

Jindal's higher ed cuts could set state back decades

By Leslie Turk

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UL President Joe Savoie and Blueprint Louisiana member Jimmy Maurin are making one of the strongest arguments for killing the proposed cuts to higher education. If Gov. Bobby Jindal gets his way, his higher ed cuts could set Louisiana's education system back 20 years.

Maurin, who chairs Stirling Properties, appeared before the Senate Finance Committee yesterday as part of a group of business leaders asking the Legislature to explore all options outside of cutting higher education.

Savoie has been effectively arguing that the Jindal position will only return us to the disastrous days of the 1980s where the cuts were so severe it took 15 years for institutions to recover.

Maurin and other business leaders like him are not likely to get their wish. Even higher ed officials like Savoie recognize that some cuts are likely; there is just no way Louisiana can afford to slash \$219 million from its colleges and universities.

Savoie and Maurin's appeal to save higher education from such massive cuts is the most important of this Legislative session. Economic development depends on it.

Many education, business and legislative leaders believe that if Jindal continues down this path of unwillingness to negotiate on these cuts, he will leave little doubt about his priorities — and will make crystal clear his posturing for higher office at a time when Louisiana desperately needs his leadership. We're in unprecedented, difficult times and sacrifices must be made in higher education, but if we can throw \$50 million out to save a chicken plant in north Louisiana, aren't we in a position to protect our colleges and universities?

We should all join together to urge the governor to push rainy day monies into higher education to cushion the blow and give higher education officials more time to make additional adjustments. The colleges and universities have already promised to do their part, increasing tuition and slashing programs. The governor needs to step up and do his.

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