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Arizona benefiting now from stimulus funds

By Sinema Kyrsten
Commentary

Arizona's plan to widen the congested lanes of U.S. 60 - our own Grand Avenue - became the 6,000th highway project in the nation this week to be funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or federal stimulus.

This project puts nearly \$45 million in recovery funds to work in Maricopa County, bringing desperately needed jobs to our state. But Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., said he doesn't approve of this economic boost to Arizona. Kyl said on national TV on July 12 that the stimulus projects should be canceled and that all remaining unspent monies should be returned to the federal treasury.

From his office in Washington, Kyl must not be aware of the vital role that stimulus dollars are playing in protecting education, health care, public safety, and infrastructure right here in Arizona.

Kyl has said that the spending isn't effective - that it's not boosting the economy. But here in Arizona, we have proof that it is working. The recovery act has funded 135 projects in our state, totaling \$308 million. The state Department of Transportation estimates that the federal stimulus highway projects alone will create and sustain more than 6,000 jobs in Arizona, which total \$521 million.

Arizona completed its first stimulus-funded transportation project earlier this month - the state Route 69 repaving project between Cordes Junction and Mayer in Yavapai County.

In the East Valley, Mesa also has received tens of millions of dollars in increases to federally funded projects such as park-and-ride and bus rapid transit funding as well as street project funding (<http://mesaaz.gov/recovery/formula.aspx>).

This part of the stimulus, which will make critical repairs to our nation's crumbling roads and bridges, partially will be left up to local leaders like mayors and governors to decide where it will be used. If they don't use it, we could lose out, not just on the repairs, but also on the jobs we desperately need.

Arizona should get its fair share of federal tax dollars or else what we pay to the federal government in taxes could go back to Washington, instead of here where it's needed. We need to make sure this money comes home to Arizona to put people back to work and build a stronger Arizona economy for the future.

With more than 30,000 projects approved, this is the largest new investment in our national infrastructure since the interstate highway system, and it creates jobs right away and builds a long-term economic future for Arizona.

Perhaps the next time Kyl comes back to Arizona, he could take a drive along the newly and beautifully repaved state Route 69 and see the hard work completed by men and women employed through the recovery act.

Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Phoenix, is the state House assistant Democratic floor leader.