

Mixed Reaction to Local Impact of Federal Stimulus

Peter Iglinski (2010-02-18)



ROCHESTER, NY (WXXI) - The federal stimulus package was adopted one-year-ago this week. The merits of the program depend on whom you talk to.

WXXI's Peter Iglinski looks at the local impact of the recovery act.

Garth Fagan Dance has been part of Rochester's cultural landscape for 39 years--and this past year has certainly been one of its most challenging. The company reported a deficit of nearly \$500,000--nearly half of its operating budget. The federal stimulus program provided a little relief to Garth Fagan--\$50,000 to be specific. Executive Director Ruby Lockhart says that money allowed the company to maintain five intern and apprentice positions.

"It didn't seem like a lot to some people. They go, "Well, that's probably just one or two positions." But what it did was to give us five or six months to really get a campaign going so that we could replace those funds through our development efforts."

If not for the federal help, Lockhart says Garth Fagan would have had to cancel out-of-town performances.

"What makes us different as a company is that we are the only company that tours outside of Rochester and brings the revenue back. Other acts that are presented here come into the community and take those funds out and are not a part of the community. So we're a part of the daily life and fabric in this community."

Lockhart says Garth Fagan Dance improves the quality of life in greater Rochester and helps attract businesses.

The \$50,000 for Garth Fagan is one of the smaller awards under recovery act. On the other end of the spectrum is the University of Rochester, which is in line to receive \$42 million for research. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter says research at the U of R that may lead to innovations that can be commercialized locally, resulting in hundreds of new jobs.

"If our economy is to grow, if we're going to produce the jobs needed to support our region's highly-trained and highly-skilled workforce--the best in the country--we must invest aggressively in new innovation. And the recovery bill is allowing universities' research and staff to do what they do best, and that's to be leaders in emerging fields that are changing the lives of people here at home and across the world."

The money for the U of R is funding research into a new HIV vaccine, contact lenses, advanced polymers, Parkinson's Disease--to name just a few projects.

And Slaughter, a Democrat, says the stimulus money has saved or created jobs at the U of R, local schools, fire departments, and even WXXI. As Slaughter sees it, the stimulus program has brought the US economy back from the brink of disaster. She says the rate of job loss has drastically slowed and the economy is growing again.

Not everyone, however, is sold on the program. Republican Congressman Chris Lee says the recovery act was a case of spending money the government didn't have.

"The most frustrating fact out of the whole stimulus is that out of the top 50 cities in the entire United States, there is only one city that actually grew employment since the stimulus has come out. That was good old Washington, DC which has added tens of thousands of federal employees that will put a further problem or burden upon taxpayers of this country."

Lee says the stimulus program created new federal programs, which typically don't go away. He says the money should have gone to the private sector instead.

Chris Wiest is the Vice President of Public Policy at the Rochester Business Alliance. He says the stimulus program was needed.

"People were very concerned about, you know, the economy at the time. Was there anything that could be done to stop this downward spiral that we were in" And, so, from a psychological standpoint, it was essential. I think there has been some investment in areas that we will reap some longterm benefits. But it's still uncertain as to nearer term if it's going to approach anywhere near the number of jobs that they [hoped] were going to be created."