



# Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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### **Editorial: Unify flood protection New York Times 2/9/06**

Natural disasters leave destruction in their wake, but they can also remove entrenched barriers to change. Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans has provided a rare opportunity to dissolve the levee boards, which fragment and decentralize storm protection for southern Louisiana, and replace them with one unified board.

Taking action on the levee boards would improve storm protection and send Washington a clear signal that the State Legislature is taking reform seriously. The federal government has been waiting for Louisiana to show that it is doing more than just asking for big sums of money. The more rational and organized the response, the more comfortable Congress will feel about spending more money on higher, stronger walls to protect the city.

Levee boards should first and foremost prepare for hurricanes, not provide patronage jobs. The Orleans Parish levee board has been roundly criticized for its sprawling interests and holdings, which made it more of a real estate developer than a safety watchdog. Perhaps the most egregious example of that is the \$2.5 million the board spent to renovate a fountain before the storms hit.

This week the State Legislature convened its second special session on Hurricane Katrina. Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and the Legislature had a chance to reform the system at the special session in November, but the governor backed a weaker oversight measure that failed to pass.

That cannot happen again. This time they must overcome rivalries for the greater good. Storms do not pay attention to parish lines, and neither should the system to defend against them. While much of the blame for the failures of the defense system falls at the feet of the Army Corps of Engineers, Louisiana should focus on what it can do to improve organization and accountability on its end.

It is startling how little urgency remains in the nation's capital to rebuild the Gulf Coast. President Bush barely found time in his State of the Union address to mention the devastation and, more important, put no additional reconstruction funds in his recently released budget for the next fiscal year.

As Ms. Blanco told the Legislature on Monday, "We had all better put Louisiana politics aside and worry about Washington politics, or our people and our state will lose." Congress is more inclined to help those who show they can help themselves. Fixing the levee boards would send that message.

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