



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Our Reform Initiatives](#)
[Resources & Collaborations](#)
[Archives](#)
[Contact Us](#)

Media

[Assessor Home](#)
[BGR Reports](#)
[Contact Orleans Parish Assessors Office](#)
[Archives](#)

Advocate - Baton Rouge, La.

A victory won for La. reform

Date: Nov 12, 2006

Approval of a constitutional amendment to consolidate the Orleans Parish assessors' offices is a great post-Katrina victory for reform in government.

We agree with Gov. Kathleen Blanco, who backed the amendment with a coalition of citizen groups, that the public's desire for change is not slacking off with the passage of time.

The seven separate assessors' offices in Orleans - every other parish has only one - had become political baronies, and contributed to disparities in assessing property for tax purposes. If more equitable assessments flow from this reform, then over time the recovery of New Orleans' economy will be enhanced.

But the important symbolic victory was that the people in the state and in Orleans Parish - both had to approve the amendment for it to become effective - cast their ballots for change. In Orleans, the amendment won 69 percent of the vote.

The change will become effective in 2010.

"As we continue to rebuild our communities, our people are demanding accountability and fiscal responsibility by government at all levels," Blanco said. "It's not about politics; it's about getting it right."

She's wrong about one thing: It is about politics.

The politically connected assessors fought the reform amendment tooth and nail in the Legislature, and it was derailed once before it finally passed. Lawmakers who are relatives of assessors were among those blocking the bill, at least for a while.

If Louisiana is to recover from the disasters of 2005, we must have a political system free from the taint of this kind of self-dealing. The cause of reform has a long way to go in our state.

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