Gov. Edwin Edwards says lawmakers should give voters a chance to slay the 'sacred cow' homestead exemption.

**EWE expects lower homestead exemption**

By MARSHA SHULER
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Although it will be a tough fight, Gov. Edwin Edwards said Monday he is confident Louisiana citizens will vote to lower the homestead exemption and that constitutional convention delegates will give voters that opportunity.

One of the more controversial planks of Edwards' convention program is reducing homestead exemption from $75,000 to $50,000. Lawmakers clearly viewed that as a "sacred cow" among voters as they reacted to Edwards' conventionspeech Sunday.

But Edwards said Monday he believes there are enough "responsible" convention delegates and Louisiana voters to make the homestead exemption proposal a reality.

"I would hope that people would look at that not necessarily as an increase in taxes on their homes," Edwards said.

The homestead exemption change would apply to new and renewed millages.

"This will not trigger immediately," he said. "Everyone in the state within taxing jurisdictions will have an opportunity under the new level, if it comes to pass, to then vote at some subsequent time on new and renewed millages.

"If people in the area felt like the proposed millages for either renewal or new were undesirable, they would have the opportunity to turn it down, in which case there would be no impact on homeowner's taxes.

Edwards stressed that the property tax proposal does not affect homeowners age 65 and above and does not affect half the homeowners in Louisiana, whose homes are valued at less than $50,000.

"Even those who are assessed over $50,000, many of them will feel little or no impact," he said.

Edwards said he thinks there are sufficient "responsible people who own homes" that fall in the $50,000 to $75,000 category "who recognize the need to move in this direction." He urged them to join with him in pushing the homestead exemption proposal.

"My message to the convention is that this is an issue that the people should decide for themselves," Edwards said. "I have every reason to believe there are enough responsible people in the convention to bring this issue to the ballot."

And once it gets there, Edwards predicted, voters will approve it.

"If think we have reached the point of maturity in Louisiana where people recognize this particular need and I simply say again this is one thing that the Legislature could not do but the people of the state can and should do, and I think they will if we give them the opportunity," Edwards said.

Some tax assessors have already opposed the reduction and have vowed to fight it in the convention.

Edwards advised the assessors to stick to their job of assessing property within the rules and mandates set out in law.

"While I don't expect them to beat the drums for this proposal, it is certainly not anything that is going to create a problem for them," Edwards said.

"I think people concerned about industrial development, the creation of jobs, people concerned about a better education system, the environment, the poor and disadvantaged — all these people — are not going to be well-served if we sit by and allow the state to collapse as California has," Edwards said. "Everybody is going to benefit, although most people will take some kind of small reduction.

"Everybody is going to benefit if we do this because at least we will be able to keep going and we will not suffer the trauma that a state such as California is now suffering and that we are going to suffer if we do not take these steps."

Edwards said he believes that 80 percent of what he proposed is going to pass the convention without any serious problems and easily pass the muster of the voters.

"Twenty percent is controversial," Edwards said. "But my message to the people is 'If you pass it all, you get the best of both worlds.'"

He said he will lobby convention delegates to pass his tax-restructuring and spending-restraint proposals.

"I feel that if that proposal is followed in substance, we will be on our way to solving our problems," Edwards said.