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North Carolina Needs Stimulus

The House approved the \$819 billion stimulus and recovery bill that directs most of its resources where they would do the most good to stimulate the economy.

Without question, this bill is enormous. But people are truly hurting, and this deep recession continues to deepen. Unemployment rates increased in 97 of North Carolina's 100 counties in December, according to statistics released Friday by the state's Employment Security Commission. Seven of the 23 counties I represent in eastern North Carolina are suffering double digit unemployment.

It is estimated that the stimulus package will save or create 132,350 jobs in North Carolina, and reduce the unemployment rate by 1.6 percent.

About 30 percent of the resources would be devoted to unemployment benefits, food stamps and fiscal aid to states to avoid cuts to services, layoffs and tax hikes. The single largest portion of the bill - \$87 billion - is dedicated to states to shore up Medicaid programs. North Carolina would receive nearly \$2.3 billion to help ensure that the neediest citizens can access health care and frees up resources needed for other services.

The bill also provides a large and needed boost - \$79 billion - for states' education budgets. North Carolina would benefit from more than \$1.8 billion in funding. Additionally, the bill would provide a \$500 boost in Pell Grant funding for 185,383 students in North Carolina, and provide for a Higher Education Tax Credit that would benefit 118,000 students.

Some of the resources that will be coming to North Carolina include:

- \$1.26 billion for education funding, including \$361 million for school improvements
- \$626 million for additional food stamp funding
- \$117 million for additional funding for Supplemental Social Income (SSI)
- \$67.4 million for job training and employment services for dislocated workers, youth, and adults.
- \$29 million for Emergency Shelter Grants

Also:

- More than 3.1 million North Carolina residents will benefit from the Making Work Pay Tax Credit.
- An expansion of the Child Tax Credit will cover an additional 484,000 children in North Carolina.
- And, an estimated 603,586 North Carolina workers would benefit from the \$25 per week unemployment increase, and an estimated 127,814 workers would benefit from the extension of benefits.

This legislation answers President Barack Obama call for bold and swift action needed to get our economy back on track. Additionally, the bill gives 95 percent of American workers an immediate tax cut, invests in America's infrastructure and takes steps toward our energy independence.

It will take time to turn this economy around, but I am confident that if all Americans work together, we can overcome the economic crisis, just as we have risen above every other great challenge in our nation's past.

Celebrating Congressman George Henry White

As Tarboro and Edgecombe County celebrated George Henry White Day I again filed legislation that would create a postage stamp commemorating his life and accomplishments.

White, one of 22 black members who served in Congress between Reconstruction and 1901, gave a powerful final speech before Congress on January 29, 1901. In his speech, White predicted, "This is perhaps the Negroes' temporary farewell to the American Congress; but let me say, Phoenix-like he will rise up some day and come again. These parting words are in behalf of an outraged, heart-broken bruised and bleeding, but God-fearing people, faithful, industrious, loyal, rising people - full of potential force."

White fearlessly and consistently stirred the conscience of America to embrace racial justice and equality for all people. He lived a great life worthy of remembering.

I refilled legislation that aims at speeding the process of honoring White with a stamp produced by the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). Previously, I wrote to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC) asking that White be honored with a stamp as part of the popular Black Heritage stamp series.

Additionally, I previously succeeded in naming the Tarboro Post Office in White's honor.

The 15-member CSAC makes recommendations to the U.S. Postmaster General on which stamp proposals merit consideration. The Committee meets four times a year in Washington, D.C. At the meetings, the members review proposals.

Digital Television Transition Delay Fails

I was disappointment that the House failed to approve legislation that would have provided a needed delay in the transition to digital-only television broadcasting.

While the House majority - 258 to 168 - voted in favor of the DTV Delay Act, the bill failed to garner the two-thirds vote needed for passage. Earlier this week, the bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent.

The House is expected to vote on the delay bill again this week. This time the bill will be brought up for a vote under a rule, so passage will only require a simple majority.

Currently, television stations across the country are scheduled to stop sending analog signals on February 17, 2009. Under the law, television stations will then only broadcast over-the-air programming in the digital spectrum. While cable and satellite subscribers will not be affected, people who use antennas to receive a over-the-air signals will need a new equipment.

To ease the transition, Congress funded a Converter Box Coupon Program that provides up to two \$40 coupons to offset the purchase of digital-to-analog converter boxes. Unfortunately, the fund was exhausted on January 4, 2009 and people are experiencing delays in receiving the coupons of up to eight weeks.

The coupon waiting list stands at more than 2.6 million requests, representing more than 1.4 million households across the country. Given eastern North Carolina's rural nature, Butterfield said it is likely that that thousands of residents would be in jeopardy of losing television service without a deadline delay.

Nielsen Media Research estimates that about 6.5 million Americans are unprepared for the digital transition.

People clearly need more time to learn more about what this transition will mean for them. Even people who avoided the long waiting list, received a coupon for a converter box and then bought the converter box could still be left without a signal. Analog signals travel further than digital signals, and many people still do not realize they may still need a new digital antenna to receive the signal.

Last month, I wrote to then-FCC Chairman Kevin J. Martin to urge a delay in the transition, and he said that he still hopes that the FCC will delay the transition. It was the second letter Butterfield wrote to the FCC to request a delay.