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The Advocate

Our Views: Iron wrinkles in disclosure

After much legislative gamesmanship, lawmakers ought to have an up-or-down vote on an important ethics bill this year. We don't see any good excuses for a last-minute effort to kill a bill to provide for disclosure of the financial interests of legislators.

The games played with House Bill 730 have been numerous, with the House loading the original bill with amendments. One of them added local officials to the disclosure requirements. The Senate also kept those provisions in the bill, and a joint conference committee should be reporting a final version of the bill in the last hours of the session.

The addition of local officials was touted as an ethics advance but in our view, and that of the original bill's backers, it was an amendment making the bill more difficult to pass.

The bill would provide for financial disclosure only in broad income categories, so it is not overly intrusive on legislators or state-wide elected officials, the latter also included in HB730. The governor already is required to make similar financial disclosure reports.

Including local officials adds large administrative burdens to the measure. We don't believe the question of financial disclosure for local officials has been thought out.

Still, if local officials are in the conference committee's report - and legislators appear to want to share whatever pain there is in the financial disclosure realm with somebody else - it's best to pass the bill.

The Public Affairs Research Council said passage of legislative financial disclosure would be a "historic" advance for Louisiana's ethics law.

We agree that it is an important part of retooling Louisiana's image as a place to do business without shakedowns. Louisiana cannot afford, in what we believe will be a long and difficult recovery period from the 2005 hurricanes, to be viewed as a place where government ethics are captive to political expedience. The original bill's provisions have been improved through the legislative process, although we're still not sold on the local-officials amendment. The bill deserves to pass this year.