USL Cannot Legally Build Own Center

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USL president Ray Authement said yesterday the university cannot legally build its own assembly center with $18 million offered by the state as proposed by former Dean of Commerce Herbert A. Hamilton.

Hamilton made that suggestion in an ad in The Advertiser, implying that a financial arrangement to provide the facility is favorable to the city, but unfavorable to the university.

Earlier this year, the legislature agreed to put up $18 million if the city would chip in a $6 million match. The center would be built on land owned by USL and a joint-use agreement between the university and the city would be worked out.

Lafayette voters will go to the polls Nov. 7 to indicate if they want to reallocate $8 million set aside for the expansion of the existing municipal auditorium to provide the match and build some roads to serve the civic center.

But Authement referred to the legislation, which he said spells out that the state will require $6 million from the city before handing over the additional $18 million to build the center.

It states: "No bonds shall be sold, however, until the State Bond Commission is satisfied that monies available to the University of Southwestern Louisiana from all other sources, together with the bonds authorized hereby, equals $24 million."

Authement told The Advertiser an assembly center would also be expensive to maintain.

"Therefore, for the University to be the sole user of the facility would bring some financial burden upon the university itself. Therefore, we would encourage use by the city and other groups," he said.

The legislation states that without affecting, restricting or limiting the obligation of the state to pay the bonds from monies pledged, "but in order to decrease the financial burden on the funds of the state, the University of Southwestern Louisiana, with concurrence of the State Bond Commission, may enter into such management and ownership agreements with the city of Lafayette as may be necessary to secure matching funds for the facility."

"I think we're extremely fortunate in being able to build one facility for Lafayette which the city and university can share," Authement remarked.

Noting that LSU has an assembly center, and the University of New Orleans has funds appropriated for one, as does Southeastern University, the university president said it was "just a matter of time" before USL asked for one.

"It would be a waste to build two," he said, adding the community could best be served by one facility that is shared.

Hamilton said he placed the ad because, "I'm just interested in the university and don't want to see it destroyed."

He said current financial arrangements are "certainly detrimental to the university," later explaining that "in his opinion, "They're just taking $18 million from the state and giving it to the city."

In the advertisement, Hamilton states USL will provide 25 acres for the proposed civic center, but Authement said yesterday it will only provide "adequate" acreage for the facility. That is apparently not expected to total 25 acres.

Hamilton said he received about 50 calls about the advertisement. "I haven't had one against it yet," he commented.