

WASHINGTON - As President Barack Obama prepares to address Congress Tuesday night, several Midlands lawmakers said it is clear what's on the minds of folks back home.

"It is 100 percent the economy," Rep. Lee Terry said after a week of meeting with his Omaha-area constituents. "I haven't had any questions about Iraq or Afghanistan, or Russia or the Middle East. It has all been about the economy."

In particular, people want to know what is in the massive economic stimulus package Congress recently approved.

"They say 'OK, you just spent \$800 billion and you guys are fighting over what's in it, but what does it really do for me? Is this really going to help the economy?'" Terry said.

Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., took the lead in negotiating a compromise on the stimulus package that helped the legislation pass. Nelson said people want to hear Obama offer a candid assessment of the stimulus bill and other government efforts to fix the economy.

"I don't think anybody's looking to have things sugarcoated, and he certainly hasn't been sugarcoating anything," Nelson said.

But Sen. Mike Johanns and Rep. Adrian Smith, Republicans who voted against the stimulus bill, stressed that Nebraskans want to hear about the president's plan to rein in federal spending.

"I've literally had people, strangers, come up to me and they are so opposed to the stimulus and it really relates to all the money - it's just very concerning," Johanns said.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said Obama needs to make good on his campaign promises of transparent government, which Grassley said was lacking in the stimulus debate.

"I think he needs to tell the people how he's going to lead and not be led around by the Democratic leadership in the Congress, because they did so much to this stimulus bill that wasn't his idea," Grassley said.

A couple of the lawmakers cited the importance of international issues.

Johanns said he'd like to hear what the president plans to do with those held in the detention center at Guantanamo Bay once he shuts down the facility.

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry said he hopes Obama addresses the spread of nuclear weapons technology.

"It speaks to global security. It speaks to the future of civilization," Fortenberry said.

Still, the state of the economy seems to be the topic on everyone's tongue.

Terry said people are increasingly worried about losing their jobs and their savings.

"There's a lot of fear," Terry said.

