

## Alexander talks LSU, future of hospital, medical school

**SBBA:**

**People in NWLA are concerned that we could lose our LSU medical school because both Lafayette and**

**Alexander:**

Q&A

SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

The Shreveport Bossier Business Alliance recently sat down with Louisiana State University President F. King Alexander for a question and answer session.

**SBBA:** Gov.-elect John Bel Edwards has stated publicly his decision to run for governor was driven in part by his concern about the ongoing cuts to higher education. How do you see his emphasis on higher education playing out in the years ahead and in what ways do you see LSU contributing to the future of Louisiana?

**Alexander:** Our conversations with Gov.-elect Edwards have been very positive. Louisiana faces many financial challenges, so it is very encouraging the incoming administration views higher education as a funding priority and a key to economic development. To capitalize on any future state investments, LSU will consider investments in meeting the state's healthcare workforce needs, improving student success, and providing more research that solves our state's problems or building the future economy. Through stable, predictable, and appropriate state support, we can increase our competitiveness on the national level, draw in the best talent, provide a challenging learning environment, and produce medical research and treatment options that change the lives of Louisiana citizens.

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**F. King Alexander**

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Q&A

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Baton Rouge have expressed interest in gaining a medical school. Is there any merit to this concern?

Let me definitively say the citizens of northern Louisiana have nothing to worry about. LSU Health Shreveport and our training programs in Monroe are here to stay. In fact, we want to expand our academic and training programs in northern Louisiana to more fully meet the medical workforce needs of the state.

**SBBA:** What is your position regarding establishing new medical schools in Louisiana?

**Alexander:** While LSU participated in Baton Rouge's planning efforts relative to medical education, we are adamant any future medical programming not compete with the existing medical schools in Shreveport or New Orleans for the state's already limited resources.

LSU is committed to supporting its existing medical schools, and will never waver from that commitment.

**SBBA:** Do you intend to conduct a national search for a chancellor to replace Dr. Robert Barish and to whom will that chancellor report? What is your intended timeline and expected process for that search?

**Alexander:** Yes, we will conduct a national search for the chancellor of the LSU Health Sciences Center Shreveport. A search committee comprised of representative stakeholders will convene with the purpose of finding the best possible candidate sometime in early 2016.

**SBBA:** With Dr. Barish's departure, we are entering a transition period. Will we have an interim chancellor and what will you task him with doing? Specifically, will he be asked to cut costs and could those cuts lead to the elimination of some departments and programs?

**Alexander:** The financial situation of LSU Health Shreveport has changed dramatically over the past three years, requiring a new plan for financial stability. It is more important than ever to diversify the school's revenue base, ensuring a vibrant medical center. The interim chancellor will work with the center's leadership over the next several months analyzing state and federal resources, strengthening operations, and building up the newly created clinical practice plan.

**SBBA:** As a result of the financial complexity imposed by the hospital privatization process, it became necessary to request additional funds directly from the Legislature to support LSUHSC-Shreveport this current fiscal year. The expectation is some funds will be needed again next year. Will you support an LSUHSC-S request for additional funds to support these schools as we continue to transition through the privatization process?

**Alexander:** I am committed to making sure LSU Health Shreveport is successful. With Louisiana's budget unpredictability, we must work to decrease reliance on direct state funding.

However, if the same situation arises this session, we will work with the Governor and Legislature to bridge the funding gap with state dollars until our other revenue streams reach maturity.

**SBBA:** One of the biggest challenges facing Louisiana is the looming shortage in the healthcare workforce – some predict a need for an additional 3,000 physicians in the next 10 years. Can you provide us with your vision for resolving that shortage and the role you see LSUHSC-Shreveport playing in that vision?

**Alexander:** Unfortunately, Louisiana citizens are plagued with a number of significant healthcare challenges. There is always a need for increasing our medical workforce ranging from doctors to personal care attendants. The medical school's incoming class increased over the past few years. But we have to pursue the development of additional programming that fits best within individual institutions. For example, there are opportunities for additional collaborations between LSU Health Shreveport, LSUS and Bossier Parish Community College to expand training in the basic sciences and allied health, areas that produce needed graduates. One of the goals our next chancellor will be charged with is matching our programming with the state's workforce needs, an emerging theme across higher education and economic development.

**SBBA:** LSU and the Biomedical Research Foundation were recently in court regarding the BRF's role as the operator of University Health.

Do you have any updates regarding that arrangement?

**Alexander:** We continue to pursue resolution to all outstanding issues related to the Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with the Biomedical Research Foundation. All of our partners will continue to work cooperatively with LSU to not only deliver care to our most vulnerable but also support the academic mission of our schools.

**SBBA:** Is there anything else you would like to share with North Louisiana about LSU's plans for the schools in our region?

**Alexander:** Let me be clear: LSU Health Shreveport is here to stay. The only plans we have for the region include expanding opportunities for students in the area and continuing to play a strong leadership role in developing the region's future opportunities. A new LSUS Student Success Center opens in January to better assure student success towards graduation.

The online programs and the doctoral program at LSUS are tremendously successful. The LSU AgCenter is basing its fight against encroaching salvinia from the Red River Research Station; and they have recently won a grant to expand a health education program for at-risk youth in Shreveport.