



Congressman

Gene Green

Reports

29th Congressional District of Texas

March 2007

Dear Friend,

The 110th session of Congress convened on January 4 and this newsletter updates issues under consideration and discusses the first 100 Hours of the new Congress. It also announces our upcoming town hall meetings and events we have scheduled, and focuses on issues of particular concern to our seniors and veterans, such as Social Security and Medicare, and funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Our second round of town hall meetings, as well as our Senior Citizens Forum and a Veterans Forum & Blood Drive will be held at various locations around our district. You and your family are welcome to attend any or all of these events.

If you need assistance with a federal agency or would just like to speak with me on an issue of concern, you do not have to wait for a town hall meeting to contact me. You can call any of our local district offices to reach me or email us through our website address listed below.

It is an honor to serve you and I hope to see you at one of our upcoming town hall meetings or forums.

Sincerely,

Gene Green
Member of Congress

Town Hall Meetings

Saturday, March 31 - 9:00 a.m.
South Houston Community Building
1007 State Street
South Houston

Saturday, March 31 - 11:00 a.m.
Lee College
Tucker Hall Auditorium
200 Lee Drive
Baytown

Tuesday, April 3 - 7:00 p.m.
in cooperation with Denver Harbor Civic Club
Denver Harbor Multi-Service Center
6402 Market Street

****Senior Issues Forum****
Wednesday, April 4 - 10:00 a.m.
Hardy Senior Center
11901 W. Hardy Road

Wednesday, April 4 - 6:30 p.m.
North Harris College - Parkway Center
250 North Sam Houston Parkway East

****Veterans Forum & Blood Drive****
Saturday, April 28 - 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Denver Harbor Multi-Service Center
6402 Market Street



Constituent Jose Conrado Lopez receives the Purple Heart, Silver Star and other service medals from Congressman Green. The medals were earned during the Korean War, but never received until Mr. Lopez' daughter Mirabel Lopez Ybarra contacted the Congressman's office for assistance.

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100 HOURS AGENDA

The new Democratic Majority of the House of Representatives unveiled the Six for '06 Agenda that was pledged to pass within the first 100 hours of the new Congress. The following is a short description of legislation the House of Representatives passed in the first 100 hours, often with significant bipartisan support. I voted for each of these bills which are now being considered by the U. S. Senate.

H.R. 1: 9/11 Recommendations

The 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act implemented recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission that had not previously been considered. The legislation will ensure risk-based distribution of funds to provide the most vulnerable areas with the resources necessary to protect citizens and infrastructure. This is particularly important for the 29th District because it is home to many of the critical sectors which determine where the funding will go. The bill also improves information sharing among different levels of law enforcement, improves the interoperability of communications for first responders, and strengthens aviation and cargo security. The House approved H.R. 1 by a vote of 299 to 128.

HR 2: Fair Minimum Wage Act

The bill increases the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour over two years, starting with \$5.85 - 60 days after enactment, then \$6.55 - one year after first increase, and \$7.25 - one year after second increase. The minimum wage had not been increased since 1996. A full time minimum wage worker earns only \$10,712 a year. Today, buying power of minimum wage is lowest in 51 years while average CEO salary was 821 times more than a minimum wage earner. Millions of families rely in whole or in part on minimum wage jobs. This is especially important to students in our district working their way through college. The House approved H.R. 2 by a vote of 315 to 116.

H.R. 3: Stem Cell Research

Pluripotent embryonic stem cells have the potential to grow into almost any type of cell or tissue. With further research, scientists could develop ways to regenerate cells to cure diabetes, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, organ failure, alzheimers and other diseases and conditions. The Administration's current policy allows limited federally funded research to continue on the sixty stem cell lines that are already in existence. The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act would authorize the federal government to support research involving embryonic stem cells generated only from embryos that would otherwise be discarded by fertility clinics. The House approved H.R. 3 by a vote of 253 to 174.

H.R. 4: Prescription Drug Negotiating Authority

The Medicare Modernization Act creating the prescription drug benefit under Medicare included a provision expressly prohibiting Medicare from negotiating on behalf of America's senior citizens to obtain the best prices for prescription drugs. This prohibition has kept Medicare beneficiaries from experiencing the kinds of cost savings that America's veterans currently enjoy due to VA's prescription drug negotiating authority. On January 12, 2007, the House passed HR 4, which would require the Secretary of HHS to negotiate with

pharmaceutical companies for the cost of prescription drugs covered under Medicare Part D. This bill also would prohibit the Secretary from developing a formulary under Medicare Part D, ensuring that the Medicare program achieves the largest cost-savings possible for prescription drugs while maintaining Medicare beneficiaries' full access to needed prescription drugs. The House approved H.R. 4 by a vote of 255 to 170.

