

The LRHA Policy Corner

May 8, 2006

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA - UPDATE:

BILL # LRHA Position	Description	Author	1st- House	Comm Report	Passed	2nd- House	Comm Report	Passed	Signed
HB 1 Track	Operating Expenses/State Government	Alario	3/13 HAC						
HB 74 Oppose	Defendant's Required Appearance/Written Notice	Johns	3/ 7 HACJC	4/20	4/25	4/26 SJC-C			
HB 87 Track	Hospital Notification/Law Enforcement	White	3/18 HJC	4/27ca	5/3	5/8			
HB 106 Support	Family Medicine Task Force Termination Ext.	Durand	3/ 8 HHWC	4/ 5	4/10	4/11 SHWC			
HB 133 Support	Medical Records Fees/Certification	Martiny	3/ 9 HCLPC	5/ 2ca					
HB 153 Track	Health Care/Prescription Monitoring Program	Johns	4/20 HHGAC	5/4					
HB 205 Track	Termination Date/La. Comm. HIV, AIDS, Hep. C	LaFonta	3/13 HHWC	4/ 5ca	4/10ca	4/11 SHWC			
HB 261 Track	Pharmacy Practice Act	Johns	3/13 HHWC	4/19	4/24	4/25 SHWC			
HB 302 Support	Dentists-Community Health Care Clinics	Strain	3/14 HHWC	4/ 5	4/10a	4/13 SHWC			
HB 406 Track	Const. Amend./Medicaid Trust Fund for Elderly	Daniel	3/15 HAC	5/ 2					
HB 412 Track	Medical Malpractice Definitions	Johns	3/15 HCLPC	5/ 2					
HB 428 Track	Term Limits/Statewide Elected Officials	Tucker	3/15 HHGAC						
HB 453 Support	Health Care Liability Limitation/Emergency	Toomy	3/15 HCLPC	4/11ca	4/18ca/ a	4/20 SJC-A			
HB 477 Track	Department of Health and Hospitals	Durand	3/15 HHWC						
HB 480 Track	Re-creates Dept. of Social Service	Durand	3/15 HHWC	4/ 6ca	4/11ca	4/13 SHWC			
HB 576 Support	Vital Statistics Registry/Quachita Parish	Walsworth	3/16 HHWC						
HB 621 Track	Pub. Health Prog. Benef. Employer Disc. Act	Burns	3/16 HHWC						
HB 623 Track	Medicaid Cuts	Dorsey	3/27 HAC						
HB 638 Track	Office of Behavioral Health	Jackson M	3/16 HHWC						

HB 663 Support	Licensing of Mental Health Clinics	Lambert	3/27 HHWC						
HB 687 Track	Human Services Districts	Jackson M	3/18 HHWC	4/ 5	4/10	4/11 SHWC			
HB 691 Track	Health Care Facilities/Licensing Fees	Gray	3/18 HHWC	4/ 5					
HB 789 Support	Health Care Providers/Criminal Background	Durand	3/17 HHWC						
HB 792 Support	Health Insurance/Grace Period Notice	Carter K	3/17 HIC	5/3					
HB 831 Oppose	Health Care Consumers Right to Know Act	Jackson M	3/17 HHWC						
HB 846 Support	Health Care Professionals/Registration	Dorsey	3/17 HJC	4/20ca	4/26ca	4/27 SJC-B			
HB 896 Support	Physician Discounts/Rendered Health Care	Walsworth	3/17 HHWC						
HB 897 Track	Hospital Ambulance Transport/Own Campus	McDonald	3/17 HHWC						
HB 989 Track	Uncompensated Care Costs/Community Hospitals	Scalise	3/17 HAC						
HB 996 Track	Medicaid Payments/Uncompensated Care	Crowe	3/17 HAC						
HB 1001 Track	Reimbursement/Nonstate Hospitals/Evacuees	Gray	5/4 HAC	5/4					
HB 1024 Track	Community Hospitals/Uncompensated Care Costs	Scalise	3/17 HAC						
HB 1224 Track	Hospitals/Licensing Requirements/Disasters	Durand	4/19 HHWC						
HB 1240 Support	Hospital Endeavors/Property Taxes	Erith	4/19 HWMC	5/ 2					
HB 1254 Track	Emergency Response Network Bd.-Membership	Durand	4/19 HHWC	5/3					
HB 1262 Track	Prescription Drugs Reimbursement	Salter	4/19 HHWC	5/4					
HB 1337 Track	Certificate of Rural Necessity Program	Thompson	4/19 HHWC						
HCR 127 Track	LA Healthcare Redesign Collaborative	Durand	4/25 HHWC	4/26ca	5/4	5/8			
SB 19 Support	Medicaid/Unused Prescription Donations	McPherson	3/ 9 SHWC						
SB 100 Track	Adult Day Health Care Program	Cravins	3/14 SHWC						
SB 105 Support	Louisiana Clean Indoor Air Act/Became SB. 742	Marionneau	3/27 SSGAC	4/26cs					
SB 125 Track	South Central LA Human Services Authority	Dupre	3/15 SHWC	5/3					
SB 135 Support	Medicaid/Direct Reimbursement	Hines	3/15 SHWC	4/ 5	4/10	4/11 HHWC	5/4		

