Edwards' children to quit casino businesses

By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau ( Baton Rouge)

Gov. Edwin Edwards, trying to quell a controversy over his family's interest in gambling-related businesses, said Friday his four children will get out of the riverboat gambling industry.

Edwards said the growth of the riverboat gambling industry is too important to the state's economy for his children to be involved.

The state ethics board still might consider an ethics complaint, filed by David Vitter, R-Metairie, who said he is glad that the Edwards family's children will get out of the riverboat-related ventures.

Edwards said, "It never occurred to me that anybody would take umbrage because of the way this thing came about."

Gov. Edwin Edwards, announcing the family decision at a news conference, said "a battery of lawyers" he consulted agree there's nothing illegal about his children doing business with riverboat companies.

"We are all still convinced it was a proper thing to do, but this issue is too important to the state," he said. "I do not want my children to become the focal point of the debate on what is ethical or not ethical. It is not important to them and it is certainly not that important to me," Edwards said.

The Edwards family's children — Anna, Stephen, Victoria, and David — are getting out of the riverboat-related ventures.

"I very much regret that this has occurred," Edwards said. "It never occurred to me that anybody would take umbrage because of the way this thing came about."

State Rep. David Vitter, R-Metairie, who filed the ethics complaint, said he is glad that the Edwards family's children will get out of the riverboats. And I am also authorized to tell you that none of them have made any money."

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Gray Sexton, chief lawyer for the Board of Ethics for Elected Officials, said that, if it can be confirmed that all of Edwards' children are out of riverboat gambling-related business, he will recommend the board not pursue an investigation against them.

"But I think the board should go on record stating its position — pronounce its interpretation of the law," Sexton said.

Sexton said the board may take up the issue in closed-door session when it meets Thursday.

"We determined that any of my children under the law — and it's very plain — can own an interest in a corporation as long as it is not more than 25 percent. That is the law. That is our considered opinion," Edwards said.

Edwards said none of his children owns more than 25 percent of the riverboat business ventures in which they are involved, and he said none of his children have individually made applications for licensing.

Stephen Edwards is a director with Riverboat Merchandising Corp., a firm that sells T-shirts, cups and other souvenir items to riverboats.

Anna Edwards and David Edwards have controlling interest in Juice Systems Inc., which supplies juice and other liquid dispensers.

Victoria Edwards is an owner of Punchline Production in the business of supplying entertainment.

Edwards said Stephen, David and Victoria made investments in the corporations in which they were involved. Anna did not, he said.

"None of them have even received back the money they invested going into the business," he said.