

December 2009

## *Stimulus Checkup*

A closer look at 100 projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.



Sen. Tom Coburn  
Sen. John McCain

## Introduction

Good jobs for millions of Americans.

Investments in priorities that create sustainable economic growth for the future.

Those were the promises made to uneasy Americans when Congress approved the \$787 billion *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, or economic stimulus bill, in February.

Nine months later, with over \$200 billion of stimulus funding already spent,<sup>1</sup> the rolls of the unemployed have grown by millions and, by any measure, more jobs have been lost than created.

Since the stimulus bill was enacted in February, nearly three million Americans have lost their jobs<sup>2</sup> and the percentage of people who are without work has risen to 10 percent.<sup>3</sup> Many who had been looking to the government for help have already lost hope.

As this and the last report, *100 Stimulus Projects: A Second Opinion*,<sup>4</sup> suggest, billions of dollars of stimulus funding have been wasted, mismanaged, or directed towards silly and shortsighted projects. Many projects may not produce the types of jobs that most Americans had hoped for or expected.

Some of the close to seven billion dollars in projects in *Stimulus Checkup* create few jobs; benefit private interests over the public good; or make improvements where they are not necessary. Some send money to companies facing fraud charges. Others take millions of dollars to do work local officials and experts admit are not needed or will not help.

Stimulus money has been, or will be, spent on dinner cruises, golf courses, puppet shows and stimulus road signs. Many Americans will question whether investing \$787 billion in these projects are the highest national priorities.

Spending \$25,000 for a puppet show may not seem like a big deal in Washington, for most Americans it is a lot of money. Washington, D.C. politicians blithely spend billions of dollars a week, but every dollar wasted is also a dollar borrowed—and a dollar to be paid back with interest in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> Recovery.gov website, “Overview of Funding,” <http://www.recovery.gov/Pages/home.aspx>, accessed December 4, 2009; As of November 27, 2009, \$217.6 billion of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* has been paid out. This includes 92.8 billion in “tax benefits,” \$60.8 billion in “contracts and grants,” and \$84 billion in “entitlements.”

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Household Data, Seasonally Adjusted, “A-3. Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex and age, seasonally adjusted,” <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/suppl/empsit.cpseea3.txt>, accessed December 4, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, News Release, “THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION – NOVEMBER 2009,” December 4, 2009, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Report can be found on the Website of Senator Tom Coburn, [http://coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore\\_id=59af3ebd-7bf9-4933-8279-8091b533464f](http://coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=59af3ebd-7bf9-4933-8279-8091b533464f).

*Why Does It Matter?*

Over the past ten years, the national debt more than doubled as Congress went on a spending spree—and yet we still find ourselves in the midst of an economic downturn.

Americans who have lost their job, health insurance, or home, are facing mounting personal debts, but are also faced with the question of who will pay off the staggering national debt that has grown by more than \$1.4 trillion over the past year.

The federal government must join American families in prioritizing its spending by making tough decisions. When we downplay wasting money on a \$6 million project, it is easy to do it again ten more times. Once \$60 million is out the door, it is easy to spend another \$60 million and before you know it, billions of dollars we do not have are spent on things we do not need. Sadly, this type of spending is excused in Congress because “it’s always been done that way.”

The American people have always rejected arguments based on “it’s always been done that way,” and will continue to do so. Congress needs to make hard choices and eliminate things that are a low priority—even if doing so is unpopular—so we can preserve this country for future generations.

In the previous report, one hundred questionable projects were identified that did not appear to hold out promise for helping the economy grow. The Administration was quick to review these projects and to its credit addressed a number of them. In the months that followed, many more questionable stimulus projects costing millions and even billions of dollars were identified. This follow-up, *Stimulus Checkup*, takes a closer look at 100 more projects that raise questions about how stimulus money has been used so far.

