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The Advocate

## **Last week at the Capitol**

Lawmakers are meeting in a regular legislative session that must end by June 28. A look at the happenings so far:

### **BIG DEAL OF THE WEEK:**

The House approved a \$29.6 billion budget for next year, rejecting attempts to reduce spending increases or to steer more money to hurricane recovery.

The House kept nearly all the spending recommended by Gov. Kathleen Blanco for the new fiscal year that begins July 1. The budget bill (House Bill 1) includes state worker pay raises, new government jobs and new money for education and health-care programs. It is \$2.9 billion larger than the \$26.7 billion budget bill approved by lawmakers last year.

Republicans tried to reduce spending, but their proposals were rejected by the House. The bill advanced by the House has less room for tax breaks than the tax cuts backed by the Senate.

### **IN THE WORKS:**

Competing versions of legislation that would require elected officials around Louisiana and candidates for those jobs to provide the public with information about how and where they make their money are moving through the Legislature.

Both bills — one approved by the House and another by a Senate committee — would require income disclosure from all elected officials and candidates for those offices. But the bills take vastly different approaches to that reporting.

The bill by Sen. Rob Marianneaux, D-Livonia, (Senate Bill 157) would require all Louisiana's elected officials and candidates to make their income tax returns a public record so that citizens can review their sources of moneymaking and employment. It awaits debate in the Senate.

The House approved and sent to the Senate a bill (House Bill 730) by Rep. Michael Jackson, D-Baton Rouge, that would add more people to the disclosure requirements, including appointed public officials and officials' spouses. But the disclosure wouldn't be in specific amounts.

## OTHER BILLS ADVANCING:

-- A bill that would raise minimum car insurance requirements in Louisiana — thereby raising insurance costs for thousands of drivers who carry the minimum insurance needed — was approved by the Senate and now heads to the House for debate.

Supporters of the bill (Senate Bill 223) by Sen. Mike Michot, R-Lafayette, said the minimum automobile liability coverage required by the law was set more than 20 years ago and often doesn't cover the damage in an accident. Opponents said the change would raise costs on people who couldn't afford the increases, raise the minimum insurance standard beyond the worth of many vehicles and force people to drop insurance coverage altogether.

-- The House passed minor changes to the statewide building code, approving compromise bills (House Bills 486 and 704) after north Louisiana lawmakers backed off demands for more sweeping changes. Among other provisions, the measures by Reps. James Fannin, D-Jonesboro, and Gil Pinac, D-Crowley, would loosen code enforcement on the installation of insulation and on simple renovations to existing homes.

## WHAT'S COMING UP:

-- The Senate's budget-writing committee begins combing through next year's budget proposal (House Bill 1) in hearings that begin today. The hearings in the Senate Finance Committee are expected to last days.

-- The House's budget committee is expected to consider bills that would divvy up \$300 million the Legislature had set aside to try to lure a new steel plant to Louisiana. Alabama got the mill, and now lawmakers are looking at ways to tap into the mill fund. Among the proposals: using all or some of the money to help reduce the projected shortfall in the Road Home program.

-- A Senate committee is expected to consider this week two proposals to ban a rare late-term abortion procedure, so-called "partial birth abortion." The measures (Senate Bill 161 and House Bill 614) by Rep. Gary Beard, R-Baton Rouge, and Sen. Ben Nevers, D-Bogalusa, would outlaw the surgery except in cases when a pregnancy endangers the mother's life. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a federal ban on such procedures in April.

## DEAD AND BURIED:

Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, said he's given up on his bill that would ban firearms in college dorms. The National Rifle Association opposed the measure (House Bill 461), which would have included dorms in the firearm-free school zone portion of state law. The bill failed on an 8-2 vote in the House Criminal Justice Committee.

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK:

“They got the ham, and we got the squeal.”

— Rep. Troy Hebert, D-Jeanerette, talking about a “compromise” worked out between the Governor’s Office and the House over changes to the statewide building code.