



Representative
Tom Petri
Reports
to The Sixth District

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Iraq and the Economy

BY REPRESENTATIVE TOM PETRI

I spend a lot of time traveling around the 6th District holding town meetings and citizen hours and meeting with people individually and in groups. The main issues on people's minds will not surprise you. Here are a few comments on two of the topics which come up repeatedly:

Iraq

Our troops have performed heroically and they are making the world safer, but I don't want to leave them in harm's way and away from their families one second longer than necessary. We can only imagine the grief of those who have lost a loved one in combat, and along with the rest of America, central Wisconsin is certainly receiving its share of sorrow.

Still, the stakes are high. Now that Saddam Hussein is in prison and his regime is history, we need to be certain that we leave behind a secure government that will not provide a haven or support for terrorists.

We need to speed the training of Iraqi forces so they can secure their own country. We need to support moderate sectors in Iraqi society as they try to build a stable and peaceful democracy. We need to help them establish enough security so that reconstruction can proceed, strengthening Iraq's economy and providing jobs for those who might otherwise join the insurgency.

We need to make sure that the Iraqi majority can justifiably believe that they are the masters of their own country, with the United States playing a supporting role. Most Iraqis want peace and democracy and are glad that Saddam Hussein is gone, but they don't like a foreign army on their soil. Some consider it an unpleasant necessity while others want us out right away. In any case, time is not our friend here.

The Administration is working feverishly to turn military responsibilities over to the Iraqi government.

Recent fighting in Falluja and elsewhere indicates that Iraqi forces can fight well when they have adequate training. With the coming elections in Iraq we can hope that more Iraqis will accept their responsibility to win the peace in their country.

It has taken far too long to get organized, but that's in the past and now, hopefully, we are doing the right things as fast as possible.

The Economy

International competition is intense, and rapid technological change is unavoidable. We have no choice other than to focus our attention on creating and maintaining a business climate that allows U.S. businesses to compete while expanding their payrolls at home.

This means working diligently to streamline regu-

lations as much as possible while protecting workers and the environment. It means finding ways to restrain health care costs, reform our legal system, and enact tax policies which encourage investment in the U.S.

I have long supported proposals to increase incentives for manufacturing and for small businesses, aware that manufacturing is a major part of our state's economy and that three-quarters of all new jobs are created by small businesses.

There are clear indications that the economy is recovering, and the unemployment rate is already as low as it was in 1996. As the Manitowoc Herald-Times-Reporter editorialized November 17: "There seems to be a new spirit.... We are diversifying our economy. While we continue to rely heavily on manufacturing, other sectors like farming, health care and services are either holding their own or increasing their workforces."

But if you are one of those who has lost a job, you may not see these encouraging signs. I have worked actively for increases in the Trade Adjustment Assistance program so that those who do lose their jobs can have access to retraining programs.

Taking a wider view, more than ever, the good-paying jobs of the future will require both a quality education and specialized training. We can't afford to relax in these areas.

Investments for Every Child

Albert Einstein once said that the most powerful force in the universe is compound interest. He didn't expect to be taken literally, but he was on to something very important.

Most people want to know how to get ahead, and one answer is straightforward: get the best job you can in order to raise some capital and then invest it sensibly, keep reinvesting the earnings from your investments, add more of your income to your investments when you can, and then give your investments time to grow.

Depending on the amount and wisdom of your investments, you may not become rich - but you're likely to end up with more cash than you thought possible.

The fact is, few people have a proper appreciation for compound interest and the consistent reinvestment of earnings. Many Americans have a hard enough time putting food on the table and paying the many bills that are a part of modern life, and the prospect of significant savings and investment seems unrealistic.

This is why I am the senior House Republican sponsor of the America Saving for Personal Investment, Retirement, and Education Act. Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum introduced a companion bill in the Senate.

Under ASPIRE, each child would be provided with a personal KIDS account which would garner tax-free earnings from birth. Parents would be encouraged to supplement these accounts, while additional support

would be given to those on the lower rungs of the income ladder, leading to the broad accumulation of personal assets to help finance successful lives.



Rep. Petri at a July 22 press conference to announce the introduction of the America Saving for Personal Investment, Retirement and Education (ASPIRE) Act.

The funds would be invested in private sector assets through a range of accounts similar to those offered to federal employees under the Thrift Savings Plan. Parents, and eventually the account holders themselves, would be able to choose between safe investments with modest returns or more "aggressive" investments with greater potential returns but also greater risk.

