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### **Sexton Leaves Ethics Board**

Recently resigned state ethics chief Gray Sexton decided he won't stay in a part-time job with the Louisiana Board of Ethics while officials look for a new administrator.

Sexton told Ethics Board members of his decision in a letter that went out Friday.

The Ethics Board wanted Sexton, a lawyer, to work in a newly created, temporary job during a transition period.

But the offer generated controversy because it was perceived by some as a way for Sexton to continue working for the Ethics Board while avoiding a new state law requiring the ethics administrator – the position from which he resigned - to disclose his private legal clients.

"To avoid what is best described as an intentional mischaracterization by those whose interests are antagonistic to our ethics program, it is best that I decline the board's proposal of continued part-time employment and, perhaps like the old soldier, fade away," Sexton told the board.

"My hope is that this action will frame my four decades of work with the ethics program for what I sincerely believe it truly is: a passion to improve ethics in our state no matter the cost to me personally," he said.

Ethics Board Chairman Hank Perret of Lafayette said he respects Sexton's decision.

"I hope now we can move on with our program and focus on issues and not people," he said.

Perret said the board, not Sexton, suggested he continue in a part-time job to help with transition.

Perret said the board will conduct a national search for a new ethics administrator who will head the agency that polices conflict of interest, campaign finance and lobbyist disclosure laws.

Sexton recommended acting board general counsel Kathleen Allen get the job permanently. He said she is "most qualified" for the job of serving as Louisiana's chief ethics lawyer.

The job is a Civil Service position, meaning the holder is shielded from political firings. A new job description has been written for a general counsel-ethics administrator at a

higher salary range than Sexton's old job. The new salary range is \$85,119 to \$140,358 annually. The old was \$58,261 to \$122,595 a year.

Sexton made \$97,364 annually, according to Civil Service records.

The Louisiana Legislature approved legislation to ban the ethics administrator-general counsel from having outside employment after Aug. 15, 2008. Legislators added a provision that required the administrator-counsel at the time Gov. Kathleen Blanco signed the bill into law to file a report detailing outside clients.

Sexton resigned from the top ethics job the day after Blanco signed the legislation. He said he had no intention of filing the disclosure report.

Rep. William Daniel, R-Baton Rouge, sponsor of the legislation, said the new law would require Sexton to file the report within 30 days because he was administrator when Blanco acted.

Daniel accused the Ethics Board of "making a mockery of ethics" by accepting Sexton's resignation, then hiring him part-time.

"I suppose if he doesn't come back to the Ethics Board in any capacity, it will make it more difficult to pursue (disclosure)," said Daniel.

The legislation was part of a package of bills sponsored by LA Ethics 1 - a coalition of business and public-interest groups - aimed at improving the state's image. The ethics chief's private outside clients could lead to real or perceived conflicts of interest, the group said.

One of Sexton's clients - Baton Rouge contractor Lane Grigsby - spent money to defeat Daniel in Daniel's bid last fall for election to the state Senate.

In an interview, Sexton said he had planned on retiring in January when long-time Ethics Board Chairman Robert Roland left the board. But Sexton said Perret asked him to stay on for another year.

"A handful of legislators on the short-end of Ethics Board charges or campaign finance issues used this vehicle as a way to get rid of me," Sexton said.

(Marsha Shuler)