



## La. legislators disclose profits

Report shows how lawmakers benefit from governmental entities

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About one-third of Louisiana legislators or their spouses made money from state or local governments last year, and a few more benefited from gambling-related enterprises.

That's according to disclosure reports members of the Louisiana House and Senate are required to file with state ethics officials.

The law is designed to inform the public how much legislators and their spouses benefit from governmental entities and from gambling enterprises, in addition to their roughly \$33,000-a-year salaries as lawmakers.

The forms don't require much detail, so some accounts of the income are sketchy.

The reports show a wide range of business activity by lawmakers.

Lawyer and state Rep. Eddie Lambert, R-Gonzales, reported \$2,360 from the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. It had nothing to do with his legal profession but with one of his hobbies.

"I trap alligators, and I do it on a wildlife management area. You do a public bid. It's a percentage of what I catch," he said.

On the other end of the money spectrum are two lawmakers with engineering firms who reported substantial business dealings with cities and towns on public works contracts.

State Rep. Gary Beard, R-Baton Rouge, reported a \$3.9-million publicly bid contract with Lake Charles and a smaller contract with Natchitoches.

Beard said the Lake Charles contract was for a sewage project that has been in the works for some time. He said much of the money his firm received went to subcontractors and other project-related work.

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Rep. Bryant Hammett, D-Ferriday, received more than \$900,000 in projects from various parish and municipal government agencies in his area. Hammett lists 13 local government entities and the state transportation agency as sources of the

money.

The local entities include parish police juries, towns, economic-development districts and ports. There are no details of the projects involved nor how they were financed.

Four legislators reported their or their spouse's association with health-care businesses that, according to state health officials, drew six-figure revenues from Louisiana's Medicaid program.

The top of the bunch is state Sen. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, whose nursing home received \$864,113 for taking care of residents whose care is paid for by the state.

State Rep. Joe Toomy, R-Gretna, reported by far the most revenues derived from business dealings with gambling entities -- \$332,417. Toomy said his wife is part owner of LaPlace Travel Center LLC, which has video poker machines.

"It's a big truck stop. Because it has video poker machines, I have to report it," said Toomy, R-Gretna. "The amount represents her total income from the truck stop operation."

The idea behind the annual reports, which are required by law, is "transparency" -- to let the public evaluate what kind of conflict, if any, exists between the lawmakers' businesses and their legislative positions.

In many cases the reports lack specifics about what work is being done and how much lawmakers or spouses benefited from the business dealings.

Some lawmakers didn't report dollar amounts on their government business dealings.

Public Affairs Research Council President Jim Brandt said his private think tank will turn attention to improving the limited amount of legislative-income reporting now required. Brandt's group favors lawmakers disclosing their income from all sources.

But, Brandt said, it doesn't look like that is going to happen any time soon, so "we might as well correct what we have got." He said his group will propose changing state law next year.

Five legislators reported personal or spousal ownership in businesses that are state Medicaid health insurance program providers. How much the businesses made was not reported on the forms by four of the five lawmakers. State law allows the omission.

The lawmakers simply put on the form that interested parties can contact the health agency for financial data. A public records request found:

- A nursing home part-owned by McPherson pulled down \$864,113 in Medicaid provider payments for care of residents.
- A Monroe rehabilitation hospital part-owned by state Rep. Gil Pinac, D-Crowley, got \$603,422 in Medicaid payments.
- A medical equipment firm owned by Sen. Mike Michot, R-Lafayette, and his wife, got \$563,582.
- A hospice business part-owned by the wife of state Sen. Tom Schedler, R-Mandeville, received \$211,671.

State Sen. Noble Ellington, D-Winnsboro, reported that a home care firm he part-owns made \$24,350 in Medicaid payments in 2004. DHH, however, found no record of payments.

Other lawmakers or their spouses did business with governmental entities in their everyday professions -- an insurance agent, appliance- and farm-supply store owners, lawyers and educators.

State Rep. Dale Erdey, R-Livingston, an insurance agent, reported \$129,915 in business with 11 Livingston Parish governmental entities. The largest is a competitively negotiated \$119,998 contract with the school board. There are others with the assessor, clerk of court, health unit, library, towns and Walker Youth Sports.

"People think automatically you are pushing your weight around to get the business. It's not necessarily true. In my case, I've had those accounts before I was elected," Erdey said.

He said he has had the Livingston Parish School Board account since 1993. The government-related business is generally property and casualty and workers compensation insurance, he said.

The report of state Rep. Hunter Greene, R-Baton Rouge, lists \$82,446 in income from 13 school boards from a "business enterprise" he and his wife own.

In an interview, Greene said the firm is Therapy Options Inc. and it does pediatric occupational and physical therapy in schools. Among the contracts are those with school systems in East and West Baton Rouge parishes, Baker, Zachary, Iberville Parish, East and West Feliciana parishes and Pointe Coupee Parish. There are others elsewhere in the state.

State Reps. Glenn Ansardi, D-Kenner, and Danny Martiny, R-Metairie, both lawyers, represent Jefferson Parish governmental agencies.

Ansardi's law firm made \$510,669 representing the City of Kenner and \$40,535 from the Parish of Jefferson. Martiny has a personal contract with the Jefferson Parish Sheriff's Office, which yielded \$139,489 last year.

Five legislators work for a state college or university and reported their 2004 income from those jobs -- state Reps. Avon Honey, D-Baton Rouge; Nita Hutter, R-Chalmette; Warren Triche, D-Thibodaux; Yvonne Dorsey, D-Baton Rouge; and Tommy Wright, D-Jena.

Honey works for Southern University. The rest are employed by the community and technical college system.

The spouses of state Sen. Sharon Broome and state Rep. Donald Cazayoux also work for state or local educational entities -- Broome's husband, Marvin, for LSU, and Cazayoux's wife, Cherie, for the Pointe Coupee Parish School Board.

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