As with the federal employees' savings plan, the

investment options would be broadly based to limit risk and run according to simple, efficient procedures to limit overhead costs.

All families would have the opportunity to supplement the original balances with after-tax contributions of up to \$1,000 per year. Children from families with household incomes under the national median would receive an additional government contribution at birth of up to \$500, and in subsequent years would receive matching federal deposits for up to the first \$500 of parental or other private contributions to a child's account.

Qualified withdrawals could be made to finance a post-secondary education or to facilitate the purchase of a first home, or could be left untouched to grow and supplement other retirement assets.

Almost daily the news is filled with stories about the financial challenges facing future generations. The importance of gaining an education, owning one's own home and adequately preparing for retirement is widely accepted, but few concrete public policies have been put in place to provide a mechanism to promote the universal personal savings necessary to meet these needs.

ASPIRE is one sensible approach to the challenge of encouraging people to save for the future, and of ultimately giving every American first-hand experience with the power of sensible investments when given time to grow.

Come to Rep. Petri's Citizen Hours! See page 4.

Congress Approves Petri Bill on Textbooks for the Blind

I'm pleased to report that in November Congress approved my bill, the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act (IMAA), to speed Braille textbooks to visually impaired students.

Because of the cumbersome process needed to translate a textbook into Braille or other specialized formats, it can take up to six months for a blind student to have the same materials as his or her sighted peers. Only a heroic effort can save this student from being hopelessly behind in class.

This was not much of an issue before the 1960s. Before that time, most blind children attended centralized schools for the blind, and there were (and are) existing resources, such as the American Printing House for the Blind in Kentucky, to provide support services such as the production of Braille

textbooks.

Beginning in the 1960s, however, blind children began attending schools in their home communities, and now the vast majority do so. As a result, every local school district which has one or more blind students must obtain or create the necessary specialized textbooks for these students. This is a laborious process that is beyond the capability of most school districts to carry out quickly or easily.

In response, my Instructional Materials Accessibility Act will:

✓ establish a national electronic file format for instructional materials. Conversion into an electronic format is a necessary step in the process of creating a Braille or other accessible version of a text-

book. The 26 states that currently require publishers to provide electronic copies of textbooks have no agreed-upon file format, which drives up costs for publishers and often results in unusable electronic files being provided, while doing nothing to reduce the six-month period needed for production of the specialized textbook;

- ✓ establish a national clearinghouse to provide "one-stop shopping" for local school districts to acquire the needed materials; and
- ✓ require publishers to provide a copy of each textbook in the national electronic file format to the national clearinghouse mentioned above.



Rep. Petri, seen here with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, was on hand at the Pentagon Oct. 7 at an official event in support of a memorial for those killed during the 9/11/01 attack there.

Sign Up for E-Mail Newsletter

I have an e-mail newsletter, generally published weekly when the House is in session and monthly at other times. To avoid sending spam, the e-mail newsletter goes only to those who specifically ask for it.

If you would like to give it a try, you will need to "opt in" by going to the following Web page:

www.house.gov/petri/subscribe.htm



Let Me Help

Has the Social Security Administration or the Department of Veterans Affairs lost track of your benefits? Are you interested in attending one of the U.S. service academies? Are you having problems with red tape? If you need help with an issue of federal concern, I'd like to hear about it. Here are three recent examples of ways that I can help.

Problem: In order to maintain a valid pilot's license, individuals must meet certain levels of physical fitness based on a medical examination and an evaluation of their medical history. Pilots must renew their medical certifications periodically and sometimes the process can be time consuming.

A constituent contacted me days before his current certification was to expire because he had not received his renewal despite having applied in plenty of time. Without his certification, he would be grounded.

Solution: My staff called the Federal Aviation Administration and it became apparent that his paperwork had been lost in the shuffle. Subsequently, his file was reviewed and the medical certificate was issued days after my inquiry into the matter.

Problem: A retired federal employee told me she was only receiving about one-third of her monthly retirement payments. Confusion resulting from having worked under three different retirement plans had delayed the final calculation of her benefits.

Solution: I sent a letter to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on her behalf. The next month she received her retroactive payments and began receiving her full monthly benefits.

Problem: A Menasha Army reservist was having trouble with the processing of her enlistment bonus and her education benefits through the G.I. Bill.

Solution: My staff got in touch with the proper military authorities who corrected the administrative errors causing the problems. The enlistment bonus was paid and her education benefits were approved.

