

Group plans new legislative proposals

BY MARK BALLARD
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An influential group of businessmen, lawyers and doctors — calling itself Blueprint Louisiana — said Tuesday it would spend \$100,000 to publicize a new package of proposals for the next legislative session.

The statewide group successfully pushed ethics and education changes after Gov. Bobby Jindal entered office in 2008. During the term that begins in 2012, Blueprint wants to revamp how public employees retire, teachers are paid and criminals are sentenced.

"The climate was very different four years ago," said Camille Conaway, of Baton Rouge's SSA Consultants, who did much of the research for the 23-page packet of recommendations.

"We're having to be a lot more laser focused" on structural changes this time, Conaway said. She had worked on Blueprint's 2007 package of bills before going to work for Jindal. She left the Governor's Office as policy director in late 2010.

Blueprint Louisiana has a \$500,000 budget, said Jim Harris, a Baton Rouge lobbyist representing the group. The advertising campaign begins Sunday in newspapers. Then next week, the group will roll out information about the proposals on billboards and social media, he said.

The goal is to attract voters to review the recommendations at the group's website: <http://www.blueprintlouisiana.org>.

In 2007, Blueprint asked legislators to sign a commitment to support the group's legislative package.

This time, Harris said, the group is asking legislators and candidates to consider the ideas and work with Blueprint on getting them passed. For the first time, however, the packets will also be sent to candidates for the state Board

The proposals including creating public-private partnerships to run many of the state's charity hospitals, starting with the facilities in Lake Charles and Alexandria.

of Elementary and Secondary Education, the panel that oversees public schools and their estimated 668,000 students.

Blueprint Chairman Jimmy Maurin, who runs a commercial real estate firm in Covington, said in a prepared statement: "The election season is a time to remind state leaders the people of Louisiana want and deserve better."

The proposals would:

- Create a single pre-kindergarten system out of the several publicly funded programs.

- Abolish tenure protection to allow the quicker removal of public school teachers from classrooms and allow principals to make performance-based decisions.

- Restructure retirement plans for public employees away from a guarantee of lifetime pension to a more defined benefit plan.

- Create public-private partnerships to run many of the state's charity hospitals, starting with the facilities in Lake Charles and Alexandria.

- Improve teaching hospitals at the LSU medical schools in New Orleans and Shreveport.

- Revise parole eligibility to allow for earlier release of non-violent and older offenders.

- Re-examine and standardize maximum sentences for drug offenses and other non-violent crimes.