

Democrat Minnick explains vote against stimulus bill

By William L. Spence of the Tribune

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BOISE - One week into the 111th session of Congress, newly elected U.S. Rep. Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, thinks it's all downhill from here.

That isn't because he has the new job down pat. It's because after the House approved a \$819 billion stimulus package on Wednesday, there isn't any more money available.

"People perceived this (stimulus bill) as the last gravy train out of the station, and it's gotten so big it probably will be. There's nothing left. We might as well go home," Minnick said during a meeting with the Association of Idaho Cities here Thursday.

Minnick was one of 11 House Democrats to vote against the measure. Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, also voted in opposition.

"It was a hard vote for me," he said. "Clearly the government has to do something to turn around this economic decline, but my view about what needs to be done was in the minority."

Minnick said he would have been happy to vote for the bill if it had focused more specifically on infrastructure projects and immediate job creation, plus some tax relief for middle- and lower-income families. The final bill, however, appropriated too much money and didn't include restrictions calling for an end to the spending when the economy improves.

"This bill is going to spend more money than we have, it's going to spend it inefficiently, it's going to leave things out, and it's going to spend so much there's nothing left for anything else," he said. "I think we could spend a quarter of what we'll end up spending and still get two-thirds of the job benefits. If it were cost-effective and had an end in sight, I would have voted for it."

Part of the problem, Minnick said, was the bill was essentially written overnight by a handful of White House staffers, committee chairmen and House Democratic leaders. There was no opportunity for public input, public hearings or alternative suggestions.

"That's the way the legislative process is supposed to work," he said. "It's unfortunate the Republican leadership chose not to participate and be more engaged in the process, because I think they would have improved the bill."

The stimulus bill now moves to the Senate. Minnick wasn't optimistic it would be improved there. In fact, he thinks the Senate could add another \$100 billion in spending.

"It will probably be a \$1 trillion bill by the time all the horse-trading is done," he said.

*Spence may be contacted at
bspence@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2274.*