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The Daily Advertiser

Ethics Groups Will Help Educate Voters

It is a habit among many Louisiana legislators to shoot down meaningful ethics bills. They did it in this year's session by loading down a reform measure backed by LA Ethics 1 with extraneous provisions that boosted opposition. The death of the bill, which demanded greater disclosure of legislators' financial interests, allows us to maintain a shabby reputation that harms us economically and in a variety of other ways.

It always has been easy to kill ethics-reform bills. Now, if the electorate will join in a partnership with two powerful organizations that are devoting extensive resources to good government initiatives, we can make it considerably more difficult.

LA Ethics 1 plans to demand that candidates in the next election let voters know where they stand on the disclosure issue that was so shamelessly tossed aside. Voters will know which candidates are sincere about improving the state's image and making the public's business totally public.

The Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce is already on board, pledging that business leaders will back candidates for the Legislature and for governor who support the proposed disclosure law and other ethics measures. Another strong organization called Blueprint Louisiana also will work to make it very hard for legislators to crush reform proposals. The business people and civic leaders involved in the organization plan to make disclosure one of their five major campaign issues in the fall.

Getting Louisiana on the right side of ethics reform is a severe challenge. As with LA Ethics 1, some of the state's most capable leaders are responding through Blueprint Louisiana. Public input, gathered at regional meetings, will provide the basis of proposals for ethics reform and other issues including education, health care, government processes, transportation and fiscal reform.

Candidates for office in the fall election will be challenged to endorse the good government agenda. We, the voters, will know their response. Blueprint Louisiana is investing more than time and energy. They are planning to spend \$3.5 million in the drive for change. A strong advertising program will create voter awareness.

For too long now, we have voted on the basis of clever political advertising, which has told us little about a candidate's stance on critical issues. This time, through the work of LA Ethics 1 and Blueprint Louisiana, we will have an unprecedented amount of information on which to base our Election Day decisions.

The bottom line is that powerful, dedicated, hard-working people are giving us a way to identify and support candidates who will work to change the state's image - by changing

the way government does business. After all the hard work by LA Ethics 1 and Blueprint Louisiana, we, the voters, are still the key to change. Take the information they will present, then use it and the ballot to make our state better.