without a local casino. Is it headline news? Are the topics of gambling and teacher pay linked in any fashion?

The results derived from personal interviews, content analysis, and contextual information presented satisfaction that overall the session was covered in each market across the state. Contrary to what literature suggested, the local news made the front pages of the newspapers during this period. The gambling industry took precedence in reporting importance over the issue of teacher pay raise, but both were addressed

throughout the sample of articles. Overall the coverage took on a positive tone regarding the session and especially towards the idea of granting teachers a pay raise, regardless of the source of the money. Although during interviews, reporters claimed it a primary responsibility to directly link gambling revenue to the issue of funding teacher's pay for their readers, the results determined by content analysis indicated they used framing, a more indirect method to get the message to the public.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

State and local politics happen continually around us everyday. During major elections, controversial issue debates and scandalous events, the coverage is prominently displayed on the front page of newspapers prompting immediate recognition from readers. In Louisiana, a state with a national reputation for its politics, the yearly occurrence of the legislative session brings news correspondents across the state to the capitol. Each day, news crews, armed with cameras, and group rallies can be found on the front steps. An outside observer would have a difficult time believing that during this time frame, state politics can be buried between the pages of the newspaper. During periods of “status quo,” however, local news, if present at all, is likely to be buried between pages.

The current research suggests the notion that state and local politics are not sufficiently covered by the media (Graber, 1993; Lynch, 2000). If political activities are covered, the story will more than likely be found between the pages, rather than prominently displayed as headline news. Freelance writers Layton and Walton (1998) reported that even as power and money have been devolving from Washington to the states, newspapers have been paying less attention to state government. “You can vote anyway you want to up here,” Carroll Russell, a state representative from Goldsboro, NC, was told when she first arrived in Raleigh in 1991, “because the folks back home will never know” (127).

This study involves the comparison of media content presented in the major media markets across Louisiana. More specifically, the present research analyzes several theoretical and conceptual influences on the newspaper coverage in the major Louisiana markets about the 2001, 10-day special legislative session, held to discuss funneling additional dollars to teacher

pay raises by adjusting the current tax structure on the riverboat casinos and Harrah's, a land-based counterpart in New Orleans.

Baton Rouge, the state capital located in the southern region of Louisiana appears to have most of the political coverage by the media. By contrast, media in the northern Louisiana cities of Shreveport and Monroe seem to focus more on agricultural industry and produce political headlines on a much less frequent basis. This leads to the question, is the media market in the northeast corner of the state receiving the same political coverage as residents living in the centrally located capital city?

The issue of teachers pay raises is clearly a statewide concern, as Louisiana teachers across the state are among the lowest paid nationally. According to Cecil Picard, State Superintendent of Education, Louisiana's average teachers' salary is approximately \$3,000 below the regional average and about \$5,400 below the national average. He pointed to these figures as the cause of a dramatic teacher shortage statewide and predicted the shortage will worsen if the state does not find a way to raise teacher pay (Myers, 2000).

Due to lack of an appropriate reaction from the government, teachers' concerns ultimately evolved into statewide teacher sickouts. In response to persistent vocal pleas from the educators for additional money, the governor finally charged his administration to come up with a plan to raise teacher pay without further taxing the citizens of the state. The cause of this decision was the public's failure to support new taxes designated to fund the pay raises in the fall of 2000. In his opening remarks of the special session to the legislature, the governor commented that using gambling dollars to fund the raises is a last resort. "If you blow up this special session, you won't be proud of Louisiana," he told a joint session in the House chamber.

“This session is about doing what the people hoped would be done with the money obtained from gambling” (Wardlaw, 2001, 1A).

As a statewide issue, teacher pay raises would lead to similar coverage across the seven major media markets in Louisiana. The seven markets include the cities of Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria, Lake Charles and Lafayette. On the other hand, the coverage of issues concerning taxes and riverboat/land-based casinos was limited to the cities catering to this entertainment. This study focuses on Harrah’s casino in New Orleans and the “floating boats” in the Red River region (near Shreveport) and attempts to answer the questions: How was the reporting different between the markets with local gambling compared to those markets without local gambling? Are the topics of funding of teacher’s pay raises, education, and gambling presented as one related issue or is each handled separately? Is the 2001 special session headline news or buried between the pages among the “soft” news?

There is significant public debate in Louisiana on the integrity of using gambling dollars to fund education through teacher pay raises. The distaste for the gambling industry is equally divided among members of the general population. A statement released by the Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) summarized these positions:

Some think the last thing you want to do is tie education to gambling. Others think if you have the gambling revenues, you may as well spend them on education. Those differing views clashed at times during the just-completed special session, but in the end lawmakers decided that teachers needed a raise, and that using as much gambling money as they could get their hands on was probably the most politically palatable way to fund it.

In a gathering on the steps of the state capitol, Reverend Willie Wooden of New Orleans openly criticized the governor and legislators claiming, “They are all addicted to gambling. Louisiana is addicted. Louisiana needs to be rehabilitated” (Hasten, 2001, 5B). According to Wooden, he continued to question the business-minded Governor M.J. “Mike” Foster, Jr. about

the type of business he is operating. “No state in the union would operate a business on chance” (Hasten, 2001, 5B).

During the investigation phase of this project, it was the researcher’s intention to observe the influences affecting the reporting of statewide political issues across the state during the special legislative session. A local can pick up the daily *Advocate*, but does someone who relies on the newspaper from the northern region of the state get the same information about the session? Is front-page political news in Baton Rouge necessarily front-page news in Lafayette? This thesis aims to examine these questions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Doris Graber (1993), the coverage of local and state politics is an area of mass communication with a significant lack of research. Graber refers to news coverage of state and local politics as “swiss cheese journalism,” claiming that swiss cheese has more substance than holes while the reverse is true of press coverage of state government. She attributes the holes to lack of appeal of the subject by a large audience and shallow media expertise.

Journalists view state politics as less interesting than national politics. Mike Riley, editor of *The Roanoke (Va.) Times*, has covered national and local politics. He described his experience when covering national politics for TIME magazine as almost too fun to be real. Riley claimed personalities were fascinating and the scandals momentous (Riley, 2000). After tiring of the fast-paced lifestyle associated with covering national politics, Riley transferred to Roanoke to cover local news and later stated, “Local politics is real and human and immensely complex. It has a direct and powerful impact on people’s lives. And it deserves serious sustained coverage” (p.42).

In addition to local news having a lack of appeal for reporters to cover, journalists are also less likely to be properly trained in this area. This argument blames journalists for not having the proper experience and lack of resources to go in-depth and, therefore, they often rely on information from politicians and policymakers (Lynch, 2000). In turn, this allows these political figures to control the media’s agenda. The reporters generally lack the technical expertise and alternative sources to judge whether they are receiving an accurate or misleading account of events. As a result, stories involving major issues relating to policy decisions receive little media scrutiny (Graber, 1996, 317).

## **EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE “CHANGING MEDIA GRID”**

In her book, *Mass Media and American Politics*, Graber goes into greater discussion about the coverage (or lack of) state and local news. She immediately addresses the reality of the glamorous nature of national politics versus the often ignored “grassroots that nourish and shape it” (p.313). She blames the lack of coverage for citizens ignorance about state politics in their own and sister states. She describes the “changing media grid” and how major population shifts from inner cities to sprawling suburbs has changed structures. The number of newspapers has been reduced so that most cities have a single newspaper and surrounding communities no longer have their own papers. Specifically, in capitol press rooms around the country, there are more empty desks and silent phones. According to Layton and Wilson (1998), nationwide only 513 newspaper reporters and 113 wire service colleagues now cover state government full-time. The number of newspaper reporters has fallen in 27 states since the early 1990’s. Bureaus are shrinking, reporters are younger and less experienced, stories get less space and poorer play, and editors don’t care (Layton and Wilson, 1998, 127). With diminishing resources, the scope of material reported is lessened and the focus is logically placed on material gaining the most public interest. Lynch (2000) points to the market forces pushing media away from covering state political issues.

The number of media outlets has also severely decreased over the past 30 years. Lynch found that within a given state, one or two firms may dominate the news industry and thus control much of the political information available to the public. Fourteen chains (firms) dominate the newspaper industry with the Associated Press (AP) as the predominant wire outlet in the United States (p.96).

“Umbrella competition,” as coined by James N. Rosse (1990), resulted from outward migration of major populations from inner cities to the vast suburbs. This led smaller newspaper outlets to operate within the area covered simultaneously by the larger outlets. The more spread out the newspaper outlets become, the less coverage local politics received. Ben Bagdikian cites this lack of information and stress of importance ultimately translates into a lack of concern and political apathy. He said, “The fit between the country’s information needs and its information media has become disastrously disjointed” (p.174). He also believed the concentration of media ownership has exerted influence on decisions concerning news coverage. He observed that as more newspapers and television stations are owned by fewer companies, local flavor and traditions in news reporting may vanish (Bagdikian, 1983).

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY WITHIN THE STATE?**

Is the public equally negligent about state and local politics across the country? A study conducted by Carpini, Keeter and Kenamer (1994) illustrated that residents living in or near a state capital are significantly more knowledgeable about state politics than residents living elsewhere in a state. Conversely, it is generally assumed that the opportunity for all citizens to get political information is relatively constant. There has been an increased homogeneity of information across the United States, but this is limited to the national level. Carpini et. al (1994) attribute this nationalization of news coverage to the dominance of the federal government, technological and economic innovations such as wire services, radio and television networks, newspaper chains, satellite delivery, and facsimile transmission.

Further in their study, these researchers maintain that the New Federalism of the Reagan and Bush administrations, coupled with a federal budget deficit has moved tasks, historically performed on the federal level, back into state control. Lynch (2000) points out that increasing

power has been given to the governors to shape the national agenda on issues such as education and health care reform. “Let the states decide for themselves,” was the response given by former governor of Texas, George W. Bush, when answering questions about public policy during his 2000 campaign for the presidency (Lynch, 2000, 93).

