



# Todd Platts

U.S. Congress, 19th District

Adams County District Office  
22 Chambersburg St., Gettysburg, PA 17325  
(717) 338-1919

Cumberland County District Office  
59 W. Louthier St., Carlisle, PA 17013  
(717) 249-0190

York County District Office  
2209 E. Market St., York, PA 17402  
(717) 600-1919

Washington, D.C. Office  
1032 Longworth HOB, Washington DC 20515  
(202) 225-5836

Toll-free Phone: 1-877-902-1919  
Web site: [www.house.gov/platts](http://www.house.gov/platts)

*Todd R. Platts*  
M.C.  
PRSR-STD

**Congressional  
Update**

**Don't miss the  
Town Meeting  
schedule below!**

**Spring 2007**

*This mailing was prepared, published and mailed at taxpayer expense.*



Dear Friend,

With the start of a new session of Congress, I am pleased to update you on the actions of the House of Representatives thus far. As always, I encourage you to contact one of my offices listed above if you have any questions or comments regarding the issues discussed in this newsletter or you believe there is a federal matter for which my staff and I can be of assistance.

Please also consider attending one of my upcoming town meetings. The dates, times, and locations of the meetings are located below. I always look forward to an engaging discussion at the meetings of the many challenges facing our nation. Your input is greatly welcomed and much appreciated.

In closing, I hope you will join me in continuing to keep our military personnel and their families in your thoughts and prayers. My recent visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, including individual visits with a severely wounded Marine and numerous Army soldiers, provided a very solemn reminder of the humble service and courageous sacrifice of our men and women in uniform. May we be ever mindful of the selfless service of these true American heroes. God bless them and their loved ones, and God bless the United States of America.

Sincerely,

Todd Russell Platts



*Day of Service - I recently took part in a "Clean Sweep" event with volunteers from the Crispus Attucks Association during their Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. We picked up trash along several blocks in downtown York. Instead of enjoying a day off from work or school, it was inspiring to see so many young citizens honoring Dr. King's legacy by volunteering in their community.*

## Platts Sponsors Renewable Energy, Fuel Efficiency Bills

Energy costs and our nation's dependence on foreign oil remain top concerns for the American people. Measures to diversify our energy supplies must be advanced to strengthen our national economy, reduce energy costs for our citizens, and enhance our national security. Two initiatives that would significantly diversify our supplies and reduce our dependence on foreign energy are the use of more renewable energy in the production of electricity and the production of more fuel-efficient passenger vehicles.

On February 8, 2007, I joined with Representative Tom Udall (New Mexico-3) in introducing legislation (H.R. 969) that would establish a renewable energy standard for electricity generation. Under the bill, 20% of all retail electricity generated in the United States would have to come from renewable sources - such as wind, solar, biomass, and increased hydropower capacity - by the year 2020. H.R. 969 has been referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce for consideration.

In March, I joined with Representative Edward Markey (Massachusetts-7) in introducing legislation that would increase fuel efficiency standards for cars and light trucks. Under the bill, the overall fleet average for cars and light trucks would increase from the current 25 miles per gallon to 35 miles per gallon by 2017. This proposal is based on a National Academy of Sciences report that found increasing fuel efficiency standards to 35 miles per gallon is achievable using currently available technologies without compromising passenger safety.

Both the renewable energy standard and fuel efficiency legislation are balanced measures based on sound science. Taken together, these bills could achieve significant reductions in the consumption of oil and other fossil fuels, as well as provide significant improvements to the environment. Enactment of these measures is critical to the adoption of a comprehensive and effective national energy policy that ensures affordable and reliable energy for today and well into the future.

## Town Meeting Schedule

| Tuesday, April 3                | Tuesday, April 3                     | Wednesday, April 4                 | Wednesday, April 4                    | Thursday, April 5                 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Stuart Community Center</b>  | <b>Crossroads Middle School</b>      | <b>Red Lion Area Senior Center</b> | <b>Penn Township Municipal Center</b> | <b>Gettysburg Borough Office</b>  |
| 415 Franklin Street<br>Carlisle | 535 Fishing Creek Road<br>Lewisberry | 20 C Gotham Place<br>Red Lion      | 20 Wayne Avenue<br>Hanover            | 59 East High Street<br>Gettysburg |
| 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.           | 7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.                | 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.             | 7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.                 | 9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.            |

## Secret Ballots Should Be Preserved

On March 1, 2007, the full United States House of Representatives voted 241 to 185 to pass legislation (H.R. 800) that would abolish the right to a secret ballot in workplace elections conducted to determine whether workers want to join a labor union. Under H.R. 800, instead of holding elections, employers would be required to recognize unions whenever a majority of their workforces simply sign union authorization cards. There is little if any secrecy involved in the circulation or signing of these cards.