SB 139 Track	Board of Examiners of Nursing Facility Admin.	Hines	3/16 SHWC	4/ 5ca	4/10ca	4/18 HHWC	5/4		
SB 147 Track	Hospitals/Licensure of Ambulance Services	Ellington	3/16 SHWC	4/19	4/24	4/25 HHWC			
SB 197 Oppose	Health Care Facility Evacuation/Hurricanes	McPherson	3/16 SHWC						
SB 247 Track	Health/Uncompensated Care Certification	McPherson	3/16 SHWC						
SB 280 Oppose	TOPS Eligibility/Families Under Poverty Level	Fields	3/17 SEC						
SB 311 Support	Health Centers/Needs Assessment	Hines	3/17 SHWC						
SB 312 Support	Rural Pharmacy Preservation Act/Health Care	Hines	3/17 SHWC						
SB 322 Support	Health Care/Mobile Rural Health Clinic	Hines	3/17 SHWC						
SB 481 Oppose	Hospital-Acquired Infection/Annual Report	Adley	3/17 SHWC						
SB 487 Track	Health Maintenance Organizations	Heitmeier	3/17 SIC						
SB 520 Support	Hospital Service Districts/Competition	Schedler	3/17 SHWC	5/3					
SB 555 Support	Clinical Social Workers as Medicaid Providers	Jackson	3/17 SHWC						
SB 562 Track	Office of Aging and Adult Services	Bajoie	3/17 SHWC	4/19ca	4/24ca	4/26 HHWC			
SB 568 Track	DHH Rules/Emergencies	Dardenne	3/17 SHWC	4/ 5	4/10	4/11 HHWC			
SB 570 Support	Rural Hospitals/Ethical Referrals	Hines	3/17 SHWC						
SB 595 Track	Medicaid Cuts/Hospitals	Dardenne	3/17 SHWC						
SB 624 Track	Mental Health Nurse Practitioner	McPherson	3/18 SHWC						
SCR 32 Support	DHH/Pandemic of Avian Flu	Nevers	4/18		4/19	4/20 HHWC	5/4		

STATE & LOCAL ACTION:

****Legislative Briefs From The State Legislature***

- Committee supports bill giving judges pay raise
 - A bill that would boost the pay of state judges won approval in the House Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, May 3rd - the measure, House Bill 126, next faces action in the full House.
 - The pay raises would take effect on July 1 of this year and July 1, 2007.
 - The plan would boost the salaries of state Supreme Court justices to \$129,187 from \$118,301; increase pay for court of appeals judges to \$122,583 from \$112,040 and increase pay for district judges to \$116,400 from \$105,780.

