



## Levee problems top Chamber's priorities

By Jeff Matthews • [jmatthews@thetowntalk.com](mailto:jmatthews@thetowntalk.com) • February 23, 2010

It's no surprise what tops the Central Louisiana Chamber of Commerce's agenda for the upcoming legislative session.

"The levees are a huge issue," said Reldon Owens, governmental affairs chairman for the Chamber.

Levees on the Red River in Rapides Parish have been decertified, which could potentially lead to many highly populated areas, particularly in Alexandria, being designated at higher risk for flooding. That could force many individuals and businesses to buy costly flood insurance.

"That affects every single person in the parish," said Owens, who spoke Monday at the monthly meeting of the North Rapides Business and Industry Alliance.

"You could have problems buying, selling or leasing your house. It affects new developments, businesses coming in here. It's horrific."

The price tag to repair the levees so they meet certification has been estimated at several million dollars. Local officials agree the problem has to be addressed, but it's unclear whether local, state or federal dollars will be spent to do it.

The Alexandria and Pineville city councils and the Rapides Parish Police Jury will meet together at 10 a. m. Wednesday in Alexandria City Hall to discuss funding to repair the levee problems.

Levee certification is the biggest of the big-picture items Chamber officials will discuss with local legislators in the coming weeks. Others include connecting industry to local port facilities via improved railroad service; expanding road transportation options such as extending four-laning on La. Highway 28 East; and supporting Louisiana State University at Alexandria as a four-year institution.

"It's a broader picture at this point, rather than bill-specific," Owens said.

There will be plenty of time to discuss specific legislation in what Owens thinks will be a busy session.

"With it being a non-fiscal session, it's open season to some degree," Owens said. "The sky is the limit (to how much legislation could be introduced). At the same time, they're going to be trying to reduce spending and plug holes. There are going to be some tough calls."

The Legislature convenes on March 29 and will adjourn no later than June 21. Bills must be filed by March 19, but the Chamber's Governmental Affairs Division will begin reviewing specific bills before then to determine if they should be supported, opposed or monitored.

Owens said the Chamber reviewed close to 1,100 bills last year, and thinks that number could go up in 2010.

"What we try to determine is how would this affect business in Central Louisiana, either positively or negatively," he said.

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