

Rep. Petri's E-Newsletter

March 3, 2009

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Wrong Direction on Stimulus

When the economy slows, people spend less - either because they lack money or because they are concerned about the future. Spending less is frequently the right decision for individuals and families, but when everybody does it, businesses find themselves without customers and the economy slows further.

In this special circumstance, it's important for the government to increase spending rapidly in order to make some of the purchases and pay some of the wages that the private sector is too skittish to handle. But to be responsible, the spending must focus on activities which create jobs, provide clear long-term benefit, are relatively non-controversial, and can be quickly scaled back once the economy recovers.

Unfortunately, the \$787 billion stimulus bill approved by Congress and signed by the President failed these requirements as it included too little short-term spending, and too much topping-off of government programs in ways which will likely inflate budgets permanently.

More emphasis should have been placed on repairing infrastructure - taking care of long-delayed maintenance of roads, bridges and the like - projects which would pay for themselves in increased economic efficiency.

As signed into law, only eight percent of the stimulus bill was committed to infrastructure spending. By one estimate, that eight percent accounted for approximately *half* of the 3.5 million jobs forecast to be created by the package. Put another way, 92 percent of the new law is targeted so poorly that it will create only as many jobs as the eight percent directed toward infrastructure. Accordingly, I could not support the plan.

Coming Up In Congress

Housing Bill: Later this week, the House is expected to consider H.R. 1106, the Helping Families Save Their Homes Act. Among other provisions, this bill would allow

judges to reduce individual homeowners' mortgage payments. I am concerned that it has the potential to reward those who took on obligations that they could not meet. The likely result: responsible homeowners in the future will have to pay more for their mortgages since lenders will require an interest rate premium to compensate for the possibility that a judge will mandate a "cramdown," - the rewriting of the mortgage contract, to the disadvantage of the lender.

D.C. Voting: The House may consider H.R. 157, the District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act. This bill would give D.C. a voting representative in the House of Representatives. The catch, however, is that the Constitution grants congressional voting representation to residents of the states, which the District is not. The District is a federal territory ultimately under the authority of Congress.

To give full voting rights to the citizens of the District, we should return the residential neighborhoods to Maryland just as Congress returned the parts of the District west of the Potomac River to Virginia in 1846.

Omnibus: Last week the House approved H.R. 1105, the Omnibus Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2009. H.R. 1105 provides funding for much of the government's domestic spending that did not get enacted when the last Congress failed to finish 9 of the 12 required appropriations bills.

If the Senate makes any changes, negotiations between the House and Senate and final votes will need to be completed by March 6, or additional funds will need to be appropriated through a temporary continuing resolution, in order to avoid a shutdown of non-essential government services.

Land Management: The House and Senate are negotiating differences over S. 22, the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act. If agreement is reached, the bill could come to the House floor for a vote in the near future.

President On Target On Student Loans

President Obama released his proposal for the federal budget last Thursday. I was particularly pleased that he proposes to shut down the old Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program and originate all new federal student loans through the Direct Loan Program.

For years I have argued that by eliminating the subsidized private middlemen in the FFEL Program, the Direct Loan Program - operated by the Education Department - is a far better deal for the taxpayers while providing the exact same loans to students. The Office of Management and Budget estimates that switching totally to Direct Loans will save taxpayers \$24.3 billion over five years and \$47.5 billion over ten years.

Due to the intense, focused influence of those financial interests which have benefited from FFEL, I have had to keep alert for attempts to weaken Direct Loans. Now it appears that the President will help us make a policy change in favor of Direct Loans - a change which is 20 years overdue.

For Civil Liberties

I have joined with Rep. Jerry Nadler and others to introduce H.R. 984, the State Secret Protection Act, legislation to curb abuses of administration state secrets policy.

The state secrets privilege allows the government to withhold evidence in litigation if its disclosure would harm national security. The purpose of the privilege is to protect legitimate state secrets, but if not properly policed, it can be used to conceal embarrassing or unlawful conduct whose disclosure poses no genuine threat to national security.

H.R. 984 would require a court to make an independent assessment of state secrets privilege claims and would allow evidence to be withheld only if the court concludes that the withholding of evidence is based on legitimate national security concerns.

Sully Testifies

The House Aviation Subcommittee held a hearing Feb. 24 on the successful Jan. 15 ditching into the Hudson River of U.S. Airways Flight 1549, after bird strikes caused both engines to fail shortly after take-off. As Ranking Republican on the Subcommittee, I had the privilege of meeting with Captain Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger, III, and his First Officer (and Madison-area resident) Jeffrey B. Skiles at the hearing.

Advance Notice of Town Meetings

It is still over a month away, but you can mark your calendar for my next round of Town Meetings. Here's the schedule:

MONDAY, APRIL 6

10:30 - 11:30 a.m.

NORTH FOND DU LAC
Municipal Building, 16 Garfield Street
Village Board Room

2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

BERLIN
Berlin Senior Center, 142 Water Street

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

BRILLION
Brillion Public Library, 326 North Main Street

Lower Level Meeting Room

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.

TOWN OF ROME

Municipal Building, 1156 Alpine Drive

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

REDGRANITE

Municipal Building, 161 Dearborn Street

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.

WINNECONNE

Municipal Center, 30 South First Street,
Community Room

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

MAYVILLE

City Hall, 15 South School Street
City Council Chambers

MONDAY, APRIL 13

9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

OOSTBURG

Oostburg Public Library/Civic Center
213 North 8th Street

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.

TWO RIVERS

City Hall, 1717 East Park Street
City Council Chambers

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

WESTFIELD

Ethel Everhard Memorial Library
117 East Third Street, Community Room

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.

NEENAH

City Hall, 211 Walnut Street
City Council Chambers

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15

9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

TOWN OF IXONIA

Ixonia Town Hall
W1195 Marietta Avenue

Legislative Update

Child Health: On Feb. 4, with my support and by a vote of 290-135, the House approved H.R. 2, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization Act. This legislation, now signed into law, provides health care coverage to more than four million children who were previously eligible for CHIP, but not enrolled. In Wisconsin the CHIP program is referred to as BadgerCare Plus, which provides health insurance to children, pregnant women and working families.

Digital TV: Also on Feb. 4, by a vote of 264-158 the House approved S. 352, the Digital TV Delay Act. This bill, now signed into law, postpones the mandatory deadline for TV stations to switch to all-digital broadcasting from Feb. 17 of this year to June 12.

I support the delay but inadvertently recorded my vote as "no." I voted "yes" on a previously considered version of this bill and inserted a statement in the Congressional Record stating that I meant to vote "yes."

Stimulus Bill: On Feb. 13, by a vote of 246-183, the House considered the House-Senate negotiated conference report accompanying H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act." This bill, now signed into law, provides \$787 billion to promote economic growth and create jobs. I voted "no" for the reasons outlined above.

Omnibus: On Feb. 25, by a vote of 245-178, the House approved H.R. 1105, the Omnibus Appropriations Act. H.R. 1105 provides funding for much of the government's domestic spending that did not get enacted when the Congress failed to finish 9 of the 12 required appropriations bills last year. The Senate has yet to complete its work on the bill. I voted "no" because this legislation increased funds for government agencies and programs by 8.3 percent over the previous Fiscal Year.

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