

Petri

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he said.

However, the benefits of public works projects under the bill must be long term, including improvements to sewer systems, roads and bridges, he said.

A few years ago, a congressional committee recommended an increase in infrastructure investment, Petri said.

"We are falling behind in that regard," he said. "There are a whole range of things to do. The bridges across the Mississippi are getting old. They need to be rebuilt."

Further, the government needs to continue to deal with railroad congestion in the Chicago area, Petri said.

The program would combine federal, state, local and railroad dollars to alleviate the congestion, which hurts farmers and businesses in Wisconsin, he said.

"It usually takes less time to move a freight car from Los Angeles to Chicago than through Chicago," Petri said. "They still have trouble trying to move from one rail system to another in that area."

An improved railroad system would also reduce truck traffic on highways.

"We need it anyhow as a country. When things are slow in the economy, it is time to do some things we have been deferring," he said.

Further, he said the private sector needs an incentive to do it now, Petri said. This would include accel-

erated depreciation and investment tax credits similar to those President Reagan initiated to improve the economy in the 1980s, Petri said.

"It would be short term," he said. "People would have an extra incentive to buy something now that they are planning on buying but not for a little while."

Also, Petri said tax credits for people who buy a new house would slow the drop in housing prices and create construction jobs.

The congressman said he met with mayors around the state who would like the federal government to streamline the process where it gives money to the states, which then give it to local governments.

As for banks, the federal government needs to assume the bad loans from banks, add capital to the good banks and let them go on operating, Petri said.

"That's what they are trying to do," he said. "But, this problem is so much bigger. They think there could be as high as \$50 to \$60 trillion dollars of bad assets out there."

But Don Glaeser of Britlion said some banks need to fail.

"Break them down into the good banks, the bad banks and the garbage ones," he said. "Let the garbage ones fail. Until a few years ago, when a bank failed it was because they did something stupid. Now, we got to a situation where they could do something

stupid."

Richard Todl of Manitowoc said he never heard of any benefits from economic stimulus checks from the Bush Administration.

"We've lost faith in our government," Todl said. "We hear all these promises. We heard Barack Obama going in and saying 'change.' He brought in half the people from the Clinton Administration. How are we going to change?"

Abuse of Power

Some of the three dozen people at the meeting complained about \$18.5 million bonuses for executives of defunct banks and similar abuses.

Petri said corporate executives are supposed to be stewards of stockholders' money, often pension and retirement funds.

"Almost all of us have a stake in how they run their business," he said. "There is a lot of housekeeping that needs to be done. The federal government can't do it all. But, it can help. Whenever there is federal money, there is responsibility."

Just like Congress in the 1930s passed regulations on the securities and banking industries, Congress today needs to pass legislation to prevent abuses in financial industries, Petri said.

Another man complained about huge bail-out packages for financial institutions, huge expense accounts for former presidents, and crooks and incompetent people running government agencies.

John Henry of Manitowoc complained that Congress often passes legislation with buried treasure for interests group, such as \$300 million for beekeepers.

"We should not hide under something for the homeless, some beekeeper money," he said. "The two don't go together."

"They bury it. They hide it if they are ashamed of what they are actually doing



A Moment with the Congressman

U.S. Rep. Tom Petri talks with a constituent during a town hall meeting on Saturday in Manitowoc. Petri fielded questions on a variety of federal topics and issues. —Journal Photo

or embezzling. Can we get Congress to take responsibility for what they are actually voting on?"

Petri said House rules sometimes allow for amendments to cut wasteful spending and sometimes do not allow for it.

"There have been and are repeated efforts to provide rules for what you are saying and open up the process," he said.

Health Insurance

Because of the slowing economy, more people will have a hard time obtaining health insurance, Petri said.

Several in the audience said they can't get or can't afford health insurance. Petri said that through Badger Care Wisconsin has a higher percentage of people with health insurance than most states.

"But, it is not nearly 100 percent," he said.

Therefore, the congressman called for improvements in the federal-state partnership providing insurance for people who cannot get it.

Postal Service

Because of the economic

decline, the U.S. Postal Service is getting less revenue, Postmaster General John E. Potter has said. If the recession continues to hammer at postal revenue, six-day-a-week delivery may not be possible.

Congress studied eliminating delivery one day a week a couple of times, Petri said, and decided against it.

Since then, Americans have been sending less first-class mail, he said.

If the postal service cuts Saturday delivery, he said it would have a busier day on Monday, which is already busy.

Afghanistan

Petri discussed his trip to Afghanistan in September and the situation there.

"We are not going to solve Afghanistan ever by purely military means," he said. "This is the crossroads of the world. Alexander the Great wandered through and back again. People who live there have seen people come and go for thousands of years. They expect we will come and we will go, too."

"We are not going to be able to support a government over there forever. We will have to find some way of getting it stabilized and turn back to what they can support, and move on."

Meanwhile, Todl and Bob Marheine of Newton questioned U.S. involvement

Quotable...

"Taxes after all, are dues that we pay for the privileges of membership in an organized society."
—Franklin D. Roosevelt

about many of the ills in Washington

By Todd S. Bergmann

This area's congressman discussed everything from health insurance to economic recovery with local residents when he stopped at the Manitowoc Public Library on Saturday for a town hall meeting.

U.S. Rep. Tom Petri, R-Fond du Lac, talked about federal issues, fielded questions and comments and expounded on some of the issues in an interview with the Journal.

Last week, Petri and all House Republicans voted against President Obama's economic stimulus bill and instead touted their own version of the bill.

"We've got to keep the politics down," Petri said. "We ought to be honest with each other and open to different ideas."

Several in the audience complained that Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is not open to ideas from outside her party and the bill contains large helpings of political pork, rather than economic stimulus.

The economic stimulus bill would designate \$63.5 billion for infrastructure, which is about 8 percent of the bill, Petri said.

"That 8 percent is projected to produce 1.8 million jobs," he said. "8 percent of the bill produces half the jobs and 92 percent of the bill produces the other half. Let's look at the other half first and look at ways we can use that to produce more jobs."

Petri said an economic stimulus bill should contain short-term rather than long-term spending.

"The point of the stimulus package is to fill in until the regular economy recovers."
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"It is not just us," he said. "What you would get out of it is that things would be calm."

"We created a corrupt government. This is not the way to handle it," Glaeser said of Afghanistan.

Other Topics

Glaeser also called for enforcement of anti-trust laws, which government has rarely enforced since the early 1980s.

"Since that time, you have had companies buying out other companies and getting bigger," he said. "You have companies getting so big that the government cannot allow them to fail. This is wrong. They should never get to be that big."

When asked about proposed legislation to reduce restrictions on using federal funds for abortions, Petri said, "I have a 100 percent pro-life voting record and I hope to maintain that."

Meanwhile, Petri, who has been in Congress almost 30 years, said he plans to seek re-election next year, at age 70.

"We take it two years at a time," he said. "I am working as hard as I can and trying to do a good job. The current plan and expectation is that I will run again. I have to do the job first rather than worry about the election."