



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
2455 Rayburn HOB, Washington DC 20515
(202) 225-5836

Toll-free Phone: 1-877-902-1919
Web site: www.house.gov/platts

Todd R. Platts
M.C.
PRSR-STD

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

Winter 2010

**Congressional
Update**

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



Dear Friend,

I hope this letter finds you doing well. As we begin the second year of the 111th Session of Congress, I am pleased to update you on the recent actions of Congress. I encourage you to contact one of my offices listed above if you have any questions regarding items in this newsletter or if there is any federal matter for which my staff and I can be of assistance to you.

Located below are the dates, times, and locations of my next series of town hall meetings. I hope you plan to attend the meeting most convenient to you. I look forward to the engaging discussions that occur at these meetings and greatly welcome the insights and concerns shared. Your participation is critically important to ensuring that our government remains a government "of the people, by the people, for the people."

In closing, please join me in having our nation's courageous men and women in uniform, along with their family members, in your thoughts and prayers. All Americans are forever indebted to these true American heroes, as well as their predecessors - our nation's veterans, for their selfless service in defense of this great country we call America. May God bless them, their loved ones, and you!

Sincerely,

Todd Russell Platts



Scouts Who Serve – During my recent troop visit to the Middle East and Asia, I was honored to present an American flag to former Boy Scouts serving with our military and civilian agencies in Islamabad, Pakistan, including U.S. Army Colonel P. Michael Phillips (seen to my right) of Gettysburg. At the request of Boy Scout Troop 78 of Gettysburg, this same flag was previously flown over the U.S. Capitol to honor former Boy Scouts now serving our country.

Prioritizing Job Creation and Economic Growth

The most important domestic issue facing the United States today is the state of the economy. The national unemployment rate - which has been 10% or higher for many months now - is at the highest level since 1983. Helping the private sector to create jobs and restoring the economy to full strength must be of the highest priority for Congress. Good jobs mean good health insurance and a growing economy will help to bring down the federal budget deficit. Our long-term national security also depends greatly on our economic strength. Unfortunately, the approach in Washington has focused more on growing the size of the federal government than on assisting the private sector, especially small businesses which were the backbone of job creation and economic growth in the last decade.

Since the recession began, there have been repeated - and failed - attempts to spend our way out of it. The wastefulness of much of the spending by the federal government has crowded out private sector investment that is so critical to long-term growth. In fact, since the enactment of the \$1.2 trillion stimulus bill (H.R. 1) last year, approximately three million jobs have been lost.

Rather than creating dozens of new federal government programs, as H.R. 1 did, Congress should have acted in a more targeted and proven manner. A stimulus package focused on three primary components - tax relief for small businesses and families, funding for necessary transportation infrastructure projects, and extended unemployment and COBRA health benefits for those citizens hardest hit by the economic crisis - could have saved the taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars while jump-starting the economy with a much greater likelihood of success.

Going forward from here, a new approach is essential. Congress should make tax incentives for work and investment permanent (H.R. 205, 664) and must bring out-of-control federal spending under control (H.J. Res. 1, 15). Additionally, enacting health care reform legislation that is truly about reducing the cost of care and fixing what is broken in our current system (H.R. 879, 1086, 2360, 2607), adopting a comprehensive energy policy that is actually about energy independence (H.R. 49, 2227), and promoting American exports while cracking down on unfair trade practices by China (H.R. 2378) would dramatically stimulate our economy and put millions of Americans back to work. Every member of Congress has a duty and responsibility to the American people to work together in a nonpartisan manner to address the economic crisis facing our country.

