

Lawmakers need to toss away the report of a task force that recommended renewing the Crescent City Connection tolls and listen to the protests from dozens of residents who attended a public hearing Tuesday night.

More than 150 people showed up to oppose the renewal of the tolls, which are set to expire at the end of the year. They complained, accurately, that officials had wasted millions of dollars in toll money instead of using those funds to pay for roadwork.

"If the money had been spent properly, we wouldn't be here," said Marrero resident Wade Perrin.

State Treasurer John Kennedy, who attended the hearing to oppose the tolls, said only 19 cents of every toll dollar is used to maintain and police the bridge. As Mr. Kennedy explained, tolls are a user fee, not a tax, but the users of the bridge have gotten only a fraction of their money back in services.

The task force was formed to find ways to financially fund operations without tolls. But a majority of the panel ignored the mandate and recommended that the tolls be renewed.

Without the tolls, the bridge still would have a \$5 million annual budget. Task force member Michael Teachworth, who voted against renewing the tolls, said the remaining budget would pay for policing, lighting and landscaping on the bridge, among other basic services. Mr. Teachworth said the state should pay for the bridge's maintenance, as it does for all other Mississippi River bridges in Louisiana.

That's the fair thing to do.