

Newswatch



By Star-Bulletin Staff

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Cayetano budget stirs skepticism

Gov. Ben Cayetano's proposed budget for the next two fiscal years has drawn a skeptical response from House Finance Committee members. They wonder how the state can be helped by what they consider an unfinished blueprint with some questionable assumptions.

The panel's ranking Republican, Minority Leader Gene Ward (Hahaione Valley), asked if "the books were cooked," to stress that the state can't afford pay raises for unionized government workers.

"They're based on facts," retorted state Budget Director Earl Anzai, noting that the administration's biennium budget and financial plan were built on Council on Revenues projections.

But, Ward told Anzai, "You're saying you don't know if you're going to be in the red or the black."

While there were bipartisan challenges to Anzai during his budget briefing yesterday, the Republicans were more aggressive in their questioning. "There wasn't enough data to say yea or nay," Ward asserted.

House Finance members were especially skeptical of Anzai's claim that Cayetano's plan for \$1 billion in construction projects to stimulate the sluggish economy won't cause the state's debt service to skyrocket.

Anzai said the administration is banking on an improved economy with an increase in general fund revenues.

Rep. Colleen Meyer (R, Kahaluu) told Anzai: "Your figures look good. But it's all assumptions. You could be creating a debt our children will have for years."

Instead of his grand scheme for a two-year construction push, Cayetano should have moved ahead with previously approved building projects he halted during his first two years in office, said Meyer and Rep. Barbara Marumoto (R, Waialae Iki).