News from Representative Alan Lowenthal

The 47th Flyer
News for California's 47th Congressional District from Congressman Alan Lowenthal

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October 5, 2013

This past week was marked with two important events that I wanted to talk with you about. Consequently, this week's edition of The 47th Flyer will focus on only these two events. No "Congress U" this week, no "Upcoming Events", and no survey question. Just you and me and these two events.

The first event is the shutdown of the federal government, something that has not occurred in nearly two decades. This event is the culmination of nearly three years of political brinksmanship. Below you can read more of my thoughts on the shutdown.

The second event this week was the opening of enrollment on health care insurance exchanges across the nation created by the Affordable Care Act. Thousands upon thousands of Americans that never thought they would be able to afford insurance signed up in the first few days of enrollment. Coverage obtained through the exchanges, such as California's CoveredCA.com, will not take effect until Jan. 1, 2014, but I am glad to know that the program is off to a good start. Below, you can read more or my thoughts on the health care reform and more information about CoveredCA.

A Government Shutdown Hurts Everyone

At 12:01 a.m. on October 1, the federal government shutdown because Congress failed to pass legislation funding government operations. The current shutdown has its origins from 2010, when, due to a lack of bipartisan consensus on a budget, Congress had to pass a "continuing resolution," or CR. These CR's have allowed the government to continue operating at existing funding levels, but do not deal with long-term budgetary issues or map out any kind of long-term spending plan. For many years, due mainly to a lack of budget consensus between the two chambers of Congress, CRs have been used in place of formal budgets.

In 2011, as Congress prepared to deal with another debt limit increase, House Republicans said they would not increase the limit without major spending cuts. The deal that came out of the negotiations eventually led to, and triggered, sequestration earlier this year — harsh $1.1 trillion across-the-board spending cuts over eight years on nearly all federal programs.

Earlier this year, House Republicans passed a $986 billion budget—which codified the sequestration funding levels—while Senate Democrats had passed a $1.058 trillion budget. Democrats tried to move forward with a conference committee to create a budget acceptable to both chambers, but my Republicans colleagues blocked the move. Though this stalled the formal budget process, government agencies and departments still needed to be funded, and required a CR to be passed.

But getting a CR out of the House is not that easy. The GOP leadership has adhered to the so-called Hastert Rule, which states that the Speaker will not bring a

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vote to the floor unless a majority of GOP members will approve the bill. Unfortunately this has resulted in eliminating almost any chance of Republicans and Democrats working together.

The most disappointing fact about the Hastert rule is that I firmly believe that if a clean CR were to be brought to the floor, something Speaker Boehner has refused to do--there would be enough Members of Congress that would vote for such a measure and it would pass the House.

Recently, House Republicans passed a CR, adding an amendment that sought to defund the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare. It was promptly rejected by the Democrat-controlled Senate. The House Republicans introduced another measure, this time tying a delay in implementation of the ACA to the CR. The measure passed the House, but was rejected by the Senate Democrats, returning the CR back to the House. A third round saw the House Republicans tying another ACA delay to the CR. This was again rejected by the Senate and sent back. During this time the midnight Oct. 1 funding deadline passed, shutting down the government.

Since then, the GOP leadership has tried to carve out exemptions to the CR allowing such things as the national parks and monuments to stay open. This piecemeal approach does not address the critical overarching reality that a large part of the government remains shuttered shutdown.

The simple short-term answer is to let the full House vote on a short-term CR bill without any amendments or riders. A simple up-or-down vote to re-open the government at the level of funding proposed by the Republicans.

I want to point out that this would be a compromise. As requested by House Republicans, the House Democrats have already agreed to the lower $987 billion CR level.

I predict this up-down vote will happen in the end; and when it does, the CR will pass with bipartisan support and the government will reopen.

Every day that the federal government remains closed means more families, students, veterans, and businesses do not have access to the federal services they need or depend on. Access to Head Start programs, small business loans, veterans' benefits, and social security – these are all critical programs and services to the people of my district and our nation.

This situation is irrational in its conception and terrible in its likely effect. This is not what my constituents sent me here to do. I came here to serve people and work on rational solutions to the problems facing my constituents and the nation.

Congress needs to move past this crisis and work together for a long-term solution. We must get back to the formal budget process and that is going to require negotiation and compromise on both sides.

The American people deserve better. It is our job, duty, and responsibility to return Congress to rational, reasoned, and collaborative governance.

Health Insurance Exchange Enrollment Kicks Off

I was pleased to hear that Covered California, which is the state's health insurance marketplace created by the federal Affordable Care Act, saw strong consumer response on the opening day of enrollment, Tuesday, Oct. 1. It was the first day that California consumers were able to shop for, compare, and enroll in affordable health plans or apply for no-cost or low-cost Medi-Cal coverage through the state's new health insurance marketplace.

With coverage starting Jan. 1, 2014, Covered California is tasked with helping Californians determine whether they are eligible for premium assistance that will be

available on a sliding-scale basis to reduce insurance costs or whether they are eligible for low-cost or no-cost Medi-Cal.

Consumers can then compare health insurance plans and choose the plan that works best for their health needs and budget.

On the first day the Covered California website, CoveredCA.com, went live, nearly 700,000 Californians visited the site. Also by 3 p.m. that day, Covered California had logged in some 17,000 phone calls to its Service Centers.

Much like all major government program rollouts in the past, the rollout of the insurance marketplaces has not been without some glitches. The CoveredCA.com site experienced problems at various times during the rollout but is expected to be upgraded this weekend to solve these glitches.

October 1 was merely the starting line, not the finish line, for those seeking health coverage through Covered California. Consumers will have the ability to enroll through Dec. 15, 2013, in order to ensure coverage starting Jan. 1, 2014, and after that they can still get insurance until open enrollment concludes on March 31, 2014.

The Covered California website is located at: www.CoveredCA.com

You can reach a Covered California Service Center at: **1-800-300-1506**

Thank you,

Alan Lowenthal

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

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