

Questions and Responses to card submitted at my Town Hall meetings

Energy

New energy legislation/climate bill

Let me share a few statistics:

- o 66 % of Americans feel that our addiction to oil threatens our security and that we need more than a band-aid approach, and 63 % support legislation that charges companies for their carbon pollution.

- o The US is the largest energy consumer in the world, and our energy use has tripled since 1950. Over 83 % of that energy comes from fossil fuels, which are going to run out someday and which add greenhouse gases to our atmosphere.

- o 20 of the hottest years in recorded history occurred since the 1980's. Glaciers and permafrost are vanishing. Weather patterns are shifting. Migration patterns are being disrupted.

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Written by Mike Honda

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As the Member of Congress representing Silicon Valley, I am proud that the House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act (H.R. 2454) last year. By passing H.R. 2454, the House acknowledges the effects and consequences of fossil fuel usage and also addresses steps to reduce the impact. For our local community, the green renewable energy economy is the next growth sector for Silicon Valley, and so an expansion of renewable energy use will create jobs and grow our economy. The Senate is currently considering multiple proposals – different versions by Senators Kerry and Lieberman, Senators Lugar and Graham, Senator Bingaman, and Senator Cantwell. At this time, no version of H.R. 2454 has passed the Senate.

Supporting green jobs/ domestic energy production; Educating people about sustainability

Because we face many challenges in building a green energy economy and fighting against global warming, we must take great strides to educate the greater public about our climate issues, which is why I introduced the [Global Warming Education Act \(H.R. 1926\)](#) . Additionally, in April, 2010, I introduced the [Smart Electronics Act, H.R. 5070](#) , which addresses the greenhouse gas impacts and energy costs of proliferation of electronic devices throughout the world. This legislation will help green the electronic industry by providing the private sector with reliable standards and incentives and by educating and empowering consumers to make smarter and more efficient choices – all of which help cool the planet. For more information on the Smart Electronics Initiative, please visit <http://smart-electronics.org>

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The President and many Members of Congress have reiterated the need to adopt a comprehensive green energy policy, one that limits pollution and invests in clean domestic energy sources. Read more on how we can together fight against global warming and achieve energy independence [here](#) .

Federal Government

Roles and Limitations of the Federal Government

As a Member of Congress, I have neither the right nor the background in law to decide how the various pieces of the Constitution ought to be interpreted. Congress is full of Representatives from various professions, such as doctors, accountants, and school teachers [\[EW1\]](#) like me. Few Members of Congress are Constitutional attorneys. For that reason, the Constitution establishes a separate branch of the federal government, the Judicial Branch, which has the responsibility to interpret and clarify its meaning. The Judicial Branch, which includes the U.S. Supreme Court, is kept separate from Congress in order to provide a check on the laws that Congress passes.

Clarification on different aspects of the Constitution and Bill of Rights

With each of my votes, I aim to uphold the principles laid out in the Constitution, while serving my constituents to the best of my ability. It is the responsibility of Members of Congress to pass laws with our best intentions to better our nation and the responsibility of the Judicial Branch to

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check the Constitutionality of those laws. I will continue to honor the oath that I take at the start of each Congress to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

Health Care

Passing the healthcare reform bill

Passing the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was a long and complicated process, and involved a great deal of research and adaptation to address the wide range of issues which affect healthcare in the United States. I have felt strongly about the need for healthcare reform for many years, and took an active role in the process of forming this bill. Long before Congress voted on the healthcare bill, I sat down with several of my colleagues and went through the bill section-by-section, to ensure that we understood exactly what the bill did and why each piece had been included. While there is still more to be done to truly fix health insurance in the United States (such as eliminating anti-trust exemptions for insurance companies), I believe this bill provides an important first step in the process, creating a strong foundation for the future of the American health insurance system.

