

Appointed superintendent bill alive despite loss

BATON ROUGE — The House of Representatives fell four votes short Wednesday of approving a Senate-passed bill to appoint the Superintendent of Education.

However, the 66-35 vote, four short of the needed two-thirds majority, was considered a test vote by proponents to see who they needed to work on in an all out lobbying effort.

Gov. Edwin Edwards, who favors passage of the measure, was in the back of the House chamber when the bill was debated and voted on said he would do everything "legally possible" to pick up the four needed votes.

The House was scheduled to debate an almost identical bill today filed by Rep. Alphonse Jackson of Shreveport but that was scrapped after Edwards said he would rather try with the measure that has already passed the Senate.

Edwards said he could get his votes. "I'm confident that when the votes comes up on reconsideration, it will pass," he said.

Edwards told reporters at an impromptu news conference in the hallway afterwards that the bill will pass next week.

Rep. Jimmy Long, D-Natchitoches and chairman of the House Education Committee, said Edwards probably won't have to wait until next week.

"I think we'll try it tomorrow

on reconsideration. I think the votes will be there tomorrow," said Long.

The bill was heavily lobbied against by Education Superintendent Tom Clausen. Four legislators did not vote.

Local legislators voting for an appointed superintendent were Reps. Burt Andrepont of Sulphur, James David Cain of Dry Creek, Wilford Carter and Margaret Lowenthal of Lake Charles, Buddy Leach of Leesville and Jimmy Martin of Welsh.

Voting against an appointed superintendent were Reps. Allen Bradley of DeRidder and Conway LeBleu of Cameron.

Under the bill, the 11-member Board of Elementary and Secondary Education would appoint a superintendent and the Senate would have the power to confirm or reject the appointment.

Shortly before the vote was taken, Edwards told reporters he knew of 10 legislators who had committed to vote both for and against the bill.

Lowenthal and Carter were both leaning against the bill until moments before the vote.

Carter said when he received a letter from the Calcasieu Parish School Board endorsing an appointive superintendent, he changed his mind.

Lowenthal said remarks made by New Orleans Rep. John Hainkel "really made my

mind up." Hainkel told colleagues they better get the 70 votes now or Gov. Edwards would have to spend \$8 million to \$10 million to obtain the short votes.

Lowenthal said she didn't want the "headlines to read she was one of those \$8 million votes."

Rep. Claude "Buddy" Leach of Leesville, had the strongest comments, accusing himself and his colleagues of playing politics and compromise for too long with education.

"Our house of compromise and political deals is going to collapse on our heads," Leach warned. "... Compromise and political game playing have

built protective shields around some legislators more interested in re-election than in education."

Leach said Louisiana can claim fame only for its crawfish. "We have built a wall of ignorance . . . I guess our children will have to stay home because they can't compete anywhere else. Let them eat crawfish, I guess."

The opponents didn't put on much of a show, letting Reps. Bradley, of DeRidder and Woody Jenkins of Baton Rouge, carry the load.

Earlier in debate, Bradley proposed amending the bill to call for a non-binding referendum on whether the superin-

tendent should be appointed or elected.

The amendment was defeated 62-41.

Bradley said a referendum could be placed on the next state-wide ballot, officially called an "advisory non-binding referendum."

Southwest Louisiana legislators voting for the amendment were Reps. Bradley, Carter, Lowenthal and LeBleu.

Voting against the amendment were Reps. Andrepont, Cain, Leach and Martin.

House Education Committee Chairman Jimmy Long of Natchitoches said the Bradley amendment was a maneuver of killing the original bill. If the

amendment was adopted, the superintendent would not be appointed, unless more legislation was submitted after the referendum had taken place.

Rep. Jim Donelon of Metairie said he opposed Bradley's amendment because it raises a serious constitutional question. "Our Constitution does not provide for elections. It does not provide to call for straw votes," Donelon said.

Bradley defended his amendment. He said if his amendment passed, he would be for the bill. "It's not going to cause a delay because it doesn't take effect until the present superintendent finishes his term of office."