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[FRIDAY, JUNE 29, 2007]

Health Access America Aims to Reduce the Number of Uninsured in Baton Rouge, LA
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Lawmakers approve almost all of Blanco's agenda
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LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans Awarded Millions of Dollars for Clinical Trials Research
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Scientific Summit Hopes to Boost Cooperation, NIH Funding
Louisiana Medical News | July 2007

Health Access America Aims to Reduce the Number of Uninsured in Baton Rouge, LA dBusinessNews | 06.28.07

Come join us

HEALTH INSURANCE INFORMATION FOR THE UNINSURED!

When: Saturday, June 30TH

Time: 10am – 3pm

Where: Cortana Mall

Why: Come meet with representatives from public and private programs to help you understand your options for health insurance coverage.

The rising number of uninsured Americans represents the most important health care issue facing the nation today. Health Access America, founded by the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC), will come to Louisiana as a year-long national effort to press for action in Washington. This program aims to link currently uninsured individuals and families with existing private and public coverage options.

Visit with LaCHIP, The Louisiana Health Plan, The Louisiana Drug Card, the Baton Rouge Association of Health Underwriters, Partnership for Prescription Assistance.

For more information about Health Access America, contact 225 921-6711.

http://neworleans.dbusinessnews.com/shownews.php?newsid=124614&type_news=latest

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Lawmakers approve almost all of Blanco's agenda Times – Picayune | 6.28.07

BATON ROUGE -- Gov. Kathleen Blanco emerged from her final legislative session Thursday with her legislative agenda virtually intact, having scored a series of decisive victories over insurgent Republicans who sought to scale back her spending initiatives in favor of more tax cuts.

Lawmakers gave the 2007 session to a close after approving more than \$32 billion in spending that directed record amounts of money into education, gave pay raises to a wide range of public officials and steered surplus dollars to road construction, hurricane repairs, a New Orleans teaching hospital and the Road Home program.

They also signed off on a series of administration initiatives to provide insurance premium relief to homeowners and make Louisiana more attractive to private insurers.

Surrounded by cabinet members at a triumphant post-ad adjournment news conference, Blanco called the nearly \$700 million in new education spending "a seismic shift in priorities" that will pay dividends for years to come.

"It puts us in the driver's seat for our future," she said.

The session also marked a remarkable turnabout for a governor whose political star dimmed after the 2005 hurricanes and faded farther after a disastrous special session last December in which the same lawmakers turned back large portions of her spending and tax-cut agenda.

In March, with polls making her a decided underdog, Blanco dropped her bid for re-election -- a decision that Blanco said helped tamp down some of the political concerns that might otherwise have dominated the election-year session.

"I believe that really did take politics out of it," Blanco said. "Everything we wanted to do in December, just about everything, was done in this term."

With most major spending issues settled days ago, lawmakers spent the hectic final hours arguing over ethics, insurance and tax-break bills. The governor has said there is room in the 2007-08 budget for about \$180 million in tax-relief. But the bills sent to her desk would cost considerably more than that in future years, and could leave the next administration with large obligations.

Since the state budget must be balanced, that means Blanco could be forced to either veto some tax bills or cancel some line items spending in the budget.

Republicans said the session will be remembered for the size of the budget, and for saddling the next governor with high-cost programs that will be hard to maintain in the future should Louisiana's post-hurricane economy take a downturn.

"We fought a good fight," House Republican leader Jim Tucker, R-Algiers, said. "We won a few but we lost most, and I think what people should take from this session is the fact that we spent every dollar over the objection of Republicans."

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But the governor's floor leaders said the new spending represents critical investments.

"It's probably the best session she's had," said Rep. John Alario, D-Westwego, the chairman of the budget-writing House Appropriations Committee who steered Blanco's spending initiatives through the lower chamber.

Barry Erwin, president of the Council for a Better Louisiana, said the session will likely be remembered for the education spending -- which includes nearly \$250 million in new spending on colleges and universities, plus pay-raises for classroom teachers bringing them to the elusive Southern regional average.

"Whether we can maintain that is another question," Erwin said.

The session also marked the end of the line for 60 members of the House and Senate who are barred by term limits from seeking re-election. Although many are running for seats in the opposite chamber, the coming upheaval lent an end-of-an-era feeling to the session's final days as long-serving legislators gave rambling farewell speeches looking back at their years of service.

One of them was Senate Pro-Tem Diana Bajoie, D-New Orleans, who said New Orleans made out well in the budget debate after winning a state commitment to back \$300 million in hurricane-damaged infrastructure repairs. "You can't rebuild a city without rebuilding the infrastructure," Bajoie said.

The hurricane-repair money was only one of many spending issues that loomed over a session in which legislators were charged with disbursing about \$3.7 billion in extra revenue spread among three fiscal years.

Spending that money along the lines Blanco proposed required raising a constitutional cap on spending, which takes a two-thirds majority and gave the Republicans, who are a minority in the 105-member House, the leverage they needed to negotiate for more tax cuts.

A turning point came when Blanco's allies loaded up the most sought-after spending items, such as roads, hurricane reconstruction and the Road Home program, into a \$1.9 billion supplemental spending bill and tied it to a separate measure lifting the spending cap.

