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Hastings Discusses Interior Department Stimulus Spending on FOX News

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Transcript:

BILL HEMMER: What would you do with \$3 billion? So far the Department of the Interior hasn't done much. Look at this graph here. Of the \$3 billion through stimulus funds, it's allocated \$310 million – that's the top line. It has spent only \$12 million. This from a program that was expected to help jumpstart the economy. Representative Doc Hastings is out of Washington, a Ranking Member of the House Natural Resources Committee. The Secretary of the Interior is going to be before you a bit later today. What's going on here?

REP. DOC HASTINGS: He's testifying in front of the Budget Committee and I think he should answer questions of where this money has gone. But let's put things into perspective. Keep in mind, President Obama said that we needed to pass this massive stimulus package in order to create jobs, and we needed to do it right away. The Department of the Interior got nearly \$3 billion of that, and Secretary Salazar said we have shovel-ready jobs ready to go. Here we are now five months later, and less than one-half of one percent of those dollars have gone out the door. The question is, and I think the question most Americans are asking, where are the jobs?

HEMMER: Well, unemployment is almost near 10 percent. Take a wild guess, how many jobs could you create with \$9 billion?

REP. HASTINGS: If you left it up to the entrepreneurship in the private sector, you could probably leverage that much much more than government spending. I think what we are really seeing more than anything else is the idea of stimulating the economy by spending

taxpayer dollars simply is not working. This is a classic example of that. Because the National Park Service itself has something like \$9 billion in backlog of maintenance repairs. Now I think that would qualify as shovel-ready. Yet here we are five months into this, and as I said, only one half of one percent of these dollars have gone out.

HEMMER: What he said back in February, which was a little bit of what you just said, he had shovel-ready projects good to go. They are quote “ready and waiting.” I quote the \$9 billion figure because that’s the amount of projects he said, that’s the amount of work that needed be done even though they only got a third of that in the stimulus plan. But you are not going to get this money back. So on the screen we wanted to find out from our own viewers through our FOX polling, whether they think it’s been effective or not. 43 percent say it’s less effective than they expected. About 45 percent say it’s about as expected. So what do you say to folks out there about how their money is being used?

REP. HASTINGS: What we are seeing here is a classic case of government spending dollars and probably doing it in their own way. Keep in mind, I want to go back to this point, it’s very important. Stimulus dollars were supposed to go out immediately in order to create jobs. The time frame of this stimulus was supposed to be about two years, roughly, that’s what the Administration had said. So we’re five month into this, the Department of the Interior has spent out less than one-half of one percent in five months. Do we really think that they can spend the extra 99.5 percent in the next 19 months? No.

HEMMER: We are not going to get that money back though?

REP. HASTINGS: Well at some point, I think there is going to be a debate on that. Because we are running these massive deficits, over \$1 trillion, it could approach \$2 trillion this year. If that money is not being spent on supposedly creating jobs, maybe it ought to go back into paying down the deficit and the national debt.

HEMMER: Is there an appetite on the Democratic side of the House, among your colleagues to have that debate? And make it public, and say the vote we made back in February was wrong?

REP. HASTINGS: The short answer to that is of course not. They are not going to do that. I’m simply saying I think America is ready to have that debate. Why? Because we have never had a \$1 trillion deficit, and we may have a \$2 trillion deficit this year. I think that’s worthy of debating.

HEMMER: Doc Hastings thank you for your time.

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