

WBR ARTICLE

Gov looks to local leaders in economic slowdown

By Dennis E. Curran

February 10, 2009 --

CHEYENNE – Gov. Dave Freudenthal is urging Wyoming business and economic development leaders to practice a new brand of leadership that will keep Wyoming from “hunkering down” to wait out the recession and instead help the state continue to grow, despite the economic downturn.

The governor spoke to Wyoming Chamber of Commerce Executives yesterday and Wyoming Economic Development Association members today, and in both cases his message was nearly the same: during the boom of the past five-six years, the state and its communities could afford be “reactive” in their leadership styles, but the changing economy is going to force them to be more “proactive.”

Freudenthal said the national recession is having an increasingly greater impact on Wyoming’s economy, particularly as the demand for energy falls, but he said it also presents Wyoming with opportunities if people keep moving forward.

“I don’t have any doubt that if we don’t hunker down and hide, we can manage our way through this,” the governor told WEDA members this noon.

However, Freudenthal warned that Wyomingites sometimes are “too timid” and often “hunker down” and wait for some outside force to bring a turnaround. Yesterday, he said people too often “turn into a turtle” and retreat into their shell or “freeze like a deer in the headlights.”

“That doesn’t work,” he said.

Instead, he said, Wyoming and its people must work hard to move through the downturn and continue efforts to grow and diversify its economy.

He conceded that public confidence has reached low levels in recent weeks and said that even in Wyoming people are wondering whether “tomorrow’s going to be better than today.”

But with strong local leadership, “we’re going to build, we’re going to build this state both in good times and bad,” he said.