Medicare's Donut Hole

Seniors who are covered by Medicare had questions about the “donut hole”. In my district alone, 8,000 seniors fall into this coverage gap each year and are forced to pay nearly 100% of their prescription drug costs out of pocket. This bill closes the prescription drug donut hole gradually over the next several years. This year, patients who enter the donut hole will receive automatic reimbursement checks for \$250 from Medicare, and beginning next year, will receive a 50% discount on prescription drugs. Over the next several years, additional measures will eliminate the donut hole completely. To learn more about improvements to Medicare Part D, click [here](#) .

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So far, 102,834 California seniors have received their \$250 reimbursement checks. If you are covered by Medicare and have 1) prescription drug costs reaching more than \$2,830, 2) you are not receiving Medicare Extra Help, and 3) you have not received your rebate check, please contact Medicare at (800)-MEDICARE. For more information from Medicare, click [here](#) .

Constitutionality

Some people have expressed concerns about the bill's individual mandate, which requires all Americans be covered by health insurance. This measure makes healthcare cheaper for everyone by spreading the risk among all Americans and increasing access to preventive care, rather than forcing those with insurance to bear a disproportionate amount of our country's healthcare costs.

One of the most important aspects of the Constitution is the establishment of "checks & balances" which allow the different branches of our government to play different roles, and to maintain oversight over each other's actions. Under the Constitution, Congress has the responsibility to "...provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States...". It fulfills this duty by passing bills that will improve our country and address problems which are affecting the welfare of its citizens. For example, the federal government mandates a basic level of education for all Americans, despite the fact that education is never mentioned in the Constitution.

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It is possible that the Supreme Court may at some point choose to review this bill. While I believe that the bill is constitutional, the Constitution itself dictates that, ultimately, that determination is up to the courts.

Coverage for Members of Congress

Contrary to many rumors, Members of Congress and their staff members are not exempt from the healthcare reform bill.

In fact, unlike most Americans, they are specifically required to Purchase Health Coverage through the [Exchange](#) . Section 1312 of the bill specifically states that:

“...the only health plans that the Federal Government may make available to Members of Congress or congressional staff shall be health plans that are –

- (I) created under this Act (or an amendment made by this Act); or
- (II) Offered through an Exchange established under this act (or an amendment made by

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this Act).”

Under the plan, most employers can choose to provide insurance through their current plans, negotiate with insurance companies for new insurance benefit plans (as they do now), or in some cases, purchase coverage through the Exchange. According to the Congressional Budget Office, by 2019 only 24 million Americans will be enrolled in the Exchanges (including Members of Congress and their staffs), while 159 million will have employer-sponsored coverage that is the same as or similar to the coverage they have now.

To view the bill text in its entirety, [click here](#) .

Tort Reform

I believe that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provides an important first step towards healthcare reform. Over the long term, however, we must continue to look at additional ways to improve healthcare and make insurance more affordable. These methods may include tort reform, as well as a variety of other strategies.

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I do believe, however, that if tort reform is addressed, it needs to be addressed very carefully so that we do not eliminate patients' rights to receive payment for damage caused by poor medical treatment or preventable errors. We must make sure that patients and families who are hurt or killed by poor medical treatment continue to have the right to address their grievances in court, and to receive compensation when appropriate.

Healthcare Workforce

This bill takes critical measures to expand the healthcare workforce in the United States, especially in the areas of greatest need, like primary care and nursing.

First, by simplifying the American insurance market, expanding access to electronic health records, and creating a basic, mandatory level of coverage, this bill will reduce the time which is currently spent negotiating with insurance companies and filling out paperwork. Some recent estimates indicate that physicians spend up to 30% of their working time negotiating with insurance. As the healthcare reform bill is implemented, physicians will have more time to spend with their patients.

The bill also invests in new training and residency programs which, along with investments in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, will add more than 16,000 new primary care

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providers over the next five years. The [National Health Service Corps](#) will be expanded to help repay student loans and provide scholarships for even more primary care physicians, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners who are willing to work in underserved areas. These measures will help ensure that healthcare providers are distributed based on the needs of our communities, and will increase Americans' access to preventive care services.