Supporters of H.R. 800 argue that it would result in less intimidation by employers against employees trying to unionize a workforce. As a former union member myself, I certainly agree that laws against workplace intimidation need to be strictly enforced. Employers who obstruct the legal right of workers to form a union are committing a serious violation of the law. Abolishing the right to a secret ballot, however, is no solution. Without a right to a secret ballot, there is likely to be more intimidation in the workplace by both union supporters and opponents.

H.R. 800 would also greatly diminish the right of union workers to vote on their first contract with an employer. Specifically, if an agreement on a contract is not reached within 90 days of a union being recognized, either the union or the employer could request federal mediation. Ultimately, this mediation could result in binding arbitration imposed on both workers and the employer. This is a dramatic change from the current practice of most of the private sector.

Secret ballots are a cornerstone of democracy. They should continue to be used to determine the true wishes of workers on important matters such as recognizing a union or accepting a contract. As such, I voted against H.R. 800. This legislation is now pending in the Senate.

## Platts Retains Committee Posts, Named Ranking Republican Member of Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee

Given the change in the majority party in the House of Representatives at the beginning of this session of Congress, and the consequential reduction of committee slots for Republican members, I was very pleased to retain my appointments to all three of my previously assigned standing committees. These committees are the Education and Labor Committee, the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

I was especially honored to be named Ranking Republican Member of the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee, which is part of the full Education and Labor Committee. The Subcommittee's focus is on national and community service efforts, youth programs, child abuse prevention, low-income home energy assistance, and services for the elderly.

Democratic Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy (New York-4) chairs the Healthy Families and Communities Subcommittee. As the Ranking Member, I will have the opportunity to work closely with Congresswoman McCarthy in advancing the Subcommittee's legislative agenda. Education and health issues, particularly those pertaining to children and families, have always been a top priority of mine as a member of Congress. The Ranking Member position is an opportunity to bring greater focus to these important issues.

The Subcommittee's first hearing focused on the issue of national volunteer service in general and the reauthorization of the National and Community Service Act in specific. As Co-Chair of the National Service Caucus, I was honored to invite George Moore, Executive Director of the Community Progress Council (CPC) in York, to participate as a witness at the hearing. Mr. Moore testified about the wonderful success of CPC's Foster Grandparent Program. Administered with funding assistance from the Corporation for National Community Service, the Foster Grandparent Program's dedicated volunteers have helped to improve academic achievement and reduce disciplinary problems of the children participating in the program.



*Freedom's Defenders - I was privileged to attend the grand opening ceremony for the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's Recruiting and Information Center at the York Galleria Mall. America's true heroes are those who have worn the uniform of our nation's armed forces past and present - and their family members. Citizens who step forward to serve their country are an inspiration to us all.*

*Young Role Model - It is a great privilege to recognize the strong moral character and leadership skills of 19th District Girl Scouts when they receive their Gold Award. I recently presented a Certificate of Special*



*Congressional Recognition to Senior Girl Scout Laura Goodlander of Etters, pictured here (from left) with Gold Award Advisor Margaret King, her parents, Carolyn and Doug Goodlander, Mindy Inners, President of the Penn Laurel Girl Scout Council, and Tom Norris, President of the Board of Directors for the York County SPCA. Laura's Gold Award Project involved organizing a youth volunteer program at the SPCA.*

## Receive Congressional Updates by E-Mail

If you are interested in receiving regular updates on what is happening in the U.S. House of Representatives, I encourage you to visit my web site ([www.house.gov/platts](http://www.house.gov/platts)) and sign up for my monthly E-Newsletter. You need only provide your name and e-mail address. **This information will be used for the E-Newsletter only and will not be disseminated to others in any way.**

The E-Newsletter is e-mailed to subscribers monthly to discuss recent House votes and other legislative activity. The E-Newsletter is also used to alert constituents to town hall meetings or other items that may be of interest to you. The E-Newsletter is sent only to those who specifically "opt in" to the e-mail list. Currently, about 4,500 people have chosen to subscribe. If you would like to view back issues of the E-Newsletter prior to subscribing, please visit <http://www.house.gov/platts/enews/archive.shtml>.



