It’s Time for Experts to Manage Levee Safety

Business Council
OF NEW ORLEANS AND THE RIVER REGION

November 16, 2005

Dear Governor Blanco:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with members of The Business Council of New Orleans last week. Many of our successful companies have relocated out of state. These businesses will not return to Greater New Orleans and others will not remain unless they know the region is safe from preventable devastation caused by flooding.

The levees in greater New Orleans failed, hundreds of citizens died, tens of thousands are homeless, property damage is in the billions, a great city has been devastated, and yet the Orleans Parish Levee Board continues to protect the不合格的 and the corrupt. You ousted the former president of the Levee Board for his disgraceful conduct before and after the storm, but his replacement is now muscling a staff lawyer who knows the truth. How can we tolerate that behavior? The drowned and near-drowned citizens of this community want radical change and want it now.

We call on you to clean house at the Orleans Parish Levee Board and replace its current membership with highly qualified, apolitical experts in engineering and project management. We also ask you to urge the Attorney General to aggressively investigate the prior activities of the Levee Board.

In this legislative session, you have proposed legislation to create an oversight board to monitor the levee board's. This additional bureaucracy will only compound the problem. We call on you to immediately announce your support for legislation to:

- Replace the existing multiple-district levee system with a single levee district covering all areas that impact hurricane protection in Greater New Orleans.
- Grant this body full authority to take all actions needed to protect lives and property from levee failure.
- Staff the body with commissioners chosen based on their expertise and without the slightest appearance of political patronage.
- Provide independent oversight and public reporting on plans and execution, with input provided by the National Academy of Sciences.
- Cause this body to promptly divest the Levee Board's interest in projects extraneous to levee construction and maintenance, either by transferring those projects to appropriate state or municipal agencies or by selling them at public auction.

One reason that Congress shows little interest in providing needed financial assistance to our communities is the perception that our politics are corrupt. For the Federal Government to act, this state must take concrete steps to clean up corruption. Reforming the levee board system will signal that the cleanup process has begun.

We call on you to declare an all-out war against corruption, the appearance of corruption and patronage politics throughout the state. These activities have no place in the recovery of this region and in the new Louisiana. To restore public trust, we must create government that is honest, competent, transparent and accountable.

Respectfully,

[Signatures]