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Congressman discusses taxes, unemployment in CSRA area

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By ROB NOVIT
Senior writer

Aiken County's unemployment rate of 7.4 percent, the lowest in South Carolina, is good news said 2nd District Congressman Joe Wilson but he's concerned about neighboring counties like Allendale and Hampton.

"Unemployment is a real crisis in South Carolina. In Allendale, the rate is 20 to 24 percent," Wilson said at a town hall meeting at Oakwood-Windsor Elementary School Wednesday. "I will do all I can to help people in those counties who are seeking employment. Hopefully we'll have a Congress in the future that finds a bipartisan way to do that."

The Republican congressman invited three people to talk briefly about their efforts regarding employment - Fred Humes, executive director of the Aiken-Edgefield Economic Development Partnership; Tina Barfield, director of Aiken's One-Stop Center; and Adam Jordan of the S C Department of Commerce.

Wilson is seeking re-election against Democrat Rob Miller, who collected 46 percent of the vote in losing to Wilson in 2008.

In times of recession, said Wilson, presidents John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush cut taxes, allowing people to keep their own money. He said President Barack Obama should do so as well and also should not allow the Bush cuts earlier in the decade to expire. If people had to pay more if those cuts do expire, Congress, in effect, would be raising taxes, and that would be the violation of a pledge, Wilson said.

"It's not rocket science," he said. "We need to let people keep their own money. Small businesses will be able to grow with more customer liquidity to buy products. Eighty percent of the jobs are small business, and that's the real challenge before us. Do we want the growth of the private or the public sector? I want small businesses to be successful."

Humes said his organization helps recruit industry to Aiken and Edgefield counties, including working with the Savannah River Site and the Department of Energy to attract new missions. Yet, 75 percent of new jobs in those counties come from existing industries and business, and he and his staff work hard to support them, too, he said.

Wilson drew smiles when he called Humes a "folk hero" for his efforts.

He also praised Barfield for the services provided by her office. While the One-Stop does process unemployment claims, Barfield said, her staff also assists people in returning to the workforce and as needed, provides retraining for those who require new skills.

The Aiken County School District's adult education program holds classes at the One-Stop office to help people earn a GED.

The congressman also weighed in on his frustration with the Obama-led health care reform measure, reiterating his belief that it will hurt small businesses and cost jobs and lead doctors and nurses to retire earlier than planned.

Wilson remains confident that Congress may have the ability after the November election to repeal the legislation in the future and replace it with common-sense reform measures, he said.

On another issue, the cap and trade plan proposed by the president is nothing more than a national energy tax, Wilson said.

"It would cause electricity rates to skyrocket," he said, calling that a threat to health and safety. "It would result in losing more jobs, and many businesses wold have to relocated because of the cost of energy."

Contact Rob Novit at rnovit@aikenstandard.com

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