The Hour online

Businesses grill lawmakers over no budget

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Local legislators highlighted the low cost, big initiatives they introduced this session, but business leaders wanted to know Tuesday where the state budget was.

Stamford and Greenwich lawmakers who gathered at the Hilton Hotel Tuesday for the Stamford Chamber of Commerce legislative luncheon said they hope to see some kind of budget adopted by the week's end, just days before the fiscal year ends June 30.

"It's frustrating, to say the least, to hear that we're still without a budget," said David Lewis, president of OperationsInc, a human resources consulting firm based in Stamford.

Lewis was one of several area business leaders to voice frustration over the lack of representation Fairfield County gets in Hartford.

"We represent 43 percent of the revenues that go into the state budget on an annualized basis," he said. "How do you take the representation that exists here, and turn it into representation there that actually moves things forward for this county?"

"It's certainly been a struggle," said state Sen. Andrew McDonald, D-27. "The resources for lower-Fairfield County are consolidated more and more to Hartford, are being redistributed to other parts of the state, and are not coming back to the communities from which they're generated."

State Rep. William Tong, D-147, echoed that frustration and blamed Gov. M. Jodi Rell for not fulfilling her "constitutional obligation."

"The governor's fundamental role is to come in and produce a balanced budget; she did not do that," said Tong.

Rell's initial budget included deep cuts with no tax increase, but legislators later learned there was a $2 billion shortfall in her proposal.

Rell and Democrats have clashed for months over how to cover a budget deficit estimated to be as much as $8.7 billion over the next two years.

There have been no bipartisan budget talks since the General Assembly adjourned its regular session.

State Rep. Livvy Floren, R-149, said of the eight counties in Connecticut, the Fairfield delegation is the only one to meet regularly and discuss matters on a bipartisan basis.

"The reality is, there are seven of us, and all we can do is go up there (Hartford) and immerse ourselves in the process," said state Sen. Scott Frantz, R-36, whose district covers Greenwich, Stamford and parts of New Canaan.

Those three communities combined send more than $1.2 billion annually to the state in tax revenue, he said.

"You don't want to know what we get back in return," said Frantz.