La. seeks funds for drug fight
Roemer, Baker outline strategy

By CARL REDMAN
Capitol news bureau

Federal anti-drug czar William Bennett understands Louisiana's position as a route for illegal drugs entering the United States and has promised to give state officials a chance to make a personal pitch for nearly $10 million in federal anti-drug grants, Gov. Buddy Roemer said Monday.

In a news conference with U.S. Rep. Richard Baker and National Guard Maj. Gen. Ansel Stroud, Roemer said he spoke with Bennett last week about Louisiana's efforts to coordinate anti-drug programs and the need for more federal funds to help underwrite the war on drugs.

Roemer said Bennett seemed receptive to Louisiana plans and has agreed to visit the state in late November or early December to survey the situation.

Baker, R-Baton Rouge, said he's confident that Louisiana has gotten the attention of the people in Washington who will be responsible for handing out federal anti-drug money. He said he expects Louisiana will get most of a $9.6 million drug-enforcement grant it is seeking.

Roemer said his conversation with Bennett leads him to expect President Bush to cover five aspects of the drug problem when he addresses the nation Tuesday night.

Roemer said he expects Bush will cover education, interdiction, law enforcement, rehabilitation and foreign policy and will promise increased federal spending in each of the areas.

"No one is necessarily more important than the others," Roemer said. "It's going to take all five 'fingers' to have this 'fist' come together.

"I expect the president...to talk about additional federal money in some of these areas. And some of that federal money will have to be matched by state and local government."

Roemer said the state already is putting money into anti-drug efforts and will do more if it is required.

Roemer said he is willing to do whatever it takes to put together a strong anti-drug program, including cutting other areas in the budget or raising taxes if necessary.

Roemer said the federal government has a stake in stopping the flow of illegal drugs through Louisiana.

"Those drugs aren't stopping in this state and being used in this state," Roemer said. "Some are, but those drugs flow to Kansas City. They flow to Chicago. They flow across the heartland of America."

Early in the summer, Louisiana submitted an $8.4 million grant request to purchase equipment and add manpower to the Louisiana State Police in an effort to step up drug interdiction efforts in the state, Roemer said.

Baker said he put on Bennett's desk last Friday a supplemental grant request totaling $1.2 million to be used to link capabilities of the state police and the Louisiana National Guard in the war on drugs.

Roemer said the proposal calls for a Louisiana Drug Crisis Response Plan.

"The state police will be managing this in cooperation with the National Guard," Roemer said. "We will not make the National Guard law enforcement officers. Their technical capability and their equipment will be used in coordination with the state police on the question of interdiction, not law enforcement."

"The first thing that would be established would be a Louisiana Strategic Command and Support Center here in Baton Rouge (at state police headquarters). The purpose of that command center is to coordinate the efforts of state and local agencies in a unified approach to drug interdiction."

That would take about half of the $1.2 million supplemental grant request.

The other half of the grant would be used for operations to cover air support and transportation, air reconnaissance and surveillance and cross-training of the state police and the National Guard.

Baker said he expects that after Bush speaks Tuesday night, other agencies around the nation will be looking for federal assistance, and Louisiana's request is on the top of the pile.

Baker said U.S. interdiction efforts in Florida and along the Texas-Mexico border have slowed the flow of drugs through those areas.

Baker said the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration estimated that Louisiana was third in the nation in suspected illegal importation activity, and the situation seems to be getting worse.

Baker said he wants Louisiana and the Gulf Coast to get anti-drug-smuggling capability that is on a par with federal installations to the east and west.

Baker said Louisiana's total grant request would be a step in that direction. He said it would allow Louisiana to put together an elite strike force trained by the state police that would be able to use the surveillance equipment and other capabilities of the National Guard.

"If we locate a 'crack house,' which generally are impenetrable to most law-enforcement activities, the National Guard has effective capability to deal with a structure," Baker said. "For instance, we may need a bulldozer. That bulldozer can move in on that location and destroy that 'crack house' very effectively.

"If there is a criminal activity or laboratory operation in northern Louisiana in the woods which would be very difficult to monitor very effectively on the ground, the Guard could deploy an F-14 (jet aircraft), and, from some 10,000 feet, do high-resolution photography to give state police the information they need to act on that location."

Roemer said he expects President Bush to announce increases in federal spending in a number of areas, such as:

- Federal spending for rehabilitation will grow from about $600 million to $925 million for the coming fiscal year.
- Education spending will rise from about $350 million to about $400 million.
- Interdiction will go from the low $400 million level to the upper $400 million level.
- Federal prison spending will go from $580 million this year to $1.2 billion next year.
- Federal support for local law enforcement efforts will rise from $150 million to $300 million.

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