Town Meeting Schedule

Thursday, March 4	Friday, March 5	Monday, March 8	Monday, March 8	Monday, March 8
Lower Windsor Township Municipal Building 2425 Craley Road Wrightsville 7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	Golden Visions Senior Community Center 250 Fame Ave. - Suite 125 Hanover 9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	Harbaugh - Thomas Library 59 West York Street Biglerville 10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Lemoyne Borough Community Room 510 Herman Avenue Lemoyne 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.	Messiah College - Parmer Cinema -Boyer Hall 1 College Avenue Grantham 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Ensuring Openness in the Legislative Process

The more open and transparent Congress is in conducting the people's business, the more likely legislation adopted by Congress will truly be in the best interest of our nation and its citizens. Unfortunately, rather than adhere to this principle of good government, Congressional leadership and Obama Administration officials have repeatedly drafted major pieces of legislation behind closed doors. Health care, cap and trade, stimulus funding, and appropriations bills have been negotiated in secret and then rushed through the House and Senate with minimal opportunity for the public or rank-and-file members of Congress on either side of the aisle to thoughtfully review them.

In response to the secretive and closed-door approach of Congressional and Administration officials, I have joined with colleagues in advocating for a more responsible approach to the legislative process. I have sponsored legislation promoting more openness and have co-signed numerous letters to Speaker Pelosi and the President demanding that the people's business be conducted in a more transparent and accountable manner. For example, I sponsored House Resolution 847 (H. Res. 847), which calls for any conference committee or other meetings held to determine the content of national health care legislation to be conducted in public. Since the House leadership refuses to schedule this legislation for a vote, I have joined with 166 of my colleagues in signing a so-called "Discharge Petition" to force consideration of H. Res. 847. A floor vote on H. Res. 847 will be required once 218 members sign the petition.

Additionally, I cosponsored a bipartisan resolution (H. Res. 554) requiring a minimum 72-hour public review period for all major pieces of legislation before the legislation could be voted on by the full House. During the review period, the bills under consideration would have to be posted on the Internet so that all Americans have the opportunity to read them. So far, 181 of my House colleagues have joined me in signing a Discharge Petition pertaining to this resolution.



Honoring Our Veterans – As a House Armed Services Committee member, I was pleased to join with (from left): Veterans of Foreign Wars PA Department Commander **Frank Mills**, Post 15 Ladies Auxiliary President **Shawn Heiges**, PA Department Ladies Auxiliary President **Bette Jean Bierdrczyki**, Ladies Auxiliary National President **Jan Tittle**, and Post 15 Commander **Bob Finch** in paying tribute to our nation's veterans, past and present, at a VFW conference in Gettysburg.



Breaking Ground – I was pleased to join Cumberland County President Commissioner **Gary Eichelberger**, Senator **Pat Vance**, Representative **Will Gabig**, Major General **Robert Williams** and other officials to break ground on phase one of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center's (AHEC) Visitor and Education Center. AHEC is dedicated to preserving the legacy of citizens who have served our nation as soldiers. As a House Armed Services Committee member, I will continue to support efforts to educate citizens on the heritage of our armed forces.

Legislation, Hearings Related to Guantanamo Bay

In early 2009, President Barack Obama announced his intention to close the terrorist detention facility at the U.S. Marine Corps base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba within one year. In November 2009, the United States Department of Justice announced that five detainees currently held at Guantanamo Bay – including Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the alleged mastermind behind 9/11 – will be transferred to New York City for prosecution in federal civilian court. The next month, the President issued a memorandum directing the transfer of potentially hundreds of other terrorist detainees held at Guantanamo Bay to the Thomson Correctional Center in Illinois.

Serious questions have been raised about this approach to the handling of terrorist detainees. Transferring detainees into the United States and trying them in civilian courts will increase national security risks and force federal prosecutors to reveal sensitive intelligence gathering techniques and data during trials. In addition, Administration officials testified recently before the House Armed Services Committee that the purchase, rehabilitation, upgrade and

initial start-up costs associated with the proposed terrorist detention facility in Illinois will total more than \$400 million. Given that American taxpayers have already funded the construction of a modern, fully operational, and totally secure detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, the expenditure of hundreds of millions of more taxpayer dollars on a move that will increase security risks and undercut our intelligence gathering efforts is irresponsible at best and dangerous at worst.

