Administrators say budget cuts a betrayal

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Capital news bureau

For the state's colleges and universities, Gov. Edwin Edwards' budget cuts are just the same song, second chorus - or maybe third or fourth chorus.

But it's the new verse Edwards added Thursday that has upset some college administrators.

Not only has Edwards handed universities a total of $132.5 million in budget cuts this year, but he has now taken $5 million more from the state's rainy-day fund, a savings account that is supposed to back nearly $6 million university heads squeezed out of last year's funding and hoped to use this year.

Commissioner of Higher Education William Arceaux said that, as painful as the cuts will be, they were not applied across the board.

Higher education officials said that, while Edwards and convinced the governor to soften the cuts on a half dozen campuses, that can least afford them, Arceaux said.

Most university heads said they had expected another budget cut this year - university budgets were trimmed by 5 percent in the fall - but had hoped to use money carried over from last year to help meet maintenance and one-time operating expenses this year.

Edwards dashed those hopes on Thursday, taking back all of the $5.8 million the university had managed to save and leaving some administrators with the feeling they are being punished for being good managers.

"We've really been blind-sided. I had no idea our carry-over money, which is crucial to our planning and development, was a major, major programs at the university, would be lost today," said Ray Authement, president of the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette.

Authement said USL had managed to save $972,644 last year, and the money had been earmarked to buy computers and software and for maintenance work on the campus.

"Now, all of a sudden, everything we didn't save today, they have put into the budget," Authement said. "I feel betrayed."

He said university officials were asked earlier this week what kind of impact a 3 percent budget reduction would have on their schools, but they were not told they would also have to deal with the loss of the carry-over money.

Authement said USL's $792,292 budget cut combined with the loss of the $972,644 in carry-over money amounts to a 5.7 percent reduction, bringing total cuts for the year to 10.7 percent.

Joffre Wisenton, president of the Southern University System, agreed that taking back the carry-over money "is really unfair to the people who are trying to do good work."

If they are given several months to work out their budgets, then they will have to come up with reduction plans in only a few weeks, Silvia said.

Silvia said the main campus, the LSU Agricultural Center and the University of New Orleans will have a particularly difficult time coping with the cuts.

With his campus facing a $2.2 million cut, LSU Chancellor James Wharton said he expects his staff and his power to spend the next several weeks searching for a way to deal with the reduction.

Wharton said that the cuts would devastate for Southern campuses and said the campuses are going to have to increase fund-raising activities to soften the impact.

"We are still working on how we will deal with the cuts," Wharton said. "We will do our best to protect personnel and hopefully there will be no layoffs. But, it will certainly affect us with respect to maintenance, equipment and supplies."

According to preliminary estimates from the Board of Regents, the standard budget cut was 2.8 percent for most universities, but the governor softened the blow for those campuses where a cut of that size would have mandated laying off large numbers of workers.

Here is a rundown of the amount of money being trimmed from each campus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus</th>
<th>Cut</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>Southern-BR</th>
<th>SUNO</th>
<th>SBU-Shreveport</th>
<th>SBU-Board</th>
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