State government is responsible for not only taxing its citizens, but also spending billions of citizen’s dollars. Shouldn’t news about the government and its workings be at the forefront of everyone’s agenda? Rather, state government over the years has been referred to as the “hidden layer of government, the stepchild of American politics and the soft underbelly of journalism” (Wolfson, 1995, 137). The results of the study performed by Carpini et. al suggest that citizens having the motivation to keep informed must also have equal opportunity given to them to obtain the information.

### **AGENDA-SETTING THEORY**

By creating this gap in local and state political coverage, does the media set the public agenda? The idea that news media influence the public agenda was first introduced in 1922 by Walter Lippmann in his book, *Public Opinion*. He theorized that the mass media (newspapers and radio, at that time) create our pictures of the world. He also understood they are often incomplete and distorted (McCombs and Bell, 1996). It was not until years later when actual research on his theory was conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972). Their results gave rise to a new two-dimensional mass communication theory, now widely known as agenda-setting. McCombs and Shaw outlined the first dimension as the transmission of issue or object salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. The second dimension looked at the media’s role in framing those issues and objects in the public’s mind (McCombs and Bell, 1996, 94).

In broad terms, McCombs and Shaw (1972) described the first basic dimension of the agenda-setting hypothesis as the daily selection of news coverage and patterns by media, influencing public perception of what are the important issues of the day. They believed a causal relationship exists between the media and the public priority issues of the news media eventually become priority issues of the public. With this basic assumption, it seems logical that state and local politics would fail to get the public's attention if they are not priorities on the media's agenda.

A series of studies (Funkhauser, 1973; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs and Shaw, 1977) examined how newspaper readers ranked issues of the day. They selected newspapers that gave first page prominence to different issues. Their results indicated that when surveyed, the readers ranked issues just the same as the journalists did. The first page issues were the most important. These results suggested the readers thought more about the issues that the media gave first page prominence.

Turk (1986) did a study to investigate how much government-sponsored news received coverage in the newspaper. She collected news released from six different state departments of Louisiana's government over a two-month period. She then counted how often the information contained in the news releases made it into the daily newspapers in the state's three largest markets (New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport). She found that newspapers used the information from half of the news releases. The points stressed in the press releases were the points stressed in the published news stories. More frequently covered during this two-month period, though, was information provided at the request of news reporters, not the unsolicited information provided by the department press releases. Turk's results indicated that news outlets

sometimes ignore the government's agenda, demanding alternate information and fulfilling their own agenda.

Where does the media look to set its agenda? Shoemaker and Reese (1991) discussed how some media set the agenda for other media. The wire service is a good example of this. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) claimed subscribing to the Associated Press or other news service gives editors confidence in their product. The newsroom receives a steady, predictable, quality product, and reduces the number of news stories that reporters have to cover. This helps the organization run smoothly by eliminating the stress of having to "find" stories under short deadlines; but consequently, it also limits the choice of news. Local newspapers can obtain news with relatively little effort by reporting information already released by the AP. No organization wants to fall short of another regarding coverage of news. Therefore, wire service has been suggested as a powerful "agenda setter" for daily newspapers. The story is transmitted by the service and picked up from town to town (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991, 189). The AP gives newspapers a credible source to attribute statements, taking the responsibilities off of their in-house reporters.

Additional studies also illustrated the influence exerted by major or elite news organizations. *The New York Times* has strong influence on coverage of international stories while *The Washington Post* exerts influence over domestic, political issues. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) hold that *The New York Times*, in general, is seen as "the final arbiter of quality and professionalism across the news media" (p.125). In the words of Gans (1979), "If the *Times* did not exist, it would probably have to be invented" (p.181).

Caudill and Ashdown (1989) used the weekly *New England Journal of Medicine* as an example of an often-quoted source of medical news. *The Journal* has achieved this position by

sending out advance copies of its Thursday publication to the news media on Monday, giving them a head start on obtaining the latest breaking news.

There are additional sources and constraints used when reporters are seeking the news. The five levels of forces outlined by Shoemaker and Reese (1991) heavily influence who decides the news, what is actually disseminated. Through their extensive research of factors that influence news content, the authors believed that by identifying these factors and in turn, being able to recognize their interrelatedness, mass communication researchers will be able to explain why content takes on its media characteristics and where it is headed in the future. The factors are listed as follows:

1) Personal interest by the editor, 2) Media routines, 3) Organizational factors, 4) Extra-media influence, and, 5) Ideology.

For the purposes of investigating local news coverage, the first three factors would be most closely related to the topic under investigation. The depth of personal interest by the editor could affect not only the placement of the coverage, but also the length/prominence of the story. During the special session, the tight timeframe could be an influence. Reporters are expected to produce at least one, if not more stories per day. The story content is shaped to some degree by whom the reporter is able to contact in order to get a quote for his/her story that particular day. The limited time frame might force some reporters to seek general information from a wire service rather than expending additional time and stress by personally gathering all facts to use in his/her article. Wire service reporters working under the most stringent time constraints are most likely to rely on official activities and on the governor (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991). In addition, organizational goals, economic role in the community and internal power structure of the newspaper ultimately affects the content of daily news. Owners who have more than one

news organization may be less aggressive in seeking specific news coverage due to less “hands on” involvement in each locality.

### **CONCEPT OF FRAMING**

The concept of *framing* defines the second dimension of the agenda-setting theory according to McCombs and Bell (1996). Framing addresses the research of transmission of attribute salience. This latter dimension looks at the role of the news media in the framing of issues and other objects.

Gitlin (1980) introduced the concept of framing to the field of mass communication with his study analyzing how an American television network trivialized a major student political movement during the 1960's. A variety of framing strategies can be used during any social movement by the media including describing the scope of the social problem, providing critique of alternative proposals for coping with the problem, or detailing of the tactical moves of activists and officials.

Entman (1993) claimed that frames “call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions” (p.55). In the arena of political coverage, bad publicity and resulting negative reactions by the readership can have devastating effects. When media frame stories in ways that suit media, rather than official goals, public officials may be forced to recast their own focus of attention (Graber, 1997). Inadequate or misleading coverage of an event could generate further controversy among the political issues. Audience reaction and results of public opinion polls could ultimately affect a legislator's final vote on the issue.

Attractiveness of the selection initially draws a reader's eyes to the story. The content must hold his attention. According to Press and Verburg (1988), politicians think journalists too

often equate “interesting” with “entertaining.” To catch the public attention, politicians say that journalists dramatize political events in ways that distort their meaning. Press and Verburg believed that politicians recognize public perceptions, rather than reality, are the basis for a good deal of political action (p.112).

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) defined media frames as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p.143). The framing and presentation of events and news in the mass media can thus systematically affect how recipients of the news come to understand these events (Price, Tewksbury & Powers, 1995, p.4).

Shanto Iyengar, a pioneer in the research of the framing effects of news coverage on public opinion and political choice commented:

The frames for a given story are seldom conscientiously chosen but represent instead the effort of the journalist or sponsor to convey a story in a direct and meaningful way. As such, news frames are frequently drawn from, and reflective of, shared cultural narratives and myths and resonate with the larger social themes to which journalists tend to be acutely sensitive. (London, 1991, 2)

Different types of media create different impressions on audiences. According to Graber (1996), political news lacks this sort of luster and therefore, receives less time than crisis reporting (natural disasters, crime).

Beyle and Lynch (1991) presented a paper supporting print media as the most effective media for state and local political news. Results from a poll by Beyle and Lynch administered to high ranking elected officials in each state (including the governors), indicated a majority vote for print media as the most important in setting the political agenda, with wire services and television following. From their results they concluded that television provides quick exposure, but transmission of a message is much more effective and detailed in print.

## **GATEKEEPER INFLUENCE**

Who decides what is news? Reporters are not at liberty to just print or report what they personally feel is important. If this were the case, one would be hard pressed to find similar news reported by any network or newspaper. Rather, there are numerous influences affecting what makes the final cut to go to print. The fourth phase of the agenda-setting theory directly addresses these considerations. This latter development rephrases the original theory research question, “Who sets the public agenda?” to ask, “Who sets the news agenda?” This transformation of the news agenda from the independent variable to the dependent variable looks at journalists, producers, and editors as “gatekeepers,” decision makers who control the flow of news (Salwen and Stacks 1996). It is physically impossible for humans to personally experience all news as it occurs. As a result, Lynch (2000) stated, “Gatekeepers hold back a flood of information- potential news—and only allow a small trickle-news-to reach viewers and readers” (p. 94).

We rely daily on the various media markets to provide us with the latest breaking news. But, how can we discern that what we read, see and hear about is not only an accurate account, but also the full scope of news that is occurring? Pamela Shoemaker (1996) describes gatekeeping as an essential part of the news gathering and dissemination process. It begins when potential news items are first received, discovered, and analyzed. From the news organization’s standpoint, gatekeeping ends with the final selection and shaping of news items and its dissemination.

## **PACK JOURNALISM**

Individual reporters do not want their coverage to differ greatly from the others, encouraging what is known as “pack journalism.” This concept is defined by McCombs and Bell

(1996) as the phenomenon followed by journalists to seek consistency and conformity in their reporting of events. This phrase was first coined by Timothy Crouse in his personal experience as a member of the press corps covering the 1972 elections:

A group of reporters were assigned to follow a single candidate for weeks or months at a time, like a pack of hounds [sic] on a fox. Trapped on the same bus or plane, they ate, drank, gambled, and compared notes with the same bunch of colleagues week after week. (pg. 7)

The “pack journalism” effect is made possible by a small size press corps, accounting for insufficient coverage of many important subnational stories (Graber, 1993, 321). Editors do not like to see distinct differences in coverage between their reporters and “the competitors.” For example, by its design, the news bureau located in the basement of the state capitol provides easy access for reporters from different papers to cross paths frequently during the course of a day. Shields and Dunwoody (1986) found that although newspapers from different regions encouraged their reporters to view each other as competitors, in practice they routinely shared information among themselves, especially those capitol reporters.