I am a cosponsor of two bills addressing the transfer of Guantanamo Bay detainees into the United States. H.R. 2294 would prohibit the transfer of terrorist detainees into the United States without the approval of the state legislature and governor of the state into which the detainees will be transferred, as well as a certification that the President has mitigated any risks to national security posed by the transfer. H.R. 4463 would require all foreign terrorists to be treated as enemy combatants and tried by military tribunals. Both bills are pending in the House Armed Services Committee.

Assistance is Just a Phone Call or Click Away

My staff and I stand ready to answer your questions and help resolve matters pertaining to the federal government. While we cannot direct a federal agency to resolve your case in a specific manner, we can help to ensure that your case receives full, fair, and timely consideration. Please do not hesitate to call any of my offices listed on page one for assistance. Additionally, answers to many of your questions may be found on my official web site (www.house.gov/platts). Simply click on the "Helping You" tab to see a list of subjects, such as Medicare, financial aid to students, and veterans benefits.

My office also provides other services, such as: requesting a United States flag be flown over the Capitol Building, providing House Gallery Passes for you to watch the House of Representatives in session, and submitting requests to the White House Visitors Center for tours of the White House. To read more about these and other services, simply click on the "Visiting D.C." link on my web site.

If you are specifically interested in learning more about legislation moving through Congress, I encourage you to visit my web site and sign up for my monthly E-Newsletter. The E-Newsletter is e-mailed to subscribers periodically to discuss House votes and other legislative activity, as well as to alert constituents about town hall meetings and 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. Your information will be used for the E-Newsletter only and will not be disseminated to others in any way.

Health Care Reform Debate Continues

The House and Senate have now passed two different health care reform bills by votes of 220-215 and 60-39, respectively. While these bills seek to achieve an important goal – access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans, they do so in manner that fails to uphold what I believe should be a guiding principle regarding health care reform - the physician's principle of "First, Do No Harm."

In addition to putting at risk the current health care coverage of millions of Americans, the House and Senate bills include two common features that will also cause significant economic harm: more than \$700 billion in new taxes and more than \$400 billion in cuts to Medicare. The new taxes will destroy jobs and force more employees into government-run health care. Irrationally, in the name of better access to health care, the Senate bill imposes a 40% tax on comprehensive health insurance plans that the federal government deems too generous. The House bill (H.R. 3962) imposes new taxes on medical equipment such as wheelchairs and walkers.

The Medicare cuts in H.R. 3962 and the Senate bill will jeopardize the quality of our seniors' health care. For example, the House and Senate bills cut more than \$150 billion from Medicare Advantage, a program in which more than 20% of our nation's seniors in Medicare have chosen to participate. Such cuts, if adopted, will likely lead to the discontinuation of most if not all Medicare Advantage plans. I voted against H.R. 3962.

Throughout the health care reform debate there have been numerous opportunities for Congressional leaders and Administration officials to reach across party lines. Reforms such as restricting the ability of insurers to deny coverage for pre-existing conditions, making it easier for small businesses to afford health insurance for their employees, and allowing young adults to stay on their parents' insurance plans have strong, bipartisan support in Congress. Unfortunately, a proposal offered by Republicans that contained these features (H. Amdt. 510) – along with responsible medical malpractice reform – was blocked by a vote of 187-247.

Throughout the course of debate on health care legislation, I actively sought out the feedback of my constituents through traditional and telephone town hall meetings, one-on-one meetings, e-mails, telephone calls, letters, and off-the-cuff discussions in store check-out lines and other settings throughout the 19th District. I also spoke out in Committee and on the House floor to highlight problems with the House-passed legislation, worked with colleagues on alternative proposals, and voted to demand a more open and accountable process.

The current status quo regarding health care is unacceptable. Millions of Americans are without health insurance and millions more are struggling to keep up with ever-increasing health insurance premiums. However, if a House-Senate compromise is to now pass Congress and be signed into law by the President, it should be considered in an open and deliberate manner and should genuinely reflect bipartisan principles. Importantly, it should fully uphold the physician's principle of "First, Do No Harm."



Public Servant – I was pleased to recently present a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition to *Darryl Albright* in honor of his retirement after more than 30 years in law enforcement, including 28 years as Chief of the Northeastern Regional Police Department.

