

## April 3, 2009: Weekly Washington Update

This week has seen some significant developments on the path to approving a budget for the fiscal year 2010 set to begin in October of this year. I am happy to report that in the course of the budget debate I supported an alternative to the proposed majority plan which would reign in spending, balance the budget, and place America on a path to fiscal responsibility. Although that alternative did not pass and the majority plan was approved, we still have much work ahead of us in the way of controlling spending, creating jobs, and further collaboration with the Senate on a final budget resolution.

First, in considering the majority budget resolution I asked myself, "does the family that lost their source of income or saw their pay cut this year get to spend more than they have?", clearly the answer is "no" and our government should share their restraint when it comes to spending. With that in mind, I supported an alternative budget that would have given priority to national defense and veteran's healthcare and would have frozen all other spending for five years. We need to get our arms around where our tax dollars are heading and evaluate a balanced, common sense approach to where they should be directed in the days ahead without adding to our massive debt burden today. Furthermore, it deeply concerned me that the budget will place a greater burden on small business owners who are the incubators of 70% of our nation's new jobs at a time when Americans are facing the largest unemployment rates in several decades.

Just Friday morning, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the U.S. economy lost 663,000 jobs in March, bringing our unemployment rate to a whopping 8.5%. To put this number in perspective, if that many people in the first congressional district had lost their jobs, that means every single person would be unemployed. Additionally, the average work week in March dropped to 33.2 hours, a new record low. Since the recession began in December 2007, the economy has lost a net total of 5.1 million jobs, with almost two-thirds of the losses occurring in the last five months. This is clearly a problem which is continuing to develop, and Congress needs to focus all of our efforts on getting the economy back on track.

This means that any future spending by the government should focus on what is best for the long-term fiscal health of our nation. We need to incentivize job creation for small businesses by reducing their tax burden. Clearly our government is unable to sustain its current rate of spending and concerns are mounting over how we will continue to finance our obligations if we do not make tough decisions today. I will continue to support legislation which does not place our debt on the backs of future generations, prioritizes the national defense, and takes a fair and balanced approach to the issues confronting the nation.

These next two weeks I will be in Virginia during the Spring Congressional District Work Period. I look forward to using this time to hear your concerns and thoughts on what Congress' road map to recovery should look like. Upon Congress' return to Washington later this month the House and Senate will begin to resolve the differences in their respective budget resolutions. I hope that the budget Conference Committee will remove the limits on charitable contributions which would cost our nation's especially vital charities nearly \$9 billion annually. I also hope the Committee can come to terms with our rate of spending and continue to ratchet that down to a manageable amount. I am happy to get back to Virginia full time these next two weeks and will continue to keep my ears and mind open to your ideas on how we should solve the problems this nation faces now and in the future.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

