



2007–2008 HIGHLIGHTS

The **Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana** is an independent voice, offering solutions to critical public issues in Louisiana through accurate, objective research and focusing public attention on those solutions.

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PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH

PAR published a number of significant research studies on state government issues in the past year.

Questioning Candidates Beyond the Platitudes This report outlines the major issues facing the state in the areas of health care, state finance, education and the economy – relative to the legislative and statewide elections of 2007. The report distills these problems into the basic facts and explains the political challenges inherent in each solution. Beyond the elections, this document will continue to serve as a useful reference for citizens and policymakers to evaluate solutions as they are proposed.

GulfGov Reports: Spending Federal Disaster Aid This GulfGov Reports analysis examines two major types of aid being used for reconstruction and economic recovery: FEMA Public Assistance (PA) grants and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The report demonstrates many of the intergovernmental challenges and problems federal, state and local officials face as they navigate through the stops and starts of the recovery effort toward long-term stability for the region. This is the second special topic report in the GulfGov project, a joint effort with the Rockefeller Institute of Government in New York.

Higher Education Tuition and Fees: Louisiana's Options for Keeping Pace This report recommends several policy changes that would allow higher education institutions in this state more flexibility to raise tuition and fees within certain limits. The policies recommended in this report would provide sufficient flexibility for reasonable, annual adjustments that would keep charges affordable by tying tuition and fee growth to rates at peer institutions and to growth in the state's family income level. Better outcomes also would be encouraged by tying increases to the achievement of institutional performance standards.

Strengthening the Standards: A Case Study of Disaster-Related Contracting Practices in Louisiana State contracts with private entities are the citizens' window into how taxpayer dollars for goods and services are spent. This analysis examines the state's policies regarding post-disaster contracts for professional, social and consulting services – negotiated contracts with subjective selection criteria, which often raise taxpayer suspicion. This report makes recommendations that would increase citizen access to contract documents and require adoption of emergency contracting best practices to decrease the potential for misspending in expedited negotiations.

GulfGov Reports: Response, Recovery, and the Role of the Nonprofit Community in the Two Years Since Katrina and Rita This report examines the role of the nonprofit sector in the recovery, what impact hurricanes Katrina and Rita have had on the work of these organizations, and what changes they already have made to handle the next disaster that strikes. In contrast to the criticism that seems to accompany almost every aspect of the governmental recovery effort, the consensus among local officials, residents, and outside observers is that the nonprofit sector has responded to the rebuilding challenge beyond all expectation.

Higher Education Performance Funding: Louisiana's Options Colleges and universities in Louisiana lag behind their peers in other states on a variety of performance indicators. This analysis recommends a funding approach that would reward significant improvement but would not grant blanket rewards for mediocre performance or success in hitting easy targets. This report makes recommendations for revisions to the state's funding formula for higher education, establishment of institutional performance measures and design of a performance funding initiative.

WATCHDOG ISSUES

PAR issued the following commentaries to provide a timely perspective on current public issues:

- 03/17/08 Special Session Set Stage for Growth, PAR Says
- 02/27/08 PAR Wraps Up the Special Session on Ethics
- 02/18/08 PAR Says Postpone Ethics Board Reorganization
- 06/29/07 PAR Wraps Up 2007 Session
- 06/26/07 PAR Says Financial Disclosure Bill Offers Historic Chance
- 06/07/07 PAR Says Health Care and Airports Need Sunshine, Too
- 06/01/07 PAR Says Help Fund Local Redevelopment and Road Home

CITIZEN EDUCATION

PAR's citizen education efforts over the past year included updating recurring publications for reprinting and Web publication, making personal and media presentations, and answering requests for information.

Guide to the 2008 Louisiana Legislature This handy, pocket-sized guide was completely updated to reflect elections through March 2008. The *Guide* provides helpful information about state legislators, statewide elected officials and the state's congressional delegation, including biographical data, photos and contact information.

Guide to the Constitutional Amendments This objective analysis explains the arguments for and against each constitutional amendment that voters must approve or deny. The 2007 guide analyzes the four amendments on the October 20 ballot.

Speeches, Public Forums and Media Appearances In the past year, PAR staff presented more than 50 speeches to civic or professional associations throughout the state and frequently appeared on TV and radio interviews.

www.la-par.org PAR's Web site is often visited by citizens and media professionals around the state for useful information on Louisiana government. A companion site, the GulfGov Reports Web site (www.rockinst.org/gulfgov), provides information specific to the recovery.

RESEARCH STUDIES UNDERWAY

Transportation Funding This study will evaluate the state's options for increasing funding for transportation infrastructure, including tax and fee increases, budget adjustments and toll roads. This study would identify the lessons learned by other states that have embarked on public/private partnerships to develop transportation infrastructure.

Higher Education Governance This report will examine the structure and function of the state's higher education governance entities, including the Board of Regents and the four system boards. This analysis of budgetary and management authority will examine systems in other states to present Louisiana's options for drawing clearer lines of accountability for spending and performance.

GulfGov Reports: The Role of Community Rebuilding Plans in the Hurricane Recovery This is the third special topic report in the GulfGov Reports research series. This study will examine regional and community recovery and rebuilding plans in Louisiana and Mississippi. These plans provide the framework for the direction of the recovery and a glimpse into how the character of the affected communities is changing.

Budgeting for Health Care Reform This report outlines the budgetary changes that would be necessary to transform Louisiana's unorthodox health care system into a more efficient and accessible model. These reforms would better integrate care for the state's uninsured citizens with care for paying patients, offer expanded access to health insurance and target funding toward programs of excellence.

Electoral Redistricting This study will evaluate the state's options for determining how electoral lines will be redrawn following the next full census. Using best practices from other states that have designed an independent method for electoral redistricting, the goal would be to design a method for Louisiana that minimizes the opportunity for political influence in the results.

Economic Development Incentives This research project will evaluate Louisiana's use of corporate incentive funds in comparison to best practices around the nation. Economic development efforts by the states to attract and retain businesses are rapidly deployed, interrelated and rarely scrutinized by the public because of their complexity. This analysis will put Louisiana's economic development toolbox in a national context, identify barriers to progress and propose policies that maximize the effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and transparency of state spending to attract investment.

PARTICIPATION ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

PAR's president and staff have represented PAR on the following boards and commissions:

School and District Accountability Commission
Blue Ribbon Commission for Educational Excellence
High School Redesign Task Force
Civil Service Comprehensive Public Training Program Advisory Committee
Member of the Louisiana Recovery Authority Audit Task Force
Louisiana Commission on Civic Education
Louisiana Coalition for Open Government
Levee District Authority Nominating Committee
Louisiana Budget Project Advisory Committee (LANO)
Gov.-Elect Jindal's Government and Fiscal Reform Advisory Council
Gov.-Elect Jindal's Health Care Reform Advisory Council

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