

## Moving out of state

### Louisiana keeps losing prime taxpayers

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Two-thirds of the people who left Louisiana in the year after the 2005 hurricanes were white, well-educated and in their prime tax-paying years, according to a recent survey by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Nearly one in four made more than \$50,000 per year, according to Census Bureau estimates based on responses from 27,905 people in 2006, after the tumult from hurricanes Katrina and Rita subsided. Previous census estimates were calculated from utility hookups, birth certificates and other sources.

The numbers show the longtime trend of people leaving Louisiana — a trend called “out-migration” — continued unabated despite extraordinary efforts to rebuild damaged portions of the state to lure residents back after the massive hurricane evacuations.

Gov. Bobby Jindal said the numbers underline the need for state government to focus on ways to keep people from leaving Louisiana and to entice people elsewhere to move here.

“Our top priority has got to be the out-migration of our people,” Jindal said. “It would be a mistake to blame this on the hurricanes. This has been going on for the last 15 years, at least. We’ve been the only state in the South to consistently see more of our people move out faster than people are moving in.”

Jindal said that like many others in Louisiana, he has family members who have moved to other states. The governor’s brother, brother-in-law and sister-in-law all live outside Louisiana.

“People love this state. The reason they are leaving is because of lack of educational and lack of economic opportunities,” Jindal said. “It is key to improving our quality of life and moving our state forward to be able to provide the opportunities to keep our people home.”

Jindal cited two efforts by his administration to help stem the outflow.

One is a set of changes to ethics laws that includes requiring more public employees to better detail their financial holdings. The other is work-force development, a drive to better coordinate training so workers can do the jobs employers need.

“The great irony is that even as people are leaving, we still have 90,000 vacant jobs in Louisiana, in part ... because we as a state have not done a good job in training our people for the jobs that are here,” said Jindal, adding that he thought progress is being made.

While agreeing that the new efforts will help to a degree, some policy groups fault the governor for not having a more coordinated strategy.

“We’ve talked about it a lot, but we still don’t have any kind of strategy that is clearly articulated,” said Barry Erwin, who heads Council for A Better Louisiana, a nonprofit advocacy group. CABL will try to focus on the issue at its annual meeting in December, he said.

“We have been trying to have some conversations with him,” Erwin said of Jindal. “It now seems to be on their radar screen.”

Erwin said he would like to see the state concentrate on “knowledge-based jobs.” One way to do that would be publicly funding a research alliance designed to help researchers on targeted projects translate their work into expanding commercial businesses, he said.

“We don’t do a good job of turning research into economic development,” he said.

Erwin said now that Jindal has tackled ethics and workforce development — cornerstones of the gubernatorial campaign — he would like to see the governor focus in 2009 on out-migration.

“We don’t see the needle moving much,” said Jim Brandt of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana, a nonprofit advocacy group. “We’ve seen some progress on some fronts, yes, but there have only been fairly modest changes in the Legislature and not the major reforms that many had looked for. ... I hate to be pessimistic, but the opportunity for change is not when you’re headed in down budget mode.”

The 2007 American Community Survey shows that 71,571, or 61 percent, of the 117,124 Louisiana residents who moved to another state were between the ages of 20 and 54. In that group, 31,113 were in their 20s.

The survey shows 61 percent of the residents who left are white and 61 percent had attended college. Of the 56,964 Louisiana earners leaving the state who reported making more than a nominal income, 13,549 made more than \$50,000 per year, the reported found.

Louisiana’s population in 2007 was 4.29 million, up from 4.22 million in 1990 but down from 4.5 million in 2000, according to the survey.

Much of the population increase stems from births outpacing deaths, said Elliott Stonecipher, of Shreveport, who analyzed this report and has studied out-migration numbers for years. But the births have just barely kept up with out-migration — at a time when most states around Louisiana have enjoyed double-digit growth numbers.

The Census Bureau numbers show that in the past 27 years, Louisiana has lost about 84 residents each day, or about four per hour, Stonecipher said.

“It ain’t hurricanes. It’s a lot of things,” he said. “People from the outside see our crime problems, our political corruption, that we can’t educate our children. We need to make a case for someone to want to come here.”

As an example, Stonecipher pointed to post-Katrina changes in homeowners insurance.

Homeowners recently have been hit by named-storm deductibles that allow insurance companies to cover little, if any, hurricane damage while collecting significantly higher premiums, he said. That is coupled with the widespread perception that the state's elected officials favored the insurance companies by letting them write such policies, he said.

"We can no longer claim that life here is cheaper than in other places because, one, it's not true, and two, people know it in their pocketbooks," Stonecipher said.

Insurers and their defenders in the state Legislature argue that competition eventually will reduce insurance premiums and provide better coverage options.

Stonecipher counters that state government has focused on economic development projects rather than being creative.

The Legislature did approve one such "out-of-the-box" idea earlier this year.

The "Grants for Grads Program" lets the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency pay up to \$10,000 for residents who buy homes in Louisiana immediately after graduating from college and stay for five years.

House Bill 1156 originally was drafted as a much larger effort but was passed as a pilot program for 100 people to be chosen at random.

"I didn't have the statistical data, just the sense that people are leaving Louisiana after getting their college education," said state Rep. Neil Abramson, D-New Orleans, who sponsored the legislation. "We are constantly looking at — and we really have to be — ideas that create a better quality of life that people can afford."

Sean Reilly, chairman of Blueprint Louisiana, a nonprofit advocacy group organized by the business community, said making changes will require a sustained effort.

"The better mousetrap is no secret. We just need the courage of our convictions to get it done," he said. "You can't just make changes from a policy perspective. You have to make changes in a real world way. That kind of follow-through is what state government is responsible for. We're going to hold them accountable."

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## **Movers by age**

Louisiana residents who moved out of state in 2006:

UNDER THE AGE OF 19: 32,619.

20 TO 29 YEARS: 31,113.

30 TO 54 YEARS: 40,458.

OVER THE AGE OF 55: 12,934.

TOTAL LEAVING STATE: 117,124.

*Source: American Community  
Survey, 2007*

**EBR numbers**

East Baton Rouge Parish in 2006:

BASE POPULATION: 423,984.

LIVED IN THE SAME HOUSE A YEAR AGO: 346,033.

MOVED WITHIN THE PARISH: 50,331.

MOVED TO A DIFFERENT PARISH: 17,182.

MOVED TO A DIFFERENT STATE: 11,099.

*Source: American Community  
Survey, 2007*

*Mark Ballard is editor of the Capitol news bureau.*