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

Media

[Levee Home](#)
[Legislative Activity](#)
[Corps of Engineers
Levee Tour
Nov. 2010](#)
[Levee & Flood
Protection
Contacts](#)
[Archives](#)

AMERICAN PRESS EDITORIAL

Approve Amendment 3 for levee board reform

Constitutional Amendment 3, arguably, is the most important of the 13 amendments on the Sept. 30 ballot. We encourage a vote in favor of its passage.

Amendment 3 would authorize the Legislature to establish two regional flood authorities in southeast Louisiana, replacing the current system of multiple and disconnected levee boards.

Here's a one-word reason to consolidate the numerous levee boards: Katrina. Water pushed by the hurricane overwhelmed the levees that protect the greater New Orleans area.

Though the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers bears the brunt of the liability for the levee breaches that drowned New Orleans, the levee boards around the Crescent City who were charged with maintaining the levees hold some responsibility for their failures.

The amendment provides for the creation of the two boards. The Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East would be responsible for those areas north and east of the Mississippi River

The Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West Bank would oversee levees south and west of the river.

The amendment also provides that some members of the governing boards have a background in engineering or a related field. That provision will bring more professional expertise to the boards and help do away with the political patronage that has long clogged the current system.

Having just two boards will give the region a more unified approach to flood protection and end the current levee boards' involvement in nonflood protection facilities.

Is there any issue more basic to the recovery of New Orleans and southeast than flood protection?

Some have argued that the levee boards should have been consolidated into one flood protection authority, not two. That, though, is no reason to oppose Amendment 3.

Its passage would not only improve flood protection in the region, it would send a message throughout the state, nation and world that Louisiana residents are no longer satisfied with the status quo, and want real reform that takes the politics out of a critical issue.

For that reason, we recommend a vote for Amendment 3 on Sept. 30.

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