

News Clips Report

Group calls for reforms to save state money Times - Online, The

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BATON ROUGE — Blueprint Louisiana, a group of business people formed to suggest ways to improve state government, offered a 14-point plan Monday that representatives say could plug at least \$1 billion of the \$1.6 billion deficit the state is facing this year.

Besides cutting what the group terms "inefficiencies," like management costs, certain programs and too many state employees, the plan promotes raising new revenue by imposing higher tuition for college students and fees on hospital visits.

The recommendations to be presented to the Legislature include suggestions in three basic areas — general government, health care and higher education. The cost savings and revenue-producing measures combined total \$972 million to \$1.6 billion, according to Blueprint figures.

"We encourage not only thoughtful discussion about these and other ideas, but bold and decisive action to advance statewide priorities that build a foundation for sustainable government," said Blueprint Louisiana chairman Bill Fenstermaker, of Lafayette, CEO of an engineering, surveying and environmental consulting firm.

Several of the proposals reflect ideas being pushed by Gov. Bobby Jindal, the Department of Health and Hospitals and higher education leaders.

Besides raising higher education tuition, the group will push "eliminating programs that do not meet acceptable standards," referring to the Board of Regents' list of more than 450 low-completer programs at colleges and universities, said Blueprint co-founder Clay Allen of Lafayette termed.

The plan calls for giving campuses freedom to increase tuition to what Allen termed "market-based" levels in exchange for focusing on academic performance and eliminating programs. They should also receive more freedom to manage their budgets, all things that higher education officials and Jindal are supporting.

Jimmy Maurin, of Hammond, chairman of Stirling Properties, said "across-the-board cuts are a mistake, in cutting state employees and everything else. It's got to be surgically done."