- James Coleman Sr., chairman of the Judicial Compensation Commission, which recommended the increases, said that, even with the increases, district judges would still be paid about \$5,000 less than the Southern average.
- House wants to ban last-minute party switch
 - A bill prompted by the last-minute party switch of U.S. Rep. Rodney Alexander — and would prohibit similar switches — was approved by the House in a 65-35 vote.
 - Alexander, R-Quitman, touched off a storm with Democrats when after first filing to run for re-election two years ago as a Democrat, he re-filed as a Republican two days later, 15 minutes before the sign-up deadline for candidates ended.
 - House Bill 11 by Rep. Willie Hunter, D-Monroe, would ban candidates from filing more than one notice of candidacy for the same office in the same election
 - It goes next to the Senate for debate.
- Senate to consider bill extending claims period
 - The time period that victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita could file claims with their insurance companies would be extended, under legislation headed to the full Senate for debate.
 - Sen. Julie Quinn's bill would give policyholders through Sept. 1, 2007, to file claims from Katrina and through Oct. 1, 2006, for claims related to Rita - Without objection, the Senate Judiciary A Committee approved Senate Bill 740.
 - Chuck McMains, a lobbyist for the Property and Casualty Insurance Association, testified against the bill, saying it may be unconstitutional because it attempts to void the terms of insurance policy agreements that are contracts.
- Boat registration, fee bill falls short in the House
 - The House rejected a bill that would require people who buy recreational boats, starting next year, to register a title with the state and pay fees of \$26.50.
 - It was the third fee bill pushed by the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to run into problems in the House.
 - The House voted 52-39 for House Bill 1052, but it needed 70 votes to pass.
- Smoking ban moves forward
 - Smokers would not be able to light up in restaurant dining rooms or in cars while traveling with young children under legislation approved by lawmakers.
 - This is the second year in a row that Sen. Rob Marionneaux has fought for the passage of a no-smoking ban in most public places.
 - This year, he won the battle in the Senate but saw his bill amended to exclude enclosed bars within restaurants.
 - Senate Bill 742(Previously SB 105,) now moves to the House.

****Housing Plan Sails Through Senate***

Gov. Kathleen Blanco's proposed housing program for hurricane victims sailed through the Senate on Thursday, May 4th.

- Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 63 calls for the state to spend \$7.5 billion to rebuild, repair and buy out owner-occupied homes in the areas affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita - the plan also includes \$1.5 billion to create affordable rental units.
 - The federal government is giving the state billions of dollars in hurricane relief and the state has to submit a plan for spending it.
 - The next step is for the House to approve the plan and the proposal also must be approved by the federal government.

- The storms destroyed or severely damaged more than 122,000 owner-occupied homes – Governor Blanco wants to set the ceiling on homeowner assistance with uninsured damages at \$150,000 - in calculating assistance, insurance payments and aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency would be deducted.
 - At the moment, her plan is partially funded because it relies on an additional \$4.2 billion that is included in the President’s supplemental bill before the Congress.
 - The U.S. Senate approved the bill last week and a version of it already has cleared the U.S. House.
 - Representatives from both chambers now have to hammer out a compromise.

ON THE FEDERAL FRONT:

****Senate Budget Panel Likely To Alter President Bush’s Line-Item Rescission Plan***

On May 2nd, Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg, R-N.H. promised changes that would significantly weaken President Bush’s line-item rescission proposal after the bill faced blistering attacks from Democrats and bipartisan concerns that it could lead to abuses.

- Gregg said the bill would be altered to prevent a president from submitting unlimited rescission proposals that could tie up the congressional calendar, or from impounding spending unilaterally.

- Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, ripped the bill as a pernicious assault on the power of the purse granted to Congress by the Constitution.
 - Byrd noted that the measure would allow the president to defer spending for 180 days — six months — even if Congress rejects proposed rescissions – with nothing in the measure that would bar a president from proposing the same rescissions again and again.
 - Sen. Jim Bunning, R-Ky., said the legislation has no chance of passage as currently drafted.

****Conference Battle Looms As U.S. Senate Passes Supplemental***

Ignoring a veto threat, on May 4th the Senate passed by a 78-20 vote an emergency supplemental spending measure totaling about \$109 billion for defense, hurricane recovery and other projects — far more than the \$94.5 billion President Bush has said he would support.

