

Friday, November 2, 2007

Recently, the Congressional leadership announced that the House would not be in session on Fridays. Late night comedians and political commentators immediately lampooned Congress for its “three-day weekend.”

“Wouldn’t it be nice if we could all have three-day weekends?” asked one pundit.

Look, I think I have the best job in the world, but letting Members get back to their districts on Friday is not the same as sending school children home after four days of school. It gives our constituents a chance to actually meet with their Representatives and gives Members of Congress a chance to get out to their community. But it is not a “three-day weekend.”

I was thinking about this three-day weekend last Sunday night, while I was sitting at the Uniondale Marriot with Representatives Carolyn McCarthy and Tim Bishop. We were attending a meeting of the Long Island Foreign Affairs Forum featuring House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (who made the decision to give us these so-called three-day weekends). Did I mention this was on Sunday night?

The best way I can put to rest the myth of the Congressional three-day weekend is to share my schedule for a typical weekend in mid-October:

VACATION EVE - Thursday, October 18, 2007:

It is the night before my “three day weekend” and I can’t wait! I have a stack of books waiting to be read and my TIVO is filled with old movies to be watched. Votes in Washington ended late in the afternoon, so I can be on a 6 pm Southwest Airlines Flight to Islip Airport. That means I will be home by 8 pm. And then, my 3 days of R & R begin!

DAY ONE OF MY SUPPOSED “CONGRESSIONAL THREE-DAY WEEKEND” – Friday, October 19, 2007:

8 a.m. - What better way to begin a three-day vacation, then to wake up and read a stack of memos and briefing papers about the day ahead!

10 a.m. – I arrive at Republic Airport! Not to take a flight for my long weekend, but to speak on

THE MYTH OF THE CONGRESSIONAL THREE-DAY WEEKEND

Thursday, November 01, 2007

legislation I have introduced requiring large planes to install secondary flight deck barriers as a security measure.

1:30 p.m. – I meet with school district officials in Deer Park to discuss new strategies to reduce taxes with efficient “green energy technologies.” It’s part of the Next Generation Energy Security Initiative that is the focus of my attention in Congress.

3:00 p.m. – In my District Office in Hauppauge, I have several meetings and a handful of press interviews (strange that the same media that complains about Congress “taking off Fridays” doesn’t hesitate to call for interviews on Fridays). Then I meet with Rep. Jerry Nadler to discuss transportation funding issues on Long Island. Jerry spent his Friday off traveling round-trip from New York City to review traffic issues with me on my Friday off on Long Island.

5:00 p.m. – After returning a pile of telephone calls, I head home. Day one of my three- day weekend is over and my staff has been kind enough to give me the night off.

DAY TWO OF MY CONGRESSIONAL THREE DAY WEEKEND – Saturday, October 20, 2007:

9:30 a.m. – I meet a staffer in Dix Hills and head to the VA Hospital in Northport.

10:00 a.m. - I hold my annual Veterans & Military Reservists Workshop. About 100 people gather and we assist them in navigating through the process of applying for benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other agencies.

11:30 a.m. – We leave Northport and head south to Islip.

12:00 p.m. – I speak at an Islip Democratic Committee brunch about federal and local issues. Since we arrive late, I miss lunch. Luckily, there is a bagel place nearby, where a staff member and I enjoy a delicious “Bagel-Dog.” As I await this culinary delight, I answer questions from a Bay Shore constituent.

4:00 p.m. – I drive north again, this time to Harborfields High School, for my annual Military Academy Fair. Several dozen high school students gather to learn how to secure my nomination to our nation’s military academies.

6:00 p.m. – I arrive home, for a Saturday night dinner with my wife.

DAY THREE OF MY CONGRESSIONAL THREE-DAY WEEKEND – Sunday, October 21, 2007:

I have most of the day-off but it’s back to Washington on Monday, home the next Friday, for another three-day weekend, including that Sunday night meeting with my colleagues at the Marriott.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining about the congressional schedule. In fact, I'd be

bored crazy if I didn't work most weekends and there are people I represent working two and even three jobs to barely make ends meet. I never forget that there are soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan who have an infinitely more onerous workload than me. The point I am making is that the bloggers and pundits are doing you a disservice when they pontificate about Congress "taking it easy." In fact, for the vast majority of my colleagues - on both sides of the aisle - having Friday off in Washington simply means working on Friday at home.

So the next time you hear someone talk about these three-day Congressional weekends, I hope you'll email them this blog entry. And while you're at it, tell them I pay the same social security contributions that everyone else does and that I don't have free health care for life (contrary to the Internet rumors).

Of course, that's another story, which I can't write about now because I have a meeting. Did I mention I'm writing this on a Friday?