

Rep. Petri's E-Newsletter

February 3, 2009

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A Fresh Start

We now have a new Congress, a new President and a fresh start. So far, the relationship between President Obama and the Republicans in the House of Representatives has been notably positive.

The President visited Capitol Hill Jan. 27 to discuss his stimulus proposal with the House Republicans and then with our Senate counterparts. The meetings were cordial, and having been in the first meeting, I can attest that President Obama was in top form. Later that same day I attended a smaller meeting at the White House with the President's Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, economic adviser Lawrence Summers and others.

When the House voted on the stimulus package Jan. 28, it received no Republican votes. In fact, since 11 Democrats joined the Republicans in voting "no," you might say that I was on the bipartisan side.

I discuss more about the bill below, but I trust the President understands that Republican opposition to the package was based on our honest concerns about its contents. We may not always agree, but I hope we can maintain an open dialogue. Since the end of the campaign, President Obama has avoided partisan cheap shots at Republicans, and most Republicans have responded in kind. I think that's the right way to go.

Coming Up In Congress

Stimulus Bill: On Jan. 28, the House approved H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 - more commonly known as "the Stimulus bill." The Senate is expected to pass its version soon, and then differences between the two will be negotiated. With large Democratic majorities in both chambers, there is little doubt that President Obama will sign a record-breakingly large stimulus bill into law in mid-February.

On the Floor Tomorrow: On Feb. 4, the House is expected to approve delaying the digital TV transition until June and complete work on the Children's Health Insurance Program, making it ready for the President's signature. There's more on both of these issues below.

Fiscal Year '09 Appropriations: Later this month, Congress is expected to consider an omnibus spending bill consisting of the nine remaining bills which should have been approved by last Oct. 1 to fund most of the federal government. For the past four months, most of the government has operated with funds provided through short-term continuing resolutions.

FAA Reauthorization: As mentioned last month, as the ranking Republican on the Aviation Subcommittee, I will be closely involved in the months ahead in the effort to reauthorize and update the Federal Aviation Administration. This legislation will include airport improvements, modernization of the air traffic control system, safety and environmental programs, and more. The Aviation Subcommittee is holding a reauthorization hearing next week, on Feb. 11.

This Week: More Town Meetings

As you know from earlier postings, I've begun my latest round of town meetings. This is an opportunity for 6th District residents to meet with me to discuss federal issues in a group setting.

Understandably, the economy has been the dominant topic so far.

Here is the schedule of my remaining meetings:

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5

1:00 - 2:00 p.m., **PRINCETON**, City Hall, 438 West Main St., City Council Chambers
3:30 - 4:30 p.m., **OSHKOSH**, City Hall, 215 Church Ave., Room 406

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6

9:00 - 10:00 a.m., **ADAMS**, Municipal Building, 101 North Main St., Council Chambers
11:00 - 12:00 Noon, **WAUTOMA**, CAPsell Center, 205 East Main St., Conference Room D
2:00 - 3:00 p.m., **MONTELLO**, Marquette Co. Courthouse, 77 W. Park St., Pub. Safety Training Rm.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7

9:00-10:00 a.m., **MENASHA**, Elisha D. Smith Public Library, 440 First St., Activity Room

Personal Initiatives

Tax Fairness for Charity Drivers: On January 15, I introduced H.R. 590, the [Charitable Driving Tax Relief Act of 2009](#).

Currently, if you volunteer and drive your car to deliver Meals-On-Wheels or take someone to the hospital or a doctor's appointment or whatever as part of a charitable enterprise, you can only be reimbursed at the rate of 14 cents a mile. If you are reimbursed more than that,

it's subject to tax as taxable income. If, on the other hand, you are working for a business and you use your car on a business mission, the employer can reimburse you 55 cents a mile, and it's not subject to a tax.

That's discriminatory and unfair. My bill would raise the amount of tax-free reimbursement for charitable drivers to the business level.

