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**Congressional
Update**

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

Spring 2006

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



Dear Friend,

I am pleased to once again update you on various issues currently before Congress. If you have any questions regarding an issue discussed herein or need assistance with any federal government matter, please do not hesitate to contact one of my offices listed above.

I especially hope you will take note of the dates, times, and locations of my next series of Town Meetings as listed below and will plan to attend whichever meeting is most convenient for you. Your input is greatly welcomed and desired. Please also note that a summary of the responses to my January Constituent Survey is found on the last page of this newsletter. My sincere thanks go out to all who took the time to share your opinions with me.

Finally, with Memorial Day upon us, it is especially fitting that we remember and give thanks for all Americans who have worn the uniform of our nation's armed forces, past and present. Please join me in having these courageous citizens and their families in your thoughts and prayers. We solemnly pay special tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation and its citizens.

Sincerely,

Todd Russell Platts

Port Security Legislation Advances

The United States has 361 ports, many of which are in heavily populated areas, through which nearly 11 million cargo containers pass annually. Approximately 6,000 commercial ships make 60,000 or so port calls each year. These numbers highlight the national security and economic importance of port security. A terrorist attack at one of our ports could have devastating effects, both on the safety of millions of Americans and on our local, regional, and national economies.

Since the 9-11 terrorist attacks, Congress has increased annual funding for federal port security efforts from \$259 million to \$1.6 billion, an increase of approximately 600%. Congress has also enacted legislation requiring security plans for our ports and biometric identification cards for port workers. However, many security experts believe more needs to be done. The proposed acquisition of operations at six United States ports by Dubai Ports World, which was ultimately abandoned due to Congressional opposition, further focused public attention on the importance of strong port security.

On May 4, 2006, the House of Representatives passed the SAFE Port Act (H.R. 4954) by a 421 to 2 vote. I cosponsored and supported the passage of H.R. 4954. This Act would fund grants for ports bolstering their security, launch a port security training program, and authorize additional Coast Guard funding. In addition, H.R. 4954 would build upon and enhance the current layered system of maritime security, under which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) screens the cargo manifest for 100% of all inbound cargo containers. Any container deemed to be high-risk is then scanned or inspected. H.R. 4954 also requires DHS to develop and continuously update a plan to deploy the most up-to-date scanning technology at ports, both within the United States and overseas, in order to increase the percentage of cargo scanned and ensure the scanning works as intended.

With respect specifically to Dubai Ports World, the full House passed an appropriations bill that would, in part, ban Dubai Ports World from acquiring operations at any United States port (H.R. 4939). I supported this ban in light of the company being owned by a foreign government having a historically poor track record on terrorism. The sensitivity of information about port security and the ability of employees to access sensitive parts of a port necessitate a guarded approach towards the ownership of United States port operations.

A joint House-Senate conference committee must now resolve differences between the House and Senate versions of H.R. 4939. As discussion of these bills and, more generally, homeland security continues, we must remain ever mindful of the terrorist threat facing our nation and the importance of not letting our guard down. For more information regarding H.R. 4954, please visit the House Homeland Security Committee's website at <http://hsc.house.gov/>.



Defending Our Security - America remains deeply appreciative of the dedication of the men and women who serve every day to protect our nation and its citizens. Dur-

ing a recent Congressional Delegation trip to Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait, I was honored to visit with the soldiers of Battery F, 109th Field Artillery (York) PA National Guard in Balad, Iraq.

Town Meeting Schedule

Monday, June 5

**Silver Spring Township
Administration Building**
6475 Carlisle Pike
Mechanicsburg
7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Tuesday, June 6

**South Central York
County Senior Center**
150 East Main Street
New Freedom
9:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Saturday, June 10

**Springettsbury Township
Administration Building**
1501 Mount Zion Road
York
8:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.

Monday, June 12

**McSherrystown
Fire Department**
238 Main Street
McSherrystown
2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

True Lobbying Reform Needed

On May 3, the House of Representatives voted 217 to 213 to pass the "Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act" (H.R. 4975). I voted against this legislation because it fails to provide for real lobbying and ethics reform. I instead supported a substitute proposal that, had it not failed, would have instituted truly meaningful and comprehensive reform.

H.R. 4975 is significantly weaker than Senate-passed reform legislation. H.R. 4975 fails to ban lobbyist-paid meals and gifts (e.g., sporting event tickets), continues to permit privately funded travel, and does not include comprehensive earmark reform.

Two bipartisan amendments I cosponsored to strengthen H.R. 4975 - one to establish a non-partisan Office of Public Integrity which would supplement the gridlocked Ethics Committee, and the other to broaden the list of crimes which would result in Members having to forfeit their pensions if convicted - were blocked from consideration.

