

April 1996



U.S. REPRESENTATIVE
JOHN OLVER



A Report on 1995, A Look to the Future



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1011

Dear Friend:

A new majority came to Congress in January 1995, intent on dramatic change. One year later, very little has been accomplished.

While Congress did finally pass significant legislation, notably lobbying and gift reform, congressional accountability, and telecommunications deregulation, much of last year was spent in gridlock. The results are disappointing. Indeed, many Congressional experts rate the 104th Congress as one of the worst since 1945.

Most striking has been the failure of Congress to carry out its most basic constitutional duty—passing annual appropriations bills. The October 1, 1995 deadline to pass annual appropriations came and went with no action, resulting in two unprecedented government shut-downs. As of April 15, the 1996 budget still has not been completed. And Congress is already behind on beginning consideration of fiscal year 1997 appropriations.

This inability to come to an agreement on the budget, coupled with attempts to make potentially devastating changes in Medicare and Medicaid, the environment, education, and economic security, lay the groundwork for a difficult fight in 1996. But I will continue to fight for the interests of the people of the First District.



Congressman Olver discusses the success of the Community Oriented Policing Program (COPS) with members of the Fitchburg Police Department. In 1995, Olver obtained nearly \$6 million in COPS funding for the First District, providing local communities with the funds to put more police officers on the streets.

Sincerely,

Working to Provide Job Training for Our Young People

As many of you know, the Republican leadership in Congress recessed for much of the month of February. Although I would have preferred to remain in Washington to work on a real budget deal, I used the recess to reach out to the people of the First District on many issues — especially job training.

From Pittsfield to Westfield to Gardner, many communities are worried about congressional action slashing the summer youth jobs program from the budget. Although there have been attempts to restore funding for this program, to date, no solution has been reached.

In meeting with past participants in this program, their parents, program administrators, local officials, and

businesspeople, it is clear that summer youth jobs play an important role in the development of our young people. In addition to providing training, this program also teaches the value of work and the satisfaction of a job well done.

That is why I intend to continue the fight for the summer jobs program. If Congress can find the money to give the Defense Department \$7 billion more than it asked for, it surely can find less than one-eighth of that for summer youth jobs.

Preparing our young people for the job market is a task too important to ignore. This program should not be yet another victim of ideological budget politics.

Preparing Our Pre-Schoolers for Their Educational Travels

Also in February, I visited many Head Start classrooms across the district.

With the future of Head Start funding in jeopardy, it is important to understand just who is a part of Head Start and what Head Start accomplishes.

In visiting these classes, I was able to talk with many four- and five-year-olds, seeing just how much their Head Start education meant to them, as well as to their parents and teachers. This is more than pre-school. Head Start is an important tool in the development of our young people, a tool that prepares them for the rigors of the school years ahead.

It is no secret that educational initiatives, starting with Head Start and continuing with Drug-Free Schools, math and science skill development, college financial aid, and job training programs, are facing drastic cuts. In the current

Congress, some find it easier to deny a young child education than to tell the CIA that it does not need its recently discovered \$2 billion slush fund.

Over the last year, I have fought against these types of thoughtless cuts to education. 1996 is no different. The time has come to fight back, ensuring that education receives both the attention and funding that it deserves.



Congressman Olver answers questions about proposed cuts in federal financial aid from students at North Adams State College. During the year-long debate on education funding, Olver fought against deep proposed cuts to Pell Grants and other forms of aid that help students afford college.

Congressional Accomplishments

The following is a list of some of the more meaningful legislation Congress passed which I supported and voted for.

Internal Reforms

The Congressional Accountability Act, making Congress subject to the same anti-discrimination and work-hour and wage laws as the private sector. Workplace safety and collective bargaining rights become applicable later this year.

Virtual ban on gifts to Members of Congress, preventing special interests from "winning and dining" legislators.

Overhaul of lobbying rules

All three measures were passed by the House in 1994, with my support, but were killed by Republican filibuster in the Senate. I received a "Blue Ribbon"

award from the good Citizens for a Citizen Action for a ban and lobbying

Other Accomplishments

Telecommunications reform, telecommunications reform, Deliverers of cable, local phone services, compete with each other, vices, hopefully reduce competitive pricing a new law also requires to install the "v-c" oned by President fully pushed by (Mass) that will a certain programs a children's view.

■ Sex crimes again Requires tougher crimes.

What Congress Should Do

My prescription for where Congress should head is very straightforward. Within the context of a rational and fair balanced budget plan, federal priorities should be placed on education, economic security and opportunity, protection and prudent use of our environmental resources, and preserving the health care safety net so that all Americans — not just the wealthy — are covered.

In this regard, there are many objectives that I will continue to work toward. In the coming months, you will hear from me on many of these and other pressing issues.

