The recently completed legislative session fell short in some crucial areas, but there were also some notable accomplishments. Critics acknowledged the meaningful work but complained that opportunities for post-hurricane reform were too often missed. The Public Affairs Research Council says the state still faces monumental problems with health care, higher education, teacher pay and ethics.

The criticism is accurate.

The Council for a Better Louisiana complained "some of the fundamental restructuring of government at the state level that one might have hoped to see post-storms never occurred." Still, CABL recognized worthwhile accomplishments during the session. Lawmakers voted to consolidate some elected posts in New Orleans, including a proposed constitutional amendment to reduce the number of assessors from seven to one. Money was set aside to cover federal charges for disaster-response programs and future possible evacuations. Those were CABL priorities.

Despite its shortcomings, Gov. Kathleen Blanco had something to shout about when the session drew to a close. Her basic agenda moved smoothly through both houses.

The governor was vocally proud of issues such as education pay raises passed during the session, the reorganization of New Orleans government, setting up a program for using ethanol in a blend with gasoline, and reorganizing the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness to include creation of nine regional deputy directors to coordinate emergency response.

The "No Pet Left Behind" bill passed, mandating all local emergency preparedness officials to include dogs and cats in their plans to evacuate people without their own transportation.
Nursing-home evacuation plans can now be more critically reviewed.

Legislators empowered the state Department of Health and Hospitals to review and order revisions to individual evacuation plans of nursing homes. Current law requires nursing homes only to have a plan, but the state has no power to review it for viability.

Health care was not totally ignored. A new commission is charged with developing a comprehensive plan for designing a new health-care delivery system for the uninsured, first in New Orleans, then statewide. State Rep. Sydnie Mae Durand, D-St. Martinville, drafted the resolution in response to a request by U.S. Health Secretary Michael Leavitt after his visit to Louisiana this spring to talk about funding for a new system.

There is much in which Blanco and members of the legislature can take pride.

In the area of long-term reform of health care and other key state issues, however, there is much left undone.

The fact they are not in session does not bar lawmakers from studying problems and seeking solutions. Most of the remaining problems have been clearly identified. The momentum should continue.