Many people contact me through my toll-free number: 1-800-242-4883. Others write to me at this address: Rep. Tom Petri, 490 West Rolling Meadows Dr., Suite B, Fond du Lac, WI 54937. Or use e-mail by going to my Web site and clicking on the "E-Mail Rep. Petri" link.

My Web address is: **www.house.gov/petri.htm**



In early October Rep. Petri was named a "Guardian of Small Business" by the National Federation of Independent Business. NFIB President Jack Faris said, "He has done what we hoped every government official would do. And that is, he said he was for small business, and then, for years and years he's been voting for small business in Congress."

Internships for College Students

Would you like to learn more about our federal government – especially how Congress really works? If so, you might consider an internship in my Washington office. Interns in my office are unpaid, but I cooperate with schools that are willing to offer credit for the experience.

The work required is not complicated, but it is important and provides a chance to get a first-hand look at Congress and government service.

For further information, check my Web site at **www.house.gov/petri/intern.htm**

Would you like your own personal copy of the U.S. Constitution?

Could you use a resource guide for resolving consumer problems?
Have you ever wondered about the proper display of Old Glory?

My office has a limited supply of the following publications which are available for the asking. Please call one of my district offices or e-mail me via **www.house.gov/petri**:

- ❖ ***U.S. Constitution***
- ❖ ***U.S. Constitution (pocket size)***
- ❖ ***How Our Laws Are Made***
- ❖ ***Our American Government***
- ❖ ***Our Flag***
- ❖ ***Consumer Action Handbook***

Getting Results: 108th Congress Final Report

Several important bills were approved by the House and Senate during the 108th Congress, and signed into law by the President. Here are some of the highlights:

■ **H.R. 1, PRESCRIPTION DRUG AND MEDICARE MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2003.**

Provides a prescription drug benefit under Medicare and makes important improvements to the program. Includes a Health Savings Accounts provision, which allows families to accumulate tax-free savings to pay for qualified medical expenses, increasing consumer resources for families.

■ **H.R. 2, JOBS AND GROWTH TAX ACT OF 2003.** Broad-based tax relief to encourage consumer spending to boost the economic recovery while promoting investment by individuals and businesses that will lead to economic growth and job creation.

■ **H.R. 100, SERVICEMEMBERS CIVIL RELIEF ACT.** Provides for financial protection and temporary suspension of certain judicial proceedings for servicemembers on active duty.

■ **H.R. 218, THE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS SAFETY ACT.** Will enable thousands of well-trained and well-equipped off-duty and retired police officers to serve and protect our communities by allowing them to carry concealed weapons widely throughout the United States.

■ **H.R. 743, SOCIAL SECURITY PROTECTION ACT OF 2003.** Strengthens oversight of representative payees (people who handle benefit checks for others, such as children or mentally impaired adults), bars Social Security benefits to fugitives, revamps the Social Security Administration's procedures for paying attorneys who represent successful claimants, and tightens the rules for some state and local retirees who switch jobs briefly in order to boost their Social Security benefits.

■ **H.R. 1000, THE PENSION SECURITY ACT OF 2003.** Gives millions of Americans new tools to help them better manage and expand their retirement savings.

■ **H.R. 1308, THE WORKING FAMILIES RELIEF ACT OF 2004.** Extends marriage penalty relief and the child tax credit as well as ensuring that the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) will not affect more middle-income families.

■ **H.R. 1997, UNBORN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE ACT.** Provides that if an unborn child is injured or killed during the commission of a crime already defined by federal law, prosecutors can bring two sets of charges: one on behalf of the mother and one on behalf of the unborn child.

■ **H.R. 2297, VETERANS BENEFITS ACT OF 2003.** Provides certain financial, health, housing, and educational benefits to servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

■ **H.R. 2622, FAIR AND ACCURATE CREDIT TRANSACTIONS ACT OF 2003.** Provides consumers with the tools they need to fight identity

theft and to ensure the accuracy of their credit reports while establishing permanent national credit reporting standards.

■ **H.R. 3161, TO RATIFY THE AUTHORITY OF THE FTC TO ESTABLISH A DO-NOT-CALL REGISTRY.** Authorizes and ratifies the Do-Not-Call list which restricts phone solicitations.

■ **H.R. 3926, THE ORGAN DONATION AND RECOVERY IMPROVEMENT ACT.** Authorizes \$25 million in new resources for efforts to increase donation of organs. This includes providing help to cover travel and other expenses for people who make living donations of organs.

