

While many members of Congress are visiting exotic capitols of the world, I spent this week where I always prefer to be...in the heart of the 6th Congressional District. My travels this week took me through town halls, service clubs, schools and churches throughout Anderson, Muncie and New Castle.

Tuesday began with a brief meeting with Andrew Stoner, author of "Legacy of a Governor: The Life of Indiana's Frank O'Bannon." Andrew is an excellent author and had promised to pass along a copy of this important work of Indiana history at our next meeting.

I told him not only would I read the book but, given my affection and admiration for our late governor, I would display the book proudly in Washington, D.C.

Andrew replied, "That'll raise some Republican eyebrows!"

So be it.

Governor Frank O'Bannon was a friend and an example of a humble, servant leader.

The book will be on the shelf in Washington, D.C., next week.

Much of the rest of the day was occupied with stops in Anderson. The Rotary Club was especially well-attended as they were meeting at the

[Flagship Enterprise Center](#)

where so much entrepreneurial energy is being released, creating 21st Century jobs.

I have been a supporter of Flagship since its inception and am humbled by the progress Chuck Staley and his team are making every time I visit.

I went on to speak to Southside Middle School where a gymnasium full of eighth graders peppered me with questions for an hour...really great fun.

I try to get into a school in my district every two weeks.

I really believe that government officials have an obligation to teach the rising generation about the institutions and traditions of our nation.

I also love being with the kids.

It makes me miss my 7th, 8th and 10th grader a little less when I'm on the road for a few days.

At the end of the convocation, a teacher approached to thank me for supporting the troops in my remarks to the kids. She said that her son, Spc. Austin Cooper, was an Army Ranger who had served two tours of duty in Iraq and believed strongly in the mission.

She added, "He got home today."

Startled, I replied, "Today?"

She responded, "He called this morning when they landed at the base and said, 'Mom, I'm home.'" I threw my arms around her and by the time the hug ended we both had tears in our eyes.

I can't imagine more precious words for the parent of a soldier to hear. I thought of the 3,400 families of soldiers who just departed for Iraq with the 76th Infantry Combat Brigade last week. I pray each and every family gets to hear, "Mom, I'm home."

Later that day we held our first of three town hall meetings. The gathering at Madison Park Church of God was intimate; the next two days drew crowds of 60 and 30 and they were all very helpful to this public servant. My

only rule at town hall meetings is this: You don't have to put a question mark at the end of your remarks.

I encourage citizens to simply speak up and, not surprisingly, many do.

The issues at all the town hall meetings centered on several topics. Concern over the crisis of illegal immigration remains very strong.

I also heard concerns about the rise of China as a global economic and military power.

In New Castle, there was a real focus on jobs and in Muncie I heard concern about the treatment our soldiers receive when they return from battle with injuries. In each discussion, I and our staff tried to listen attentively, respond and internalize the tone and content of the remarks.

I find these forums very helpful in keeping me grounded in Hoosier conservative common sense. That's why I hold town halls throughout the year. I appreciate all who attended this week and in the past.

Mile after mile, we met with constituents, local officials and newspaper editors. We listened and we offered a candid assessment of the year ahead in Washington, D.C.

I said that, unfortunately, during a presidential election year, politics is in the saddle in Congress.

While I pledged my commitment to work to create jobs, support our troops, push for fiscal discipline and advance traditional values, I assumed that much of the nation's capital will be dominated by the themes and issues that arise in the presidential campaign. It has probably

always been so, but it doesn't mean I have to like it.

We have serious challenges facing this nation, at home and abroad, and I would rather see Congress focus on confronting those challenges but I am not confident they will.

My thanks to the constituents who took time to attend our various forums, invite us to service clubs and schools and to the public officials and reporters who made time for a short chat. I now feel more prepared to face the return of the 110th Congress with renewed vigor to represent Indiana's great 6th Congressional District.

-Mike Pence