



Everything New Orleans

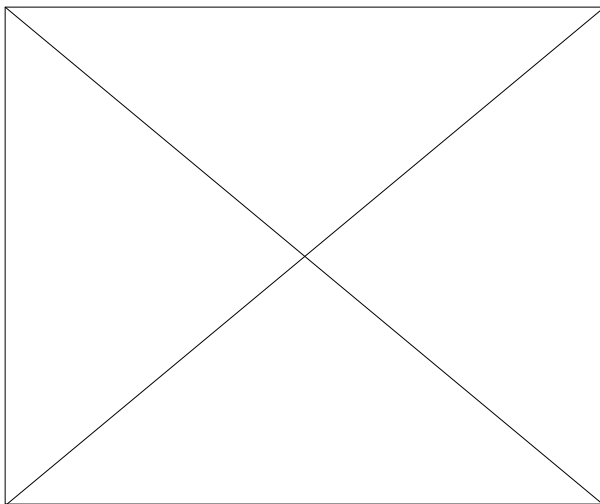
# The Times-Picayune

## EDITORIAL: A double line of protection

Tuesday, July 22, 2008

Gov. Bobby Jindal laid out in compelling terms Friday how urgently Louisiana needs resources to protect and rebuild our coast.

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And he argued persuasively for President Bush to give the state financial relief to ensure that there's no lag in levee work or coastal restoration projects.

For now, the federal government is insisting that Louisiana pay its \$1.8 billion share of levee construction costs up front. The figure includes \$200 million more for that work than would have been required pre-Katrina.

That is unfair. President Bush ought to give Louisiana 30 years to pay its share and reduce the cost to pre-Katrina levels, as Gov. Jindal is asking. All it would take is an executive order. The long-term payment plan is allowed under the 1986 Water Resources Development Act, and California and Nevada have been given those terms on similar projects.

Louisiana should be given the same consideration. After all, if the federal government's levees had held up during Katrina, much of New Orleans would have been spared. This community shouldn't be made to suffer further in the name of safety -- and neither should other Louisianians.

If the state is forced to pay on what is essentially a cash basis, it will knock a huge hole in the budget and likely require deep cuts in education and health care.

Not only that, \$500 million that is supposed to be used on coastal restoration projects might have

to be used instead to pay for levees.

Louisiana should not be put in the position of choosing between levee work and restoration projects, both of which could provide life-saving protection from future storms. The state's coastline is vanishing at a breathtaking pace, and the opportunity to save it is diminishing quickly as well.

"Part of the reason we're pushing so hard (for better terms on the levee work) is that we want to use those resources for coastal restoration, because we all know you can't build levees alone to protect people and our property," the governor said.

In addressing President Bush, the governor is reaching out to his own party's leader. This is a fiscal and philosophical conservative pleading his case with Washington.

Political party shouldn't matter when lives and livelihoods are at stake. But if the Bush administration was leery of the former state administration, Gov. Jindal ought to give them comfort.

When President Bush delivered his speech from Jackson Square in September 2005, his promise of help gave solace to storm-battered South Louisianians. "In the journey ahead you're not alone," he said. ". . . We will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives."

Strong levees and a restored coast are what it will take to make greater New Orleans safe in the years to come. And President Bush ought to give Louisiana the help it needs to keep both efforts on track.