

Economy hot topic for Rep. Petri at talk

Postage 2/7/09
By Kevin Kirkpatrick
Daily Register

MONTELLO — Discussions about the nation's economy and making money dominated the conversation between U.S. Rep. Thomas Petri and Marquette County residents Friday.

About 15 people participated in Petri's town hall meeting at the Marquette County Courthouse in Montello.

"People are quite concerned about the economic upheaval that we're in and a number of ramifications concerning it," the Fond du Lac Republican said.

Lesla Vich, a business owner from Montello, said that America is losing jobs because of the free-trade system.

"You can barely buy raw goods for what it costs to ship finished goods across the waters," she said. "The government needs to have control of where products are manufactured."

Chad Vich also was frustrated with the free-trade system.

"We need to put tariffs on imported goods to level the playing field," he said. "We wouldn't have to have bailouts if we had good jobs here."

Petri responded that the

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nation's economic situation is a lot more complicated than just a "Buy American" provision.

"It's not going to get us out (of debt) by laying out faults," Petri said. "We need to sort all this out and get it on a sounder level, but that's going to take awhile."

Petri, who voted against the latest stimulus bill, said the government needs to clear the system of bad debt in order to improve the nation's economy.

"The key is getting the financial system working again," he said.

Talks about health insurance also took up a significant portion of Friday's hourlong meeting.

Several citizens were concerned about the rising costs of health insurance and asked Petri what he was doing to address it.

Petri responded that one step he is taking is supporting legislation that strengthens BadgerCare and similar programs.

"I think it fills an important gap for low-income people," he said.

Additionally, Petri suggested that people band together to purchase a basic insurance plan from an association or start health savings accounts.



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Rep. Thomas Petri speaks about the state of the nation's economy during Friday's town hall meeting in Montello. About 15 Marquette County residents attended the meeting.

Dana Hielke from Ripon questioned what Petri was doing to regulate large dairy operations in Wisconsin. She talked about a large 11,000-cow dairy operation that was coming to Green Lake County and how the manure produced by this operation would affect the water and health of the residents nearby.

"I just want a limit on how many (cows) can be in one place," Hielke said.

Petri said there are already many checks and balances throughout the dairy system in the state and that he would further look into the issue.

Petri said Montello's meeting was similar in nature to

10 other town hall meetings he has conducted throughout Wisconsin's 6th Congressional District over the past two weeks.

Petri concludes his town hall meeting schedule with a stop today in Menasha.

Wisconsin's 6th Congressional District includes Adams, Calumet, Dodge, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Manitowoc, Marquette, Sheboygan, Waushara and Winnebago counties. Petri has served as the district's representative since 1979.

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