



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

Let your voice be heard in rebuilding the Greater New Orleans Area


[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](#)

Lafayette Daily Advertiser

End comes to old levee board system

Jan 3, 2007

It should not have been done so quietly. There should have, at least, been cheering Thursday when the Orleans Levee Board adjourned - forever. The agency was one of the oldest symbols of corruption, abuse of power and patronage in Louisiana. Maybe there should have been jazz bands playing and people dancing in the streets to celebrate the occasion. Instead, the board faded into history with the quiet utterance of five words by President Michael McCrossen: "Hearing no objections, it's over." It should have been over long ago.

It took the effects of a killer hurricane to create enough public disfavor that the state could finally replace all the old levee boards with a better system.

The boards were formed to govern the levees and assure that they were capable of protecting against floodwaters. Whether it was the fault of the boards or of the U.S. Corps of Engineers - or both - the levees were no protection against Hurricane Katrina. We are not sure how much of the Orleans board's time was devoted to levees, since it also ran a police force and an airport. The Times-Picayune said that besides involvement in these entities, which had no relationship to levees, the board had "a dismal history of political intrigue."

While corruption was always a dark shadow over most levee board operations, it was their extensive use for political patronage that prevented them from being effective. A levee board appointment was a favored way of repaying a political debt, rather than a way of putting in place knowledgeable, effective board members.

On Monday, the system of governing levees officially changed as a constitutional amendment approved by Louisiana voters became effective. The levee boards of Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, Tangipahoa, St. Tammany and parts of St. Charles and St. John the Baptist parishes now are governed by the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority, which is divided between two boards that oversee the western portions of Orleans and Jefferson parishes and another board responsible for the rest of the area. Law now requires that the governing board be made up of five engineers or professionals in a related field, three professionals in another discipline with at least 10 years of experience and three at large members. The days of rampant patronage ended Monday, and all the strange assets of the old boards - the police department and airport of the Orleans board and the recreational, real estate and other non-flood-related assets of all - are now the responsibility of the state Division of Administration.

We recognize that there have been good levee boards operated by good people, but the ease with which the boards were subjected to corruption and cronyism was demonstrated far too often through the years.

Consolidation was an important measure. Properly administered, the new system will bring an end to one area of corruption, inefficiency and cronyism in Louisiana.

Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans © 2005 - 2013