Darryl retired as Chief of Police in order to become Chief of the York County Detective Bureau under District Attorney Tom Kearney. 19th District residents are blessed by the selfless and courageous service of our law enforcement personnel.



Supporting Our Troops – As a House Education and Labor Committee member, I was pleased to recognize Northern High School students *Matt McCullough*, *Taryn Weaver*, and *Kayla McHale* for their marketing class project to support the Armed Forces Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides financial assistance and support services to members of the military and their families.

It was a pleasure to join these students, as well as Dillsburg Mayor *Hank Snyder*, *Patrick Hanley* of the Armed Forces Foundation, Sergeant *Charles Ingraham* of the Pennsylvania National Guard and Northern High School students *Grant Cole*, *Kristin Taylor* and *Josie Hall* in promoting efforts to support our nation's military families.

Budget Deficit at Historic Level

The annual federal budget deficit is at a historically high level - currently 10% of our nation's overall economy. This is the highest level since World War II. Congress has voted five times in just the past year-and-one-half to increase the national debt limit. Over the last three years, the national debt limit has been increased an astounding 39% to its current level of \$12.4 trillion. Unbelievably, rather than looking to rein in federal government spending to address deficit spending and thereby lower the national debt, Congressional leaders have proposed to increase the national debt limit by as much as an additional \$1.9 trillion.

I voted against the most recent increase in the debt ceiling (H.R. 4314), as well as the previous four increases. I also voted against out-of-control spending that has caused the enormous debt increase - including the Wall Street and automobile manufacturer bailouts, the \$1.2 trillion stimulus bill, and the fiscal years 2009 and 2010 omnibus appropriations bills.

Passage of the fiscal year 2010 omnibus appropriations bill (H.R. 3288) epitomizes Washington's out-of-touch spending mentality. H.R. 3288 provides appropriations in 2010 for numerous federal departments and agencies, including the Departments of Commerce, Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs. Many of the programs within these departments and agencies are critically important to the economic vitality of our nation and our citizens' overall quality of life. However, given the serious fiscal challenges facing our nation, H.R. 3288's increase of non-defense, non-veterans discretionary spending by almost 14% is irresponsible and wholly indefensible. Unfortunately, the full House of Representatives voted to pass H.R. 3288 by a margin of 221-202. President Barack Obama signed this bloated spending bill into law on December 16, 2009.

At a time when seniors and families are sitting around kitchen tables struggling to figure out where to cut spending to make ends meet, Congress has refused to do the same. While some deficit spending during a time of war and recession may be necessary to meet our nation's security needs and ensure fiscal stability, such challenges should not be used as an excuse to abandon fiscal restraint altogether.

Time to End “Too Big to Fail”

On December 11, 2009, the full U.S. House of Representatives passed a 1,300 page bill seeking to regulate the financial sector (H.R. 4173). This legislation would enhance the authority of the Federal Reserve to regulate firms deemed “too big to fail,” as well as establish a permanent bail-out fund for such firms when they go under.

I voted against H.R. 4173 and in favor of an alternative. In voting against H.R. 4173, I was concerned that the bail-out authority contained in the legislation would provide an unfair competitive advantage to larger firms – many of which are the same ones that are responsible for the current financial crisis. Under the legislation, these larger firms would, in essence, be given a government financial guarantee, while smaller firms would not.

The alternative proposal that I supported was aimed at ending the current ad hoc approach to bailing out firms. Specifically, the alternative would have created a new board consisting of federal regulators and outside experts to identify systemic risks to the financial sector. Importantly, in place of large taxpayer-funded bailouts, the alternative would also have created a new bankruptcy process to more efficiently handle large financial firms if and when they fail.

Unfortunately, the alternative to H.R. 4173 was defeated by a vote of 175-251. The underlying bill was then passed by a vote of 223-202 and is now pending consideration in the Senate. It is important that the Senate act on legislation to better oversee the financial sector and guard against a repeat of Wall Street’s greed and mismanagement that shook the foundations of our nation’s economy. However, it is also important that the legislation does not establish a permanent bail-out fund that will only serve to encourage risky investment schemes by firms deemed “too big to fail.”

