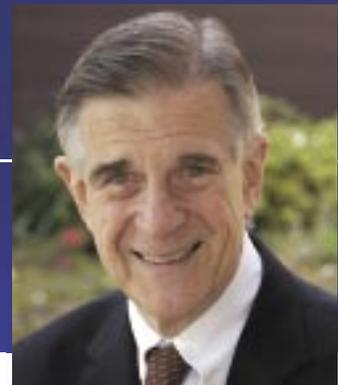


CONGRESSMAN PETE STARK

DECEMBER 2005 REPORT



BUDGET PRIORITIES

When Hurricane Katrina hit earlier this year, Americans saw what we try to keep hidden: the face of poverty right here at home. The one positive outcome from this devastation *could* become a rebirth of the war against poverty. Unfortunately, that does not appear to be the case in Congress at this time.

While none of them have complained about how to fund the Iraq war, we have seen an outcry from those in the Republican Majority who are refusing to fund hurricane relief right here at home. They are working to cut billions of dollars from programs aimed at helping low- and middle-income families, students, and children. That's right, in the name of helping those with low-incomes, their goal is to take the dollars from other people who need that very same assistance. A few of the proposals include:

- More than \$10 billion in cuts to Medicaid, the program that provides medical services to low-income children, families and senior citizens in nursing homes;
- Cutting nearly 225,000 people and \$700 million from the food stamp program;
- Cutting \$590 million from foster care children;
- Cutting student loan programs. The typical student will pay an additional \$5,800 for their loans.

The cruel joke here is that these cuts won't actually pay for Katrina aid or reduce the deficit. Instead, they help pay for the next agenda priority for the Majority: \$70 billion in new tax breaks for the wealthy. In fact, the tax breaks are so expensive that even with the cuts being considered, the deficit will increase by \$20 billion.

There are ways to reduce the deficit that do not impact working families or impoverished Americans.



Representative Stark speaks with employees at the NUMMI plant in Fremont about issues affecting working families.

For instance, Medicare currently overpays HMOs for offering Medicare Advantage plans. I offered an amendment that would reduce these overpayments and pay HMOs the same rate we pay other providers. This would have saved \$24 billion and offered real protections to real people rather than HMOs. However, the

Majority defeated the amendment.

I still believe that Katrina provided us with a genuine opportunity to promote the positive role of government in people's lives. I will continue to work to protect working families, children and impoverished Americans. We cannot allow some in Congress to balance the budget on the backs of the poor – especially not for the benefit of the rich.

HELP FOR MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES

Last month I held town meetings on the new Medicare prescription drug program. I was pleased to be joined at those meetings by the California Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP). HICAP provides one-on-one counseling and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries who are trying to navigate the new drug program. If you have particular questions about your options, you should contact them at (510) 839-0393.



Representative Stark discusses Medicare and other issues with senior citizens at a local senior center.

Those meetings were an opportunity to hear directly from constituents about the problems they are facing. What I heard is consistent with what people around the country are saying: there are many, many plans, but not enough information to make knowledgeable choices. With so much confusion out there, it's likely many people will tune out rather than try to determine their best course of action.

As you know, I oppose this prescription drug bill because it is far too complicated and fails to provide an adequate benefit. Now that it is law, it should be improved so – at a minimum – beneficiaries can be sure they are protected from harm.

To that end, I've introduced the Medicare Informed Choice Act (HR 3861). It's a simple bill that extends the initial open enrollment period through the entire year so that no one will be charged late penalties for failure to act by May 15, 2006. It also allows all beneficiaries the option of changing plans once in 2006. Also, it protects those with retiree health benefits through their former employers through the first year of implementation.

Enacting this bill would go a long way toward giving Medicare beneficiaries and their families some peace of mind with regard to their choices. I'll continue to work with like-minded colleagues and advocates to gain support for this legislation and encourage Congress to enact it.

