

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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Steve Monaghan, President * Les Landon, Editor

2013 Regular Legislative Session

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Opening day shocker: Jindal drops tax plan

Faced with withering opposition from his allies, Gov. Bobby Jindal shocked lawmakers in his session-opening speech by announcing that he will “park” his proposal to abolish state income taxes and replace them with higher sales taxes and limits on incentives.

In his remarkably short speech – just 13 minutes long – the governor told lawmakers that he expects them to design a bill to do away with the income taxes, but gave no instructions on how the lost income could be replaced.

Capitol insiders were astonished by the lack of detail in Jindal’s remarks. The perfunctory address made no mention of the lawsuits that have declared major portions of his education overhaul unconstitutional, did not address the looming billion-dollar budget deficit, and skirted growing concerns about providing health care as the state’s charity hospitals are phased out.

LFT president rails against DOE’s \$128 million administrative budget

As the House Appropriations Committee began its study of the state’s \$24.7 billion general fund budget on Tuesday, LFT President Steve Monaghan asked members to closely monitor the Department of Education’s \$128 million administrative budget.

Monaghan, the only representative of a teacher organization to address the committee, said that many aspects of the department’s budget are problematic. As an example, he cited a “lack of transparency” in the way the department hires highly paid administrators.

“Once upon a time we at least know who was being hired to do what,” Monaghan said. “Now it seems that we discover those things without any rhyme or reason.”

Monaghan noted that funding for public schools through the Minimum Foundation Program has been frozen for the past five years, even as the department brought in minimally qualified administrators at high salaries.

“The department’s priorities seem to be more ideological than instructional,” he said.

Monaghan’s complaint echoed [published reports](#) that top hires at the department are being brought in to sell the administration’s privatization and voucher plans at the expense of traditional public schools.

“There was a time when research drove decisions,” Monaghan told the committee. “It doesn’t seem that research is driving decisions now.”

“I bring a message from the classroom that conditions are getting much worse,” Monaghan told lawmakers. “Please be watchdogs and help us with this fight.”

Enough is Enough: Rally at the capitol on April 30!

The Louisiana Federation of Teachers is joining with a large coalition of organizations to rally at the state capitol on April 30 in opposition to the Jindal administration's policies.

This true grass-roots movement began in central Louisiana last month, when more than 500 people held a candle light vigil to protest the closing of Huey P. Long Hospital in Pineville. Rallies have sprung up across the state since then.

As the movement grew, so did its objectives and interests. The movement now represents broad-based discontent with the direction the state has taken. It has become a coalition interested in preserving what our forefathers knew as the common good – a belief that a decent society educates its young, protects its weak, heals its sick and provides a dignified retirement for those who spent their lives in service to the people. In recent years, all these have become victims of the Jindal administration.

Organizations that have committed to work on and participate in this event include the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, the Louisiana Association of Educators, the Louisiana Association of Retired State Employees, the East Baton Rouge NAACP, AFSCME, several Central Trades and Labor Councils, Earl K. Long Medical Center employees, Equality Louisiana, Louisiana Movement, the East Baton Rouge Democratic Executive Committee, and the list continues to grow every day.

[A Web site for the event is at this link.](#) As information becomes available, it will be posted there and on the LFT Web site as well.

Bill to “restructure” education department advances

A bill that defenders of the State Department of Education say is necessary to decentralize their operation and provide better service to local school systems ran into strong opposition from the Louisiana Federation of Teachers before winning approval of the House Education Committee on Thursday.

DOE spokesperson Erin Bendily said that HB 650 by Rep. Steve Carter (R-Baton Rouge) would allow the department to consolidate offices in the department into teams that could provide “customized support” to school systems.

But LFT Legislative Director Mary-Patricia Wray reminded committee members that just last week the department came under criticism from the House Appropriations Committee for its lack of budgetary transparency.

“With that very dark shadow looming over them, the department now comes before you to seek a new structure that will make the misuse of funds even easier to achieve,” she said.

“Unless and until the department can demonstrate responsible, honest and transparent fund management under their current structure, this committee should reject their request,” she said.

The plan put forward by the department will make the misuse of funds “even easier to achieve,” according to Wray.

LFT's legislative director questioned the quality of support that has been offered to school systems in recent years, saying that DOE's focus has been “to cut vital staff, sell off library books, reinvigorate the test obsession, provide two confusing school performance measures instead of one reliable one...If this is the kind of thing the department means to encourage...then we must ask on behalf of all professional educators in our state that you reject this plan.”

Bill will assist breastfeeding mothers

A bill allowing nursing mothers to pump breast milk in private and under sanitary conditions won approval of the House Education Committee on Thursday.

HB 635 by Rep Patrick Williams (D-Shreveport) requires schools to provide “an appropriate, private room, other than a restroom, that may be used by an employee to express breast milk.”

The bill also says that schools must give teachers a reasonable amount of time to express breast milk for up to a year after the birth of the child

The bill was requested by Red River United, an affiliate of the LFT, and is part of the Federation's legislative agenda. Speaking on behalf of the bill, LFT Legislative Director Mary-Patricia Wray told the panel that breast-feeding teachers are often placed in awkward situations when they attempt to express breast milk during school hours.

Panel okays extending stipend for national certification

With no opposition, the House Education Committee Thursday approved a bill that will continue a program that pays a stipend to teachers, counselors and school psychologists who earn national certification.

HB 540 by Rep. Sam Jones (D-Franklin) voids a sunset clause in existing law that would stop educators from receiving the \$5,000 stipend after July 1 of this year.

Speaking on behalf of the bill, Jones pointed out that a number of studies have been published showing that the rigorous certification process that teachers go through results in higher achievement by students.

The bill is part of the LFT legislative agenda.

Higher ed funding plan advances

A plan to link state funding for higher education more closely to student performance was unanimously approved by the Senate Education Committee on Wednesday.

SB 117 by Sen. Conrad Appel (R-Metairie) would create study panel to recommend changes to the higher education funding formula. Appel said he favors an "outcomes-based" funding model that groups Louisiana's higher education institutions into tiers, and then compares their performance to others in the same group.

The plan would build upon the LaGRAD act of 2010, which bases 15% of an institution's funding on student performance.

The panel would begin its deliberations in September, and report to the legislature by next January 15.

Segregated special education schools bill pulled

A bill that had raised hackles in the special education community because it could have segregated special needs children into separate schools will apparently not be moved by its author.

HB 642 by Rep. Nancy Landry (R-Lafayette) would have authorized the creation of "regional special education schools" in each of the state's eight educational regions. The schools would have been established as non-profit corporations and approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education as nonpublic schools. Tuition at the schools would have been paid by state vouchers.

After hearing massive opposition from special education parents and advocates, Landry announced that she will not move the bill.