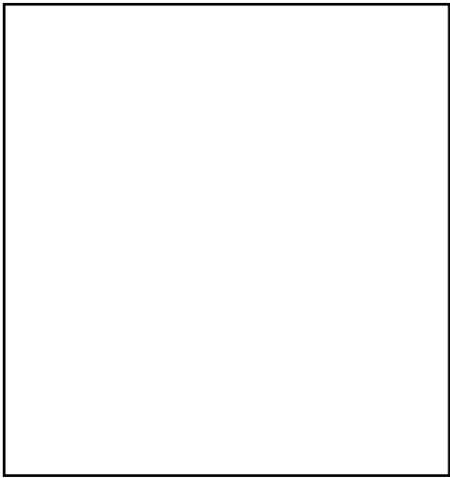


**13th District  
107th Congress**

**UPDATE**



WASHINGTON, D.C.

MAY 2001

## **STARK EFFORTS TO FIGHT WASTE, FRAUD, AND ABUSE PAY OFF: MEDICARE'S IMPROPER PAYMENTS DROP AGAIN**

There is good news to report on Medicare. In March, the Department of Health and Human Services reported that improper Medicare payments to doctors, hospitals and other health care providers declined last year to an estimated level of 6.8 percent or just under \$12 billion (out of more than \$173 billion in Medicare fee-for-service payments). The payment error rate has fallen by roughly half since it was first estimated at approximately 14 percent in 1996.

The payment error rate measures the percentage of payments made by Medicare that were not supported by providers' documentation or that otherwise did not meet Medicare payment requirements. It is important to understand that the payment error rate does not measure the level of fraud in Medicare, although some errors could result from fraudulent activities.

This significant, sustained decline in erroneous payments is good news for all of us. It reflects our work in Congress to preserve Medicare funds for their proper use, Health Care Financing Administration's (HCFA) improved oversight, its efforts to clarify Medicare payment policies, and its insistence that doctors and health care providers fully document the services that they provide. New initiatives and resources to prevent, detect and eliminate errors and fraud in

Medicare have also helped.

We can achieve further reductions in the Medicare payment error rate by simplifying Medicare payment rules and improving outreach to and education for health care providers

I testified before the Appropriations Subcommittee to ask that HCFA be given a bigger budget to more effectively administer Medicare and fight waste, fraud and abuse. If we increase

HCFA's budget now, I am confident that the ultimate savings for taxpayers will far exceed the up-front investment.

You can help, too. Many providers make honest mistakes, but if you think your provider has billed you or Medicare in error, you can call 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477) weekdays from 8AM to 5:30PM EST and the charges will be reviewed to determine whether they are appropriate.



## **DO YOUR CHILDREN HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE?**

### ***Help is Available for Many Families***

No child should be without health insurance and that is why I continue to pursue efforts in Congress to create a universal health insurance program for all children—called MediKids—that would provide a guaranteed source of insurance for all children until age 23. Unfortunately, that legislation still has not become law.

In the meantime, there are programs that can provide health insurance for children in California. If you have a child without health insurance – or know children who are uninsured – I urge you to take advantage of these important programs. These programs include Medicaid (called MediCal in California), the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and other local programs.

Congress passed the SCHIP plan in 1997 to expand access to health insurance for children in families with incomes too high to qualify for MediCal, but below 200% of the federal poverty level (\$34,926 for a two-parent family with two children).

*Continued on page 3.*



from  
the  
mailbag ...

Dear Pete,

End commercial logging  
and protect our remaining  
roadless areas in  
America's National For-  
ests.

Ronald, Hayward

*Dear Ronald,*

*I agree and will be vigilant  
and vocal on this.*

Dear Pete,

Oppose the 5 cents per E-  
mail charge in 602P.

Orville and Doris, Castro  
Valley

*Dear Orville and Doris,*

*This 602P is a hoax. Email  
away.*

Dear Pete,

Oppose bills to restrict  
RU-486; they are attempts  
by anti-choice lawmakers  
to restrict access to a safe  
and effective drug.

