

Stuck on Stupid? Maybe.

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fiefdom (noun): anything, as an organization or real estate, owned or controlled by one dominant person or group.

If you haven't heard, Harry Anderson and his wife, Elizabeth, left New Orleans. On their way out, they talked with the [New York Times](#) and, among other things, noted that New Orleans appears to be "Stuck on Stupid."

New Orleanians hate nothing more than someone telling us what we already know. It sends us into weird spasms of denial—like when someone from out of town comments on how filthy the city is (even pre-levee failure) and suddenly the Times-Picayune is filled with letters from indignant residents bizarrely claiming that no city is in fact cleaner than New Orleans.

So before we all get our righteous indignation fired up, perhaps it bears taking a moment to contemplate what Anderson (and countless others who are voting with their feet) is saying and what we as a community might do to ensure that he is wrong — at least in the long-term. Because like it or not he appears to have truth on his side at the moment.

Anderson singles out the continuing leadership failure of the Nagin Administration along with some specific grievances related to the tax assessment on his property and Entergy's inability to provide professional services. Back in June, a group of developers, real estate brokers and architects [told City Hall](#) that systemic problems in the permitting process were jeopardizing billions of dollars in investments.

What these two disparate—and admittedly anecdotal—examples point to is something we all have known for quite some time: that if our community is to thrive, we need large-scale institutional changes to the way business is done in New Orleans. Not just a new council or a new ordinance but serious reforms that will ensure that our gains today are enshrined in law and not dependent upon the good graces of whoever happens to be in office at any given moment.

We have three opportunities before us right now that together could go a long way toward ensuring that we don't get stuck on stupid.

The first is the [Consolidation of the Levee Boards](#) .

The second is the [Consolidation of the Tax Assessors](#).

The third is the passage of the proposed [changes to the New Orleans City Charter](#) that will place citizen participation legally in the planning process, create a master plan with the force of law, and will dismantle once and for all the system of councilmanic fiefdoms that has done so much damage to our community. [PDF of the full Bureau of Governmental Research report is available [here](#)]

We've lost enough families. We've lost enough businesses. Business as usual never was good enough.

This past year has taken its toll on all of us, but we need to complete the journey. So lets pull together one more time: talk with your neighbors, get active in the passage of these three initiatives, keep a little bit of that pissed-off energy in reserve for when we need it! This is our community and we need to make certain that our political elite understand this simple lesson once and for all.

*In the long run men hit only what they aim at.
Therefore, though they should fail immediately,
they had better aim at something high.
-Henry David Thoreau*