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Bill wants elected public officials to report where they get their money

Louisiana is currently in the bottom five states when it comes to ethics laws. A package of bills called LA Ethics 1 is committed to shaping-up Louisiana's image and move it to the top of the list. One bill would make elected public officials report where they get their money.

Legislators are calling for glass pockets on every public official. They say the reason is to give the public more transparency, so they can see how the money is coming and going. Steven Moret with the Baton Rouge Area Chamber says, "This bill provides a lot more transparency than it does today, which is currently roughly zero for most legislators and statewide officials."

Representative Michael Jackson of Baton Rouge wants to make all legislators, statewide elected officials and candidates for office report where they get their money, including the money their spouses make. Senator Cleo Fields asks, "So you're talking about the full-time income of a person's spouse, even if they're not an elected official?" Representative Jackson replies, "That's correct." Fields then asks, "What is the purpose of that?"

Jackson says the point is to expose any related income a spouse might have to politics. Against his wishes, Jackson's bill now includes all elected officials, so anyone from the governor to a school board member would have to report where they get their money. Representative Don Cazayoux says, "One of the main arguments against financial disclosure is that it will deter people from running for office." Representative Jackson says, "By adding every elected official in Louisiana gives this bill no opportunity for compromise."

CEO of the Shaw Group, Jim Bernhard is so convinced that we need some type of ethics reform in Louisiana that he came here to testify for the first time ever. He says, "After spending 400 million (dollars) to recruit a company from Germany, let's not be so naïve to think that part of the ethics in Louisiana wasn't a part of their decision to locate somewhere else. And they went to Alabama, where they were fist-fighting last week in the Senate. Can you imagine what they think of us if they chose that?!"

Bernhard says he has a hard time recruiting employees because of our state's image, and he and other legislators agree that if they can work on it, they'll open a

window to attract more businesses and bring qualified workers to Louisiana. Jackson's bill, in its changed form to include all elected officials, passed out of a Senate committee, so the last step is the Senate floor before it reaches the governor's desk for signature.

(Caroline Moses)