

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 29, 2010—The Franklin Center for Global Policy and Exchange hosted Congressman Rush Holt (D-NJ) at a 2010 “Benevolus Series” policy discussion on Thursday, April 29, 2010, in the Longworth House Office Building. This is the second of its kind this year, the first was with Congressman John Larson (D-CT).

The Congressman is serving his sixth term representing the 12th district of New Jersey in the U.S. House of Representatives and currently sits on the House Committee on Education and Labor, the House Committee on Natural Resources and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He is a good friend of the Franklin Center and attended the TransAmerica Conference in Ottawa, Canada, last summer.

Congressman Holt opened the discussion by saying it has been an interesting 111th Congress, and believes the year thus far has been quite productive, despite some public perception. Because of the massive news coverage behind health care, the Congressman believes many Americans lost sight of other reforms that had been enacted by the Congress like credit card reform and work place protection.

He then spoke at length about health care and why he believes its passage is historic and memorable. As a whole, he said the passage of health care will change the way Americans look at medical treatment, just like Social Security changed the way people looked at retirement. He stressed that the health care bill was not a reform to the existing system, but rather an expansion that gives millions the opportunity to find reliable coverage.

Congressman Holt is specifically looking forward to the increase of primary care doctors and the creation of accountable care organizations. More primary care doctors will give patients a better starting point when looking to treat an ailment, rather than going to a specialist immediately, he said. This new benefit and the creation of accountable care organizations will also give Medicare users additional places for general care.

The Congressman then switched topics to discussing the intelligence war and the difficulties in finding a balance between protecting American civil liberties and combating terrorism. He discussed how he is somewhat concerned by what he views as an overly suspicious mentality that some Americans have adopted over the past few years and hopes it will not damage the reputation of the U.S.

Vice Chairwoman of the Franklin Center Ambassador Constance Morella then changed the conversation to immigration and asked Congressman Holt about the recent immigration bill passed in Arizona. The Congressman admitted that he didn't think federal reform would happen this year, but believes it may be a possibility. The lack of national support for Arizona's actions, he thought, might propel immigration legislation forward and into committee. One concern the Congressman did express about immigration was the potential growth of fear and suspicion of other Americans and visitors, which he likened to the McCarthy era.

Congressman Holt, Ambassador Morella and Vice Chairman of the Franklin Center Ambassador William Hughes then recalled their years in Congress together and how they believed Congress was more likely to work across party lines in the past. All three mentioned that the growth of electronic media has become a detriment to bipartisanship. Ambassador Morella also noted that the increased number of candidates running in primaries has driven them to ideological extremes well before the general election. Congressman Holt acknowledged bipartisanship didn't happen with health care and doesn't see it happening in the near future. All three agreed being collegial is becoming even more and more difficult.

The Congressman closed the discussion on a note about trade, saying it was not a topic he heard about much in his district and suggesting there was little momentum for passing broad trade legislation in the immediate future.

