



Roy Barnes – I'll Put Georgia Back on Track

By Denise Etheridge, Staff writer, The Coastal Courier – November 23, 2009

Former Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes made a brief social appearance in Midway on Wednesday evening. Barnes recently entered the gubernatorial race, which is already crowded with candidates, both Democrat and Republican. Georgia's 80th governor is up against fellow Democrats Thurbert Baker, DuBose Porter and David Poythress. If Barnes wins the primary in July, he will compete against the Republican candidate in November 2010. At present, Republicans running for governor include Nathan Deal, Karen Handel, Eric Johnson, John Oxendine and Austin Scott. Barnes is currently travelling the state to raise campaign funds and listen to Georgians' concerns, said Chris Carpenter, Barnes's campaign manager. The seasoned politician stopped in at Gabriel's House Ranch off Highway 84 for an invitation-only fundraiser and barbecue hosted by local attorney Billy Jones. Standing outside as dusk fell, leaning on his pickup and ignoring the gnats, Barnes addressed issues like education, transportation and water. He also touched on issues that affect Coastal Georgia in particular. "I'm not running to put another line on my resume," Barnes said. "I've lived in the governor's mansion. I want to put Georgia on the right track and then go home." The former governor said he has a proven track record, even with the mistakes he made during his previous term in office.

"They were difficult times then, they're difficult times now," he said, referring to the state's high unemployment figures. Barnes said 275,000 jobs were created during his tenure. Barnes acknowledged that many educators were unhappy with changes he made to Georgia's public schools, and said he should have "explained" those reforms better.

"We all have a common ground here," he said, referring to educators, parents, students, businesses and government. Barnes said a strong educational system translates into economic development and job growth. He would like to see more of Georgia's teachers receive national board certification. "Fifteen percent of North Carolina's teachers are board certified and they've had the greatest gain in test scores over the past 25 years," he said. The former governor said if elected he would initiate higher academic standards, especially in math and science. However, Barnes does not favor more standardized testing. "Testing is necessary but over testing is counter-productive," he said. Barnes said teachers need to be given the necessary tools to "make the light come on" in their students. A combination of the latest technology and allowing teachers to appropriately discipline students would go a long way, he said. As for transportation, Georgians must "look to the next horizon," Barnes said. The former governor would like to see a consolidated state transportation plan that addresses the different transportation needs across the state. The building of highways and bridges is still important, he said, but progressive initiatives such as mass transit in large cities like Atlanta should be explored. A commuter rail linking other cities, such as Macon, Augusta, Savannah, Albany and Valdosta, would also offer Georgians more transportation options.

"As fossil fuels get more scarce we must look at alternatives to automobiles," he said. As for water, Barnes said Georgia needs a statewide water policy that concentrates on conservation. He warns that if elected he would not allow Atlanta to take water from Georgia's neighbors, or from watersheds other than the Chattahoochee, and not from the coast's aquifers. "We get plenty of water," he said. "It comes down to storage and release." He said "leaks" in Atlanta's water system, as well as leaks found in other Georgia cities' systems, need repair. Barnes said the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority can help finance these repairs. Barnes said he is also dedicated to conserving Georgia's natural resources and protecting the state's parks. "Our coast's resources are diamonds we ought to protect," he said, in reference to Georgia's marshes. Barnes is currently the attorney representing William Butler, owner of Kilkenny Waterfront Properties LLC, who is suing the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee for granting Bryan County a permit to build a marina near Red Bird Creek. The suit claims the committee violated the Heritage Trust Act by granting the permit. The former governor said the park system is an economic draw that caters to tourists who seek the pristine beauty of nature and allows families who can't afford "lavish expenditures" to have memorable vacation experiences. As for the military, Barnes said he will continue to support the military and military installations in Georgia. Barnes helped back the construction of the Mid-Coast Regional Airport at Wright Army Airfield off Sunbury Road outside of Fort Stewart.