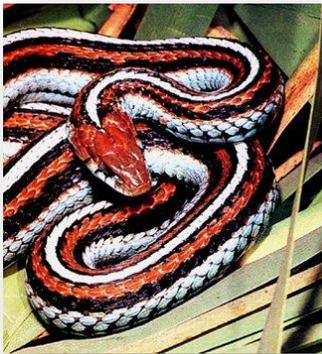
Sincerely,

Tom Coburn, M.D.  
U.S. Senator

John McCain  
U.S. Senator

## 5. Water Pipeline to a Money-Losing Golf Course (\$2.2 million)

A \$2.2 million stimulus grant will help pay for new pipes to pump recycled water to the Sharp Park Golf Course in San Francisco, California.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, the golf course may not exist for much longer. The City Council is considering closing the public course over concerns for the California red-legged frog and the San Francisco garter snake that live in the area.<sup>35</sup>



Both endangered animals are struggling for survival, with the golf course sitting squarely in the middle of their habitat. Environmental advocates are hoping to dismantle the golf course and turn it into park land, while a determined band of golfers are hoping to have the golf course deemed an “historic landmark.”<sup>36</sup>

While the golf course was designed by Alister Mackenzie, best known for designing Augusta National,<sup>37</sup> Sharp Park has not followed in Augusta’s successful footsteps. The number of rounds played has decreased nearly 48 percent since 2002 and the course now operates at half of its capacity.<sup>38</sup> If the golf course ultimately is closed down, the usefulness of the new pipeline would be significantly reduced.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors recently received a recommendation from its parks director to keep the golf course open,<sup>39</sup> but then delayed a vote on the matter after public outcry.<sup>40</sup> Adding to the uncertainty of Sharp Park’s future is its status as a money-loser for the city; the golf course lost \$42,784 in fiscal year 2008-2009.<sup>41</sup> Despite these concerns, the Department of the Interior awarded the North Coast County Water District a \$2.2 million grant for the creation of a recycled water pumping station, which will primarily serve the Sharp Park Golf Course.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Website of the Department of the Interior, Department of the Interior Recovery Investments, “Bureau of Reclamation – Title XVI Projects,” <http://recovery.doi.gov/press/bureaus/bureau-of-reclamation/title-xvi-projects/>, accessed December 4, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> King, John, “Fight continues over fate of Sharp Park Course,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 31, 2009, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/08/31/MNRH19F83Q.DTL>.

<sup>36</sup> King, John, “Fight continues over fate of Sharp Park Course,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 31, 2009, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/08/31/MNRH19F83Q.DTL>.

<sup>37</sup> Website of Sharp Park Golf Course, “Home,” <http://www.sharpparkgc.com/>, accessed November 30, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Website of the Neighbor Parks Council, “San Francisco Recreational Opportunities Study – Summary Report,” <http://www.sfnpc.org/files/draftyoungerreport815.pdf>, accessed December 7, 2009. There were 67,463 rounds played in FY 2002-2003 and 35,000 rounds in FY 2005-2006. Total capacity is 70,000 rounds.

<sup>39</sup> Website of City of San Francisco, Letter from Philip Ginsburg, General Manager, San Francisco Recreation and Park Director to Mayor Gavin Newsom and David Chiu, President, Board of Supervisors, November 6, 2009, <http://www.sfgov.org/site/uploadedfiles/recpark/sharp%20park%20cover%20letter%20202.pdf>, accessed December 5, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Freedman, Wayne, “Still no decision on fate of Sharp Park,” ABC7.com (San Francisco), November 19, 2009, <http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/sports/pro/golf&id=7128800>.

<sup>41</sup> City and Council of San Francisco, “Sharp Park Budget Report,” April 24, 2009, <http://www.thesweetmelissa.com/files/sharp-park-budget-report.pdf>, accessed December 5, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Website of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, “Proposed Sharp Park Recycled Water Project,” Spring 2008, [http://sfwater.org/Files/FactSheets/SharpPrkv9\\_bg.pdf](http://sfwater.org/Files/FactSheets/SharpPrkv9_bg.pdf), accessed December 5, 2009.