

***Rooting Out Fraud, Waste, and Abuse***  
***Apopka Chief, 2-23-04***  
***by Congressman Tom Feeney (R-Oviedo)***

Earlier this month, the President submitted his budget request for the federal government's next fiscal year. It highlights the renewed need to limit the size of government and curtail excessive spending.

Ronald Reagan once defined the American taxpayer as someone who works for the federal government, but doesn't have to take the civil service exam. In Florida, the average taxpayer works until July 6 to pay his or her share of tax and regulatory burdens imposed by federal, state, and local governments. Americans should work to support their families -- not the government.

In 2003, the federal government spent \$2.15 trillion, billions of which were wasted, stolen or just plain lost. With the current necessity of funding homeland security and national defense combined with increasing Social Security and Medicare costs, the need to control or reduce other spending programs is enormous. The President's budget limits such spending to a 1% increase for next year. While this growth rate is the smallest in recent years, more room remains for spending reduction and control.

Savings can occur from the reduction and elimination of waste, fraud and abuse. Last year, I co-founded the Washington Waste Watchers, a group dedicated to this purpose.

Federal agencies routinely award grants to organizations to fund research or perform community services, but fail to properly monitor these grants. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) financed such a grant to a Virginia group – the Community Resilience Project. This \$13 million grant was intended to support counseling services to those affected by the September 11 attack on the Pentagon. But the Community Resilience Project deviated from this purpose and offered programs to any interested person such as a year long celebration of trees, gardens and other healing places, a drama class to improve one's life, and Iranian films on cultural understanding.

When this program was brought to my attention, I delivered a speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives highlighting this mismanagement. Additionally, I joined 24 of my colleagues in demanding FEMA scrutinize this out-of-control program. The resulting investigation led to a \$6 million reduction in future funding, increased program audits, and a renewed program focus on service to September 11 victims.

While this \$6 million savings is only a small part of the billions in federal waste, it serves as an excellent example of how the Washington Waste Watchers are protecting taxpayers. I've fought irresponsible government by highlighting waste and cosponsoring legislation to reform the budget process, eliminate government credit card fraud, and sunset outdated government programs.

Taxpayers deserve a government that places minimal burden on them and uses their tax dollars wisely. Too often a government program is evaluated by how much money it spends, rather than how that money is spent. I'm energized by the recent successes of the Washington Waste Watchers and will continue to strive for a more responsible government.