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My pledge to the people of Plaquemines Parish

By John Bel Edwards, Governor of Louisiana

The resilient people and bounty of natural resources of Plaquemines Parish are important to Louisiana, and my administration is committed to protecting and ensuring their future. That is why the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), working cooperatively with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and other natural resource agencies, is engineering and designing the two largest and most powerful coastal restoration projects in our country's history.

The Mid-Barataria and Mid-Breton sediment diversions will establish a controlled and permanent connection between the Mississippi River and the emaciated coastal wetlands on either side of Plaquemines. They will build new wetlands, anchor and extend the lifespan of other planned restoration projects constructed through dredging, and invest around \$2 billion of *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill funds in the local economy. Equally important, these projects will give the people of Plaquemines a brighter future by maintaining distance between their communities and the Gulf of Mexico.

I firmly believe these projects are crucial to the future of Plaquemines and our state, but I also understand there are concerns about potential effects to the seafood industry, which I would like to address.

Over the last several decades, hurricanes, the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill, multiple years of extended high rivers and heavy rain, and suppressed seafood prices due to surging imports have brought a variety of new challenges to the already hard work of the men and women who make their living on the water. Unfortunately, future projections indicate the worst may yet be to come with up to 55% of Plaquemines' land area lost and flooding depths of 13-15 feet or higher in a 100-year storm by the end of fifty years.

Avoiding this large-scale catastrophe is my first duty as Governor. That is why through the 2017 Coastal Master Plan, the State has identified \$6.6 billion in projects to build or maintain land and reduce flood impacts in Plaquemines. This includes ridges, marsh creation, shoreline, structural and nonstructural protection, and sediment diversions.

The state has years of science and planning all pointing to sediment diversions as being essential to the future of our coast. All of this analysis does not, however, exempt us from undertaking a rigorous federal environmental review and permitting process—and we do not think that it should.

This review process is led by the Army Corps of Engineers and involves numerous other federal agencies. It is driven by public input and will scientifically evaluate potential impacts to the fisheries, the economy, and many other aspects of life and the environment. My administration is working hard to quickly and thoroughly conduct these reviews so that important issues and impacts can be identified and addressed appropriately and in a timely manner. In the end, these projects will not be built unless the State addresses every single negative impact through avoidance, minimization, or mitigation.

I want the citizens of Plaquemines to know that finding efficiencies is not equivalent to cutting corners. There will be no sacrifices to rigor or thoroughness as we proceed. In fact, I have instructed CPRA and LDWF to go above and beyond what is required by the federal process to work through issues raised by the seafood industry, and to also work cooperatively with the Plaquemines Parish government.

Since September 2016, CPRA's Diversion Program Team has received input from over 5,600 people and held more than 70 meetings throughout Plaquemines and other nearby parishes. CPRA has also proactively engaged the seafood industry by giving presentations at monthly seafood task force meetings and holding public outreach events at bait shops and other locations convenient to fishermen.

Even with these diversions and the other proposed investments in the Coastal Master Plan, the future difficulties we will face along our coast are going to pose significant challenges for us, which is why we must work together to address them. Additionally, I have also asked CPRA, LDWF, and Louisiana Sea Grant to hold meetings with leaders from the seafood industry to hear their ideas for potential adaptation strategies that will help weather the changes that may arise in the coming decades both from coastal restoration projects or natural environmental change. Such meetings have already begun with the oyster industry, and conversations with other sectors of the seafood community will be forthcoming.

While we understand the big picture, there are some things we don't know. I know the details matter to you, and they matter to me as well. That is why I am committed to faithfully adhering to the federal review process, asking the state agencies to go the extra mile in their outreach to those potentially affected by these projects, and bringing all of the expertise and experience the state has to offer to help Plaquemines and our coast withstand the challenges we have ahead.

The potential challenges awaiting coastal Louisiana and the people of Plaquemines in the coming decades will test our resolve and fortitude. We must take bold action to reverse our current trajectory. In the face of these trials, Louisiana is moving forward with the right strategies and the right projects based on the best available science. Together, we will be stronger and better positioned in the long run by pursuing this strategy.