## Lobbying and Ethics Reform Advances

On January 4, 2007, the full United States House of Representatives adopted a lobbying and ethics reform measure (H. Res. 6, Title II) that generally bans lobbyist-paid meals and gifts, privately sponsored travel arranged by or with lobbyists, and the use of corporate jets by Members of Congress. I voted in favor of the bill. H. Res. 6, Title II is very similar to a proposal that I supported last session as well. When I voted in favor of those reforms, the proposal was defeated 216 to 213. Thankfully, the reforms this session passed by a vote of 430 to 1.

I believe more still needs to be done to ensure lobbyists, Members of Congress, and their staffs fully comply with ethics laws and rules. The ethics reform legislation from last session would have required the House Inspector General to conduct audits and investigate compliance with House Rules. Additionally, I cosponsored an amendment to last session's proposal that would have further strengthened the Inspector General's oversight with the creation of an independent and non-partisan Office of Public Integrity meant to supplement the often-gridlocked House Ethics Committee. Unfortunately, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi chose to not include either of these provisions in this session's lobbying and ethics measure, opting to instead appoint a task force to study the matter and draft recommendations for consideration at a later date.

Public service is a noble profession filled with many good people. The recent scandals in Washington, however, eroded the trust that the American people have in Congress – and understandably so. The American people want and deserve nothing less than true and meaningful lobbying and ethics reform. An effective enforcement mechanism must be developed and implemented by the House if truly meaningful reform is to be had. After all, no reform is of any importance if it is not enforced.

### House Committee Approves Whistleblower Bill

For the past two sessions, I have introduced bipartisan legislation that would help restore protections for federal employees who blow the whistle on illegalities in the federal government, gross mismanagement and waste, and dangers to the public health and safety. The central portion of this legislation would have overturned a series of Federal Circuit Court decisions that found, for example, that whistleblowers are not protected from retaliation by supervisors if they direct criticism to a wrongdoer instead of to a higher authority. The legislation also would have entitled whistleblowers to jury trials where their claims are not acted upon within 180 days.

This session, I am again the lead Republican sponsor of a very similar bill (H.R. 985). Representative Henry Waxman, Chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Representatives Tom Davis (Virginia-11) and Chris Van Hollen (Maryland-8), and I introduced this legislation on February 12th. In addition to overturning hostile federal court cases and creating a limited right to jury trials, H.R. 985 contains provisions related to national security whistleblowers. Under current law, such whistleblowers have little protection against their security clearances being revoked in retaliation for their reporting waste, fraud, or abuse within the government. Under H.R. 985, however, national security whistleblowers would be protected if they make their report to an authorized Member of Congress, an authorized individual within the Department of Justice, or the Inspector General of their agency.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform unanimously approved H.R. 985 on February 14, 2007. The next step for H.R. 985 is consideration by the full United States House of Representatives.



*Double Eagles - The Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle was host to a special ceremony recently as [David Weigle](#) of Troop 173 was promoted to the rank of Eagle Scout at the same event where his father, [Brett Weigle](#), was promoted to the rank of Colonel in the United States Army. I was pleased to present David with a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition and a U.S. flag and thank his family (including his mother [Deborah Weigle](#) pictured above) for their service to our community and our nation.*

## 109th Congress Concludes, Passes Tax and Health Care Bill

The 109<sup>th</sup> Congress completed its legislative business in December 2006 with the passage of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 (H.R. 6111). This bipartisan legislation - which passed by margins of 367 to 45 in the House of Representatives and 79 to 9 in the Senate - contained provisions related to taxes, health care, and energy. I voted in favor of H.R. 6111. The President signed H.R. 6111 into law on December 20, 2006.

With respect to taxes, H.R. 6111 extended several tax provisions that had either expired or were set to expire by the end of the year. These provisions included an above-the-line deduction for families with higher education expenses, the Research & Development tax credit for businesses, and certain incentives for renewable electricity production.

