Meeting Notes – Oct. 19, 2021

LaFayette Rotary met on Tuesday, October 19. Rotarian Dori Harmon was responsible for the program. She invited Representative Debbie Wood to be the speaker. Rep. Wood addressed three topics: legislation, the special session that has just been concluded, and the upcoming special session. One piece of new legislation involves athletics. A student must play on a team according to their gender at birth. Another piece of legislation prohibits curbside voting. To vote, you must be physically present at the polls or mail in your ballot with the appropriate identification. The third piece of legislation discussed was the medical marijuana bill. There must be a prescription to obtain the marijuana and it must be edible; it cannot be smoked. No gaming legislation was passed. When considered, there are two parts to gaming: the lottery and gaming (e.g., machines, casinos).

The special session just concluded dealt with the prisons. The state is under a federal mandate to address the conditions in our prisons. The approximate cost will be $785,000,000.. A little more than half of the cost, $400,000,000 will be covered under funds provided by the American Rescue Plan. The remainder will come from the issuance of bonds. Two prisons will be built, each housing 4,000 prisoners. Construction of the two new prisons will allow for the closing of four older prisons. In Phase 2, the women's prisons will be addressed. In the area of sentencing reform, a prisoner convicted of a non-violent crime can be released within the last 12 months of their end of sentence and would be monitored. This would help with overcrowding.

The next special session is set to begin on October 28 and will address redistricting, based on the new census numbers. Rep. Wood represents District 38 which includes parts of Chambers County as well as parts of Lee County. Only about 1/4 of Chambers County remains in her district. Most of Chambers County is in District 37 along with Randolph County. Rep. Wood is hopeful that she will gain back parts of Chambers County, especially in the Huguley/Lanett area. It was noted that the governor sets the topics open for discussion for the special sessions.

Diane Sherriff