

(The funding mechanism will probably be based on a similar method as the Farm Bill. Priority will be given to USDA or SRF backlog projects, which as of this writing, Wyoming does not currently have any backlog projects listed at USDA or the SRF system.)

Clyburn Leads Charge for Rural Stimulus

Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009

Some House Democrats led by **Majority Whip Clyburn** are pushing for language in the economic stimulus package that will ensure that rural communities and more impoverished areas receive their fair share of development funds.

With package specifics and just how to move forward still up in the air, Clyburn raised the issue in Tuesday's closed-door, bipartisan meeting of congressional officials with President-elect Obama.

He broached the subject again at the weekly meeting of Democratic committee chairman Wednesday morning, receiving what he and others at both meetings categorized as a positive response.

Clyburn confirmed his efforts to *CongressDaily*, saying that lawmakers must be careful in developing the package and cognizant of the discrepancies that occurred in federal spending during the Great Depression.

"Those of us who studied what the government did, we know that various communities and various entities were excluded from that recovery," said Clyburn. "We have to be careful that we do not create a 21st Century New Deal because we very well might be visiting on rural communities and others a raw deal. This legislation will have to be written in such a way to be fair to these communities."

Of specific concern to him and other lawmakers, according to senior Democratic aides, is the level of power governors will hold in distributing funds.

Clyburn said that in his state of South Carolina, Republican Gov. Mark Sanford is saying he does not need the funds, joining Texas GOP Gov. Rick Perry in decrying the proposed spending.

He argued that governors should have a timeline to spend the funds allocated and if they do not, public entities like cities, counties and regional developments, along with public-private entities that oversee community development agencies, empowerment zones and enterprise communities should be given access to the funds.

Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman **James Oberstar** outlined a plan Wednesday on how \$85 billion in infrastructure projects he has recommended should be disbursed, which appears to provide at least some of what Clyburn is looking for when it comes to transportation-related spending.

The Transportation Department and EPA would begin doling out funds to states, cities and public transit agencies within the first week, with priority given to projects where bids can be awarded within 90 days.

Those entities and others receiving funds are required within 90 days to submit how they will use the money and include a priority list for projects. States within 30 days would need to report to either lawmakers or the administration what jobs would be created. Federal agencies overseeing the funds will need to report to Congress every 30 days for the first 180 days on how funding will be doled out, the number and status of projects and how many jobs are created or sustained.

Clyburn is not alone in raising concerns about rural areas getting their piece of the pie.

House Armed Services Chairman **Ike Skelton** sent a letter to **Speaker Pelosi** Wednesday arguing for funds to be directed toward existing rural programs outside of transportation infrastructure.

Rep. **Alcee Hastings**, D-Fla., echoed Clyburn in saying rural needs have historically been ignored.

"If it is formulaic, and I believe it should be, the concerns of rural people so they are not left out as they have been in the past must be addressed," said Hastings.

Clyburn met with Oberstar Wednesday to discuss the issue and is expected to meet with Appropriations Chairman **David Obey** and Financial Services Chairman **Barney Frank** soon on the issue.

A Pelosi spokesman said she is "very supportive of rural investments in the economic recovery package because it will create jobs and make crucial investments in areas that have been hit just as hard during this recession as our cities."

A spokesman for **Majority Leader Hoyer** said he shares Clyburn's "concerns that money must be most effectively targeted on where economic recovery is most critical" and that such concerns must be addressed in the package.

Separately on Wednesday, rural development specialists made their pitch for money for rural infrastructure in the stimulus, saying it would move quickly through the economy.

Rep. **Mike McIntyre**, D-N.C., chairman of the House Agriculture Specialty Crops, Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee, told a meeting of congressional staffers that many rural counties, particularly in the South, have had to stop infrastructure projects due to the recession.

"Rural America must be a part of the economic stimulus package," McIntyre said in a release after the event. "At a bare minimum, we have to allocate sufficient funding to address the backlogs I have identified in USDA water and wastewater systems and community facilities programs. The backlogs total \$1.4 billion in budget authority for a \$4.8 billion program level."

Rob Johnson, a Loco, Okla., official representing the Rural Water Association, said USDA can get rural water construction money "into the field in 75 to 80 days." Officials also said USDA's money can move faster because USDA maintains so many local offices and has projects approved in advance.

It remains unclear what level of support Clyburn's plan will have among Republicans, although Clyburn said he plans to meet with Minority Whip Cantor soon.

"We are very happy that [President-elect Obama] believes tax cuts ought to be a major part of the package," **Minority Leader Boehner** said Wednesday. "The president-elect has made it clear that he is interested in our ideas. I think that is a good start."

Across the Capitol, Senate Budget ranking member **Judd Gregg** said he is trying to win support for a provision in the stimulus that would help ensure that the money is not spent on frivolous projects.

"The problem is, if every state is acting like New Hampshire, every community in New Hampshire is drawing up their wish list. I have seen lists that have shown things like the alarm system for a dorm at UNH," said Gregg. "This is an earmark feeding frenzy of a scope that we have never seen before and it can't be that way."

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