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La. Senate votes to force politicians' financial disclosure

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) ~ The Senate voted on Wednesday to force mayors, legislators and other politicians to report their incomes, an attempt to clean up Louisiana's reputation for corruption.

Senators approved a bill that would force local and state incumbents and candidates to publicly report the range of income from each investment or employer. Sen. Butch Gautreaux and other supporters said the state will never shed its foul reputation unless its politicians acknowledge where their money comes from.

"The perception out there is that we are a corrupt state, and I know it's not true and you know it's not true, but it's out there," said Gautreaux, D-Morgan City.

The measure, by Rep. Michael Jackson, D-Baton Rouge, faces another major hurdle: changes made in the Senate must be approved by the full House. If the House rejects them, the bill will end up in a committee of House and Senate members.

The House supported simple disclosure, where politicians had to report receipt of amounts of more than \$10,000.

The Senate altered the measure drastically. Some senators argued that such minimal disclosure was pointless, and would merely trigger curiosity in the public about how much more than \$10,000 a politician received from various employers and investments.

"Let's get a grip. Let's do something that's meaningful," said Sen. Tom Schedler, R-Mandeville.

With a 19-17 vote, senators approved an amendment by Sen. Rob Marianneaux, D-Livonia, to strengthen the bill. As it stands now, the bill would force disclosure of income ranges ~ between \$50,000 and \$100,000, for instance ~ similar to the way members of Congress are forced to report.

Jackson's bill has the backing of a coalition of local chambers of commerce, who argued that financial disclosure will ease investors' fears of bribery and graft when they consider doing business in Louisiana.