



Your Congressman Reports

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Representative in Congress

June 2004 – 7th Congressional District - Illinois

This newsletter finds us with only a half year to go in the 108th Congress. There are a number of interesting and important townhall meetings coming up in the next few months. These townhall meetings offer some wonderful opportunities for you to interact with your Member of Congress, to make your voice heard, to gather information and to hear what is on the minds of your neighborhoods.

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The escalating war, acts of terrorism, treatment of prisoners and issues surrounding the economy have dominated much of our thought and action during the first six months of this year. However, other domestic and social issues continue to constitute great challenge to our everyday lives. As Congressman of the 7th District of Illinois I have continued to confront these issues and work to address these challenges.

Legislative initiatives

My legislative initiatives are solid and continue to be worked through the process. The Senate has passed S. 874, the **Sickle Cell Treatment Act** which is identical to my bill in the House, H.R. 1726 on which I am working to try and get House action this year.

May 12, 2003, the Government Reform Committee unanimously passed H.R. 4341, the **Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2004**, which I sponsored along with Representatives John McHugh (R-NY), Henry Waxman (D-CA), and Tom Davis (R-VA). As the ranking member of the special panel on postal reform and oversight, I am pleased that we have passed a bipartisan bill that will help to ensure the long-term viability of the united states postal service (usps).

The USPS impacts a \$900 billion industry that employs more than 9 million people and represents 9 percent of the GDP. The USPS is currently \$7 billion in debt to the U.S. Government, and has massive unfunded liabilities. Declining first class mail volumes, rising labor costs, and infrastructure related costs and rigid statutes necessitate reform. The bill we passed preserves universal service, protects collective bargaining, and provides the Postal Service with ratemaking flexibility and the mailers with rate stability.

Recent and Upcoming Meetings and Events

As Ranking Member of the **Special Panel on Postal Reform and Oversight**, I brought a hearing to Chicago which provided stakeholders from the Chicagoland area an opportunity to testify. I also established and held the first meeting of my **Chicagoland Postal Roundtable**. Both the hearing and the Roundtable were well attended and quite productive.

Small Business Hearing February 17, 2004. The 7th Congressional District was host to an official Small Business Committee Field Hearing on finding capital for small business and helping small businesses get contracts with the Federal Government. This was a very productive hearing and several small business owners and organizations were able to testify. Some of those who participated were Mr. Obie Wordlaw (JERO Medical Equipment and Supply), Mr. William H. Leggett (Collectors Training Institute, Inc.), Ms. Frankie J. Redditt (Ashley's Quality Care, Inc.), Mr. Sam Johnson (Best Metals and Fabricators), Ms. Theresa Jamison (Smart Technology Services, Inc.), Ms. Charlotte Harrison (Millennium Data Systems), and Mr. Bruce Montgomery (Montgomery & Company).



Congressman Davis discusses Veterans Issues with Dr. Joan E. Cummings (Network Director VA Great Lakes Health Care System) and VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi (right) at the May 25, 2004 renaming of the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center

May 27, 2004 Townhall meeting on the MiCASSA legislation. Many of the organizations who work on disability issues were able to participate in a Townhall meeting I held on my MiCASSA legislation, H.R. 2032 which promotes independent living for people with disabilities. This bill is sponsored in the Senate by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa. We now have 99 co-sponsors in the House and I am optimistic about continuous movement of this legislation. The MiCASSA bill will allow service providers, States and consumers to obtain more cost effective long-term services in the most appropriate setting for the individual. MiCASSA makes the existing entitlement more flexible. It amends Title 19 of the Social Security Act and creates an alternative service called Community Attendant Services and Supports. This

allows individuals eligible for Nursing Facility Services or Intermediate Care Facility Services for the Mentally Retarded, regardless of age or disability, the choice to use these dollars for ``Community Attendant Services and Supports."

May, 28, 2004 Senior Citizens Townhall meetings. Three Townhall meetings with seniors at, the **Oak Park Library**, Oak Park, the **Hillside Community Center**, Hillside and the **Garden House Apartments**, Maywood, gave many 7th District seniors an opportunity to discuss prescription drugs and other pressing issues with me.

