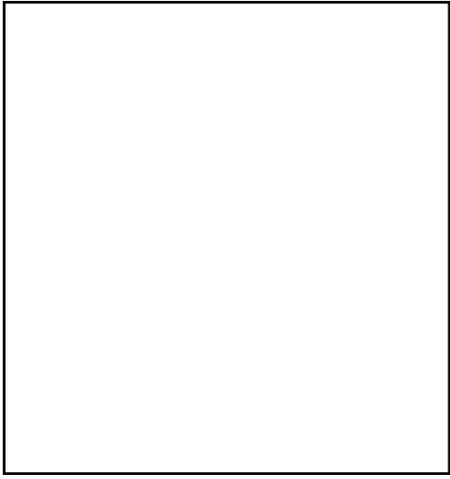


congressman

PETE  
STARK

13th District  
107th Congress

UPDATE



WASHINGTON, D.C.

FEBRUARY, 2001



Dear Friends,

Passing good laws in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress could be more challenging than at any other time in recent history.

The Republicans hold the leadership with a slim majority in the House of Representatives. The November elections showed the country split and not just by party label. There is an ideological split as to the role the federal government should play in resolving issues ranging from retirement security to preserving the environment.

I still believe that the federal government has a role to play, but many Members of this Congress question whether the government should do much at all. They prefer to leave most challenges and obligations up to individuals, charities and possibly local governments.

They favor individual savings accounts over the Social Security retirement system that we now have with its safety net for widows and their children, and for the disabled. Turning Medicare into a voucher program, leaving retirees to search for health coverage in the free market system, ignores the fact that Medicare was started because private insurers did not want the risk of insuring the health care needs of seniors.

As an antidote to a softening economy, they propose the immediate enactment of a \$1.6 trillion tax cut based on a **projected budget surplus** that may never materialize.

They believe that industry should not be impeded by regulatory restrictions.

They oppose a minimum wage increase arguing that it would be a drag on the economy.

They believe that the energy crisis should be solved by drilling for oil and destroying currently protected wilderness areas.

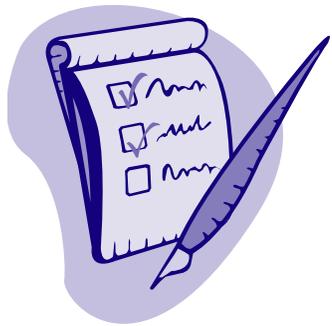
They believe our education system can be improved by removing the "strings" that target federal education assistance to communities with the most students in poverty, or who are otherwise disadvantaged.

I strongly disagree with these changes in policy and I pledge to you that I will speak my views on each and every one of these issues as they are debated in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress. I will work with my colleagues who understand that there are some problems that individuals cannot and should not have to solve alone . . . such as our current California energy crisis!

In a nation as wealthy as ours, children should not go to bed hungry at night. Nor should they go wanting for medical care when they are ill.

Seniors should have a retirement system that works all the time, not just when the stock market is booming. Those on a tight budget shouldn't have to choose between getting their prescriptions filled and buying food.

*Continued on page 4.*



## Stark's Priority List for Health Care Legislation

The challenges facing the new Congress on health care are substantial. A significant portion of our population (some 43 million Americans in 1999) lacks any form of health insurance. For seniors and the disabled, we have a health insurance program that provides coverage, but leaves out prescription drugs. And, too much health legislation is driven not by the coverage needs of our population, but by the demands of our mostly for-profit health care industry and Wall Street.

It is still unclear how the new Congress and the new Administration will choose to move forward on a health care agenda. The issues that I believe deserve most immediate attention are:



### **Creating a Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit:**

Medicare still fails to cover outpatient prescription drugs—an integral part of health care today. The program must be modernized to include an affordable, guaranteed prescription drug benefit.



### **Enacting a Meaningful Patients' Bill of Rights:**

Doctors—not health plans—should make medical decisions. With more people covered through managed care plans, we should enact federal protections to ensure that everyone has access to redress if their plan fails to properly care for them.



