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Congressional Update

Don't miss the Town Meeting schedule below!

Winter 2011

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



Dear Friend,

I know that you and all 19th District residents shared my deep sadness and horror upon learning of the senseless and violent attack on my colleague, Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, members of her staff, and citizens of Arizona's 8th District. Please join me in keeping all the victims of this tragedy and their families in your thoughts and prayers.

This act of violence was an unthinkable attack on a dedicated public servant and her constituents. It was also an attack on one of the most important cornerstones of our form of representative democracy – the duty of elected officials to reach out to the citizens they serve. It is imperative that we not allow the tragic events of January 8th to prevent elected officials from fulfilling this duty to remain in close contact with their constituents and well grounded in their concerns.

In closing, please be assured that I will remain an actively engaged member of our community. I look forward to our continued interactions – whether at town meetings such as those listed below, at public events throughout the district, or informally when we simply cross paths in the community.

Sincerely,

Todd Russell Platts

House Adopts More Open Rules, Cuts Own Budget by 5%

The 112th Congress began with Members of the House of Representatives being sworn-in on January 5, 2011. The House immediately began work by adopting two important reforms to the way that Congress operates. First, the House voted 238 to 191 to adopt new rules (H. Res. 5) intended to make the House's procedures more open and accountable. Second, the House voted 408 to 13 to adopt legislation (H. Res. 22) cutting its own budgets by 5%. I voted for both measures.

New House Rules

The new House rules package contains a number of reforms intended to address abuses of the legislative process committed in recent years. Among the reforms:

- Text of legislation not previously considered in committee must be posted on the Internet at least 72 hours prior to any vote on the bill.
- Six-year term limits are re-imposed on committee chairmen. These term limits were adopted in 1995 as part of the Contract with America, but were removed by House leadership in 2009.
- Committees must post the text of legislation they have considered, or "marked up," within 24 hours. Committees must also post the text of any amendments adopted to the legislation. Furthermore, committees must webcast their hearings for the public to view.
- A new "cut-as-you-go" rule requires increases in mandatory spending to be offset by reductions elsewhere. In addition, a new "spending reduction account" is established so that – when the House votes to cut a program – the savings go to deficit reduction instead of being spent on a different program.
- All bills introduced in the House must cite their Constitutional authority.

Congressional Budgets Cut

H. Res. 22 cuts the budgets of all House leadership, committee, and member office accounts by 5% for 2011 and 2012. These cuts will save taxpayers a total of \$35 million in fiscal year 2011. The savings – while a very small percentage of overall federal spending – are meant as a "down payment" in getting total federal spending under control. The new House majority is advocating a return to fiscal year 2008 spending levels – in effect, pre-stimulus, pre-bank bailout spending levels. Given the importance of leading by example, Congress' own budget is an especially appropriate place for spending cuts to begin.

While the 112th Congress has much work ahead, the adoption of the new House rules and cuts in Congressional budgets are a good start. From here, Members of Congress need to work diligently at addressing the many challenges facing our country – from the federal budget deficit to jobs and economic growth, from health care policy to national security. The American people rightly expect and deserve no less.



Honoring Those Who Served – On Veterans Day, I was proud to join with local veterans at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 15 in

Gettysburg to dedicate a memorial to Korean War veterans from Gettysburg and the surrounding area. Pictured with me above are: VFW Post 15 Commander William D. Hewitt and Lt. Colonel (Ret.) C. Lyle Rishell of Gettysburg, who donated the memorial. LTC Rishell served in both World War II and the Korean War.

Town Meeting Schedule

Monday, February 7

New Cumberland Borough Building
1120 Market Street
New Cumberland
7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 8

Agriculture and Natural Resources Center
670 Old Harrisburg Road
Gettysburg
1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Saturday, February 12

Junior Achievement of South Central Pennsylvania
610 South George Street
York
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Monday, February 14

South Middleton Township Building
520 Park Drive
Boiling Springs
10:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Record Tax Increase Averted, Large Spending Bill Defeated

In December, Congress passed compromise legislation aimed at preventing a \$3.9 trillion tax increase. Separately, Senate Republicans defeated an omnibus spending bill containing 7,000 earmarks and costing over \$1.1 trillion. I voted in favor of the tax bill and opposed the spending bill.

Tax Increase Averted

Restoring the economy to full strength must be Congress' top priority. Allowing taxes to increase during a recession would jeopardize an economic recovery and cause further job loss. The tax bill passed by Congress (H.R. 4853) rightly puts our nation's economy ahead of partisan politics.