### **POTENTIAL FOR INCREASED LOCAL COVERAGE**

Researchers do remain optimistic that there might still be hope for increased coverage of local politics. Graber (1993) believes that the era of informal, inexpert handling of the press by subnational officials may be ending (p.318). Politicians are learning how to work with the press, and the formation of public information offices is spreading throughout city, state and federal government. They are becoming more sensitive to the press and learning how to work with reporters to improve coverage. According to Lynch (2000), as governors and state legislators gain more power, the news media will focus more on state politics (p.97). According to Purnick, local and state governments are now more powerful than ever. Washington has “reinvented” government by shifting responsibility to state and local governments. Authority over spending,

especially on social programs and education, has devolved from the center from Washington to localities (Purnick et. al, 1998, 35). If legislators flood the news media with press releases and pre-written stories, they can influence the tone and perspective of coverage, along with the potential frequency. Whether this transition occurs over time or not, it is easy to recognize that there exist many influences behind what news actually makes it into the public's hands.

Based on the literature reviewed, the researcher proposes to investigate the following research questions in this thesis project focused on the Louisiana Legislature's 2001, 10-day special session dealing specifically with legislation regarding teacher pay raises, Harrah's Casino, and the riverboat casinos:

- RQ1: Are there major influences shaping the story content of the special session among the seven primary dailies in Louisiana?
- RQ2: Is there variance in coverage from region to region regarding the special session?
- RQ3: Do the newspaper articles on the special session link the issue of teacher's pay raise to gambling revenue or are they handled as separate issues?
- RQ4: Did this special session get conspicuous coverage?
- RQ5: Do reporters look to each other when writing stories?
- RQ6: Did reporters frame certain issues in their coverage of the special session?
- RQ7: Did the articles convey a specific mood about the issues discussed during the special session?
- RQ8: Was there a prominent main topic throughout the newspaper coverage of the special session?

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In order to compare the reporting presented by the seven major newspaper markets across the state during the legislative special session, the methodology was designed to examine several theoretical and conceptual issues. The researcher used two methods to analyze variations and influences affecting reporting.

The first method involved a content analysis of the 116 newspaper articles published during the 10-day session. As defined by Wimmer and Dominick (1997), this method studies and analyzes communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner. A content analysis is a useful method for the researcher to get quantitative results from the printed material. For this study, the coding identifies the presence of certain frames, mood of articles towards specific issues, primary topics and other trends present throughout the sample. The coding sheet guidelines (see Attachment A) help review the articles for the key terms and topics for this project. Each story, as the unit of analysis, was numbered. The newspaper title/town of publication, story title, and news provider/writer were recorded. In addition, the coder marked the exact story location, length of article and major character included in photograph with article (when applicable).

In addition to the above data coding categories, the coder read the entire article to determine the primary and secondary topics. The primary topic is defined as the single topic covered in the first two paragraphs of the article. The secondary topic is the information that immediately follows the first topic in the news story.

In addition to the primary and secondary topics, the coder noted the presence of specific frames in the story. According to Entman (1993), frames call attention to some aspects of reality

while neglecting other elements, leading to impact on audiences. In this project, a story frame is defined as the context or background behind a subject that is being covered. The frames for selection include improving education, using gambling money to fund education, alternate sources of revenue, gambling as an addiction (moral/social problem), and lobbying influence from gambling industries.

Finally, the coder marked the overall general mood of the articles towards the special session, gambling industry, teacher pay raise, and the linking of gambling to teacher pay raise. A key was provided with a range 0 to 6: with 1 as the most negative mood, 5 the most positive mood, 0 when it does not apply and 6 as mixed—story included both positive and negative elements.

Upon completion of the coding, the researcher entered the values into an Excel spreadsheet. The categories were labeled and converted into SPSS format for further analysis. In addition, to test reliability of the coding tool employed by the study, a volunteer coder was recruited to read twenty randomly selected articles.

The researcher conducted several rounds of personal interviews to get the reporter's perspective on how he/she presented the news to the reader. Through personal interviews with several key reporters, the researcher gathered information regarding how stories were pieced together to educate the public about the events of the special session.

The interviews were held in the reporter's individual office. Each lasted approximately 45 minutes in length. The researcher prepared a list of questions for the interviews (Attachment B). Each reporter selected for interview was the designated writer on staff for their respective paper during the special session. Upon completion of each interview, the researcher compiled responses into typed format for inclusion in final document.

A sample of the questions addressed is as follows: Do the reporters confer with one another to develop a baseline story? Were there regional influences affecting how each was to report the issues? Did reporters have one credible source to turn to? Who determines the headlines? How much influence do legislators have on reporting? The Alexandria, Lafayette, Monroe, and Shreveport markets are covered by one unified bureau. Although they are unified, do the four papers vary in their coverage of the session highlights? The bureau has three full-time reporters and a fourth *Shreveport Times* reporter who spends several weeks a year filing stories from the Capitol. How does the coverage and story frame differ from paper to paper?

The 2001 Legislative Special Session had a unique situation in which a reporter from another state spent the 10-days in Baton Rouge at the capitol attending the debates, printing coverage for his local newspaper. The reporter was from the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. The interview was held during a 20-minute phone conversation. Follow-up concerns were addressed via electronic mail correspondence. The questions discussed between the researcher and the out-of-town reporter are listed as follows: Did the Las Vegas reporter emphasize the gambling aspect more than education? Did he even mention the teacher pay raise as a direct result and influence on legislator's votes? His interest was tied to the Harrah's casino in New Orleans—was this his only focus?

In addition to the phone interview, the researcher performed a content analysis on the seven articles the *Las Vegas Review Journal* reporter published covering the session. The coding tool was identical to that used for the 116 Louisiana articles (Attachment A). Upon completion, the coded values were labeled and placed into an Excel spreadsheet for conversion into SPSS format. Further analysis was performed on the SPSS results and findings reported.

The researcher also held an informal interview with the author of one of the two legislative bills which was the focus of debate during the special session. The legislator's viewpoint offers the researcher an additional perspective on the progression of the session and the resulting newspaper coverage. The interview was conducted at the state capitol in the legislator's office. It was approximately one-hour in length. An informal list of questions was prepared prior to the interview to lead discussion. The questions are as follows: When did he first see the need to author this type of legislation? Did someone request he draft the bills? Did the discussions in the committee hearings proceed as he expected? On the floor? Were the final results what he expected? How did he feel about the media coverage given to the session? Did he feel the media does a good job reflecting the debate and the issues? Upon conclusion of the interview with the legislator, the researcher compiled the answers in a typed format for reporting in the Results section.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section addresses results recorded following personal interviews with reporters working in the capitol bureau, an out-of-state reporter, and a Louisiana legislator. The second section reports results from the content analysis.

#### PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

##### Reporting from the capitol bureau

Because of the request from reporters, names are withheld in this document. The reporters that I was able to contact and meet with were from the following papers with offices located in the capitol bureau:

Baton Rouge/*The Advocate*  
New Orleans/*The Times Picayune*  
Lafayette/*The Daily Advertiser*  
Alexandria/*The Town Talk*

Each paper had a different approach to covering the legislative session. The *Times Picayune* bureau is composed of four-persons, all of whom participated, to some degree, in the reporting of committee meetings or floor debates. At the inception of the special session, the bureau chief designated one reporter to cover Harrah's casino and another to follow the riverboat casinos legislation. As committee meetings are often held at consecutive times, additional reporters were brought in from New Orleans, as needed, to help maintain ample coverage of all meetings. Although a primary reporter authored the final story, several reporters often had contributed information they had gathered individually.

With Harrah's casino in New Orleans at the center of the debate, the bureau chief explained that logically Harrah's received the focus of coverage by the *Times Picayune* during

the special session. He stated, Harrah's is viewed by the public as not only a gambling institution, but also, more importantly, as an economic issue for the city – an employer for approximately 2,500 people. Other cities across the state might not recognize this immediate economic influence. He perceived that most of the readership in other cities views Harrah's only as a facility where individuals go to gamble their money and that person living in Louisiana is typically either pro-gambling/Harrah's or anti-gambling/Harrah's. The reporter continued to express his opinion that the anti-gambling readers are less likely to be interested in reading extended information about the struggling casino in parts of the state not immediately influenced by Harrah's presence.

The cities of Alexandria, Lafayette, Shreveport and Monroe are covered by one unified Gannett bureau. Under this umbrella, the designated full-time reporters in each bureau office work together on stories, but are budgeted under different papers. The bureau chief is formally employed under the *Shreveport Times* and all stories for the four cities are supposed to go through him first. The Monroe *News Star* does not have an individual full-time reporter located at the capitol. The *Shreveport Times* reporter writes stories for Shreveport and Monroe (papers share an office) and therefore, the stories are identical nearly all of the time.

The Gannett reporters concurred the session was assigned to the *Shreveport Times* reporter since the focus of the riverboat bill was on the Red River floating casinos in the Shreveport/Bossier region. The reporter assigned from the *Shreveport Times* was imported from the main office in Shreveport, strictly to cover the session. He returned to the northern city shortly after its conclusion. The Gannett reporters regretted not having more input on the session coverage. They felt “spotty” coverage had been given by the hometown reporter that solely focused on Shreveport/Bossier issues and, therefore, a lot of local coverage for their cities and in

turn, readers, was overlooked. Shreveport and Bossier City region was the focus of the reporting—Alexandria, Lafayette and Monroe fell wayside. The Gannett Bureau reporters from these respective regions did admit that the special session was not the primary agenda in their towns, since their cities do not have a riverboat casino. Yet, space was allotted in the papers for the session, and as a result, the readers interested in local news suffered due to region-specific coverage focusing on the Shreveport and Bossier City region. The Gannett reporters' final comments addressed their concern that overall the regional papers have shrunk in size over the years. Each edition contains much less news.

*The Advocate* has a designated gambling reporter who was responsible for reporting on the special session. The reporter relied on other reporters within his own bureau for additional information on topics flowing in and out of his articles for which he is not an expert. For example, he relied on the paper's education reporter to effectively cover the issue of teacher pay.

