

Congressman Tom Petri

News from Congress



DECEMBER 2007

CONGRESSIONAL PROGRESS AND SETBACKS

We had a change in leadership in 2007, with the Democrats becoming the majority in Congress and assuming the leadership positions. While acknowledging that every Congress has its successes and failures, it's nevertheless disheartening that, as of this writing in early December, only one of the critical 12 annual appropriations bills which fund the federal government's discretionary spending has become law, even though the new budget year began October 1. The government is currently operating on stop-gap funding.

We are also lacking completion of legislation regarding much-needed health care for poor children, immigration, the No Child Left Behind Act, the Farm bill and much more. Some of these issues may have been resolved before you receive this newsletter, but multiple legislative delays have been dismaying.

There has been some progress, however, including the following new laws, which I supported.

College Costs: In September, Congress approved the College Cost Reduction Act, legislation which I helped to craft in the Education and Labor Committee. This new law boosts college financial aid by \$20 billion over five years while paying for itself by reducing unnecessary federal subsidies paid to lenders in the college loan industry. It also provides for \$750 million in federal deficit reduction.

Water Resources: In November, we won final approval of the Water Resources Development Act. This new law addresses several years' worth of water projects which are important for environmental and economic reasons. I worked to win the inclusion of authorization for Manitowoc Harbor and River dredging, Green Bay Harbor and Fox River clean up, and for a study of the Johnsonville dam.

Minimum Wage: Earlier in the year, we raised the minimum wage by \$2.10 over two years to \$7.25 an hour. Those of us concerned about higher wages harming small businesses managed to win some tax relief for them.

Ethics Reform: We approved legislation tightening ethics and lobbying rules for the federal government. The new regulations require members of Congress to disclose small campaign contributions that are "bundled" into large packages by lobbyists. Lobbyists are required to detail their own contributions to campaigns, presidential libraries, inaugural committees and charities controlled by lawmakers. New disclosure requirements were instituted for "earmarks," measures which representatives request for initiatives in their home districts.

Competitiveness: Congress approved the "America Competes Act," legislation which increases

research investment and strengthens educational opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics from elementary through graduate school.

Senior Care: The Secretary of Health and Human Services denied Wisconsin's request to continue the popular SeniorCare program, but thanks to the efforts of Wisconsin's congressional delegation, we won approval of legislation which included an extension of that program through 2009. Many Wisconsin seniors prefer SeniorCare over the new Medicare drug benefit, which is why I worked to keep it available.

FDA Reform: We passed Food and Drug Administration reforms to strengthen the FDA's ability to ensure that new drugs are both safe and effective while also recognizing the need to get vital drugs to patients in a timely manner.

And finally, with my support, Congress approved legislation to reauthorize the **State Children's Health Insurance Program**. SCHIP funds an essential portion of Wisconsin's BadgerCare program for low-income residents. Unfortunately, however, passage of this bill cannot be considered a success as the President vetoed the bill. As of this writing, negotiations have failed to produce a compromise with sufficient support to become law.



I had a busy and successful year working with Republicans and the Democratic majority to significantly advance my education legislative agenda, which includes increasing access to student financial aid and ensuring its affordability, improving the No Child Left Behind law, and serving special education students. Here's an update on my initiatives.

No Child Left Behind

✓ **Petri Initiative H.R. 711: Troops to Teachers Improvement Act**

Purpose: To help more veterans transition into second careers as teachers.

Result: Included in bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act draft!

✓ **Petri Initiative H.R. 3979: Assessment Accuracy and Improvement Act**

Purpose: To give states more flexibility to use computer adaptive testing and more reliable data on each student's progress.

Result: Earning praise from educators and national press as an innovative approach that meets the needs of students and of Washington!

Higher Education

✓ **Petri Initiative H.R. 1010: Student Aid Reward (STAR) Act**

Purpose: To save taxpayers billions by decreasing wasteful subsidies to banks and increasing grants to low-income students.

Result: \$22 billion in subsidy cuts returned

to students as increased grant aid and interest rate reductions over the next five years. Signed into law as part of the College Cost Reduction Act in September 2007!

✓ **Petri Initiative H.R. 2465: Income Dependent Education Assistance (IDEA) Act**

Purpose: To increase flexibility and protections for student loan borrowers by providing for IRS collection of income-contingent consolidated loans.

Result: Key provisions of bill included in College Cost Reduction Act. Signed into law in September 2007!

