

# OPINION

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## Examine La. tax exemption policies

Twice in the first week of February, reports in The Advocate have centered on the folly of Louisiana's tax exemption policies. As a founding member of the Better Choices for a Better Louisiana Coalition, I want to thank your reporters for digging more deeply into the current budget crisis.

Reporter Marsha Shuler's interview with House Speaker Jim Tucker revealed this fact: The amount we allow as tax exemptions is almost equal to our general fund revenue.

Speaker Tucker's acknowledgement that lawmakers may have to look at tax loopholes as part of the solution was a welcome, honest contribution to a very necessary public dialogue.

On Saturday, Ted Griggs' report on the absence of severance taxes from the Haynesville shale wells reinforced our strong belief that Louisiana's tax exemption policies must be more thoroughly examined.

When our coalition held its first news conference on the Capitol steps on Nov. 18, we made two modest requests to elected leaders: first,

place an immediate moratorium on new tax exemptions, and second, take a serious look at the 441 exemptions that are on the books.

Does each of these exemptions, which total about \$7.1 billion, serve the public's best interest? Or, do a few, some or many of these adversely impact Louisiana schools, communities and the quality of life of all Louisiana citizens?

As this conversation about the current budget crisis and Louisiana's future continues, the public will expect — and wise leaders will demand — that these exemptions be examined and these critical questions be answered.

We believe Louisiana can make better choices than the deconstruction of higher education or elimination of essential public services. We urge the public to examine those choices at the Better Choices for a Better Louisiana website, <http://www.betterchoicesla.org>.

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