



## Opinion

### Letter: Bill would be ethics step back

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In the new administration's rush to pass a comprehensive ethics package during this time-limited special session, the League of Women Voters of Louisiana is concerned that one bill, HB41, that was added to the call at the last minute and put on a fast track to passage, would be a giant step backward. HB41 would gut the independent Ethics Board's authority to decide on ethics charges and give it to administrative law judges selected by an appointee of the governor.

Common Cause Louisiana president Wendell Lindsay wrote "This bill was not part of Gov. Jindal's campaign platform, was not considered by his Ethics Advisory Committee, was slipped in the special session call at the last minute, was not made available to the public until its prefiling on the Saturday before the special session was opened on Sunday, and was approved on a continuing fast track by the House Committee on the following Monday.

"Despite the plea from the Ethics Board that there are serious constitutional and other problems with the bill, and despite requests to the governor's office for further study made by CCLA and at least one other good government organization, the House approved the measure last Friday."

A PAR (Public Affairs Research Council) report released Monday says, "The administration proposal to insert administrative law judges into the process of ruling on ethics violations would dilute the existing power of the Board of Ethics. While most of the ethics reform package is in line with previous PAR recommendations, this one raises some troubling questions that require additional research. There should be no rush during this special session to change the power and authority of the Board of Ethics."

The bill's supporters say HB41 is necessary to prevent the Ethics Board acting as both prosecutor and jury. However, that purpose can be accomplished in a number of different ways without having the governor appoint the person who selects the hearing officer.

Yet, for some unexplained reason, the Governor's Office insists that its approach is the only one and it needs to be acted upon immediately.

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Key legislators are the chair and members of the Senate and Governmental Affairs Committee whose identity and contact information can be found online at <http://senate.legis.state.la.us/Senate&Government/Assignments.asp>

**Jean Armstrong, president**  
**League of Women Voters of Louisiana**  
**Baton Rouge**