Defense Funding Approved by Congress, Measure Includes Programs to Help the Unemployed

In December 2009, Congress voted to pass an appropriations bill (H.R. 3326) that includes important funding for U.S. troops abroad. H.R. 3326 also extends certain programs to help the unemployed, here at home, weather the difficult economic times facing so many of our nation’s citizens. I joined the majority of my colleagues in voting to pass this important legislation.

H.R. 3326 provides overall funding for the Department of Defense in fiscal year 2010. This includes a 3.4% pay raise for members of the military as well as essential funds for war operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. The war operations funding will help support President Barack Obama’s decision to deploy an additional 30,000 troops in Afghanistan. The aim of the additional troops in Afghanistan is to stop the flow of foreign fighters crossing the border from Pakistan to conduct attacks on American troops and Afghan civilians, while also training the Afghan army so they can assume a larger role in ensuring the security of their own country.

H.R. 3326 also provides additional federal funding for extended unemployment benefits and COBRA health care premium subsidies. These programs were set to expire at the end of 2009, but were made available through February 28, 2010 under H.R. 3326. The extended unemployment benefits program provides additional weeks of unemployment compensation for the long-term unemployed, as well as an additional \$25 per week benefit. The COBRA health care subsidy is equal to 65% of an unemployed worker’s health care premiums. H.R. 3326 passed in the House by a margin of 395-30 and in the Senate by a margin of 88-10. President Obama signed the measure into law on December 19, 2009.

Congressional Pay and Benefits

Numerous constituents have contacted my office recently regarding the accuracy of communications pertaining to Congressional salaries, health care benefits, and pensions. The following information is intended to present a factual overview of these issues.

First, contrary to recently circulated e-mails and letters-to-the-editor, Members of Congress did not vote themselves a \$4,700 pay increase for 2010 and a \$5,300 increase for 2011. To the contrary, a provision was added to the Fiscal Year 2009 spending bill to block the automatic Congressional pay raise scheduled for Fiscal Year 2010 from taking effect. This legislation was enacted into law on March 11, 2009. Additionally, although no action has occurred yet, it is very likely that Congress will also block the automatic pay raise scheduled for Fiscal Year 2011. As the prime sponsor of legislation (H.R. 346) that would permanently prohibit automatic pay raises for Members of Congress, I supported the 2010 freeze and am fighting for a similar freeze on Congressional salaries in 2011 (H.R. 4255). With millions of Americans out of work, many individuals and families struggling to make ends meet, and seniors not receiving a Social Security increase for 2010, it is imperative that Congress rein in inappropriate spending in Washington. Blocking pay raises for ourselves is the right place to start.

Second, please know that Members of Congress do not receive free health care. Rather, Members of Congress purchase health insurance through the Federal Employees Health Benefits Pro-

gram, which offers a cafeteria plan featuring multiple private insurers to all federal employees. Like most employer provided plans, all federal employees, including Members of Congress, pay a portion of their insurance premiums. I participate in a basic Blue Cross-Blue Shield plan, as well as purchase supplemental eye and dental coverage. I pay approximately \$6,100 per year for my family’s coverage.

Finally, despite long-standing rumors to the contrary, Members of Congress are required to pay Social Security taxes. Prior to 1983, no federal employees - including Members of Congress - paid into Social Security, but nor were they eligible for Social Security benefits. Members of Congress and other federal employees were instead covered by a separate pension plan called the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). Because the old pension system was not designed to coordinate with Social Security, Congress directed the development of a new retirement plan for federal workers once federal workers were brought into the Social Security system. The result was the Federal Employees’ Retirement System (FERS) Act of 1986. Members of Congress first elected in 1984 or later are enrolled automatically in FERS, unless they decline coverage. Members of Congress elected prior to 1984 could remain in CSRS or change their coverage to FERS. Congressional pensions, like those of other federal employees, are financed through a combination of employee and employer contributions.