

Officials need to pull back records curtain

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What's good for the goose is good for the governor, to mangle an old saw. Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal rode into office on a crest of ethics reform that inconsistently left too many of his administration's records high, dry and out of the public eye.

In fact, some changes to open records laws had the effect of putting even more of records out of public reach. Protections also extended beyond the governor's staff to state agencies and departments.

In a time of revenue shortfalls, with critical decisions being made on budget cuts and government realignment, it's time for lawmakers to open the curtains on the administration.

State Sen. Robert Adley, R-Benton, and state Rep. Wayne Waddell, R-Shreveport, again are leading an assault on secrecy with Senate Bill 593 and House Bill 307. Each could be heard this week in separate committee hearings.

The measures essentially target those papers — reports, analyses, memos — used to form administration decisions. The bills would remove restrictions on records related to budgeting and also lift the curtain on other records generated in the large bureaucracy outside the governor's office.

Making more records open has been endorsed by the likes of the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana and the League of Women Voters of Louisiana.

Said PAR in a written endorsement, "SB 593 and HB 307 generally aim to set reasonable limits on the existing exceptions in order to maximize public access while protecting only the most sensitive documents." Current law "stifles debate" by "keeping important and useful information out of public view." When it comes to decisions about cutting programs, for instance, the public has a right to the same information available to the administration regarding the impact to services.

Says the League of Women Voters in its pithy observation, "No public official should be above the (Louisiana) open records law."

We agree.