

Himes cites successes of bailout, stimulus funds

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STAMFORD -- Suffering declining revenues, job losses and near bankruptcy, it's been an anxious past year for the business community, Rep. Jim Himes said in an address to the Business Council of Fairfield County Thursday.

Himes spoke candidly as the keynote speaker for the Business Council's 40th annual luncheon, addressing Wall Street reform, green job creation, health care reform and education.

"You are facing challenges you have never seen before, that are pervasive around the country and are exacerbated in your case that the United States public are as mad as hornets right now," Himes said to a crowd of over 200. "Their anger is directed at you and me. My job is to help return confidence in investment, growth and employment."

Joe McGee, vice president of Public Policy for the Business Council, said they chose Himes as this year's keynote speaker because he serves on the House Financial Services Committee which has been grappling with reforms aimed at reeling in risky Wall Street trading practices and consumer protection measures. Previous speakers included former Republican Congressman Christopher Shays.

"Jim Himes is clearly very knowledgeable for a freshman in Congress," McGee said. "He comes out of the financial sector and is able to speak with ease and awareness on the issues that directly affect those members of the business council and the community."

Himes is a former Goldman Sachs executive who took office in January 2009.

, said economic conditions have improved slightly. When he first took office, more than 750,000 jobs per month were being lost, spiking concerns that the United States was spiraling into a depression that mimicked that of the 1930s.

He asserts however, that because of unpopular actions like the bailout and stimulus packages, that the United States "dodged a major bullet."

"I didn't go to Congress to do what I did. I spent an immense amount of time putting fingers in the dike with the financial bill, the stimulus; it's not why I wanted to be there,"

he said. "I wanted to be there because we are not configured as a country to win anymore. We are eroding our chief competitive advantage as a nation with innovative capacity."

Himes plans to run for re-election and refocus his efforts on education. Nearly half the students enrolled in Bridgeport schools do not graduate and of those, half will end up incarcerated, costing taxpayers \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year, Himes said.

However, the problem does not lie solely within inner cities. Affluent American students are now competing with students from Europe, China and Taiwan, and U.S. citizens are currently losing the battle in education and innovation.

"We need to educate our people to be innovators; to create new products and services and right now we are losing in that," Himes said.

By allocating more funds and turning efforts toward improving education in the U.S., he believes more people will come together to help aid Medicare, Social Security and job creation, especially in the energy revolution.

Joslyn Gadwah, branch manager of the local staffing firm Manpower, said this past year has been the most difficult for employment since its inception in 1960. Manpower works to fill jobs in marketing, sales, the financial sector and various administrative roles. More recently, the organization began to help those seeking jobs in the green industry, a sector that Himes addresses in his legislation.

"The advent of green jobs and work are really going to bolster Fairfield County," Gadwah said. "We're now beginning to work with green technology and we look forward to working with his new initiatives."

During a 20-minute question and answer session, Himes also touched briefly on President Barack Obama's performance and where he sees room for improvement.

"Leadership involves an awful lot of empathy, and (Obama) is a cerebral and analytic person about the right answer," Himes said. "He is not good at resonating with people and has not put a respected CEO into the Cabinet, which would have been well-served."

During the luncheon, the Business Council also named Richard Taber, CEO and chairman of First County Bank, as its 2010 Walter H. Wheeler, Jr. Leadership Award winner, who will be honored at a dinner in October.