



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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New Orleans First in Nation to Place Experts on Local Levee Boards

Louisiana State Senator [J.P. Morrell has signaled](#) to Governor Bobby Jindal that he will vote against re-appointing two commissioners to the two New Orleans Flood Authorities formed post Katrina citing the high cost of the flood experts' monthly commutes.

Dr. Johannes Westerink, hydrologist for the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-West, [incurred travel expenses](#) of about \$5,000 per year to commute from Indiana. Ricardo Pineda, flood expert for the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority (SLFPA) East, [incurred travel expenses](#) of about \$20,000 for 2009 and 2010 to commute to and from California.

The two Regional Flood Authorities who were put in place so the Army Corps of Engineers, the agency charged by [Congress since 1965](#) to design and build the New Orleans regional hurricane protection, would now work with two local sponsors instead of a nearly a dozen.

The SLFPA-East and West are required to include hydrologists, civil engineers and other professionals and are supposed to "hold the Army Corps' feet to the fire" and assure that such a disaster like what occurred during Katrina would not happen again.

The Flood Authorities are intended as a 'good governance' model. Members are not politically appointed and are not compensated for their service. Only one member of the levee board can reside in each of the represented Parishes. These restrictions and others produce a truly regional board largely free of political pressure.

Since 2005, Congress has released \$15 billion for repair and improvement to the region's failed hurricane protection system. But Congress also [inserted](#) language into the 3rd Supplemental Public Law 109-148 requiring the establishment of "...a single state or quasi-state entity to act as local sponsor for construction, operation and maintenance.." of the projects. This was required because some Congress members were reluctant to release federal funds to Louisiana, convinced the funds would "fall down a black hole." It is possible that they did not understand that contracts for both designing and constructing the hurricane protection system are controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers. And that the contracts the local levee boards controlled were for non-flood assets.

It is well established that the pre-Katrina historic levee boards were not exactly models of good governance and that appointees often knew little to nothing about hurricane protection. But as observed by [Dan Hitchings](#), Director of Task Force Hope for the Army Corps in February 2006, the local levee boards did nothing wrong of significance relating to the levee and floodwall failures.

After seeing the need to monitor the actions of the Corps, then-Sen. Walter Boasso from St. Bernard Parish, the New Orleans Business Council and [Citizens for One Greater New Orleans](#) combined their efforts to craft the new Authority legislation and garner Louisiana support for it. But there were no models to follow since no other similar levee entity existed in the entire country.

"I made it up," said Boasso. "There was no state model that we had taken this from."

After the drowning of New Orleans, Louisiana had to "invent the wheel." It would be surprising if this first wheel were not perfect.

The 2006 campaign to create a technically competent regional Authority to watch over the Army Corps was called Levee Board Reform, a *moniker which may have implied that the Governor-appointed individuals to the pre-Katrina levee boards were somehow responsible for the deadly flooding*. When we reference the 2006 campaign, we prefer to call it Levee Board Empowerment, and it is indeed quite an accomplishment.

Creation of the two local superboards and populating them with non-political experts has now become a model for the United States. In 2006, California voted on a [historic package of Flood Bills](#) that put requirements on professional backgrounds of its board members similar to those in Louisiana.

The [majority of the American population](#) lives in counties protected by levees, so more states will likely follow suit.

Perhaps allowing commissioners who reside out of state to vote via Skype or conference call could save taxpayers some funds. But Mr. Pineda's and Mr. Westerink's travel

9/17/2018

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expenses may be a small price to pay to remove the appearance and opportunity for corruption and help assure the \$15 billion that Congress approved gets spent wisely.

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