Better School Tests: On January 22, I introduced H.R. 655, the [Assessment Accuracy and Improvement Act](#).

Currently, under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, each state is required to test students in grades three through eight. Each state has its own tests, which must be approved by the federal Education Department. The tests are often done on paper and are identical for every student within the same grade in any given state.

Many educators say "adaptive" tests are far more valuable. These are tests done on computers which automatically adjust to the student's level of ability. If the test-taker is answering most of the questions correctly, the computer asks harder questions. If the test-taker is flubbing answers, the questions get easier.

The Education Department won't allow the use of adaptive tests to fulfill federal requirements because it says that every student should take the same test - with the same questions. Educators say that misses the point - that the best test tells you most accurately what the student knows. I agree, and my bill would allow schools to use adaptive tests to fulfill their NCLB requirements.

Campaign Finance Reform: On January 27, I introduced H.R. 726, the [Citizen Involvement in Campaigns \(CIVIC\) Act of 2009](#).

My bill would allow taxpayers to choose between a 100 percent tax credit for political contributions to federal candidates or parties (limited to \$200 per taxable year) or a 100 percent deduction (limited to \$600 per year). By encouraging small donations, the CIVIC Act would reduce the tendency of candidates to rely on a few large special interests or wealthy donors for campaign funds. In other words, it would dilute the potential influence of big contributors.

Education Award

On Jan. 9, the National Association of Scholars presented me with an [award](#) for introducing and winning passage for the Higher Education for Freedom Act, a bill which gives the Department of Education the authority to make grants in support of the study of free institutions, the American founding, traditional American history, and Western civilization.

Legislative Update

Fair Pay: On Jan. 27, by a vote of 250-171, the House approved S. 181, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. The President has since signed this bill into law. The legislation

eliminates the filing deadlines for discrimination lawsuits. I opposed the bill because, although it might be appropriate to re-think filing deadlines, they do serve a legitimate purpose and should not be abolished wholesale.

Children's Health Insurance: On Jan. 14, with my support and by a vote of 289-139, the House approved H.R. 2, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization Act. The legislation would provide for a \$33 billion expansion of the program over four and a half years. A final version, negotiated with the Senate, is likely to be approved Feb. 4.

In Wisconsin CHIP is known as BadgerCare Plus, a program that provides health insurance to children, pregnant women and working families.

Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP): On January 21, by a vote of 260-166, the House approved and sent to the Senate H.R. 384, the TARP Reform and Accountability Act. I opposed this bill for several reasons including its retroactive imposition of conditions for accepting aid and the inclusion of the auto rescue legislation which failed to pass Congress last December.

TARP Funds Release: On Jan. 22, with my support and by a vote of 270-155, the House approved H.J. Res. 3, a resolution of disapproval concerning the release of the second \$350 billion authorized under the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. Because of the way that Act was written, and because the Senate voted to release the funds, the House's vote of disapproval was merely symbolic and the administration has access to the funds.

Digital TV Transition

Under current law, at midnight on Feb. 17, all full-power television stations in the United States would be required to stop broadcasting the analog signals which have been standard since the 1940s, and switch to 100% digital broadcasting. However, I believe it is highly likely that Congress will push the transition date back to June 12 - a delay which I support.

Most of us in Congress are concerned that many people still have not prepared for the transition and will be surprised when their older TVs stop working. Delaying the last date for analog transmissions will provide extra time to get the word out.

The federal government has been offering \$40 coupons to help defray the cost of the converter boxes. Full details are available online at <https://www.dtv2009.gov/>. Because of the high demand, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration is currently putting applicants on a waiting list, and it is important to get on the list quickly due to limited funds for the program.

Converter boxes are available at stores which sell electronics. If you, or anyone you know, will need a converter box, I encourage you to act quickly to avoid the inconvenience of a lost TV signal.

Additional information on the digital transition can be found at my Web site:
<http://petri.house.gov>.]

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<http://petri.house.gov/subscribe.shtml>