Sharing information between reporters from different papers is not unheard of, but depends on the type of information being discussed. There was a consensus among the five reporters that information for stories is not discussed unless it is "common knowledge" or simple technical questions (correct spelling of names or confirming quotes). Each reporter seeks information/quotes region-appropriate for his/her particular paper. In light of this, for example, if a reporter from the Alexandria bureau leaves the room and the Baton Rouge reporter gets a key quote from a legislator that would be of interest to the Alexandria reporter, he would openly share this information with the absent reporter upon his return.

The presence of the reporters in the same committee rooms ultimately leads to similar stories written from paper to paper with differences seen primarily in quotes selected from regional legislators and citizens, when applicable. Each reporter was asked if he relied on a

credible source during the session. Responses produced mixed results. The Baton Rouge region reporter relied on several key legislators: Senator Ken Hollis, Jr. (R-Metairie), Representative Daniel R. Martini (R-Metairie), and Senator Donald R. Cravins (D-Arnaudville), for the “on the record” quotes and additional information. He spoke extensively about Harrah’s issue with Harrah’s primary lobbyist, Randy Haynie, but all conversations with Haynie were “off the record.” This meant he could not print the information unless he got the same account from another, quotable source.

The New Orleans reporter remarked that although he had a legislator to talk to, he also recognized that legislators have personal agendas limiting the usefulness of information provided. Therefore, the reporter would talk to other sources in order to present a piece based not only on a legislator’s own agenda.

The remaining reporters claimed not to have a particular source. Rather, they made use of long-term relationships with various budget analysts employed by the legislative fiscal office to obtain detailed budget information. They claimed that it is not common to have a reliable legislator to provide information during the session regarding committee meetings and floor debate. Outside sources provide valuable story detail. For example, when the teachers protested at the capitol, the focus was on them for the day’s story. According to one reporter, he covers “...what I hear and see going on around me that day and look to write the relevant facts.”

When asked if certain topics had to be included in their coverage of the special session, the popular response was gambling and money as a unit. Each felt the two issues were clearly linked and, therefore, every story had to include both aspects. One reporter strongly believed the link was important to convey to the audience as the usual “...political deal to buy the boats off,

using teachers to push anti-gambling legislators to vote for the bill. Marking gambling money for a ‘good’ cause is nothing new to Louisiana.”

With the multiple agendas put forth by Harrah’s executives, the governor’s staff, teacher unions and Harrah’s employees, there were many influences present at the capitol that could have been the main focus of session coverage by the reporters. Each reporter firmly revoked any suggestion made by regional influences to report the issues in a certain way. They claimed to not let public opinion affect their work. Alternately, one reporter claimed that during legislative sessions, he gets most of his information from the lobbyists working on the floor of the capitol. “On certain issues, they run the place.” For example, during this special session, Harrah’s casino had a powerful force of lobbying influence ranging from their own hired individuals to employees of the casino fighting to keep their jobs. The teachers made their presence known by voicing full support of the legislation in an effort to get the pay raise they had been seeking for years.

Depending on the region and topic, several reporters claimed to rely on their local legislators and some of the fiscal staff from the capitol. One reporter did remark that his local legislators, being typically conservative white, anti-gambling, male legislators, firmly opposed the riverboats and Harrah’s. As a result of this, the reporter got none of his information from his regional legislator and alternately, looked to other vocal participants in the legislative debate for his stories.

In general, each of the reporters felt that the coverage of the special legislative session did receive ample space in their respective papers. They were all allocated a spot on the front page. The Baton Rouge *Advocate*, in particular, placed a big focus on politics and education, which often resulted in use of the special session stories covering the front page.

Shouldn't big issues be covered on the front-page news? One reporter felt that a "requirement" from the editor for a front-page local news story each day could have an unexpected negative consequence. He reminisced back to his previous employment at the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that mandated a suburban story on the front-page everyday. He chuckled as he expressed his disapproval of having to write a story about a 200-year old tree as the leading story.

None of the reporters have any voice regarding the title that goes with their story or an accompanying picture. They all laughed when asked this question. A copy editor back at headquarters is responsible for these decisions, although the capitol bureau reporters fend off the resulting calls from any disgruntled readers. This practice seemed to be the norm among all capitol bureau newspapers.

### **An Out of State Perspective**

For the first time during a Louisiana legislative session, an out-of-state reporter flew in to observe and send reports back to his hometown newspaper regarding the progression of the special session. Jeff Simpson, a *Las Vegas Review Journal* reporter, was dispatched to Baton Rouge to cover the gambling focused session since Harrah's parent company is based in Nevada.

The Louisiana special session was the first legislative session that he has covered as a reporter. He received the assignment from his editor. Harrah's is a major Las Vegas-based casino operator and the company has lost hundreds of millions of dollars in New Orleans. Whether the company would get its tax break and stay in New Orleans or would not get the break were important issues to Las Vegas economy. Harrah's employs over 12,000 Nevadans, so a fiscal catastrophe in New Orleans could have a big impact on Nevada.

The focus of Simpson's coverage was predictably heavy on Harrah's casino, with only brief references made to teacher pay raise and riverboat casino issues. He was asked if he felt it important to link the issue of gambling to the issue of teacher pay raise when presenting the coverage to his Nevadan readers. He believed the issues of teacher pay raise and of the related riverboat tax changes were important for context, but not nearly as important overall to his story. The Harrah's tax cut was the main story his readers were looking for.

Simpson commented that overall the session was organized very well. He found the Louisiana legislative staffers very helpful to his coverage as were the legislators and Governor Mike Foster. He commented that most experts predicted the deal was already sealed before the session started, but "I can't pretend to understand the labyrinthine politics of the Pelican State. One of the biggest shocks to me was the relative insignificance of political party affiliation. A number of Louisiana journalists and politicians tried to explain to me that personal relationships are much more important than party affiliation, quite different from California, Florida, Ohio and Nevada, states I'm more familiar with. Geography and religion seemed to be more important than political party affiliation as well."

### **Major Findings**

In conclusion, the personal interviews offered insight to the reporting efforts by the capitol bureau reporters, in addition to the out-of-state perspective by Jeff Simpson with the *Las Vegas Review Journal*. Sharing information, including story leads, is uncommon among bureaus. With the exception of the news shared with the AP wire, information is selected and analyzed internally. This would suggest there still exists a certain level of competition between news bureaus.

Strategically, approaches to cover the special session varied among the capitol bureau newspapers. The New Orleans bureau saw it as high priority to have full coverage of all meetings at all times and, therefore, kept four full-time reporters involved to some extent in committee meetings and floor debates. *The Advocate* had one full-time reporter dedicated to the gambling issue. The Gannett Bureau imported a reporter from the Shreveport office to write the stories for the Gannett papers, leaving minimal input from reporters from other cities falling under the Gannett umbrella (Alexandria, Monroe and Lafayette). As a result, the other Gannett reporters accused the Gannett Bureau as biased towards the Shreveport/Bossier City riverboat casino debate. Although these reporters lamented not having more control over the attention given to their particular regions during the special session, they suggested this was because of lack of general local news coverage provided for their readers rather than regret that Alexandria, Lafayette and Monroe were not specifically highlighted among the gambling discussions.

Each reporter felt responsible to specifically link the topics of gambling to education. It was anticipated that these topics would have been covered separately while still providing the public an accurate account of the progression to the session. In contrast, each reporter expressed an obligation to mention both topics in each piece covered. It was the Governor's agenda and, therefore, they felt it was impossible to write about one without referring to the other. The reporters seemed to have much leeway when covering the issues and as a result, had flexibility to use sources and seek information they deemed appropriate.

Overall, each of the reporters felt comfortable with the amount of attention given to local news by each of the respective papers. Depending on the time of year and current events, the placement of their state government-focused stories will vary from the front-page of the A-section to other less prominent locations. During the legislative sessions, they expect the news

they report to be a primary focus of the daily news. When the legislature goes home, news from the capitol decreases and, therefore, the coverage given to bureau news is much less, if at all. Information reported is that which they seek out from state departments and other government entities or less often, receive by way of government press release.

### **The Voice of a Legislator**

Representative Charlie Dewitt (D-Lecompte), Speaker of the House, was the primary author and negotiator on House Bill 2. This bill provides for gaming while riverboats are docked and gaming on permanently moored riverboat vessels.

At the start of our discussion, Speaker Dewitt opened by expressing approval of the media coverage of the legislature. For this session, his biggest lament was that the press was unable to properly explain to the average citizens why they convened for this extraordinary special session. Newspapers tended to surmise things that were not there. He used references in articles to the various deals made with the casino industry as examples. “The only commonality in reporting was the economic role of the 3,000 jobs in New Orleans” (Dewitt 2001).

House Bill 2, the gambling/riverboat bill and Senate Bill 1, Harrah’s Casino legislation, were tied together to create a special fund with money accrued by increasing taxes on the riverboats and Harrah’s casino. If one bill failed, the other automatically did as well.

Speaker Dewitt suggested that deals are part of politics and Harrah’s is the source of many. For example, the casino had separate ongoing negotiations with the city of New Orleans and surrounding hotels and restaurants in order to be able to offer perks to attract high roller gamblers to Harrah’s. To their employees, Harrah’s offers a generous 401K, health insurance, and retirement options in addition to compensation above minimum wage. To make a comparison, Speaker Dewitt asked the question, “Does K-Mart do this for their employees?”

The casino assists employees who are first-time homebuyers ready to purchase. These examples, Speaker Dewitt stated, were to show just how much Harrah's had invested. It was too much for them to fail. He was surprised the press did not mention this more in their coverage as he claimed to have made more trips to New Orleans in 10 days than ever before in order to meet with Mayor Morial to make sure the Harrah's bill passed and, in turn, the riverboat bill.

