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The Town Talk

### **'Glass pockets' legislation extended to local officials**

BATON ROUGE -- All elected officials in Louisiana would have to disclose the sources of any income above \$5,000, under "glass pockets" legislation that cleared the Louisiana House late Wednesday afternoon.

The House voted 85-14 in favor of House Bill 730 that is aimed at giving constituents the ability to see whether officials might have a personal financial conflict. The legislation, co-sponsored by Reps. Michael Jackson, D-Baton Rouge, and Don Casayoux, D-New Roads, originally applied to state legislators. Louisiana Ethics 1, a group of chambers of commerce and civic groups, backed the legislation as a means of helping overcome Louisiana's long-standing reputation as one of the nation's most politically corrupt states.

Jackson said Louisiana ranks last in the South and 44th in the nation in income disclosure requirements, according to several Washington-based rating groups. The legislation would put Louisiana in the top five, he said. "We need to shed more light on what we do as legislators," Jackson said.

House members, who spent more than an hour debating the legislation, backed an amendment extending it to all elected officials as a means of creating opposition as it heads to the Senate. They backed changes that extend its provision to members of the State Ethics Administration Board that would administer the program as well as to top appointed officials. In addition, the House made the bill effective Aug. 15, instead of Jan. 1, so that it would apply to all candidates who qualify to run in the fall elections.

The bill would require that officials disclose only the sources, not the amounts, of income of more than \$5,000, as well as ownership of property other than their home, income above \$250 from a public agency received by their business in which they own at least 10 percent interest. The disclosure would also have to be made by the spouses of the reporting official.

Filing a false report would be punishable by a fine of \$1,000 to \$10,000 and up to six months in jail.

Rep. Gary Smith, D-Norco, sponsored the amendment requiring all local elected officials to file the same forms. "If it's good for us, it ought to be especially good for officials on the local level " who have a lot more contracting authority." Over Jackson's objections, the House voted 80-18 in favor of the amendment.

"I guess we all want to go to jail around here," said Rep. Charlie DeWitt, D-Alexandria, one of those who openly opposed the legislation, "because if you leave anything off, you have to pay a fine or go to jail."

(John Hill)