

# OPINION

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## READERS' VIEWS

### Use fiscal notes in streamlining

In the Nov. 24 edition of The Advocate, Commission on Streamlining Government Chairman Jack Donahue is quoted as calling on state Superintendent Paul Pastorek "to do the math and ... give us the plan."

The Louisiana Budget Project has called for the commission to do the same. LBP recently requested the commission to use the Legislative Fiscal Office to conduct fiscal analyses of its recommendations and to release those analyses to the public.

Without the analyses, the public is kept in the dark on the source of the projected cost savings, what programs are proposed to be cut and what groups will be impacted.

With the financial facts, alternatives for balancing the budget that are more attractive and less damaging may become more apparent.

At the time LBP issued its letter, the commission had released 80 recommendations, none with fiscal notes. As of Nov. 24, the number of recommendations had increased to 171. Only 17 have fiscal notes.

Many of these recommendations contain specific cost savings projections, but no information about how those savings were derived, who will be impacted and how.

Many of the programs on the commission's chopping block provide critical health-care and human services, such as Medicaid, pharmacy services, food stamps, nursing home care, home care, child protection and care for the disabled and veterans.

Twenty-five years of effort to get LSU's funding to a level competitive with its Southern

peers may be undone if reductions are not made strategically. These cuts in services could not come at a worse time.

Since Gov. Bobby Jindal came into office, Louisiana's employment has declined. The Louisiana Workforce Commission just released its most recent employment numbers, showing employment fell to 1.911 million in October, a loss of 44,000 jobs compared with a year ago and down from 1.929 million in December 2007.

While Louisiana's job losses have been less than the national average, they inflict real damage to real families living in a state that was already one of the poorest in the nation and, thus, could least withstand further hits to its economy. Thus, the need for government services is greater than ever.

The administration and Legislature have a tough job to do. The projected shortfall in the state's budget over the next two years approaches \$2 billion.

Tinkering at the margins will not solve a problem of this magnitude. Creative solutions are needed. And those solutions need to include looking at ways to increase revenue, rather than relying solely on reductions in spending.

But developing creative solutions requires a better understanding of the problem and the commission's proposed solutions. For that, the public needs the fiscal notes to all commission recommendations.

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