

EDITORIAL: Keep watch on ICF

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The state's relationship with Road Home contractor ICF is drawing to a close, and that's certainly a relief.

But the state still needs to keep a careful eye on the company even in these waning days, as a dispute over legal bills proves. The state's legislative auditor found that the Louisiana Recovery Authority paid \$340,000 in bills that ICF incurred defending itself from employee lawsuits.

Those bills aren't the state's responsibility and shouldn't have been submitted to the LRA, recovery chief Paul Rainwater said.

The state is liable for some of ICF's legal bills under its contract, but not for lawsuits filed by employees that include things like age discrimination or overtime disputes.

"That's between them and their employees," Mr. Rainwater said. "We're not going to pay that."

Indeed, the state shouldn't pay ICF one dime more than the company is contractually entitled to receive. ICF's abysmal management of the Road Home program hampered people's recovery from the 2005 hurricanes and caused great misery and hardship.

The state has withheld \$4 million in travel and overtime expenses that ICF tried to collect, and it's also fining the company another \$1 million for failing to meet performance benchmarks. But it's a shame that Louisiana didn't include more benchmarks in its \$912 million contract with the Virginia company.

"They hold up charts of how their stock price drops when I criticize them," Mr. Rainwater said. "That's their mindset."

But Mr. Rainwater should continue to speak his mind. Louisiana officials have no reason to feel sorry for ICF. Dropping stock prices are hardly unique these days. And in any event, ICF chose to go public shortly after it secured the massive Road Home project.

Surely it was in ICF's best interest to do a good job and earn praise instead of censure.

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