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sumers, increasing consumption, and inspired investors to return to the markets. The results have been better than expected. The economic growth rate hit 8.2 percent in the last quarter. Manufacturing output is at the highest levels in two decades. The Dow Jones Industrial Average reached its highest level in 18 months and the job rate shows the best signs of improvement in two years.

Aside from the war and the economy, our Nation faced other challenges. Health care costs continue to be one of the top concerns of all Americans. Rep. Nunes hosted a health summit that brought together medical leaders from throughout the Central Valley to discuss ways of improving access to health care. This action resulted in Rep. Nunes' proposed legislation, to give health care centers more flexibility in dealing with emergency room patients, spurring a new regulation along the same lines. Following the health summit, Congress passed historic reform to the Medicare system that will now include a prescription drug benefit for the first time in history. This action kept our promise to senior citizens. The prescription drug benefit means that never again will low-income seniors have to face the choice between putting food on the table or paying for life-saving prescription drugs. It also means that seniors with high-cost drugs will have an insurance benefit that will protect them. It is expected that the average senior will get their drug costs reduced by up to 60 percent because of this far-reaching reform.

Included in this historic legislation was wide reaching assistance for rural hospitals in the 21st Congressional District to the tune of \$21 million. Congress also authorized new tax free health savings accounts, which will give consumers more flexibility in managing health care expenses. These health savings accounts will revolutionize the health care market, with the potential of providing consumers better health care at a lower price.

Despite concerns over healthcare, our nation faced another domestic crisis -- the lack of a comprehensive national energy policy. Significant problems with the western power grid, blackouts in California and New York, turbulence throughout the natural gas market and the persistent problem of increasing gasoline prices, catapulted the debate over energy policy to the top of the agenda. With prices at the gas pump soaring, Rep. Nunes helped take the lead to increase the domestic supply of oil and natural gas to lower prices for consumers and reduce U.S. reliance on foreign oil. With our 21st century economy unable to rely on 20th Century energy supplies and infrastructure, new, reliable sources of energy must be found to maintain our economy and bolster our national security. Based on this, Rep. Nunes traveled to the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to examine oil and gas leasing plots and hear testimony on the region's massive energy potential, which is estimated to be the largest discovery of oil in the United States.

Consequently, Congress put together a comprehen-



Rep. Devin Nunes traveled with other Congressmen to Alaska on a fact finding mission regarding domestic oil supplies.

sive energy policy aimed at making our Nation more energy independent. The Energy Security Act did several things. It created incentives to get the most out of our natural resources, from promoting greater energy efficiency, to encouraging the use of renewable fuels such as ethanol. It encouraged greater reliability for electricity by providing for open access of transmission lines, while improving the transparency of electricity markets. This energy policy has another key benefit -- it will create jobs. The latest estimates are that it will create up to a million jobs. The House passed the energy conference report by a large bipartisan margin in the House, and we are waiting for final action by the Senate.

Another issue addressed last year was education. In the 107th Congress, the President's No Child Left Behind legislation was passed, increasing accountability and demanding results when it comes to educating our children. This year, Congress kept its

promise by increasing education funding to \$4.1 billion, the highest Federal contribution to education in history. Clearly, Congress is keeping its promise to the parents, teachers, and children of America.

Finally, Congress passed a series of legislative initiatives designed to make this nation a better place to live. Congress passed the Do Not Call and Do Not Spam bills, aimed at stopping consumers from being harassed through the phone and through computers by marketers. Congress passed the Amber Alert bill, to help keep our children safe from kidnappers. Congress passed historic levels of funding to combat AIDS. Congress passed the President's Healthy Forests Initiative, to protect communities from out-of-control forest fires. Congress passed the Fair Credit Reporting Act so that consumers have better access to their credit reports to protect against the persistent problems of credit card fraud.