With respect to health care, H.R. 6111 stopped a cut in physician reimbursements that was scheduled to automatically occur under an out-of-date Medicare formula, thereby helping to ensure seniors continue having their choice of doctor under the Medicare program. H.R. 6111 also expanded Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) for individuals with high deductible health insurance policies, allowing families to contribute more into HSAs and thereby pay more of their medical bills with tax-exempt dollars.

Finally, H.R. 6111 contained compromise provisions related to offshore energy exploration. Specifically, H.R. 6111 allows offshore energy exploration on an 8.3 million-acre portion of the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Under the bill, however, no leases for oil or natural gas production can be granted for areas within 100 miles of Florida's coast. In addition, the state-portion of royalties generated by the leases can only be used for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants or Gulf state projects related to conservation, environmental restoration, or reducing the environmental impact of offshore drilling.

# Seeking a Military and Political Solution in Iraq

When the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group (ISG) issued its report in December 2006, attention was largely focused on their recommendations for a political approach to the situation in Iraq. We should not forget, however, that this political approach was supposed to be complemented by the U.S. military's mission of training and equipping Iraqi forces - as well as the possibility of sending U.S. reinforcements into Baghdad.

While the ISG openly acknowledged Iraq's importance to our nation's regional security goals and our on-going fight against al Qaeda, the ISG rejected the possibility of sending 100,00 to 200,000 additional troops to Iraq for several reasons. However, the ISG endorsed a more limited and short-term increase in American troops focused on securing Baghdad and further training of Iraqi forces. The ISG report states: "We could, however, support a short term redeployment or surge of American combat forces to stabilize Baghdad, or to speed up the training and equipping mission, if the U.S. commander in Iraq determines that such steps would be effective."

The House of Representatives recently passed a non-binding resolution condemning the deployment of U.S. reinforcements to Iraq. I voted against the resolution. Ironically, the resolution essentially advocates a "stay-the-course" policy, embracing a status quo that everybody agrees is unacceptable.

The reinforcements being sent to Iraq are meant to target al Qaeda elements in the al Anbar Province and to assist Iraqi forces in stabilizing Baghdad, thereby improving the prospects for a long-term political solution to the country. Specifically, as announced by the President, the plan to secure Baghdad requires the deployment of three Iraqi battalions for every American battalion. The Iraqi battalions would largely come from the areas of Iraq which are already stable. The plan also requires the Iraqi government to work more vigorously towards national reconciliation.

Our courageous troops liberated Iraq from a regime of terror and torture and assisted the Iraqi people in standing up a new democratic government. Now, the actions of the Iraqis, not simply their words, must guide our nation's actions in the months ahead. While I support the deployment of reinforcements to fight al Qaeda and related terrorists in Iraq and to further train and assist Iraqi security forces, the lead forces in ending sectarian violence in Iraq must be Iraqi. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki and his government must fully understand that our deployment of additional troops is contingent on the Iraqi commitment to treat perpetrators of sectarian violence - whether Sunni or Shi'a - equally and the ability and willingness of Iraqi forces to assume lead responsibility for security throughout Iraq over the course of this year.

Doubts about the plan to secure Baghdad are certainly understandable. There are no guarantees that this new initiative will succeed. War is inherently uncertain, and the plan requires a lot more from the Iraqi government. Benchmarks must be set to measure military and political progress in Iraq. The benchmarks should indicate the degree of Iraqi government cooperation with United States military, the level of experience of Iraqi Army battalions, and the amount of progress the Iraqi government has made towards national reconciliation and sharing resources. I have cosponsored legislation (H.R. 1062) proposing such benchmarks. H.R. 1062 would also establish a bipartisan legislative committee to monitor progress in meeting these benchmarks. If progress is not made in the months ahead, other options will have to be explored.

The consequences of failing in Iraq, however, are too great to withdraw now without allowing the new security plan an opportunity to succeed. As the ISG report states, "We also rejected the immediate withdrawal of troops, because we believe so much is at stake." An immediate withdrawal would provide a significant boost for the terrorist groups that have been instigating sectarian violence in Iraq. Leaders of these groups would declare victory, strengthen their influence in the region, and likely turn Iraq into a safe haven from which to train and plot attacks against Americans.

An analogy can be made to Afghanistan. In 1989, after helping to liberate Afghanistan from Soviet occupation, we failed to help the people of Afghanistan establish a secure new government. Instead, we walked away and watched as the Taliban came to power and created a safe haven within which al Qaeda was free to operate. On September 11, 2001, the connection between what happens in the mountains of Afghanistan and our own security here at home became tragically apparent. We cannot afford to make the same mistake again in Iraq.

