Editorial: Stop criminals from killing New Orleans

New Orleans CityBusiness

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It's about time New Orleans faced its crime problem head on.

New Orleans has long made excuses for and tried to explain away its outrageous violence and murder statistics.

So it's encouraging to see Mayor C. Ray Nagin and Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco team together to face the crime issue. We welcome the presence of the National Guard as heartily as frightened residents in isolated neighborhoods must welcome them.

For too long, city and state officials would have been too timid to make such a bold move. They would have fretted more about the stain on our national image than the blood in our streets.

Business pressures have also played a part. Tourism officials, always quick to point out most murders usually happen away from hot spots frequented by travelers, want the best spin put on our atrocious crime patterns for fear of scaring people away. But the best way to attract business is to quell the violence, not sell a rosy image.
We need to recognize crime is the 800-pound gorilla in the room. And it's killing our city.

To reduce crime, we will need more police officers. We must pay police more and hire more law officers. The New Orleans City Council was wise to do away with the residency requirement that restricted its ability to hire enough officers post-Katrina. Police Superintendent Warren Riley must now be given the money necessary to expand his force, which is eroding from officers who tire of living and working in trailers while risking their lives every day.

Police say theirs is a thankless job when judges fail to impose stiff sentences on violent offenders. Too often, police arrest murder suspects who are later released. The 19 percent conviction rate for New Orleans murder suspects is an indictment of the entire judicial process.

The National Guard presence is welcome but it's only a Band-Aid. We need to help solve the crime problem ourselves through mentor programs for teens involved in crime and Neighborhood Watch groups who help each other patrol their own neighborhoods. The New Orleans Police Department needs to make community outreach one of its top priorities. The citizenry must respond.

It's not just the New Orleans image being snuffed by these senseless
killings. It's the city itself. Let's do all it takes to cut down on crime.