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Representative Tom Petri Reports to The Sixth District

Challenges We Must Overcome

BY REPRESENTATIVE TOM PETRI

I've been traveling around central Wisconsin meeting with people and finding out what's on their minds. Here are my thoughts about some of the concerns which come up most often:

The War: We are training a new Iraqi military to take over for us, and the faster the better. But in the meantime, we need to support our troops and their mission. And I'm happy to say that Americans are.

But many have had quite enough of the war in Iraq. The conflict has turned out to be a lot more difficult than we had been led to expect. But since we're there, most feel that we have to finish the job.

I have been to far too many military funerals and visited too many wounded soldiers to take the sacrifices of our troops lightly. We cannot allow Iraq to be a failed state serving as a sanctuary for Al Qaeda and its allies.

The Economy: The economy grew by a rapid 4.8 percent in the first quarter of the year, unemployment is low at 4.7 percent, and most economists expect continued strong growth ahead. Yet, some have a sense of unease.

Clearly, the shocking rise in gasoline prices is playing a role. Rapid economic growth in China and India has ratcheted up the worldwide demand for oil and resulted in a situation which magnifies disruptions caused by international tensions, civil disturbances in oil producing countries, natural disasters and more.

I am confident about our ability to manage our energy needs through conservation, alternative energy sources and technological advances in energy production, and I support proposals to do this. But this will take time.

This unease about the economy predates the current run-up in gasoline prices, however.

America is meeting the challenge of international competition and has transformed itself into one of the world's most efficient and successful economies. However, this has meant that companies have had to strive harder in order to succeed in the new environment. For employees at all levels, the result is stress and insecurity.

Shielding our businesses from competition would lead to stagnation and ultimately leave us with a second-rate economy. But we can't simply say to our friends and neighbors, "You're on your own during this painful transition."

We need to give people the aid and training they need to help them land on their feet. And we have to make sure that our children get the education necessary to be successful in a world filled with people striving to participate in the modern international economy.

Medicare Drug Benefits: I've stood up in front of rooms full of senior citizens and heard the anger, complaints and concerns about the new drug benefit, Medicare Part D. But I've also heard from others who have signed up and are saving on their prescription costs.

The drug benefit was designed to make providers compete against each other and give seniors plenty of options. It has succeeded in that, and reports from around the country show that large numbers of elderly Americans are saving a great deal of money. But, yes, signing up can be complicated.

The people who get the most from the program are the ones who are prepared to sit down with an advisor to

determine which qualifying plan does the best job of covering the prescriptions they need. The process can be about as much fun as doing your taxes, and some people are clearly intimidated by the possibility of making a mistake.

The initial enrollment period for those currently eligible to sign up ended on May 15, with the next open season scheduled for November. But more seniors become eligible every day. Those who feel overwhelmed should certainly ask for help from family members, Medicare advisors and others that they trust. Also remember that if you find you've chosen the wrong plan, you can switch during an annual "open season."

Further information is available at www.medicare.gov on the Web or by calling 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227).

Immigration: We are a nation of immigrants, but we have a right to make our own decisions about who comes in. Our first step should be to make it much harder for undocumented aliens to enter the country simply by walking across an unguarded part of our borders.

Only after we stop the flow in can we make intelligent decisions about the illegal aliens already here. That is why I voted for a bill in December to secure our borders and strengthen efforts to stop employers from hiring illegal immigrants to remove the incentive for entering the U.S. illegally in the first place.

Congress will be grappling with this issue over the next several months as the House and Senate work to finalize reform legislation.

Current Initiatives

Members of Congress have to work on the major issues which attract the most public attention, but other concerns deserve attention as well.

As Vice Chairman of both the Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee where I am Chairman of the Highways, Transit and Pipelines Subcommittee, I have particular input on a wide array of education, labor and public works bills, but here are some of my personal initiatives:

Student Loans: The federal government has two major student loan programs. The older guaranteed loan program subsidizes private lenders who make loans to students while the newer direct loan program issues loans directly from the U.S. Department of Education.

The loan terms are the same for both programs, but the guaranteed loan program costs the taxpayers three times as much per dollar lent compared with the direct loan program. I have a proposal to encourage greater use of the more efficient program.

