



▲ Rep. Levin speaks with students about legislative issues.

Representing the 12th Congressional District of Michigan

The Congressional Connector

Week of April 21 - 25, 2008

Lawmakers Back Bill to Free Up 70,000 Barrels of Crude Oil a Day

With gas prices across the country at record highs, and the summer driving season approaching, 32 House lawmakers have sponsored legislation [H.R. 5473] to temporarily suspend further crude oil shipments to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR). Rep. Levin is a cosponsor of this legislation.

Currently, the SPR is over 96 percent full with 700.9 million barrels in reserve. Yet, even as American families struggle with record-high energy prices, the Bush Administration is soliciting bids to acquire 13 million barrels of additional oil, or roughly 70,000 barrels a day. H.R. 5473 would suspend any other acquisition for the SPR in calendar year 2008. Temporarily suspending SPR purchases will send a signal to oil speculators, who have been bidding up the price of petroleum, and could provide immediate relief to consumers.

Bill to Extend Unemployment Benefits Clears House Committee

On April 16, the House Ways and Means Committee voted 23 to 13 to approve legislation [H.R. 5749] to provide up to 13 weeks of extended unemployment benefits in every state; further, it would provide an additional 13 weeks (for a total of 26) in States – including Michigan – with high unemployment rates. The next step for the legislation is the Floor of the full House of Representatives. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration remains opposed to extending UI at this time.

During the Ways and Means Committee's consideration of H.R. 5749, Rep. Levin read actual letters from Michigan residents who exemplify the importance of extending unemployment insurance benefits. To read these letters, [click here](#).

To view a recent story from the Macomb Daily, "Roseville Couple's Letter Read in Washington," [click here](#).

House Approves Legislation to Protect Continued Access to Federal Student Loans

On April 17, the House approved legislation [H.R. 5715] to ensure that the turmoil in U.S. financial markets does not keep students and families from accessing the federal student loans they need to pay for college. The bipartisan legislation was approved on a vote of 383 to 27. Among its other provisions, H.R. 5715 would reduce borrowers' reliance on costlier private college loans by increasing the annual loan limits on federal college loans.

Speaking in favor of the measure, Rep. Levin said, "A college education continues to be the best pathway to a good paying job, and having a well-educated workforce is crucial to our nation's economic success. All qualified students that desire a university degree should have the opportunity to earn one." For more information, [click here](#).

Bill Would Crack Down on Wasteful, Abusive Purchases on Government Credit Cards

In response to a recent report by Government Accountability Office (GAO) that documented a variety of problems associated with government-issued credit cards, a bipartisan group of House lawmakers is backing legislation [H.R. 1395] to crack down on the abuse of government credit and debit cards. Among other problems, the GAO investigation found that some government cardholders "used purchase cards to subscribe to Internet dating services, buy video iPods for personal use, and pay for lavish dinners that included top-shelf liquor." To view the GAO report on government credit card abuse [click here](#). H.R. 1395 would require all federal agencies to strengthen their internal controls for government charge card programs, as well as establish penalties for violations. It would also authorize federal agencies to offset the salaries of employees who make improper purchases and would require the immediate dismissal of employees who knowingly committed fraud. Rep. Levin is a cosponsor of this legislation.