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The Times-Picayune

Don't revisit failed efforts to raid New Orleans' flood protection funds: An editorial

June 25, 2011

By Editorial page staff

Legislation that sought to raid flood protection money to prop up the old Orleans Levee Board's non-flood assets didn't go nearly as far as supporters had hoped.

State Rep. Nick Lorusso

But apparently Rep. Nick Lorusso, the bill's author, hasn't given up on this bad idea.

In an email that he sent to members of the Non-Flood Protection Asset Management Authority, Rep. Lorusso lamented the fact that money to maintain and police Lakeshore Drive, provided by the Southeast Flood Protection Authority-East, will expire in 2012, "so we will have to revisit again next session," he said.

"Sorry... but that was the best we could get from the Governor's office and I was trying to save the bill from the veto pen," he wrote in the email.

But Rep. Lorusso should not try to plunder flood protection money again -- that's shortsighted and irresponsible. And the flood authority shouldn't have to fight to hold onto critical dollars needed to protect people and property every time the Legislature goes into session.

Rep. Lorusso at one point considered amending House Bill 475 to grab 20 percent of tax revenue dedicated to levees for the management of non-flood assets -- land holdings that historically were intended to generate money for flood protection.

When the attempted raid ran into stiff opposition, lawmakers pushed for a deal between the two authorities. The agreement, which ended up in House Bill 475, calls for the flood protection authority to pay the non-flood panel \$700,000 this year and next to maintain Lakeshore Drive and to pay for a reduced police force to patrol it -- about another \$700,000 a year.

The fact that this deal is for a limited time is appropriate. The non-flood panel can address future revenue needs by selling off assets, an issue that was discussed in negotiations along with the need to turn over control of the Lakefront Airport to some other entity and to get professional assessments of the value of the non-flood assets.

The legislation didn't address those points, but they are reasonable steps for a board that should be working itself out of a job.

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