

New Orleans **CITYBUSINESS**

Blueprint Louisiana motto: Create a state we deserve

BATON ROUGE – “It’s time to create a state we deserve”

With this simple statement, Blueprint Louisiana launched its five-part plan aimed at pressuring legislators taking seats in this fall’s historic election to answer to constituent needs rather than lobbyist siren songs.

The time is ripe, Blueprint board members said, because term limits will help open roughly half of the 144 legislative seats to new rumps. And before those freshman legislators can be branded by the corruption that has been a hallmark of Louisiana politics, Blueprint Louisiana wants them to commit to a slate of reform tactics chosen after more than a year of research by a number of community groups statewide.

The Blueprint Louisiana platform promises to be a breath of fresh air in a fetid state where legislators can change their vote after the fact, where the Legislature allowed cockfighters to remain in business despite disapproval from 90 percent of voters and where a popular ethics reform is killed by the “process” with no legislator fingerprints on the document.

Blueprint Louisiana’s agenda includes:

- Adopt the nation’s best ethics laws.
- Prepare students for a lifetime of success.
- Develop a skilled work force.
- Provide first-class access to health care.
- Build a superior transportation system.

All are critical needs in Louisiana. But it didn’t take long for the long knives to come out after the Blueprint Louisiana plans were unveiled in Baton Rouge last Monday.

The message is impossible to argue with, though, so critics took aim at the messengers. “Blueblood Louisiana” is more like it, sniffed one partisan critic taking a predictably populist potshot.

It’s true the 25-member Blueprint Louisiana board has deep pockets. This is the can-do cream of the crop in Louisiana. These folks have proven they know how to make money in a state notoriously difficult to do it in.

It’s a mistake, however, to label the Blueprint Louisiana bunch as solely silver spooners. Matt Stuller, for example, famously launched his mega-successful jewelry business out of the trunk of his car in Acadiana. He succeeded by the sweat of his brow and the soundness of his ingenuity. His integrity is beyond question, too.

There's only one reason Stuller Settings remains headquartered in Lafayette after being wooed by several rival states for years: He cares about his home state. It's not because he couldn't strike a better deal elsewhere, that's for sure.

Stuller's common sense capability is reflected throughout Blueprint Louisiana, which has statewide representation. The New Orleans region is well represented by King Milling, Whitney Bank president; Rob Stuart, New Orleans Capital One Bank president; Suzanne Mestayer, New Orleans Regions Bank president; Dan Packer, retired CEO of Entergy New Orleans; James Caillier, The Patrick Taylor Foundation executive director; David Voelker, Frantzen and Conway Investments LLC; and Bill Oliver, AT&T Louisiana president.

The North Shore is ably represented by the indomitable Maura Donahue of Donahue Favret Contractors in Mandeville and Jimmy Maurin, chairman of Stirling Properties in Covington.

Blueprint Louisiana has the right ideas. It offers a way for voters to pressure their representatives into necessary reforms. It's a group devoted to pushing Louisiana up the national list of achievers. Let's work to see they succeed.