Roemer signs anti-drug package

By CARL REDMAN

Gov. Buddy Roemer signed into law Thursday a package of anti-drug bills that include measures mandating stiffer sentences for drug violations near schools to allowing confiscation of property purchased with drug money.

Legislative approval of the drug package - much of the bill recommended by a special task force - designates Louisiana as the nation's leaders in anti-drug laws, Attorney General William Guste Jr. said.

Much of the package was recommended by a special task force that included representatives from district attorneys, law enforcement, the governor's office and the attorney general.

Gustie and Rep. Jim St. Raymond, R-New Orleans, said one measure in the package to allow seizure of personal property purchased with drug money - things such as cars and homes is a very important part of the package.

"For those people who said we have not gotten anything done this session: If that was one of the only bills that we passed, I would be very happy that we passed something substantive, something that's going to put teeth in the law, something to take the profit out of drugs, and that's what this bill does," St. Raymond said. "... Anybody that wants to deal drugs in Louisiana they better think twice about it."

Gustie said the package is not the final solution of the drug problem in Louisiana. The state already had tough anti-drug laws, and the drug package make things even tougher for drug violators.

Roemer said the next step is to try to reduce the demand for drugs.

"The real secret (for reducing the demand for illegal drugs) is at home right now, or in the neighborhood right now," Roemer said. "That means education. That means them seeing evidence that the drug pushers won't be tolerated, won't be winked at. That means the money we're spending for prisons, for law enforcement and all the rest."

Bills signed into law by Roemer include the following:
- SB446 to create a 21-member council to coordinate drug abuse prevention resources and come up with a statewide plan by next April.
- SB447 to increase penalties for production, manufacturing and possession of large quantities of amphetamines and methamphetamines.
- SB448 by Saunders to make it illegal to knowingly launder drug money.
- SB451 and SB455, companion bills to permit the death penalty for murders linked to drug deals.
- SB453 to prohibit soliciting minors to act as carriers in drug deals.
- SB456 to allow monitoring of so-called precursor chemicals used in making illegal drugs.
- SB458 to provide for the seizure of property and proceeds associated with drug crimes.
- SB708 to suspend the driving privileges of adults convicted of felony drug offenses.
- SB8 to create drug-free zones around schools.

SB8 was pushed by Sen. Cleo Fields, D-Baton Rouge, and mandates stiffer jail terms for felony drug convictions in some areas frequented by children. The Fields measure also mandates substance abuse counseling in all schools.