

Delaware Would Benefit from Pro-Family, Suburban Agenda -- May 2006

By: Congressman Mike Castle

Delaware communities are often considered suburbs of the major cities that surround us -- such as Wilmington, Baltimore and Philadelphia. It is where many families reside and where concerns about open space, education and health care are top on residents' minds. Because of this, I joined the Suburban Agenda Caucus in the House of Representatives, comprised of 50 Members representing suburban areas, from Washington State to Florida. We recently unveiled a new family agenda for Congress that will focus on addressing the needs and priorities of suburban communities throughout the United States. The Caucus is pushing individual bills backed by voters in suburban areas including 401 Kids Savings Accounts, Health Information Technology, Open Space Conservation and Internet Protection for Kids.

This announcement, the first in a series of legislative initiatives that Congress is working on will be of huge help to suburban families throughout the U.S. I am hopeful that through our work, we are addressing the issues that families truly care about.

Some of the key initiatives we are pushing in Congress include:

- The School Safety Acquiring Faculty Excellence Act: This legislation directs the Attorney General, at the request of certain state education officials, to conduct fingerprint-based checks of public or private school employees, job applicants, or volunteers for positions involving work with or around children.
- Internet filters/Parental Warnings on MySpace.com and other networking websites: This legislation expands the Children's Internet Protection Act to include social networking websites.
- The Open Spaces Preservation Act: The legislation obligates 15% of farmland protection funds to help non-federal entities to purchase conservation easements.
- The Health Information Technology Promotion Act: The legislation creates national standards for electronic medical records by creating the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and clearly defines its roles and responsibilities within Health and Human Services (HHS). Specifically, the bill requires Secretary of HHS to develop a strategic plan to coordinate implementation efforts for health IT standards, HIPAA transaction standards, and new coding systems.
- The Gang Elimination Act of 2006: The legislation calls on the Attorney General to identify the top three gangs threatening the United States and to submit to Congress a detailed strategy to eliminate these gangs within four years.
- 410 Kids Family Savings Act: The legislation allows savings accounts to be established in a child's name at birth in amounts up to \$2000 annually. The money for the accounts is contributed after taxes, but interest may accumulate tax-free and withdrawals for approved purposes would be tax-free. Money for the accounts may be used for college education expenses, first time home purchases, and/or could be rolled into a Roth IRA for retirement.

I am pleased to say that the House Leadership has agreed to allow these bills to be debated and voted on over the next six months. These are issues that cannot be ignored, and with such a large majority of Delawareans who share the concerns that these pieces of legislation address, I will continue to work to make sure they are a priority for Congress.