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Recovery act marks one year of existence

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, better known as the stimulus bill, marks its one-year anniversary this week.

One of the most contentious pieces of federal legislation passed last year, the stimulus has been derided by Republicans as a waste of money that will add hundreds of billions of dollars to a growing federal debt while doing little to rein in the growing unemployment numbers.

Democrats and members of the Obama administration counter that the act has created or saved hundreds of thousands of jobs, and has worked to prevent the country from sliding into a depression.

Regardless of how you may feel about the stimulus bill, once it became law, it was critical for New Mexico to organize quickly and position itself to claim as much federal money as possible. The state's Office of Recovery and Reinvestment has been working to do just that.

And, on the one-year anniversary of the stimulus, it is reporting that \$580 million has thus far been paid out from a pool of \$1.3 billion available and \$2.06 billion announced for the state.

Grant County will receive more than \$4.6 million, including \$600,000 for improvements of 12th Street in

Silver City; \$341,000 for a new office of sustainability in Silver City and \$357,000 for energy improvements in the Silver City school district.

According to the state, 10,221 full- or part-time jobs have been funded in New Mexico through the recovery act. For the period of Oct. 1 to Dec. 31, 2009, 2,959 full-time equivalent jobs were funded.

The bill helped lift nearly 55,000 New Mexicans above the poverty level in 2009, according to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and distributed by New Mexico Voices for Children.

Sukumar Brahma of Las Cruces, an assistant professor at New Mexico State University, is one of several New Mexicans highlighted on the state's recovery Web site. Brahma is researching how wind farms respond to severe electrical disturbances, and has been allocated \$272,816 from the U.S. Department of Energy.

While we commend the state for its efforts to secure stimulus money, we are also concerned that it is being used, particularly in education, to maintain existing programs.

The stimulus is one-time money, and should not be used for recurring commitments.