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Monroe News Star

Blanco visits city to support amendments

September 28, 2006

By Greg Hilburn

Gov. Kathleen Blanco said she knows voters' eyes could glaze over when they step into the election booth Saturday and see 13 proposed constitutional amendments.

That's why she's campaigning around the state to support four amendments she believes will help strengthen Louisiana's hurricane protection and help restore its vanishing coastline.

"I know there are a lot of amendments on the ballot, but these four are critical for hurricane protection," Blanco said.

Blanco, who visited Monroe Wednesday, is campaigning to pass Amendments No. 1, No. 2, No. 3 and No. 4.

Amendment No. 1 would change the name of the Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Fund to the Coastal Protection and Restoration Fund and would deposit into that fund all potential federal revenues from offshore oil and gas production.

Amendment No. 2 would require the state to deposit 20 percent of any future sale of the state's tobacco settlement directly into the Coastal Protection and Restoration Trust.

Amendment No. 3 consolidates southeastern Louisiana levee districts and requires board members to have some expertise in flood control.

Amendment No. 4 would lower compensation paid by the government for private property taken for hurricane protection projects.

"Louisiana is going to be defined by whether we have systems in place to avert the kind of disasters we had with (Hurricanes Katrina and Rita)," Blanco said. "It's imperative as we ask for federal money that we take it upon ourselves to have the systems in place that will help our state."

Blanco said she considers the four amendments part of an overall package to protect Louisiana from future storms.

"All of the amendments give us more tools to do that," Blanco said.

Blanco said that Congress has "been very impressed that we're willing to lock down any future revenue we get from offshore production will be locked down for coastal restoration and hurricane protection" with Amendment No. 1.

The governor also said that residents and business owners will gain confidence through the consolidation of the levee boards.

"People want to know that they're going to be protected, and they feel more confident when we have experts and professionals on those boards," Blanco said.

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