Public service is a noble profession filled with many good people. The recent scandals in Washington, however, have eroded the trust of the American people in Congress - and understandably so. As passed, H.R. 4975 increases the frequency with which

registered lobbyists must file disclosure reports, makes these reports more accessible to the public through the Internet, and requires more information to be disclosed. While these changes are an improvement over current law, much more is necessary to restore the public's trust and confidence in Washington.

The substitute reform proposal that I voted for would have addressed many of the aforementioned weaknesses in H.R. 4975. Under said proposal: lobbyist-paid meals and gifts would be banned; lobbyists would be prohibited from funding, arranging, or participating in privately-funded travel; corporate jets could not be used for official travel; all legislative earmarks would have to be fully disclosed; the text of bills would have to be made publicly available for at least 24 hours before any vote; and, the House Inspector General would conduct audits and investigate compliance with House ethics rules. Unfortunately, this alternative to H.R. 4975 was defeated by a 216 to 213 vote.

The Senate and the House must now resolve differences between their two respective bills. As we approach any final compromise, Congress should pass true ethics and lobbying reform. The American people want and deserve nothing less.

200 Years - Gettysburg Borough recently marked its 200th anniversary. I was honored to present



Gettysburg Mayor *William Troxell* with an American flag that was flown over the United States Capitol to commemorate the occasion. Borough Council members (left to right) *Bill Monahan*, *Caroline Smith*, *Ted Streeter* (Council President), and *Marty Qually* participated in the event.



Honoring a Fallen Hero - Members of the Veterans of the Vietnam War, *Donald Henise Memorial Post 35*, along with York County Department of Veterans Affairs

Director *Barre Shepp*, State Senator *Mike Waugh*, myself and many local veterans, attended a Remembrance Service organized by Major *Jeffrey Hines* to honor U.S. Navy SEAL *Neil Roberts*. All Americans are forever indebted to Petty Officer First Class *Roberts* who died in combat in March 2002 in Afghanistan.

Medicare Update

The Medicare Part D program offers Medicare beneficiaries a variety of private prescription drug health insurance plans at rates subsidized by the federal government. All plans must meet certain minimum standards, and many exceed those standards. So far, over 30 million seniors have enrolled in Part D. Although the initial open enrollment period for the year has passed, there remain three groups of seniors who may still enroll in the program without penalty:

- *New Medicare beneficiaries.* All such beneficiaries continue to have the option of enrolling into the program the three months prior to their becoming eligible for Medicare, the month of them becoming eligible for Medicare coverage, and the three months after their becoming eligible for Medicare.
- *Medicare beneficiaries that involuntarily lose coverage under certain employer or union sponsored drug plans.* Such beneficiaries may enroll in Part D within 63 days of losing coverage. Beneficiaries with an employer or union plan should receive a letter explaining whether they would qualify for coverage under this provision.
- *Medicare beneficiaries who become newly qualified for the limited-income subsidy in 2006.* The limited-income subsidy provides extra help to seniors with limited incomes and assets. In Pennsylvania, such seniors likely also qualify for either the state-run PACE or PACE-NET program.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania must still determine details on how PACE and PACE-NET will interact with the federal Part D program. For those seniors already enrolled in PACE or PACE-NET, it may be easiest to simply remain with that program until the details are resolved, even though the Part D benefits may be slightly better. If your income rises and you no longer qualify for PACE-NET, you will still be able to enroll in Part D without penalty.

The next open enrollment period for Medicare Part D is November 15, 2006 to December 31, 2006. During this time, beneficiaries who did not join during the initial open enrollment period or upon otherwise becoming qualified for Part D may join for the first time. However, said beneficiaries will pay higher premiums based on the number of months they delayed. As with the penalty charged to those who delay enrolling in Medicare Part B, this extra premium is permanent.

Importantly, the annual open enrollment period is also a time when Part D participants can switch plans if they choose. Also, beneficiaries with an employer or union plan like those outlined above can voluntarily choose to join Part D during this time. No penalties apply for either of these groups.

If you or anyone you know needs assistance in applying for or selecting a Medicare Part D plan, please do not hesitate to call one of my district offices listed on the address panel of this newsletter or call my toll-free office number at **1-877-902-1919**. My staff and I stand ready to assist you. Additionally, please visit my office website at <http://www.house.gov/platts/casework/medicare-rx.shtml> for more information regarding this matter.

Overseeing Hurricane Katrina Expenditures

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, America's first reaction was to provide immediate help to those in need. Once the initial rescue efforts ended and the full scope of the disaster set in - the absolute devastation of an area the size of Great Britain - the federal government began to provide the financial resources necessary for the Gulf Coast states to begin the recovery effort. America's second reaction was an understandable desire to ensure that these resources, which have already exceeded \$100 billion federal dollars, are spent effectively, efficiently, and honestly.

