

Republican Rep. Lee Terry joined colleagues across the nation Wednesday in criticizing the year-old economic stimulus bill, saying it created few jobs. Terry said the \$787 billion stimulus package -- pushed by President Barack Obama to bolster the nation's struggling economy -- was a "government growth bill" that provided little help to Nebraska businesses. Across the nation, Republicans and Democrats were holding dueling press conferences and releasing dueling press releases debating the merits of the stimulus bill. Obama and Vice President Joe Biden have argued the measure was needed to create jobs and help the economy recover from the recession.

Biden has said the bill created 2 million jobs in the past year, including 3,800 in Nebraska. Obama also said Wednesday that the measure may have kept the nation from experiencing another Great Depression.

Terry is running for re-election against Democrat Tom White, an Omaha attorney and state senator.

"This bill was never intended to help the private sector," Terry said Wednesday at a press conference at a small Omaha store called the the Tea Smith. "That was the dirty little secret about this bill. That's why I voted against it. It was intended to help the government grow." Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., said in a statement that one-third of the stimulus funds has delivered tax relief to individuals, leaving more money in Nebraskans pockets to spend and keeping people -- from construction workers and teachers to prison guards -- in jobs.

Terry was joined at the press conference by Ernie Goss, an economist at Creighton University. Goss said he believes the costs associated with the stimulus bill far outweigh any good the measure has done, saying he believes taxes, interest and inflation all will rise.

Nebraska received about \$322 million last year, according to a report on the stimulus bill released by the federal government. A big chunk of those dollars have been used to fund public schools that could have faced drastic budget cuts without the stimulus dollars.

Said White: "It kept thousands of teachers on the job teaching the kids. It also kept our property taxes from going through the roof."

White said that if Terry had a problem with how stimulus dollars were spent, he should take it up with Gov. Dave Heineman, a Republican who used the dollars to plug a state budget gap.

Terry declined to criticize Heineman, saying that was up to the governor.

Overall, the state is expected to receive \$1.1 billion from the stimulus bill.

Terry voted against the stimulus package, although he did vote for a bank bailout bill proposed by former GOP President George W. Bush.

Goss said he objected to both measures. He said the increase in federal spending may have created some jobs but in the long run will prove costly to the nation.

"What TARP (bank bailout) bill and the stimulus package did was to delay the inevitable," said Goss, who argued the nation will have to pay the debt through increased taxes that will dampen

the nation's economic growth over the next decade.

Terry said he voted for the bank bailout bill after talking with business leaders and others who said it was needed to prevent a meltdown. He said he has begun to question that vote.

Terry said a key point of the bill was to use any money repaid by banks to pay down the nation's debt. That hasn't happened, said Terry.

"My opinion today is a lot closer to Dr. Goss' opinion," he said.

Contact the writer:

444-1309, robynn.tysver@owh.com

