

Lawmakers flood agenda with 384 more measures

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On the last day to file bills, state legislators Tuesday added 384 more measures to their workload for the current session of the Louisiana Legislature.

The state House of Representatives has 1,351 measures on their agenda, while the state Senate has 805.

The regular session of the Legislature, which began March 31, must conclude by 6 p.m. June 23.

State Legislative Black Caucus members used the occasion to announce their support for 45 proposed bills and resolutions.

Exactly what was in the legislation added before the legal deadline lapsed remains something of mystery until House and Senate clerks process the bills and post them online.

Among last minute Senate bills thrown in the hopper were two sponsored by Senate President Joel Chaisson that would alter laws Gov. Bobby Jindal pushed in a February special session on ethics.

The bills by Chaisson, D-Destrehan, are among dozens filed during the 2008 regular session to fix problems and “unintended consequences” of Jindal’s hurriedly passed ethics agenda.

Senate Bill 769 attempts to, among other things, better define what type of contracts with government agencies are required to be disclosed by public officials and their next-of-kin.

Senate Bill 770 would change some of the legislative and executive branch lobbyists’ reporting requirements.

Under one of the changes, a lobbyist who is compensated for both lobbying and non-lobbying activities would only have to report the portion of his income derived from lobbying.

Black Caucus Chairman and state Rep. Juan LaFonta, D-New Orleans, said the caucus has not issued its own legislative package in the past couple years.

Within the caucus package are 15 measures dealing with criminal justice, including a Senate bill that would make the display of a noose in public with the intent of intimidation a felony.

The caucus also is supporting a resolution sponsored by LaFonta to create a task force to study the

discrepancies in the criminal sentencing of African Americans as opposed to other races.

LaFonta said the caucus waited to get as many of its 30 members on board with the package before releasing it. He said only a few had not signed off on it.

LaFonta said the caucus discussed its package with Gov. Jindal, who put them in touch with several state department heads. He said the governor did not commit to anything specifically but felt the criminal justice package was close to what the administration envisioned.

The caucus also supports:

- Six measures dealing with voter registration and voter education.
- 10 bills regarding education.
- Six bills and one resolution awaiting filing regarding health care.
- Seven bills that deal with other issues, including a bill that would prohibit the use of wireless communications while driving without a hands-free device and a prohibition against hiring illegal aliens.

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