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Thompson talks turkey

By **CONNIE KORBEL** Staff Writer -

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In just a little over an hour, U.S. Congressman Mike Thompson fielded a flood of questions at his packed "town hall" meeting held at the Redwood Coast Senior Center last Wednesday.

As quick as questions were posed, Thompson delivered direct, succinct and no-nonsense explanations, interpretations, convictions and predictions. The audience, whether they agreed or not, knew exactly where their elected official stands on a comprehensive collection of issues, beginning with Social Security.

Congressman Thompson said former President George Bush "mis-spoke" about Social Security, that it's not true that it's "broke." Thompson stated that Social Security is solvent until 2037.

"Social Security was a very far-reaching program. It's the most successful government program there's ever been," said Thompson. "It's responsible for keeping a heck of a lot of people out of poverty; it's an absolute lifeline for many and important for the economy."

Thompson said the scope of Social Security has greatly expanded since it was signed into law 75 years ago.

In Mendocino County alone, Social Security — just the retirement portion — accounts for \$207 million in income, he said.

"This is spent locally; it's not squirreled away for trips to the Bahamas," he said.

When asked by the first speaker why his letter had not been responded to by Thompson's D.C. office (the local office had) regarding his petition to repeal the 16th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution,

Thompson apologized and explained that he gets between 300 and 1,000 letters every week. But he didn't dodge the issue. He told the man he wasn't interested in repealing the amendment. The speaker picked up his things and walked out.

The 16th amendment allows Congress to levy income taxes without apportioning them among the states or basing it on census results.

To a question about reauthorizing former President George Bush's Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 that sunsets at the end of the year unless reauthorized, Thompson said he doesn't want it renewed.

"I don't think a single job was created by giving the richest a tax break. With the huge [Bush] taxcuts, we saw the economy go off the cliff," he said.

He did report that Americans pay less in taxes today than since the Great Depression and that taxes need to be fair to and progressive with income levels.

Concerns raised included end-of-life Medicare costs, emergency relief funding, Senate voting rules, the Marine Life Protection Act, Navy testing offshore, the recent Arizona "racial profiling" immigration debacle, healthcare, the electoral college, the funding of two wars, and health and human services funding woes.

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On the Senate voting rules and use of the filibuster, Thompson explained that the rules aren't different now, just how they're being used.

"The threat' alone is stopping so much," Thompson said. "I'm a big majority-rule guy. I'd let them [filibuster]. I think if we had more open debate, the public would understand the issues better."

To the question, "Where are we on Single Payer Healthcare?" Thompson said, "Nowhere."

"There wasn't even support for the Public Option compromise which was greatly mischaracterized," he said. "The bill passed is the one we'll live with for awhile. It's going to take awhile to implement it. It will be refined and improved and be better than what we have."

There wasn't anything Thompson hesitated on or hedged — he's heard it all before and from the sound of it, he's clear on where he stands on all fronts.

In general, it's clear that any reforms that are going to cost money are going to be "tougher" while the nation "is in the heart of a terrible recession."

Thompson confronted the "blatant lies" about the healthcare reform "death panel scare." He pointed out that his similar legislation that provides for advanced directives in California, "never had anyone complaining."

In closing, Thompson directed a comment to the senior population.

"The senior voice is a very loud voice. You have clout and you should use that," said Thompson.

The occasion also celebrated with a cake the 75th anniversary of Social Security Administration.

The visit was just one of many constituency stops for Thompson while Congress was on a break. Thompson represents seven counties.

Attending the diverse discussion were Mayor Doug Hammerstrom, Mendocino Coast District Hospital CEO Raymond Hino, Mendocino County Office of Education Superintendent Paul Tichinin, Mendocino County Health and Human Series Director Susan Era and other recognizable "public" faces.

Senior Center Executive Director Charles Bush said Thompson is, "A wonderful friend to Redwood Coast Senior Center."

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