



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Stimulus Setback

JAMES L. SEWARD July 16, 2009

A couple of months ago I made a plea for genuine oversight of the federal stimulus dollars flowing into our state. While the governor's office did enact a few minor measures, real checks and balances have not been instituted.

There are several reasons why I called for a transparent process in regard to the distribution of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) money. My top concern has always been and continues to be, that with \$25 billion in taxpayer money being spent, the public should know where the money is going, how it is being used and how many jobs are being created.

Now a couple of specific instances have come to light that emphasize my concerns.

Recently, a number of concerned constituents brought to my attention the governor's plan to post specially designed road signs identifying economic stimulus projects. When I heard of this farce I was stunned. Nearly \$1 million will be used to produce and post signs alerting people to stimulus work sites. Some of these signs will cost as much as \$8,000 apiece, all just to pat government on the back.

When asked about the signs, the governor tried to place the blame on Washington D.C. suggesting they were required by the federal government. But U.S. Senator Charles Schumer

and Congressman Dan Maffei, along with the U.S. Department of Transportation have all said that is not the case. While the signs are suggested they are not mandatory. Not only that, but New York has gone above and beyond the federal suggestions when it comes to the sign design. Some states are producing smaller, less expensive signs that run just a few hundred dollars. If we are going to post these signs, we must do so in a more cost effective and fiscally responsible manner. Better yet, we can follow the lead of states like Texas, Virginia and Florida- none of which are posting any special signage.

I thought the stimulus money was supposed to put people back to work. I fail to see how posting a big green road sign is accomplishing that goal. These promotional billboards are no help to a father or mother looking for a job, or a small businessman trying to pay for health care for his employees. Simply put, this is government spending at its worst.

I have written the governor asking him to rethink the ill-advised signs before it is too late. He has stated publicly many times that shared sacrifice is necessary and that we must all “share the pain” in order to overcome the fiscal crisis, a sentiment which I certainly agree with. It is outrageous and hypocritical to waste hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars on unnecessary signage, while at the same time insisting that struggling families and businesses in New York “share the pain.”

I am also concerned about who we are hiring to perform the construction projects and infrastructure work. A recent press release from the NYSDOT included the following project listing:

- A contract for \$234,300 was awarded to Charter Contracting Corp. of Campbell, Ohio.

Under this contract, bridge decks, exposed concrete, asphalt and steel bridge surfaces on 102 state-owned bridges in Oneida and Herkimer counties will be cleaned and pressure washed.

While I don't question the need for bridge maintenance and upkeep, I am wondering why an Ohio firm is being hired to perform the work.

In announcing the project, NYSDOT Acting Commissioner Stanley Gee talked about bringing critical economic recovery funding to New York state. Well, it looks like this check will be sent a bit further west, all the way to Ohio. I will be contacting the governor on this matter as well.

These two examples prove the need for better accountability of the federal stimulus funds. We are wasting money on unnecessary road signs and now we are hiring out of state companies to do our work. We need a fully transparent process to ensure that money is being distributed fairly, sensibly and for New York job creation.