H.R. 4853 preserved the existing income tax rates for all Americans for at least two years. Without its enactment, the lowest income tax rate would have increased from 10% to 15%. Most other income tax rates would have increased as well. The "marriage penalty" would have fully returned, the "death tax" would have been reinstated at a 55% rate, and 15 million more middle-income taxpayers would have had to pay the Alternative Minimum Tax. Taxes would have also increased on capital gains, dividends, and small businesses. The average middle income family would have seen their taxes go up by \$1,540. In all, H.R. 4853 halted a \$3.9 trillion tax increase.

Other components of H.R. 4853 extended unemployment compensation benefits for an additional year and created a "payroll tax holiday" amounting to 2% of workers' wages for one year. While some Members of Congress supported certain elements of the package but not others, it was important to find common ground. Failure to act would have increased the uncertainty that already exists in the economy - an uncertainty that stops businesses from hiring and contributes to our unemployment rate of 9.4%.

H.R. 4853 passed the House by a vote of 277 to 148. It passed the Senate by a vote of 81 to 19. President Obama signed the measure into law on the same day it passed the House - December 17, 2010.

Omnibus Spending

The omnibus spending bill, defeated in the Senate, was bad policy for its reckless spending. Earmarks in the bill included projects such as: \$247,000 for "Wine Grape Cultivars" in Washington; \$500,000 for "Oyster Safety" in Florida; \$500,000 for a "Hawaiian Culture and Arts Program"; and, \$2,150,000 for "Salt Pond restoration" in San Francisco. In addition, at a time when the federal government needs to be tightening its belt, the bill would have instead continued fiscal year 2010 levels of deficit spending throughout the entire 2011 fiscal year.

After the defeat of the omnibus spending bill, Congress approved a stop-gap measure to keep the federal government operating through March 4, 2011. Funding for the remainder of the 2011 fiscal year will be a topic of debate in the new 112th Congress. Ultimately, Congress needs to restore spending levels to their pre-stimulus, pre-bank bailout levels in order to eliminate deficit spending and reduce the national debt.



Arts Competition Winner – Each year, the Congressional High School Art Competition recognizes the artistic talents of young citizens. The 19th District's 2010 winning entry was "Two Hounds," an acrylic painting by

Zoe Carnes-Douglas, a senior at Carlisle High School. Zoe (pictured above with me) is the daughter of Billie Carnes and William Douglas of Carlisle. Information regarding the 2011 Competition can be found on my website at <http://www.house.gov/platts/services/students.shtml>.



Family Service – I was pleased to present Karah Fissel, a Biglerville High School senior, a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition and a U.S. flag in honor of her achieving the Gold Award, the highest award in Girl Scouts. Karah was

joined at this presentation by her brother, Jason Fissel, a junior at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, who earned his Eagle Scout from the Boy Scouts in 2006, her mother, Kathy Fissel, who previously earned the First Class Girl Scout Award, and her father Jim Fissel, who served six years in the U.S. Navy.

Health Care Law Repeal

As this newsletter goes to press, the full House of Representatives is scheduled to debate and vote on the "Repealing the Job-Killing Health Care Law Act" (H.R. 2). Consideration of this two-page bill fulfills the promise of the House Republican Conference to have an up-or-down vote on the repeal of the health care legislation adopted last session. I cosponsored H.R. 2 and support its passage.

H.R. 2 would repeal the new health care law that - once it is fully implemented - is expected to cost more than \$2 trillion, cut Medicare by \$500 billion, increase taxes by \$600 billion, impose job-destroying mandates on businesses, and further increase the cost of health care premiums by as much as 10-13% in the individual market. It is unlikely that the Senate will pass H.R. 2. Furthermore, President Obama has promised to veto the bill if it did pass both chambers. Nonetheless, it is essential for the new House majority to keep its word to the American people. We are determined to replace last session's bad public policy with real reforms that will truly make affordable, quality health care available for all Americans without crippling our already struggling economy. Consideration of H.R. 2 helps to ensure continued scrutiny of a complex law that was wrongly rushed through the legislative process last session. The goal is not only to repeal the new health care law, but also to replace it with reforms - debated openly through the ordinary legislative process - that are truly about addressing health care costs.

Ultimately, there are elements of the new law - such as allowing young adults to stay on their parents' insurance plan until age 26 and insurance reforms dealing with pre-existing conditions - that will be retained. Importantly, however, other reforms that were not included in last year's legislation must be adopted if ever-increasing health care costs are to be reined in effectively and responsibly. Examples of such reforms include:

- allowing small businesses and individuals to join together in national group plans to reduce premium costs by increasing the size of the risk pool in the same manner that large corporations are already permitted to do;
- allowing individuals to purchase health insurance across state lines thereby increasing competition for their business; and,
- enacting medical malpractice liability reform legislation to save tens of billions in health care costs.

Adopting reforms such as those listed above will help to address the skyrocketing cost of health care without imposing job-crushing mandates on businesses or costing taxpayers trillions of dollars in new government spending.

