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## Bill would funnel billions to N.C., but Perdue wants fewer restrictions

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WASHINGTON - Congress' plan for stoking the economy isn't the no-strings-attached sack of billions that Gov. Beverly Perdue hoped for when she traveled to Washington this week asking for cash.

But it is a lot of money.

Congressional Democrats, with input from President-elect Barack Obama, have created a massive package that could funnel billions of dollars to North Carolina through school construction loans, highway projects, research projects and energy grants.

Exactly how much is unclear.

U.S. Rep. David Price, a Chapel Hill Democrat, said about \$150 billion of the package would go to states, and another \$150 billion to municipalities -- much of it through existing federal programs.

"We tried to do a quick but responsible accounting of what might have an immediate effect," Price said in an interview.

The bill includes \$30 billion in highway construction money nationwide that would be divided according to the highway funding formula. Another \$87 billion in Medicaid funding also would be divided among states according to a formula.

Those pots would go directly to states.

Also included in the bill is \$79 billion to help states prevent cutbacks to services, although it's unclear how that would be divided. Perdue told lawmakers on a trip Wednesday that she needed \$1 billion to fill North Carolina's budget hole because of the recession.

U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge said North Carolina could receive \$448 million with the help of zero-interest bonds to build new schools through a plan he inserted into the bill. He said the construction could help produce more than 10,000 jobs.

Perdue said in a statement that the bill isn't yet where she wants it to be, calling it a "first draft."

"This is a critical first step," Perdue said. "I continue to urge Congress to give states the flexibility that enables us to invest quickly in our infrastructure and human services."

U.S. Sen. Richard Burr, a Winston-Salem Republican, said he would vote against the bill as it now stands -- even though he supports some of its ideas. He said the hefty list of dozens of federal programs amounts to little more than a supplemental appropriations bill.

"The word 'stimulus' is a fig leaf," Burr said. "There is nobody that is left out of this bill. There can't be anybody that can't be left out."

U.S. Sen. Kay Hagan, a Greensboro Democrat, declined comment on the stimulus package. Her staff said she needed more time to review it.

The state's organization of city mayors said the stimulus package could be exactly what they need to fund local projects.

"You could track the things that are included in this package, and it's actually what we are ready to do," said Chapel Hill Mayor Kevin Foy, chairman of the N.C. Metropolitan Mayors Coalition, made up of the state's 25 largest cities.

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