



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

[Assessor Home](#)
[BGR Reports](#)
[Contact Orleans Parish Assessors Office](#)
[Archives](#)

EDITORIAL: THE SOLO ASSESSOR

Monday, June 15, 2006

In the end, the vote was lopsided. Following the 98-2 vote in the House Tuesday, the Louisiana Senate voted 35-2 Wednesday for legislation to merge New Orleans' seven assessor offices into one.

Voters in New Orleans and statewide will decide this fall whether to approve a constitutional amendment to make the change. And no matter what, the current crop of assessors, who were elected in this spring's city elections, will get to serve out their four-year terms.

Even with all that, the Legislature's vote for Senate Bill 141 by Sen. Ann Duplessis signals a monumental change in direction. Just weeks ago, the balance of political will and energy seemed to be with the status quo.

Legislation to merge the seven assessor offices into one got nowhere in the special session in February, and few New Orleans area lawmakers gave the effort much of a chance before the regular session began.

But Sen. Duplessis and Rep. Austin Badon kept pushing the bill that so many politicians thought was a sure loser, and they deserve great credit. They had support from thousands of post-Katrina New Orleanians who are fed up with politics as usual. Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans successfully backed levee board reform in the special session, and then went to work on the assessor issue.

The person who turned lawmakers around on this issue, though, was Gov. Kathleen Blanco. When the governor put the considerable power of her office behind the consolidation legislation, it started to move. She spent the weekend before the House Ways and Means Committee's vote lobbying committee members, and they voted 11-2 for the bill. This is the same committee that killed assessor consolidation in the February special session.

Gov. Blanco had logic on her side. New Orleans has never needed seven different tax assessors. It didn't need seven assessors when more than half a million people lived here, and it surely does not need them now.

The cost of salaries, expense accounts and benefits for the seven elected officials is an absurd \$5.6 million over a four-year term. Opponents claim that the savings will disappear into salaries for a bigger staff for the single assessor. That is a false argument, though some of that money ought to go to putting together a professional staff of property experts to properly handle assessments citywide.

Potential savings in salaries isn't the only reason to change the assessor system anyway. The current system is irrational: The seven municipal districts vary greatly in size, and

assessment practices vary from one district to another. A new homeowner pays far more in taxes than a neighbor who has been in the same house for 20 years. Millage rates in the city have risen higher and higher to make up for the underassessment of property.

All of that makes the city's tax system unfair and unreliable -- and makes New Orleans' recovery that much harder. Fortunately, citizens will now have the chance to vote for reform.