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### **Our Views: Load wagon to kill a bill**

Was it an outburst of enthusiasm for ethics reform that led the state House to pass a major bill on the subject by the whopping vote of 88-13?

Think again.

The House passed the bill only after it was loaded with amendments that, while seeming to expand financial disclosure reporting by officials, could sink the bill. The initial bill, HB730, was pushed before the session by a coalition of business and good-government groups as a way to make Louisiana one of the leaders among the states in government ethics.

When it hit the House floor, it would have provided for financial disclosure by legislators and candidates for the Legislature, and for statewide elected officials and candidates as well.

The governor already must report sources of income.

Many legislators have scoffed at such proposals in the past, considering them an invasion of privacy.

HB730 met these objections by setting up a reporting system that reports income only in broad ranges. It is not intrusive, and it is intended to make Louisiana's law consistent with that in the most progressive states in the nation. The bill follows the pattern long established for the governor's income disclosures.

Members of the House clearly did not want to be on record voting against an ethics bill. But the House amendments might "improve" the bill to death.

Amendments added a slew of other officials to the list of those reporting, from local elected officials to a number of appointed officials in state government. They also advanced the effective date of the bill to Aug. 15, making it apply to candidates running in the fall elections. That's an administrative nightmare in the making.

Shrewd judges of horse flesh, the members of the House have an instinct for what each beast will carry.

Every amendment to HB730 adds to the group of opponents who might be interested in opposing the measure in a critical hearing in the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee. The House amendments load the beast beyond its limit, likely engendering more opposition in the Senate committee.

There might be a case for financial disclosure of other officials, but the issues involved in those questions were ignored. This is a bill-killing scenario, not a serious case of lawmaking. If the Legislature wants to take credit for ethics reform, let it adopt with reasonable changes the original provisions of HB730. The charade on the House floor last week fooled no one.