My plan would save \$13.4 billion over 10 years of money currently wast-

ed on the guaranteed loan program. Of that, \$10 billion would be used to increase grants for low-income students while the remainder would help to reduce the deficit.

Unfortunately, the organizations which currently collect the wasteful spending in the guaranteed loan program have put enormous effort into blocking my initiative. But the battle continues.

Animal Rights Extremists: Animals deserve protection from unnecessary abuse, but animal rights extremists feel free to use threats, vandalism, property damage, and harassment to intimidate individuals associated with animal enterprises (such as farms or research labs). In response, I have introduced legislation, the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act of 2005, which addresses gaps in the current federal criminal code to help authorities use it more effectively. As this goes to print, the Judiciary Committee has scheduled a hearing in late May.

Global Warming: As the lead cosponsor, I recently helped to introduce a proposal to curb the industrial release of greenhouse gases which promote the dangerous warming of our atmosphere. This bill would use market incentives by establishing fees per unit of pollution which would be charged to emitting industries. The fees would rise over time.

On the theory that it's better to start moving in the right direction rather than simply talking about it, this bill is designed to provide enough flexibility so that it can actually be



Waushara Argus photo by Scott Steuck

Fourth and fifth graders at Redgranite Elementary School met with Rep. Petri during his visit to the Wautoma Area School District on April 12. Petri spent the day discussing his job with students and education concerns with teachers.

passed by Congress and signed into law.

Campaign Reforms: More needs to be done to make political campaigns clean and fair. I have introduced legislation to regulate the dirty campaign practice of spreading rumors about a candidate under the guise of conducting a poll.

A second bill would encourage small campaign contributions in order to dilute the influence of large donors. I am also a cosponsor of legislation to make sure that all electronic voting machines provide a paper record of each vote which the voter can inspect when voting, and which will be available for recounts when disputes arise.

Safeguarding Social Security: If the government created a \$1,000 retirement account for every newborn American, the account could be expected to grow to \$58,000 in current dollars by retirement at age 67.

If that money were used to pay the account holder's Social Security benefits before tapping into the Social Security Trust Fund, it would go a long way toward strengthening the Trust Fund for our children and grandchildren. I have introduced legislation to do this and am encouraging my colleagues to consider the long-run benefits of its passage.

Keeping in Touch

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call or write. In addition to the usual addresses and numbers on page 1, you can contact me by e-mail. Due to the high volume of messages which I have received from all over the country, I am asking everybody from the 6th District to use the form linked to the front page of my Web site found at: www.house.gov/petri/

This form filters out "spam" e-mail, which can number in the hundreds or thousands on any given day. When writing by e-mail, please include your name and postal address to guarantee a response.

Also, I produce an e-mail newsletter. If you would like to give it a try, please go to the following Web page:

www.house.gov/petri/subscribe.htm

2006 Questionnaire Results

I want to thank everyone who answered the questionnaire in my last newsletter. About 9,000 responses came in.

The responses were close to my expectations. Anybody who talks with people in central Wisconsin quickly learns that there is a lot of anxiety about the direc-

tion of our country and about the war.

I was interested to find that a majority continues to support our efforts in Iraq despite the hardships there.

A majority also supports the new Medicare drug benefit, although almost half indicate that the program needs to

be fixed.

And a strong majority favor reducing the federal deficit by cutting spending rather than by raising taxes or doing both. This is in keeping with responses in previous questionnaires.

Here are your responses:

1) On balance, do you think the country is on the right track or the wrong track?

- a. Right track—33.5%
- b. Wrong track—66.5%

2) Now that Iraq has adopted a national constitution and elected its first parliament, what role should our military play in Iraq?

- a. Stay the course until we are certain that Iraq's new government is stable and its military and police forces can provide adequate protection from insurgents—58.5%
- b. Set a quick deadline for withdrawal of U.S. troops and let Iraq handle its problems as best it can—41.5%

3) After some years of large federal surpluses, deficits have returned and Congress faces pressure to erase the red ink. Which of the following choices best describe your preferred solution to this problem?

