The organizers of a three-day “think tank” on Louisiana education have had second thoughts about plans to bar the public and media from the conference that is slated to begin Monday at LSU.

Steve Lakis, president of the Massachusetts-based State Legislative Leaders Foundation, said Tuesday the media will be allowed to attend the “Louisiana: Coalition for an Educational Renaissance” that is scheduled for Sept. 9-11.

Lakis said the decision to open the meeting was prompted by reaction from an article that appeared in Tuesday’s Morning Advocate, detailing the plans to hold the conference behind closed doors.

In the article, staffers of Gov. Buddy Roemer — who was slated to give the keynote speech on the first night — expressed surprise about plans to ban the media.

They said the governor was preparing a speech that made some important points about education and he intended for his remarks to be in public.

Lakis said he conferred with participants and organizers of the conference Tuesday, who agreed to open the conference to the media.

“The general consensus was that rather than try to fight something that we never intended to have to fight to begin with, that we’ll simply open this up to the press,” Lakis said.

He said previous conferences staged by the State Legislative Leaders Conference have involved several states or have been national in scope. Next week’s meeting will be the first in which the focus is upon one state, he said.

Lakis said that there will continue to be people who are disappointed because they weren’t invited to the conference, but said the program had to be limited because of budget constraints and the size of the facilities at LSU.

Topics slated for discussion next week include “Intellectual Rearmament: Preparing to Prosper in the 21st Century” by David Pearce Snyder, lifestyle editor of The Futurist; “Coalition Building for Louisiana” by Eileen Babbitt, associate director of the MIT/Harvard University Public Disputes Program; and “Professionalization of Teachers” by Art Wise, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Lakis jokingly said he had learned a valuable lesson from the adverse publicity stemming from the closed-door policy.

“In one of my conversations this morning, I said, ‘Sometimes we beg the press to come and we can’t get them — now I know the secret,’” he said.

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