When Harrah's was first constructed, Speaker Dewitt explained that the tax imposed on them by the state were determined by either using a formula or flat \$100 million per year, depending on their net income. To his knowledge to date, the formula had never been used. Harrah's was obligated to the \$100 million per year and was having trouble meeting this requirement. When the legislature met, Harrah's was the first in line to get a new deal. They could not survive under the current conditions. Ironically enough, Speaker Dewitt went on to comment, the Indian reservations across the state with thriving casinos operating on their land pay nothing to the state. There was no coverage in the media highlighting this arrangement. That seemed like an easy target for news reports.

The riverboats, targeted for increased taxes under the proposed legislation during the special session were not in dire financial need. Their battle was to be allowed to stay dockside at all times. At their current 18.5% tax rate, they were required to sail so many hours a day. This is seen as a deterrent to gamblers who do not like to sail and/or don't want to be trapped on a boat for hours (or however long until the boat returns to the dock). In reality though, commented Speaker Dewitt, the boats in Baton Rouge and Lake Charles only sailed about 15% of the mandated time. 85% of the time an excuse was made (bad weather, current, etc) preventing the gambling boats from having to leave the dock. The boats on the Red River in the

Shreveport/Bossier City region have never been required to sail. The Red River is not navigable. Yet, they were taxed at the same 18.5% as the rest of the state's "sailing" riverboats.

At the start of the special session, Speaker Dewitt had the intent to raise the tax from 18.5% to 23.5% and make all boats permanently dockside. His plan permitted the boats to increase their total square footage, but not increasing the number of gaming machines. This gave more room on the "boats," but did not expand gambling facilities in the state. The newspapers referred to these as barges. Speaker Dewitt anticipated that the riverboats would embrace this idea now allowing room for restaurants to be located right next to the gambling machines. Yet, his proposal met enough opposition and eventually died on the floor. He was not able to convince legislators that this was not an expansion of gambling. The lobbyists for the riverboats in Lake Charles opposed the 21.5% option as well, desiring to remain at the current 18.5% and continue cruising. Representative Dewitt explained why Lake Charles wanted this option as he had spent one evening watching the boats in Lake Charles sail. "They never float at the same time, when one would leave the dock, the gamblers would all scramble off of that boat and on to the other three remaining dockside. They would continue this rotation as one boat came back and another left. Why would they want to pay the additional taxes when they had already figured out how to 'bend' the sailing law" (Dewitt 2001)?

The final versions of the two legislative bills ultimately lowered the taxes on the Harrah's casino and permanently docked all floating riverboats at a tax rate of 21.5%. The riverboats in the Red River region were required to pay the increased rate, even though they had been dockside from their inception due to the shallow waters they were built on. Speaker Dewitt claimed he was pleased with the outcome of the session although he would have liked to get the rate to 23.5%. "Gambling is here and the only way to ever remove gaming now would be to tax

them the hell out of the state. Until then, we might as well get as much money from them as we can” (Dewitt 2001). He would like to work in a future session on getting some money back to the state from the casinos operating on the Indian reservations.

The discussion concluded with general questions about the media pressure as the Speaker of the House. He handles the media by giving them what they want. At the conclusion of each day, he walks to the rear of the chambers to the doors where the media line up and ask him questions. “I typically get a good response from them because I just answer what they ask” (Dewitt 2001).

## **CONTENT ANALYSIS**

### **Intercoder Reliability Results**

The content analysis covered 116 total articles from the seven major newspapers in Louisiana. The researcher read each article and used the guidelines (Attachment A) to code the requested variables. A volunteer coder was recruited to read 20 articles randomly pulled by the researcher in order to test reliability of the coding tool employed by the study.

As a result, the first seven variables proved to be straightforward and objective in nature addressing the date of article, author, title, page number, length and content of picture (as applicable). Coder reliability was 100% for these selections on the coding guidelines.

Lowered reliability was found when the more subjective issues were coded. The scales selected for use by the researcher led to discrepancy in coding between the researcher and volunteer coder. Before proceeding, the volunteer was thoroughly briefed on the methodology designed by the researcher. Upon completion of reading the article, the coder was requested to select the main and secondary topic. Seventy-five percent of the time the researcher and coder concurred on the main topic. Agreement on the secondary topic was much lower (25%). The

definition of secondary topic provided on the guidelines was not precise enough to ensure an acceptable range of intercoder reliability on this variable.

The coding of frames in articles had a much higher reliability than the presence of mood. The coder was to mark yes or no regarding the presence of a particular frame in the article. The coder and researcher agreed on the frames as follows:

Alternate sources of revenue	(88%)
Gambling money used to fund education	(81%)
Improving education	(75%)
Lobbying influence	(75%)
Economic influence	(44%)

Determining the mood of the article towards certain topics had very low reliability. A scale was provided as a guide ranging from 0-does not apply, 1-positive, 3- neutral, 5-negative, to 6-mixed positive/negative. More specific guidelines to the coder might have increased the low reliability. As coded, the intercoder reliability test produced the following percentages of agreement:

Mood towards special session	(63%)
Mood towards gambling industry	(38%)
Mood towards teacher pay raise	(50%)
Mood towards linking teacher pay raise to gambling	(69%)

### **Researcher Findings**

The results found by the researcher during the actual content analysis are presented as follows. Upon completion of the article, the researcher selected the main topic and secondary topic covered in the piece. The main topic was defined as the single topic covered in the first two paragraphs of the article. Using this definition, the researcher found that the main topic of the seven newspapers in 33.6% of the coverage was discussion about the riverboats. Harrah's Casino followed with 26.7% of stories having it as the main topic. These two issues were on the

forefront of the reporter agenda, with over 50% of the total articles opening with one of these two issues. See Table 1. below for details.

**Table 1.**

Main Topic of Article									
Newspaper Title	Gambling	Lobbyists	Teachers Pay	Tax Struc	Teacher Nat'l Pay Rank	Harrah's	Riverboats	Economic Impact	Total
<i>The Advocate</i>	4 25.0%	1 6.3%	2 12.5%	1 6.3%		4 25.0%	4 25.0%		16 100.0%
<i>The Times-Picayune</i>	2 16.7%		1 8.3%			5 41.7%	4 33.3%		12 100.0%
<i>The Town Talk</i>	1 9.1%		3 27.3%			1 9.1%	6 54.5%		11 100.0%
<i>The Times</i>	3 15.8%		4 21.1%	1 5.3%		3 15.8%	8 42.1%		19 100.0%
<i>The News Star</i>	2 13.3%		4 26.7%	1 6.7%		4 26.7%	3 20.0%	1 6.7%	15 100.0%
<i>The Daily Advertiser</i>	4 17.4%		4 17.4%		1 4.3%	7 30.4%	6 26.1%	1 4.3%	23 100.0%
<i>American Press</i>	3 15.0%		1 5.0%		1 5.0%	7 35.0%	8 40.0%		20 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>19 16.4%</b>	<b>1 0.9%</b>	<b>19 16.4%</b>	<b>3 2.6%</b>	<b>2 1.7%</b>	<b>31 26.7%</b>	<b>39 33.6%</b>	<b>2 1.7%</b>	<b>116 100.0%</b>

Teacher pay raise was the most frequent secondary topic with 28.6% of the articles addressing it following the main topic. The secondary topic, for this purpose, was defined as the topic covered in the remaining sections of the article that immediately follows the main topic and is not included in the first two paragraphs.

These results indicate that teacher pay raise was covered in a handful of stories, but only secondary to the main topics of the floating riverboats and Harrah's casino. Based on the personal interviews with the reporters, each of them pointed out the importance/obligation they felt to link the Harrah's/riverboat issue to the issue of teacher pay raise. These low percentages, however, do not illustrate this coupled emphasis. In over 70% of the articles, another issue besides teachers pay raise was addressed as the secondary topic. These topics included Harrah's

casino, riverboats, morality of coupling gambling with education, constitutionality of tax structure, gambling, lobbyists, education, and economic impact.

In addition to the main topic and secondary topic covered in the articles, the coder identified the presence of particular frames in a story. A news frame is defined as the way that news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists. According to Entman (1993), a frame brings the readers attention to some aspects of reality, while obscuring other elements. Therefore, different frames of the same news topic might lead audiences to different reactions.

Of the frames coded, only one exists in the majority of the 116 articles. The direct/indirect discussion of using gambling money to fund education occurred in 63.8% of the articles. These results could explain the lack of obvious correlation between the issues of riverboats and Harrah's casino linked to the issue of teacher pay raise. The reporters indicated it was an important link for them to make in each story. Yet, the topic of teacher pay raise was not the secondary topic the majority of the time. The results suggest the journalists might have made the link through frames in his/her writing rather than outright statements made in the articles.

The other frames coded did not appear in the articles in any significant percentages. Improving education was only referenced in 18.1% of the articles; alternate sources of revenue, 22.4%; the issue of gambling as an addiction (social/moral problem), 15.5%; economic influence of gambling, 41.4%; and the influence by the lobbyists, 19%. The higher economic influence can be attributed to 75% of the stories in the *Times Picayune* coded positively for this frame.

In addition to frames, the overall mood of the article with respect to certain issues was investigated. The categories were designed to illustrate if the article had an overall positive, neutral, or negative mood. The most significant results found, having a Chi-Square factor of  $\chi^2 = .034$ , was the mood towards giving teachers a pay raise. Ninety-eight percent of the 116

articles were positive with only 2.3% (1 article) negative. This was the only mood variable not coding any stories as neutral. See Table 2. below for details. These results clearly indicate a very positive mood in all stories towards giving teachers a pay raise.

**Table 2.**

<b>Mood Towards Giving Teachers a Pay Raise</b>			
Newspaper Title	Positive	Negative	Total
<i>The Advocate</i>	3		3
	100.0%		100.0%
<i>Times Picayune</i>	3		3
	100.0%		100.0%
<i>The Town Talk</i>	2	1	3
	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
<i>The Times</i>	9		9
	100.0%		100.0%
<i>The News Star</i>	7		7
	100.0%		100.0%
<i>The Daily Advertiser</i>	14		14
	100.0%		100.0%
<i>American Press</i>	4		4
	100.0%		100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>43</b>
**x2=.034	<b>97.7%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The other results did not indicate a strong relationship between the papers on the three moods coded, yet did indicate an overall positive mood for the stories as a whole. Sixty percent of the articles has positive mood towards the special session. The New Orleans *Times Picayune* was the most positive paper (85.7%) toward the special session. Yet, 40% of the coverage in the Lake Charles *American Press* presented a negative reading to the reader. See Table 3. below for details.

