State lawmakers on Friday recognized a $1.5 billion shortfall the state faces in the coming year, but some legislators expressed skepticism about the figure.

The state Legislature last year approved a temporary 1-cent sales tax hike that expires next year as a quick fix to shore up the state's finances until a more permanent solution could be reached.

State budget leaders told lawmakers Friday that the sales tax hike's expiration; growth in expenses, including the need to cover costs that have been delayed; and oil projections have pushed the previously anticipated billion-dollar figure to $1.5 billion.

"That's the net effect of all revenue sources," state economist Greg Albrecht told the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, which is made up of the budget leaders from the House and Senate. But legislators, who have held four special sessions in the past two years to deal with budget issues, questioned the accuracy and whether budget advisers were accurately calculating the current expenses.

"It would be a lot better to have real numbers," said Sen. Jim Fannin, a Jonesboro Republican who previously chaired the House Appropriations Committee. "Historically, those numbers don't work."

Gov. John Bel Edwards has been holding hearings with business leaders and plans to meet with legislators and community groups to come up with plans for addressing the "fiscal cliff" the state faces for the coming budget cycle that begins July 1.

Lawmakers, driven by House Republican leaders who have frequently been at odds with Democrat Edwards, rejected a package the governor proposed during this year's legislative session.

Many budget and tax measures can be taken up only during odd-numbered years, so Edwards is likely to call a special session to take up legislation to address the revenue shortfall. Some lawmakers have floated the idea of continuing all or part of the sales tax increase.

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