

Congressman

# Vern Ehlers

Serving Michigan's Third District  
U.S. House of Representatives • Spring 2006



**SPRING 2006**  
**CONGRESSMAN**  
**VERN EHLERS**

**CONGRESS OF**  
**THE UNITED STATES**

**Serving Michigan's**  
**Third District**

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April 2006

Dear Friends,

During the first half of last year, I was proud of the progress made in the House of Representatives. We worked hard, tackled tough issues, made considerable progress, and completed our budget and spending bills on schedule for the first time in many years.

Then came Katrina, Rita and Wilma!

These devastating hurricanes crippled three states and nearly destroyed one of our nation's most historic cities, New Orleans. The Congress scrambled to help the people, restore services, and change our spending bills to help the ravaged areas. We are still struggling to find the best solutions for New Orleans. We also are looking deeply into the way our nation handled this disaster, and we will revamp our emergency agencies so we can respond much better in the future.

But we also have good news: our nation's economy has bounced back! The national unemployment rate has dropped to 4.8 percent, the lowest since 2000. Unfortunately, the bad news is that Michigan's economy remains in the doldrums, with the highest unemployment rate in the country. I am certainly doing all I can in Congress to advocate for our state. One result is President Bush's American Competitiveness Initiative, which contains many issues I have been pushing for, such as increased investment in math and science education and in scientific research, with rapid transfer of new innovations to manufacturers to boost their output.

The situation in Iraq weighs heavily on all of us. When our troops invaded Iraq three years ago, I suspected we would be there for quite some time. Unfortunately, my suspicion has proven true. We are making substantial progress in helping the Iraqi people establish a healthy, democratic society, but al Qaeda and other terrorists are working hard to undermine these successes. We should be immensely proud of our troops, their loyalty, their dedication and their sacrifices. Each fallen soldier is like a dart in my heart, and I ask you to join me in constant prayer for the troops and their families.

Please join us at the Medicare Prescription Enrollment event on **April 17** or at one of my town meetings on **April 29** and **May 6**. More details are elsewhere in this newsletter.

May God bless you and America, and may America be a blessing to God!

Sincerely,



**House Administration**  
**Committee, Chairman**

**House/Senate Committee on the**  
**Library of Congress, Chairman**

## My Committee Assignments

As your congressman, I have a variety of duties in the House of Representatives.  
Here is a list of the committees and subcommittees on which I serve:

**Education and the Workforce**  
**Committee**

**Subcommittees:**  
Education Reform  
21<sup>st</sup> Century Competitiveness

**Science Committee**  
**Subcommittees:**

Environment, Standards and Technology,  
**Chairman**  
Energy

**Transportation & Infrastructure**  
**Committee**

**Subcommittees:**  
Aviation  
Water Resources and Environment



## Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education

A nationwide poll recently showed that both parents and students are content with the science and math education their children receive in school. We must adjust this attitude of complacency if we are to remain a strong nation. When you look at international assessments of mathematical and scientific literacy, it is clear that U.S. students are being outperformed by other countries. We should be very concerned about this and what it may mean for our country's future workforce since all jobs of the future will require at least a basic understanding of math and science. In the words of Craig Barrett, chairman of Intel Corp., "If you look at the driving forces for today's economy, it happens to be the high-tech area. You can't be successful in those fields if you don't have a workforce that understands mathematics and science."

Improving the science and math education of our nation takes long-term commitment and dedication. As a scientist and science educator, I have been tapped to focus my energies on the improvement of science, technology, engineering and

math education (collectively, "STEM Education") at all levels—from pre-kindergarten to post-graduate. Under the umbrella of STEM Education, one of my priorities is to make certain that America has a well-educated workforce.

Last year, Congress approved legislation that will award scholarships to undergraduates who choose to major in the physical, life, or computer sciences, math, technology, or engineering (or a foreign language). The program, the National Science and

Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grants, provides up to \$4,000 to high-achieving, Pell Grant-eligible students in their third and fourth academic years of undergraduate education. Another area of need is the teaching workforce, since many of our science and math teachers do not have an adequate background in these fields. Within the same bill, I also supported a provision that will allow for up to \$17,500 in student loan forgiveness available to teachers of science and math.

It is also critical that we equip today's manufacturing workers with the skills needed for tomorrow's jobs. Earlier this year, I worked with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to secure a \$15 million Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant for the West Michigan Strategic Alliance and its partner organizations in seven local counties. These funds will provide for the "mapping" of manufacturing workers' skills, foster innovation within the manufacturing workplace, and also create training opportunities in high job-growth areas, such as biotechnology and advanced manufacturing. Additionally, I am working with DOL and state officials to ensure that laid-off workers can quickly access training programs through the local MichiganWorks agencies. This should create more job opportunities in Michigan.

Finally, we are continuing to grow a bipartisan Congressional member organization called the House Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Education Caucus. In just a year and a half, the Caucus has grown to include more than 100 Members of the House and includes a Senate Caucus as well. These Members of Congress are conscientiously seeking ways to improve STEM education by connecting educators, industry and policy-makers. For more information about the Caucus and its goals, please visit my website.