**Table 3.**

<b>Mood Towards Special Session</b>				
Newspaper Title	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>The Advocate</i>	2	1	1	4
	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
<i>Times Picayune</i>	6		1	7
	85.7%		14.3%	100.0%
<i>The Town Talk</i>	6	1	1	8
	75.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
<i>The Times</i>	10	6	2	18
	55.6%	33.3%	11.1%	100.0%
<i>The News Star</i>	8	2	3	13
	61.5%	15.4%	23.1%	100.0%
<i>The Daily Advertiser</i>	9	2	6	17
	52.9%	11.8%	35.3%	100.0%
<i>American Press</i>	8	1	6	15
	53.3%	6.7%	40.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>82</b>
	<b>59.8%</b>	<b>15.9%</b>	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Fifty-five percent of the coverage was positive in the newspaper articles towards the gambling industry. The Monroe *News Star* was the newspaper coverage most favorable to the industry (71.4%). The most negative was *The Advocate* (50%) towards the industry. See Table 4. for details.

**Table 4.**

<b>Mood Towards Gambling Industry</b>				
Newspaper Title	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>The Advocate</i>	6	1	7	14
	42.9%	7.1%	50.0%	100.0%
<i>Times Picayune</i>	5	2	1	8
	62.5%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
<i>The Town Talk</i>	3	2	3	8
	37.5%	25.0%	37.5%	100.0%
<i>The Times</i>	11	5	2	18
	61.1%	27.8%	11.1%	100.0%
<i>The News Star</i>	10	2	2	14
	71.4%	14.3%	14.3%	100.0%
<i>The Daily Advertiser</i>	10	4	7	21
	47.6%	19.0%	33.3%	100.0%
<i>American Press</i>	10	2	6	18
	55.6%	11.1%	33.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>101</b>
	<b>54.5%</b>	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The final mood coded was towards linking teacher pay raise to gambling. Fifty-five percent of the articles reporting came across as positive to the reader. The *Shreveport Times* came across as the most positive, with 71.4% of articles, followed closely by the *American Press* with 70%. *The Advocate*, again, presented the most negative reading with 55.6% of its articles being negative. See Table 5. below for details.

**Table 5.**

<b>Mood Towards Linking Teacher Pay Raise to Gambling</b>				
Newspaper Title	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>The Advocate</i>	1 11.1%	3 33.3%	5 55.6%	9 100.0%
<i>Times Picayune</i>	4 57.1%	2 28.6%	1 14.3%	7 100.0%
<i>The Town Talk</i>	4 66.7%		2 33.3%	6 100.0%
<i>The Times</i>	10 71.4%	1 7.1%	3 21.4%	14 100.0%
<i>The News Star</i>	7 50.0%	2 14.3%	5 35.7%	14 100.0%
<i>The Daily Advertiser</i>	9 52.9%		8 47.1%	17 100.0%
<i>American Press</i>	7 70.0%	2 20.0%	1 10.0%	10 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b> <b>54.5%</b>	<b>10</b> <b>13.0%</b>	<b>25</b> <b>32.5%</b>	<b>77</b> <b>100.0%</b>

During the legislative session, the capitol bureau reporters all felt that their respective papers devoted more front-page coverage to the session highlights. Sixty-one of the 116 articles, just over 50%, were found on the front page. The news coverage ranged from bold headlines and picture juxtaposed to a simple opening column leading to the bulk of the story found in interior sections.

There seems to be an unstated belief that headlines highlighting the gambling issue rather than the issue of teacher pay raise is more likely to get the attention of the reader. The words “riverboat” or “docksides” showed up in the headlines 37 times. “Gambling” and “gaming” had

22 occurrences and “Harrah’s” had 19. The least mentioned in the headlines was “teacher’s pay raise” used 18 times in the 116 stories analyzed.

Teacher’s pay raise also took a definite backseat in the coverage given by the reporter from Las Vegas for the *Las Vegas Review Journal*. His coverage was heavily slanted towards the Harrah’s Casino issue. In an effort to not slant the overall analysis results, the articles written by Simpson were coded using the same guidelines as the 116 articles, but analyzed separately. The results from the content analysis of his articles showed Harrah’s as his primary topic in 100% of his articles. Economic impact (71%) was the secondary topic. This can be attributed to the resulting impact that the closing of Harrah’s in New Orleans would have on the Las Vegas economy.

Frames used in the *Las Vegas Review Journal* were limited to lobbyist’s efforts (71%) and economic influence (86%). These findings echo the preference of Las Vegas viewpoints.

Simpson was here to report the progression of the Harrah’s bill. The issue of teacher’s pay was a topic that just happened to be addressed at the same session. As a reader living in Las Vegas, he/she would have been hard pressed to recognize the link between the teacher’s pay and the passing of the Harrah’s Casino and riverboat legislation. Whether or not teachers in Louisiana received a pay raise did not impact Las Vegas at all.

In conclusion, the results determined by the primary researcher based on the findings in the content analysis present several notable relationships. Although there was not an indication of an overwhelming main topic among the seven papers, over 50% of the coverage presented riverboats or Harrah’s as the main point of discussion. Teacher pay raise did code as the most frequent secondary topic, but only 28.6% of the time. This is not a high incidence considering reporter’s statements during interviews that pairing the two topics (gambling and teachers pay)

was an important link when writing articles. The earlier hypothesis suggests that reporters linked the two topics more frequently through the use of frames, rather than outright statements. This hypothesis was made based on the results coded for frames using gambling money to fund education occurring in 63.8% of the articles. This was the only frame coded for that appeared in a significant percentage.

In addition to frames, the overall mood of the article with respect to certain issues was coded. This category produced the most significant results with reporters outright for giving teachers a pay raise. Of the options given, this was the only mood not coding neutral for any article, 97% positive, and 2.3% negative. Overall, the mood of the articles concurred with this positive spin, with negative stories appearing sparsely throughout the total articles.

The reporting presented through the *Las Vegas Journal* was slanted towards gambling. Simpson was a gambling reporter on assignment to report the fate of Harrah's casino. His articles focused on gambling and only made brief suggestion to teacher's pay raise. He addressed the topic when discussing Governor Foster's agenda for the special session, but future reports addressed only his primary concern of Harrah's and economic impact resulting based on the outcome of the session.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### SUMMARY

The researcher conducted this study in order to investigate various factors that might have affected newspaper coverage of the 2001, 10-day special legislative session. The following section provides a synthesis of the results derived from personal interviews and content analysis of the newspaper articles.

**RQ1: Are there major influences shaping the story content of the special session among the seven primary dailies in Louisiana?**

Yes. These influences include news sources, lobbyists, short deadlines, and expectation of readership's interest. Reporters looked to legislators, lobbyists, fiscal staff and floor discussion to base their stories. Sources tend to discuss topics important to them, which might have led to what was highlighted in a news stories. The paid lobbyists for Harrah's Casino were constantly present at the capitol during the 10-day session, providing convenient access for story sources. The teachers, nevertheless, were not as accessible, which might have made their issue secondary in the news. According to the reporters interviewed, editors' anticipation of a daily story on this session put them under tight time frames for researching and writing. Lastly each paper examined seems to cover the event differently; the focus of each paper's coverage seems to echo the market's interest. This point will be addressed in greater detail in the following question.

**RQ2: Is there variance in coverage from region to region regarding the special session?**

Yes. The results concerning variance in coverage from region to region during the special session were not as pronounced as anticipated by the researcher. Harrah's Casino is located in New Orleans and, therefore, the *Times Picayune* focused on this issue. The bureau

chief explained that the economic fallout that would result from Harrah's claiming bankruptcy was of major interest to his readership. Content analysis results indicate the casino was the major topic in 42% of the *Times Picayune* articles. This percentage is greater than any other topics, yet still not the majority. Alternately, the Gannett bureau reporter from Shreveport focused on the riverboat legislation that can impact the Red River boats. The floating casinos were the main topic in 42% of the *Times* articles. Due to the umbrella set-up of the Gannett bureau over Lafayette, Alexandria, and Monroe, their content should have been nearly identical. The content analysis results did not support this hypothesis for all three cities. *Alexandria Town Talk* did have the riverboat casinos as the main topic 55% of the time. Alternately, the main topics of the other Gannett bureau papers ranged from Harrah's in Lafayette's *Daily Advertiser* to teacher's pay and Harrah's in Monroe's *News Star*. These results do not support regional influence as a factor.

**RQ3: Do the newspaper articles link the issue of teacher's pay raise to gambling revenue or are they handled as separate issues?**

The issues of teacher's pay raise to gambling revenue are linked in many of the articles. Based on the interviews, the reporters expressed a responsibility to link the two subjects since this was the Governor's call. The quantitative content analysis results indicated that the link was made through more hidden frames rather outright statements. Teacher's pay was only coupled with gambling (Harrah's casino and riverboat casinos) as the secondary topic in 29% of the coverage. Over 70% of the time, another issue besides teacher's pay was addressed as the secondary topic. These figures did not support the reporter's claim that they were obligated to link the two. Nevertheless, the presence of both frames appearing in 64% of the articles explained how the issues were linked together. The journalists seemed to use indirect references, rather than outright statements, to link the two.

**RQ4: Did this special session get conspicuous coverage?**

Yes. The special session did get conspicuous coverage. The capitol bureau reporters claimed their respective papers allotted certain space on the front page for the session highlights. Each reporter was expected to produce a front-page story each day during the legislative session. Sixty-one of the 116 articles, just over 50%, were found on the front page. The news coverage often included bold headlines with pictures juxtaposed to a simple opening column leading to the bulk of the story continued on an interior page.

