



Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans

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Times-Picayune

EDITORIAL: Common sense on ethics

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

When lawmakers passed tougher ethics reform measures in February, they swept some regular citizens into the net with elected officials.

Many Louisianians who serve on state boards and commissions were put into the same financial reporting category as legislators, the Public Service Commission and other public officials, which **Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans** say is onerous.

"Asking citizens with no political aspirations to disclose financial information that is unrelated to any potential conflicts of interest will dissuade many highly qualified and capable citizens from serving on these organizations," leaders of the citizen advocacy group argue.

They make a good point, and the new requirements are already pushing some residents away from service. Rosemary Ewing, whose husband Randy formerly served as Senate president, decided not to serve on the State Museum Board because of the intrusive disclosure requirements.

As members of the House & Governmental Affairs Committee meet to consider Senate Bill 718 today, they need to keep that in mind.

Kenner Sen. Danny Martiny is trying to ease the reporting provision for appointed boards and commissions. His Senate Bill 718 would move most of them into a lower reporting tier.

That would require board members to report income from government and gambling interests. They also would be required to certify that they have filed federal and state income taxes and certify that the board member or the member's immediate family has no conflict of interest.

Sen. Martiny's bill was straightforward but has been complicated by an amendment from Sen. Joe McPherson of Woodworth that was added on the Senate floor. The amendment essentially puts any board with rule-making authority back into the higher reporting tier. That could erode Sen. Martiny's effort to bring sanity to the reporting requirements.

The House ought to go back to Sen. Martiny's language.

The truth is that lawmakers put these burdensome requirements on boards and commissions on purpose and, in some cases, out of spite. If they had to abide by tougher rules, then they wanted everyone else to do so.

But there is a big difference between being an elected lawmaker with power over virtually every aspect of residents' lives and being an unpaid or low-paid board member who is

setting policy for museums or elder care or animal welfare.

In many cases, members for these citizen boards serve out of a sense of duty and love of their state. Lawmakers ought to encourage that sort of dedication to the public good, not make it a hardship.