Kristina, Fremont

*Dear Kristina,*

*I will oppose this and other  
bills that chip away at choice.*

Dear Pete,

I don't think the  
President's tax plan is  
feasible.

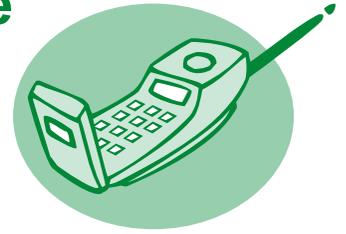
Kathleen, Hayward

*Dear Kathleen,*

*Nor do I.*

## Stark Calls for Consumer Reports on Cell Phone Service

### FCC to Gather Complaints and Publish Quality of Service Reports



I recently introduced a bill, along with Congressman Anthony Weiner (NY), to collect information on cellular phone service. Increasing numbers of people are using cell phones. And as this use has increased, many people have found that the quality of service is less than adequate. In order to address these concerns, we have introduced the Cell Phone Service Disclosure Act.

This legislation would set up a group at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to collect information and consumer complaints on cell phone service. The bill would:

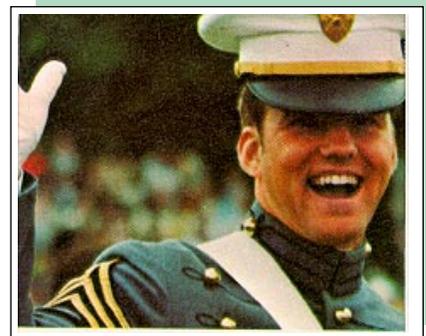
- Direct the FCC to set minimum standards of quality for cell phone service.
- Require the FCC to setup a toll-free number that cell phone users could call when they experience service problems (dropped calls, dead spots, poor sound quality, improper billing, etc.).
- Require the FCC to report this data to Congress and the public every six months.

This legislation will enable consumers to contact the FCC to determine which cellular phone provider has the best service. The bill's reporting mechanism will also help service providers by providing an independent source to determine which service problems are most vexing to consumers and how each company fares relative to their competition.

We have seen improvements in other industries after reporting requirements were implemented. For instance, reporting on lost baggage and "on-time" records for the airline industry helped inform consumers before they bought tickets and spurred the airlines to improve their records. I think it's time now to make the same push for improvement in the cell phone industry.

## ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!

High school students (especially juniors) and their families who want to learn about attending West Point, Annapolis, or the Air Force Academy are invited to attend my



### ACADEMY INFORMATION NIGHT

**Thursday, May 3**

6:30 - 7:30 pm

at San Leandro Library, Estudillo Room  
300 Estudillo. San Leandro

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# Stark Introduces Bill to Improve Child Welfare Workforce

## *Foster Children Should Receive Quality Care*

I recently introduced the Child Protection Services Improvement Act, which provides aid to child welfare agencies so that they can improve the quality of their workforces. Child welfare agencies serve the 568,000 children in foster care, who have suffered from neglect and abuse. The quality of decisions made by these agencies on behalf of children depends heavily on the capacity and quality of the child welfare workforce.

With so much at stake, we cannot ignore the flaws in the current system. A recent joint survey by the Child Welfare League of America, the American Public Human Services Association and the Alliance for Children and Families highlights the problems with the child welfare workforce. This study reported very high annual staff turnover: an average

of 19.9% for public child welfare agencies and 40% for private agencies. Almost half of these agencies report difficulty in finding and retaining qualified child welfare workers. Agencies reported that child welfare workers left the field because their caseloads were too high and their salaries were too low.

The disrepair of the child welfare system has had tragic consequences, often scarring children for a lifetime.

To improve the child welfare workforce, the Child Protection Services Improvement Act provides education loan forgiveness to child welfare workers that have been with an agency for at least two years and it provides states with \$500 million in matching grants over five years. States can use these grants to improve



child welfare workers' wages, increase the number of workers, reduce the turnover and vacancy rate of child welfare agencies, increase education and training of child welfare workers, attract and retain qualified candidates, and coordinate services with other agencies.