### **Protecting and Preserving Medicare:**

There are those in Congress who would like to limit the government's financial obligations to Medicare, leaving sick seniors potentially vulnerable to cuts in services. I am committed to fighting to protect and preserve Medicare as an entitlement program that continues to guarantee quality health care to our nation's seniors and disabled population.



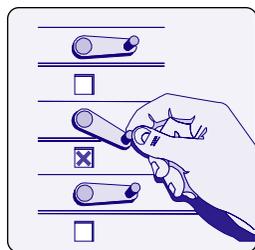
### **Expanding Access to the Uninsured:**

There are many avenues available to expand health insurance coverage to the uninsured. For example, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (called "Healthy Families" in California) has begun to make real strides in expanding children's health coverage. We should build on this and other existing federal programs to further expand coverage. There will be a rush to use the tax code to expand coverage in the new Congress but I am leery of the tax approach. To

truly expand coverage, Congress must allocate significant revenues and must reform the health insurance marketplace. Otherwise, people who would get new tax incentives to purchase policies may not have affordable plans available to them. I am doubtful that the commitment in revenues and reforms will be made.

If this Congress moves forward on these health policy priorities, there is much that can be accomplished and many who will benefit.

## Stark Supports Election Reform



The recent disenfranchisement of thousands of voters demonstrated the severe shortcomings of our country's election process. To guarantee that every vote counts, Congress must find solutions and fully fund those reforms before the next federal election.

A key component to any reform is voter education. Voters and precinct workers should know that registered voters don't need multiple forms of identification to "verify" their registration. Voters must understand that they have a right to assistance at the polls. Ballots must be clear so that voters understand them.

We must fix outdated, faulty equipment. Older voting machines are found disproportionately in minority districts and may have been the reason for thousands of registered voters being disenfranchised. Whether this result was by plan or happenstance, it must be corrected.

I strongly advocate legislation to solve these problems. We can start the process by asking the Federal Election Commission to study voting problems or by creating a bipartisan commission to examine voting problems and suggest better ways to conduct elections. However, I believe it is crucial that the studies be completed promptly. Reasonable suggestions regarding voting equipment, standardized ballots, expanded voting hours, improved techniques to train precinct workers and educate voters should be developed soon to give Congress time to act before the next national election.

Congress must also provide funds so that states and local governments have the resources to implement these reforms. A failure to fund reforms would risk the further disenfranchisement of the poor and minorities on a scale that our country has not experienced since the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

I will work to improve our electoral process so that every citizen will know that his or her vote counts and will be counted.

## Stark Sees Major Challenges in Environmental Policy



Major changes, and none for the better, are likely in the area of environmental legislation and regulation. The new administration has signaled a new era in which the mining, oil, gas and timber industries will have increased access to federal lands and decreased regulation of that use.

The administration has already indicated its intent to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) for the oil and gas industry. The coastal plain of the ANWR in Alaska boasts diverse wildlife, including the calving area of the Porcupine caribou herd and nesting and feeding areas for many species of migratory birds. The protection of wildlife in the ANWR would be put at risk by oil drilling in this region.

The House majority leadership recently sent a strong letter to the President indicating a need to repeal many of former President Clinton's efforts to protect our natural resources. These proposed changes include:

- relaxing a ban on snow-mobile use in our national parks;
- removing some of the national monument designations given to public lands during the last administration;
- preventing the designation of large wilderness areas as national monuments; and
- using a formula to benefit the oil and gas industry when calculating the cost for industry to operate on public lands.

These efforts could have a devastating impact on the progress we have made to protect our environment. I pledge to oppose any plan to dismantle resource protections in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress.

