

# The Free Lance-Star

## Wittman: Tourism needs aid

Congressman Rob Wittman speaks to Fredericksburg Regional Hospitality Council

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BY BILL FREEHLING

The local tourism industry needs competitive per diem rates, access to guest workers and affordable health care costs for employees, U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman said yesterday in Fredericksburg.

The Republican congressman, who represents much of the area, spoke at yesterday's monthly meeting of the Fredericksburg Regional Hospitality Council at the Hampton Inn and Suites in Celebrate Virginia.

Wittman noted that the Fredericksburg area offers both tourism opportunities and an attractive place for government-related business drawn by Marine Corps Base Quantico, Fort A.P. Hill and Naval Support Facility Dahlgren.

Last year, the U.S. General Services Administration bumped up the federal reimbursement rate for a night of lodging in the city and Spotsylvania from \$70 to \$74. That applies to people staying here on federal business. The per diem rate in Stafford County is \$95.

"More needs to be done," Wittman said of the local per diem rate. "It's a great business opportunity."

Wittman also said he's working on ensuring that seasonal-type businesses have access to international "guest workers" here on H-2B visas. He's co-sponsoring a bill, H.R. 1136, that would help with that. It's in the House Judiciary Committee.

Wittman said the guest workers are needed for the types of jobs that many local residents don't want to do--such as crab-picking jobs on the Northern Neck. He noted that participating businesses have to first show they can't get local workers.

The congressman also addressed President Obama's proposed budget. He said it's important for government spending to stimulate the economy in the short term, but he's concerned about the multi-trillion-dollar deficits facing the country. Keeping health care costs reasonable is essential for businesses and individuals, he said.

During the Q&A session, Wittman received a number of requests from the audience. Among them were help finding money for upcoming Civil War susquecentennial events, a new Civil War Life Museum and increased hours at the Virginia Welcome Center on Interstate 95 north of Fredericksburg.

BillFreehling: 540/374-5405

Email: [bfreehling@freelancestar.com](mailto:bfreehling@freelancestar.com)