

Congressman Weber mixes short-term optimism, long-term caution — and warnings

by Gail DeBoer

Staff writer

Former U.S. Congressman and Republican Party strategist Vin Weber, R-Minnesota, believes the United States is on track for an economic recovery over the next 18 months.

As for the long term outlook — well, that's another issue.

Weber's remarks came during the Cass County Economic Development Corporation's (EDC) annual meeting Oct. 29 at the Chase Hotel and Conference Center in Walker.

"I tend to be optimistic about where our country's going from here," he began. "I think we will recover faster than many predict; a steep V decline is usually followed by a steep V recovery."

Weber said the government reacted to the crisis in a smart way with the Federal Reserve pumping liquidity into the economy. That's something that didn't happen in the Depression.

He noted, however, that to address the crisis, the government has put almost \$2 trillion on the balance sheet, with the Troubled Asset Rescue Plan (TARP), stimulus package, legislative funding, and potentially health care reform.

That has created an unprecedented expansion in the size, scope and reach of federal government.

"We are at the point we were in 1945, the last year of World War II. Our deficit and debt will equal levels of a wartime economy, when you were spending to save your country. But we need to think real hard about where we are."

Weber commended the Obama administration for many of its actions in responding to the economic crisis. Nevertheless, he warned that if big health care and cap and trade expenditures are added, things could get worse.

"This administration is building on an irresponsible [fiscal] legacy of the previous [Bush] administration," he declared.

"We haven't taken our fiscal responsibilities seriously for a long time. We are on track to spend money we don't have!

"It's not so much a question of Republicans or Democrats. The question is, are we willing to face up to responsibilities as a country? We have to tell people, 'You can't have everything you want.'"

Weber served in Congress 1981 to 1983. He and his family have a home on Leech Lake near Walker and another in Alexandria, Va. He is co-founder and managing partner of Clark and Weinstock, a public policy advocacy and business consulting firm in Washington, D.C., and is considered one of the Republican Party's most prominent strategists.

Earlier in the meeting, EDC members elected four new board members. They are Brian "Mike" Myers, director of Tribal Development for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; Laura J. Hansen, owner and manager of Bill Hansen Realty in Longville and Hackensack; Bill Palmer, clinic administrator for Brainerd Lakes Health; and Jay Cline, branch manager of Woodland Bank in Jenkins.

Guests also heard project talks presented by the owners of two new businesses that received assistance from the EDC and executive director Gail Leverson.

Dave Kaufman owns Trails RV Park north of Walker on Highway 371. The 84-site park welcomes seasonal units and transients and offers amenities including a swimming pool, playground, shower house, drive-through spots, recreation room, and more.

Trails RV opened in mid-summer 2008; this summer was the first whole season. Kaufman said he was happy with this summer's occupancy. On an average summer weekend, about 60 to 65 stalls were occupied.

Ridgeline Manufacturing of Pillager is owned by Jerry and Sue Newman and Nick and Julie Newman. The Newmans bring 25 years of manufacturing experience to their new venture. Ridgeline manufactures docks, boatlifts and track systems, canopies, stairways, house decks trailers and apartment patios.

Since they opened last year, they have established 54 dealers in seven states and three Canadian provinces. During the last year, Ridgeline has been selling more commercial docks, due to the robust structure of their products. Ridgeline also manufactures custom-made, all-aluminum stairways for lakeshore homes. Recently they began manufacturing fire-resistant, powder-coated aluminum patios, railings and decks for apartment house complexes.

11.11.2009