Public policy center to be named after former Governor Kathleen Blanco

Melissa Watson
melissa.watson@thevermilion.com

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette will open the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center to provide the public with information on public policy issues Blanco encountered during her career as a politician and her term as Louisiana governor from 2004 to 2008, according to the Daily Advertiser.

The Edith Garland Dupre Library and the College of Liberal Arts will work in conjunction with the center on training, research and archival of the former governor’s records.

While Dean of Liberal Arts Jordan Kellman, Ph.D., declined to comment in advance of a July 11 university press release, Associate Dean Pearson Cross, Ph.D., expressed support for the center.

“The intent of the Blanco Public Policy Center is to have an advisory and an informational effect on the people who are important in Louisiana politics and policy … and to help improve the climate of public information,” Cross said.

Cross also explained why the university chose Blanco as the center’s namesake.

“Kathleen Blanco and the Blanco family have had a long-term historical connection to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette through (not only) going to school here, but also in terms of Blanco’s husband being a long-term administrator,” Cross said.

BLANCO
continued on page 4
Blanco's husband, Raymond "Coach" Blanco, was a UL Lafayette football coach, then Vice President of Student Affairs at UL Lafayette until his retirement in 2009, according to an university press release.

Blanco attended the "Our Louisiana" speech delivered by Governor John Bel Edwards in the UL Lafayette Earl K. Long Gym on May 22. At the event, elected officials and UL Lafayette administration praised her efforts in public policy and supported her in wake of a diagnosis of a form of terminal liver cancer.

Blanco served as governor during Hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 storm which caused $125 billion worth of damage and killed 1,577 Louisiana residents in 2005, according to CNN. The storm famously broke the levees protecting New Orleans and flooded the city.

According to NPR, Blanco has received criticism for "her slow response and lack of leadership during Katrina."

Michael Brown, the former head of FEMA, blamed local government entities for the New Orleans residents trapped in the Superdome, as he wrote in a column for Politico Magazine, "Had the mayor and governor fulfilled their responsibilities as elected leaders of their city and state, most if not all of the people crying for help in front of national television cameras would not have been there."

According to NPR, the resulting criticism by Louisiana residents after the storm caused Blanco not to seek re-election after her first term.

Cross said the accusations surrounding Blanco and Hurricane Katrina lack evidence and are not enough to prevent opening up a public policy center in her honor.

"Those who carp at her tradition on the basis of a few short events ... are clearly cherry-picking the evidence in order to make an invidious political distinction that has no merit in my view," Cross said.

Cross also said Acadiana in particular needs improved access to public policy information.

"The Acadiana region and the state of Louisiana are in dire need of the kind of information and public policy focus the Kathleen Blanco Public Policy Center will bring," Cross said, "Good information and insight are always in short supply in state government and public policy."