

Rep. Petri's E-Newsletter

June 2, 2009

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The Rush for Health Care Reform

Just about everybody in Washington agrees that we need health care reform. Medical costs have been growing faster than inflation for decades and insurance premiums have become a major burden for individuals and businesses - a burden that continues to grow.

The question is: What should we do? As of 2007, there were 46 million uninsured Americans. How can we help everyone get coverage without limiting access to doctors, rationing services and raising taxes? If it's possible, it won't be easy.

Congressional leaders have promised President Obama that they will pass a health care reform bill by early August. Certainly, they are right to bring the issue to the front burner.

At the same time, government economists predict that public and private health spending will hit \$2.5 trillion this year, taking up 17.6 percent of gross domestic product. Government-mandated changes in health care will have enormous consequences for our economy and the way Americans live. We all hope those consequences will be positive, but we are taking a big risk if we rush through insufficiently-considered legislation.

Coming Up

In addition to the push for universal - or near universal - health care, the House leadership is planning to bring a climate change bill to the floor which would require businesses to obtain permits if they release carbon dioxide (CO2) through the burning of coal or other operations. Reducing CO2 emissions is intended to slow global warming.

The expense will be passed on to consumers, and the annual cost for the average family has been estimated by proponents as \$200, and by opponents as \$3,100. Proponents say the bill is necessary to save the planet, opponents say that it will result in the loss of anywhere from 1.8 million to 7 million American jobs. While sorting out competing claims, I want to make sure that Midwestern industries, their employees and consumers generally will be treated fairly.

The House and Senate need to come to agreement on supplemental funding requested by President Obama for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A bill approved by the House May 14 would provide \$96.7 billion in additional emergency funding for the current fiscal year. The Senate has returned its version after adding authority for the government to lend up to \$108 billion to the International Monetary Fund.

An authorization bill for the Transportation Security Administration is scheduled for the House floor this week, and authorization bills for the Defense and State Departments have been mentioned for consideration during the next month or two.

By early August, the House and Senate leaderships both hope to pass all 12 of the huge appropriations bills which fund the government's "discretionary" activities (those which are separate from "entitlement" spending such as Medicare and Social Security).

What I've Been Up To

Vulnerable FAA Computers: The federal government recently released a report requested by Rep. John Mica and myself which confirmed our suspicions that the nation's air traffic control system is vulnerable to cyber attacks and will continue to be as the system is modernized, unless steps are taken to address significant security gaps. The Aviation Subcommittee, where I am the Ranking Republican member, is holding a roundtable discussion on the issue next week.

Academy Appointees: On various dates during May I met with and presented Certificates of Special Congressional Recognition to the four 6th District students that I sponsored for the U.S. service academies who will be attending. They are Logan Roy of Plymouth, Michael Reindl of St. Nazianz, and Patrick Costello of Neenah, all of whom will be attending the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD, and James Stevens of Random Lake, who will be attending the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, CO.

Congressional Art Competition: At a May 8 reception held in the UW-Fond du Lac Commons, I announced that Kiel High School senior Sarah Pritzl is the winner of my Congressional Art Competition.

The competition, voluntarily sponsored by Members of Congress through competitions held in their congressional districts, affords creative high school students the opportunity to showcase their talents in Washington, D.C. Sarah's artwork will be sent to Washington to be displayed in the U.S. Capitol for one year. She will be invited to a reception in Washington, D.C. on June 25 and in addition will receive scholarship opportunities from the Savannah College of Art & Design.

Human Services Award: I received the William Steiger Human Services Award on May 8 from the Wisconsin Community Action Program Association for my efforts to help low-

income residents. My work in support of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which provides significant help for low-income workers, was highlighted.

Tax Speech: I keynoted an American Enterprise Institute conference in Washington on May 12 on how the tax code affects low-income taxpayers. I outlined my work on the disincentives faced by low-income individuals and families as they try to make their way into the middle class. I further discussed the ways the nation's benefit programs and tax structure discourage marriage among those with modest and moderate incomes.

Education Hearing: On May 20, Education Secretary Arne Duncan came before the House Education and Labor Committee to exchange views on education policy for the next four years. During questioning I told him that I support the President's proposal to expand the cost-effective Direct Loan Program for students and shut down the expensive, subsidized alternative, the Federal Family Education Loan program. For over 20 years I have been advocating direct loans as a better deal than the FFEL program for taxpayers and students.

I also questioned the Secretary on restrictions I am trying to overcome which limit the effectiveness of adaptive testing and the Troops to Teachers Program.

Legislative Win: On May 20, with my support, the House approved a Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights, H.R. 627. Signed by the President on May 22, the new law includes provisions which Rep. Patrick Murphy and I had introduced as a stand-alone bill in the House, the Student Credit Card Transparency Act, H.R. 2217.

Our proposal provides greater transparency by requiring credit card companies to report on their arrangements with colleges and alumni associations when receiving the assistance of those institutions to solicit students for credit cards. The question is, are colleges and alumni groups operating in the interests of the students or simply to benefit themselves, and shouldn't the students be informed?

Sen. Kohl and others added the provisions of H.R. 2217 to the larger Credit Cardholders' Bill of Rights when it was considered in the Senate.

Memorial Day: At the request of the American Legion Roger-Ostrich Post 343, I spoke at Memorial Day services in both Coloma and Hancock.

Grants Conference: On May 28, I held a conference on grant opportunities for local governments and nonprofit organizations at the Moraine Park Technical College in Fond du Lac. Over 200 local officials and nonprofit leaders participated in various sessions designed to assist them in applying for grants from the federal and state governments. Based on comments from attendees, it was a very successful day.

Legislative Update

War Funding: On May 14, by a vote of 368-60, the House approved legislation to provide \$96.7 billion in additional emergency funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. While I support continued funding for our troops, I voted "no" in protest because I think Congress and the President should make a greater effort to estimate war costs as part of the regular budget process instead of low-balling the figure with the expectation of having to come back later for emergency supplemental funds.

School Construction: On May 14, by a vote of 275-155, the House approved H.R. 2187, a bill to fund school construction. I voted against this legislation because the construction of schools should primarily be a state and local responsibility. Before creating new initiatives, Congress should first fully fund the current federal education programs, including those meant for the neediest and disabled students. The bill is pending in the Senate.

Mortgage Fraud: On May 18, with my support and by a vote of 338-52, the House approved S. 386, a bill to strengthen laws against financial crimes including mortgage fraud. The President signed it into law on May 20.

Mortgage Foreclosure: On May 19, with my support and by a vote of 367-54 with one abstention, the House approved S. 896, a bill to make a number of changes to current law regarding federally-insured mortgages with the aim of encouraging mortgage modifications to help people stay in their homes. The President signed the bill into law on May 20.

Credit Card Protections: On May 20, with my support and by a vote of 279-147, the House approved H.R. 627, a bill to strengthen consumer protections for credit card holders. On May 22, the President signed the bill into law.

FAA Reauthorization: On May 21, by a vote of 277-136, the House approved H.R. 915, legislation to reauthorize Federal Aviation Administration funding and safety oversight programs. I helped to write the bill and support most of it. However, ultimately I voted against it because it includes controversial labor provisions which would quickly cost the taxpayers \$1 billion. The bill is pending in the Senate.

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