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Governor extends Guard's N.O. stay

Friday, June 20, 2008

Soldiers to patrol areas through end of the year

Times-Picayune

By Laura Maggi, Staff writer

National Guard troops will remain in New Orleans until the end of the year to help police officers patrol the less populated areas of the city, Gov. Bobby Jindal announced Thursday.

"We know part of encouraging people to come back and rebuild their homes and businesses is having confidence in the security," Jindal said a news conference with NOPD Superintendent Warren Riley and Mayor Ray Nagin.

Currently 360 Louisiana Guard soldiers patrol New Orleans. Gov. Kathleen Blanco first sent the troops in the summer of 2006 after a spate of murders and an uptick in other crime after Hurricane Katrina. The soldiers have been deployed in the New Orleans Police Department's 3rd, 5th and 7th Districts, which include most of the flooded areas of the city, from Lakeview to eastern New Orleans to the 9th Ward.

The soldiers were set to leave next month, until Jindal decided to extend their tour at the request of Riley and Nagin. Jindal granted an extension after taking office in January, as Blanco had repeatedly done when she was governor.

The state spends about \$1 million each month to keep the complement of Guard soldiers in New Orleans.

Jindal emphasized that the number of soldiers will be reduced in the coming months. About 320 soldiers will be kept through July and August, the hottest summer months when crime typically spikes in New Orleans. Some troops will be pulled out of the city in September, when 260 soldiers will remain, said Maj. Gen. Bennett Landreneau, the head of the Louisiana Guard. The troop strength will decrease again in November to 216 soldiers, who will continue to patrol until Dec. 31, he said.

The Police Department, meanwhile, has launched a \$1 million campaign to recruit more officers. The money for that campaign also came from the state, as well as some private money.

The Guard extension "allows us to continue to enhance our ranks as we are now on a major recruitment drive," Nagin said.

Hundreds of officers left the Police Department after Katrina, but the NOPD's ranks have recently stabilized at 1,441 officers, Riley said. The recruitment effort aims to boost the number of officers to 1,550 by year's end, Riley said.

By November, when the Guard troops drop to 216 soldiers, a class of about 45 new officers will have graduated from the police academy, Riley said. Riley said the department also has started redeploying NOPD personnel to get more officers out on patrol.

After serving in New Orleans, eight Guard soldiers have applied to join the NOPD, while more than 40 others have expressed an interest, Riley said.

The NOPD plans to streamline the training requirements for any Guard soldiers who want to become New Orleans police officers, allowing them to attend an abbreviated police academy class in recognition of their past training, Riley said. He hopes to get enough Guard applicants to hold a specific class for them.

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