Chancellors discuss impact of cuts

By JORDAN BLUM

Advocate Capitol News Bureau

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Chancellors throughout the LSU System discussed the “enormous impacts” proposed state budget cuts would have on their campuses during the LSU Board of Supervisors meeting Thursday.

The LSU System is facing a state funding cut of about 15 percent. That amounts to $102 million — $97 million without statutory dedications — and includes about $34 million cut from the main Baton Rouge campus.

“I believe very seriously the state of Louisiana has a contract with these students,” LSU Chancellor Michael Martin said.

The students are holding up their end, Martin said, but the state will not if the Legislature approves the pending cuts.

The legislative session begins April 27. Gov. Bobby Jindal has recommended $219 million in total cuts to colleges statewide.

LSU campus chancellors complained the cuts would result in hundreds of layoffs, increased class sizes, fewer class offerings, the loss of student services and increased tuition and fees by at least 5 percent.

Martin said the main LSU campus may have to shut down research institutions such as the Center for Advanced Microstructures and Devices, called CAMD, on Jefferson Highway.

University of New Orleans Chancellor Tim Ryan said his school may need to eliminate all its athletics programs, unless students approve massive student fee increases.

LSU Paul M. Hebert Law Center Chancellor Jack Weiss said it pains him to lay off several employees who are doing their jobs very well.

Arguably hurt worst is the LSU Agricultural Center, which cannot offset cuts with tuition dollars.

The center performs research and extension services to every parish, but does not enroll students.
“Our situation is beyond dire,” said LSU AgCenter Chancellor Bill Richardson, adding that the cuts would force the AgCenter to declare a financial emergency, or exigency, for a second time since Hurricane Katrina.

LSU board member Tony Falterman, of Napoleonville, said the Legislature and public must understand that “higher education is being destroyed.”

“We can’t let this happen,” added board member Stanley Jacobs, of New Orleans.

LSU System President John Lombardi said people hear the numbers but often do not realize the “very, very bad consequences” on the campuses “at a level clearly damaging to the future of this state.”

Hypothetically, Lombardi said, the cuts could double in two years when federal stimulus dollars are no longer available to soften the blow.

The board also approved a resolution Thursday supporting 5 percent tuition increases for the next fiscal year.

The Legislature last year approved three years of 5 percent increases. But they must be re-approved each year by the state’s joint legislative budget committee.

LSU campuses also are considering additional student fee increases, but no decisions have been finalized yet.

The tuition increase would generate more than $10 million for the LSU System, including $7.1 million for the main campus.

The LSU System’s total budget to start the academic year was $1.58 billion, but the state share was $690 million.