Doctors will continue to choose which plans they will accept in their offices, and reimbursement rates will continue to vary for each individual insurance plan.

Subsidies

Current estimates show that the average family pays a "hidden insurance tax" of approximately \$1000/year in additional premium costs to cover uncompensated care for the uninsured. In my district alone, the cost of treating the uninsured has risen to approximately \$113 million/year.

This bill increases individual responsibility by requiring everyone to invest in health coverage beginning in 2014. Even those who receive health insurance subsidies will be required to pay at least a small portion of their premiums. Federal subsidies that help cover premiums will cost taxpayers significantly less than what we currently pay to provide expensive emergency room care to those without health insurance.

Immigration

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Status of CIR

Since Rep. Luis Gutierrez introduced [H.R. 4321, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act \(CIR ASAP\)](#), I have been working diligently with public officials and community advocates nationwide to build strong momentum to pass this critical reform legislation. On September 29, Senator Menendez introduced a [comprehensive immigration reform bill](#) in the Senate, which I am happy to report, included the family provisions of my legislation, the [Reuniting Families Act \(H.R. 2709\)](#) and [Uniting American Families Act \(H.R. 1024\)](#). Meanwhile, congressional leaders are meeting with advocacy groups to discuss various issues relating to immigration reform to gather important feedback from families and individuals experiencing problems with the broken system.

Stance on AZ bill and federal lawsuit

I understand that the current immigration system does not support undocumented students or agricultural workers, and that is why now, more than ever, our nation needs a comprehensive solution to these problems. With the passage of Arizona's SB1070, an anti-immigrant law that allows rampant racial profiling, now is the time to act on comprehensive immigration reform. The President has been clear: comprehensive immigration reform is in the hands of Congress, and we must act. We must move forward through such setbacks and ensure a comprehensive bill that enforces labor standards, secures our borders, allows for family reunification, and protects **all** families and individuals, including same sex partners.

Please read more about my support of the Justice Department's lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Arizona's SB 1070 [here](#).

Afghanistan/Iraq War

Afghanistan: Getting Out

The conflict in Afghanistan is not only the longest war America has ever fought, but is also the most expensive, resulting in an expenditure of about \$1 million per service member per year of taxpayer dollars. As Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus's Afghanistan Taskforce, I have championed the effort to examine the impact of U.S. troops on the ground, and with my colleagues have determined that our current strategy is both wasteful and ineffective. As a result, I am a proud co-sponsor of H.R. 5010, which calls for a plan to safely remove our troops from Afghanistan.

Washington's agenda for national security does not reflect the political reality in Afghanistan, a nation in which the struggle for power is among different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and not between Hamid Karzai's government and the Taliban. While the current strategy continues to target known leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, it ignores Afghanistan's poor socioeconomic conditions which makes it easy for new leaders to arise. Furthermore, Afghanistan has been historically hostile toward foreign occupation which only helped the Taliban and Al Qaeda expand their movement and gain more followers. Although the forces currently serving in Afghanistan are our nations' courageous heroes, their lives are needlessly

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being sacrificed. A military-managed approach, which has prioritized military strikes, drone attacks, and night raids, has done little to help improve the lives of average Afghani citizens.

Thus an effective solution, as recommended by the Afghanistan Study Group Report, includes a more comprehensive approach that would bring together warring factions, allow for diplomatic talks between stakeholders in Central and South Asia, and advance economic stability in the tribal areas that are hotbeds for terrorist activities. This solution is not only directed toward the reality of the situation in Afghanistan, but is also a more fiscally sound way of managing the conflict. Moreover, only 25% of the military and nonmilitary aid going to Afghanistan actually stays there; the remaining 75% goes to U.S. and foreign contractors. As the average American suffers from unemployment and home foreclosure, spending tax dollars ineffectively abroad does little to mitigate these problems.

