By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

Efforts to entice Continental Airlines to Lake Charles bogged down Friday with Gov. Edwin Edwards rejecting as too costly company requirements for a maintenance plant at Chennault Airpark.

But Edwards made it clear that the door is still open if Continental can present a scaled-down proposal. Edwards would not say specifically what Continental wants.

“T have made a determination that the proposal was not satisfactory to the state, albeit we would like very much to have the jobs,” Edwards said. “The price tag we cannot meet at this time. I am going to advise Continental of this decision.”

Edwards made the decision public after a mansion meeting with legislative leaders, heads of top state business and labor groups and Edwards’ economic development chief.

He said he did not want to finalize his decision until conferring with the group. He said those in attendance “unanimously concurred in my decision.”

“We are going to advise Continental that while we cannot handle the entire package, if it elects to break the whole proposition down into segments we will be very pleased to take another look — or a look at one or more of the segmented proposals,” Edwards said.

Edwards said about 6,500 jobs are at stake in the Continental proposal.

Lake Charles is among places that Continental is considering for a maintenance plant to replace one that is closing in Denver. Edwards declined to make public Continental’s specific demands, saying it would betray a confidence.

But he said the company wanted the state “to furnish them with a significant amount of operating capital and several hundred million dollars worth of capital construction.

“The entire package I analyzed and came to the conclusion that it was just too expensive given the number of jobs to be created and that was the unanimous recommendation of the group,” Edwards said.

“Now it will be left up to Continental to determine if it can break up the entire proposal into smaller packages which we may be able to handle,” he said.

Included in the discussions were Senate President Sammy Nunez, D-Chalmette; state
Sens. B.B. “Sixty” Rayburn, D-Bogalusa; Mike Foster, D-Franklin; and Jon Johnson, D-New Orleans; state Reps. Steve Theriot, D-Marrero; John Travis, D-Jackson; and Sherman Copelin, D-New Orleans; Louisiana AFL-CIO chief Victor Bussie; Louisiana Association of Business and Industry chief Dan Juneau; bond attorney Steve Hicks; Department of Economic Development Secretary Kevin Reilly; and former state Rep. Claude “Buddy” Leach.

Edwards said Leach has been working with him “as a private citizen out of the Lake Charles area.”

No Lake Charles area legislators or other local officials were present for the meeting.
Continental

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