

SBC president joins faith leaders opposing Louisiana tax plan

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NEW ORLEANS (ABP)—Southern Baptist Convention President Fred Luter is among nearly 250 Louisiana clergy who signed an open letter opposing Gov. Bobby Jindal's plan to raise the state sales tax to 5.88 percent.

Luter, pastor of [Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans](#), is among names identified as the United Faith Community of Louisiana in an open letter voicing "deep concern" about the Republican governor's tax proposal for the upcoming legislative session.

According to the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, the planned increase in the sales tax would raise the current rate by about 47 percent and would be added on top of local sales taxes. Residents in New Orleans, for example, would pay a combined rate of about 11 percent under the plan.

Most regressive in nation

Clergy members say Louisiana already has one of the most regressive tax systems in the nation, putting a disproportionately high burden on low- and moderate-income families. The chief reason, they said in the letter, is the state's heavy reliance on the sales tax.

"It is universally recognized that sales taxes create a disproportionate burden on poor and moderate-income families, who spend nearly all they earn," the letter said.

"Louisiana already has the third-highest sales tax rate in the nation," the

letter continued. “We are concerned that your tax plan seeks to increase our state’s sales tax rates even further.”

Burden on the poor

The clergy leaders said increasing the sales tax would “deepen the root causes behind the unfair and regressive nature of our state’s tax structure and worsen the burden for poor and moderate-income families in our community.”

Further, they said, the additional burden on lower-income families is not to fund important needs but instead “to decrease the tax burden for those members of our community who are most blessed with wealth and resources.”

Clergy leaders called on Jindal to reframe tax reform in ways that “would be just and in accord with the ethical frameworks of our faith traditions.”

Find new revenue sources

“Tax reform should not increase the sales tax rate or take any other steps that make our tax structure more regressive than it is already,” the clergy said. “New sources of revenue should be used not merely to redistribute the tax burden from one group to another, but to invest in high priorities for our state, such as health care, education, human services and infrastructure, which have seen significant and far-reaching cuts in recent years.”

The clergy leaders also expressed doubt that the governor’s proposed tax plan will be sustainable over the long term. Sales typically grow slower than personal income, meaning the state would be moving from a faster-growing revenue source to a slower one.