

Rep. Petri's E-Newsletter

May 5, 2010

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Health Care Problems Surfacing

The new health care law will help many who need coverage. That's important. Nevertheless, I favored different approaches and voted against "Obamacare" because I am concerned that it will mean poorer care for most, coupled with an unaffordable national price tag far in excess of what has been advertised.

In April, the Chief Actuary of the government's Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a report on the new law. Some highlights:

- * National health expenditures are expected to increase from the current 17 percent of Gross Domestic Product (more than any other country) to 21 percent under the new law.
- * Health care shortages and price increases are "plausible and even probable."
- * The provisions of the legislation "intended to help control future health care cost growth" will have "a negligible financial impact over the next 10 years."
- * The law "jeopardizes access to care" for seniors because of payment reductions to providers for Medicare services. Medicare Advantage access will be cut in half.
- * About 14 million people are likely to lose their employer-sponsored coverage. Smaller employers will be inclined to terminate coverage so their workers can qualify for "heavily subsidized coverage" through the government's health insurance exchange.
- * The new taxes on medical devices, prescription drugs, and insurance plans "would generally be passed on through to health consumers in the form of higher drug and device prices and higher insurance premiums."
- * Even after close to \$1 trillion of tax increases and Medicare cuts, net federal spending on health care will increase by \$251.3 billion over the 10 year budget window.

Clearly, the health care law was written in haste, with more concern about getting it passed than about getting it right. I anticipate numerous other unintended consequences to surface over the months and years ahead.

Coming Up In Congress

Coming up this week is H.R. 5019, the Home Star Energy Retrofit Act of 2010. This \$6.6 billion "Cash for Caulkers" bill would establish rebate programs to encourage people to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

The Democrats are currently arguing over whether or not to produce a formal budget outline by approving a budget resolution. "Blue Dog" Democrats are calling for budget restraint while "progressives" are resisting that. There is some talk that the majority leadership will ultimately settle on a "deeming" resolution, which would be less detailed than the normal budget outline, but which would set limits on appropriations.

Once the majority's leaders decide how it wants to proceed on the budget, we can expect the various major appropriations bills to make their way to the floor of the House.

The House will likely vote on a defense authorization bill before Memorial Day.

There is talk of a supplemental spending bill, probably appropriating additional funds for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and potentially including other spending priorities which the Democrats want to get through.

The House and Senate are working on different versions of an "extenders package" to determine which expired tax benefits will be retained or altered. Among these are a deduction of state and local sales taxes for states without income taxes; an additional deduction of real estate taxes for people who don't itemize; tuition deductions; teachers expenses; a research and development credit; and tax free distributions from Individual Retirement Accounts for charity.

Funding to keep the Federal Aviation Administration operating has been extended to July 3. Negotiations continue to settle on a long overdue FAA reauthorization bill.

What I've Been Up To

On April 7, I held town meetings in Friendship and Redgranite.

On April 8, I toured UW-Fond du Lac with members of the UW Board of Regents and spoke briefly at the opening of the Regents' two-day meeting at UW-Fond du Lac. At Lincoln High School in Manitowoc, I presented a Certificate of Special Recognition to Air Force Academy appointee Brandon Vance. And I held town meetings in Two Rivers and Chilton.

On April 14, in Washington I participated in a meeting of the Dairy Farmer Caucus which hosted Ambassador Ron Kirk, our Trade Representative. Then I attended a reception with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili.

On April 17, I hosted a Congressional Art Competition Reception and Awards Ceremony at Windhover Center for the Arts in Fond du Lac. Ben Erickson, a junior at Neenah High School, was awarded Best in Show. Ben won a trip to Washington, D.C. in June to participate in

an artist reception for winners of all congressional art contests from throughout the country. His painting, "Reflections of the Season," will be displayed with other student artwork in the U.S. Capitol Building for a period of 11 months.

On April 19, in Oshkosh I met with unemployed individuals who meet weekly at St. Raphael's Church in Oshkosh to discuss their concerns. In the Town of Menasha offices I participated in a meeting to discuss the 441 interchange. Then I visited Westfield High School's innovative biodiesel fuels program.

On April 20, I participated in the Fourth Annual Nelson Institute Earth Day Conference. I was on a panel discussing the late Sen. Gaylord Nelson's legacy.

On April 21, in Washington I participated in an Education and Labor Committee hearing on "Reforming the Juvenile Justice System to Improve Children's Lives and Public Safety." John Solberg, Executive Director of Rawhide Boys Ranch in New London, presented testimony.

On April 27, I received the Spirit of Enterprise Award from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in recognition of my votes to reduce taxes and support economic growth and job creation in 2009.

Legislative Update

April 15, 2010

The House considered the Senate amendment to **H.R. 4851, the Continuing Extensions Act of 2010**. H.R. 4851 provided a two-month extension to the emergency federal component providing additional weeks of eligibility for unemployment benefits. The bill also provided extensions of COBRA health insurance premium subsidies, the national flood insurance program, and an adjustment to the amount physicians are paid by Medicare.

H.R. 4851 passed the House by a vote of 289 - 112. I voted in favor of this legislation which was signed into law by President Obama later in the day.

The House considered **H.R. 4715, the Clean Estuaries Act of 2010**. This legislation reauthorizes the Environmental Protection Agency's National Estuary Program (NEP). NEP is intended to promote comprehensive evaluation and planning efforts to protect estuaries in the United States that are deemed to be threatened by pollution, development, or overuse. The bill also increases the authorized funding level for the program from \$35 million to \$50 million.

The House approved the bill by a vote of 278-128. While I am supportive of efforts to protect our nation's estuaries, I voted against this bill because it increases the authorized funding level for the program at a time when our nation is facing record deficits. The bill is now pending in the Senate.

April 27, 2010

The House considered **H.R. 5146**, a bill to block Members of Congress from receiving a cost of living adjustment in pay during fiscal year 2011.

With my support, the House approved the bill by a vote of 402-15. The bill has been cleared for the President's signature. I have cosponsored and supported similar legislation in the past.

April 28, 2010

The House considered **H.R. 5013, Implementing Management for Performance and Related Reforms to Obtain Value in Every Acquisition Act of 2010**. This bill is intended to promote the efficient procurement of items required by the Defense Department.

With my support, the House approved the bill by a vote of 417-3. The bill is now pending in the Senate.

April 29, 2010

The House considered **H.R. 2499**, a bill to establish a two-stage process for votes by the people of Puerto Rico to determine whether they prefer that island to continue with its current commonwealth status or instead become either a state or an independent country.

The House approved the bill by a vote of 223-169 with 1 voting "Present." I voted against this bill because it is very controversial among Puerto Ricans, many of whom believe the procedure for the votes on Puerto Rico's status is improperly tipped in favor of statehood. The bill is now pending in the Senate.

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