June 7, 2004. Sub-committee on Civil Service Hearing on Federal Hiring. 3333 West Arthington, Chicago, Illinois. The Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization will be hosted by the 7th Congressional District for a hearing on "The Federal Hiring Process: The Long and Winding Road." The Subcommittee members expect the meeting to be attended and shed additional light on how to get a job working for the Federal Government. In addition, a mini job fair will be held for individuals to receive information on where to go and how to apply.

June 25 and June 26, 2004 Townhall meeting on the State of the African American Male. This meeting is designed to focus some in-depth probing of the question: what is causing the African American male to experience such serious disparities in quality of life indicators such as educational attainment, earnings, status of health, rates of imprisonment and lack of civic involvement and participation.

The social and economic status of African-American males are continuing to decline and clearly require intervention. The unemployment rate among African-American males is approximately 31.9 percent, which is triple the national average. African-American males make up 6% of the total Illinois population and account for 60% of the Illinois prison population. According to the Census Bureau 30% of African-American males under 18 live below the poverty line. Black men lead every negative aspect of almost any statistics compiled, they earn less, are deeper in debt, save less, are less educated, and tend not to have as many employable job skills. It is expected that the meeting will produce a body of knowledge that can be used to develop legislation and/or programs to help change some of these conditions.

We are losing far too many African-American males to drugs, gangs, homicides and an overall climate which promotes a high level of disenchantment, helplessness and hopelessness. If we are to reverse these trends, special efforts must be put forth and, I believe, an intensive up-close look at these issues and problems could provide realistic problem-solving approaches. The meeting will be held Friday evening, June 25th and all day Saturday, June 26 at Malcolm X College, 1900 West Van Buren, Chicago, Illinois. **In addition, there will be a major health fair for information and screenings and a job fair for individuals seeking employment..**

Saturday August 21, 2004. Annual Back-to-School. This event, as in past years, will be held in Columbus Park 5700 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois. Need more be said about the importance of this event?

September 17 and September 18, 2004. State of the District 2004. This is the 5th year anniversary of this very popular district-wide event. Friday, opening night: hear State of the District Keynote address, see presentation of 7th Congressional District Awards, meet people who share your concerns. Saturday, all day: participate in workshops and discussions on dozens of issues. Engage in fascinating debate with your neighbors, make sure your voice is heard. Congressman Davis will spend the day visiting as many workshops as possible and will hear live report-backs from each workshop discussion. This year's State of the District Town Hall Meeting will be held at: Malcolm X College, 1901 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois.

There are opportunities for interns and fellows in my Congressional office. If you, or someone you know, may want to access this type of experience please call my office in Washington at 202-225-5006.



The State of the District

The sucking sound of U.S. jobs leaving for low wage havens abroad is now being supplemented by the even more ominous sound of U.S. boots being drawn into the quagmire of occupying Iraq. The horrific reports surrounding the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib have forced every American to focus on the consequences of our occupation of Iraq. New revelations demand that Congress examine the responsibilities of the chain of command all the way up to the Secretary of Defense. I have joined the Congressional Black Caucus and others in calling for the resignation of Secretary Rumsfeld.

It is no coincidence that on the morning of April 28 a Department of Justice attorney representing Defense Secretary Rumsfeld was arguing before the Supreme Court that the United States should have the right to imprison a U.S. citizen indefinitely, without legal representation or any other contact with society based on a "Presidential determination."

That same evening came the first news reports of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners. There remain serious questions about the impact of some provisions of the Patriot Act on basic notions of our democracy.

I voted against authorizing the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In public statements at the time (3/17/2003) I noted:

"I remain unconvinced that war is the necessary or best alternative to remove the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction from Iraq. I do not believe that military action will bring stability to Iraq or the Middle East. I do not believe that war with Iraq will reduce the threat of terrorism to the people of the United States. I do not

believe that pre-emptive unilateral military action provides the legal, moral, ideological or social basis for expanding democracy, freedom, human rights or economic and social justice.”