That left the biggest spending increases -- such as pay-raises and new money for health-care and higher education -- in the operating budget, which only needed a simple majority to pass. And it meant that anyone wanting to bring home election-year cash for the most popular programs was put in the politically difficult position of having to lift the cap to access the money.

Republicans managed to keep the supplemental bill bottled up in the House for weeks while they negotiated for more tax cuts, but pressure from the administration eventually broke the logjam and allowed the budget bills to pass easily.

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"We never ever thought we could win that battle," Sen. Tom Schedler, R-Mandeville, said, adding that a vote against the supplemental bill "would have been a death wish for returning members."

While Republicans were bargaining for more tax cuts, members of the New Orleans delegation and the Legislative Black Caucus were demanding that more money be directed to hurricane relief. The breakthrough for them came when House leaders agreed to set aside \$23 million in a revolving loan fund that the city can use to secure up to \$300 million in loans to repair hurricane-damaged infrastructure.

"We had a whole lot of money to spend and I think it was cut up pretty evenly," said Rep. Juan LaFonta, D-New Orleans, the chairman-elect of the Black Caucus who helped strike the deal.

LaFonta said the loan fund -- which still needs to be codified in a cooperative endeavor agreement -- will help jump-start recovery projects that have been held up by red tape at the state and federal level. "You'll start to see the building and the infrastructure and the cranes," LaFonta said.

Tucker said the failure to cut back on new spending represents a "squandered opportunity" and said Republicans would take their case to the voters this fall.

"I think that if we take anything from this is, it's a new day next term," Tucker said. "With the election of new members and the term limit situation it's going to make it much better for our efforts."

But for this session, the victories belonged to the outgoing Democratic governor and the term-limited floor leaders who helped shepherd her agenda through the Legislature.

"She took a lot of beatings (since the hurricanes) -- some deserved and some not deserved," said Rep. Monica Walker, D-Hessmer. "It was important for her in her final session to come out on top. This helps her legacy."

http://blog.nola.com/times-picayune/2007/06/lawmakers_approve_almost_all_o.html

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LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans Awarded Millions of Dollars for Clinical Trials Research and Infectious Diseases Institute

AScribe | 06.28.07

NEW ORLEANS, June 28 (AScribe Newswire) -- Chancellor Larry Hollier, MD, announced today that the Louisiana Board of Regents voted to award LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans a \$3.3 million grant and an equal share of a \$5.9 million grant from their Research Commercialization and Education Enhancement Program.

"We are grateful to the Louisiana Board of Regents, Commissioner of Higher Education Dr. Joseph Savoie, and the Louisiana Recovery Authority, which was instrumental in obtaining these funds, for investing in our educational and research enterprises," said Dr. Hollier. "These programs will help us stabilize the supply of health care professionals in New Orleans and promote economic recovery by enhancing our efforts to recruit and, as importantly, retain current faculty."

Dr. Paul Fidel, Associate Dean for Research at the LSUHSC School of Dentistry, is the principal investigator and will lead the \$3.3 million South Louisiana Institute for Infectious Disease Research. The institute will build upon research strengths in fungal diseases, HIV/SIV, sexually transmitted diseases, vaccines/vaccine development, respiratory diseases, oral diseases and biodefense-emerging infections at LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans and Tulane Health Sciences Center.

The institute will create an educational component that will provide a technical training program for Louisiana Associate or Baccalaureate students designed to prepare them for careers in academic research laboratories and the biotechnology industry. The institute will also initiate programs for intellectual stimulation and mentoring, providing research enhancement funds, as well as salary support for postdoctoral fellows and graduate students.

The institute's commercialization component will provide pathways to efficient and effective commercialization of promising translational discoveries with the help of the schools' technology transfer offices, The New Orleans BioInnovation Center (NOBIC), and area business schools.

"The grant enables us to take areas of strength in infectious disease research and create a 'Tower of Strength' and the educational component will provide a pipeline of high quality workforce for research," notes Dr. Fidel. "The commercialization component will provide a pathway to more effectively take discoveries into the marketplace. Together, we envision the ultimate reward to be the advancement of the discovery process that will provide better treatment and cures for those suffering with infectious diseases."

Dr. Steve Nelson, Professor and Chief of the Section of Pulmonary Medicine at LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans, is the co-principal investigator of the highest ranked and highest funded grant. The \$5.9 million Clinical and Translational Research Education and Commercialization Program at LSU Health Sciences Center and Tulane will support clinical and translational research. The clinical core will comprise the General Clinical Research Center (GCRC) housed at University Hospital which Dr. Nelson leads as Program Director. This unit is one of a national network of approximately 78 centers usually located in units within hospitals of academic medical centers. Their primary mission is to provide a research infrastructure for clinical investigators who receive their primary support from NIH components as well as other Federal agencies.

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Current GCRC research projects include new cancer therapies, new drugs for malaria, AIDS, and asthma, among others. These projects represent about \$25 million of NIH funded research.