**RQ5: Do reporters look to each other when writing stories?**

Not entirely. Reporters do not always look to each other when writing stories. Reporters from different bureaus do not converse freely, but the reporters of different specialties assisted each other with story production. There was a consensus among the reporters that information for stories is not discussed unless it is “common knowledge” or simple technical questions (correct spelling of names or confirming quotes). Each reporter seeks quotes from legislators particular to his region. By design the offices in the Capitol Bureau present an ideal setting for “pack journalism”, but my interviews do not seem to support this theory.

**RQ6: Did reporters frame certain issues in their coverage of the special session?**

Yes. Reporters framed certain issues during their coverage of the session. Of the frames coded, only one existed in the majority of the articles. The direct/indirect discussion of using gambling money to fund education occurred in 64% of the articles. Forty-one percent of the articles referenced the economic influence of gambling.

The other frames coded for did not appear in the articles in significant percentages. Improving education was referenced in 18% of the articles; alternate sources of revenue, 22%;

the issue of gambling as an addiction (moral/social problem), 16%; and the influence by the lobbyists, 19%.

**RQ7: Did the articles convey a specific mood about the issues discussed during the special session?**

Yes. The content analysis part of the project attempted to detect whether an article conveys an overall positive, negative or neutral mood to each individual issue. The most significant results found was the mood towards giving teachers a pay raise. Ninety-eight percent of the 116 articles coded positive in regards to giving teacher's a pay raise.

The other results did not indicate a strong relationship between the papers on the three moods coded, but did indicate an overall positive mood for the coverage as a whole. Sixty percent of the articles had positive mood towards the special session. The New Orleans *Times Picayune* was the most positive paper (85.7%) towards the special session. Yet, 40% of the coverage in the Lake Charles *American Press* presented a negative reading to the reader.

Overall, 55% of the coverage was positive towards the gambling industry. The Monroe *News Star* was the most positive paper (71.4%) to the industry, while The Baton Rouge *Advocate* were the most negative, with 50% of the articles negative.

The final mood coded was towards linking teacher pay raise to gambling. Overall, fifty-five percent of the articles were positive. The *Shreveport Times* was the most positive paper towards making this link (71.4%), followed closely by the *American Press* (70%). *The Advocate*, on the other hand, was the most negative (55.6%) towards the issue.

**RQ8: Was there a prominent main topic throughout the newspaper coverage on the special session?**

Yes. The gambling industry was the prominent main topic throughout the newspaper coverage on the special session. The results of the content analysis indicated that the main topic

of the seven newspapers surveyed was the discussion about the riverboat casinos (33.6%). The coverage of Harrah's Casino followed with 26.7% of the stories. These two gambling industries were on the forefront of the reporter's agenda, with over 50% of the total articles opening with discussion on either of them.

## **DISCUSSION**

The 2001 special legislative session may be deemed a success as the final outcome saved Harrah's Casino in New Orleans from having to file for bankruptcy, and docked the floating riverboat casinos permanently across the state, in exchange for an increase in taxes creating the necessary funds for teachers to receive the pay raise they had desperately been seeking. As the debate was tossed between the members of the House and the Senate, the media bounced along with the progression, reporting each day's events in the newspapers across the state.

Overall, results of this study derived from personal interviews, content analysis, and contextual information presented the researcher satisfaction that the session was covered daily by each of the seven major newspaper markets across the state. The gambling industry took precedence in reporting importance over the issue of teacher pay raise, but both were addressed throughout the articles. Overall, the coverage took on a positive tone regarding the session, and especially towards the idea of granting teachers a pay raise, regardless of the source of the money. Using gambling revenue to pay the teachers had caused concern among segments of the population prior to the onset of the session. Linking this pay raise to revenue generated by taxing the gambling industry was the charge given by the governor. Therefore, reporters addressed both topics when writing articles covering the session highlights.

The literature suggests that state and local politics are underreported, taking a backseat to other attention-prompting events. Graber (1993) compared the coverage of state and local

politics to swiss cheese, claiming that, “Swiss cheese has more substance than holes while the reverse is true of press coverage of state government.” As discussed in the literature review, Graber (1993) attributed the gaps to lack of appeal of the subject by a large audience and shallow media expertise. The results detailing the newspaper coverage given to the special session does not indicate this void, at least during the 10-days of the active legislative special session. Alternately, over 50% of the articles were found occupying space on the front page of their respective local paper, whether covering the entire page or simply a leader column to be continued in the interior section.

Was this prominent coverage a reflection of heightened interest in state politics or simply a result of the very restricted time period covered by this thesis? The 10-day session was held prior to the regular 60-day annual legislative session and attracted media from across the state. This investigation focused on an event that, by its extraordinary nature, might have attracted increased coverage by the media during its brief occurrence. Special sessions are not called on a regular basis and when convened, the agenda only deals with a strictly limited number of issues designated by the governor as important enough to address exclusively outside of the normal annual session legislation. Gambling and teacher pay raises were two independent issues frequently being addressed by the various media outlets across the state. The increasing occurrence of media-provoking teacher sick-outs held on the capitol steps and the nearly bankrupt casino industry begged that immediate action be taken by the governor as dire economic consequences were growing closer. The issues only became related to each other by the governor’s call.

Gans (1979) claimed those with economic or political power are more likely to influence news reports than those who lack power. When the governor of Louisiana calls an extraordinary

session of the legislature (requiring expenditure of additional taxpayer dollars) focusing on very select items, it is almost a “give away” event for political reporters to cover as news. It is a prime situation for the press to have government officials all congregated in one location as convenient accesses for story sources. The state legislators meet in the House and Senate chambers of the capitol building available to reach for comment, fresh from debating issues directing impacting many citizen groups. Alternately, state and local politics occurring on a more isolated regional basis typically does not provide prominent official sources addressing important issues attracting the attention of a large audience. An event with direct involvement of the governor automatically ensures attention of the press, whether by design or unfortunately sometimes, without warning.

During the interview sessions held with reporters, each reporter described an expectation by their editors for placement of at least one headline story each day from the events of the session. This internal influence exerted by the editors supports the discussion by Shoemaker and Reese (1991) whose book, *Mediating the Message*, addresses the five levels of forces that heavily impact the news and what is actually disseminated. During the 10-day session, deadlines may be more pressing when trying to produce a daily piece. As editors expect a daily update, the story content is shaped to some degree by whom the reporter is able to contact in order to get a quote for his/her story that particular day. The limited time frame might force some reporters to seek general information from a wire service rather than expending additional time and stress on themselves by personally seeking all facts to use in his/her article. Wire service reporters working under the most stringent time constraints are most likely to rely on official activities and on the governor (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) also described how media ownership impacts the news. Owners who have more than one news organization might be less aggressive in seeking specific news coverage, due to less “hands on” involvement in each locality. The Gannett bureau that oversees the newspapers in the cities of Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria and Lafayette clearly demonstrates this loss of autonomy. The reporters for Lafayette and Alexandria verbally expressed their concern with the lack of region-specific coverage of the session for their readership. Although neither city is the home of a riverboat casino, the coverage published was heavily focused on the issues concerning the city of Shreveport and the surrounding Red River region. The reporter designated by the Gannett bureau to cover the session was from the Shreveport area and, therefore, it is logical that the reporter’s coverage addressed this issue over the other issues affecting other cities falling under the Gannett umbrella. This kind of locally oriented coverage was not a unique situation only to Gannett. The chief of the *Times Picayune* bureau explained that since Harrah’s casino was located in the heart of New Orleans, the *Times Picayune*’s coverage would focus on the Harrah’s bill. The potential economic impact weighing on the passage/failure of the legislation threatened to directly affect a great portion of the *Times Picayune* readership. In this instance, the regional focus satisfied the primary readers as the majority of the readers subscribing to the *Times Picayune* live in New Orleans. On the other hand, the readership for the Gannett bureau papers spans from the northern Red River region of the state deep into the southwest. The only session topic with universal stakeholders across the state was the issue of granting teachers a pay raise. This was linked to passage of the riverboat and Harrah’s casino legislation and, therefore, it seems that the newspapers would have addressed this issue more directly rather than through frames, as the results indicated.

The personal interviews held with capitol bureau reporters provided the researcher with a candid, yet informal perspective on the reporting of news during a special legislative session. Bureau size ranged from four reporters covering a single issue in the New Orleans *Times Picayune* bureau to simply one individual covering the news for four cities as illustrated by the design of the Gannett bureau ownership for the papers located in the cities of Alexandria, Lafayette, Shreveport and Monroe. The bureau reporters interviewed claimed that linking the issue of gambling revenue to teacher pay raise was an essential piece in each story since it was the governor's call, yet the findings of my content analysis did not seem to support this. Although over 50% of the total articles indicated Harrah's casino or the riverboats as the main topic, only 29% of articles coupled teacher's pay raise as the secondary topic. Over 70% of the coverage had another issue following the gambling discussion. Alternately, the link between Harrah's casino/riverboats and teacher's pay did code as a frame in 64% of the articles. These results suggest the journalists made the link through indirect and contextual discussion (frames) in their writing rather than outright statements made in the articles.

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) described another influence affecting reporting as the sources selected for use. In addition to simple floor debate, the reporters looked for comment from regional legislators to include in each story. Gans (1979) contended that persons with power are more likely to influence news reports. Therefore, it is logical that gambling-centered voices were reported more frequently as the primary topic as the voice of the teachers fell wayside. Powerful lobbyists funded by the gambling industry flocked the capitol to persuade the legislators. Meanwhile, the teacher unions could not afford this sort of additional lobbying. It seems inevitable that vocal supporters of the gambling industry were easily located for comment while the teachers spent their days during the session instructing students in the classrooms.

