

Enzi on economic plan: Government not solution

By Carole Cloudwalker, Cody Enterprise



Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., tours the new Social Security office in the Park County Public Library in Cody on Feb. 18 and learns about the interactive features of the office. (Photo by Sara Loven)

The \$787 billion stimulus plan recently signed into law lacks details showing how its promises might be kept, Sen. Mike Enzi said in Cody last week.

Enzi was among all but three Republican senators opposing the president's package; no Republican House members supported the plan.

Enzi says the package of federal spending and tax cuts that purported to revive the economy and save millions of jobs failed to explain how all that would be accomplished.

"How do you know whether you save a job or not?" the senator asked, adding that while Wyoming is told to anticipate 8,000 new jobs because of the stimulus package, "I'm still looking for the calculations on that. It's a phony figure."

And even if the math worked out, Enzi applied

some calculations of his own.

"By dividing 3.5 million jobs by the cost of the package, that's \$283,000 per job," he said.

A former Gillette accountant and shoe store owner, the senator said he would have preferred to boost small business as one means of aiding the economy in a sort of trickle up, rather than trickle down, approach.

"You can create jobs by helping small business, possibly by (offering) a formula for unsecured loans at low interest for each new job they create," he said.

"It's hard to get that initial money, but once business succeeds, it's easier" to obtain financial aid.

"When big companies lay off people, the people get jobs in small businesses," he said. Small businesses are highly motivated because "they know they are just one deal away from having no jobs," according to Enzi.

And he said Wyoming "has 50,000 small businesses" defined by the federal government as companies with fewer than 500 employees.

"We may not have a single big business headquartered in Wyoming," he added. "Ninety-seven percent of the people in Wyoming work for small businesses."

In Denver, President Barack Obama said the stimulus package had received broad support in Washington and elsewhere, though Democrats pushed it to passage with only the three Republican votes in the Senate.

"I do things in a bipartisan way," Enzi said Wednesday while touring the new library in Cody. But he found too many problems with the stimulus package to support it.

"I'm the fourth most conservative senator," said Enzi, who added that he follows the "80 percent rule" which is, "Anybody can agree on 80 percent of the issues, so if you can avoid the 20 percent that are going to cause fights, you can get a bill passed."

Though the stimulus package, one of the biggest public spending programs since World War II, has been signed into law, Enzi said it's not too late to change it and make the legislation more palatable.

Changes are made more likely by the fact that only 11 percent of the \$787 billion stimulus package will be distributed in the first year, the senator added.

"Government cannot be the (entire) solution," he said.

But adding a fix to resolve housing issues, and possibly reducing the scope of the law "so you don't stun the American people with anything," would be a good start.

Aiding the lagging housing market might be accomplished by offering a tax credit to investors who buy foreclosed properties or those that have been on the market more than 180 days, he added.

"That gets rid of excess inventory," which maintains home values for those still making payments, he said.

Another area of concern is the decreasing value of various retirement accounts, Enzi said.

Leaving the accounts untouched might be the best plan, since "there's going to be a point where the market reverses itself."

People with 401 (k) plans should "take some time with their decisions," and also consider remaining employed longer.

"Stay in the workforce," the senator advises. "I tell people they really shouldn't retire."

Another area of the legislation that could be altered is the addition of more help to improve infrastructure, which is a "good thing to do as stimulus," Enzi said.

"What Wyoming does is to spend money on one-time projects with definite ends to them," he said.

He added that the current legislation claims to favor "shovel-ready" projects, but in fact favors tasks that state and local governments have already put enough money into that they will go forward in any case.

While the president touted the economic boom the legislation would generate, Enzi says he cannot determine where that will come from and how the numbers presented could materialize.

"I have been trying to find out where the money comes from" \$600 million to Montana and \$400 million to Wyoming," the senator said.

He said some of that calculation appears to include unemployment benefits, which are not exactly in keeping with stimulus and progress.

"But we (in Wyoming) are definitely not as bad off as some states," he said. Among the four worst-hit by the recession are California, Florida, Pennsylvania and Ohio, he added.

He said to pull out of a recession, "you've got to solve what caused the hurt," while ceasing the "fear-mongering" that keeps money in people's pockets because they worry they will need it if things get even worse.

"This package isn't going to do it," he added.

Children enjoy stories read by Enzi during library visit

While for two days Park County adults enjoyed attending various meetings and library tours with Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo, their children made a slightly tougher audience.

The senator devoted some time Feb. 18 to reading to young children at the Park County Public Library in Cody.

The children enjoyed tales of "Honest Abe" by Edith Kunhardt and other illustrated volumes, but remained a tough sell when it came to being impressed about who was doing the reading.

When asked if a senator sounded like an important person, Vayden Thompson, 6, tersely replied, "No."

Asked what a senator does for work, Thompson hazarded a guess: "He reads things?"

Maddox Stinson, 7, confessed that he and his friends "just came in to look at books," though they readily agreed to stay and hear the senator read about Abe Lincoln.

Wyatt Smith, 6, was more impressed with the handouts.

"We got free candy from a jar over there," Smith said, clutching some packaged red Twizzlers.

Tanner Blatt, 5, and Andy Bode, 4, confessed they did not know what a senator was and were not overly disposed to find out.

They enjoyed the stories once their caregiver, Debi Dawe, settled them down near the fireplace in the library for the reading session, however.

Dawe already had explained the functions of government officials to them last week after she returned from a trip to Washington, D.C.

While there, she visited the offices of Sen. John Barrasso, R- Wyo., with whom she discussed early childhood issues.

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