

June 22, 2007
The Town Talk

Our view: Show us the money and the source of it

The Louisiana Senate has voted to require mayors, legislators and other politicians to report their sources of income.

We endorse the move, and encourage the entire Legislature to endorse it.

House Bill 730, the focus of this discussion, attempts to clean up government. While financial disclosure alone won't end corruption in Louisiana, it will go some distance toward improving the state's performance and reputation.

H.B. 730, by state Rep. Michael Jackson, D-East Baton Rouge, would require local and state incumbents and candidates to report the range of income from each investment and employer.

Sen. Butch Gautreaux, D-Morgan City, and other supporters said the state must shed its tainted reputation by allowing the public to see who pays the politicians who want to represent the people.

We agree, completely.

We disagree with anyone who thinks the problem is only a perception. Back-room deals, sweetheart deals, bribes and more waft through this state like so much smoked meat. As we all know, where there's smoke, there's fire.

Listen up, legislators: Louisiana residents believe government is corrupt. They've been burned so many times they'd be fools not to think so.

The House's "glass pockets" proposal got significant changes in the Senate designed to strengthen the measure.

The House version called for simple disclosure, requiring politicians to report the receipt of amounts of \$10,000 and more. Some senators argued that such minimal disclosure was worthless. A politician could receive dozens of \$9,999 checks from various employers and investments, and the public would never know about them.

On a 19-17 vote, senators approved an amendment by Sen. Rob Marionneaux, D-Livonia, to require disclosure of income ranges similar to how members of Congress are required to report.

The proposed changes now go back to the House. If they are rejected, the bill will go to a House-Senate committee.

With the legislative session scheduled to end Saturday, you can guess what might be coming.

Lawmakers will point to the bill, such as it is, and say they tried to pass it, but the other guys just wouldn't do it. That's called politics.

The intent of the bill is important. Call your legislator and say so.

We agree with the coalition of local chambers of commerce and other business leaders who argue effectively that financial disclosure will ease potential investors' concerns about corruption when they consider doing business in Louisiana.

Disclosure also will give Louisiana residents more confidence in their government and in their future.

Read House Bill 730 online at www.legis.state.la.us. Use the bill-search tool.