The review panel noted that the educational component is innovative and likely to be successful in increasing the numbers of trained clinical scientists. They went on to say that the use of a navigator for clinical researchers to guide the development of a clinical research protocol from conception to patient accrual is an excellent idea and should provide the type of mentoring that is crucial for effective faculty development. The proposed commercialization core is solid and demonstrates a good institutional track record in this area.

The reviewers concluded "that this is an outstanding proposal that is absolutely essential to the future of clinical and translational research in south Louisiana. It will support the infrastructure that is the backbone of clinical research and the training of future clinical and translational scientists. Given the substantial impact of Hurricane Katrina on this program and the excellent track records of the faculty involved, support is essential and highly likely to bear fruit both in terms of an improved workforce and enhanced commercialization."

"The funding provided by the Board of Regents/Louisiana Recovery Authority for this proposal is essential to the recovery and growth of both medical schools and to the future of clinical research and training in Louisiana," said Dr. Nelson. "It will provide our citizens with access to the latest medical therapies, train the next generation of physician scientists and healthcare professionals, and provide a pathway for the commercialization of our new discoveries into new industries and jobs in Louisiana."

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Scientific Summit Hopes to Boost Cooperation, NIH Funding Louisiana Medical News | July 2007

TED GRIGGS

One of Louisiana's best-kept secrets is that its scientists have been among the most successful at obtaining National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants set aside for states traditionally bypassed for research funding.

The scientists hope to change that. Their first step was the first-ever summit of the researchers who obtained nine NIH grants valued at more than \$120 million.



"We have two major objectives. One is to disseminate the information about all these grants to the scientific world as well as the dignitary world," said Paul Fidel, PhD, associate dean of the School of Dentistry at LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans and one of the organizers of the summit.

By getting the message out, Fidel said researchers hope to show the public and politicians the kind of impact biomedical science is having in Louisiana.

The summit also had a second goal: to bring all the principal investigators together and let them get to know one another better, Fidel said.

"Because they have all these common threads between them," Fidel said. "We're trying to find out how to interact amongst ourselves at our various institutions because we're all in this space."

The summit brought together the scientists who have secured Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence and Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence grant winners. Their research includes developing new molecular targets for clearing clogged arteries, high blood pressure and heart disease caused by diabetes; potential treatments for Alzheimer's Disease, epilepsy and stroke; a peptide that helps stop leukemia cells from producing tumors; and uncovering fundamental knowledge for respiratory infections of infants and their link to asthma.

The IDeA program was designed to spread NIH funding for biomedical and behavioral research, according to the agency. In the past, six states — California, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas — received the majority of NIH funding. Each of those states gets more than \$1 billion a year from NIH.

Louisiana is one of 23 states eligible for IDeA funding.

Fidel said the IDeA program is working, and Louisiana has been one of the major beneficiaries. The nine NIH grants in Louisiana are the most among its neighbors in the program, Mississippi, Arkansas and Oklahoma, which was the closest with six.

Dennis J. O'Callaghan, director of the Center for Molecular and Tumor Virology at LSU Health Science Center in Shreveport, said his facility lies 320 miles from New Orleans and the scientists need to have more interaction. Just getting together to exchange ideas is a tremendous help, he said.

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He suggested the scientists gather next time at a central location, possibly in Many or Natchitoches.

O'Callaghan said the scientists could stretch their research funds by sharing core facilities and technology so that each facility doesn't have to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars, or even millions, in equipment and instruments.

"Some of these instruments are \$400,000 or even \$500,000 a clip. The service contracts alone are 10 or 12 percent," O'Callaghan said. "You get five or six big instruments, you're talking enormous amounts of money every year."

For example, a vector lab, which can insert genes into viruses, carries a price tag of around \$1 million, O'Callaghan noted. If a Baton Rouge facility already has made this investment, it makes more sense for a researcher in Monroe to pay the lab to insert the genes, pack the resulting viruses in dry ice and ship them.

O'Callaghan said he hopes the scientists can find other ways to collaborate. Say that the Health Science Center in Shreveport brings in a Nobel laureate. These other guys are probably going to want to know about it, O'Callaghan said.

"They may actually want to come on up, or maybe we could have the Nobel laureate hold a seminar in Alexandria, where we all could go," he said.

Dr. Nicholas Bazan, also a PhD and director of the Neuroscience Center of Excellence at LSU Health Sciences Center New Orleans, said he and Fidel were hoping to generate ideas about where to go next when they organized the summit.

Louisiana's biomedical research community is "a dormant giant," Bazan said. Together the scientists comprise an enormous force, both for research and for improving the public's health.

Fidel said the research grants have generated and will continue to generate a significant economic impact.

Each scientist who wins a grant mentors junior faculty members, who in turn build their research, apply and receive additional grant monies, Fidel said. The leverage for the original \$11 million grant eventually becomes \$35 million or \$40 million.

In the meantime, the scientists are looking for ways to prevent cutbacks in the IDeA program. The Bush Administration has recommended a \$28.9 billion budget for NIH in fiscal 2008, a cut of \$389 million.

Harold Silverman, an LSU professor who heads the Louisiana Biomedical Research Network, said as the NIH budget falls, programs such as the IDeA program feel the pinch.

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