

Minnick meets with UI officials to discuss stimulus possibilities

Idaho Congressman had voted against stimulus

By Halley Griffin, Daily News staff writer

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Geoff Crimmins/Daily News

U.S. Rep. Walt Minnick is ready to defend Idaho's interests in the stimulus package he voted against.

"There's a lot of money for research. I want to support that, and the opportunity to talk to the university about projects that it might have available gives me insight, and we can work together," Minnick said.

"And once we understand the system better, (we can) make sure the University of Idaho and higher education in Idaho gets its fair share."

Minnick spent Wednesday morning meeting with research leaders and administrators at the University of Idaho to get an idea of the types of projects the UI has in the works.

"I want to work with the (UI) to help interface with the funding agencies to see that Idaho gets its fair share and our share doesn't go to Ohio or Iowa because they haven't heard of our projects," Minnick said.

Minnick is Idaho's lone Democrat in Congress, and one of the few who voted against the \$787 billion stimulus bill.

Now that the money is being disbursed, Minnick is ready to help steer it toward unique research endeavors in Idaho.

He cited the \$30 billion going toward the National Institutes of Health as an example.

"(What) we were talking about is a potential source of funding for research initiatives and particularly those where the University of Idaho is doing some things that are truly world-class and unique," he said.

Minnick said the work the UI does in agriculture is being done by few others. Research in organic pesticides, for example, could be added to a list of worthy projects with commercial viability.

"And my focus was to tell them that we will do anything we can, I will do anything I can, my office, to facilitate that and ... when they get their list together, do what we can to ensure that they receive fair consideration by the granting agencies," he said.

Minnick also referenced about \$200 million headed to Idaho for "broadly defined" education.

He said the money needs to be handled quickly and efficiently and get to schools as soon as possible.

"It's to be spent, not studied," he said.

Minnick said he doesn't think there will be any fallout for voting against his party on the bailout package.

"They respected the argument, and I think it - if anything - has enhanced our reputation," he said. "It occasionally pays to stand out from the herd."

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