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Postmaster Agrees to Major Renovations in Weldon

This week I announced that the Weldon Post Office will soon get some needed improvements. Anyone who's been to Weldon's Post Office knows it needs a major renovation.

Last month, I wrote to U.S. Postmaster General John E. Potter to urge for improvements to Weldon's Post Office at 401 Washington Avenue. Among the problems I noted were chipping and discolored interior and exterior paint, loose and unstable flooring, damaged woodwork, dim lighting and the poor condition of the parking lot.

The Postmaster contacted my office this week after agreeing to repave and re-stripe the parking lot, clean and repaint the exterior, provide new exterior signage and improve the landscaping. Work is scheduled to begin next week and should be completed within a month. Cost estimates for the improvements were not immediately available.

The House recently approved my legislation naming Weldon's Post in honor of longtime educator and civic leader Dock M. Brown. The legislation is pending passage in the Senate and it is anticipated that the bill will be signed into law by President Bush within a month.

It means the Post Office will soon have a new look to go with the new name.

Mr. Brown taught history at Weldon High School and Eastman High School for 24 years and served as principal of Pittman High School for 10 years. He also served on the County Board of Health as well as the Board of Mental Health. He was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the State Mental Health Association for his tireless dedication to the issue of Mental Health.

Mr. Brown also served as a Halifax County Commissioner for eight years and in the North Carolina House of Representative for two years. Additionally, he served as a Weldon Town Board Commissioner, Trustee at Elizabeth City State University, member of the State Agriculture Committee and on the Superior Court Judge Selection Commission.

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House Slashes Handouts for Oil Companies, Protects Environment

The House approved legislation that would make significant new investments in renewable energy sources, create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, help decrease our dependence on foreign oil and slash taxpayer funded subsidies to oil companies.

The Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Tax Act of 2008, H.R. 5351, was approved by a vote of 236 to 182.

The Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Tax Act makes new investments that will help reduce our dependence on foreign oil, increase renewable electricity production, create jobs and protect our environment. The bill extends and expands tax incentives for renewable electricity, energy and fuel, as well as for plug-in hybrid cars, and energy efficient homes, buildings, and appliances. Additionally, the bill includes solar energy tax credits that could reduce carbon dioxide pollution by 240 million tons.

The new investments in wind, solar, geothermal and fuel cell technology will also create hundreds of thousands of new jobs and help strengthen the American economy. The Geothermal Energy Association estimates that the geothermal provisions alone could create tens of thousands of new jobs and stimulate tens of billions of dollars of new investment in geothermal energy production.

Additionally, the legislation repeals \$18 billion in unnecessary tax subsidies for big, multinational oil and gas companies. The vote comes shortly after the big five oil companies recently reported record profits for 2007, with ExxonMobil earning \$40.6 billion - the largest corporate profit in American history. While oil companies have profited, consumers have felt the pinch.

Every day, families in North Carolina are feeling the pain at the gas pump and at home when they buy home heating oil. All the while, big oil companies are making billions of dollars and receiving handouts from the government. It simply isn't fair.

Are You Ready for Digital Television?

A little less than a year from now, our nation will undergo one of the most significant technological changes in history: the transition to digital television. On February 17, 2009, television broadcasters will begin airing exclusively digital signals – and analog television sets that are not connected to a converter box, cable, or satellite will stop working.

There is no question that the digital television transition will bring our nation great benefits. Some of the channels currently used by analog television stations will be freed up for advanced wireless service, while other channels have been set aside for public safety communications, a key recommendation of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (the 9-11 Commission).

The digital television transition will also bring benefits to television viewers. Digital television will mean more, free, broadcast television channels, in addition to clearer images and enhanced sound quality.

Consumers need to begin preparing for this monumental change now, not only to enjoy the benefits of digital television, but to avoid losing their television service altogether. Families who receive their television signal over-the-air, using a traditional rooftop antenna or "rabbit ears," will have to acquire a new "digital to analog" converter box to ensure that their television sets can display the new digital signals. Television sets connected to cable or satellite service should not require a new converter box.

This shift from analog to digital is a major undertaking: in 2005, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimated that more than 20 million households nationwide could lose service on one or more television sets. Many of those families who will be affected do not know they need to take action: a recent Consumers Union survey found that of those Americans who will have at least one television affected by the transition, nearly two-thirds (61%) incorrectly believe they are not affected, do not know that they are affected or are completely unaware of the transition. Clearly, if households and families are not properly informed and prepared, there is great potential for confusion next February.

Further complicating the issue, those most likely to rely on over-the-air broadcasting are also among those demographics hardest to reach. Almost half of these 20 million households have annual incomes of less than \$30,000. The majority of them are headed by either an elderly person or a native Spanish speaker.

The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has set up a program to help consumers defray the cost of converter boxes. Every household is eligible for two \$40 coupons, each of which can be used towards the purchase of a converter box.

Every one of us has a crucial role to play in this transition. I will continue working to educate my constituents about the steps they should take. Consumers can also call 1-888-DTV-2009 or visit <http://www.dtv2009.gov> to learn more.

House Honors Goldsboro's Wooten

This week the House approved my legislation naming the Goldsboro Cashwell Drive Post Office in honor of educator and former County Commissioner John Henry Wooten, Sr.

John Wooten completely devoted himself to improving the community because he loved it with all his heart. He was a dedicated public servant who truly deserves to be honored.

Last year, I filed legislation naming Goldsboro's main Post Office at 3100 Cashwell Drive in honor of Mr. Wooten for his immense service to the community. Previously, I succeeded in naming Goldsboro's North William Street Post Office in honor of Philip A. Baddour, Sr. through the same process.

Mr. Wooten taught science in the city schools before becoming principal of Dillard High School. After the city and county schools merged, he became an assistant superintendent. His accomplished career also included teaching at Wayne County Community College.

I applaud Mr. Wooten's full commitment to ensuring academic excellence for black students in the face of segregation. John Wooten was responsible for helping to bring out the best in many of Wayne County's young people.

Mr. Wooten was a graduate of the Goldsboro school and earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from North Carolina A&T State University. He was also a doctoral candidate at Duke University, and he was one of two North Carolina educators chosen by President Lyndon B. Johnson to serve on the White House Commission for Education. He served as a trustee of North Carolina A&T State University and was national president of the university's alumni association.

Even with all of his commitments to education and the community, he still found time to give more.

First elected in 1986, Mr. Wooten was the first African American to serve as chairman of the Wayne County Board; and, he served on the board for 12 years. He was named outstanding county commissioner by the Neuse River Council of Governments and received the Dr. S.B. McPheaters Award for outstanding contributions to the county's Mental Health Association.

Mr. Wooten was a member of the C.S. Brown Lodge, state Association of Educators, Wayne Memorial Hospital Board of Directors, Salvation Army Advisory Board and first chairman of the Goldsboro Redevelopment Commission.

Mr. Wooten was a lifelong member of the First African Baptist Church in Goldsboro, where he also served as Deacon Board chairman and as weekly Sunday school teacher. He also served in the U.S. Army during World War II and remained a member of the Army Reserves for several years. Sadly, Mr. Wooten died in January 2007 at the age of 82.