Of continued primary concern to me is the economic security of working families. This will be pursued further during a series of forums on the subject I have planned throughout the district. There are many things that Congress should do in this area, including the following:

- Increase the minimum wage. The time has come to end efforts to block at least four different minimum wage bills.
- Protect workers' pensions from being raided by employers without permission or even notice. Pensions are the key to economic security for retirees. They are not toys for com-

pany executives.

- Make pensions portable, allowing employees to keep building that nest egg, regardless of corporate takeovers or job changes due to market instability.

- Make health insurance portable as well, allowing workers to keep coverage with them as they change jobs. If individuals have adequate health insurance, they should not be forced to exchange it for inadequate coverage or no coverage at all just because they change jobs.

- Prohibit insurance carriers from dropping or denying individuals because of pre-existing conditions.

- Pass a welfare reform plan that can really work — a plan with strong work requirements, as well as education, job training, health care provisions, and child care.

- Support valuable education and job training — initiatives that ensure an educated and competitive workforce.
- Fund youth summer jobs, giving our children economic opportunities and a chance to avoid the increasing cycle of despair and lack of direction that too many of our children face.
- Support community policing, which put more officers on our community streets, and instill a greater sense of community and safety. We should not resort to block granting law enforcement funds, a policy that failed in the 1970s.
- Provide modest tax cuts for the middle class and working families. If there is money available for a tax break, it should not be going to the wealthiest 2% of our citizens.

“Of continued primary concern to me is the economic security of working families.”

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government group support of the gift m.

ishments

— Overhaul of industry regulation. Long distance and will now be able to her to provide setting in more com- more choice. The TV manufacturers a device champi- nton and success- Ed Markey (D- parents to block stations from their

children — sentences for such

- **Unfunded mandates** — makes it more difficult for the federal government to impose mandates on states and cities without helping pay for their costs of compliance.
- **Self-Employed Health Insurance Tax Deduction** — Makes permanent the tax deduction for health insurance costs of self-employed people, increasing the deduction from 25% to 30% of health insurance costs beginning in 1995.
- **State Taxation of Pensions** — Prohibits states from taxing the pension benefits of current non-residents.

If you would like more information about any of these legislative initiatives, please contact me at either my Washington office or one of my district offices. I will be more than happy to provide you with a more detailed look at the legislation passed in 1995.

Olver Receives 100-Percent Rating on Environmental Votes

In its voting scorecard for the first session of the 104th Congress, the League of Conservation Voters gave Congressman Olver a perfect 100-percent rating for votes cast on environmental issues, calling him an “environmental hero.”

This is the second straight year that Olver received a perfect score from the LCV. He also has the highest four-year average in the Massachusetts delegation with a 98-percent rating on key environmental votes.

Budget Impasse

In 1995, the House passed a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. The proposal failed in the Senate, however. While I voted against the House-passed version, I voted for four different versions I believed made more sense, but all four were defeated.

The congressional majority next moved to adopt a seven-year spending and tax plan. I voted for a substitute version which would have reached a balanced budget in seven years, with a budget surplus at the end, in a fairer way.

The current budget standoff has made the fork in our legislative road abundantly clear. The question before us is not, "Can we balance the budget in seven years?" That question has already been answered by both sides.

The President and the Republican congressional leadership have already agreed on enough budget cuts to pass a seven-year balanced budget and give the taxpayers a modest tax cut.

The only outstanding question is, "How do we do it?" Republicans and Democrats still remain worlds apart on what should be sacrificed for a balanced budget.

Amid all this budget gridlock, there are some fundamental

issues that must be addressed. Any budget proposal that reaches balance by gutting environmental enforcement, by cutting virtually every aspect of aid for education from Head Start and Drug-Free Schools to student financial aid and job training, and by making severe cuts in Medicare and Medicaid is a deal that is simply unacceptable to me.

Instead of supporting a \$7 billion defense spending increase that the Defense Department did not even ask for, I will fight for a fair, acceptable balanced budget. A fair budget deal will protect Medicare and Medicaid. It will allow for further cleanup of the environment. And it will invest in our children's education, starting at pre-school and continuing through college. It will not place the cost of balancing the budget solely on the backs of working class families.

It is time for Congress to craft a fair, reasonable balanced budget that reflects the concerns of all people, and not just those in Washington. It is time to finish the job that Congress should have completed back in October. It is time to pass the budget.

"...It is time for Congress to craft a fair, reasonable balanced budget that reflects the concerns of all people..."

Providing Answers for the Citizens of the First District

Whether you have a question about pending legislation, need assistance in applying for federal services, or just wish to voice your opinion on congressional activities, Congressman Olver's staff is pleased to help you.

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