

Saying no to stimulus money makes no sense

Written by Marc H. Morial, NNPA Columnist
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When President Obama signed into law the \$787 billion stimulus package designed to bring needed relief to struggling economies and families, citizens in almost every state breathed a sigh of relief.

But, due to the misguided stubbornness of a handful of Republican governors who are threatening to refuse stimulus funds for their states, some citizens are still waiting to exhale.

While passage of the stimulus package was accomplished without much Republican support in either the Congress or among GOP governors, most federal and local elected officials now realize it is their duty to avail themselves of the essential help the stimulus package will deliver to their state budgets and constituents. But, in an effort to score political points with their conservative base, the Governors of some of the hardest hit states, including South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Alaska, have threatened to refuse some or all of the stimulus money targeted to their states.

They claim the money comes with too many strings attached or that the expansion of certain benefits is unsustainable. At best, their ideological objections, which were thoroughly debated and defeated in Congress, are weak; at worst, they are a flimsy smokescreen for a deliberate and unconscionable dereliction of duty.

In my view, refusing stimulus funds at this point would be the political equivalent of cruel and unusual punishment for millions of people who have lost jobs, life-savings and homes because of the current economic meltdown.

How, for example, in good conscience could Governors Haley Barbour of Mississippi and Bobby Jindal of Louisiana, states with billion dollar budget shortfalls and the highest poverty rates in the nation, even think about refusing stimulus funds for their constituents?

Do they not think their citizens, a large portion of whom are poor and Black, deserve the expanded unemployment benefits, Medicaid relief, education funds and infrastructure jobs that will flow to every other state?

While no one, including the President, is absolutely certain the new stimulus strategy will solve all our problems, millions of Americans went to the polls in November and voted to give change a chance.

Would these governors deny their people that chance? Would they let their stubborn devotion to the failed policies of the past keep federal help from reaching their people? Would they rather lose jobs than take the money? It simply makes no sense.

Fortunately, South Carolina Congressman and House Majority Whip, James Clyburn, foresaw this troubling possibility and insisted on language in the bill that would give state legislatures the power to over-ride the dictates of governors: "If funds provided to any state in any division of this act are not accepted for use by the governor, then acceptance by the state legislature, by means of an adoption of a concurrent resolution, shall be sufficient to provide funding to such state."

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This means that the people, not their governors have the last word. We agree. As Congressman Clyburn has said: "No community or constituent should be denied recovery assistance due to their governor's political ideology or political aspirations."

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