Town meeting launches La. into America 2000

By DOUG MYERS, Capitol news bureau

Louisiana kicked off its version of America 2000 with a bang Monday as more than 6,000 people participated statewide in discussing how to locally meet President Bush's wide-ranging educational goals by the year 2000.

Gov. Buddy Roemer called for Monday night's statewide "town meeting," which was broadcast on Louisiana Public Broadcasting and focused on what should be done to improve education in communities throughout the state.

"This is the beginning," Roemer said. "This is not the end.

Louisiana 2000 is a grassroots effort aimed at involving Louisianans in a push for educational excellence and to establish community-wide strategies for achieving Bush's six national education goals. The goals include, among other things, that all children in America will start school prepared to learn, that 90 percent of high school students will graduate and that American students will be first in the world in science and mathematics.

A wide variety of people, ranging from teachers to retirees and community leaders to ministers, assembled at sites in 55 parishes Monday night.

Roemer said the way the state can achieve Bush's education goals is through citizens working together as a team.

"This process is not about me and my worries," Roemer said. "It's about us.

Roemer said education is important because "workers aren't competing with muscle anymore. Instead, Roemer said, "we do it between our ears."

Prior to the statewide teleconference, town meetings were held at 55 sites to discuss what could be done locally to achieve the goals of Louisiana 2000. During the teleconference, project leaders talked of the need for more parental involvement, more flexibility in the curriculum and the need to increase the graduation rate.

Shelton said the most exciting thing about Monday's meeting is the focus on parental involvement. Roemer agreed.

"Not every teacher is a parent, but every parent is a teacher," Roemer said.

Ray Arneson, a spokesman for the state Department of Education, said the department is already looking into providing more flexibility in the curriculum. For example, it is currently studying using applied algebra in the classroom.