

# Democrats Back Suits Against Oil & Gas Industry

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — The Louisiana Democratic Party is supporting lawsuits demanding that 97 oil and gas companies pay for damages to the state's marshes that led to coastal wetlands loss and contributed to higher storm surges during hurricanes.

The New Orleans Advocate reports the 210-member Louisiana Democratic State Central Committee passed the resolution Saturday on a voice vote with one in opposition. The committee held its regular meeting to hear updates on the party's work and consider positions on several policy questions.

Gov. Bobby Jindal strongly opposes the litigation filed last July by the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East. The lawsuit seeks damages for the extensive network of canals cut by energy companies through wetlands. The canals allowed increasing amounts of saltwater to intrude into the marshes, which weakened the vegetation and resulted in land loss, the suit says.

The authority oversees the massive levees and complex flood control system that protects much of the New Orleans area.

Governments in Jefferson and Plaquemines parishes then filed a set of nearly 30 lawsuits alleging dozens of energy companies and their contractors destroyed and polluted the parishes' coastal areas.

"It's troubling to me that we have a governor who doesn't want to see the lawsuits proceed," said Louisiana Public Service Commissioner Foster Campbell, who pushed the committee to endorse the resolution.

The Democrats resolved to back the lawsuits and encourage state and local boards and governments to seek judicial remedies.

The resolution is the position of the Democratic Party, but members and elected officials will not be sanctioned if they take different positions, said Karen Carter Peterson, chair of the state Democratic Party and a state senator from New Orleans.

Several legislators say oil and gas interests have been raising the possibility of a bill that would short-circuit the litigation and make it difficult for governmental entities to file lawsuits without the express approval of the governor. No such bill has been filed for consideration during the legislative session that begins March 10, but the possibility of such a measure was a major part of the conversation about the resolution.

Jim Harlan, who represents part of St. Tammany Parish, said he was concerned such

## **Democrats Back Suits Against Oil & Gas Industry**

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

---

a resolution would be used by opponents to paint the Democratic Party as anti-energy. While unfair and incorrect, he said, such a label would hurt Democratic elected officials and candidates in a state whose economy and workforce rely so heavily on the energy industry.

"Does this body, by adopting this resolution, want to make this a partisan issue?" Harlan asked.

Nevertheless, he said, he supports enforcing contractual provisions that require the oil and gas industry to repair the damage it did, as each of the companies had agreed to do.

"It's a question of responsibility," he said.

New Orleans writer John M. Barry, the former vice president of the SLFPA-East, addressed the Democrats, saying he hoped for the opportunity to also speak to the state's Republican Party.

He said the issue is about responsibility and the rule of law. "What the industry is now saying, when it goes to the Legislature and asks them to kill the lawsuits, what they're saying is, 'We're above the law,' " Barry said.

His nomination for another term on the authority was rejected during a nominating meeting that focused heavily on the lawsuit and Jindal's vow not to appoint supporters of the litigation.

**Source URL (retrieved on 01/28/2015 - 12:31pm):**

<http://www.chem.info/news/2014/02/democrats-back-suits-against-oil-gas-industry>