All federal money comes with strings attached, and certain controls are typically in place to ensure that someone who receives a benefit is in fact entitled to that benefit. In emergency life-threatening situations, however, as was clearly the case with Hurricane Katrina, typical financial controls and requirements are often initially waived - an eminently reasonable approach when citizens are suffering and at-risk. At the same time, every dollar that is wasted through fraud or mismanagement is a dollar that does not go to someone who needs it. Thus, it is important to quickly re-establish financial controls and to keep a close watch as taxpayers dollars are expended over the long term, once the urgency of the immediate response has subsided. Now that we are in the monumental rebuilding phase of the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort, these controls are more important than ever.

The Hurricane Katrina recovery effort will involve nearly every agency in the Federal government. While FEMA is the most visible, providing immediate assistance, the bulk of money for affected individuals will actually come from the Small Business Administration in the form of low-interest disaster loans, grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and disaster unemployment benefits from the Department of Labor. The Department of Agriculture provides assistance through its Food Stamps program. Even NASA has been part of the recovery effort, sheltering storm victims at its Stennis Space Center. Fortunately, each of these federal agencies has a built-in independent watchdog - an Office of Inspector General (IG).

The Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability, which I chair, oversees the work of Inspectors General, a cadre of thousands of auditors and investigators who watch over the activities of the federal government day in and day out. As soon as Hurricane Katrina hit, the Department of Homeland Security IG established a working group to coordinate the efforts of these Inspectors General.

I have traveled to the Gulf Coast to learn exactly what financial controls are in place and how effectively they are working on behalf of the American taxpayer. Joined by Special Inspector General for Hurricane Katrina, Matthew Jadacki, I visited with numerous federal and state officials in Mississippi and Louisiana who are overseeing the recovery effort, local New Orleans firefighters - many of whom lost their homes in the hurricane, and auditors from the affected states who are ensuring that contracts are properly written and executed.

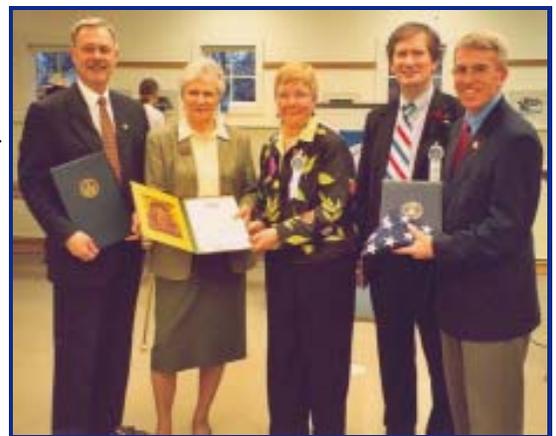
In response to the overwhelming scale of the rescue and recovery efforts associated with Hurricane Katrina, the United States Department of Justice quickly established a Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task force. I met personally with the United States Attorney on the ground in Baton Rouge who is leading this critically important law enforcement effort. The Task Force established a fraud hotline to collect leads and a single database accessible to all law enforcement - state, local and federal. A zero-tolerance philosophy and swift prosecution has resulted in hundreds of individuals charged with various hurricane fraud-related crimes and 40 guilty pleas to date. More importantly, there is strong evidence that the strategy of deterrence is working: the Red Cross and FEMA reported that a total of \$8,016,417.62 in disaster-assistance funds has been voluntarily returned once prosecutions began to be reported in the press.

Helping to safeguard the tax dollars of all American citizens is one of my most important responsibilities as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability. With this in mind, the Subcommittee will continue to actively oversee the financial accountability efforts associated with the Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts. For more information regarding this or other Subcommittee activities, please visit the Subcommittee's website at <http://reform.house.gov/GMFA/>.



The Recovery Continues - Members of the New Orleans Fire Department are joined by a vast array of local, state and federal partners as part of the Hurricane Katrina recovery effort. As chair of the Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability, I traveled to the Gulf Coast in April to ensure that taxpayer funds for the recovery are going to those truly in need.

A Milestone for New Cumberland Borough - March 31st marked the commemoration of New Cumberland Borough's 175th anniversary. Participants in the anniversary event, at which I presented a Congressional citation and an American



flag, included (left to right): State Representative Jerry Nailor, State Senator Pat Vance, New Cumberland Mayor DJ Landis, and Gerald Shekletski, Esq., Chairman of the 175th anniversary committee.

