Edwards says Treen lowered school funding

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Former Gov. Edwin Edwards told college professors Saturday that Gov. Treen has reduced state support for higher education, and he promised to do whatever is necessary to bring state universities into the high-technology age.

"I am really concerned that the level of funding for colleges and universities has gone down progressively since I left office," Edwards said about 156 collegiate members of the Louisiana Federation of Teachers.

Edwards said the formula that provides state money for universities was at 92 percent during his last year in office, but Treen has allowed it to decline to 86 percent.

The proposed budget for next year is 82 percent," the former governor said. "In just a few years you'll be failing, if 75 percent is a passing score.

The funding formula, based on the number and complexity of courses taken by students at each university, is adjusted upward each year by the Board of Regents.

Treen has often said that, even accounting for inflation, his administration has contributed increased funds for higher education. Edwards said Treen effectively reduced support for universities by reducing the state's share of the formula.

Edwards said Treen further showed his lack of concern for universities when he vetoed a $3.7 million funding bill that Edwards said would have assured college professors of raises equal to those granted to other state employees in 1981.

"I think that telegraphed a clear signal of where he puts you in his list of priorities," Edwards said. "Somebody up there just doesn't care about you..."

The former two-term governor said he will listen to the needs of higher education personnel, although he may not always give them what they want.

He also promised to make high technology development a major priority if he is returned to office this fall.

Edwards said Treen's proposed budget for next year is a "complete reorganization" of the university system, and he said that the new budget would cause the state to spend less on higher education.

"I am not going to have my university system reduced to the point where it is no longer competitive," Edwards said.

Edwards' remarks were made in a luncheon address at the annual higher education conference of the teachers' union. He was given a standing ovation by the college professors when he entered the banquet room and when he finished his speech.

For the past three years we have missed an open door to the governor's office," union president Bill Savage said. "Now we are getting to know the governor of New Orleans, told the group.

Savage introduced Edwards as "the man of the future governor" and said that Edwards "always listened to what we had to say..."