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## Momentum grows for ethics reform

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Proponents for ethics reform in Louisiana lost a major battle last month, but they certainly aren't deterred.

In fact, those advocating financial disclosure by state legislators appear to be invigorated by the "glass pocket" legislation, and are adding allies to their cause.

Their motivation has been stirred by the defeat of House Bill 730 which in its original form called for legislators and legislative candidates to generally disclose income, assets, liabilities and other financial dealings.

The bill was amended to include all statewide and local elected officials, including mayors, city council members, police jurors and school board members.

The House favored reporting in two categories — under \$10,000 and over \$10,000. The Senate followed the standard for Congress, with 10 monetary categories.

Both the Senate and House approved the bill, which was then sent to a conference committee to work out the financial reporting discrepancies. However, two members of the six-man committee, Sens. Don Hines and Robert Adley, demanded that the amendment requiring local officials to report their income, be stricken from the bill.

House members on the committee, however, wouldn't budge and with no agreement by the committee, the bill failed in the waning hours of the session.

More than one observer believes that the addition of the local officials in the House was ultimately a poison pill that led to the bill's death.

"In the end, neither chamber had to cast a final vote on the bill, so everyone gets to claim they voted for stronger ethics laws, but the shenanigans of the other chamber prevented the bill from passing," said Public Affairs Research Council President Jim Brandt.

Good government groups have pledged to carry on the fight for stronger ethics.

LA Ethics 1 leader Stephen Moret said his group of businessmen and civic leaders will demand that candidates in the fall declare their stance on ethics reform.

Blueprint Louisiana, another coalition of business and civic leaders, will lend its support to candidates who sign to support specific legislation.

"Glass pockets financial disclosure ranks one or two at every single workshop, so clearly it is an issue for voters and citizens of this state," said Blueprint Louisiana organizer Sean Reilly.

Some politicians have already heard the message. Republican gubernatorial candidate Bobby Jindal said that, if elected, his first

action would be to call the Legislature into special session to address ethics reform.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Foster Campbell said Thursday he will press the state Legislature to pass significant ethics reform legislation in 2008 when he is elected governor.

Indeed, the pressure from the electorate is on to address ethics reform in the Legislature.

Despite last month's setback, the momentum appears to be on the side of the reform advocates.