Earlier this year, the United States Senate confirmed Army General David Petraeus as the new commander of American forces in Iraq by an overwhelming vote of 81-0. An expert in counterinsurgency and one who has overseen the training of Iraqi security forces during a previous deployment to Iraq, General Petraeus has testified that he has reason to believe additional U.S. troops will allow the mission in Baghdad to be accomplished. General Petraeus and his troops should be given a chance at success without the United States Congress beforehand sending a message of no confidence.

Our prayers and best wishes continue to be with our troops in harm's way. Regardless of our differing positions on our mission in Iraq, I hope that we will stand as one in our support for the troops as they work to fulfill their mission. They and their families deserve our eternal gratitude and deepest respect.

**Afghanistan Update - Lieutenant Colonel Lynda Granfield (third from left) recently visited Glatfelter Memorial Library in Spring Grove to discuss our**



**Nation's ongoing military and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. LTC Granfield was stationed in Afghanistan and served as commander of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Jalalabad, where we met during my January 2006 Congressional Delegation trip to Afghanistan. LTC Granfield is currently assigned with the Department of State in Washington, D.C. Joining us at this event were (from left) Joan Smith, Jon Kugler and (second from right) Maureen Brenner from Glatfelter, a local paper company, and Debbie Van de Castile (far right), from Glatfelter Memorial Library.**



**Affordable Housing - I was pleased to join representatives from the Housing and Redevelopment Authorities of Cumberland County, Orrstown Bank and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh to announce nearly \$1.5 million in funding to renovate the One West Penn Apartments in Carlisle for the benefit of**

**area seniors. Following a ceremony at the apartment complex with residents and community leaders, we toured two homes on North West Street that are part of the Pride of Carlisle Neighborhood Development Initiative. The initiative is designed to replace absentee landlords and eliminate blight. Homeowners, through a neighborhood association, take an active role in reducing crime and vandalism in their community.**



# 110th Session of Congress Underway

In January 2007, the House of Representatives began the new session by passing six different bills covering a range of subjects. I voted in favor of these measures for the reasons discussed below. As of the writing of this article, final agreements on these bills must still be reached with the Senate before they are enacted into law.

***The 9-11 Commission Recommendations Implementation Act (H.R. 1).*** This legislation would enact a variety of measures that are related to the recommendations of the 9-11 Commission.

H.R. 1 passed by a vote of 299-128. Most of the provisions contained in H.R. 1 are similar to legislation I have supported in the past. For example, similar to a bill that passed the House but not the Senate last session, H.R. 1 would distribute more federal first-responder funding based on assessed risks. It would also build on a program enacted by Congress last year that aims to make emergency communications more interoperable.

***The Fair Minimum Wage Act (H.R. 2).*** This legislation would increase the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.25 per hour over two years. H.R. 2 passed by a vote of 315-116. The federal minimum wage has not been increased since 1997, and Pennsylvania law is already scheduled to increase the state minimum wage to \$7.15 per hour. The increase contained in H.R. 2 is therefore unlikely to have a negative impact on Pennsylvania employment.

Prior to the passage of H.R. 2, an amendment was offered to allow small businesses to band together across state lines in order to obtain health insurance for their employees at a cheaper rate, as well as to extend and expand certain tax relief for small businesses. This amendment was blocked from direct consideration by a vote of 232 to 197. I voted in favor of allowing the amendment to be considered, and would have voted in favor of the amendment if given the chance. Based on actions by the House and Senate since the initial passage of H.R. 2, it appears that the final minimum wage bill to be sent to the President for approval will include specific tax relief targeting small businesses.

***The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (H.R. 3).*** This legislation would allow researchers to apply for grants from the National Institutes of Health or other federal agencies in order to conduct research involving embryonic stem cell lines. Importantly, eligibility for federal funding would be limited to stem cells from frozen embryos that were: originally created for the purposes of fertility treatment; were willingly donated by the individuals seeking fertility treatment after their clinical needs were met and said individuals would otherwise choose to discard the embryos; and were donated without any compensation being paid for the embryos.

