Coalition blasts Roemer for gutting scorecard criteria

By SCOTT DYER
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The Louisiana Coalition for Tax Justice blasted Gov. Buddy Roemer and his appointees to the state Board of Commerce and Industry Wednesday for gutting the state’s environmental scorecard that is used to rank industrial tax break applications.

At a press conference, coalition spokesman Chris Gaudet said Roemer has stacked the influential board with appointees who are sympathetic to industry and who have systematically watered down the scorecard criteria. At the same time, he said, the Legislature has passed new tax breaks that will make Louisiana even more attractive to corporations that pollute the environment.

“We are tired of having our drinking water threatened with pesticides and our air filled with carcinogens,” he said.

On behalf of the coalition — which includes 28 Louisiana labor unions and environmental groups — Gaudet called upon state officials to put a stop to the “corporate welfare that is being doled out to careless polluters who destroy our environment and ruin our government.”

The environmental scorecard program gauges the amount of tax breaks a company should receive based on its compliance with environmental laws, entitling firms with higher scores to better tax breaks.

By reducing the penalties for poor environmental records, critics argue the Board of Commerce and Industry has rendered the environmental scorecard meaningless.

Earlier this week, an official from the Department of Environmental Quality also said the changes in industrial tax exemptions recently approved by the board will cost tens of dollars and reduce the incentive for companies to cut back millions of pounds of toxic emissions.

John Glenn, a policy planning administrator for DEQ, said the changes approved by the board last week will eliminate $2.5 million in taxes for just 10 major firms in Louisiana.

At the coalition’s press conference Wednesday, Steve Monaghan of the East Baton Rouge Parish Federation of
Teachers said the tax dollars are desperately needed to support local schools and clean up the environment.

"We're seeing a declining (tax) participation from corporations in the education of our children," Monaghan said. "At the same time, the corporations are demanding a better product to come to our communities. We feel that the onus is on industry — if they want a better product, that product has to be paid for."