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Monday, Jan. 26, 2009

Kasemeyer: State budget deficit could hit \$2.4 billion

Business leaders need to speak up in Annapolis, Pipkin advises

— C. Benjamin Ford |

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Maryland's political leaders struck a pessimistic note to about 300 people at the Greater Baltimore Committee's annual legislative forum Monday morning, as they voiced concern that the state's \$1.9 billion budget deficit could grow to more than \$2.4 billion if revenues continue to plummet.

The General Assembly has no desire to add new taxes to close the budget deficit, but Sen. E.J. Pipkin (R-Dist. 36) of Elkton told those at the breakfast forum at the Sheraton hotel in downtown Baltimore that the legislators were likely to add "hidden" taxes in the form of new business regulations.

Business leaders need to make their voices heard in Annapolis, because business groups that supposedly represent them are too quick to support plans from the Democrats in power, Pipkin said.

The business leaders should use the economic downturn to fight plans like a proposal for a single-payer state health care system, Pipkin said.

Also at the forum, Senate Majority Leader Sen. Edward J. Kasemeyer (D-Dist. 12) of Columbia said Maryland is trying to create the best environment to attract workers, primarily through education spending for a well-trained work force.

Kasemeyer, vice chairman of the Budget and Taxation Committee, said the budget shortfall is expected to grow, possibly to as much as \$2.4 billion. He also said the recession could continue for three to five years.

Del. Talmadge Branch (D-Dist. 45) of Baltimore said the state budget already is lean, with possibly 700 of state employees pending.

"It's tough on everybody," he said. "This is a lean, lean budget."



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