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OPINION

Our Views: Levee costs must be fair



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Every part of this country, it seems, has its own special type of threat from natural disaster.

The Gulf and Atlantic coasts regularly are threatened by hurricanes. The West Coast is vulnerable to earthquakes. As we've seen recently, the Midwest is susceptible to flooding.

Taxpayers in other parts of the nation should hope they are treated better by their government, should they need its help, than the victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Louisiana.

The latest example of Katrina fatigue in our national government: An exorbitant demand for repayment in three years — instead of the usual 30 years — of the state and local share of rebuilding levees in the metropolitan New Orleans area.

As U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., noted in a letter to President Bush on this issue, the \$5.8 billion in federal money for these projects isn't for protection from a Category 5 hurricane. It's just to bring the levees up to their supposed standards before Katrina struck almost three years ago.

Louisiana would have to put up \$1.8 billion as its share of

the cost of the levee work, in just the three years.

As Gov. Bobby Jindal and members of the state delegation in Congress have argued, Louisiana doesn't want a free ride on the cost share. But our state shouldn't have to pony up \$600 million or more a year for the urgent levee projects.

The cost share poses "irreparable harm to our ongoing recovery efforts," Jindal added.

Congress passed the new levee authorization — a good thing — but without provisions for extended repayment over 30 years.

It does not make sense to hit Louisiana with a three-year bill for cost-share money that usually is spread out for far longer periods.

As Jindal, Landrieu and others have said, give us the standard 30-year deal. The government has not been ungenerous, but in this case it seems unreasonable.

We hope the president will do what he can to make this repayment schedule more reasonable.

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