

PAR opposes Jindal-backed bills

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BATON ROUGE — The nonpartisan Public Affairs Research Council on Wednesday became the latest group to oppose Gov. Bobby Jindal's efforts to make it easier to tap various state trust funds.

PAR said the bills would only "postpone the difficult decisions facing budget makers."

The government watchdog group joined the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry and the Tea Party of Louisiana in opposing a package of bills advanced by Senate leaders that is designed to prevent health care and higher education from bearing the brunt of budget cuts.

Among other things, the changes would allow the state's "rainy day" fund to be tapped in years when certain federal revenues decline, instead of reserving that money to deal with drops in state revenue.

Other bills would liberalize the rules governing the Louisiana Education Quality Trust Fund and allow tobacco settlement money to be diverted from a trust fund and sent to health care programs.

Jindal has said the changes are needed to give legislators more flexibility in responding to financial downturns, and to lessen the impact of budget cuts on public colleges and health programs.

According to a commentary by PAR President Jim Brandt, the group supports limited changes to the education fund to allow interest earnings to be used to cover educational expenses when the state has a budget shortfall. But it opposes any changes to the rainy day fund, or proposals that would erode the principal in any state trust funds.

Brandt said most of the bills "are shortsighted maneuvers that would circumvent measures designed to force fiscal discipline when budget crises hit."