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### **Disclosure rules target local officials**

A bill setting new guidelines for disclosure of personal financial information by public officials is improving as it moves through the legislative process. We were encouraged when a majority of statewide officials supported a move to apply the same disclosure rules applicable to the governor to their offices. Now, that bill has been amended to require that local elected and appointed officials also file disclosure statements.

Rep. Gary Smith, D-Norco, pushed for inclusion of local elected officials such as police jurors and city councilmen in the list of officials subject to the bill's provisions. Rep. William Daniel, R-Baton Rouge, took the issue further, proposing that the disclosure rules, which would give the public some idea of income sources, debts owed, property owned and investments made, be applied to appointed officials as well. That would cover heads of agencies and members of boards and commissions.

The bill made it through the House with the new provisions. We hope it does not hit a brick wall in the Senate.

Currently, the governor and state legislators are subject to disclosure regulations. That might give the impression they are the only ones who need to be watched - a peculiar attitude when you consider that three Louisiana insurance commissioners in a row have been tried, convicted and jailed in recent years. As Daniel pointed out, secretaries of state agencies may have more conflicts of interest than legislators because they can sway the way contracts for millions of dollars are awarded.

At the local level, city council members, police jurors, assessors, clerks of court and others may have less clout, but there is still the potential for conflicts of interest. Louisiana's history of graft and corruption has never been limited to the governor and Legislature. Over the years, conflicts of interest have surfaced across the entire spectrum of government activity. Probably the most glaring example at a local level was the old levee board system, which, before being revamped last year, was described by the New Orleans Times-Picayune as having "a dismal history of political intrigue."

While the disclosure bill has been expanded to cover a wider range of public officials, it left the House with somewhat weakened guidelines for public disclosure. Instead of specific dollar amounts, it would require that financial data be reported in broad categories - one for amounts of more than \$10,000 and the other for lesser amounts. For income, property, investment or liability valued below \$5,000, no reporting would be required. We have little hope that the Senate will strengthen the requirements.

In an ideal situation, local officials would follow the lead of statewide officials, throwing their support behind that part of the bill requiring full disclosure of financial information

at their level of government. It would be gratifying to see Lafayette officials at the forefront of such a move.