Receive Congressional Updates by E-Mail

If you are interested in receiving regular updates on what is happening in the U.S. House of Representatives, I encourage you to visit my web site (www.house.gov/platts) and sign up for my monthly E-Newsletter. You need only provide your name and e-mail address. **This information will be used for the E-Newsletter only and will not be disseminated to others in any way.**

The E-Newsletter is e-mailed to subscribers monthly to discuss recent House votes and other legislative activity. The E-Newsletter is also used to alert constituents to town hall meetings or 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. Currently, about 4,000 people have chosen to subscribe. If you would like to view back issues of the E-Newsletter prior to subscribing, please visit <http://www.house.gov/platts/enews/archive.shtml>.

Constituent Survey Results

Surveys such as the one included in my January newsletter are a valuable means of keeping me well informed of your views and concerns regarding legislative proposals. **Almost 11,000 citizens responded** to one or more survey questions. The results are found below. **I am pleased to extend my deepest thanks to all who took the time to share their opinions with me.**

- Should trade sanctions be imposed on goods made in China?
Yes 7,042 (70%) No 3,039 (30%)
- Should illegal aliens currently working in the United States be allowed to obtain a work visa and stay in the United States if they first pay a \$2,000 fine?
Yes 2,220 (21%) No 8,238 (79%)
- Should illegal aliens currently working in the United States be required to return to their home countries to legally apply for participation in any new "guest worker" program?
Yes 8,770 (82%) No 1,907 (18%)
- Should the current federal income tax code be replaced with a "flat tax" consisting of no or few tax deductions and a single tax rate of 17-19%?
Yes 6,230 (60%) No 4,114 (40%)
- If a flat tax would be enacted in place of the current federal income tax, should deductions for charitable contributions and home mortgage interest be retained?
Yes 7,278 (71%) No 2,952 (29%)
- Should the federal income tax be replaced with a national retail sales tax?
Yes 3,567 (35%) No 6,701 (65%)
- Should all health care insurance premiums and expenses be tax deductible, regardless of whether a taxpayer itemizes?
Yes 8,337 (79%) No 2,250 (21%)
- Should so-called "527 groups," which are political organizations that raise and disburse money to influence the outcome of elections, be subject to the same campaign finance regulations as political parties?
Yes 10,161 (95%) No 502 (5%)
- Should the federal government increase funding for education programs such as special education and the No Child Left Behind Act?
Yes 5,751 (55%) No 4,788 (45%)
- Should the federal government increase spending on the development of alternative and renewable energy sources?
Yes 9,642 (88%) No 1,263 (12%)
- Should fuel efficiency standards for new cars and light-trucks be increased?
Yes 9,130 (85%) No 1,621 (15%)
- Should drilling for natural gas be permitted off the U.S. coast, so long as the bordering states agree to it?
Yes 9,356 (88%) No 1,275 (12%)
- Should limited energy exploration be permitted in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), so long as the Department of Interior ensures, through regulations and leasing conditions, that there will be no significant adverse impact on ANWR wildlife and habitat?
Yes 7,480 (69%) No 3,297 (31%)
- Should the current minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour be increased to \$6.25 per hour?
Yes 6,730 (66%) No 3,540 (34%)
- Should the current minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour be increased to \$7.25 per hour?
Yes 4,467 (43%) No 6,029 (57%)
- If a minimum wage increase is adopted, should business taxes be reduced to offset such an increase?
Yes 4,796 (46%) No 5,595 (54%)
- Should fines for broadcasters be increased for communications deemed "indecent" by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)?
Yes 7,955 (74%) No 2,749 (26%)
- Should American consumers be allowed to obtain prescription drugs re-imported from Canada, the European Union, and other industrialized nations?
Yes 9,072 (85%) No 1,657 (15%)
- Should restrictions on federal funding for medical research involving new embryonic stem cell lines be lifted or loosened?
Yes 6,171 (58%) No 4,416 (42%)

Field of Champions - As a longtime advocate of the United States Army War College in Carlisle and its mission to educate our nation's future strategic leaders, I was pleased to participate in the opening ceremony of the Jim Thorpe Sports Days Competition, at which students from our nation's six war colleges competed in a variety of athletic events. The Army War College finished first in this annual competition. I joined Colonel Craig Madden, Deputy Commandant of the Army War College, in awarding first place medals to the Army War College's women's relay team.



Saving Lives - The American Red Cross, Cumberland County Chapter, recently marked the one-year anniversary of its "Seconds Count" fire prevention campaign which included the distribution of smoke detectors to area senior citizens. As a member of the Congressional Fire Services Caucus, I was pleased to present Shippensburg Township resident Eugene Revelle with the 5,000th smoke detector, along with Anne Hinkle, Director of the Shippensburg Senior Citizen's Center, and Karen Miller, Cumberland County Chapter Senior Services Coordinator.