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Business groups ask House for economic stimulus package

By Bill Cotterell
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Despite a \$2 billion hole in next year's budget, business leaders urged House money managers Tuesday to invest in an "economic stimulus package" to kick-start Florida's economy.

After chairing a dreary three-hour briefing on state spending needs and slumping revenue projections, House Budget and Policy Chairman Ray Sansom said he likes the ideas put forth by Associated Industries of Florida and 16 other big business and professional organizations.

▼ADVERTISEMENT ▼ But the Fort Walton Beach Republican said the House and Senate will have to balance severe belt-tightening with spending that spurs job growth and retail activities.

Amy Baker, coordinator of the State Revenue Estimating Conference, said collections for November and December were about \$98 million lower than her group's already-reduced revenue projections for the current fiscal year. She said economic indicators, led by a continued downward spiral in the housing market, have all the dismal earmarks of a recession.

"We have to be careful about using the R-word," said Dominic Calabro, president of Florida TaxWatch, a corporate-funded policy-study group that analyzes state fiscal and operating factors. "There is a certain amount of self-fulfilling prophesy in this."

Calabro was among a parade of executives endorsing AIF President Barney Bishop's call for an economic-stimulus package in the 2008 legislative session, which starts March 4. Bishop said the businesses were deliberately not putting a price tag on their plans, leaving it up to Gov. Charlie Crist and the Legislature to decide how much to invest.

The package included:

- 1 Highway development to relieve congestion and provide fast transport to ports and business hubs,
- 1 Affordable-housing funding, both to spur job-creation in construction trades that have slumped and to provide work-force housing that will increase bank lending and consumer purchasing,
- 1 School funding, with a shift in the class-size limits from a per-school basis to district-wide measurement. That would take a constitutional amendment.
- 1 Alternative water-supply solutions, including reclamation, desalination and collection and storage of rainwater to create jobs.
- 1 Expansion of Florida's 14 deep-water ports to compete with Savannah for automotive and big-retailer imports, as well as increasing exports.
- 1 More investment in the \$2 billion aerospace industry. Bishop said NASA plans a three- to five-year gap between the end of the shuttle program and start of the Constellation program, with thousands of engineering jobs at stake, and;
- 1 Strategic marketing for international tourism.

"These one-time capital infrastructure improvements will place Florida in the most favorable position when the economy turns around," Bishop said.

Baker, head of the legislative economic unit, said "three shocks" have

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What can one say to this! The arrogance of these guys does not shock me anymore, as they have had it their way with this legislature for so long. I truly don't believe the elites are aware of the fear and anger simmering in the declining middle class, or perhaps they just don't care! With the possible exception of the NASA related items, this "stimulus" will go to the big developers and contractors who will rake it in while using cheap imported labor. Of course, some of these profits will be kicked back to the politicians who approved the "stimulus" to begin with! Again, I guess us serfs will have to content ourselves with some meaningless "culture of life" and "sanctity of marriage" legislation, while the REAL game of crony capitalism is played out. However, I am starting to think the charade is not going to work this time.

Posted by: **MOSS500** on Wed Jan 09, 2008 8:23 am

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damaged Florida's economic outlook. Those are the first drop in home prices since the Depression, the worst credit crunch since the late 1980s and financial institutions grapple with consumer fears and defaults and continued high oil prices that harm state tourism.

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