H.R. 3 passed by a vote of 253 to 174. As a pro-life Member of Congress, I sincerely appreciate the principled position of opponents of embryonic stem cell research and have struggled with this issue myself. I voted for identical legislation in the previous session of Congress, however, because of the moral acceptance generally given to the practice of in vitro fertilization coupled with the potential benefits of embryonic stem cell research for people suffering from conditions like spinal cord injuries, juvenile diabetes, Parkinson's, and heart disease. While there are many promising alternatives to embryonic stem cell research, including umbilical cord research and research on adult stem cells, I believe there also remains significant medical justification in pursuing limited embryonic stem cell research alongside these other alternatives.

Prior to the passage of H.R. 3, an amendment was offered to ban federal funding of any type of human cloning. I am opposed to human cloning and therefore voted in favor of the amendment. Unfortunately, the amendment failed by a vote of 189-238.

***The Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act (H.R. 4).*** This legislation would require the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to participate in price negotiations with pharmaceutical companies under the Medicare "Part D" program.

H.R. 4 passed by a vote of 255 to 170. Having the HHS Secretary participate in negotiations on behalf of all of Medicare's 40 million seniors will likely help better control costs under Medicare Part D for both the federal government and for America's seniors, at least with respect to certain specific drugs where there is currently little or no competition in the private sector. Importantly, H.R. 4 would ban the Department from establishing a one-size-fits-all national prescription drug formulary. This provision is vitally important to preventing HHS from interfering with seniors' access to prescription drugs.

***The College Student Relief Act (H.R. 5).*** This legislation would gradually reduce interest rates on student loans from the current 6.8% to 3.4%.

The 3.4% rate would not apply to existing student loans and would not be totally phased in until 2011. H.R. 5 passed by a vote of 356-71. While this legislation needs improvement prior to any final enactment, the bill appropriately focuses attention on the important issues of higher education access and affordability.

***The Clean Energy Act (H.R. 6).*** This legislation would repeal a special top tax rate of 32% for energy companies, versus 35% for most corporate income. H.R. 6 also corrects the terms of certain 1998 and 1999 leases that erroneously provided royalty relief to oil companies in violation of federal statute. Revenues generated by these changes would fund research into renewable energy and energy efficient technologies.

H.R. 6 passed by a vote of 264-163. While the legislation falls far short of what needs to be done to fully address the issues of energy costs and our dependence on foreign oil, incentives for the development of alternative and renewable energy sources should be a component of any truly comprehensive energy policy. Moreover, energy companies—in light of their recent significant profits—do not need special tax breaks or royalty relief as an incentive for production.

## Subcommittee Conducts Oversight Hearing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center

As a nation, we have no greater responsibility or more important duty than caring for our courageous troops who were wounded while defending our nation and our freedoms. On March 5, the Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, on which I serve, held a hearing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center focused on this important issue. The hearing shed light on the bureaucratic hassles and wholly unacceptable conditions experienced by troops returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan with serious combat injuries.

The provision of inpatient medical care at Walter Reed is generally considered to be very good. The problems at the facility appear to be most related to the bureaucracy and red tape associated with outpatient care that has led to much frustration, delayed follow-up medical care, and heightened mental health issues among soldiers and their family members. The full House Committee on Government Reform began an investigation into this bureaucracy and red tape last session. However, it was not until degrading and unhealthy living conditions at an outpatient resident hall at Walter Reed (Building 18) were disclosed that the breadth of the unacceptable level of care was fully understood and this issue received the full attention it deserves. The unacceptable conditions at Building 18 included mold, torn walls, soiled mattresses, leaky plumbing, and an infestation of rodents and cockroaches - all visible symbols of a broken and uncaring system.

The stories told by witnesses at the hearing were truly heart-wrenching. One soldier, Staff Sergeant John Shannon, described how he came to Walter Reed for treatment of a traumatic brain injury and the loss of an eye after being shot in combat in Iraq. Just five days after being shot and after only two days of inpatient care at Walter Reed, Staff Sergeant Shannon was discharged to outpatient status, given a photocopied map of Walter Reed, and told to go to the Mologne House to stay while receiving his outpatient treatment. Staff Sergeant Shannon then sat in his room for weeks waiting for someone to contact him about his much-needed follow-up medical care. It was not until he took the initiative to call numerous offices that he finally got in touch with his caseworker, who in turn expressed great concern for his well being because she did not know what had happened to him. Further indignations subjected on Staff Sergeant Shannon included when a clerk required Shannon to produce his Purple Heart Commendation as proof that he was entitled to a new uniform since his name was not on the Defense Department's list of soldiers who served in the Global War on Terror.

