

What a week it has been. I had the great privilege of attending President Bush's final State of the Union Address on Monday. It was thrilling to be in attendance for this annual speech to the nation.

I was pleased to join my fellow legislators tonight to hear directly from the President his agenda for the coming year. The President laid out a number of thoughtful initiatives aimed at revitalizing our slowing economy, ending wasteful government spending, securing our borders and protecting our freedoms at home and abroad. I was encouraged to hear that he is committed to tax relief for American families and that he will do his part to end the gluttony of earmarks in the appropriations process. His bi-partisan tone is much needed at this time, and I look forward to working with my Democrat colleagues in the coming year to come up with fair and transparent solutions to the challenges we face as a nation.

This past week also saw the passage of the economic stimulus package. I was pleased to vote for the stimulus package because it was a bipartisan economic growth package that will benefit hard-working American families. I have long believed that tax relief should be the centerpiece of any economic stimulus package and I was very pleased that Congressional leaders focused on putting money back into the pockets of middle-class families, thereby allowing Americans, and not the federal government, to choose how best to help grow our economy. We have a long road ahead of us, but I am confident that the steps we have taken this week will help keep Americans in their homes, employed and able to provide for their families.

I also joined several of my fellow Republicans to address the issue of earmark reform this past week. Wasteful government spending is harmful to our democracy and threatens to undermine the trust voters have put in us as their elected representatives. In a slowing economy it is important that the Legislative and Executive branches of the federal government show restraint

when spending the public's money. That is why I was proud to co-sponsor the Earmark Reform Concurrent Resolution which places a complete moratorium on all earmarks, including ones put forward by the administration, until a joint select committee has completed a thorough review of earmarking rules and procedures. I am confident that we can solve this problem and bring about transparency to the appropriations process.

It was definitely a busy week. Between the State of the Union and a number of key pieces of legislation there was much going on around our nation's Capitol. I am hopeful that as we get further into the session we can really start to take a number of key issues on in greater depth. I think we need to be talking more about health care and education. I think we need to get serious about illegal immigration. Thankfully, we have a lot of dedicated men and women serving in the Congress and I believe that we will be able to get things done for you in the coming months.

I hope you all had a good week and I look forward to reporting back to you next week.