✓ **Petri Initiative H.R. 4035: Student Loan Auction Market (SLAM) Act**

Purpose: To study and pilot market-based reforms to the guaranteed loan program to cut wasteful spending.

Result: Included in House-passed version of College Cost Reduction Act; alternative version signed into law in September 2007!

✓ **Petri Initiative H.R. 2004: Higher Education for Freedom Act**

Purpose: To authorize new grants to promote civic and history education for K-12 and college students to ensure a better understanding of American government.

Result: Included in Higher Education Act

passed by House Education and Labor Committee in November 2007!

✓ **Petri Initiative: Education Department Oversight and Loan Program Accountability**

Purpose: To hold Education Department to account for hundreds of millions in wasteful spending by leading congressional efforts through letters, hearings and legislation.

Result: Successful amendment to the Higher Education Act to require greater Justice Department review of questionable Education Department payments to student loan companies to ensure greater accountability to taxpayers!

Special Education

✓ **Petri Initiative: Textbook Accessibility for Visually-Impaired Students**

Purpose: To ensure accessible format textbooks are available to visually-impaired college students as quickly as possible.

Result: Led efforts to extend my successful 2004 legislation for K-12 students to make services available for college students; included in the Higher Education Act that passed the House Education and Labor Committee!

MORE LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

As a senior member of the Education and Labor Committee, many of my legislative initiatives this year have been concerned with student loans and other education legislation. And I have had some successes, as you will see in the above "Report Card."



I also have continued efforts in other areas. For instance:

Campaign Legislation: Some people call them "push polls," but a better term is "smear polls." It's the practice whereby an organization working on behalf of a campaign calls large numbers of people—supposedly to do a poll, but in reality to spread rumors.

You may have received one of these calls over the years. Your phone rings, and the person on the other end says, "We are conducting a poll. Do you plan to vote for candidate X or candidate

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Rep. Petri brought Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Jerry Costello (right) and other subcommittee members to Oshkosh July 28 to participate in the Experimental Aircraft Association's AirVenture Oshkosh, the largest general aviation fly-in convention in the world. They met with EAA President and AirVenture Chairman Tom Poberezny and held a pilots' town hall meeting to discuss issues important to general aviation. Rep. Petri is the Ranking Member on the subcommittee.

NEEDED: CALM CONSENSUS ON IRAQ

Thankfully, loud and angry rhetoric about Iraq seems to have fallen out of fashion, but the war continues to be a major cause of bitterness and distress. With at least some fragile signs of improved security evident, the argument for immediate withdrawal has lost some of its steam. Many people seem unsure of the right way forward, and are resigned that our troops will continue to face combat for months to come, at least.

Unfortunately, that seems a realistic attitude. We want to get out of Iraq as soon as possible, but we need to leave in a responsible manner to lessen the risks of greater conflict further down the road.

To find the right approach, I have been urging my colleagues to tone down the politics and seek a consensus approach. I have also been offering my own suggestions.

In February, I made clear my dissatisfaction with the prosecution of the war by urging the Administration to abandon its attempts to build a unified Iraq. Instead, I joined with those who say that strife between that country's ethnic and religious groups can only be minimized if we allow the communities to separate into a loose, regionally-based confederation, each mostly responsible for its own internal affairs.

Already, the Kurdish-controlled area in the north has become relatively peaceful and prosperous. Violence has also decreased in Shiite and Sunni-dominated areas as



Rep. Petri was on hand August 31, 2007, in Oshtemo as the Badger State welcomed the Wisconsin Army National Guard 1157th Transportation Company back from the war. Nicknamed the "Mighty Badger Unit" for its tenacity and professionalism during training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, the 1157th was deployed for 14 months, 12 of which were in Iraq.

minorities have now largely been forced out of formerly mixed communities.

The Administration continues to express support for Iraq's ineffectual national government, but our military on the ground has wisely found ways to make alliances with local tribal and religious leaders who, in turn, are finally urging cooperation against al Qaeda in Iraq, the Saddam Hussein die-hards and the radical Shiite and Sunni militias.

It's a shame that this change has only been brought about after so many Americans have lost patience with this long, inconclusive conflict. Years, and lives, were spent prosecuting the wrong policy. Now, utilizing the more effective approach of Gen. David Petraeus, it's possible to imag-

ine that we will be able to begin staged withdrawals without abandoning Iraq to wholesale civil war, which could quickly draw in neighboring countries and create a far more dangerous situation for world peace, the economy and legitimate American interests than exists with the current conflict.