There were also encouraging stories of good men and women at Walter Reed going to bat for the patients, helping them to navigate the bureaucracy. Nonetheless, the overall testimony revealed how far the military's medical care system in general and Walter Reed Army Medical Center in particular have to go in better serving our nation's wounded troops. The Commander of Walter Reed, Major General George Weightman, has been fired and the Army's top civilian official, Secretary Francis Harvey, resigned in response to the substandard care uncovered. Repairs are finally scheduled to be made at Building 18. Changes to the overall outpatient medical care system, however, must now be implemented to ensure our wounded men and women returning home receive the full range of help, both in terms of medical treatment and assistance with their cases, to which they are properly entitled.

## Helping Local Fire Companies

As a member of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, I strongly commend firefighters and other emergency personnel who risk their own safety to protect and serve our communities. These courageous and dedicated first responders have earned our deepest respect and gratitude.

To help meet the equipment and staffing needs of our nation's fire departments, Congress established the Assistance to Firefighters grant program (FIRE grants) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters program (SAFER grants). In Fiscal Year 2007, a total of \$662 million was appropriated for firefighter assistance, including \$547 million for FIRE grants and \$115 million for SAFER grants.

Unfortunately, the President's proposed Fiscal Year 2008 budget requests just \$300 million for FIRE grants (a 45% cut) and eliminates funding for SAFER grants. These proposed funding levels are wholly inadequate. I joined my colleagues in the Congressional Fire Services Caucus in preventing similar cuts in funding for these important programs from being enacted in the last session of Congress and will work to do so again this session. Both of these programs are critically important to our nation's first responders. Individuals with questions about these or other grant programs should contact my Deputy Chief of Staff, Mr. Bob Reilly, at

(717) 600-1919.

As daunting as the equipment needs are for 19th District fire and emergency services departments, an equal if not greater challenge is the recruitment and retention of adequate personnel. Many of the more than 120 fire companies in the 19th District are facing severe volunteer retention problems. In an effort to help address this issue during the last Congress, I introduced the Volunteer Firefighter Tax Relief Act, which would give a tax deduction to volunteer firefighters to be used for the purchase of personal safety clothing needed when performing fire fighting services. Unfortunately, this legislation was not enacted prior to the end of the session.

While Congress can and should do more to support the brave men and women across our Nation who risk their lives to save others, there is something you personally can do to assist this important effort as well. The contact information for every fire company in the 19th Congressional District is listed on my website at [www.house.gov/platts](http://www.house.gov/platts) in the "Quick Links" section of the homepage. Please consider volunteering with your local fire company. Whether it's responding to emergency calls, helping with fundraising efforts, or performing administrative duties, your assistance is much needed and will be greatly welcomed.

## New Passport Requirements for Travelers

The Department of Homeland Security and Department of State have launched a new program, known as the "Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative." This initiative is intended to strengthen border security while also better facilitating entry into the United States for American citizens and legitimate foreign visitors. Under the program, all persons - including American citizens - traveling **by air** between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean and Bermuda must now present a passport, Air NEXUS card, U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Document, or an Alien Registration Card, Form I-551, if applicable. The passport requirement does not apply to American citizens traveling to or returning directly from a United States territory such as Puerto Rico or the United States Virgin Islands.

As early as January 1, 2008, all persons - including American citizens - traveling between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Bermuda **by land or sea**, may also be required to present a valid passport or other document as determined by

the Department of Homeland Security. Currently, a "Passport Card" is under development to allow travelers to more easily satisfy this requirement. While recent legislative changes permit a later deadline, the Departments of State and Homeland Security are working to implement the Initiative as soon as possible. The Department of State has announced ample advanced notice should be provided to enable the public to obtain passports or passport cards for such land and sea entries.

As a result of these changes, processing times at regional passport agencies, including the Philadelphia office, have increased dramatically. Constituents interested in applying for a new passport or renewing an existing passport are urged to apply early to avoid potential disruption of travel plans.

For more information on the above-discussed changes, please visit the Department of State website at [http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport\\_1738.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html), or contact one of my district offices.