Saving St. Martin Projects
Legislator’s Session Goal

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CECILIA — Rep. Jesse Guidry of Cecilia says he will call a special session to reconsider the state's Capital Outlay Bill. "My main concern is not to lose what I thought I had in the original bill," Guidry said. The bill was padded with so many amendments just hours before the close of the regular session, that Guidry says many legislators didn't know what it contained.

The bill, which would have budgeted $1.8 billion, had not been voted out of the House when the legislative session ended at midnight, July 14.

Gov. Dave Treen has said he will call a special session to rehash the budget, but a date has not been set.

When the legislature does return to the Capitol, Guidry says he will be fighting to save $500,000 for improvements to the St. Martin Parish jail.

"My main concern is not to lose what I thought I had in the original bill," Guidry said. "It was in an I-A priority, which means it would have been funded in March." Guidry said he "received assurances this week from the administration that the jail funding would stay in."

The measure would allocate 70 percent of the cost of jail renovations and expansion up to $2 million, he said. The St. Martin Parish Police Jury would have to contribute 30 percent of the money.

The late Sheriff Charles J. Fuselier was under fire during his tenure for alleged inadequacies in the jail, including lack of sufficient space and recreational facilities for inmates.

Sheriff Charles A. Fuselier, the late sheriff's son and successor, says the state funds would be spent to upgrade and expand the jail, which is on the third floor of the parish courthouse.

Also at stake for St. Martin residents is a line item to appropriate $400,000 for improvements to Evangeline Area Tri-Parish Vocational-Technical School.

"We want to upgrade the facilities to make it a first class school," Guidry said. "That had a No. 1 or No. 2 priority, which means it would have been funded this year."

Other projects in the original bill included funds for continued work at the Lake Fausse Point Park and in the Longfellow-Evangeline State Commemorative Area and $300,000 for planning a parish multi-use center on school board property north of Breaux Bridge.

Guidry says legislators and staffers in Gov. Dave Treen's administration have been meeting, trying to make the bill palatable to the Senate, House and Governor's Mansion.

"That's where the action is now," he said. "I met with the governor this week, and he wants a good bill, too. But there are other reports going around that give me serious doubt (that a favorable bill will emerge)."

One of those reports, according to Guidry, is that bill will be trimmed from $1.8 billion to about $800 million.

"If that happens, no local projects would get funded," said the Cecilia representative. "Only state projects like highways, bridges, universities would get funded. Even some of the big ticket items would probably get cut."

Guidry says he thinks one of the problems with the bill has been that a cap on spending was not set from the beginning.

"This is the first time we've had as much as $500,000 or $600,000 in cash funds to play with," Guidry said. "It seems to have everyone flustered."

Guidry says the bill would get funded, only after it is apparent that a reasonable chance of reaching a compromise exists.

"The longer we delay, the more money it is costing the state," he said. "But at the same time, we have a democratic government, and we've got to reach a compromise."

"We have to come up with a reasonable capital outlay bill pretty soon," he added. "If we meet again and don't come up with a good bill for the people of this state, we will be open to a lot of ridicule."