

CASTLE CALLS ON CONGRESS TO FINISH BUSINESS BEFORE CLOSING SESSION -- DECEMBER 18, 2007

Government Funding, Energy, Taxes, and Kids' Health Insurance

Wilmington, DE -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle hosted a press conference this morning in his Wilmington office to highlight the need for Washington to work out its differences in order to move legislation during Congress's final week of 2007. Congress has an aggressive agenda this week with several important bills, including Fiscal Year 2008 Appropriations, energy policy negotiations, Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT), the Children's Health Insurance Plan.

"It is disappointing that we are in this position," Rep. Castle said. "The White House and the Democratic leadership should have sat down months ago to negotiate. Unfortunately, Washington is as polarized as ever and the willingness to work out our differences has never been more vital. All the bills on our final agenda are priorities for the nation.

"Congress has been in the unfortunate habit of funding the government with Continuous Resolutions, which is a way of avoiding appropriations negotiations. That funding expires next week, and since Congress has failed to send 11 spending bills to the President, we will see a package of all remaining 11 bills combined into one huge omnibus spending bill. Appropriations bills should have been done months ago, but the President has signed only one of the 12 appropriations bills, which funds the Department of Defense for next year. Doing them all in one group is the wrong way to proceed. I prefer Congress complete the bills one by one so the process is much more transparent; however, I will be paying close attention to additional spending before I support the omnibus bill.

"The energy bill is another high priority. As it stands now, it does set fuel economy standards and requires more production of biofuels, but it falls short without the renewable electricity standard and the tax package from the House bill. I believe the final bill, while imperfect, can reduce the nation's dependence on oil and curb emissions contributing to global warming.

"Without immediate attention to the Alternative Minimum Tax, thousands of Delawareans will be subject to confusing tax policies and late returns. Congress should immediately enact a short-term patch to protect unintended taxpayers from the AMT, while negotiating a permanent reformation to simplify the tax code."

Another stop-gap measure in lieu of reauthorization is SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) funding. Rep. Castle has continuously supported reauthorizing SCHIP for 5-years and expanding it to reach another 4 million kids in need, bringing the total to 10 million children.

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