KEY VOTES THAT CONGRESS HAS RECENTLY TAKEN:

GAS ACT – H.R. 3893

A bill to expedite the approval process for, and expand the number of, domestic oil refineries. The bill weakens public health and environmental laws and overrides the ability of local governments to make determinations about placement of oil refineries. Passed 212-210. **STARK VOTED NO.**

PROTECTION OF LAWFUL COMMERCE IN ARMS ACT – S. 397

This bill would provide gun manufacturers and dealers with a special exemption from lawsuits – an exemption not granted to any other industry. Passed 283-144. **STARK VOTED NO.**

THE THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES RECOVERY ACT – H.R. 3824

Authored by Rep. Pombo, this bill is most simply described as legislation to undermine the Endangered Species Act. It gives immeasurable and unprecedented subsidies to landowners and makes it more difficult for a species to be considered endangered. Passed 229-193. **STARK VOTED NO.**

THE DEFICIT REDUCTION ACT – H.R. 4241

A bill to cut more than \$50 billion from critical programs that help working families such as Medicaid, student loans, food stamps, and foster care. The cuts will not reduce the deficit. Instead, they will be used to offset tax breaks for the richest among us. Passed 217-215. **STARK VOTED NO.**

FEDERAL ACTION NEEDED ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Nearly one-third of all adult women will experience at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood regardless of their race or economic status. Yet only about one-seventh of all domestic assaults come to the attention of the police. Domestic violence is too serious an issue affecting too many people to continue to remain unaddressed. One obvious step the government should take is to ensure that public programs make every effort to combat this nationwide problem with counselors trained to deal with the severe and vital issues surrounding domestic violence.

That's why I recently requested that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to the Congress on the efforts of state and federal agencies to addressing the problem of domestic violence among welfare recipients. What they've reported back is dismal.

More than half of all women receiving welfare are, or have been, victims of domestic violence. Unfortunately, the GAO report found that victims of domestic violence rarely have access to a caseworker trained to handle their special needs. Currently, 14 states require no domestic violence training for caseworkers and 31 states require only a one-time training.

Victims of domestic violence receiving welfare assistance are eligible for special waivers that expand their eligibility for assistance – such as an exception on the work requirements. However, because there are so few caseworkers trained to deal with domestic violence, very few women are even offered these waivers.

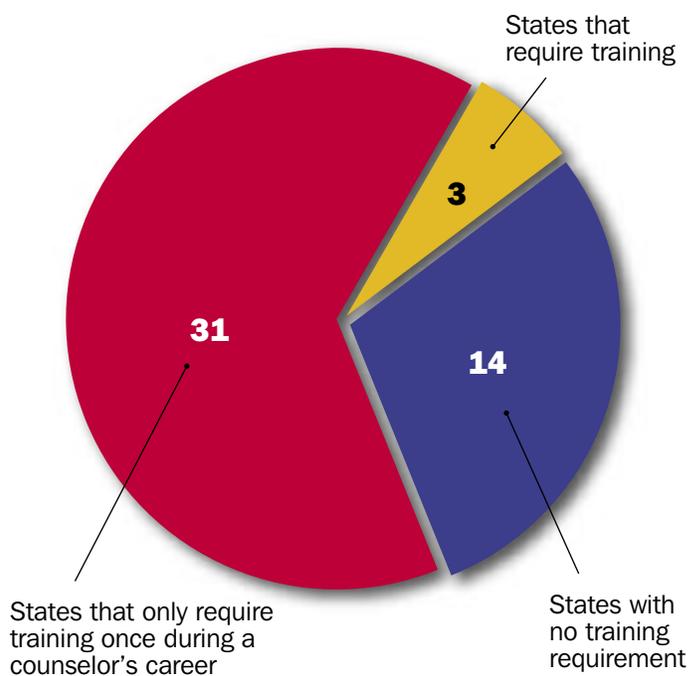
Additionally, the GAO report found state marriage and fatherhood programs – initiatives highly touted by the Bush Administration – have done little to address domestic violence. Again, in these programs as well, domestic violence often goes unrecognized by under-trained caseworkers who cannot identify the warning

signs and may be encouraging marriages between couples that have a history of domestic violence.

Victims of domestic violence need and deserve to speak with trained professionals who understand victims' needs as well as being able to connect them with services that may be available.

This GAO report points to a real failure in our welfare system. I will continue to work to increase the number of caseworkers trained to handle domestic violence cases and require more regular training of those professionals. We also must remember that domestic violence is not limited to those on welfare – it affects millions of people of all ethnicities and they all need our help. To see a full copy of the report, you can visit www.gao.gov and reference report number: GAO-05-701.

States Fail to Require Adequate Domestic Violence Training for Welfare Counselors



Two states did not respond to GAO's survey



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