From a legislative standpoint, Speaker Charlie Dewitt, D-Lecompte, claimed satisfaction with the amount of press coverage given to this session (and in general during the annual legislative sessions). As Speaker of the House, his position automatically draws the press to him seeking comment. Speaker Dewitt also has the advantage of having a very open personality, evident through the comfortable disposition he presents when speaking to the media. He enjoys it. Unfortunately, another legislator was not available for comment in order to get a second perspective regarding the press coverage from an “ordinary” legislator. Would he or she have been as satisfied with the press coverage? Due to this void, my legislative interview results are based upon the opinion of one outspoken prominent individual and, therefore, lack sufficient validity and reliability over time. Although interesting, the qualitative data is only descriptive of this particular case.

In addition to the qualitative research findings, a content analysis was conducted. One-hundred and sixteen articles were coded for main/secondary topics, presence of certain frames, and mood of article towards content included in articles regarding the session. As previously discussed, the results indicated reporter’s use of indirect frames to link the main and secondary topics of gambling (Harrah’s casino and riverboat casinos) and teachers pay raises.

The most significant results found in the part of content analysis were reporter’s presentation of certain issues that convey a positive, negative or neutral mood to the reader. There was a 98% overall positive mood projected from the articles towards granting teachers a pay raise. Towards the gambling industry, this mood coded as 55% positive.

The content analysis provided objective quantitative data to the researcher, yet it also has its limitations. The low reliability found on certain issues suggests the need to re-examine the coding guidelines in an effort to increase reliability level in the future. This low reliability

unfortunately leads one to question the results gathered, especially those appearing to have been significant. The intercoder reliability test suggested that the scale used to rate this variable was not precise enough to properly guide multiple coders to have the same interpretation of the question and therefore, premise to answer.

In conclusion, this thesis supports the impact of corporate ownership on news coverage illustrated through the Gannett bureau news coverage vis-à-vis independent papers. In addition, local news coverage as presented in this case, contrary to expectation, can be prominent during limited time periods. Local coverage is dependent upon the presence of certain factors including source of the coverage and the content. In this case, the Governor of the state convened a special session of the legislature in order to change the current tax structure of the local gambling industry in an effort to raise teacher's pay statewide. Although the notion of linking gambling revenue to education brought moral concerns to some, the Governor reminded everyone in his opening speech of a decision made previously, in this legislature, to dedicate tobacco money towards the TOPS program. This program provides full college tuition to a select group of incoming freshmen at LSU who meet the academic requirements. Hence, this sort of "deal" is not new to the world of Louisiana politics.

The Governor made it very clear in his opening speech that he believed the dedication of gambling money to education was long overdue in Louisiana and this was the time to act. "Make no mistake, if we fail in this special session, there will be another one. We will be back again and again until we deal with the real problem plaguing Louisiana. I will not give up until this is fixed" (Foster, 2001,1). The legislature had control of how long it would take. The press followed closely as the legislature took their call and debated through the issues. Ten days after the opening session and after many deals were made, the legislation passed as per the desire of

the Governor. Harrah's Casino in New Orleans was spared from having to file for bankruptcy, the floating riverboat casinos are now permanently docked across the state in exchange for an increase in taxes and teachers are able to receive a pay raise. The capitol bureau reporters returned to their offices to sit back, reflect, and begin the countdown until the convening of the next round of the Louisiana legislature.

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**APPENDIX A  
ATTACHMENT A  
CODING SHEET GUIDELINES**

Story Number \_\_ (such as 01, 02, 11)

Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Newspaper Title: \_\_

- 1: The Advocate/Baton Rouge
- 2: Times Picayune/New Orleans
- 3: The Town Talk/Alexandria
- 4: The Times/Shreveport
- 5: The News Star/Monroe
- 6: The Daily Advertiser/Lafayette
- 7: American Press/Lake Charles
- 8: Las Vegas Review Journal

Story Title \_\_\_\_\_

News providers/writers: \_\_

- 01: AP
- 02: Dan Turner
- 03: Mike Hasten
- 04: Robert Morgan
- 05: Carl Redman
- 06: Scott Dyer
- 07: Randy McClain
- 08: Joe Gyan, Jr.
- 09: Marsha Shuler
- 10: John Hill
- 11: Todd Billiott
- 12: L. Bianca Chretien
- 13: David Barham
- 14: Jack Wardlaw
- 15: Rebecca Mowbray
- 16: Frank Danze
- 17: Gordon Russell
- 18: Steve Ridea
- 19: Chris Gray
- 20: Scott Dyer and Carl Redman
- 21: John Hill and Mike Hasten
- 22: Ed Anderson and Jack Wardlaw
- 23: Steve Ridea and Becky Mowbray
- 24: Steve Ridea and Jack Wardlaw
- 25: Rachael Van Horn

- 26: Jim Beam
- 27: Jeff Simpson

Story location \_\_\_ (Enter the 3-digit page number, e.g. 01B or 12C)

Total number of paragraphs \_\_

Picture included with the article \_\_ (01: yes 00: no)

If marked 01: yes above, major character in the picture: \_\_

- 01: Governor M.J. "Mike" Foster, Jr.
- 02: Senator John Hainkel, President of the Senate
- 03: Representative Charlie Dewitt, Speaker of the House, D-Lecompte
- 04: Senator Ken Hollis, R-Metairie
- 05: Senator Bill Jones, D-Ruston
- 06: Representative Edwin Murray, D-New Orleans
- 07: Representative Donald Cazayoux, D-New Roads
- 08: Senator Reggie Dupre, Jr., D-Houma
- 09: State Capitol
- 10: Gambling boat
- 11: Harrah's Casino
- 12: Stephen Perry, Chief of Staff
- 13: Sherri McConnell, Harrah's lobbyist
- 14: Randy Haynie, Harrah's lobbyist
- 16: Reverend Neil Bernard
- 17: Reverend Willie F. Wooten
- 18: Colin V. Reed, Harrah's CFO
- 19: Harrah's employees
- 20: Senator Foster Campbell, D-Elm Grove
- 21: Senator Cleo Fields,
- 22: Representative Troy Hebert, D-Jeanerette
- 23: Senate Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Committee
- 24: Louisiana school teacher
- 25: Juris Basens, Casino Manager, Shreveport

Main topic of the article \_\_ (Main topic is defined as the single topic covered in the first two paragraphs of the story)

- 01: Gambling
- 02: Lobbyists
- 03: Education
- 04: Teachers pay
- 05: Constitutionality of tax structure
- 06: Rank of Louisiana among teacher pay raise
- 07: Harrah's casino
- 08: Riverboats
- 09: Economic Impact

Secondary topic of the article \_\_ (Secondary topic is defined as the topic covered in the remaining sections of the article NOT included in the first two paragraphs).

- 01: Gambling
- 02: Lobbyists
- 03: Education
- 04: Teachers pay
- 05: Morality of coupling gambling with education
- 06: Constitutionality of tax structure
- 07: Harrah's casino
- 08: Riverboats
- 09: Economic Impact

Frames used in the story (1: yes 0: no)

A frame is defined as the way that news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists. A frame calls attention to some aspect of reality, while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions.

- Improving education
- Gambling money used to fund education
- Alternate sources of revenue
- Gambling as an addiction – moral/social problem?
- Lobbying influence
- Economic influence

General reading of the article:

Key: positive 1 2 3 4 5 negative

(3 is neutral, 0 when does not apply, 6 mixed – including both positive and negative elements)

- Mood towards special session
- Mood towards gambling industry
- Mood towards teacher pay raise
- Mood towards linking teacher pay raise to gambling

**APPENDIX B**  
**ATTACHMENT B**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Do you confer with other reporters to develop a baseline story?
2. Are there certain topics that you HAD to include in your coverage of the special session?
3. If you get a piece of information (verbally, one-on-one private conversation), do you share with other reporters?
4. Have you been involved in a reporting situation where another person wrote something completely contradictory to your account of the same event? How is this handled by the editor?
5. It is my current understanding that Alexandria, Lafayette, Monroe, and Shreveport markets are covered by one unified Gannett bureau. What does this mean for reporting from the capitol bureau to local residents of each city?
6. When covering the session, did you specifically link the topics of education and gambling? Or did you cover them as separate issues?
7. Were there any influences from your region pushing you to report the issues in a certain way?
8. How did you decide what to report from the session for your hometown newspaper?
9. How likely is it that you determine the wording of the headlines?
10. Do local legislators from your region contact you often to provide information to include in your coverage? If so, how do you verify what is given to you?
11. When you covered the special session, did you have a creditable source that you consistently contact for reliable information?
12. Since public opinion varies greatly on approval/disapproval of linking education with gambling, did this affect your coverage at all?
13. Did you choose the photographs to be included with your article (if applicable)?
14. Do you use photographs to make an impression on the audience?
15. As a government reporter, what is your impression on the extent of attention given to local politics versus other topics (sports, national news, international news) included in the newspaper?
16. How long have you worked for the bureau?
17. Have you worked in other areas of the newspaper?

## VITA

Jennifer Bhatia Ledbetter was born in Morristown, New Jersey, on July 16, 1974. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree, with Honors in biology, from Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi in 1996. She is married to Jason S. Ledbetter, M.D.

In March 2000, she was appointed Public Information Officer for the Department of Social Services (DSS). She first came to the department in November 1999 as the Confidential Assistant to the Secretary. In her current position, she serves as the spokesperson for the department and handles all media, legislative and constituent inquiries. In addition, she composes public speeches for the Secretary and represents her in her absence on Boards, Commissions, and other meetings. She also serves as the editor of the quarterly department newsletter.

Ms. Ledbetter worked from March 1997 until moving to DSS at the Division of Administration (DOA), Office of Commissioner, as a Legislative/Research Analyst. In this capacity she served on the Executive Staff of Commissioner Mark C. Drennen, serving as direct support to the Deputy Commissioner. In this capacity, she was the liaison between the DOA and the Legislature during the legislative session. She arranged for contracts, consultants and other logistics for all events concerning the Governor's Undersecretaries' Group on the LA STARS Initiative, a working document aimed at improving the delivery of services to the citizens of the State of Louisiana. In addition, she worked on the Y2K remediation efforts.

Ms. Ledbetter serves on the Children's Trust Fund Board and is a member of University Baptist Church. Her hobbies include running, swimming, reading and waterskiing.