It is clear that as we work to make our country more secure, we need to shift our strategy in Afghanistan, withdraw our troops, and improve their nation's economic and social conditions.

Iraq: Getting Out

President Obama recently announced the end of our nation's painful seven year long war in Iraq. August 31, 2010 marked the official end date to U.S. combat operations in Iraq, a war I have staunchly opposed and voted against since its beginning.

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As a member of the Out of Iraq Caucus, I feel strongly that the American people were misled into supporting the war in Iraq, and have advocated for safely redeploying our troops from the country and focusing our resources elsewhere. In 2007, I joined nearly ninety of my colleagues in pledging that I will only support appropriating additional funds for U.S. military operations in Iraq for the protection and safe redeployment of our troops out of Iraq.

At its peak, the Iraq war degenerated into a dangerous sectarian civil war and put our troops in grave danger, killing over 4,000 men and women in our military. Tens of thousands more suffered injuries and post traumatic stress disorder upon their return from Iraq. Our taxpayers have paid more than \$700 billion to finance this war.

In his August 31, 2010 address to the nation, President Obama acknowledged that the drawdown of our troops is far from a clean cut exit from Iraq. I agree with him that the drawdown does not warrant a “Mission Accomplished” banner and is by no means a victory lap. Now is not the time to celebrate the end of the war—for although security gains have been made and violence has lessened, we leave behind a politically unstable and barely functioning democracy in Iraq, along with 50,000 U.S. troops. Now, we must work with Iraq as it stabilizes and becomes a completely independent government, and hope we may soon fully remove all of our troops.

Middle East Issues

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Co-sponsor H.Res. 1431; Condemn Iranian human rights abuses; U.S. should empower Iranian people uprising

As a co-sponsor of H.Res. 704, I support the United States' commitment to ensuring the security and protection of Camp Ashram Residents against inhumane treatment and involuntary deportation by Iraqi security forces.

Concerns about Iranian nuclear ambitions

I co-sponsored and voted in favor of the most comprehensive Iran sanctions bill to date: H.R. 2194, the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act. I support continued sanctions on the government of Iran, as they continue their nuclear programs, belligerent threats against Israel and the entire Middle East region, and remain a threat to America's national security at home and abroad. However, such sanctions should only continue if they demonstrate the intended effect of crippling the Iranian government, and do not harm the people of Iran.

Kucinich's anti-Israel and Reid-McConnell letters

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Following the *Mavi Marmara* incident, I did not sign Rep. Kucinich's or Senator Reid's letter to the President. I vehemently support Israel's right to defend itself, and join President Obama in expressing my deep regret at the loss of life and those injured in the *Mavi Marmara* incident.

Views on Israel/Palestine conflict & supporting a two-state solution

Both the Israeli and Palestinian people deserve to live a life free of the threat of attack or psychological fear. It has always been my hope that US involvement in the region may be used to positively improve the lives of people affected by the conflict between Israel and Palestine. I ardently support Israel's right to defend itself and to protect its people from those who would do them harm, and I believe that a two state solution with the creation of a Palestinian state is the best way to achieve peace in the region. For the past 9 years, American efforts in resolving the conflict between Israel and its neighbors have been lackluster. America, as the world's sole superpower, needs to more actively engage in diplomatic efforts to bring the region back from the brink and towards a fair, lasting peace. I am pleased that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have formally reopened direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and I am hopeful that Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority will reach agreements for peace and prosperity for both peoples.

Several people had questions about lobbying and campaign finance reforms.

Here are my responses to your questions about these issues.

Citizens United

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Many constituents expressed their concerns over the implications of the Supreme Court's decision earlier this year in the case [Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission](#). On January 21

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, 2010, the

[Supreme Court overturned decades of campaign finance law and policy](#)

in its ruling, which removed restrictions on the expenditure of special interest money in our nation's elections. This decision will make it much easier for special interest groups and corporations to "buy" elections for the candidates that serve their interests.