*Congressman Ehlert discussed STEM Education and competitiveness issues with President Bush aboard Air Force One.*

## The American Competitiveness Initiative

The laser. DNA sequencing. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). The Internet. Music players and cell phones smaller than a credit card! Where did all these inventions come from? For many years, the United States has been the world leader in the development of innovative new technologies that improve our lives, primarily through basic research discoveries. From tools like the Global Positioning System (GPS) to methods of harvesting energy from waste, our country historically has been very creative and inventive. Recently, however, it appears the U.S. may be in danger of losing our position of leadership to our global competitors. As nations such as China and India strongly boost government support for science research as well as technology education, the playing field has shifted. In fact, Thomas Friedman authored a book last year titled "The World is Flat," describing how the global trade and technology advances have made it possible to communicate and conduct business with billions of other people across the planet. This means that competition, as we know it, is also changing, and our country needs to make sure we are maintaining our strength in technological innovations that support our economy.

We are pleased that many economic and national leaders are responding to this need. In December, I helped organize a National Summit on Innovation ([www.usinnovation.org](http://www.usinnovation.org)) hosted by the Department of Commerce, advised the steering committee that organized the event and assisted in developing the agenda. The purpose of the summit was to discuss the seriousness of the global competitiveness challenge with senior government decision-makers and to promote an action plan to ensure continued U.S. leadership in innovation. The summit brought together key leaders from government and industry to decide on what was needed to strengthen America's innovation ability.

In his 2006 State of the Union Address, President Bush announced a new initiative known as the **American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI)**. The ACI seeks to build on our successes and to strengthen our nation's capacity to innovate by committing \$5.9 billion in the next fiscal year to increase investments in scientific research and development, strengthen education, and encourage entrepreneurship. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House to ensure that we allocate the money to help fuel our economy.

### Communicating with Congressman Ehlert

I am interested in hearing from you about what is happening in Congress and our federal government. There are a variety of ways you can communicate with me. If you want to comment or inquire about a legislative matter, please direct your correspondence to my Washington, D.C., office. If you are seeking assistance with a problem you have, you should contact my Grand Rapids office.

Due to security concerns, all postal mail to the U.S. Congress undergoes extensive screening, which slows delivery of your message. Of course, the U.S. Postal Service will deliver your message, but if you need quick assistance, I recommend e-mailing, calling or faxing your message instead.



#### E-mail

On the Internet, go to: [www.house.gov/ehlers](http://www.house.gov/ehlers)

Then, click on:

**"Write Your Rep"**

#### Washington Office

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## Information about Your Medicare Prescription Benefit

### Signing Up For Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage – Enrollment Closes May 15

Many people with Medicare are delighted that they are saving money with Medicare's new prescription drug plans. Others haven't signed up because they may feel overwhelmed. This is no surprise, since it takes time to understand large, new programs, especially if they are complex as insurance is.

Let me make one point very clear: If you have Medicare and don't have prescription drug coverage, you should enroll in the Medicare prescription drug plan. Even if you do not take a lot of prescription drugs now, it is still good to consider joining because as you age, you likely will need prescription drugs. Signing up for this Medicare coverage could protect you from very high prescription drug bills in the future. However, enrolling ultimately is up to you since the program is completely voluntary.

To make a decision about whether to enroll:

- Gather information about your current coverage for prescription drugs. Make sure you know what coverage, if any, you have now;
- List information about the drugs you use, including their names and dosages;
- Add up how much you currently spend on prescription drugs.

Once you have this information, contact Medicare to learn more about signing up for prescription drug plans in your area. You can go to [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov) or call 1-800-MEDICARE.



*Congressman Ehlers was joined by Kent County Medical Society Executive Director William G. McClimans, Jr., and Dr. Mark McClellan, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, at an October event in Grand Rapids that explained the new Medicare Prescription benefit to area residents.*

### Questions & Answers about Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage

**Q: Who can get Medicare prescription drug coverage?**

**A:** Everyone with Medicare is eligible for this coverage, regardless of income and resources, health status, or current prescription expenses.

**Q: When can I get Medicare prescription drug coverage?**

**A:** You may sign up until May 15, 2006. If you don't sign up by May 15, or when you are first eligible for Medicare, you may have to pay extra if you decide to enroll later.

**Q: How does Medicare prescription drug coverage work?**

**A:** If you join, you will pay a monthly premium, which varies by plan, and a yearly deductible. You will also pay part of the cost of your prescriptions. If you have limited income and resources, and you qualify for extra help, you may not have to pay a premium or deductible.

**Q: What if I am a retiree and have drug coverage through my (or my spouse's) former employer or union?**

**A:** Medicare is helping employers and unions continue to provide retiree drug coverage. Your employer or union probably mailed you a letter explaining how they will work with Medicare and what decisions you will have to make. If you do not hear from them, call your benefits administrator.



**Q: Is my Medicare-approved drug discount card the same as Medicare prescription drug coverage?**

**A:** No, a drug discount card is NOT the same as Medicare prescription drug coverage, which is an insurance program. Medicare-approved drug discount cards are temporary cards to help people get a discount on drugs until they join a prescription drug plan. Medicare-approved drug discount cards will expire on May 15, 2006.