While I have been straightforward about my disagreements with much of the Administration's prosecution of the war, I have avoided partisanship with the funding of our troops and have always voted to provide our men and women in the services with the supplies they need for as long as they are required to operate in the war zone.

Also, the public focus on Iraq has been so intense that we often forget that we have troops at war in Afghanistan. This, too, is a long and difficult conflict. Although it is smaller in scope and less controversial, since it is unarguable that we are fighting Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda and his Taliban allies there, we need to make clear to our service members there that they have our full support.

More Legislative Initiatives *continued*

Y? If I told you that candidate Y is a slumlord who hates children and seniors and who likes to speed through neighborhoods running down family pets, would that change your vote?" For this kind of phony poll, the charges need not have any basis in fact.

People can say what they want, but they should stand behind their words. That's why my bill, H.R. 1298, the **Push Poll Disclosure Act**, would require all polls conducted for federal candidates which contact more than 1,200 homes to identify the poll's sponsor. For polls which are not made public, poll sponsors would be required to file with the Federal Election Commission the cost of the poll, a count of households contacted, and a transcript of the poll's questions.

Campaigns are expensive and pressure candidates to raise large amounts of money.

My bill, H.R. 1482, the **Civic Involvement in Campaigns (CIVIC) Act**, would help to dilute the impact of big donors by encouraging small donations. Under the bill, taxpayers who wish to contribute to campaigns for federal offices would be allowed to choose between a 100 percent tax credit (limited to \$200 per year), or a tax deduction (limited to \$600 per year). Both limits would be doubled for joint returns.

Tax Fairness: Should the government tax charity work? Hardly. But consider this: when you drive your personal vehicle on a business errand, your employer can reimburse you at the rate of 48.5 cents per mile. If you drive your car to deliver Meals-On-Wheels to an elderly neighbor or do some other voluntary charitable work, the charity

can reimburse you, but Uncle Sam will tax that money as income.

My bill, H.R. 1827, the **Charitable Driving Tax Relief Act**, would exclude the charity reimbursement from the volunteer's taxable income.

Modernizing Aviation: Also worthy of note, the House has approved its version of a bill to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration. As the top Republican on the House Aviation Subcommittee, I have played a major role in crafting the House bill, which will help modernize airports nationwide, strengthen consumer rights of passengers and, crucially, move us away from air traffic control systems based on ground radar to a satellite-based system. Now we are waiting for the Senate to act.

Citizen Hours With Representative Tom Petri — January 2008

Citizen Hours provide an opportunity for Rep. Petri to meet one-on-one with individuals who need help with Social Security or veterans benefits, who want privately to discuss problems with farm programs, with the Internal Revenue Service and the like, or who simply want to express opinions about issues of national concern. Please come to share your concerns.

Tuesday, January 8th

9:30 – 10:30 a.m.

Watertown

Municipal Bldg.
106 Jones St.
City Council Chambers

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

Waupun

City Hall, 201 East Main St.
City Council Chambers

3:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Green Lake

Green Lake County Courthouse
492 Hill St.
Demonstration Room

Wednesday, January 9th

9:30 – 11:00 a.m.

Oshkosh

City Hall, 215 Church Ave.
Room 406

2:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Kimberly

Village Hall
515 Kimberly Ave.
Council Chambers

4:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Chilton

City Hall
42 School St.
City Council Chambers

Thursday, January 10th

10:15 – 11:45 a.m.

Manitowoc

City Hall, 900 Quay St.
City Council Chambers

2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Plymouth

Plymouth Public Library
130 Division St.
Meeting Room

Friday, January 11th

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

Adams

Municipal Bldg.
101 North Main St.
Council Chambers

1:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Wautoma

Wautoma Public Library
410 West Main St., Meeting Room

3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Montello

Marquette County Courthouse
77 West Park St.
Public Safety Training Room

Saturday, January 12th

10:00 – 11:30 a.m.

Fond du Lac

Fond du Lac Public Library
32 Sheboygan St.
Eugene G. McLane Meeting Room

Visit Congressman Petri on the web! petri.house.gov

Email: Follow the link on the front page of the Web site above.

To receive Rep. Petri's periodic electronic newsletter, go to petri.house.gov/subscribe

Representative **Tom Petri** Reports

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Citizen Hour Schedule Inside