H.R. 5: College Student Relief Act

The bill cuts student loan interest rates in half over a five year period. Rates would be reduced to 6.12 percent on July 1, 2007 and reduced by .68 percent each year until 2011 when the rate would be 3.4 percent. The average student loan debt is around \$13,800. This bill will save a student with average debt \$4,400 over the life of the loan. The House approved H.R. 5 by a vote of 356 to 71.

H.R. 6: CLEAN Energy Act

H.R. 6 exempts the oil and gas industry from a recent corporate tax cut, reduces geological expensing for major energy producers, and requires new payments on 1998-99 offshore leases to make up for serious government errors that left the usual payment obligations out of the original offshore lease agreements. These provisions raise \$14 billion over 10 years which will be invested in clean alternative energy programs to reduce dependence on oil. The House approved H.R. 6 by a vote of 264 to 163.

New House Rules Part I: Ethics Reform

New House of Representative rules ban gifts, including meals and tickets, from lobbyists and the organizations that employ them. The rules also ban lobbyists and the organizations that employ them from financing travel for Members of Congress or staff, except for one-day travel to visit a site, attend a forum, participate in a panel, or give a speech. Trips will require pre-approval by the Ethics Committee and full disclosure of all travel within 15 days after the trip, and Member travel on company planes is prohibited. In addition the new rules clarify that no Member can take or withhold an official act or influence on the basis of partisan political affiliation an employment decision of any private entity. Finally, the new rules require mandatory ethics training annually.

New House Rules Part II: Fiscal Responsibility

This legislative package requires pay-as-you-go budget discipline by requiring that any new entitlement spending or tax cuts be offset with reductions in other areas of the federal budget. In addition to PAYGO budget discipline, this resolution would require full transparency and end the abuse of special interest earmarks. These budget rules will be critical to reduce a federal budget deficit that swelled to \$248 billion in fiscal year 2006 and has contributed to the \$8.7 trillion federal debt. Improved fiscal discipline will ensure that we do not pass along to our children and grandchildren an unsustainable federal debt that threatens the economic security of this country. On January 5, 2007, the House passed this resolution by a vote of 280-152, with the support of 48 of our Republican colleagues.

REPORT TO SENIORS

Administration Budget Includes a New Call for Social Security Partial Privatization

Despite overwhelming congressional opposition to previous efforts to partially-privatize Social Security, the Administration's fiscal year 2008 budget renews its call for Social Security privatization. Specifically, the budget proposes to divert up to one-third of workers' Social Security payroll contributions, a move that would drain \$637.4 billion from the Social Security Trust Fund in the next ten years. The plan would force the government to borrow more than \$17 trillion by 2050, adding to our national debt and would hurt the long-term sustainability of Social Security.

In addition to the privatization proposal's detrimental impact on the federal budget, the proposal would also impose serious benefit cuts on Social Security beneficiaries – regardless of whether they open a private account. The proposal would impose the largest single benefit cut in the program's history on anyone earning more than \$20,000 a year. These benefit cuts fall disproportionately on middle class Americans, cutting benefits by more than 40 percent for future retirees.

For 70 years, Social Security has safeguarded Americans' independence and economic security in their retirement years. The establishment of risky private accounts would take away this economic security and subject Social Security beneficiaries to the whims of the market. Americans have earned their Social Security benefits, and any changes to the program should strengthen the program without increasing the deficit or slashing guaranteed benefits.

Administration's Budget Includes \$75.9 Billion in Cuts to Medicare

The Administration's fiscal year 2008 budget proposal included \$75.9 billion in cuts to Medicare over the next five years. The bulk of the cuts would affect annual Medicare reimbursement levels for Medicare providers. These providers include inpatient hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health facilities, inpatient rehabilitation facilities and hospice providers. The budget, however, does not provide a solution to the proposed cuts in Medicare physician payments, which could threaten seniors' access to health care under Medicare.

The budget also attains \$10 billion in Medicare savings over ten years by increasing Medicare Part B premiums for certain upper-middle income beneficiaries. Under the budget, the income thresholds for higher premiums are not adjusted for inflation, meaning

that more seniors will reach the thresholds for higher premiums each year. The President's budget would also apply this means-tested policy to the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit.

