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McMorris Holds Agriculture Forum with Chairman Bob Goodlatte



McMorris was joined by House Agriculture Chairman Bob Goodlatte for an agriculture forum in Ritzville. Over a hundred people from the agriculture community attended the event and expressed serious concerns about the future of farming in Eastern Washington. Concerns about county loan rates, fertilizer costs, transportation costs, water reliability, and fuel costs were all conveyed. Agriculture is important to the region's economy and it is clear that relief must be provided.

High fuel and fertilizer costs were the top concerns that were raised at the forum. Our farmers have been hit especially hard by the increase in fuel prices and continue to face tough economic times. Farmers from Ritzville to Dayton reported that high fuel costs are hurting their bottom line and their ability to compete.

Loan rates are another big concern that needs to be addressed. For the wheat growers in particular, loan operations have exhausted most of the cost saving options and they are having difficulties maintaining their current operations. Higher commodity prices, disaster relief through disaster aid or counter-cyclical, and new tax credits were all proposed as possible solutions and will be further examined. McMorris is working with Chairman Goodlatte and the USDA to help address some of the concerns.

Attention Seniors: New Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits

In just a few months, Medicare Part D, the prescription drug benefit Congress passed as part of the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, will start to bring relief to millions of seniors who struggle with the high price of prescription drugs.

Everyone eligible for Medicare is eligible for prescription drug coverage starting January 1, 2006. Every senior will be able to find coverage that meets his or her individual needs. Consumers can choose from at least 10 national plans that cover brand name or generic drugs.

Medicare will pay nearly all drug bills for seniors with limited means. About one-third of seniors will be eligible for a Medicare drug benefit with little or no premiums, low deductibles, and no gaps in coverage. Those with the lowest incomes will be assigned plans and will pay no premiums or deductibles.

Key dates to remember:

* **November 15th** - first day to register for plans.

* **January 1st** - new coverage takes effect.

* **May 15th** - last day to sign up without penalty

Visit www.medicare.gov for more information.

McMorris Votes to Update and Modernize the Endangered Species Act

The House of Representatives voted in favor of the Threatened Endangered Species Act

(TESRA) of 2005. McMorris, a member of the Resources Committee, is an original co-sponsor of the bill that will improve and update the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

“After 30 years we finally have a commonsense solution that will facilitate the relationship between protecting endangered species and using our natural resources and land,” said McMorris. “It is time to move away from burdensome regulations, lawsuits and punitive settlements and focus on using objective scientific standards, creating stronger roles for local and state governments, and increasing accountability.”

TESRA fixes the long-outstanding problems of the ESA by (1) focusing on species recovery (2) providing incentives (3) increasing openness and accountability (4) strengthening scientific standards (5) creating bigger roles for state and local governments (6) compensating private property owners for lost use of land and (7) eliminating dysfunctional critical habitat designations. [Read More](#)

McMorris Works to Provide Quality Care to Veterans

McMorris took key steps in the fight to protect Veteran’s health care in the Walla Walla region. Last week her office participated in a Local Advisory Panel meeting that reviewed seven Business Plan options regarding the medical facility.

“One of my top priorities for residents of our community is ensuring access to quality and affordable health care,” said McMorris. “Veterans’ health care is an important part of that. We need to honor our commitment to those who sacrificed for our country. Because of the crucial location of the Walla Walla veterans hospital and the necessary care it provides, I am working with health care providers in our region, local officials, my colleagues in the Pacific Northwest, and Secretary James Nicholson to ensure continued availability of care.”

McMorris spoke with Senator Larry Craig, Chairman of the Veteran’s Affairs Committee in U.S. Senate, concerning veteran health care needs in Walla Walla and the surrounding service areas of Northeast Oregon and parts of Idaho. He assured her that he is committed to working to find a good solution for health care in this area.

