

January 16, 2009: Weekly Washington Update

The first week of a new session of Congress is similar to the first week back to school after the summer break. Like a student learning where his or her locker is, getting a new class schedule and finding homeroom, a Member of Congress is getting adjusted to the legislative schedule, finding his or her way to a new office, selecting new committee assignments, and learning the priorities of new leadership. It was an honor to be sworn in as the Representative of the 1st Congressional District for the 111th Congress and it was exciting to feel the energy on the House floor when the new Congress was gavelled to a start.

The glow did not last long after the ceremonies and pomp and circumstance came to a close and it is time to get to work on behalf of the people who elected me to Congress. While it is important to reflect on the tradition and history of the House of Representatives at the start of each new session, there is one tradition carried out each year that I do not support.

The first bill I signed my name to when returning to Washington last week was the "Stop the Congressional Pay Raise Act." This bill would prohibit an automatic pay raise for Members of Congress from going into effect in January 2010. In 1989, Congress passed a law that provides lawmakers with an automatic pay raise every January unless the body votes specifically to reject the raise. The pay raise scheduled to go into effect for 2010 would raise the salary of a Member of Congress by \$4,700 to \$178,400.

When hardworking Americans in Virginia and across the United States are fighting to keep their jobs and their homes, it is an outrage for Congress to permit the practice of automatic pay increases. Congress must set the example by not only being good stewards of taxpayer dollars, but also by cutting spending across the board to make room for the critical priorities of this Nation.

Even in good economic times, a Member of Congress shouldn't expect to receive an automatic pay raise irrespective of his or her job performance. In no other industry would this be considered an acceptable practice. Unfortunately, I had not been elected to Congress in time to vote against the automatic pay raise effective January 2008. Shortly after I was elected in 2007, I supported efforts to block the pay raise effective January 2009, which were ultimately not successful. I assure you that I will continue to support efforts to curb this practice now and in the future.

If we can be of assistance or if you have questions or comments please feel free to contact us at 202-225-4261 or at <http://wittman.house.gov/>