

Attracting new or expanding business into Louisiana was one of Governor Kathleen Blanco's main planks on her campaign platform. Only a year into her administration and Ms. Blanco may be on the verge of chasing away one of this state's most recognizable and profitable assets, the New Orleans Saints. Governor Blanco wants a new deal to replace the one agreed upon in 2001 by Former governor Mike Foster and Saints owner, Tom Benson. You don't have to be a Saints fan or even follow sports to understand the positives far outnumber the negatives when studying the economic impact of an NFL franchise.

A survey by Dr. Tim Ryan, a well respected economist and chancellor at the University of New Orleans, estimates that the Saints franchise generates \$180 million yearly to New Orleans and Louisiana's economy. An additional \$25 million in taxes from players and employee salaries are collected each year. In 2004 the state paid the Saints \$7.1 million due to a shortfall of the designated \$15 million to be collected from a hotel-motel tax levied in the New Orleans area. Naming rights for the Louisiana Superdome, which are not yet finalized, could bring an estimated \$3 million to help close the gap.

Surely, Ms. Blanco understands the accounting process of not only developing new business, but retaining existing business in our state. Reports of \$44 million in incentives were given to Union Tank Co. to relocate from another state to Alexandria. Sometimes, money has to be invested to better ourselves and make a profit.

The repercussions from losing the Saints are endless to everyone in the state. What would we do with an almost vacant Superdome? Tulane continues to move more of its games to City Park Stadium. The state owned dome would fall into disrepair and eventually be imploded. No Saints, no Superdome, no Super Bowls, and no annual Sugar Bowl. Major league sports bring a professional image to New Orleans and Louisiana. When a company surveys our area to locate a business, having the Saints is a definite plus.

One can make all the goofy jokes about the Saints not being a professional team and make remarks like, "I would rather pull for Jake and Carolina, anyway". But guess who the joke will be on one day if the Saints move to a bigger and hungrier city such as San Antonio, Las Vegas, or the NFL's choice - Los Angeles. Commissioner Paul Tagliabue would love relocating the team with the second to last smallest TV market over to the west coast and the nation's second largest TV market.

I respectfully request that Governor Blanco use extreme caution when negotiating. Remember, Saints owner, Tom Benson, is an old used car salesman who already has a contract in hand. We all must remember one more fact. If the Saints leave, the NFL is Gone Forever in Louisiana.

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