



Constituents to Shimkus: Stay in office

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News-Democrat

August 24, 2005

MARYVILLE - U.S. Rep. John Shimkus, R-Collinsville, said Tuesday his constituents want him to keep running for office despite his pledge to serve only 12 years.

"Overwhelmingly they would like me to stay," Shimkus said.

Shimkus told voters in 1996 that he would not serve more than six congressional terms. He is now trying to determine whether his constituents will support him serving more than 12 years if re-elected in 2006.

Shimkus said his constituents have been kind and encouraging. He said he cannot predict how they will feel in the future.

"I don't think it's the public's problem anymore," Shimkus said. "It's my problem."

Shimkus spoke about the term limit issue Tuesday during his visit to the DaVita Maryville Dialysis Center.

Shimkus and center workers discussed the proposed Kidney Care Quality and Improvement Act of 2005.

"We're hoping to gain support from the representative to co-sponsor the bill," said Jill Abernathy, center social worker and facility administrator.

"There's a lot of promising provisions in there," Shimkus said. He said he has to further evaluate the proposal.

"Every act comes with more money," he said.

DaVita is a national company that serves patients with chronic kidney failure. DaVita regional director Gina Stateler said there are 14 DaVita centers in the greater St. Louis area.

Shimkus toured the Maryville center and spoke to patients receiving treatment. Abernathy said the center treats 48 patients at eight stations. Construction to expand the center to 12 stations begins Aug. 29.

"The need in the area is getting larger and larger," Abernathy said.

Abernathy said some dialysis patients need about \$1,000 of medication monthly. She said Rick Bargiel of Collinsville has a co-pay of more than \$300 a month for one type of medication.

"It's pretty financially devastating," nurse practitioner Cathy Wheeler said.

Wheeler said the center's patients range in age from the 20s to the 80s.

Bargiel, 51, is part of the DaVita Patient Citizens program and will travel to Washington, D.C., in October to speak about the bill and on behalf of dialysis patients.

"I want to tell them about the life of dialysis, which isn't bad, but isn't the greatest in the world," Bargiel said. He said he contracted kidney disease due to diabetes, and attends dialysis three days a week for four-hour treatments. A former physiologist who is now assisted by a seeing-eye dog named Yurek, Bargiel is on two kidney waiting lists, with about 53,000 people ahead of him.

Shimkus offered Bargiel encouragement for his treatments.



"I know it's not easy," Shimkus said.

Abernathy said that over the last 20 years, DaVita dialysis centers have received a 5 percent reimbursement increase, while hospitals have received a 30 percent increase.

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