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Petri gets an earful at meeting

Residents air grievances on health care, Congress

By dan benson

Sheboygan Press staff

About 60 people packed the Kohler Village Hall meeting room Thursday afternoon to vent their frustrations with Congress, President Barack Obama and the recently passed health care reform package during a town hall meeting with Rep. Tom Petri, R-Fond du Lac.

"I'm fed up by these shenanigans," Marlin Miller of Sheboygan, told Petri angrily. "The only solution is term limits. I supported you when you started out, Tom, but how long have you been in, 30 years?"

"I believe in a two-year term limit," said Petri, who represents the 6th Congressional District and has served in the House of Representatives since April 1979. "That's your job. Every two years you can clear all of us out. But start with those who have been in longer (than himself), like David Obey," the northwest Wisconsin Democrat who has been in Congress since 1969.

Petri said the Kohler meeting was his third this week and one of 12 he plans on holding in the district by the end of next week.

"Clearly, health care is on people's minds," he told a reporter before Thursday's meeting, as the standing room-only crowd filed in. "But also a variety of other issues, such as the economy in general, energy policy, cap and trade and immigration."

Crowds in Neenah and Oshkosh earlier this week were even larger and just as vocal on the same issues, he said.

"It's been a busy session," he said.

The audience, whose attendance included an 11th-grade social studies class from Kohler High School, were almost uniformly opposed to the health care plan, higher taxes and increased government spending.

"Is it constitutional to tell me what kind of health insurance I have to buy?" Dennis Planinshek of Sheboygan, asked Petri.

Petri, noting that several state attorney generals have or said they will file suit to block implementation of the health care plan, said that, "I expect that to work its way to the Supreme Court."

Petri said Republicans don't have to repeal the health care plan. They could effectively quash it by refusing to fund the initiatives as each one comes before Congress for authorization.

"The president can't spend money unless it's appropriated by the Congress," he said.

James Zimmer of Sheboygan said Congress is ignoring the will of voters.

"Is Washington aware of the anger out here? Why aren't they listening? Do they think we're stupid?," he said.

5/12/2010

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"Obama carried the Sixth Congressional District (in 2008), so he thinks he is representing the Sixth District," Petri said.

Petri urged people to become politically active and to vote in the November election.

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