

**It's the Economy, Stupid**

**By Sam Farr**

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President Bush has long struggled against the fact that our economy is in a tailspin. He refuses to take action on rising gas prices and ignores the ever-increasing cost of food. But last week, we heard a real whopper: "We're not in a recession, we're in a slowdown."

Let's ignore the fact that recessions are declared months after the fact, and by economists with far more expertise on the issue than the president. Let's also look past the fact that the president happily bails out banks that face bankruptcy, but doesn't feel the same passion about families who can't afford rent and food.

Here's my response to that statement: Who cares what we call it, let's work on fixing it.

When we see news reports from the White House on the state of our economy, they show an administration that is more intent on defining the problem than doing anything about it. Even worse, we find an administration that refuses to consider ideas from Congress about how to help out those families in need. It's a sad situation.

You may have read news reports last week about plans to shutter the Capitola Career Center. This one-stop shop for employment assistance is run by the Santa Cruz Workforce Investment Board, but it's having trouble coming up with enough funds to keep all its locations open. That means thousands of jobseekers will be out of luck.

The Workforce Investment Board helps find jobs for Santa Cruzans throughout the county. The Capitola facility provides training and helps find jobs for the unemployed and new jobseekers. It's a great tool for job hunting, with a wide variety of resources. The board, which is funded largely through the federal Workforce Investment Act, is composed of volunteers from around the community, and its efforts are to be commended.

To reward the work that is being done in Capitola and at sister sites around the country, the president has proposed to cut funding for the program next year by 15 percent. In the last handful of years, the Capitola service center has seen a drop of more than one-third in its federal dollars in the last handful of years. Apparently, no good deed goes unpunished.

We're seeing more and more people battling to make ends meet. A Gallup poll last week showed that 84 percent of Americans think the economy is getting worse. But we still see reluctance by the White House to take proactive steps to stem the tide of bad news.

Democratic plans for a second economic stimulus package include extending unemployment insurance, expanding the food stamp programs and investing in programs to create new jobs. Stimulus plans are meant to inject money into the economy quickly, and what better way than to give money to those who need it most? Unfortunately, that common sense approach isn't universally acknowledged.

This week, millions of American families will begin to receive rebate checks from the first economic stimulus package. Checks for couples will be as high as \$1,200, and that's not counting the \$300 rebate per child. The government hopes that these checks will be spent rather than saved.

I'm afraid this stimulus package won't have a big impact on our economy. It's imperative that Congress and the president maintain focus on reviving our economy and safeguarding our pocketbooks.

The president is free to continue splitting hairs, debating whether or not we're in a recession and avoiding action. But every weekend when I return to the Central Coast, I hear the stories of families struggling to make ends meet. I invite him to step outside the Beltway, to listen to the problems cropping up around the country.

The Democratically led Congress will do its best to maintain full funding for the Workforce Investment Act; it's the least we can do to help our communities. But I hope the president will decide to work with Congress, not against it, to boost the lot of all Americans, not just a select

few.