Medicare Will Not Charge Late Fee for Low-Income Enrollees

The Medicare program has announced that it will not charge late enrollment penalties for low-income beneficiaries who enroll in Medicare Part D in 2007. Generally, Medicare beneficiaries who were qualified to join a prescription drug plan but chose not to enroll face a late enrollment penalty if they do not enroll during their initial enrollment period.

Only certain Medicare beneficiaries are exempt from the late enrollment penalties, primarily those beneficiaries who qualify for Part D's low-income subsidy. Medicare beneficiaries should contact the Social Security Administration to determine if they are eligible for the low-income subsidy. Once beneficiaries are declared eligible for the low-income subsidy, they can apply for drug coverage with the late enrollment penalty waived. Beneficiaries who qualify for the low-income subsidy can join a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan anytime throughout 2007 and are not limited to the open enrollment period.

Individuals who first qualify for Medicare in 2007 and enroll in a prescription drug plan during their initial enrollment period also will not be charged a late enrollment penalty.



Congressman Green discusses issues before Congress with constituents at the Veterans Day Program at Madison Jobe Senior Center in Pasadena

REPORT TO VETERANS

FY07 VA Budget

The budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs under the fiscal year 2007 Joint Funding Resolution is \$3.6 billion higher for veterans' medical care than the budget approved by the previous Congress for fiscal year 2006, \$3.4 billion overall. The increase is significant, and the level is consistent with the need to keep up with health care inflation and the increasing number of veterans coming into the VA health care system.

This increased funding level is good news for America's veterans, because it provides \$278 million dollars more a month for the VA health care system compared to the budget passed by the previous Congress. Funding the VA at 2006 levels would have forced harmful cuts in health care services for hundreds of thousands of veterans due to health care inflation and the increasing number of veterans using the VA health care system.

The following are the totals for VA:

- Veterans Healthcare: \$32.3 billion, an increase of \$3.6 billion above the fiscal year 2006 funding level
- VA discretionary total is \$36.5 billion, an increase of \$3.4 billion above fiscal year 2006 funding level.

President's FY08 VA Budget

The President released his FY08 budget with an \$87 billion proposal for the VA that includes an increase in discretionary medical care funding to \$34.2 billion, or almost \$3 billion more than last year's request, with significant increases in mental health care, and additional funding to help reduce a VA backlog that currently exceeds more than 870,000 claims.

Congress must ensure that those areas that need additional funding are addressed and the House and Senate must ensure that a VA budget is approved before the government's new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1. The past several years, this has not happened and the VA has not known what its budget will be until 3 or 4 months after the end of the previous fiscal year which delays improvements of services.

The budget increases for healthcare are a good starting point, but we must oppose the prescription co-payment increase and enrollment fees. Veterans should not have to pay for health care they earned.

Mark Your Calendar

*Congressman Green invites you to a
Veterans Forum and Blood Drive*

Saturday, April 28, 2007

9:00 a.m. – Noon

Denver Harbor Multi-Service Center

6402 Market Street

Please join Congressman Green and veterans' service organizations at an informational forum on programs available to veterans. Congressman Green has also arranged for representatives of the Armed Services Blood Program to be present to conduct a blood drive in support of our troops. Everyone is welcome to participate in this vital endeavor.

VA Security Breaches

For the second time in a year and a half, a VA laptop containing veterans' personal information has been stolen. On January 22, an employee at the Birmingham VA Medical Center reported that an external hard drive was missing. The hard drive was used to back up information contained on the employee's office computer, and may have contained data from research projects the employee was involved in. The employee also indicated the hard drive may have contained personal identifying information on some veterans. Investigators are still working to determine the scope of the information potentially involved.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee has held multiple hearings on the VA's technology security. This type of incident is unacceptable and I will work with my colleagues in Congress to ensure veterans' personal information is protected. If you think you may have been affected by one of the VA security breaches, please contact our office and we can assist you in notifying the VA.

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Official Business



M.C.

Presorted Standard
W/S Carrier Route

Si le gustaría recibir una copia de este noticiero en español, hágame el favor de escribirme a 256 N.Sam Houston Pkwy. E, Ste. 29, Houston, TX 77060. Si es más fácil, también puede llamar a nuestra oficina para recibir el noticiero al 281-999-5879.

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