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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

Today's America has some challenges, but Kansas Congressman Tim Huelskamp remains optimistic that the country is ready to handle those obstacles.

After being told how to vote on certain issues in Washington, he spoke to House leadership about what he believes is the correct way to vote.

"I told the speaker of the House, Mr. Boehner, I don't work for you," he said. "I work for 700,000 Kansans, and you're not on the list. I can't let anybody in Washington tell me how to vote on the issues of agriculture. At the end of the day, it's critical and essential that you have someone up there that's working for you, not taking orders from them. At the end of the day, it's your voting card, not theirs."

Huelskamp spoke Wednesday morning at the Rock Island Depot in Liberal as part of a series of town hall meetings, and he said representing the people is more important than voting the way many in Washington would like.

"It doesn't matter whether you're from Ohio, Virginia or California, where three leaders are from," he said. "You guys are just as important there, and just because the speaker of the House might be your member of Congress, that shouldn't give you any additional representation in Washington."

Huelskamp's first topic regarded the multi-trillion dollar deficit the nation now faces, and he said America's credit card is about to be maxed out again as early as November.

"The good news about that is it's not so bad compared to where it will be," he said. "We're on a track here where the debt is just about ready to take off. Under the first five years of this president, they've added a trillion dollars of debt every year for five years."

Huelskamp said the new debt that will incur after November will feature social security, Medicare and Medicaid for many soon-to-be retirees from the baby boomer generation.

"Our debt's gonna get even worse quickly," he said. "Medicare's gonna go bankrupt in as few as nine years. Medicare goes bankrupt, nearly every hospital in my district is gone. Under the president's health care plan, he takes \$700 billion stolen out of Medicare puts it in to pay for Obamacare. You still have a trillion-dollar deficit."

Huelskamp added the Federal Reserve has been the single largest purchaser of the country's debt over the past half decade.

"Currently, almost half of our debt is held by foreign nations and foreign individuals, foreign companies," he said.

Huelskamp then opened the floor to questions from the audience. The first came from Al Orr, commander of the local American Legion post, who asked about suspected targeting by the IRS that requires American Legion posts to keep dates of service and member records or perhaps face a \$1,000-a-day fine.

"I think it's outrageous," Huelskamp said. "We've been trying to get hold of the IRS. They're not very responsive these days. DHS has revealed in some of their materials that veterans are possible terrorist threats."

The next question asked to the congressman came from a Vietnam veteran, who was demanding answers for what happened nearly one year ago in Benghazi, when a U.S. ambassador and three others were killed in action. Huelskamp said as of now, no answers are to be had.

"I have no idea what happened in Benghazi," he said. "It's because the people who know are not telling. That's in the administration. I will also fault Republican leadership in the House. The speaker refuses to appoint a select committee."

Like the person who asked the question, Huelskamp wants responses from those in the know about Benghazi.

"We're still asking questions, not getting any answers, and I wish my leadership would be more aggressive on finding the answers to that," he said. "We do believe two did die because we didn't send air support when we were supposed to. Nobody's taken credit or blame for that yet that I know of."

Huelskamp then commented on a question about defunding Obamacare. He said he and others are continuing to make a push for doing something.

"In the past two and a half years, there's been probably 40 votes in the House to refund or defund or repeal in part or in whole or take away some of the money," he said. "There's never been a vote yet on defunding the entirety of the implementation."

Another audience member brought up issues concerning welfare, in particular reports that living at home and not working paid more than actually having a job. Huelskamp said that could lead to disaster for everyone.

"I think it's bad for taxpayers when we have this situation, but it's even worse for individuals," he said. "Work is a good thing."

Huelskamp next addressed an issue regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, better known as food stamps. He said he currently has an amendment on the House floor for the Farm Bill to address those needs.

"Eighty percent of the Farm Bill is food stamps," he said. "It's a food stamp bill. Food stamp spending has grown 300 percent in 12 years. We have 47 million Americans on food stamps."

Huelskamp said this is only one small part of the picture.

"I offered an amendment that dealt with this issue," he said. "Out of 47 million Americans, we have 3 million that fit this category. They're able bodied. They're adults. They have no dependants, and they are on food stamps."

Huelskamp then asked what the government requires for a person to get on food stamps.

"We require absolutely nothing," he said. "We don't require them to look for a job. We don't require them to do charitable work. We don't require them to volunteer. All we require them to do is take your debit card and go in and use it."

Another concern came from the audience about term limits for representatives and senators. Huelskamp said the U.S. Supreme Court, in 1997, had ruled a constitutional amendment needed to be passed in order to accomplish that, and he said the high court is not likely to change its mind on that.

"That's a really uphill battle," he said.

Huelskamp said a better way to address what many consider to be lack of activity in the nation's capital is to make sure House and Senate leaders go back to their home districts more often, which he said many in Congress do not.

“Our big problem in Washington is not necessarily how long you’ve been there,” he said. “It’s how often you come home. Your home and your heart should be in your district, not in Washington.”

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