Smith: Input needed on Capitol Hill.

It may seem like trying times on Capitol Hill but Nebraska's third district congressman sees that as positive.

"More Americans are paying attention," Adrian Smith said during a noon-hour visit to the Gothenburg Senior Center Friday.

Smith spoke briefly and then answered questions.

With different sides to issues aired, more debate and participation in government, the better off Americans are, Smith said.

Describing the health care issue as huge, he said a change in the makeup of the House and Senate in November could prevent "more damage" such as escalating costs.

"We could then pursue policies that get to the problems we face," Smith said, noting the importance constituent input.

Smith said there are a lot of “moving parts” to the health-care reform bill.

For example, he said taxes and fees will be implemented right away but benefits will be on hold for another four years.

Medicare Advantage, a plan where beneficiaries can receive Medicare benefits through private health insurance plans, will be phased out, Smith said.

He noted that the bill adds more than 100 new government entities that will mean new mandates.

“They won’t drive down the cost of health care,” Smith said.

The congressman said he recently voted against Puerto Rico becoming a state mainly because of the cost involved.

“They don’t pay federal income tax and have a welfare system of their own that we’d undertake,” Smith explained. “I think the timing is not right.

Smith also thinks Wall Street should not be bailed out as he said is being proposed in financial reform but should bear the consequences of bad decisions.

“If people didn’t learn lessons from the mortgage meltdown, I don’t know what we can do,” he said. “Taxpayers should be wary of a permanent bailout.”

He’s willing to look at tax reform but Smith doesn’t support a national sales tax to close the

federal deficit.

Despite oil leaking from the recent explosion of a rig in the Gulf of Mexico, Smith said he favors offshore drilling.

“We’ve seen accidents happen but I think they’re isolated,” he said. “Hurricane Katrina didn’t cause leaks which speaks well of technology.”

On the West Coast, Smith said there are places on the beach where oil bubbles up naturally.

Because petroleum is a finite resource, he said the nation needs an “all-above” approach in solving the enery problem using biofuels, nuclear and hydro power and wind.

Smith said he’d like to see more hydro-energy generated in irrigation canals that could power center pivots.

He is against cap-and-trade legislation—where emission caps are set and allowances auctioned, sold or granted—because he said it would increase the cost of energy.

“Farmers need to be good stewards of our natural resources in ways other than heavy-handed government that stifles the economy,” Smith said.

Asked what Nebraskans can do to survive the times, he said not to buy a house they can’t afford and to buy long-term care insurance.

“And look to the future rather than having the government make decisions for you.”

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