

Officials visit D.C., seek funds for growth

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In a fast-paced, two-day trip to Washington, D.C., Hinesville Mayor Jim Thomas and a pack of community leaders visited state federal representatives last week to voice concerns, ask questions and make requests on behalf of area residents. Ensuring money from the stimulus package for various projects was their main priority.

"Unless you go plead your case individually, they don't know what you need," Thomas said.



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"Basically we discussed the recovery act and several projects the city and county had interest in and we shared information with the elected officials," Ron Tolley, director of the Liberty County Development Authority, said.

During the trip the group participated in about a dozen meetings, including face-time with Sens. Saxby Chambliss and Johnny Isakson and Reps. Jack Kingston and John Barrow.

Tolley said the meetings covered a range of needs pertaining to the city and were comprehensive.

During many of the meetings, the group asked for advice and funding to accommodate the population surge expected to reach the area.

In relation to the growth and housing issue, the delegation also met with Steven Fritts, associate director of the FDIC, to get information to help local banks deal with the volume of loans to contractors estimated to build needed housing.



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Another major topic of concern for the mayor was meeting with the Army's Corp of Engineers to discuss the idea of holding a forum for local businesses to meet with Fort Stewart's construction specialists and collaborate on imminent construction.

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Funds

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being spent on Fort Stewart is being spent with small businesses," Thomas said.

Thomas said the growth of Fort Stewart will have a tremendous impact on the city, and officials went into these meetings seeking as much support and funding as they could get.

"I think we're getting a significant amount of support from Washington," he said.

The group also talked with Barrow's representative about stimulus funds for the Diversity Center (a medical clinic for uninsured

or poorly insured residents) and talked with Chambliss about the city's needs for stimulus funds for road and infrastructure projects.

Another priority for the mayor was visiting with Mary Ellen Hombs, a representative for the U.S. Interagency on Homelessness. Thomas said this visit was in an effort to get the city's homeless problem under control.

Thomas and Tolley agreed everyone they met was forthcoming and supportive.

"It was two days well spent, a very busy two days, but very profitable," Thomas said. "You're not going to get everything you ask for, but where they could help they did."