

Congresswoman Baldwin stops for coffee chat

Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) took a bit of time to stop and listen to the concerns of her constituents this past Friday.

Making a brief stop at Our House assisted living for seniors home at the edge of town, Baldwin took a quick tour and met with some of the residents before heading on to the Amundson Center Senior Room for coffee with the ten or so that showed up to chat with her.

Unlike many other representatives, Baldwin makes time to come home almost weekly to the area where she was born and raised, Madison, WI, and listen to what her friends, neighbors and others within her second congressional district have to say.

Baldwin, while on congressional recess, thought it was the perfect time to visit with those in the Cambridge area, share a cup of coffee and listen to their concerns.

"It's hard to be a representative if you don't get to hear from those that elected you," Baldwin said. "I enjoy having the opportunity to listen to my constituents. They always have a wide variety of issues to discuss and I always seem to learn so much."

After introductions, Baldwin looked into the faces of those that sat before her and asked what concerns they had.

Those such as Village President John Schrader, Village Trustee Linda Begley-Korth, Dane County Supervisor Bob Salov and local business owners Mim Jacobson and Marian Korth of the Country Comforts Bed and Breakfast all sat around the table with their fellow neighbors to ask Baldwin for her help.

A major issue that circled the table was health care, or the lack of it.

Baldwin, a firm supporter of health care reform, has authored a bill that would enable states to provide health care coverage for their uninsured.

Those that sat before her wondered how the state of insurance in America has gotten so bad and why so many are finding it hard to pay for prescriptions that total \$600 a month.

Baldwin told her audience that she was very impressed with the simplicities of health care systems in other countries and felt that, "each state should take care of their uninsured and underinsured."

One of those listening, a former nurse said that she had become so frustrated with the whole health care system that she had considered dropping health care all together.

"You don't ever want to be without healthcare because you never know what could happen," Korth said. "As a member of Community Hope, I watched as a young woman was faced with either putting her family in debt or dying. No one should have to make that choice."

Schrader brought up the fact that some insurance companies are even denying people coverage due to their credit.

Schrader went on to say that due to "credit based insurance" those with poor credit are seen as being more likely to be fraudulent and more likely to be denied insurance.

Upon hearing that this happens in today's world, Baldwin said, "If there are a few that can't make their payments, drop their insurance but don't deny them insurance altogether."

Baldwin agreed that health care is an issue that many feel very strongly about and one that needs major reforms before becoming perfect.

"It's so heartwrenching, but you have to keep pushing forward," Baldwin said. "I think that we're closer than we have been in a long time to finally making some headway."

Salov asked Baldwin about possible recognition for programs, such as the Cambridge Youth Center, that has been a proven way to solve problems.

Salov went on to say that the Cambridge Youth Center runs for less than pennies a day and has been a positive impact on the youth that it serves. He was wondering if there might be some additional help that could be found to help the program stay up and running.

Baldwin told the group that one of

her many goals was to find funding for organizations that truly needed it.

"We're trying to be more aggressive and assertive at helping local programs find funding," Baldwin said. "We've been trying to listen and have a person that researches the needs of existing programs, matching those needs to the proper funding agent. It's helpful for me to know what programs have those needs because then we can hopefully help them find what they need. These programs are important to everyone's future."

The talk then moved to tourism and how to promote tourism and agriculture at the same time.

Baldwin said she liked coming to this area because she could see the pride in both tourism and the agricultural realm.

Baldwin felt this would be an important aspect in the future and that a marriage of eco-tourism and agrotourism would be important to the success of a community like Cambridge.

Korth told Baldwin about Cambridge's rich past and the 1906 school building that housed not only the youth center, but also very rare artifacts donated by members of this community.

Korth went on to say that many of the items in the historical museum were items that were distinct to this area and Cambridge's past.

Korth felt that this rich history could be further enhanced through pottery and other local artisans.

She talked about ways that these artisans could reach out to visitors and local students, since current economic crunches have left less of an artistic choice in Cambridge schools.

Korth was proud of how self-sufficient Cambridge had been, gaining \$45,000-\$50,000 in private donations to strengthen the building, but wondered what Baldwin might suggest to make current dreams a reality for the Village of Cambridge.

Baldwin suggested making a project description with what needs to be done and what that potential

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cost may be. She said that it helps in trying to determine what is needed and where it might come from.

Another area of interest was the redistricting the State Assembly had been going through, going from nine district seats to eight.

Tammy looked at this as a new and exciting time of change.

"I don't look at it as a challenge," Baldwin said, "but as an exciting new year of meeting new people."

And Cambridge was happy to have Baldwin visit.

"Thank you very much for coming," Korth said. "Sometimes we feel like we're out on the edges and not part of the loop. This truly makes us feel a part of the whole process and we can't thank you enough."

Baldwin too expressed her gratitude for the warm cup of coffee on a cold day and the lively conversation.

Baldwin hopes that she can again make her way back to this tiny village and share the ideas of those she represents.

"I'm nothing without them," Baldwin said. "I do this so they can be heard and I can serve them best."