“I believe that war with Iraq will make it more difficult to find effective, multi-lateral, non-military solutions to the many and growing challenges and dangers we face in the international arena. I believe that war with Iraq, and its aftermath, will come at great cost to our nation. There is still time, still a chance, to pull back from the brink of war and to move forward with a determined strategy of collective action and international solidarity to end the threats of Weapons of Mass Destruction and terrorism.”

“I have no doubt that America will prevail militarily. However, as we press forward with this war I remain mindful of the terrible human tragedy facing the people of Iraq and of the inherent inability of this war to achieve our goals of ensuring the safety of our homeland and the American people. The problem of Weapons of Mass Destruction will continue to confront us on many fronts. I expect that we will be faced with ever more complex and difficult circumstances in bringing peace and stability to Iraq and the entire Mideast region. It is my hope and expectation that we will redouble our efforts to seek collective, non-military solutions to these critical issues.”

These statements still reflect my views. As reports of the circumstances surrounding the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent response of government, my focus is on pressing for real and immediate alternatives to current policy. While the great, overwhelming majority of our men and women in uniform have done everything requested of them, some of our nation’s most respected military leaders including Retired Generals Anthony Zinni, Norman Schwarzkopf, Wesley Clark, and Eric Shinseki, have joined in harsh criticism of the lead-up, planning and strategy of the war.

No less troubling are the slowly emerging plans for Iraqi “sovereignty.” There are deep concerns about the legitimacy of the interim government, over the control of the Iraqi army, police and paramilitary forces, over the development of the Iraqi oil industry, over the freedom of the print and electronic media and a host of other questions. The Iraq quagmire is taking the lives and bodies of our young men and women, more than 800 of our finest young people have died in the war to date. Thousands more have been wounded requiring and deserving the finest medical care our country can offer, they will require assistance from our Veterans Administration in future years. I hope Congress will do everything necessary to meet the needs of our veterans.

Funding the occupation of Iraq is tearing at our domestic budgetary priorities and, because it consumes such a disproportionate share of our national resources, it is reducing, not increasing our security. Communities already gasping from loss of jobs, health insurance, economic opportunity, access to affordable housing, admission to quality child care, and broken educational promises of “leaving no child behind” are looking desperately for a life preserver . . . but not even finding a straw to grasp. Illinois lost more than 237,000 jobs since January 2001 and there are now more than 387,500 unemployed. In April 2004 alone Illinois lost another 2000 manufacturing jobs. *At the rate we are creating jobs today it will take four more years of similar job growth without a break just to get back to the employment level we had in 2001.* The current minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour and has not been increased in seven years - the longest period without a “cost of living” increase ever. In the 1950s and 1960s the minimum wage averaged 50% of hourly earnings. Today the minimum wage is only 33% of the average hourly earnings.

One of the most important issues we face is the problem of illegal drug use. The use of drugs increases the risks of the HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases as well as diseases such as tuberculosis. Drug use has reached epidemic proportions, affecting as many as 7.1 million people, their families and their communities.

Of course the best option is prevention, that is, never start the use of illegal drugs. I support the allocation of additional resources to that end, but we also need to deal with the needs of established drug users. Obtaining access to drug treatment has become more difficult. We know, based on scientific research, that access to treatment on demand results in the highest rates of effective treatment. Treatment on demand results in some short term increases in cost to the public, but in the long term, both for the public and for the addict, effective therapy decreases the demand for health care, promotes more efficient use of the health care system and provides major reductions in cost to the criminal justice system, and other public programs.

I have spoken out strongly in support of the C.A.T.C.H. Initiative to get more treatment resources for individuals who suffer from drug addiction: “Treatment, Not Jails.” I am optimistic about developments toward treatment on demand.

Medicare Drug Discount Card

Medicare beneficiaries will soon be bombarded with advertisements, mailings, and promotions for participation in the new Medicare-approved prescription drug discount card program. This program is part of the Medicare overhaul passed last year (I voted against this version of Medicare reform.) This transitional program will only be in effect from June 2004 through December 2005.

