

June 26, 2007
CABLWire

It's Time to Get Serious About Ethics Reform

It's make it or break it time for HB 730, the lynchpin legislation in the LA Ethics 1 package which calls for legislative financial disclosure. Despite versions of the bill having passed overwhelmingly in both the House and Senate, there is no question that this legislation has been a political football. And at least some lawmakers have, no doubt, enjoyed kicking it around.

But the fun and games are over. The session is winding down and the political machinations need to come to an end. It's time to get serious and answer one simple question. Will Louisiana have substantive reform in legislative financial disclosure or not? It's as simple as that.

One of two things need to happen. Either members of the House of Representatives should vote to support HB 730 in its current form and send it to the governor for her signature, or they need to commit to a good faith effort to find a reasonable compromise in the conference committee. That last point is critical.

Right now the House and Senate are on record at opposite extremes on financial disclosure. The House went for a little. The Senate went for a lot. Theoretically, that leaves a lot of room for compromise. Unless, as many fear, lawmakers don't really want to compromise, but want the bill to die.

Without doubt, the secretive conference committee would be a good place to do it. In fact, it's probably the best place for those against reform since the bill can be killed without any fingerprints. The vast majority of legislators can then go home with the alibi

that they are officially on record for voting for one version of financial disclosure or another. Very convenient.

But the opposite could happen, too. Since the House and Senate have taken vastly different approaches to disclosure, they could work together to strike a fair balance somewhere in the large middle ground available for compromise. That would be a great win for Louisiana.

Whatever happens, though, the citizens of the state are watching. They may not understand everything that happened with the budget, but they get this one. If the Louisiana Legislature cannot find a way to provide some level of financial disclosure when there is so much room for legitimate compromise, we'll get just what an already cynical electorate needs right now – another “I told you so” moment courtesy of the 2007 legislative session. It's not too late to avoid that. For those who would like to weigh in with legislators and get in on the debate, go to the LA Ethics 1 web site.