

Leaders discuss proposed \$131M budget cut

Leaders

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State legislators, higher education administrators and community leaders in northwest Louisiana met Tuesday to discuss a looming \$131 million higher education budget cut statewide.

Schools throughout the state received notice from Governor John Bel Edwards Thursday to formulate plans each institution would execute in a budget crisis scenario if the proposed cuts were to be adopted. The cuts were proposed to address the \$750 million mid-year Louisiana state budget shortfall and the \$1.9 billion deficit for the upcoming fiscal year.

Two panels of state education leaders and legislative officials discussed the possible repercussions Tuesday at the Greater Shreveport Chamber of Commerce in a meeting to “develop a coordinated regional approach” to absorb the cuts.

A concrete plan was not presented at the discussion, but chancellors represented said their hope is that the state will hear the education community’s concerns.

According to the Shreveport-Bossier Business Alliance for Higher Education, state appropriations for higher education have been cut most severely in Louisiana – by 53 percent.

District 6 State Rep. Thomas Carmody echoed SBBA’s statement.

“Eight years ago, we had students paying 30 percent and the state paying about 70 percent in education,” he said, adding that universities in the state have been held to a higher standard of education while simultaneously operating on dwindling state appropriations.

Joseph Rallo, state commissioner of higher education, said schools statewide need creative approaches to minimize impact.

“Of \$262 million, higher education is being asked to put together plans to accomplish 50 percent,” he said. “This 50 percent is the highest in any budget reduction in the history of Louisiana. We’re talking about 50

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percent with only four months left.”

Panelists said cutting faculty and staff in half, losing potential students and ending specific programs to cover the cost would be detrimental to the entire state, not just to one college or university.

Southern University System President Ray Belton said his school's comprehensive support services would be compromised if the budget cut were adopted.

"The budget reduction is dramatic and will have a disastrous impact on Southern University System," he said. "A cut of this magnitude will literally compromise the University System's mission. The school's share of the cuts is \$7.4 million.

District 8 State Rep. Mike Johnson said Louisiana's government hasn't been prioritizing higher education when it comes to budget adjustments.

"Before we cut higher education, I think all of you need to look legislators in the eyes and say, 'What did you do about all that other waste?' There is more waste from the state government," he said. "It's been done the wrong way for too long." Louisiana State University Vice President for Finance and Administration Dan Layzell said LSU campuses will not be able to provide the same education experience and student resources it has in the past if it operates on \$65 million less. "We've done what the state has asked, we've enrolled more students, we've graduated more students and we're trying to become more efficient in our operations," Layzell said. "We'll be doing a lot more with less and we're at a tipping point right now." Senator Mike Walsworth, District 33, said the damages will be to families and higher education employees.

"Higher education cannot get cut," he said. "But they will not cut \$131 million, period."