■ **H.R. 4520, THE JUMPSTART OUR BUSINESS STRENGTH (JOBS) ACT.** Includes \$76 billion of tax relief for the U.S.-based manufacturing sector to stimulate economic growth and promote new factory jobs. The centerpiece of this legislation is a three-point tax rate cut for manufacturing that occurs in the United States. In addition, the JOBS Act reforms many of the tax code's complicated international provisions to level the playing field for U.S. companies and allow U.S. manufacturers to better compete in the global market. Finally, the JOBS Act is revenue neutral; it will not add a single dollar to the federal deficit but will help reduce the deficit through economic growth.

■ **H.R. 4759, THE AUSTRALIAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT.** This agreement is expected to produce a \$2 billion increase annually in trade for both nations by 2010, creating up to 40,000 jobs.

■ **H.R. 5186, THE TAXPAYER-TEACHER PROTECTION ACT.** Shuts down excess taxpayer subsidies to student loan providers and uses the money to help poor schools address a shortage of qualified teachers in math, science, and special education. The savings from this change to previous law will be used to raise, from \$5,000 to \$17,500, the maximum amount of student loan debt that may be forgiven for certain highly qualified teachers.

■ **S. 3, PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION BAN ACT OF 2003.** Bans the partial-birth abortion procedure in which an intact living fetus is partially delivered until some portion of the baby is outside the body of the mother before being killed.

■ **S. 15, PROJECT BIOSHIELD.** Authorizes \$5.6 billion over 10 years for the development of vaccines and other countermeasures against biological attacks with smallpox, anthrax and botulism toxin, as well as other dangerous pathogens, such as Ebola and plague.

■ **S. 151 (H.R. 1104), CHILD ABDUCTION PREVENTION ACT.** Greatly strengthens law enforcement's ability to prevent, investigate, and prosecute violent crimes committed against



Rep. Petri visited the Pine Haven Christian Home in Sheboygan Falls Oct. 27 to discuss the new Medicare prescription drug benefit which Congress approved in 2003.

(Photo by Randall Peich)

children, and codifies the National AMBER Alert program.

■ **S. 286, BIRTH DEFECTS AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES PREVENTION ACT OF 2003.** Reauthorizes the National Center on Birth Defects and Disabilities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and expands its programmatic activities.

■ **S. 342 (H.R. 14), KEEPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SAFE ACT OF 2003.** Reauthorizes the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, the Adoption Opportunities program, the Abandoned Infants Act, and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

■ **S. 650, THE PEDIATRIC RESEARCH EQUITY ACT OF 2003.** Gives the Food and Drug Administration authority to require makers of drugs and biological products to conduct tests specifically to assess such products' safety and effectiveness for children and to determine proper dosage.

■ **S. 811, AMERICAN DREAM DOWNPAYMENT ACT.** Authorizes the Secretary of HUD to make grants to participating jurisdictions for downpayment assistance to low-income, first-time home buyers using the HOME program as a distribution mechanism.

■ **S. 877, CAN-SPAM ACT OF 2003.** Imposes limitations and penalties on the transmission of unsolicited pornography and commercial electronic mail via the Internet.

For Better Student Aid

There's a simple, effective way to boost aid for colleges and students at no cost to the taxpayers. All that's needed is open minds and honest analysis.

The federal government maintains two student loan programs: the Federal Family Education Loan program (FFEL) and the Direct Loan program which I've championed for 20 years.

Both programs serve students well, providing loans on identical terms for the borrowers, but the federal government's Office of Management and Budget recently confirmed what I have long believed - that the Direct Loan program is a far better deal for the taxpayers.

Created under the Higher Education Act of 1965, the FFEL program helps to make higher education affordable by providing loans under the Stafford, Parent Loan for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) and Consolidated Loan programs. Student loans under FFEL are made by private lenders who receive a government subsidy for participating. The government also guarantees to pay for 98% of any defaulted loan, essentially eliminating any risks for the lenders.

Saving money should be a no-brainer - eliminate the middle man. That's why, in 1992, I played an essential role in creating the Direct Loan program which lends students money directly from the U.S. Treasury. The Direct Loan program requires no subsidy and provides taxpayers with considerable savings - up to 10 cents per loan dollar.

In 2005 the two programs expect to make a total of \$85 billion in student loans. Two-thirds will be through the FFEL program and 1/3rd will be direct loans. If all of those loans were direct loans, we would save over \$6 billion.

