

Our Views: Don't stop with vetoes

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Gov. Bobby Jindal's line-item vetoes of \$16 million in spending for local projects is a good start toward fiscal discipline at the State Capitol, but he shouldn't stop there. We hope the governor will use his veto pen even more in the future to carve excessive spending from the budget.

At this point, Jindal has vetoed more budgetary earmarks than any governor has in the past. That should burnish Jindal's credentials in conservative circles — not only here, but across the nation, where Jindal enjoys a following as a rising Republican star.

But if the governor wants to deepen the substance behind the symbolism of these vetoes, he should use his line-item veto more consistently, and with clearer adherence to his stated principles of fiscal stewardship.

As the nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana pointed out, Jindal's approach to cutting budget fat took several steps in the right direction. Jindal released a list of general criteria during the session to warn legislators of the types of projects that wouldn't pass muster.

Then, citing those criteria, he cut more than \$9 million from the 2008 supplemental budget and \$16 million from the 2009 operations budget.

Jindal said his criteria for funding local projects were that they must have statewide or substantial regional impact; must have been presented or openly discussed during the legislative session; must be a state agency priority; and must have the proper disclosure form published online prior to consideration of funding.

Among a number of area projects that got the ax, Jindal vetoed \$45,000 in spending for the Louisiana Art and Science Museum and \$250,000 in spending to help create a children's museum in Baton Rouge. The apparent rationale for these vetoes was that these projects should be funded by local sources rather than the state.

We understand the wisdom of that philosophy, even when it complicates fundraising for worthy projects in the Baton Rouge area.

But the governor has not been consistent with his criteria in using his veto pen. For example, he let stand \$5,000 in spending for Forest, a village in rural north Louisiana, in the current operating budget, with no indication of the money's planned use in the legislation. The village of Lillie in Union Parish is to receive \$10,000 in House Bill 1, the budget legislation for the state spending year that began earlier this month.

These items don't seem to meet the governor's standards for funding of local projects, and there are numerous other examples of projects that do not appear to meet the governor's criteria.

Standards lose meaning if they are not applied uniformly.

Although Jindal vetoed \$16 million in local spending in the state budget, around \$39 million in local earmarks were left in the operating budget.

"However," PAR noted, "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."

No budget process is ever perfect, but the spending practices at the State Capitol still need lots of improvement, even after the governor's gesture toward fiscal restraint.