Trustees want education a part of special session

By KAREN DIDIER
Capitol news bureau

Additional funding for education should be a part of any special legislative session, members of the Board of Trustees for State Colleges and Universities said Friday.

The board, which governs the state's regional universities, also agreed to ask the Legislature to allow universities to carry over funding from last year.

At the request of its Faculty Advisory Council, the board will send a letter to the governor asking that higher education be included in the call for a special session.

Board member Mack Abraham of Lake Charles said making education part of a special session could subject it to further cuts.

"There's a danger there. If you put it on the agenda, they may cut it," Abraham said.

Hank Ziller, chairman of the faculty council, said the request should be for an increase in funding.

"If nothing else, we should ask that funding not be cut," Abraham said.

The governor said this week that budget cuts previously funded will have to be reinstated in light of the state's poor economic condition. Restoring the cuts would mean a $51 million reduction for higher education. Plus, state universities would be subjected to an additional 3 percent cut, which the governor has said will have to be imposed on all state agencies.

The two cuts would mean about a 12 percent reduction in the University of Southern Louisiana.

He said schools carefully planned their budgets last year, knowing that economic conditions could be worse this year and they would need extra money to offset losses.

USL took a number of budget-cutting steps, including reducing summer school, to be able to carry over some money, Autthement said.

After that reduction, "if you take it (the carry-over money) on top of that reduction, then you're penalizing those institutions that have done a good job of managing their money," Autthement said.

Abraham commented that had universities known they wouldn't be allowed to spend the carry-over money, then they would have spent it last year.

"They've offered us a piece of candy, and now they're taking it back," Abraham said.

The request for additional funding also will be sent to all legislators, the board decided.

The board also agreed to a request from its president that the Legislature be asked to approve a method so that universities can carry over money saved from last year.

The Legislature had given its approval to such carry-over funding, but, based on an opinion from the state attorney general, administrative budget officer Ralph Perlman has said that such carry-overs cannot be allowed.

The presidents want the Legislature to pass corrective legislation to allow the expenditure of carry-over money.

Board member Eugene Gouaux of Lockport said the Legislature may balk at the first resolution—calling for more money—if they know colleges had a surplus last year.

"It's not surplus money. It's a managed carry-over," said Ray Autthement, president of the University of Southern Louisiana.