General Backs Lawsuit Against Oil Companies

KEVIN McGILL, Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — The Army general who won acclaim for helping restore order in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina is backing a flood control board's lawsuit against oil and gas companies.

Retired Lt. Gen. Russell Honore (AHN'-ur-ay) endorses the lawsuit in a full-page advertisement in Monday editions of The Advocate newspaper. The lawsuit filed by the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East seeks to hold 97 oil, gas and pipeline companies responsible for much of the continuing loss of wetlands that protect New Orleans from hurricanes.

The oil industry, Gov. Bobby Jindal and other flood control boards oppose the lawsuit, saying it undermines state coastal protection efforts. Honore argues that government efforts have failed to hold the companies accountable.

"As citizens, the only recourse you and I have left is the courts," Honore states in the ad, which was paid for by two environmental advocacy groups, Levees.org and the National Resources Defense Council paid for the ad.

Honore, a south Louisiana native, retired in 2008 and now works as a consultant on disaster preparedness issues. He has been increasingly outspoken on environmental issues, including abandoned oil wells and the huge, growing sinkhole in Louisiana's Ascension Parish. That sinkhole occurred at the site of a salt dome where a company was extracting brine used in the petrochemical refining process.

"I don't do politics," Honore said in an interview Monday. "But I do believe in environmental justice."

Honore's backing gives the SLFPAE, a board created after Hurricane Katrina to oversee three New Orleans area levee districts, some high-profile support at a time when the board is under heavy political pressure from Jindal and others to drop the lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed in state court in New Orleans in July and has since been moved to federal court. Jindal has repeatedly called it a windfall for trial lawyers. And his coastal protection chief, Garrett Graves, has said that if the lawsuit continues, the administration will seek legislatively to change the SLFPAE board's membership.

Graves has said that, by filing the lawsuit, the SLFPAE has exceeded its authority. He also said the suit endangers cooperative ventures the state has undertaken with oil companies to save the coast.

Levees.org founder Sandy Rosenthal said Honore was not compensated in any way for the ad or for backing the lawsuit.

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