

Guest Column to The New-Star  
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From: Mayor James E. “Jamie” Mayo  
City of Monroe, LA

## **Flowing in the Right Direction**

Over the next few weeks, thousands of local students will graduate from school. Let me be among the first to say congratulations. The youngest will move from Pre-K to Kindergarten - while others will earn their GED, trade certification, high school diploma, or college degree. Academic goals, challenges and advancement are not limited by age. We celebrate their achievement because we are proud to see those we love overcome obstacles and flow in the right direction.

For those of us working in Monroe city government, our goal is to embrace our people, address our challenges and keep things flowing in the right direction. That is progress! Our success is about what we do while working together. I want to thank our City Council, legislators, local governments, educational systems and institutions, and numerous partners who help make that happen every day. Thanks to the leadership of Chief Eugene Ellis and the hardworking men and women of our Monroe Police Department, crime is down in almost every major category. U.S. Attorney David Joseph made this official announcement back in February. Under the leadership of Chief Terry Williams, our Class 1 Rated Fire Department scored its highest rating score ever. Yet, our elite fire personnel continue finding ways to improve our training and ability to respond to emergencies because every life is important.

With a conservative approach and leadership from Director of Administration Stacey Rowell, our Fiscal Task Force, and cooperation from all city department heads we take seriously our jobs as stewards of taxpayer dollars. The Monroe city budget has remained in the black despite an up and down economy. Our fund balance is strong at \$13.9M and our Standard & Poor AA-bond rating allows us to finance progressive projects as some of the lowest interest rates available.

We work with community members, local governments, state and federal officials to move our city forward. You may have read or seen recent news stories about the progress of projects such as the Kansas Lane Connector, Garret Road-I-20 Interchange, U.S. Highway 165 South Lighting Project, Georgia Street Pump Station, Youngs Bayou Retention Pond, Oregon Trail Levee, River Styx Pump Station, or our Water Treatment Plant Expansion. These are major multi-million-dollar infrastructure projects that will enhance our local quality of life by improving travel, drainage, water quality and economic development.

The city has four economic development districts, three of which have revenue streams used for infrastructure improvements. This goes without mentioning the much smaller, but still very important, projects worked on daily by our Public Works, Engineering, and Planning & Urban Development Departments.

The IBM application development center is up and running across from CenturyLink. You may have heard construction has begun on Century Village, the 88-acre lifestyle community that will surround it. However, that is just one of the nearly dozen new subdivisions that have been constructed throughout our city in the past decade or so. In addition to private facilities, the Monroe Housing authority also had top notch senior living areas such as Francis Tower and South Pointe.

One of the reasons our community is great is because of the arts, music, culture and people we have here. The Origin Bank Downtown RiverMarket, Art Gallery Crawls, River Jams, Makers Fair, Monroe Symphony Orchestra, multiple museums and other events gives our city character. We are proud of local chefs and entrepreneurs who continue to invest in Monroe. Our local shops and restaurants offer fantastic food with unparalleled southern hospitality. You can spend an afternoon playing golf or tennis, taking a brisk walk, or watching your kids play soccer or baseball/softball at one of 36 local parks. Each year, nearly one hundred-thousand residents and visitors ride the boat and train or enjoy the adventure of seeing animals at the Louisiana Purchase Gardens & Zoo.

We truly appreciate the work of Governor John Bel Edwards, the Louisiana Economic Development office, CenturyLink CEO Jeff Storey and board members for their hard work to ensure Monroe will continue to retain thousands of local jobs and the largest corporate headquarters in the state of Louisiana. A few weeks ago, a Denver Post writer took a jab at Monroe as being a “small pond” that snagged the “big fish” by being able to keep the CenturyLink headquarters here through, at least, 2025. The writer buffed at the fact that a metro area as large as Denver was not chosen over a small northeast Louisiana city.

Yes, we are smaller. Our official confirmed population is 50,344. Our Monroe metro population is just over 270,000 (Ouachita, Union, Lincoln, Morehouse, and Richland Parish). And, we all put our heart and soul into making Monroe and northeast Louisiana a great place to live, work and play. We will work together to do everything we can to ensure companies of all sizes are able to thrive, grow, and continue to call Monroe and northeast Louisiana home.

By working together, we are making a difference and flowing in the right direction. Monroe is one city, with one future!