

Representative Tom Petri

News from Congress



May 2012

Straight Talk on the Top Issues

BY REP. TOM PETRI

So far this year I have held 24 town meetings throughout the 6th District, and I have scheduled several more in June (see page 2). Town meetings and my annual questionnaire (see page 3) are powerful tools for keeping in touch with the people I represent.

Here are three key issues people ask me about:

Jobs: The March unemployment figure showed a drop from 8.3 percent to 8.2 percent nationwide. We can cheer the fact that the economy is now creating more jobs, but the gains are much too slow. Much of the drop in the unemployment rate is the result of workers who have essentially left the job market because they don't expect to be hired.

We would be doing better if business leaders weren't faced with unusually high levels of uncertainty about regulations, taxes, penalties and rising health insurance premiums resulting from Administration decisions which should be reversed.

The House has approved more than 30 bills designed to improve the tax and regulatory climate for businesses. The Senate is ignoring our job creating bills, however.

Gasoline Prices: Regular gasoline prices nationwide averaged \$1.68 per gallon in early January 2009. As of mid-April, some economists think prices are peaking at around \$4, but others expect to see \$5 this summer.

Many factors go into the price of oil and its derivatives, but recent policies have played a role and should be reconsidered.

Part of the problem is that the current Administration has spent the past three years tightening the screws on domestic fossil fuels production in order to make it easier for the President's favored but costly "green" energy initiatives to compete.

The President is correct that domestic energy production is up, but the increase is on private land, thanks to innovative new technologies that have been developed over decades. In contrast, according to the Energy Department, oil production under federal leases dropped 11 percent in 2011 and is expected to go down by almost as much this year.

We should welcome the development of alternative fuels but recognize that, for the most part, the technology has not advanced enough to make them widely affordable. Further advances will require time and a prosperous economy to fund research.

Meanwhile, unless we want Americans to be substantially poorer, for the foreseeable future fossil fuels will play a

crucial role in our lives and economy.

Accordingly, in February the House passed the PIONEERS Act, which seeks to encourage more domestic energy production as part of an effort to reinvigorate America's manufacturing, transportation, and service sectors. Unfortunately, the Senate leadership is refusing to consider it.

For the sake of economic opportunity, price stability and energy security, and with due concern for the environment, we should determine to make greater use of the vast stores of energy available in our own country.

Health Care: In June, the Supreme Court is expected to issue its decision on the President's health care law. It may rule that the law is constitutional, or alternatively, unconstitutional as a whole or in part. It may decide that the individual mandate (the requirement that everybody buy an approved health insurance plan) alone is unconstitutional. If that happens, the critical funding mechanism for the program will disappear, likely leading to its collapse.

I opposed and continue to oppose the President's health care law. I think it transfers too much power to Washington and does it in ways that will seriously reduce the quality of health care in this country.

However, if we eliminate the law, we must replace it. Everybody agrees that pre-reform health care in America was too costly and inefficient, and underserved those with low incomes.

We need the right reforms to eliminate waste throughout the system and reward high-quality, low-cost care. We should be choosing approaches which give consumers incentives to use their health care dollars wisely as opposed to turning more decisions over to the government.



Rep. Petri participated in an event held March 20 to draw attention to the importance of investing in infrastructure. See page 2 for an update on transportation legislation.

CHALLENGING AGENDA AHEAD

Despite the discord in Washington, Congress must find a way to move forward with vital legislation. Some important bills will be taken up shortly in the House, but reaching agreement with the Senate and the President will be exponentially more difficult. It seems inevitable that many items will be put off until the end of the year, after the campaign season has ended.

Here are some of the top issues we urgently need to address:

▲ **"Taxmageddon"**—Unless something is done, the coming New Year will be rung in with unprecedented tax increases. A typical middle-class household making \$50,000 per year would see its tax bill rise by \$1,870. That's over \$150 per month.

This is because the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts and the Social Security tax holiday are set to expire. Other provisions, including the patch for the Alternative Minimum Tax, the estate tax, and the lower rate for capital gains and dividends, also will expire. And new health care taxes are set to kick in.

The House is expected to work on tax revisions piece by piece in the months ahead, but final votes after negotiations with the Senate are not likely to occur until a lame duck session in November and December. There is a lot of interest currently in comprehensive tax reform leading to tax simplification, but while some insist that we should

bring it about this year, others insist that it can't be accomplished in the time left in this session.

▲ **Budget and Appropriations**—The House has approved a budget plan and will shortly begin to consider 12 spending bills that are supposed to be produced annually to fund the government. As we work on these bills, we will emphasize reining in spending.

If we fail to finish work on the 12 bills, or if we fail to reach agreement with the Senate on those bills, late in the year we will pass a huge "omnibus" bill incorporating whatever changes we can agree upon.

▲ **Economy/Jobs**—The House will continue to approve bills designed to generate economic growth and jobs. However, the Senate majority seems determined not to take many of them up.

▲ **Surface Transportation**—The current transportation program, which funds highway, transit and safety activities, was recently extended through June. The Senate has passed a bipartisan bill that authorizes the program through 2013. Meanwhile, the House Transportation Committee approved a five year bill in February, but there weren't enough votes for it to pass the House. I reluctantly voted against the bill in the Transportation Committee because it

would have treated Wisconsin unfairly. The House on April 18 passed an extension of current programs and is negotiating with the Senate on an authorization bill through 2013.

▲ **Farm Bill**—Both the House and Senate agriculture committees are working on a farm bill as the current program expires this year. However, due to time constraints and other factors, it is uncertain whether agreement will be reached.