Platts Named Government Reform Subcommittee Chairman

Consistent oversight is the key to ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and that federal government programs are meeting the needs of the American people. At the beginning of the current session of Congress, I successfully sought to become Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Organization, Efficiency, and Financial Management. In this role, I will be working closely with the Government Accountability Office - the investigative arm of the Congress - and agency Inspectors General to identify and remedy systemic causes of waste, fraud and abuse.

As part of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee (OGR), the Subcommittee has jurisdiction over matters relating to the financial management and overall efficiency of federal departments and agencies. I previously served as Chairman of this Subcommittee - which was named the Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability - from 2003 to 2006. During this time, the Subcommittee focused on ending wasteful government inefficiencies - such as overpayments for services, accounting errors and under-performing programs. The need for financial accountability and oversight of government operations has never been greater than it is right now. I am thus especially pleased to again be chairing the Subcommittee on Government Organization, Efficiency, and Financial Management.

In addition to serving on OGR, I will also be returning as a Member of two other House Committees - the House Armed Services Committee, which has jurisdiction over defense programs and policies, and the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, which has jurisdiction over federal education programs and labor law. Ensuring access to a quality education for our nation's children in a fiscally responsible manner must remain a top priority for Congress. Finally, believing that the security of our nation and the safety of our citizens are foremost responsibilities of the federal government, I am especially pleased to continue playing an active role in ensuring that our courageous men and women in uniform are provided the resources they need to complete their critically important missions successfully and return home safely to their loved ones.



Young Leader Honored – As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am always inspired to meet young people who seek to serve their country in our military. One such student is Dallastown Area High School senior and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) cadet **Samantha Craley**. Samantha was recently awarded the Legion of Valor Bronze Cross for Achievement for her excellence in military, scholastic, and civic affairs. Samantha was joined at this event by her parents, **D. Michael** and **Theresa Craley** of Dallastown, as well as (from left): York County Common Pleas Judge **Chuck Patterson**, Lt. Colonel (Ret.) **Joe Innerst** - senior Marine Instructor of Dallastown's JROTC program, **Barre Shepp** of American Veterans (AMVETS) Post 2 of York, State Representative **Stan Saylor** and 1st Sergeant **Matthew Corwin**.



Hands On Experience – Each summer, local college students work in my district and Washington offices to learn about Congress and to serve 19th District residents. The interns who served with my office in 2010 are (pictured with me from the left): **Ashton Traaen**, a junior at the University of South Carolina and daughter of Thomas and Donna Traaen of Carlisle; **Ann Swade**, a senior at York College of Pennsylvania and daughter of Daryl and Marianne Swade of New Freedom; **Sarah Neitz**, a junior at the University of Scranton and daughter of Stephen and Noreen Neitz of Gettysburg; **Joseph Fabie**, a senior at Saint Francis University and son of Joseph and Roxanne Fabie of York; **David Vissering**, a senior at Penn State University and son of Thomas and Melanie Vissering of Abbottstown; **Maggie Stauffer**, a junior at Ursinus College and daughter of Jud and Kelly Stauffer of Red Lion; and **Anne Morris**, a senior at the University of Mary Washington and daughter of Frederick and Caroline Morris of York.

Good Government Measures Prioritized

The House of Representatives passed two bills in December aimed at reducing waste in the federal government: the Government Efficiency, Effectiveness and Performance Improvement Act (H.R. 2142) and the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act (S. 372).

Program Assessments

Representative Henry Cuellar and I introduced H.R. 2142 in June 2009. It is similar to legislation I first introduced in 2004. A previous version of H.R. 2142 passed the House in June 2010 but was amended by the Senate. The modified bill was approved by the House on December 21. President Obama signed the measure into law on January 4, 2011.

H.R. 2142 requires that all federal agencies work with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to identify outcome-based goals for their programs and then submit an action plan to achieve those goals. Agencies are required to conduct regular performance assessments outlining how they are working to meet their stated objectives. These assessments will be publicly available. H.R. 2142 also calls on the Government Accountability Office to perform detailed evaluations outlining how effective federal agencies have been in achieving their performance goals.

One of the reasons we find ourselves with a national debt totaling more than \$14 trillion is that federal programs, ineffective or not, never end. Taxpayer-funded programs that are not performing effectively must be reformed or eliminated. Enactment of H.R. 2142 is the culmination of a bipartisan seven year effort and will significantly improve Congress' ability to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.

Whistleblower Protections

S. 372, sponsored by Senator Daniel Akaka, is similar to legislation introduced in the House by Congressman Chris Van Hollen and me. S. 372 encourages the reporting of waste, fraud, gross mismanagement, and specific dangers to public health and safety within the federal government by strengthening the inadequate protections currently afforded to federal employees. S. 372 would overturn a series of Federal Circuit Court decisions that have undermined previous federal whistleblower laws. Since whistleblower law was last strengthened in 1994, more than 200 whistleblower cases have come before the Federal Circuit Court – yet only three have prevailed.