**Q: What prescription drugs will the Medicare prescription drug plans cover?**

**A:** Each plan will feature at least two prescription drugs for most medical conditions, but not every plan will cover every drug. It is important to check that the plans you are considering offer the drugs you need.

**Q: Where can I get more information?**

**A:** Call 1-800-MEDICARE or log onto [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov).

### Extra Help Available

Nearly 1 in 3 people with Medicare will qualify for extra help that will cover between 85 percent and 100 percent of the costs of their drugs. Most people who are eligible for this extra help will pay no premiums, no deductible, and no more than \$5 for each prescription.

The amount of extra help will be based on income and resources (including savings and stocks, but not counting your home or car.) You may qualify if your resources are less than \$11,500 (if you are single) or \$23,000 (if you are married).

If you think you may qualify, call the Social Security Administration for more information at 1-800-SSA-1213.

### Save the Date

You are invited to attend a **Medicare Prescription Drug Plan (Part D) Enrollment Event on Monday, April 17, 2006, in Grand Rapids. For more information, please contact my office at (616) 451-8383 or (202) 225-3831.**

Visit Congressman Ehlers' Website! [www.house.gov/ehlers](http://www.house.gov/ehlers)

## Helping You



Dealing with federal agencies sometimes can be frustrating and time consuming. We are available to help relieve some of that frustration. Providing assistance to you is our primary priority. While we cannot force an agency to act in your favor or promise you the result you want, we can cut through red tape and help make sure you get a fair hearing.

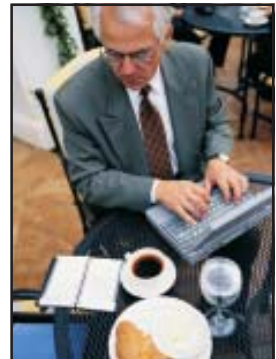
Areas in which we can provide help include (but are not limited to): Military and Veterans' Affairs, Social Security, Medicare, Passports, Immigration, the Internal Revenue Service, Housing, the U.S Postal Service and Student Loans. Links to many of these agencies are available through our webpage ([www.house.gov/ehlers](http://www.house.gov/ehlers)).

**For your privacy protection, federal law requires that we obtain your written permission before contacting an agency on your behalf.** Please contact the Grand Rapids office for information about how to obtain a "Privacy Release Form" so that we may help you.

## Visit Our Website

Thanks to the Internet, we can provide you with information that you will find useful and interesting. By visiting our website, you can:

- ✓ Subscribe to our weekly e-newsletter;
- ✓ Send Congressman Ehlers a message;
- ✓ Read our latest news releases;
- ✓ View legislation sponsored by Congressman Ehlers;
- ✓ Access a Washington, D.C. visitor's guide;
- ✓ Link to a wide variety of organizations of interest to the Third Congressional District and a history of people who have represented our area in Congress;
- ✓ Link to Constituent Services;
- ✓ Link to other governmental organizations;
- ✓ And much, much more!



[www.house.gov/ehlers](http://www.house.gov/ehlers)

## Town Meetings and Special Events

**Saturday, April 29**

### IONIA

#### Town Meeting

9 a.m. – 10 a.m.

Ionia County Central Dispatch  
545 Apple Tree Drive, Ionia

### HASTINGS

#### Town Meeting

11 a.m. – 12 noon

Hastings City Hall, Council Chambers  
201 East State St., Hastings



**Saturday, May 6**

### GRAND RAPIDS

#### Town Meeting

9 a.m. – 10 a.m.

#### Medal of Merit Ceremony

#### Honoring Local High School Students

10:30 a.m. – 12 noon

#### Congressional High School Art Competition

12 noon – 1 p.m.

#### All May 6 events above to take place at:

Gerald R. Ford Museum, Auditorium  
303 Pearl St. NW, Grand Rapids

**Persons requiring special accommodations at any of these events should contact my Grand Rapids office at (616) 451-8383 at least 48 hours prior to the scheduled event.**

## Old Glory

United States flags that have been flown over the U.S. Capitol are available for purchase through my Washington office. You

also may request, by calling or writing in advance, that your flag be flown on a specific date for special



occasions such as anniversaries, birthdays and graduations. All orders must be paid for in advance. For more information, including an up-to-date price list, contact my office or visit the "Constituent Services" section of my webpage, [www.house.gov/ehlers](http://www.house.gov/ehlers)



CONGRESSMAN VERNON EHLERS  
Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Official Business

## Weekly Updates in the Ehlers e-Newsletter

Every week that the U.S. House of Representatives is in session, you can stay informed about what is happening in the House by subscribing to my electronic newsletter, the *Ehlers e-Newsletter*. To subscribe, visit my website – [www.house.gov/ehlers](http://www.house.gov/ehlers) – click on "e-Newsletter," follow the instructions and you will receive an e-mail from me each week that the House is in session. You can also view past issues in the Archives on my website.

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