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By Rep. Walt Minnick

Our nation is in trouble. Unemployment rates are climbing, people are watching their savings disappear and all of us are worried about what comes next.

That's why Idaho families, workers, businesses and local governments should get what they have asked for from the U.S. Congress: smart investments to create new jobs and put people back to work.

I do not believe that the largest spending bill in U.S. history is the most effective way to do that. That's why I voted against the American Recovery and Investment Act, otherwise known as the stimulus bill.

What began with a tight focus on job creation and infrastructure improvements ballooned into a 'something for everything' spending proposal. And it will saddle our nation with economic burdens which could be just as onerous as the one we are wearing now.

Hundreds of billions of dollars in the stimulus bill are for programs which have never before been authorized by Congress. Like you, I think it's a horrible idea to try to appropriate large sums of taxpayer dollars to programs that have never before been debated or authorized.

A Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report on the stimulus bill estimates that only 7 percent of the \$358 billion of the discretionary funds in the plan would be spent in this fiscal year. The CBO also estimated that only 38 percent of the bill would be spent by the end of fiscal year 2010 and that a third of the bill would still be unspent in 31 months.

If this bill becomes law, our deficit will grow to nearly \$2 trillion, and every penny we borrow will come from foreign lenders who will rapidly gain too much leverage over our economic welfare and decisions. We are in a recession, and we must spend some money to get the economy moving again, but the American people must have guarantees that this stimulus bill will not become an excuse for fiscal irresponsibility.

There is much about the stimulus bill I support. We need to improve health care. Our nation needs a completely new approach to energy. We must improve higher education and increase access for all children.

But those things are not immediate, direct economic stimulus.

To jump-start our economy, Congress needs to fund shovel-ready road projects, and should remove restrictions that force the money to go only to projects meeting federal standards. We should extend unemployment benefits so our workers can hang on until the economy begins to

turn the corner as the stimulus funds work into our financial system. We should provide money to states so they can help local school districts carry out planned construction projects and thus save money to help keep teachers in the classroom. And we should offer tax cuts to those who need the money the most, so it will go into our economy quickly, spur spending and increase jobs.

Once the economy is moving again, Congress needs to go back to balancing the budget and start paying for what we spend. Like you, I believe that these tough times could also be the beginning of a new era of fiscal responsibility, but it must start with smart, strategic spending on key projects to put people back to work.

These tough times require quick, direct action, but our obligation to the next generation means spending every nickel in the most cost-effective way.