

Congress will have its hands full (The News Journal)

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By Congressman Mike Castle

I would like to thank Delawareans for their confidence in allowing me to continue representing them in Washington. We have a true sense of community in our state and it is a privilege for me to ensure our voices are heard in Congress.

Delaware

voters expect their legislators to practice the highest levels of ethics, civility and respect -- keeping the focus on the needs of people, not political parties. We also demand the highest levels of ethics and government transparency and we should expect the same from those we send to Washington.

I congratulate Senators Obama and Biden and look forward to working with them both in Washington.

Delawareans

are excited to have one of our own as vice president of the United States and I agree it is truly an honor for our small state to see Joe in this important role.

This

election was a challenge for Republicans locally and nationally. While long overdue, in my opinion, voters across the nation have begun to demand more government transparency, accountability and bipartisanship from Washington. Republicans should return to demanding fiscal sensibility and protecting every tax dollar we spend. In recent years, federal spending has grown too fast. We have to re-evaluate how to keep government programs viable by spending the taxpayer money more efficiently; otherwise, we threaten the sustainability of these programs for future generations.

Now

that election season has come to an end, the focus in Washington should be on re-establishing economic security and creating more job opportunities through innovation and new training programs. I have worked with both parties on these measures because Delaware's economic health is paramount. This means job growth, investments and incentives

for businesses to come here and to thrive. Our economic security is also reflected on our infrastructure -- easing traffic congestion on I-95, promoting tourism at our beaches and recreational areas, and continuing to modernize our impressive Air Force Base in Dover.

For the next two years in Washington, I will urge Congress to focus on extending health care, access to quality education, and finding a path to energy independence.

I am optimistic about the progress being made in Iraq and seeing the Iraqi government expand its role to provide for its own security and infrastructure. This trend enables the reduction of our troop levels in Iraq, which is currently taking place and scheduled to continue.

I will persist in my calls for a new diplomatic strategy, which I feel is imperative to achieving further and long-term stability in the region, and support an increased commitment to using our military, economic, political and diplomatic resources to end the violence in Afghanistan.

Here at home, we have the momentum in Congress for finally creating an inclusive health care system where every American can access quality, affordable health care, and where health care spending is controlled.

Recently I lent my support to legislation, which I believe will play an important role in the health care reform "dialogue," and is the only bipartisan and bicameral proposal that has been introduced to date.

It provides the needed mechanisms and overarching structure to insure everyone, but allows the private market to still be around. This bill, the Healthy Americans Act, would give every American the power to choose a comprehensive private health insurance plan that is not tied to employment, which continues if you lose your job, and which is comparable to what members of Congress enjoy now; incentivizes prevention, wellness and disease management; creates a system of tax benefits and premium reductions to ensure every American can afford coverage; and prohibits pre-existing health problems from being used to determine eligibility or the price paid for insurance. While we make the transition to providing universal coverage, we must be able to continue to rely on the many state and federal safety net programs.

I am committed to the goals of No Child Left Behind, and continue to work with students, parents, educators and administrators to develop solutions that ensure we put kids first. I will pursue reforms, based on their feedback, to better measure individual student growth and improve graduation rates while addressing the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners. We also must hold colleges and universities accountable for outrageous tuition hikes and reduce the barriers to higher education. Education is the best route to personal economic security and the key to maintaining America's global leadership.

A top priority for Congress in 2009, even though gas prices are dropping, is reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

The truth is that we need a comprehensive energy policy for the nation, which includes solar, wind, nuclear, domestic production, biofuels that aren't based on food crops, conservation and efficiency, hybrid technologies, renewable energy standards and advanced batteries.

Delaware is a leader in many exciting initiatives and I have faith in American innovation and technology -- this is the way we will improve how we use and produce energy domestically and reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

Across the country, voters are demanding the same standards we embrace here in Delaware: integrity, open government and civility.

My commitment to Delaware has always been to put people above politics to find common ground.

With the collaboration of ideas and willingness to compromise, we can make the tough decisions and move the country forward.

Together, we can make progress on the most important issues of our time.