“As we move forward, these next few months are pivotal in influencing Secretary Nicholson’s decision as to the type of health care that is provided in this area. I feel strongly that we as a community need to coalesce around a small number of options, and present them to the Secretary with a united voice. I look forward to the joining with the LAP and the local task force in furthering those options that will ensure a continuum of care.”

McMorris Unveils New Plan to Combat Crime in Eastern Washington

The Congresswoman announced the details of a new crime plan at a town hall meeting held in Spokane. The crime plan focuses on overcrowded jails; homeland and border security; meth and the war on drugs; and empowering communities to fight crime.

McMorris, along with representatives from the law enforcement community, highlighted some of the specific problems facing Eastern Washington. Today in Spokane there are over 40,000 warrants that have not been served because of the lack of jail space. The use of methamphetamines is a growing epidemic in the country, especially in the Pacific Northwest, and comprehensive legislation must be drafted to help address the growing struggle against meth. Our Northern Borders must remain secured and law enforcement agencies need to be provided with all the border security personnel, technology, and resources they need to ensure our national security. Finally, citizens need to be empowered with the necessary tools so they can be fully informed of any potential dangers in their communities.

“Communities have demonstrated all across this state that broad collaboration, with active and informed public participation, results in more effective strategies and efforts to address drug-related crime,” said town hall panelist Steve Freng of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. “Spokane is exemplary in this regard, and we are privileged to be a partner in their accomplishments.”

A complete copy of the crime plan can be found online at www.mcmorris.house.gov/issues.shtml

High Fuel Prices Hurt Eastern Washington Economy

People in Eastern Washington continue to experience the hardship associated with high fuel prices. This problem has only been made worse by the devastating impacts of Hurricane Katrina and Rita.

One of McMorris' top priorities in Congress is to provide economic growth for our region. This goal becomes increasingly difficult when farmers, small business owners and customers are paying nearly three dollars a gallon for fuel. Crude oil prices are expected to rise by 34 percent this winter and natural gas costs are expected to increase 71 percent.

Work is being done at the federal level to address our rising energy prices; unfortunately

there are no quick fixes to provide immediate relief. A balance must be struck between rising consumption and the need for energy conservation and efficiency.

In order to achieve long-term solutions to the rising gas prices, we must ultimately lower our dependency on foreign oil and continue to develop renewable energy projects.

Price-gouging by companies will not be tolerated. Our economy functions because customers have faith that the prices they pay for goods and services are fair market values—and the price of gas should be no exception. Visit <http://gaswatch.energy.gov> to report suspected price gouging.

Legislative Update

The House of Representatives passed the following key bills since August:

H.R. 3668 – Student Grant Hurricane and Disaster Relief Act
H.R. 3672 – TANF Emergency Response and Recovery Act of 2005
H.R. 3673 - The Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act
H.R. 230 - National Small Business Regulatory Assistance Act
H.R. 250 - Manufacturing Technology Competitiveness Act
H.R. 3132 - Children’s Safety Act of 2005
H.R. 889 - Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act
H.R. 2123 - School Readiness Act
H.R. 3402 - Department of Justice Appropriations Authorization Act
H.R. 3824 - Threatened Endangered Species Recovery Act
H.R. 3893 - Gasoline for America Security (GAS) Act

Out and About in Eastern Washington

McMorris spent the first two weeks of October holding meetings and attending events on issues important to Eastern Washington. Some of the highlights include:

- Agriculture Forum in Ritzville
- Toured Hopkins Wind Farm in Dayton
- Toured SOS Clinic and Walla Walla State Penitentiary
- Met with Walla Walla School Board
- Awarded Jubilee of Liberty Medals to eight veterans
- Gave opening speech at ALS walk in Spokane Valley
- Eastern Washington Veteran’s Taskforce Meeting

- Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits Press Conference
- Opening remarks at Wildfire conference: *Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan Procedures and Financing*
- Forward Fairchild meeting
- WSU Plant Bio Sciences Building Dedication
- Dedication of new College of Education facility at WSU

www.mcmorris.house.gov