I believe that by improving workforce training and increasing salaries, agencies will be able to keep qualified workers and children will benefit from a more experienced workforce.

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### Health Insurance for Children, continued from page 1.

In California, the SCHIP program is called Healthy Families. The state successfully petitioned the federal government to expand this coverage and Healthy Families now covers children up to 250% of the federal poverty level (\$43,658 for a two-parent family with two children). California also recently applied for a waiver from the Federal Government to expand coverage to include the parents of enrolled children. Watch future newsletters for updates on that possibility.

The Healthy Families program is run at the county level. To get an application or additional information about coverage in your area, call one of the following numbers:

**ALAMEDA COUNTY, 1-800-422-9495**

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY, 1-888-244-5222**

## New Health Plans Just For Kids.



I am pleased to report that Santa Clara County has gone further than the Federal Government has been willing to go. For Santa Clara County residents, the county committed to provide every child – regardless of income – with health insurance. Call the number indicated above for additional information from Santa Clara County.

To learn more about health insurance options for children in

California, you may also visit the Healthy Families webpage at [www.HealthyFamilies.ca.gov](http://www.HealthyFamilies.ca.gov), or call the statewide toll-free line at 1-800-880-5305.

Unfortunately, there will be far too many children without health coverage until we have a system that provides for universal health coverage. If you have had a difficult time finding affordable health coverage for your family, please share your situation with me in a letter. With your consent, I will use your family's situation to help bolster the case for the enactment of my MediKids bill.

# Stark Objects to Administration Reversal on Global Warming

## More Needs to Be Done to Reduce CO2 Emissions



Protecting the environment should not be a partisan issue. Republican Teddy Roosevelt started a bipartisan tradition 100 years ago by working to protect our natural resources. Unfortunately, President Bush has not followed Teddy Roosevelt's lead.

Less than two months into his Administration, President Bush has reversed a pledge to reduce CO2 emissions in our atmosphere. In a speech on September 29, 2000, he stated: "We will require all power plants to meet clean air standards in order to reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, mercury and carbon dioxide within a reasonable period of time."

CO2 is a gas that is released into the atmosphere from a number of origins, including industrial power plants. Scientific studies have pointed to CO2 emissions as

a key contributor to global warming. Regulating CO2 is an important step in reducing the serious threat that global warming poses for the future.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christine Todd Whitman understood both the scientific and political importance of reducing CO2 levels. She advised the President that there was sound scientific basis supporting the need for CO2 reduction and that our European allies were counting on the US to join them in efforts to reduce CO2 levels.

Unfortunately, the President has been persuaded by the coal, oil, and utility industries who argue they would bear the brunt of CO2 reduction costs. So, yielding to pressure from the special interests, the President reversed his position.

I disagree with the President's decision and hope that he will reconsider. As for me, I will continue to work in Congress to promote policies that reduce CO2 emissions. For example, I have promoted updating the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, the single most effective step the US could take to curb global warming emissions because cars, SUVs, and other light trucks emit 20% of the nations CO2 pollution. I also support including CO2 in the emission standards for power plants which are responsible for 36% of US CO2 emissions. And I support energy conservation efforts that reduce demand from power plants.

Global warming is a real problem and there are reasonable solutions at hand that I pledge to pursue.

## PETE'S TOWN MEETINGS

Saturday, May 5, 2001



### FREMONT

9:00 - 10:30 am

Fremont Senior Center, Wing A  
40086 Paseo Padre Pkwy

### SAN LEANDRO

11:00 am - 12:30 pm

San Leandro Library  
Dave Karp Senior Meeting Room  
300 Estudillo

*Doors open 10 minutes before meetings start.*

### How to reach **PETE STARK**

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Union City South (510) 494-1388  
Hayward North (510) 247-1388  
Internet mail address:  
petemaildirect@stark.house.gov  
Web site address:  
<http://www.house.gov/stark/>

### TIME VALUE