

# Wyo tops in spending highway stimulus dollars

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Friday, August 7, 2009 2:05 AM MDT

WASHINGTON -- Wyoming got a pat on the back Thursday from a key member of Congress for spending its economic stimulus funds on highway projects faster than any other state.

"I commend Wyoming and other high-performing states for investing recovery act funding quickly and efficiently," Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said in a statement.

"By moving swiftly and responsibly, those states have contributed to our nation's long-term economic growth and are helping the United States recover from the worst recession since the Great Depression," Oberstar said.

The committee's analysis of stimulus spending through June 30 shows Wyoming had spent 76 percent of the highway funding it's eligible to receive. The next fastest spending state was New Hampshire, which has spent 64 percent of its highway funds. The slowest spending state was Florida, which had spent just 2 percent of the highway money it's eligible to receive.

Oberstar sent a letter of congratulations to Gov. Dave Freudenthal, saying he expects Wyoming to "continue to keep up the good work and serve as a model for other states around the nation."

Wyoming is eligible for \$157.6 million in highway funds under the program, and had signed highway project contracts totaling \$133.9 million by June 30, according to the committee.

The stimulus program "has increased highway construction in this state to a level that it hasn't been for as long as I can remember," Freudenthal said in a press conference Wednesday. "There are more orange barrels out there from one end of this state to the other, and that puts people to work."

Freudenthal acknowledged that the money doesn't come free -- eventually taxpayers, including those in Wyoming, will have to pay for the increase in the national debt caused by the stimulus program. On the other hand, he said there have been unexpected savings for highway and other infrastructure projects because companies are hungry for work.

"We're getting better bids on construction costs than we've gotten in years," Freudenthal said.

(Associated Press writer Matt Joyce in Cheyenne contributed to this report.)