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CABLWire

## **Ethics Update**

Watching the intrigue surrounding HB 730 that deals with legislative financial disclosure is something like watching one of those serial shows with plot twists and turns at every juncture. Or maybe Survivor, though on that one you know someone will make it to the end. With HB 730 it's not at all clear whether it will survive or be killed off in the final episode.

At issue is how much financial disclosure lawmakers really want. The House and the Senate are on record with pretty large differences in their points of view. The bill began as a proposal from a coalition of organizations around the state, including CABL, called LA Ethics 1. It did not provide the full level of disclosure that some advocate, but CABL believes it struck a reasonable balance between providing a level of privacy for lawmakers and giving citizens some idea about their finances with regard to potential conflicts of interest.

So here's what's happened in a nutshell. The House of Representatives, in essence, weakened the reporting requirements. Then, in a seeming effort to make the measure more politically unpalatable, they required financial disclosure for virtually every elected and appointed official in the state.

The Senate addressed the financial disclosure issue in two ways. First, it passed SB 157 which took things to the other extreme by requiring legislators and most elected officials to disclose their federal income tax returns. Then when HB 730 came to a vote on the Senate floor yesterday, they heavily amended it to provide a much greater level of disclosure than the original LA Ethics 1 proposal and passed it unanimously.

So where does that leave us? In a curious situation. The Senate is now on record multiple times for what senators will no doubt argue is an extremely high level of financial disclosure. The House is on record for something considerably less. So, the House will likely reject the Senate changes and send it to a conference committee between the two chambers to try to resolve the differences. The problem is, despite the lopsided votes in favor of financial disclosure in both chambers, there really isn't an appetite among many legislators to have it. So what you could end up with is everyone voting for ethics reform legislation, the two chambers unable to find a compromise between their two approaches, and – voila – no survivor. Or, perhaps, this one is more like The Sopranos. You'll have to wait until the final episode to see if HB 730 gets whacked.

That would be unfortunate. This has been a good faith effort to provide a reasonable level of financial disclosure for legislators. The original proposal did not ask too much of anyone. It would be a shame if Louisiana citizens are once again shortchanged on an issue that is clearly of importance to many in our state.