

COMMENTARY: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Time Well Spent

Blueprint Louisiana Cites Special Session Accomplishments

The much-anticipated special legislative session on ethics reform is now over. Was it really worth it?

From Blueprint Louisiana's perspective, the time lawmakers spent in Baton Rouge was indeed productive. As a result of their work, we will have a state government that is more accountable to the people and more transparent in its dealings than ever before. In fact, forthcoming national rankings on governmental ethics laws will show that Louisiana is becoming a national model for ethics legislation – granting us an earned opportunity to begin wiping away, once and for all, longstanding national perceptions about Louisiana's political environment.

For this accomplishment, there's a lot of well-deserved credit to go around — to the Jindal Administration for its early and consistent emphasis on ethics and to legislators for asking questions, working the issues, and boldly casting the votes for reform. Citizen participation should not be overlooked, either. For several months now, we have sensed a real commitment from elected officials and citizens alike to move Louisiana forward. What we can take away from this session is that lawmakers are willing to follow rhetoric with action.

Examining the four components of Blueprint's ethics recommendations, we proudly report significant progress.

Financial disclosure for legislators and statewide elected officials — House Bill 1 will require a wide range of elected and appointed officials to file annual reports of their personal financial information. Three reporting tiers will cover statewide elected officials, a variety of high-ranking appointed positions in government, legislators, local officials and members of many boards and commissions.

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Additional registration requirements for lobbyists — Senate Bill 11 will require lobbyists to provide to the Louisiana Board of Ethics timely information on their client(s), payment for lobbying, and subject matter(s) lobbied and also will require lobbyists to file monthly expenditure reports electronically with the board.

Transparency when allocating state funds to non-governmental entities, such as in the General Appropriations Bill — House Resolution 2, House Concurrent Resolution 6 and Senate Resolution 12 all establish legislative rules for the required submission of information by non-governmental entities seeking state funding in appropriations or capital outlay bills.

Strengthening the Louisiana Board of Ethics with additional funding for technology upgrades and additional staff — Many of the new legislative acts passed in the special session had fiscal notes that will be funded in the upcoming 2008-09 state budget.

What else happened to advance ethics reform in the state? While not a complete list of bills that passed, here are a few additional highlights:

- **Senate Bill 1** will prevent legislators, statewide officials, members of the executive branch and some of the governor's staff and their respective spouses from obtaining state contracts after January 2012.
- **Senate Bill 3** will prevent legislators from accepting free tickets to pro, semi-pro or college sporting events and from taking free hunting and fishing trips and golf outings from lobbyists.
- **House Bill 6** will require annual ethics training and education for statewide elected officials, legislators and public service commissioners.
- **House Bill 8** will provide "whistleblower protections" for public employees who report alleged improper activities.

So where do we go from here? For Blueprint, we continue to work diligently on the other parts of our reform agenda — education, workforce development, health care, transportation and coastal issues. We remain very encouraged about the possibility of fundamental change in the state.

Thanks to many dedicated lawmakers and interested citizens, we're on our way to creating the state we deserve.

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