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Editorial

President Bush, sign our levee bill

President George Bush should sign the Water Resources Development Act, which includes the Terrebonne and Lafourche hurricane-protection system.

Congress has debated the measure and -- finally -- deemed it worthy, passing it earlier this week.

Although Bush has claimed to oppose WRDA on the grounds that it contains too much pork, it also contains some critical projects, such as Morganza.

If the president wants to take issue with the legislative process -- which does, we admit, allow too much pork into federal projects -- so be it.

But don't hold up a project such as Morganza, which could eventually protect thousands of homes, businesses and lives.

Unfortunately, Bush has said he plans to veto the WRDA legislation, and if he does, he could send advocates of the local hurricane-protection system back to square one.

If Bush does veto the bill, there is always the chance that there are enough supporters in Congress to override the veto.

That would require two-thirds votes in each chamber of Congress. Although the bill got enough votes in its first ballot, fewer legislators will be willing to openly oppose Bush's veto.

For years, people in Louisiana have fought to get Morganza authorized in federal legislation, and the current WRDA bill represents the furthest the effort has ever advanced.

And still it is not signed into law.

Local residents should be absolutely clear on this as well: WRDA authorizes the project, but it does not pay for it.

That would take further efforts on Capitol Hill and could take years in itself.

But without authorization, the Morganza effort's future is even more bleak.

There are huge questions that remain unanswered about the prospective hurricane-protection system.

There have been concerns raised about whether the planned alignment of the levee could endanger wetlands and, ultimately, whether it will even be effective against hurricanes.

Advocates counter that it's the best shot we have at building any system that will protect Terrebonne Parish and part of Lafourche.

In the end, we will have to decide whether the current design of Morganza is in the best interest of our area.

The money that will go into it will be a significant investment in our future hurricane protection and we should do all we can to make sure it will succeed.

But that process can't move forward in a meaningful way unless there is federal authorization.

And Bush and Congress hold the key to that.

We urge the president to sign the bill and let us go forward with what could be a great project. Failing that, we urge our congressional leaders to muster their courage and fight the president. We think they can succeed and in many ways we depend on that success.

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