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### West Bank levee board hailed as top-notch

#### Panelists' experience in science and engineering is trumpeted

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By Meghan Gordon, West Bank bureau

What might have come across as a mundane list in another setting had a striking ring to it Friday as the state's transportation director described the credentials carried by the new members of the West Bank's levee board.

Transportation Secretary Johnny Bradberry, who introduced the six men and one woman at the group's inaugural meeting in Marrero, read off a slew of civil and mechanical engineering degrees, a string of academic affiliations or honors, and decades of experience in hydrology, geology and other sciences. Only one member, a career nonprofit administrator, does not have a science background.

"We're putting knowledge, expertise and safety above politics," Gov. Kathleen Blanco told the new board during their nearly daylong meeting at the West Jefferson Levee District's office. "Those are the key ingredients."

Blanco told the reformed levee board to focus on the combined challenge of flood control and hurricane protection to inspire confidence among residents and the insurance industry on which their properties depend.

David Bindewald Sr. of Harvey will lead the group, after members elected him president. He holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical science and worked for 30 years in the oil and gas industry, including a decade as capital projects director at BP Amoco's Alliance Refinery and two years as the refinery's turnaround manager. He now runs his own consulting firm, Tiveldaddy LLC.

"We all have a daunting task ahead of us," Bindewald said, "but I couldn't ask for a stronger group to serve."

Algiers resident Kevin Julien Sr., a civil engineer and president of Julien Engineering & Consulting, will serve as vice president, and Harvey resident Susan Maclay, executive director of the private Louisiana Museum Foundation, was elected secretary/treasurer.

The oaths of offices administered to the group represent the completion of a grass-roots campaign started in the months after Hurricane Katrina to consolidate the political boards that oversee southeast Louisiana's defenses against hurricanes and floods.

A separate 11-member board governing the east bank of the Mississippi River from the River Parishes to St. Bernard, including coastal St. Tammany and Tangipahoa parishes, held its first meeting Jan. 10.

The convening of the West Bank levee board was stalled when legislators challenged the first set of nominees over concerns of their residency and diversity. Blanco received a new set of names from a nominating committee Feb. 1.

Because the West Bank panel was seated so late, the group didn't have to deal with a short financial quandary that its east side counterpart faced. In late January, the state approved a \$250,000 bankroll to each of the consolidated levee boards to use until \$500,000-per-year funding starts in July.

"You guys are lucky," Bradberry said. "The other board didn't have any money on their starting day."

Bradberry told the panel that it would act independently of any state agency and had the primary responsibility to inspire confidence in the residents and property owners inside their jurisdiction. He said those stakeholders would turn to them first, given a perceived distrust in the Army Corps of Engineers.

"People want to know if they are protected and will be protected effectively," he said.

The members plucked numbers out of a bucket to set up a series of staggered terms, with Joannes Westerink, a Notre Dame engineering professor and storm-surge expert, drawing a year; Bindewald and Michael Merritt of Baton Rouge, president and principal geologist

for GEM Consulting, drawing two years; Julien and Maclay drawing three years; and Robert Howson of Algiers, retired chairman and chief executive of McDermott International Inc., and Mark Morgan of Baton Rouge, a professional civil engineer and licensed levee contractor, drawing four years.

Subsequent members would be limited to two four-year terms.

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