## Stark Advocates Policies to Strengthen Public Education



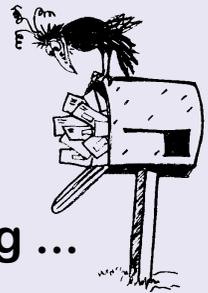
There is consensus in Congress that we need to improve our schools; the debate hinges on how to do it.

President Bush had made school vouchers a centerpiece of his education proposal. Vouchers would allow some students a credit—paid for by the taxpayers—toward their private school tuition. However, voters in California have already rejected initiatives to create school voucher programs. They recognized that to improve education, we need a strong public school system. I believe it would be best for the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress to reject vouchers as well.

More than 90% of America's students attend public schools. If we want to improve education, we should reduce the size of our overcrowded classrooms, provide the learning tools our students need, compensate our teachers fairly, and maintain high standards for academic achievement in our public schools.

We must also recognize that public schools have an obligation to educate every child including those who are poor, disabled and from different cultural backgrounds. But the costs associated with educating children with special needs have strained the re-

from  
the  
mailbag ...



Dear Pete,

Please spend a little of the "surplus" to bring our election system up to date.

John and Ann, Fremont

Dear John and Ann,

I'm willing, but wonder if my colleagues will make this a priority.

Dear Pete,

Continue the fight for universal health coverage.

Ruth, San Lorenzo

Dear Ruth,

I'll push for it until we all have coverage.

Dear Pete,

I am a high school student who supports federal hate crimes legislation. Do you?

James, San Leandro

Dear James,

Yes, I do.

Dear Pete,

Keep the Arctic Wildlife Refuge safe from oil drilling.

Kathy, Alviso

Dear Kathy,

I'll sure try—this could be the battle of the year.

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Pete".

sources of many schools. To offset these costs, the federal government now targets its education funding to help local communities pay for these higher expenditures. We must continue this support to local schools so that all our children can have a solid education, not squander resources on programs like vouchers that provide "life-boats" for a few without improving the system for all.

**Dear Friends, continued from page 1.**

Workers should be guaranteed a livable wage and know that there will be basic safety standards in the workplace. Working parents should have the peace of mind that their children are being well cared for while they earn a living for their families.

The environment should be recognized as an irreplaceable legacy to future generations, not destroyed to address short-term energy needs that can be met by other means.

We should increase our investment in the nation's education system, but not at the expense of the neediest of our youth and communities.

Finally, tax cuts must be put in perspective. They cannot simultaneously be the answer to a booming economy, a softening economy, and a weak economy. Even the new Secretary of the Treasury wouldn't endorse a huge tax cut as he answered questions this January during his confirmation hearing. Tax cuts are appropriate when federal revenues exceed the amount the federal government spends to meet those needs that we as a society deem to be necessary and appropriate.

The debate in this Congress will inevitably focus on our priorities for government and the price we are willing to pay to achieve them. The 50/50 split in Congress will result in many close votes on key issues. I will speak up for working families struggling to make a better life for themselves and their children; for seniors who deserve security in their retirement years; for future generations so that they may inherit an earth that can sustain them; and for those whose voices may be small but whose needs are great.

I'll use these Issue Updates to inform you about the bills under consideration in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress. If you have access to the Internet, please browse my web site at <http://www.house.gov/stark> where you will find additional information about my work on your behalf.

I welcome your views and suggestions on federal issues and hope you will share them with me by mail, email, telephone, and by attending our regularly scheduled Town Meetings.

Sincerely,



**PETE'S TOWN MEETINGS**

**Saturday, February 24, 2001**

**UNION CITY**

**9:00 - 10:00 am**

Ruggieri Senior Center

33997 Alvarado Niles Blvd.

**HAYWARD**

**10:30 - 11:30 am**

City Council Chambers

777 B Street

**SAN LEANDRO**

**12:00 noon - 1:00 pm**

City Council Chambers

835 E. 14th Street

*Doors open 10 minutes before meetings start.*

**How to reach PETE STARK**

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<http://www.house.gov/stark/>

**TIME VALUE**