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SEVENTH DISTRICT, GEORGIA

COMMITTEE ON RULES

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
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August 6, 2014

Dear Friend:

It's hard to believe that another school year is upon us. I hope that you will be able to make the best of your final days of summer! I plan to do the same, and with that in mind, later in this letter you will find the dates, times, and locations of another round of town hall meetings. There are only a few months left to accomplish all that you and I hope for in 2014, and I know this round of meetings will provide an opportunity to share goals and expectations.

Before we get into "what's next," however, I'd like to take a minute to look back. While I share all the frustrations that the rest of the country has about a "do nothing Senate," the House has been incredibly focused when it comes to jobs and the economy, and I'd like to share with you just a few of the things that could make a difference for America if only the Senate would decide to act on them.

Supporting American Jobs

The House of Representatives has focused all year on supporting American workers and American job creators. In fact, the House has passed nearly 50 bills this Congress that would boost employment opportunities in America. While a few of those bills have gone to the President's desk to become the law of the land—such as the Water Resources Reform and Development Act, the Farm Bill, the Student Loan Certainty Act—many other important bills are languishing in the Senate and need attention. I might understand the Senate delay if these were partisan Republican bills, but many of these languishing bills were passed with the support of more than three-quarters of the House of Representatives—which means large bipartisan support from both parties. If you'd like to see the complete list of "what could be" if only the Senate would act, visit www.speaker.gov/jobs, but be prepared to share my great frustration.

Focusing on the positive, however, I want to highlight a few big "wins" for American workers this year. One is H.R. 5021, the "Highway and Transportation Funding Act of 2014," which the House approved by an overwhelming vote of 367-55. It provides funding for the Highway Trust Fund without adding a single dollar to the deficit. What's more, this legislation addresses the reality of future funding shortfalls in the trust fund by advocating for states to have more power over transportation funds and transportation projects. There are dozens of ongoing and planned construction projects in Gwinnett and Forsyth County that rely on these federal dollars, and House passage of H.R. 5021 removes the uncertainty surrounding another year of funding. Absent any action, the trust fund was set to start slowing payments to state projects beginning

(over please)

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this August, and I am proud that the House came together to pass a bill that no doubt prevents thousands of Seventh District jobs from being put in jeopardy in the height of the summer construction season. To be clear, it's not just construction jobs that are served in this bill. Having a functioning and safe transportation system has important implications for the economic vitality of the entire Seventh District of Georgia and beyond. It is my great hope that by the time you read this letter, the Senate will have approved the House bill and the President will have already signed it into law.

There's more good news on the horizon. Though I believe the Administration continues to stifle American energy production with unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation, it was recently announced that the eastern seaboard is being reopened to offshore oil and gas exploration. For folks in the Seventh District and throughout Georgia, this could mean an abundance of affordable, reliable energy and thousands of new American jobs. I joined a number of my colleagues in sending a letter encouraging the President to continue to recognize the critical role American energy exploration plays in the lives of Georgia families, and will continue pushing him to further expand both energy exploration and production right here at home.

Another positive step for American workers, and most especially for Georgia's economy, was the passage of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act (WRRDA). There may not be very many areas of agreement in Congress, but one thing we can all agree on is that we need to move forward to prioritize the development of critical water resources infrastructure and policy that will solve our nation's water supply issues. WRRDA will finally allow us to do that by significantly decreasing the red tape that used to hold up the start of water projects for decades at a time, eliminating a backlog of outdated projects that no longer have value, and returning the power to manage water projects to the states. For Georgia, that specifically means winning the fight to protect Lake Lanier's water supply and ensuring that we can finally begin the long awaited construction on the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project (SHEP).

SHEP first began in 1987 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started evaluating the environmental impacts of a potential dredging project at the Port of Savannah. The State of Georgia was already looking ahead to the future of shipping in the 1980s and realized a great need to accommodate the projected increase of larger and larger container ships expected to unload cargo along the eastern seaboard in the twenty-first century. On June 10, 2014, the vision became reality when President Obama declared in WRRDA's signing statement that SHEP would finally begin under this law. SHEP will deepen the 42 foot Port of Savannah to 47 feet, increasing the size and operation of the Port to one of the largest, most industrious, and profitable in the country. It is projected to create more than 11,000 jobs nationwide, 3,700 jobs in Georgia and South Carolina, and more than 2,400 jobs in and around Savannah. The projected economic benefits derived from the increased transportation efficiencies are estimated to result in more than \$174 million of additional annual revenue. I was proud to work with my colleagues to make sure that SHEP's construction can begin immediately, and I look forward to the project's completion.