- The vote for the bill does not necessarily reflect how it would fare in a showdown with the White House, however - Thirty-five senators signed an April 26 letter vowing to support a Bush veto if he decides to issue one, which would be enough to sustain his action.
 - Still, Senate Appropriations Chairman Thad Cochran, R-Miss., said after passage, “I would hope there would be negotiating room with the White House” on the total.
- The measure, according to the Senate Appropriations Committee, would provide approximately \$70.9 billion in fiscal 2006 for war costs in Iraq and Afghanistan and foreign aid, \$28.9 billion for hurricane relief, \$2.6 billion for pandemic flu preparations and \$1.9 billion for border security efforts.
- House leaders have vowed to hold the line on spending in conference.
 - The House passed a \$91.9 billion version, slightly less than Bush’s original \$92.2 billion request - the President also endorsed \$2.3 billion the Senate added for flu preparations.

****Congressmen Urge Exploration***

Three Louisiana congressmen have joined together in support of legislation that they say will reduce the nation’s dependence on foreign energy.

- U.S. Reps Jefferson, Boustany and Melancon feel that opening gas exploration in the Outer Continental Shelf could produce royalties for the state that would make it less reliant on the federal government in its recovery effort, allow southwest Louisiana to protect itself and produce necessary jobs for the state.
- Soaring energy costs are causing pain not just for families at the pump, but also to critical industries that employ so many people in districts like theirs, stated the elected officials.

****TV Ads On Estate Tax Target Landrieu***

The American Family Business Institute began running television advertisements in Louisiana in recent weeks calling for the repeal of the estate or “death” tax which they say are aimed at U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La.

- Landrieu’s vote on the upcoming matter could determine whether the tax remains or not, the organization said.
- “Republicans and Democrats can agree that the time has come to bury the death tax deep in the ground where it belongs,” Dick Patten, executive director of AFBI, said in a statement.
 - Landrieu spokesman Brian Richardson said the senator has supported the repeal of the tax numerous times in the past though she has not taken a position this time yet.
 - The tax is 45 percent on any estate over \$2 million - that would leave 65 estates in Louisiana eligible for the tax.

****Breux Lauds Medicare Drug Plan***

Former U.S. Sen. John Breaux, D-La., was back in the Capitol Hill news last week lauding the Medicare prescription drug signup.

- Breaux, honorary chairman of the pharmaceutical industry-backed Medicare Rx Education Network, noted that 8.1 million people are enrolled in stand-alone prescription plans with 5.8 million in Medicare managed-care plans.
 - In total, more than 30 million Medicare beneficiaries now have some form of prescription drug coverage, Breaux said.
 - “Clearly, seniors are finding the prescription drug benefit worth the time and effort it takes to sign up,” Breaux said in a statement.

****St. Bernard schools get FEMA funds***

In a week when Louisiana school leaders went before a U.S. House committee seeking recovery funds, Rep. Melancon announced \$23 million in Federal Emergency Management Agency aid to repair schools in St. Bernard Parish.

- The money will include \$3 million for the Borgnemouth Elementary School; \$3 million for the P.G.T. Beauregard Middle School; \$4.1 million for Lacoste Elementary School; \$3 million for the C.F. Rowley Elementary School; \$3.5 million for the W. Smith Jr. Elementary School; and \$2.1 million for the J.F. Gauthier Elementary School.

****MRGO closing?***

A coalition of Louisiana community and environmental groups took out an advertisement in the Capitol Hill newspaper Congress Daily last week calling for the closure of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet or MRGO.

- The navigational channel, which is seldom used, is blamed for helping to create a water surge that helped flood the New Orleans area during Hurricane Katrina last year.
 - “MRGO destroyed families in the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans East and Chalmette and has to be closed,” Pam Dashiell of the Holy Cross Neighborhood Association said in a statement.
 - Recently, U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., introduced an amendment that would direct the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin closing the outlet - the amendment is still pending.

**The mission of the Louisiana Rural Health Association is to serve as a unified voice for the promotion of rural health care through advocacy, education, and leadership. The information above was provided in part by the National Rural Health Association and gathered from various publicly released documents of news related sources.*