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BGR REPORTS.....

One Need, One Levee Board

How will posterity view Louisiana's lawmakers if they spurn the chance to depoliticize flood control in the wake of the worst levee failure in U.S. history? How will the federal government respond to Louisiana's appeals for levee investment if the state fails to inject professionalism and technical expertise into its local sponsors for federal flood control projects? And how will citizens react to legislators if they ignore a broad-based, grass-roots effort to regionalize flood control to meet a regional need?

The answer is clear: badly.

Southeast Louisiana's need for a consolidated, professionally managed levee system is as evident as the flood damage in the region. It is time for Louisiana's legislators to create a governance structure capable of delivering optimal flood protection for southeast Louisiana.

Not any consolidation program or structure will do. Certain features are essential to an effective and rational flood control system:

- **A unified regional approach.** Rain, tidal flows, winds, and waves do not heed jurisdictional boundaries. Neither should planning, execution and maintenance of levees and other flood control structures. Flood control in southeast Louisiana should be managed on a regional basis by a single governing board. If local levee boards are not dissolved, their boards should be replaced with the regional board.
- **Professional appointees.** Issues as complex as flood control and hurricane protection deserve sophisticated, scientific analysis and debate. The regional governing board should be dominated by professionals in fields related to environmental sciences and flood control. The Governor should make appointments from a list of nominees generated by academics and professionals with expertise in these areas.
- **Local representation.** The regional board should have representation from each parish embraced within its boundaries.
- **Focus on flood control.** The regional board should focus solely on flood control and hurricane protection. Lagniappe activities,

such as the operation of parks, marinas, airports, etc., are unwelcome distractions and should be shed.

- **Asset management.** Where appropriate, the governing body should dispose of commercial assets unrelated to flood control. Where the sale of assets is not advisable, the state should administer and maintain assets for the benefit of, and in accordance with the wishes of, the residents of the parish in which the assets are located. All development should be compatible with a parish's master plan and conform to local zoning laws.

As the legislature considers levee board consolidation, it should take up the bill that creates the strongest, most professional vehicle for managing flood control and hurricane protection. All proposed amendments should be evaluated in light of the overarching goal: protecting the people of southeast Louisiana from devastating flooding. Amendments that stray from that goal to protect fiefdoms or other parochial interests should be rejected. Business as usual is simply unacceptable when the safety and economic future of the populace depends on a strong levee system.

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