- a. Spending cuts—62.7%
- b. Higher taxes—5.6%
- c. Both—29.0%
- d. Deficits not a problem—2.8%

3a) Answer only if you favor spending cuts: Spending on so-called "mandatory programs," which include Medicare and Medicaid, has been growing at a rate faster than the growth in the general economy and are seen as a primary reason for continued increases in federal spending. Which of the following do you favor?

- a. Cut mandatory spending—17.4%
- b. Slow growth in mandatory spending—27.7%
- c. Cut discretionary spending only—protect mandatory spending—54.9%

4) If you are a Medicare recipient, what is your impression of the Medicare Part D prescription drug program?

- a. A good program that will meet my prescription drug needs and save me money—12.4%
- b. A good idea, but the program has problems that need to be fixed—49.0%
- c. A bad program—38.6%

5) If you have enrolled or will be enrolling in the Medicare Part D prescription drug program, how have you found the enrollment process?

- a. Easy and straightforward—12.4%
- b. Time consuming but doable—32.1%
- c. Too confusing to even understand—55.4%

6) The Farm Bill will be reauthorized next year, and some have advocated broad cuts in agriculture support programs. In view of the federal deficit, would you support such cuts even if it would mean cuts for Wisconsin farmers?

- a. Yes—56.0%
- b. No—44.0%

7) To stabilize oil prices and reduce our reliance on foreign oil, some support increased drilling in environmentally sensitive areas such as off-shore of America's coasts. Others believe off-shore drilling is a recipe for environmental disaster while oil and gas producers contend that new technology makes drilling much safer and cleaner. Which more closely matches your view?

- a. We need to increase domestic production of oil even if it means drilling in environmentally sensitive areas—62.7%
- b. We need to avoid drilling in environmentally sensitive areas,

even if it might mean continued reliance on foreign oil and/or higher prices at the pump while alternative energy sources are developed—37.3%

8) This past December, the House passed legislation to secure the borders and improve the enforcement of existing immigration laws as the first step in a more comprehensive review of our entire immigration process. The legislation did not include a temporary guest worker program for jobs most Americans are unwilling to perform. Would you support a temporary guest worker program if it was closed to illegal immigrants and was a part of a crackdown on illegal immigration?

- a. Support—75.9%
- b. Would Not Support—24.1%

9) Do you favor or oppose amending the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as a union between one man and one woman?

- a. Favor—68.6%
- b. Oppose—31.4%

10) The world has become increasingly competitive. Some observers have suggested that the U.S. is at risk because students in other nations have outperformed U.S. students in math and science while at the same time our spending on basic research has been dropping. Do you think that government initiatives to improve the quality of math and science education and increase federal support for research and development will help to keep the U.S. competitive in the 21st Century global economy?

- a. Yes—62.3%
- b. No—37.7%

NOTE: All percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Come to Rep. Petri's Town Meetings! See schedule page 4.

Tom Petri
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Town Meetings With Representative Tom Petri—Summer 2006

Town Meetings provide opportunities to discuss national issues in a group setting. My latest round of Town Meetings will take place from July 31st through August 4th at 12 locations throughout central Wisconsin. Please come and express your opinions!

Monday, July 31st

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.
MARKESAN

Municipal Building
150 South Bridge Street
Community Room

11:00 - 12:00 Noon
MONTELLO

Marquette County Courthouse
77 West Park Street
County Board Room

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
WAUTOMA

CAPsell Center
205 East Main Street
Conference Rooms A & B

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.
ADAMS

Adams County Community Center
569 North Cedar Street
Room #103

Tuesday, August 1st

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.
WATERTOWN

Municipal Building
106 Jones Street
City Council Chambers

11:00 - 12:00 Noon
JUNEAU

Dodge County Administration
Building
127 East Oak Street
Room 1-F

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
FOND DU LAC

City-County Government Center
160 South Macy Street
Legislative Chambers

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.
OSHKOSH

Oshkosh Public Library
106 Washington Avenue
Meeting Room

Friday, August 4th

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.
KOHLER

Village Hall
319 Highland Drive
Kirkpatrick Center

11:00 - 12:00 Noon
MANITOWOC

City Hall
900 Quay Street
City Council Chambers

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
CHILTON

City Hall
42 School Street
Community Room

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.
MENASHA

Elisha D. Smith Public Library
440 First Street
Company E Room