

Rep. Petri's E-Newsletter

March 4, 2010

- * Health Care Taking All the Attention**
- * Census Is Important!**
- * Coming Up In Congress**
- * What I've Been Up To**
- * Town Meetings Scheduled**
- * Legislative Update**

Health Care Taking All the Attention

It's March, and everybody knows that the economy is the public's greatest concern, dwarfing all others. But at the White House and among the congressional leadership, it's almost all health care reform almost all the time.

President Obama has set a new deadline, insisting that legislation be completed by Easter. We shall see.

The President and his allies know that his comprehensive reform plan is widely unpopular, intensely so among many. But they are convinced that they know better than everybody else, and they fear that a strategic retreat would make them look weak. So they are raising the ante, doubling down and going all in.

Right now, the House presents the greatest challenge for the President's plan. The House approved its initial version of health care reform on Nov. 7 by a vote of 220 to 215.

Since that time, two members who voted "yes" have resigned and one has died. A fourth member has announced that he will vote "no" next time. Approximately 12 representatives who voted "yes" after winning passage of a pro-life amendment to the bill are now rumored to be solid "no" votes because the latest version is soft on abortion. At the same time, the "no" side is losing a vote because of a Republican resignation.

It would seem that the President's version of health care reform should be declared dead, but House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has proved to be a powerful arm twister.

Census Is Important!

Every household should receive census forms through the mail in March. This year's census form is short and should be easy to fill out. It is important to do so! The results of the census will impact our state and communities in terms of federal funding and the placement of legislative boundaries.

Coming Up In Congress

The House leadership has told us very little about what legislation is likely to reach the House floor in the near future. Few major bills are likely to be considered until the House approves the Senate's health care bill following a Senate leadership commitment to make significant changes through its short-cut reconciliation process, or alternatively until the House leadership decides it doesn't have the votes.

Earlier this week, Sen. Jim Bunning of Kentucky stalled consideration of a short-term extension for several expiring programs, saying we should offset the \$10 billion cost with cuts elsewhere. The delay caused several federal programs to expire on Feb. 28, including long-term unemployment benefits, health insurance subsidies for the jobless, highway funding, higher Medicare reimbursement rates for physicians, laws governing satellite TV transmissions, the national flood insurance program and some small business programs. An agreement was reached Tuesday night, and the bill has now been signed into law.

What I've Been Up To

On February 9, I participated in a hearing on the need to stop the devastating invasion of Asian carp into the Great Lakes. I took time to compare notes with Matt Frank, Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, who testified at the hearing.

On February 15, I attended a Sheboygan County School District Legislative Breakfast. Then I was a guest on a WFDL Radio talk show, participated in a Fond du Lac Rotary Club meeting, visited Central Avian & Small Animal (formerly Kaytee Products) in Chilton, met with Manitowoc Mayor Justin Nickels, and participated in an event for the Manitowoc/Calumet Chapter of the American Red Cross.

On February 16, I spoke to a group from the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce, visited Fox Lake for a meeting on wastewater issues and stopped at the Senior Meal Site, met with members of the administrative team at the Fond du Lac Lutheran Home and stopped by ADVOCAP in Fond du Lac for an update on this social services agency.

Also, the same day in Fond du Lac I met with a group of 6th District educators and with representatives of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

On February 17, at the Tri-County Schools in Plainfield I joined with elementary school students for a "vegetable break" nutrition lesson and learned how federal nutrition and after-school programs have been successfully implemented by the caring and supportive staff of this school district. I also met with members of the Petenwell & Castle Rock Stewards group at the Monroe Town Hall in Adams County to learn about their work aimed at improving the water quality and fishery of Lake Petenwell and Castle Rock.

On February 18, I was back at the Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce for an Economic Outlook Breakfast and met in Oshkosh with a group from the Green Bay Diocese to hear their thoughts on immigration.

On February 22, I attended a Legislative Dialogue Breakfast with the Northeast Wisconsin Chambers Coalition in Appleton.

On March 1, I offered remarks in Madison at the Annual Conference of the Wisconsin Farm Credit Legislative Committee.

Town Meetings Scheduled

I have scheduled my next round of town meetings for March 31 through April 8 at 12 locations throughout central Wisconsin.

Here's the schedule:

Legislative Update

February 26, 2010:

On February 26, 2010, the House considered H.R. 2701, a bill to authorize funding for the intelligence community for fiscal year 2010. The bill also included a number of changes to existing intelligence policies, including policies related to detainee interrogation and the guidelines governing when the president must notify Members of Congress about covert actions.

The House approved this legislation by a vote of 235 - 168. The bill will now go to conference committee to resolve differences with the Senate-passed version of this legislation (S. 1494). I voted against this bill because of concerns that it prioritizes criminal prosecution of terrorists over intelligence collection that could help prevent future terrorist attacks.

February 25, 2010:

On February 25, 2010, the House considered H.R. 3961, to extend several expiring provisions of the PATRIOT Act. The bill originally dealt with Medicare reimbursement for doctors, but in a legislative tactic sometimes used by the Senate, the unrelated PATRIOT Act provisions were substituted by amendment.

The House approved this legislation by a vote of 315 - 97. I voted in favor of this bill to ensure that law enforcement and intelligence agents have the tools needed to protect our national security and continue the fight against terrorism.

The President signed the bill into law on February 27.

February 24, 2010:

On February 24, 2010, the House considered H.R. 4626, the Health Insurance Industry Fair Competition Act which would repeal health insurers' exemption from federal antitrust laws.

The House approved this legislation by a vote 406 - 19. I voted in favor of this bill. The Senate has not yet considered this bill.

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