Starting this month, Medicare beneficiaries will be able to purchase a private, Medicare approved drug discount card. The costs vary, but the maximum annual fee is set at \$30. In Illinois, there will be four regional drug cards and 39 national drug cards to choose from – all offering different benefits and covering different medications. Medicare beneficiaries will be limited to one Medicare-approved card and will only be allowed to change cards once during the 2004 year end open enrollment period; even if the card no longer covers the medications your doctor prescribes. If you are enrolled in a Medicare HMO that offers its own discount card, you may only be allowed to purchase that card.

These cards are being promoted as offering significant price discounts on your prescription drugs. However, the law does not require any specific level of savings. If you already have a discount card offered in the private marketplace, your savings will probably not be much different. You can keep any cards you have now and can have multiple non-Medicare-approved cards, but you can only use one card per prescription.

Seniors with disabilities whose incomes are below \$12,569 a year for individuals or \$16,862 for couples, and who are not enrolled in Medicaid, a retiree drug plan or Tricare will be eligible for a \$600 toward prescription drugs in 2004 and again in 2005. Drug companies may require enrollees to fill out a separate form to apply for the credit. By signing the application form for the \$600 credit, enrollees are permitting the government and possibly the drug card sponsor to verify your income through your tax records and other information.

Navigating the maze of available cards will be difficult. Cards may offer good deals on some of your medications, but no value on others. The specific drugs that are discounted will vary among the cards, and may even vary within each card's plan throughout the year. Not all pharmacies will participate with all cards either. Finding the card that is right for you will require some research, and there is no guarantee one is available to meet all of your medical needs. Beneficiaries can also get help by calling 1-800-MEDICARE, or by accessing information at www.medicare.gov.

There have already been incidences of fraud surrounding these cards. Be wary of offers that sound too good to be true. Beneficiaries should never provide personal information to door-to-door salesmen, or during unsolicited phone calls. Drug card sponsors must use approved application forms, and the individual cards will carry the Medicare-approved logo. Any fraud or questionable behavior should be reported immediately to 1-800-MEDICARE.

The need for relief is very real: in a study tracking prices of 197 of the most widely used brand-name drugs from 2000 to 2003, AARP found a cumulative increase of 27.6% compared to a general inflation rate of 10.4%. Unfortunately the discount card will not provide significant relief for most Medicare beneficiaries. This complicated program may provide help for some lower-income beneficiaries, but finding the best card will be difficult. I urge you to use the resources listed above when deciding whether to enroll in the discount card program and to determine what card is best for your needs.

Report from the Committee on Education and the Workforce

During this Congress, there have been several very important pieces of legislation before the Committee. The **Head Start program, H.R. 2210**, provides education, social, health, and nutrition services primarily to low-income children before they enter school in an attempt to prepare them to succeed at the same rate of their affluent peers. The Committee accepted two of my amendments. One established an outreach program to promote the **involvement of Head Start students' fathers or father-figures**. The second amendment restored the **emphasis on the delivery of culturally sensitive and appropriate services**.

Under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, individuals with special needs are guaranteed appropriate education through funds appropriated for the states. However during this re-authorization, these guarantees were jeopardized. The Committee accepted my amendment to **examine and evaluate the disproportionate number of minority children, particularly African American males, placed in special education**.

During the Committee discussions of the **Child Nutrition and School Lunch Program re-authorization**, I worked to make sure all eligible children would receive nutritional meals with their schools at free or reduced rates. Under this re-authorization, other programs and issues were also examined such as **Woman, Infant and Children (WIC) and child obesity**. Congress should do much more to feed our Nation's poor children. However, due to budget constraints imposed on the Committee, instead of adding more children, we were only able to guarantee the continuation of assistance to those children currently receiving assistance.

After the Memorial Day recess, the Committee will continue to discuss the **Higher Education Act**. I have introduced H.R. 2504, the **Student Loan Fairness Consolidation Act**, to help borrowers refinance their consolidated federal loans into a variable rate while the federal government will recapture some of the special allowance it provides to encourage banks to make student loans.

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-1307



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