

The 2015 Louisiana Governor's Race
WHAT THE CANDIDATES ARE SAYING ABOUT COASTAL RESTORATION
Part 1 – Securing and Protecting Funding for Restoration

About the Coastal Issues Forum

Coastal restoration is one of the most important issues facing our state. To learn how our next governor plans to deal with the challenges and opportunities related to coastal land loss, the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana and [27 partner groups](#) sponsored a Coastal Candidate Forum on August 18, 2015 at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La. The full 90-minute forum was rebroadcast on [five television and six radio stations across the state](#) and is [available for streaming online](#). Participating in the forum were all four gubernatorial candidates: Public Service Commissioner Scott Angelle, Lieutenant Governor Jay Dardenne, State Representative John Bel Edwards and U.S. Senator David Vitter. Excerpts from the forum are provided only for the final two candidates, Rep. Edwards and Sen. Vitter.

Opening Remarks from Rep. Edwards:

“We’ve had lots of gubernatorial forums, starting very early this year. None of them have been more important to the future of Louisiana and dare I say to the future of our country than . . .coastal restoration. We’re closing in on 2000 square miles of land loss along our coast over the last hundred years and it threatens many things that are special about Louisiana. Including our fisheries, our wildlife, tourism, oil and gas, shipping and navigation, the economic impact of the coastal region is 20 billion dollars a year, perhaps a little bit more than that. So the bottom line, our future, our way of life is threatened. This is an immediate crisis and it requires good leadership.”

Opening Remarks from Sen. Vitter:

“I’m even more convinced that we face historic opportunities . . .That’s why I’m running . . .to provide strong leadership and real solutions . . .not play politics with it . . .And certainly for our very survival, one of those key challenges is protecting and restoring and stabilizing the coast. Now, this doesn’t happen by accident and certainly it takes a lot more than vague political rhetoric or throw-away campaign promises. So I very methodically built a campaign, reaching out to others, collecting very detailed concrete ideas to provide that leadership and those solutions. It’s coming together in a plan that we’ve put together called *Together Louisiana Strong* [and] it’s at DavidVitter.com.”

Question from Rob Gorman, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux and CRCL board member:

“Our coast is dynamic and changing every day. We are losing what we love and what sustains our communities, people and economy. We must increase our efforts to match the scale of the crisis we face, and we must do it now. Saving our coast will require unprecedented leadership, coordination, and political will.

“What are the first three actions you would take to advance coastal restoration after beginning your term in office?”

Rep. Edwards Responds:

“The three primary actions are [to] create certainty of funding; to ensure the funding is spent only in accordance with the coastal master plan and the priority projects and then to convincingly make the case to Congress and to the federal administration that this is a national priority. We’ve got to have ...budget discipline in spending money only where it counts with respect to coastal restoration... we are entering the implementation phase with more funding becoming available than ever before. ...We’ve got to make sure that we spend on the projects where we get the biggest bang for the buck first. We are in a race against time... [We must] focus attention and leadership on this incredibly important [problem] if we are going to build more momentum as we move forward.”

U.S. Senator Vitter Responds:

“Number 1, to address the overall fiscal crisis...I would immediately call a special Legislative Session focused on stabilizing the budget through fundamental spending reform and tax reform...[T]he coastal fund is one of those areas I will put completely off limits in terms of solving our overall fiscal problems. Number 2...I would take three to five major projects from the Coastal Master Plan and tremendously accelerate them and push them hard so that we are actually putting shovels in the ground and building within a few years. We cannot study this to death. And number 3, I will develop a strategy to increase funding...one element of that will be to develop an aggressive, organized campaign to raise substantial private matching funds.”

Question from Simone Maloz, Executive Director, Restore or Retreat:

“Coastal restoration is expensive, and as we continue to lose our coast, the costs will only rise. Soon, the state will have billions of dollars to spend as two new major sources of funding sources – the BP settlement and revenue sharing from GOMESA – become available. This is a sizable investment but not nearly enough. To implement the full suite of projects needed to protect and sustain our coast, we will need adequate, sustainable and reliable funding over time. In the long term, sustaining our coast will require a sustained federal, state and local investment and support, as well as the willingness of private interests to invest in their own protection – and to attract these dollars, we will need to show results. In the near term, there will be pressures at both state and federal levels to use available dollars for purposes other than coastal restoration and protection.

“As governor, how would you ensure funds intended for coastal restoration are spent as intended, to maximize results and not redirected or raided for other purposes, no matter how compelling? How would you secure the additional funding we will need to fully implement our master plan?”

Rep. Edwards Responds:

“First, we’ve got to fix the structural deficit...forecasted for the next five years of no less than a billion dollars each year. We need to do that by reducing or eliminating tax giveaways that don’t work [and] cost too much... We’ve got to provide real and principled leadership with budget discipline, working with the legislature, state agencies and local government. Don’t use dedicated funds to loan one time money into recurring revenue as too often has happened in the past...For coastal restoration, the focus must be on securing adequate funding that is reliable and sustainable over time.”

“We are entering the implementation phase...even though we have only identified a tiny fraction of what we need to do the 50-billion dollar plan, which is rapidly increasing to 100 billion dollars over the 50 years...But because of the Breaux Act, GOMESA, RESTORE, NRDA and the BP criminal fines, we do have money coming in and we have to make sure that we spend it only in accordance with the plan...[I will make] sure that those local governments in the 19 local parish coastal regions are using their money in order to implement the Coastal Master Plan as well...[W]orking with the private land owners we can actually make the dollar stretch and do some more of the coastal restoration work set forth in the master plan.”

“But we can’t do this if we are irresponsible, so we must be wise stewards of available funding. Otherwise we will never be able to convince Congress that this worthy of sustained investment of tens of billions of dollars over the coming decades, which is what we are going to have to have if we are going to be successful. We have one chance to get this right. I’m committed to being the governor that exercises the leadership to get it right.”

U.S. Senator Vitter Responds:

“[W]e have some very important pieces of the puzzle on funding that have come together in the last several years...I have been super involved as a member of the federal delegation in all of those successes, drafting and passing GOMESA revenue sharing... [and] the RESTORE Act dedicating 80 percent of the Clean Water Act funds from the BP disaster to the disaster and the affected coastline...[On] the question ‘How do we protect what’s there from getting raided?’ Well, two ways: We need greater protection for the state’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Fund. I would support and pass that and put that off limits. But the second [way]... is...leadership and doing whatever it takes as governor, just not to stand for it, vetoing appropriation bills, if necessary that raid those funds...I will make an absolute commitment to be that governor and veto if necessary those raiding of those funds.”

“The second part of the question is moving forward, ‘How do we identify additional funds, additional resources?’ Again it’s going to take a strategy and several elements. Let me mention three: I’ve been working at the federal level and making progress at connecting the dots between the enormous mitigation requirements under federal law for wetlands mitigation and the coast. Too often we have federal mitigation and it has no impact on the coast. We’re buying piney woods outside of central Louisiana... [B]ut that’s not the wetlands crisis we’re facing. I’ve passed reforms to move that mitigation to the coast and we can go further. Number 2, I would lead a coalition of other states, governors and other members of Senate and House to expand and accelerate domestic energy production and revenue sharing. And number 3...I would develop a very aggressive, organized campaign to raise substantial, private matching funds from private industry that depend on us and have their home in Louisiana.”

For more information about the Coastal Issues Forum, contact:

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