Many people in Washington have an ideological preference for the FFEL program. They assume that since that program's loans are made through private banks, they are a manifestation of private enterprise. The government subsidies and loan guarantees, however, have removed the free market from the equation. All of the rules are set by Congress, with the private lenders receiving an excessive guaranteed profit for doing basic administrative work.

The FFEL program has powerful allies, and there's little prospect of eliminating it in favor of direct

loans. But we should be able to boost the market share of direct loans.

Schools choose to participate in either the FFEL or the Direct Loan program. The terms for students under the two programs are virtually identical. Schools' choices between the two programs depend on salesmanship - and here the private lenders have an advantage. Financed by their government subsidies, they wine and dine college administrators and sometimes offer certain economic incentives.

In response, we should provide an incentive for schools to choose Direct Loans - and we can do it at no cost. We can let schools receive the subsidies that would have gone to banks had the schools used the FFEL program.

This is the idea behind legislation I introduced in May, the Direct Loan Reward Act. Schools would use these funds to provide additional financial aid to students. For instance, if this bill were enacted and the University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh were to switch to direct loans, students who receive the need-based Pell Grants would stand to gain as much as \$900 a year in extra aid.

High School Students: Service Academies Want You!

If you are a high school junior, you are probably thinking about applying for college in the year ahead. Some will want to consider the U.S. Service Academies: the Military Academy at West Point, NY; the Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD; the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, CO; and the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY.

If so, you should contact one of my offices listed in this newsletter.

Each congressional office is allowed to nominate a limited number of students for appointment to the academies. Nomination does not guarantee appointment, but does play a major part in the admissions process.

My nominations are based solely on the recommendations of an independent, bipartisan selection committee comprised of 6th District citizens.

In return for a commitment to serve in the military or Merchant Marine, the service academies provide top quality educations at no cost to the students. The Coast Guard Academy at New London, CT, is also worth considering (it does not solicit congressional nominations, however).

Further information and computer links to the academies' Web sites can be found in the Academy Page section of my Web site located at:

www.house.gov/petri/academy.htm

Keeping in Touch

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call or write. In addition to the usual "old fashioned" addresses and numbers on page 1, you can contact me by e-mail. Due to the high volume of messages which I have received from all over the country, I am asking everybody from the 6th District to use the form linked to the front page of my Web site found at:

www.house.gov/petri

This form filters out "spam" e-mail, which can number in the hundreds or thousands on any given day. When writing by e-mail, please include your name and postal address to guarantee a response.

Representative Tom Petri's January 2005

CITIZEN HOURS SCHEDULED

During the 107th Congress I spent 190 days working in Wisconsin, held 42 citizen hours in 21 cities, hosted 42 town meetings in 21 locations, and made 498 stops in 90 cities and towns.

In town meetings I meet with constituents to discuss national issues in a group setting. I expect to hold town meetings in the spring. Citizen hours, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to meet one-on-one with individuals who need help with Social Security or veterans benefits, who want to ask for help getting into the U.S. Military Academies, 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.

My latest round of citizen hours will take place from January 12 through January 17 at 12 locations throughout central Wisconsin. Please come and express your opinions.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12th

2:00 - 3:15 p.m.—MENASHA

Elisha D. Smith Public Library,
440 First Street, Company E Room

4:00 - 5:15 p.m.—OSHKOSH

City Hall, 215 Church Avenue
Room 406

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13th

9:30 - 10:45 a.m.—SHEBOYGAN

Mead Public Library, 710 North 8th Street
Rocca Meeting Room

1:45 - 3:00 p.m.—MANITOWOC

City Hall, 900 Quay Street
City Council Chambers

4:00 - 5:00 p.m.—CHILTON

City Hall, 42 School Street
City Council Chambers

FRIDAY, JANUARY 14th

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.—ADAMS

Municipal Building, 101 North Main Street
Council Chambers

FRIDAY, JANUARY 14th

11:00 - 12:00 Noon—WAUTOMA

CAPsell Center, 205 East Main Street
Conference Room A

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.—MONTELLO

Marquette County Courthouse
77 West Park Street
County Board Room

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.—GREEN LAKE

Caestecker Public Library, 518 Hill Street
Conference Room

MONDAY, JANUARY 17th

9:00 - 10:15 a.m.—FOND DU LAC

City-County Government Center
160 South Macy Street
Legislative Chambers

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.—WATERTOWN

Municipal Building, 106 Jones Street
Room 2044

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.—MAYVILLE

City Hall, 15 South School Street
City Council Chambers

Come to Rep. Petri's Citizen Hours! See page 4.