Roemer says ‘future is in classrooms’

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In his first address since losing a re-election bid, Gov. Buddy Roemer hammered home the same education message Wednesday that was central to his campaign — put the children first and everything good will follow for Louisiana.

And he warned, as he participated in the Louisiana Teacher of the Year Awards Program, that the state cannot afford to step back from the progress that has been made.


He said he’s going to be listening to hear their specific ideas on issues such as education. He said he has talked to neither Edwards nor Duke since the election.

“I don’t want to make the mistake of making a personal decision without consulting others. I’m pretty clear in my own mind what I can and can’t do. But I need to talk and listen right now, and that’s what I’m doing,” Roemer said.

Roemer, who has indicated a strong dislike for Duke, indicated that not endorsing one of the candidates is not a very viable option.

“Somebody’s got to stand up and say what they believe in. We know what the hate is and the anger. We know what the sarcastic remarks are,” Roemer said. “But somebody has got to lead the state. Somebody’s got to build dreams. Somebody’s got to stand up for children and ... I’m waiting on that. I have been waiting for months.”

Talking to the teachers, Roemer stressed the need to continue with education system improvements that were begun under his tenure, for the sake of the children and the state’s future.

In the audience were leaders of the Louisiana Association of Educators and the Louisiana Federation of Teachers, groups unhappy with Roemer’s teacher evaluation that had endorsed Edwards for governor.

“It is my hope as we build in this state there will be more honor, money, respect and requirements of our teachers,” said Roemer, who gave teachers three consecutive years of state-funded pay increases in return for being evaluated.

Roemer said teachers ought to be paid professionally. “We have got to figure out a way somehow, some way to keep the best, take the others to another job,” he said.

Roemer said America is at risk in education. “The future of this country and its freedom is in its classrooms. That’s what teaching is all about,” he said.

He said it is teachers and “putting children first” that make a difference.