State Is Moving Toward Modernization Goal

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(Times-Picayune Staff Correspondent)

BAYON ROUGE, La. - The state of Louisiana, at almost 155 years of age, is a little old to be an adolescent, but this week its voice showed signs of changing. In a roundup of more than 50 department heads and elected officials, Gov. John J. McKeithen made what could be the first genuine move toward establishing a goal for future development of the state through a comprehensive planning program. The overt act was a meeting to explain the role of Gulf South Research Institute in assembling data for presentation to the Council on Governmental Reorganization. The council was born of a promise extracted from McKeithen in exchange for endorsements of the amendment.
which makes it possible for him to seek re-election.

GSR1 entered the picture when McKeithen, through his Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, obtained some $267,500 from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in a planning grant. HUD might have looked with some question on the grant, Louisiana has already spent $23,521 of Federal money on assembling data through public works since 1963 which may or may not be of planning value.

New Approach

The new approach is part of a movement to streamline an outmoded state government, but before much can be accomplished in this direction, something must be assembled in the way of facts, primarily a clear understanding of the missions of state agencies as they exist in the minds of the agency heads.

GSR1 hopes to develop in the process data which might express the major problems facing the state in its future development, what planning tools are necessary to cope with those problems, and what resources the state has available to assist in orderly development.

From this, some priorities can be established, the mechanics of planning determined, and the public made aware of the direction recommended for state spending.

Sen. Michael H. O'Keefe, New Orleans, told newsmen when he agreed to act as a part time assistant to McKeithen in the absence of an executive secretary, that his real reason for accepting the task was reorganization of state government.

O'Keefe's Role

O'Keefe is McKeithen's chosen one for the game of agency shuffle. He wears a hat on the Council for Reorganization and another beanie on the inter-Governmental commission, both involved in the same game. His interest in the long-range view was manifested some years ago when he authored the bill which requires a five-year capital budget adopted by the Legislature with annual messages for implementation from the governor.

O'Keefe seemed to feel the chances for anything to be done to accomplish both planning and reorganization were better if he was close enough to McKeithen to prod him and his conscience.

There have been many efforts to arouse the Legislature to modernize state government short of a constitutional convention, but with little success to date. Especially obnoxious are the number of agencies which have little legitimate responsibility, or which duplicate the functions of others.

Odds makers are wondering whether the Orleans lawmakers will fare better with McKeithen in the reorganization battle than he did in getting the governor to obey the law on capital budgets — which so far McKeithen has ignored.

Denies Rumor

On another subject, last week this column reported a story making the rounds that Public Service Commissioner Ernest Clements would replace Wild Life and Fisheries Commissioner Leslie Glasgow. This week Clements called to deny the story.

"Purely rumor," said Clements. "I wouldn't take it for $50,000 a year. It has never been discussed. I can assure you. I don't even know Dr. Glasgow. It's a big enough job running the Public Service Commission. I wouldn't go to New Orleans at all."

Clements' public service post — elective — pays $12,500 annually. The Wild Life job now pays about $16,000 a year. Clements vowed he intends to seek re-election on his record of combating telephone rate increases.