Rep. Petri visited Manitowoc Public Utilities on April 9. When Congress is out of session, he spends substantial time visiting businesses, service clubs, public officials and attending local events to keep up to date on the needs of the 6th District and the concerns of his constituents.



Town Meetings provide opportunities to discuss national issues in a group setting. My next round of Town Meetings will take place from June 11th through June 14th at 11 locations throughout the 6th District.

Monday, June 11th

9:00 – 10:00 a.m.—**OXFORD**
Village Hall, 129 South Franklin Avenue
Community Room

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 Noon—**GREEN LAKE**
Green Lake County Government Center
571 County Road A
County Board Room

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.—**REDGRANITE**
Municipal Building
161 Dearborn Street

4:00 – 5:00 p.m.—**OSHKOSH**
City Hall, 215 Church Avenue
City Council Chambers

Please come and express your opinions!

Tuesday, June 12th

10:30 – 11:30 a.m.—**TWO RIVERS**
Lester Public Library
1001 Adams Street
Community Room

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.—**KIEL AREA**
Town of Schleswig Town Hall
21935 Rockville Road

4:00 – 5:00 p.m.—**CEDAR GROVE**
Cedar Grove Public Library
131 West Van Altna Avenue
Community Room

Wednesday, June 13th

9:30 – 10:30 a.m.—**MENASHA**
Mead Public Library
440 First Street, Company E Room

2:30 – 3:30 p.m.—**HORICON**
City Hall, 404 East Lake Street
Activity Room A

Thursday, June 14th

2:00 – 3:00 p.m.—**KOHLER**
Village Hall, 319 Highland Drive
Kirkpatrick Center

5:00 – 6:00 p.m.—**FOND DU LAC**
Fond du Lac Public Library
32 Sheboygan Street
Eugene G. McLane Meeting Room

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS?

Your opinions are of vital concern to me. Please take a few minutes to answer these important questions.

You can answer online at petri.house.gov/2012survey or mark your responses on the form below.

1. Are current federal government policies mostly helping or hurting private sector job creation?

- A. Mostly helping
- B. Mostly hurting

2. Should we stick with the current 2014 date for withdrawal from Afghanistan? Should we keep substantial numbers of troops there until the Afghan military can take over? Or should we get out faster than 2014?

- A. Stick to the 2014 date
- B. Stay — don't set timelines
- C. Get out faster than 2014

3. In balancing the federal budget, which do you favor?

- A. Spending cuts
- B. Raising taxes
- C. Both
- D. None

4. Do you support tax reform that would reduce tax rates but also reduce or eliminate many tax deductions?

- A. Yes
- B. No

5. The U.S. has recently completed trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia and others which lower trade barriers for our exports to those countries and for our imports from them. Which approach to international trade more closely represents your viewpoint?

- A. We should support free global trade with few tariffs on imports and exports
- B. We should protect domestic industries from foreign competitors
- C. Other

6. Do you support or oppose efforts to repeal and replace the President's health care law?

- A. Support repeal and replace
- B. Oppose repeal
- C. Unsure

7. Recently, the Obama administration and five Great Lakes states reached agreement on procedures for review and approval of wind farms in the Great Lakes. Wisconsin has not signed the agreement. Do you support or oppose offshore wind farms in the Great Lakes?

- A. Support
- B. Oppose

8. Do you support construction of the Keystone pipeline, which would bring crude oil from Canada to refineries in the U.S.?

- A. Yes
- B. No

9. Social Security revenues must be brought into line with benefits. To keep Social Security solvent, which approach most closely represents your views?

- A. Limit the growth of benefits
- B. Raise Social Security taxes on all workers
- C. Raise the cap on income which can be taxed (currently \$110,100) without increasing benefits
- D. Some combination of the above
- E. Other

10. The costs of Medicare are rising at an unsustainable rate. Do you support reforming the program for those under age 55?

- A. Yes
- B. No

SAVE POSTAGE! Repond to the questionnaire online at: petri.house.gov/2012survey



NAME _____

- 1. A B
- 2. A B C
- 3. A B C D
- 4. A B
- 5. A B C
- 6. A B C
- 7. A B
- 8. A B
- 9. A B C D E
- 10. A B

Please indicate your age range: 18-34 35-59 60+
 To receive my e-mail newsletter, check the box and print your email address:

NAME _____

- 1. A B
- 2. A B C
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- 10. A B

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Agricultural Policy Conference



In February Congressman Ribble and I hosted an agricultural policy conference in Kimberly. This was an opportunity for producers and others within the agriculture community to share

their thoughts on our nation's agriculture policies.

Video of the conference can be found at Wisconsin Eye:
www.wiseye.com/Programming/VideoArchive/EventDetail.aspx?evh-did=5797

Business Summit

I held a Business Summit in March at Lakeshore Technical College to give business leaders from throughout the 6th District an opportunity to discuss what the federal government should be doing to foster economic growth and job creation.

Much of our conversation dealt with partnerships between government and business, Cham-

bers of Commerce and schools. I was particularly interested in how the Small Business Administration has been adapting its programs to emphasize job creation. Many employers lack the time to search out useful government programs and then jump through hoops to qualify for them, so I am happy that I can be a resource for these businesses.

Visit Congressman Petri Online at petri.house.gov — and “Like” him on Facebook

To email Rep. Petri, or to receive his periodic electronic newsletter or email issue updates, please follow the “contact” link on the front page of the website above.

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Congressman Tom Petri

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Questionnaire Responses