

February 25, 2008: Weekly Washington Update

This week Congress was out of session. Instead of working in Washington, I was back in the district in what is known as a district work period. Members of Congress use work periods to go back home and meet with local leaders, small business owners, community organizations and other groups to find out what is going on back home and what issues are important to constituents.

So I used my week to do just that, visiting with as many groups as I could each day. Instead of telling you about each visits though, I thought I would discuss a few of the more interesting meetings I participated in.

One of the first visits I had this week was to the Northrop Grumman Newport News shipyard. Over 21,000 employees work there and are many are constituents of the First District. The shipyard was actually the last place I stopped as a candidate for Congress and the first place I visited as a new Member of Congress (all in the span of 14 hours!). I was pleased to have the opportunity to return and meet so many of the fine men and women who build the ships that the United States Navy is using to keep us safe and win the War on Terror.

During my tour of the yard I was given an overview of the shipyards operations and a tour of the shipyard itself, including a real neat tour of an actual aircraft carrier. My trip allowed me gain a new appreciation for the folks who work at the shipyard, particularly in light of the gentleman who died last week while on the job at the shipyard. The finest ships in our naval fleet are built at the Newport News shipyards and I am proud to represent the folks who make that possible.

I also toured the Naval Air Station Oceana in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the Outlying Field issue (OLF). Thankfully, the First District is no longer being considered the new OLF, but I wanted to see it first hand in order to understand the issues and the needs of the Navy. I also had the opportunity to take a helicopter tour of Oceana and further down a tour by air of one of the proposed sites for the OLF in North Carolina.

On Thursday I headed up to King George to take a tour of Dahlgren, a fine facility that recently conducted a successful and record-setting railgun test. Captain Judy Smith gave me an overview of base operations. I was given an update on the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense System and the successful targeting and destruction of the non-responsive satellite in space. I also visited the Joint Warfare Analysis Center, which is part of the Joint Forces Command.

In addition to these wonderful tours and meetings, I also took some time to meet with local small business owners in Fredericksburg to discuss the recent economic stimulus package and the impact it will have on small business owners who are trying to do their part to get our economy moving forward. We talked about what the government can further do to help small business continue to grow and help us rebound for our current economic slowdown.

Overall, this week was a very productive one. I had the chance to meet with many wonderful people and get some great feedback and what we should be doing up here in Washington. I always look forward to hearing from constituents and I hope to hear from you soon.