

Locals tell Petri: Stimulus bill is pure pork

Congressman gets an earful during listening session

BY KATE MCGINTY
Sheboygan Press staff

2/19/09

Hear this, Washington: Sheboygan County residents are frustrated.

Republican Rep. Tom Petri hosted a town hall forum Saturday as part of a 12-stop tour of his 6th Congressional district. He told the 25 constituents gathered in the Mead Public Library that his intention was to listen, not speak.

Their hour-long sound-off focused almost exclusively on the economic stimulus package. Many described it as astronomical and mind boggling, and they demanded more accountability for those benefiting from it.

"Hear the word, if you would: frustration. People are frustrat-

ed. People are angry with government. People are angry with the leadership in this country," said Ed Wackowski, of Sheboygan. "Take that message back, that American citizens are angry with the way they're running it."

Most residents — who applauded Petri for hosting the forum and "taking the beating" — told Petri they want the government to provide some help to citizens, but they disagreed strongly on whether the stimulus package in front of Congress now will do the trick.

Mark Makowski of Adell kicked off the meeting with a fiery testimony about the substance of the stimulus package.

"Do you have any insight on why the hell we have all this pork instead of a straight up bill?" he asked.

Jay Hoogstra, of Sheboygan Falls, pleaded with Petri to let strong businesses thrive and bad businesses die. Hoogstra said he's a businessman who hasn't

worked since July 1.

"I want the American dream. I'm ready, willing and able, and I'm not begging for a handout," he said. "Please, please, stay out of business."

Petri, along with every other Republican in the House, voted against the economic stimulus package that passed that chamber on Wednesday. He told constituents Saturday he wanted to see more thought put into the plan and more stringent guidelines for any money given out.

"What we were doing was increasing spending in a lot of programs that could not be turned off really easily," Petri said. "I'm not saying if things are going down we hold out and do nothing, but we should try to focus on things that don't just grow government."

Petri wraps up his tour of the district on Feb. 7 in Menasha.

Reach Kate McGinty at kmcginty@sheboyganpress.com and 453-5125.



Sixth District Congressman Tom Petri talks to community members in the Rocca Room at Mead Public Library in Sheboygan on Saturday during a town meeting. Photo by Sam Castro/The Sheboygan Press