

## Salt Lake mayor says all recognized need to 'kick us into gear'



Gerald Herbert, Associated Press

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Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker was among a dozen or so mayors invited to Washington Thursday to take part in a sit-down with President-elect Barack Obama's economic stimulus team.

Becker, who was one of only two Western mayors at the meeting, said the hour long session focused on the role of city leaders in the development, passage and implementation of the plan.

"Our discussion focused on ... the objectives of the plan, and what the critical needs are as the economy continues its downward spiral," Becker said. "All recognized the need of a bold and effective insertion of money to kick us into gear."

Becker said details are still being worked out on the the allocation and distribution of the massive funding proposal, but the Obama team continues to stress assurances that the money will be used efficiently, that congressional "pet projects," or earmarks, are banned from being attached and that transparency and accountability remain priorities.

Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. told the Deseret News Thursday he believes the state will get its fair share of stimulus funds but isn't convinced there won't be earmarking in the final package approved by Congress.

"The thought of no earmarks, that's a nice thought," Huntsman said. "In a perfect world, you'd actually be able to get there. It'd be nice to prove that point. I hope we can, but there's a long way to go."

Huntsman said Utah — one of the most Republican states in the nation — would clearly benefit from not allowing funds to be earmarked by the Democrat-controlled Congress.

The state has put together a \$14.4 billion "wish list" of projects that range from highway projects to sewer treatment systems that the governor said are consistent with the new administration's plans for stimulus spending.

Becker said Salt Lake City's own stimulus list — coming in at nearly \$780 million — also jibes well with the basic requirements outlined by Obama's team and includes a \$65 million rebuild of the North Temple viaduct and \$126 million in "green" projects featuring a proposal for a \$70 million geothermal power-generation plant.

Becker, who also participated in a mid-December Obama-sponsored meeting with senior adviser Valerie Jarrett, said he feels the city is well-positioned to be on the beneficiary list when the federal dollars are disbursed.

"We've come forward with a specific set of projects that create jobs and build infrastructure," Becker said. "The Obama team has recognized these are the kinds of projects that will move us into a positive economic future."

Becker said he did get an opportunity to have a light moment with the next president to thank him for inviting the University of Utah marching band to his inauguration ceremony and talk about another current hot-button issue that hits close to home for Utahns — the much maligned college football Bowl Championship Series that has left the undefeated Utah Utes out of contention, seemingly, for the national title.