Finally, I want to highlight another great bipartisan achievement, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This summer, the House and Senate worked together to pass this bill, which will provide much needed assistance to the many Americans who are still struggling to find work. The WIOA streamlined and modernized our federal workforce development

programs in an effort to get more Americans the skills they need to be successful in today's competitive economy. For too long, we have wasted money on ineffective workforce training programs that weren't focused on linking America's high-skilled workforce with the needs of American employers. WIOA fixes that problem by better targeting our financial assistance and eliminating programs that aren't working. There are far too many jobs going unfilled these days due to a lack of qualified candidates, and I was proud to support the WIOA so that we can put more Americans back to work.

Bringing America's Voice Back into Congress

I have always believed that a bad process leads to a bad product, and for far too long politics and posturing has trumped policy and principle when it comes to crafting legislation. I won't try to tell you that politics and posturing are gone from the House, but I will tell you with certainty that we have opened up the process to allow more members to participate and more ideas to be heard. That has resulted in success for the House in reducing spending, approving reasonable budgets, passing responsible Appropriations bills, and more. The Senate—with its closed process—hasn't fared as well. Would you believe that individual members of the minority party in the House have been able to offer more amendments than all Republican members combined in the Senate this year? It is shameful, but true.

We haven't opened up the process altruistically in the House. We've done it because, as the Constitution envisioned, it works. In 2014, for the fourth straight year, I was honored to join House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) to pass a House budget resolution in advance of the April 15 statutory deadline. What's more, this year, through the leadership of House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-KY), we have passed 11 of 12 appropriations bills out of the House Appropriations Committee, and seven have already passed the full House. This is the first time since I have been serving you in Congress that so many appropriations bills have passed out of the Appropriations Committee.

For instance, just a few weeks ago we passed an Energy and Water Appropriations bill that reduced spending by \$50 million from last year's level yet also included critical policy provisions for Georgia, such as an amendment that ensures the Administration will continue advancing one of the most important jobs generators in the entire state, SHEP. We also passed the annual bill that funds Commerce, Justice, and Science programs and successfully reduced \$398 million from last year's total. This bill also included key provisions that restrict federal funding for cities that refuse to enforce immigration law and provide additional resources for America's veterans.

There is no reason why Congress cannot complete its work on time through regular order, if we only work together. It's so much easier to pass these bills and prevent them from becoming controversial when every member of Congress is able to have a voice in the process. We must make tough choices about which programs to support, but governing is about making those tough choices and doing what is best for the American people. That is why I am proud that the House has made it a priority to bring these tough choices forward for a vote. Opening up the process to more voices is good governance that matches up with our Georgia values and also provides certainty and greater transparency in how our government is funded. To see

its importance, one need only look at the U.S. Senate, which has failed to pass even a single Appropriations bill for years, a fact that would shock and appall the drafters of our Constitution.

Working for American Students

The future of this country always depends on the next generation, and the House is doing everything that we can to ensure that opportunity and freedom are made available to all. One important legislative victory this year came with the passage of H.R. 10, the “Success and Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Act.” For years, the federal government has provided states with competitive grants to fund the creation of charter schools, and as most of you already know, the Seventh District is home to some of the nation’s most impressive charter schools. For instance, the Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science and Technology (GSMST) was ranked as the second best charter school in the country last year. There was room for improvement within our existing federal charter schools programs, however, and that’s why I was proud to support H.R. 10. This important piece of legislation streamlines and modernizes a number of federal charter school programs, and refocuses funding to encourage the expansion and replication of high quality charter schools. It also gives state and local leaders the flexibility to pursue groundbreaking charter school models if that’s what is best for our students. I look forward to seeing students in the Seventh District benefit from these improvements.

We’ve talked about our successes this year, and now I want to spend a moment discussing what is coming up on our Congressional agenda.

