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Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans: Statement Regarding SB 553

When voters statewide approved the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authorities (SLFPAs) by an overwhelming 81% in the September 30, 2006 constitutional election, they created two politically independent levee districts as political subdivisions and units of local government.

They voted to put public safety first, to create constitutional protection for two local-area flood protection authorities, and to keep them out of politics (particularly, out of gubernatorial politics).

The political independence of these two regional flood protection authorities relies hugely on their status as political subdivisions. Under Louisiana's Constitution, they are units of local (not state) government. They serve our metropolitan area flood protection needs and are not controlled by the Governor, as they were pre-Katrina.

Now, legislative assaults on their political independence seek to move them away from the protections of local government, treating them as state agencies subject to the Governor's control.

That's not what Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans fought for in 2006. That's not what Louisiana voters approved when they passed the 2006 constitutional amendment.

SB 553 seeks to redefine the SLPFAs as state agencies, despite Louisiana law that says levee districts are political subdivisions and despite voters' *constitutional* approval of the regional flood protection authorities under Article VI (the "Local Government" section of the Louisiana Constitution).

SB 553 gives the Governor control over SLFPA powers that have been governed exclusively by approval of the Attorney General. SB 553 would remove SLFPA from procedures appropriate to local government entities and instead subject them (retroactively) to contract procedures for state agencies, requiring approval from both the Governor and Attorney General.

Voters voted differently. They voted to insulate these two regional flood protection authorities from political influence. SB 553 would undo the voters' preference

for political independence and would treat the two flood protection authorities differently from other levee districts and political subdivisions in Louisiana.

This misguided legislation should be a source of concern for every local government enterprise in Louisiana. Beware! With the stroke of a pen, you can lose your local autonomy and be placed under the control of a state agency.

The Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authorities East and West are not and have never been state agencies. Like other Louisiana levee boards, they are political subdivisions and units of local government.

This legislation seeks to undo the constitutional protections put in place by the people of Louisiana. To treat the SLPFAs as politically controlled state agencies wasn't a good idea pre-Katrina, and it's not a good idea today.

Legislators should stand with their constituents and with Citizens for 1 by voting against SB 553.