S. 372 has the support of the National Taxpayer's Union and other good government organizations. Unfortunately, while S. 372 passed the House and Senate in December without objection, it did so in different forms. It thus did not become law prior to the end of the session. I will be working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in the House and Senate to reintroduce an updated version of S. 372 in the near future.

Orderly Repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Signed into Law

On March 2, 2010, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that the Department of Defense (DOD) would conduct a thorough review of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy prohibiting openly gay men and women from serving in the military. The review was to examine the impact that repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy would have on military readiness and effectiveness, unit cohesion, recruiting, retention, and family readiness.

The review solicited feedback from more than 500,000 active duty and reserve component Service members and spouses, with more than 200,000 responses ultimately being received. The Working Group that conducted the review was composed of forty-nine military personnel, officer and enlisted, and nineteen civilian personnel from across the Department of Defense and the Military Services. The Group was Co-Chaired by General Carter F. Ham, U.S. Army, and the Honorable Jeh C. Johnson, Department of Defense General Counsel.

In May of this year, while the DOD review was still underway, the House of Representatives voted on an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2011 National Defense Authorization Act that would have effectively repealed the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. I voted against this amendment at that time because I felt it was disrespectful to the men and women in uniform and their families for Congress to vote on a repeal of this policy without first considering their vital input.

DOD’s nine-month review of the impact of repealing the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was completed in November 2010. The review’s findings include a broad range of opinions about the likely impact of a repeal. Ultimately, however, the review concludes that repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy can be implemented in a manner that minimizes the risks associated with military readiness and effectiveness, unit cohesion, recruiting, retention, and family readiness.

On December 15, the House voted 250-175 to pass House of Representatives Bill 2965 (H.R. 2965). The Senate passed the bill by a 65-31 vote. President Obama signed the measure into law on December 21. Importantly, H.R. 2965 does not repeal the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy immediately. Rather, repeal is made contingent upon the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff certifying to Congress that the DOD has prepared the necessary policies and regulations to implement the repeal in a manner that is “consistent with the standards of military readiness, military effectiveness, unit cohesion, and recruiting and retention of the Armed Forces.” Such a deliberate and orderly implementation of the repeal will be critical to its success and is consistent with the review’s recommendations.

It is also relevant to note that the armed forces of more than thirty countries, including many of our nation’s closest allies such as Great Britain, Israel, Canada, and Australia, have allowed openly gay men and women to serve in their militaries for years. As a result, American military personnel have been serving in combat settings throughout the world with openly gay troops from these nations. The successful experience of these countries in maintaining strong and effective militaries, while allowing gays to serve openly, affirms the DOD’s findings that the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy can be repealed in a manner that minimizes the risks.

In addition to my consideration of the DOD’s findings, I received and thoughtfully considered the input of many currently serving military personnel and veterans in the 19th District, as well as numerous other 19th District residents. Similar to the findings of the DOD review, the input I received from my constituents included passionate appeals for and against repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy.

Throughout my tenure in Congress, I have had the privilege to interact with thousands of our nation’s armed service members – here at home and overseas in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and elsewhere. Each of these interactions has been truly inspiring and humbling. Our men and women in uniform, along with their loved ones, are the true heroes of our nation. But for their selfless service, the freedoms that all of us fellow Americans enjoy everyday would not be. Given that these proud Americans have answered the call to serve and stand ready to make the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of their fellow citizens, each and every one of them has earned my highest respect and heartfelt gratitude.

Given the tremendous number of troops with whom I have interacted over the last ten years, it is safe to say that I have visited and thanked a significant number of gay soldiers, marines, airmen, sailors, and coast guardsmen for their courageous and dedicated service in defense of all that is good about our great country. In light of the Department of Defense’s findings, to oppose a repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy would contradict the respect and gratitude that I feel for all who serve – regardless of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, to retain the existing policy, under which heroic Americans can go into harm’s way to defend this nation and return home with disabling combat-inflicted wounds only to be involuntarily discharged once outed as being gay, would be a grave injustice and unworthy of a nation founded on the high ideals of “liberty and justice for all.” As such, I voted for the orderly repeal of the policy as contemplated in the DOD review and contained in H.R. 2965.

In conclusion, I share the sentiments expressed by the co-chairs of the Department of Defense review, General Ham and Mr. Johnson, when they stated: “We are both convinced that our military can do this, even during this time of war. We do not underestimate the challenges in implementing a change in the law, but neither should we underestimate the ability of our extraordinarily dedicated Service men and women to adapt to such change and continue to provide our Nation with the military capability to accomplish any mission.”

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.

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. 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.