



## Together Louisiana Leaders Meet with Gov. John Bel Edwards



Rev. Lee Wesley of Together Louisiana Calls First Meeting with Gov. Edwards to order.

### Monday, March 7, 2016

Thirty-three leaders from across all sections of Louisiana met with Gov. John Bel Edwards in the waning days of a Special Session of the Legislature called to address an almost \$3 billion deficit. Outgoing Gov. Bobby Jindal left the deficit of \$900 million in the current fiscal year and \$1.9 Billion in the next fiscal year to the state. Gov. Edwards who is in the early days of his third month in office has already kept two pledges to TLA, the statewide network of local broad based organizations and institutions affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, the nation's oldest and largest organizing network, one is regularly meeting with TLA leaders and the second is the Expansion of Medicaid.

At the beginning of the Monday afternoon meeting, the Governor announced that Medicaid Expansion would take affect on July 1 and would have a \$100 million positive impact on the state budget. The Governor laid out the current negotiations with legislators over the budget deficit and thanked TLA for its daily presence in the legislature. TLA leaders told the Gov. Edwards that they had remained silent around the 1cent sales tax increase passed by both houses to address the current fiscal crisis. The Governor stated that being a good Catholic, "He would go to confession before Easter and confess the sin of the sales tax." Rev. Lee Wesley asked, "How much sales tax he would confess?" The Governor responded with whatever the final number is. Governor Edwards asked the leaders to work with him on long-term fiscal reform and TLA pledged their desire to work with him but expressed concern about even short-term expansion of regressive sales taxes as potentially blocking future leverage for progressive tax reform. He also pledged to address several pressing issues on the TLA agenda, among them the water quality issue in St. Joseph and the statewide problem of food deserts. At the conclusion of the meeting Governor Edwards pledged to participate in the TLA Leadership Assembly in April to continue discuss the current issues facing the state and to engage TLA around its vision for the future of Louisiana.

**Further Legislative Update:**

On the last day of the legislative special session, 10 Together Louisiana Leaders went to the Legislature with a mission to kill two bills one would replace the progressive income tax with a flat tax and the other would raise sales taxes beyond the one cent already approved by the legislature. As the session closed both bills were dead and after his press conference Gov. John Bel Edwards thanked TLA leaders for our work.