

# Angered Citizens and Business Leaders Fed Up With Politics as Usual Demand January Legislative Session for Levee Reform

Dec 15, 2005, 00:00 ET from Members of the Business Council of New Orleans and The River Region

NEW ORLEANS, Dec. 15 /PRNewswire/ -- Over 45 thousand signatures on petitions from angry area citizens, as well as, letters from area business leaders insist Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco (D-LA) and State legislators call a January State Legislative session to enact Levee Board reform for long term levee safety.

"Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans was formed out of frustration at the response to levee safety by Blanco and Louisiana Legislators," said founder, Ruthie Frierson. "People of New Orleans are fed up," she continued. "Many lost lives, jobs, homes and possessions. They are enraged that Louisiana politicians are still playing games with their lives. The people are focused on and demanding safety from future flood devastation," Frierson concluded.

"The spontaneous formation of this group organized and energized the community," Jay Lapeyre, Chairman, The Business Council of New Orleans and The River Region, said. "Gathering significant signatures in just two weeks demonstrates citizens of Louisiana are no longer accepting politics as usual," he reported. "They are rising in anger against patronage politics and special interest deal making by the political elite."

"Business Council members and petitioners all recognize citizen safety from flooding is top priority," said Business Council Member, Tom Oreck, President and CEO of The Oreck Corporation.

"Conversations with members of our Congressional delegation, members of Congress from other states and coverage in the national press confirm that Louisiana needs to send an immediate, powerful and unequivocal signal that politics-as-usual is over in Louisiana," Oreck said.

The Times-Picayune reported that CEOs of significant businesses are "waiting on news about levee protection" before deciding whether to return to the city.

"Many of Louisiana's citizens and companies relocated out of state. If they are not convinced the city is safe from further preventable devastation by flooding, they simply will not return to Greater New Orleans and others will not remain," Oreck said. "Those long term decisions are being made now," he reported.

"The risk of New Orleans' economic collapse is real. It will continue to increase if levee reform is delayed," Lapeyre cautioned. "It's simple: fix the levees, fix city services, clarify the rules and the people and business will follow," he said.

"Clearly the system did not provide adequate protection," said Business Council member, Richard Bachmann, Chairman and CEO of Energy Partners, Ltd. "The Governor and Legislators need to take decisive action to prove to citizens and businesses they should return or stay," he continued, "In addition they must demonstrate to the Federal Government that necessary funding will be spent appropriately."

"Louisiana is viewed skeptically by Congress and the nation," according to Lapeyre. "True Levee Board reform is a litmus test of whether Louisiana can be trusted to meet the challenges of rebuilding and put Federal funds to work, not to politics," he said. "This is not just a local problem," Lapeyre noted. "It affects the entire country. The nation cannot afford another preventable disaster of this magnitude."

According to Lapeyre, Louisiana is a primary source of the Nation's crude oil, natural gas and energy production, as well as, refining petroleum for consumer use as gasoline.

Following is the complete text of the letter sent to Governor Blanco and State Legislators as signed by The Business Council of New Orleans and The River Region and Jefferson Parish Business Council members.

Dear Governor Blanco and State Legislators:

It is imperative that we have an immediate and public commitment to a Special Legislative Session in January. Press reports and House Speaker Salter's recent comments have caused grave and increasing concern.

Governor, you confirmed in your announcement Saturday, that we need to consolidate levee safety across districts, end the patronage, put experts in charge, and provide professional management focused on levee safety. Protecting the lives and property of our citizens must be this State's highest priority.

Louisiana is viewed skeptically by Congress and the nation, and true levee board reform has become a litmus test of whether Louisiana can be trusted to meet the challenges of rebuilding. If we fail this test, we'll not receive the support needed to revitalize our communities.

Conversations with members of our Congressional delegation, members of Congress from other states, and coverage in the national press confirm that Louisiana needs to send an immediate, powerful, and unequivocal signal that politics-as-usual is over in Louisiana.

The citizens of Greater New Orleans strongly believe we need a January session and need to enact these reforms immediately. Citizens For 1Greater New Orleans consists of concerned citizens across our region. They came together spontaneously. In two weeks, they collected over 45,000 signed petitions demanding both a Special Session in January and levee board reform now. <http://www.citizensfor1greaterneworleans.com>

These petitioners all recognize that citizen safety from flooding is our top priority. The Times-Picayune reported that CEOs of Tidewater and other significant businesses, are "waiting on news about levee protection" before deciding whether to return to the city. The risk of economic collapse of New Orleans is real, and it will continue to increase if levee reform is delayed.

As experienced leaders, you know the difference between expressions from

the grassroots that are drummed up artificially and the real thing. Over 45,000 petition signatures reflects the genuine and intense anger and frustration citizens in our region feel at the failure of our levee board to exercise competent, credible leadership in managing our levees, and outrage that the Legislature failed to take decisive action in the last Special Session.

Politics-as-usual won't work.

It is imperative that we have immediate commitment to hold a special session in January and enact these reforms; your public support for both of these actions is vital.

Respectfully,

Members of the Business Council of New Orleans and The River Region, and of The Jefferson Business Council

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Cocie Rathborne  
Chairman, Jefferson Business Council  
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Boh, Robert S. (Bob)  
President & C.E.O.  
Boh Brothers Construction Co., Inc.

Bollinger, Donald T. (Boysie)  
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