Reforming the Veterans Health Administration

In an effort to make good on our promises to America’s veterans, the House and Senate convened a special Conference Committee to work out the differences between two different House and Senate bills that aim to reform our Veterans Health Administration. This legislation is not only good for all of our nation’s veterans and the taxpayers who support the best health care possible for them, but it is also especially good for our veterans and their families right here in Georgia.

For Georgia, the legislation will specifically work to prevent the four tragic patient deaths at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, three of which the VA Inspector General’s recent report linked to gross negligence and mismanagement of patients seeking treatment. It will also prevent those found responsible for such mismanagement, like former Atlanta VA Medical Center Director James Clark, from receiving bonuses in any year in which our veterans suffered due to VA misconduct. Additionally, the legislation will recommend that those found complicit in the mismanagement of our veterans’ health care at the Atlanta VA Medical Center now and in the future receive no special immunity from being fired. We cannot afford to let our veterans down. Though the VA has already taken steps to allow veterans increased access to immediate treatment outside the VA system, our veterans are looking to us to restore their trust in the VA’s health care system and return the Veterans Health Administration to the greatest health care system in the world so that there will never again come a time when a veteran is abandoned by the VA. The compromise language that the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees have worked out is an important step forward, and I hope that by the time you read this letter

the President will have followed Congress' lead and signed this bill into law.

An Immigration Crisis that Reckless Politics Created

What happens if you tell the world, "America's immigration and visa system will remain broken for businesses and adults, but for children under age 18, the Administration is creating a special path to legal status?" The answer is the most predictable crisis on the border that America has ever seen, as tens of thousands of children are being sent to America by parents who believe America's immigration laws have dramatically changed. Despite what I believe to be the President's unilateral declarations, America's immigration laws in fact have not changed, and these children must be sent home and reunited with their parents. Only by applying for a visa through the statutory and legal process can any family be welcomed to America's shores.

Let me be clear: these children are victims in this process. Whether reckless political speech, misinformation and lies from human smugglers, an errant rumor mill, or more, children are the ones who are being put at risk, and I am committed to doing all I can to return these children to their home countries quickly and safely. In fact, I believe that the faster we can return a newly smuggled child, the faster we can put an end to the rumor that America's laws have changed.

Let me be clear once again: We must enforce the laws that are on the books. Certainly, too, we must change any laws that are failing us. We must ensure that America remains the most economically prosperous nation on the planet as we move forward in this new century. Only the President can enforce the law, and America must demand that he do that. Only Congress can examine and propose changes to the law, and America must demand that Congress engage in that. With decisive action that enforces current law and a commitment from Congress to make any necessary changes to make America stronger, we can end this new border crisis as quickly as it began. Reckless talk began this crisis, but responsible behavior will end it.

How to Become More Involved

Of course, these are not our only priorities for this Fall, and I know that you probably have concerns that you would like Congress to address. I hope you know that you can always write a letter to me at the address on this letterhead. I can also be reached via email (woodall@mail.house.gov) or on my webpage (woodall.house.gov/contact-me). I look forward to hearing directly from you. And to that end, I also want you to know about my upcoming Town Hall Meetings schedule.

TOWN HALL MEETING SCHEDULE

Thursday, August 21st
7:00PM – 7:30PM
Telephone Town Hall
Call-in Number: (877) 229-8493
Passcode: 17849

Monday, August 25th

7:00PM – 8:00PM
Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center
75 Langley Drive
Lawrenceville, GA 30046

Tuesday, August 26th

7:00PM – 8:00PM
University of North Georgia – Cumming Campus
300 Aquatic Circle, Room 125
Cumming, Georgia 30040

Thursday, August 28th

7:00PM – 7:30PM
Telephone Town Hall
Call-in Number: (877) 229-8493
Passcode: 17849

Congress works best only when it accurately reflects the voice of the American people. It is an honor and a privilege to serve you, and I look forward to our working together to make America and our Seventh District community even better tomorrow than it is today.

Sincerely,



Rob Woodall
Member of Congress

P.S. Please sign-up for my e-newsletter at <http://woodall.house.gov> if you'd like to stay informed about what's happening in Washington, D.C., and around the 7th District. You may unsubscribe at any time.