Only two councilmen attend Morial speech

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — When outgoing New Orleans Mayor Dutch Morial gave his last State of the City speech, only two of the seven city councilmen showed up.

Morial, who will be replaced May 5 by Councilman-at-Large Sidney Barthelemy, called on the people of New Orleans to back the incoming mayor's efforts to solve the city's financial problems. Estimates place the city anywhere from $12 million to $30 million in the red.

James Singleton and Lambert Boissiere Jr. were the only councilmen to hear the mayor's last major address, which was delivered Monday night in the council chamber to about 150 Morial supporters and political appointees.

Councilmen said they didn't get invitations until Monday and had made other plans. But Morial spokeswoman Cheron Brylski said the councilmen were sent notices about the speech more than a week ago.

"Our fiscal insufficiencies continue to be the greatest obstacles to our future progress, said Morial, who tried repeatedly over the past eight years to win approval for various tax increases and new fees.

"And there is no doubt in my mind that time is running out if we are successful to surmount these obstacles without suffering any disabling backlash."

Morial said he regrets that, as he leaves office, "this city's legacy of fiscal insufficiencies continues to hover over us like a dark cloud." He urged citizens to analyze the options his administration had presented and "compare these to the tough choices which must continue to be made if new revenues are not generated."

"Be determined to solve this problem once and for all," he said. "The answer has to come from our own pockets."

Toward the end of his speech, which was interrupted by applause 24 times, Morial, characterized as "fiesty, combative or abrasive at points during his tenure, took a conciliatory approach.

He thanked the council for approving many of his projects, thanked city employees for working long hours and thanked citizens for supporting his programs.

He admitted to making errors and said "perhaps on some things we were overanxious and too zealous in our pursuit of progress."

Morial was to be honored at a series of events Tuesday and Wednesday as he prepares to relinquish office next Monday.

On Wednesday, Milwaukee Mayor Henry W. Maier will be the featured speaker at a $150-a-plate testimonial dinner. Proceeds from the dinner will go to a guest speakers program on urban affairs to be administered by Xavier University.