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Buckley warns 'cuts, cuts, cuts' will harm state

Assembly speaker to respond to Gibbons State of State speech

By MOLLY BALL
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Assembly Speaker Barbara Buckley told a business group Wednesday that continuing to "cut, cut, cut" the state budget in response to revenue shortfalls will damage Nevada in the long run.

Echoing a presentation she has been giving at town halls around the state for several months, Buckley, D-Las Vegas, told the North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce that a "balanced approach" that doesn't cut teacher salaries will be necessary to get the state out of its current hole.

Buckley didn't go into specifics about what she plans to propose, especially when it comes to increasing state revenue -- raising taxes -- to avoid an estimated \$2.4 billion in cuts to state service levels over the coming two years for which the Legislature budgets.

Gov. Jim Gibbons, a Republican who has vowed not to increase most taxes, is scheduled to present his budget proposals today when he delivers his State of the State address.

One component of Gibbons' proposal will be a 6 percent pay cut for state workers, a majority of whom are teachers.

Buckley is scheduled to present the Democratic response to Gibbons' speech immediately after he gives it at 6 p.m.

She said it's hard to be specific without knowing what Gibbons will say, but she plans to present constructive proposals rather than merely objecting to Gibbons' plans.

Buckley told the small group of assembled business people that she's been gathering ideas for possible solutions that can be examined and hashed out by the Legislature after it convenes next month.

If the Democratic-controlled Legislature doesn't want to go along with Gibbons' proposed cuts, it is going to have to do a lot of heavy lifting. Among the proposals Buckley said she favors is getting rid of outdated tax breaks and wasteful use of economic development funds; reforming but not eliminating public employee retirement benefits.

Education must be improved as the basis of future prosperity, a view that others in the room echoed, Buckley said.

"I know that together we can come up with solutions for our state that will allow us to continue our progress."

Contact reporter Molly Ball at mball@reviewjournal.com or 702-387-2919.

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