

Lawmakers' ire imperils progress

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The anger of some lawmakers over Gov. Bobby Jindal's veto of their pet projects is understandable, since the governor allowed funding for similar projects in other areas. With \$55 million in earmarks slipped into the budget, Jindal cut only \$16 million - less than a third.

The nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council asked a pertinent question about earmarks that stayed in the budget: "With no scoring mechanism or uniform evaluation procedure for each local project granted funding, the public is left to wonder why those were left in the budget to compete with statewide needs for state tax dollars."

There is obvious inconsistency in the governor's cuts. Funding for some playgrounds, museums and organizations was killed, while some festivals, museums and local senior citizens organizations are scheduled to receive funding.

A Baton Rouge children's museum was denied \$250,000 in funding, while \$6,500 for the Cotton Museum stayed in, along with \$110,000 for the Civil Rights Museum. An earmark for a balloon festival in Baton Rouge was cut, but \$50,000 for the Christmas Festival in Natchitoches escaped the knife.

Four towns - Gibsland, Homer, Haynesville and Junction City - will get \$10,000 each, with no description of the spending. Other towns lost funding they were slated to receive.

Jindal cut an \$800,000 add-on for a multipurpose baseball and recreational center for Evangeline Parish, but allowed a \$250,000 proposal for a playground in Jefferson Parish.

State Sen. Eric LaFleur, D-Ville Platte, said his Evangeline Parish project would have benefited a multiparish, rural region with few outlets for children and families.

Commenting on Jindal's inconsistency, state Sen. Mike Michot, R-Lafayette, said, "This was not the right way to go about doing this."

Jindal issued a letter to lawmakers setting forth his criteria. He said each project must have regional impact, be a state agency priority and have been openly discussed during the legislative session. Proper disclosure forms about the organizations must also have been filed with the House and Senate.

We have no problem with the governor's criteria. There is a problem, however, with the inconsistency in the way it was used.

State Sen. John Alario, D-Westwego, said he understood the rules for non-governmental agencies. He didn't understand, he said, why \$330,000 he added to the budget for two parish playgrounds funded through government agencies was vetoed.

"At no time did they talk about not funding programs through government agencies," Alario said. "They changed the rules in the middle of the game."

We are apprehensive about the widening breach between the governor's office and members of the Legislature. We have seen programs of previous administrations crippled because of angry lawmakers. Hopefully, the relationship between the executive and legislative branches will soon become more positive. Otherwise, Louisiana's chances of continuing to move forward will become disturbingly slim.