Mouton feels up to key task

By MIKE HASTEN
State Editor

BATON ROUGE — Turning Louisiana’s unemployment rate around won’t be an easy job, says Phyllis Mouton, Gov.-elect Buddy Roemer’s secretary of labor designation, but she feels up to the task.

Mouton, a 38-year-old Lafayette businesswoman, says she will apply many of her business skills to improving the state’s job situation.

The new job is “challenging,” Mouton told The Advertiser Wednesday, “but I accept the challenge. I feel that I have the background for the job.” Besides her business experience, she has “16 years in grass roots and workers’ organizations across the state.”

Mouton was one of five secretaries named by Roemer Wednesday. He said they “represent a strong hope for the people of Louisiana and the employees who work in the specific departments. Each has a solid record of performance and expertise in the areas of the departments they will manage.”

Roemer said leadership of his departments will be “based on performance, not politics.”

Decreasing unemployment is the No. 1 task for Mouton and much of the problem stems from the slump in the oil industry.

Mouton is well aware of the problem, being executive vice president and majority owner of (See Mouton, page 5)
CIRCLE M Supply in Lafayette.

She says she will attack unemployment of oilfield workers specifically through a program administered by the Department of Labor that re trains displaced workers.

It's too early to outline a complete plan, she says, because she has not had a chance to review everything that is now being done.

"I can't make a statement that I'm going to make major changes," she said. "Allow me time to get in and suggest short and long-term ideas."

One of her ideas is to call upon familiar people and programs in Lafayette, she said. "I intend to utilize the resources of Lafayette."

Mouton said she is approaching her new job, which she will assume March 14 when Roemer is sworn in as governor, with "excitement, enthusiasm and knowledge."

She said she is finding enthusiasm among other members of Roemer's administration and believes that together, they can turn the state around.

"You're going to see things moving in an optimistic direction," she said. "Anything positive has to begin with optimism."

Mouton is currently serving as a member of Roemer's advisory panel on economic development and is past president of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce.

She also is on the board of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry.

She holds a bachelor's degree in computer science and a master's in psychology and rehabilitative training from USL.

Roemer also named four other cabinet appointees.

Paul Templet, 47, of Baton Rouge will head the Department of Environmental Quality. He is an associate professor at the LSU Institute of Environmental Studies and president of Templet Resources Inc. of Zachary and serves as chairman of Roemer's advisory panel on the environment.

Arnold Broussard, 40, a business and financial consultant in New Orleans, will head the Department of Revenue and Taxation.

Raymond Stephens of New Orleans will serve as Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources. Stephens, 59, is an independent petroleum geologist and a consulting professor of petroleum geology at the University of New Orleans.

Virginia Van Sickle, 37, of Baton Rouge will head the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. She is currently the assistant director of the Louisiana Geological Survey and is a former deputy secretary of the department. She serves on Roemer's advisory panel on wildlife and fisheries.