LABI Supports Landowner Plan for Basin

Louisiana Association of Business and Industry (LABI) has filed a statement with the U.S. Corps of Engineers concerning their position on the Atchafalaya Basin. The statement follows:

The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, the largest statewide business organization in Louisiana, represents all sectors of commerce and industry ranging from manufacturing to retailing to banking interests. LABI is comprised of 3,600 members from a variety of firms, large and small.

LABI recognizes the need for flood control in the Atchafalaya Basin to protect lives and property. LABI also believes that Louisiana's abundant natural resources—the streams, wildlife and forests that make up our beautiful state—should be protected. In addition, LABI believes that it is important for the state to foster the acquisition and management of recreational areas for use by all kinds of Louisiana citizens, including employees and employers.

At the same time, however, LABI is committed to the protection of private property rights of landowners, both in the Atchafalaya Basin and throughout the state as a whole. For that reason LABI supports the real estate plan for the basin proposed by the Louisiana Landowners Association which provides 80,000 to 90,000 acres to the state in sales and donations totaling $50 to $55 million. Compared to the 'Tentatively Selected Plan,' it would benefit both Louisiana and Basin landowners in the following two ways:

1. State purchase of the land in toto from basin landowners would allow the state total control of property access, timber rights, etc., and would remove from the landowners the unfairness of bearing liability for public use of their land without any control of that same public.
2. State purchase of the land would be made from willing landowners, allowing those who wished to sell their land to do so voluntarily in the spirit of free enterprise.

Based on the latest action from Washington, any real estate plan which has at its heart massive support funding from the federal government is both unrealistic and ineffectual. It is doubtful that anyone can convince Congress or the president that purchase of land rights in the Atchafalaya Basin should take precedence over Social Security payment, funding for school lunches or any of a number of programs recently cut from the federal budget.

If recreation for Louisiana citizens is important to the state—and LABI believes it is important—then the state should pay for it, either from monies accumulated in trust funds or from use fees from the public for their future recreation in the Atchafalaya Basin.