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Edwards: Anti-tax lawmakers should detail \$1B-plus in cuts

By The Associated Press

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*Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards in New Orleans on Jan. 10, 2017.
(CHRIS GRANGER)*

Lawmakers who don't want to replace more than \$1 billion in expiring taxes should detail how they intend to cut that amount of state spending, Gov. John Bel Edwards said Thursday, taking aim at House Republicans who have blocked tax legislation.

The Democratic governor made his comments to **Together Louisiana**, a group of faith-based and community leaders, as he urged members to call their lawmakers, push for the taxes to be replaced and tell "them how important it is to continue to invest in their people."

"If they insist on allowing the revenue to fall off the table, make them tell you with specificity the cuts that they propose. Because that has never happened," the governor said.

Edwards didn't name names. But his words were targeted squarely at House Republicans who have stymied previous tax packages recommended by the governor and others to offset the mid-2018 tax expiration.

More than \$1 billion in temporary taxes, mainly a 1 percent state sales tax hike, roll off the books on June 30 and create a giant hole for the 2018-19 financial year that begins July 1.

While House GOP leaders have proposed lessening state spending to shrink some of the budget gap, no one has offered a specific proposal for cutting more than \$1 billion from Louisiana's operating budget.

"I can respect people who say, 'You know what? I'm just not voting for that revenue.' But only if they turn right back and say, 'And this is what I would cut,'" Edwards told the crowd assembled in a local Baptist church. "Saying no to everything, but not having your own proposal to make, is part of the problem. It is not part of the solution."

The governor didn't spell out what package of taxes he'd like to see passed.

House Speaker Taylor Barras, a Republican, has described it as a "difficult exercise" to try to make the full amount in cuts, saying he doesn't see a way such reductions in spending could spare colleges, the TOPS free tuition program and health care programs. He has said he expects to find a solution that is a blend of cuts and taxes.



Edwards has talked to Louisiana's Tax Commission chairman about enacting the posting requirement for information about the Industrial Tax Exemption Program.

Though the state's operating budget tops \$28 billion, cuts would come from the \$9.4 billion general fund, the portion of money funded by state taxes, limiting which agencies would take the hits. The cuts also would grow larger if they fall on programs such as Medicaid that get federal matching cash for every dollar the state spends.

Some Republicans describe the governor as pushing to raise taxes and grow government. Edwards sought to frame the debate differently Thursday, saying it would keep the state treasury at an even keel, receiving the same dollars it gets today.

"I'm not asking for net new revenue beyond what we're collecting," he said.

Edwards has held closed-door meetings with business leaders and local elected officials to make his case for replacing the expiring tax dollars. He's also been meeting with legislative leaders, in the hopes of building consensus for that approach.

Any tax plans will require a special legislative session to consider.