

House authorizes auditor to examine uses of CCC - Times-Picayune, The (New Orleans, LA) - June 23, 2011 - page A 02

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BATON ROUGE -- The House has authorized Legislative Auditor Darryl Purpera to look into possible improper uses of **Crescent City Connection** toll revenues and the way some related contracts have been awarded.

Without objection, the House late Tuesday approved House Resolution 106 by Rep. **Patrick Connick**, R-Harvey, who has been a critic of the spending practices of the CCC Division of the state Department of Transportation and Development.

The resolution does not have the force of law but authorizes or directs an agency to take action. The resolution does not need Senate approval.

"This is stuff that has come out recently," Connick said. "It has not been looked at."

Rep. Jeff Arnold, D-Algiers, tried to amend the resolution to have the allegations Connick aired included in an audit Purpera now has under way, but that request was rejected.

Arnold pointed out that 13 audits have been conducted on span-related issues in the past few years.

Connick's resolution says that an internal investigation by the transportation department, which oversees the bridge, has "uncovered irregularities in the awarding, performance and payment of certain contracts" in the bridge division.

Connick said that about \$1 million in toll money has been spent on repairs to the ferries and bridges as well as CCC lighting without awarding or renewing contracts.

He said that an engineer working for the CCC Division was "dismissed for procurement errors and for issuing work orders without written contracts for ferry repairs and decorative bridge lighting."

The resolution says the department's internal investigation also found that CCC tolls were used to pay for administrators' salaries to work on the Louisiana 1 toll bridge near Grand Isle, an arrangement not authorized by law. It also says that toll money allegedly was used to make improper payments of \$60,000 in legal fees related to the Louisiana 1 bridge.

Connick asked Purpera to report on ferry repairs for the past seven years and make the audit available to lawmakers no later than 30 days before the start of the 2012 regular session, which is scheduled to open in mid-March.

The House also amended then approved, 50-40, Senate Concurrent Resolution 47 by Sen. David Heitmeier, D-Algiers, to create a 10-member task force of professional and civic leaders to look into the fate of the tolls on the CCC, which are scheduled to expire at the end of 2012.

The task force would have to show its findings to lawmakers on the future of tolls, how the span could be operated without them and the future of the bridge police force and ferries that rely on toll revenues.

Connick amended Heitmeier's measure in the House to require that the task force appointees be subject to the same financial disclosure requirements as lawmakers. He also amended it to require that the task force members meet in open sessions, serve without pay and make a report to lawmakers by Feb. 1.

Arnold, who handled the measure for Heitmeier, said the resolution is "not about the past of the bridge but about its future. ... Are we going to have tolls going forward?"

Heitmeier indicated he will ask the Senate to go along with the changes made by the House.

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