I strongly believe that the Supreme Court's decision runs against the core of our nation's principles and the ideals of a democracy by the people, for the people. If Congress does not act, it will become much easier for corporations and special interests to drown out the voices of the American people. That is why I, along with many of my colleagues, am working to pass measures in the House to address this case, as well as the general issue of campaign finance reform. I believe that one of the most critical of these measures is the passage of the [DISCLOSE Act](#) (see below).

Disclose Act

Several people had questions about the future of the DISCLOSE Act. This bill, H.R. 5175: the Democracy is Strengthened by Casting Light on Spending in Elections Act, was introduced as a legislative response to *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*.

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This bill includes a number of measures to increase transparency, strengthen existing regulations on campaign funding, and make it easier for the public to obtain information about campaign fundraising and donation sources. It increases reporting requirements, decreases campaign donations by foreign interests, places additional limits on communication between corporations and political candidates, and takes a variety of other steps to close campaign finance loopholes and make our elections more transparent, open, and fair. [Click here to learn more about the measures included in this bill.](#)

This bill was passed by the House on June 24th, 2010 with my vote in support. Unfortunately, on September 23rd, 2010, the Senate failed to move the DISCLOSE Act forward during a cloture vote. It is my hope, however, that it will be reintroduced in the next Congress, and I will continue to work with my colleagues to advance this bill, and other measures to increase transparency and decrease the influence of special interests in our elections.

Fair Elections Now Act

The [Fair Elections Now Act \(H.R. 1826\)](#) would create a program to provide some public financing for Congressional candidates, establish campaign spending limits, and would increase campaign regulation and oversight.

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This bill would create a voluntary public financing system for Congressional campaigns. It is designed to leverage small donor contributions by providing a 4 to 1 federal match of contributions below \$100 from residents of a candidate's state.

I have long been an advocate for campaign finance reform and public financing. This bill is a step in the right direction to fix our broken system, and show that lawmakers are indeed representatives of the people and not representatives of special interests. I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1826, which has my full support.

Moveon's "Fight Washington Corruption" Pledge

Several of you requested that I sign [MoveOn.Org's "Fight Washington Corruption" pledge](#) . Those who sign this pledge agree to do the following:

- o Support the overturn of the Supreme Court's decision in the *Citizens United* case (see above), including, if necessary, passing a Constitutional amendment;

- o Support the Fair Elections Now Act; and

- o Work to pass legislation to end the overwhelming influence of corporate lobbyists on legislation in Washington, D.C.

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It is normally my policy not to sign legislative pledges. Because of this critical issue, however, I was willing to make an exception. I am therefore proud to announce that I have signed on to the “Fight Washington Corruption” pledge.

The Democratic led Congress, along with President Barack Obama, has worked to raise the standard for government transparency and accountability. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act took many measures to create an unprecedented level of accountability in government spending, with detailed information about every project published online. In addition, over the last two years, the administration and Congress have worked to create or update websites for a wide variety of government agencies and initiatives, in order to make it as easy as possible for the public to find out what the government is doing, and where it is spending money.

Of course, there is still much more that needs to be done. I believe strongly in the importance of lobbying reform, and will continue to work with my colleagues in this and future sessions of Congress to make elections and campaign financing more honest, transparent, and fair.

[\[EW2\]](#)

Jobs and Economy

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the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009](#) in order to create new jobs and save existing ones, spur economic activity and invest in long-term growth, and establish new, unprecedented levels of accountability and transparency in government spending.

So far, the Recovery Act is responsible for more than 2 million jobs nationwide in a variety of fields, including research, education, construction, engineering, law enforcement, and more. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that this number could be as high as 3.3 million jobs. Many of these jobs are with private businesses and organizations, which have been able to expand as a result of the grant and loan programs established in the Recovery Act, and others are with government agencies and contractors. Before the Recovery Act, our economy was losing an average of 750,000 jobs each month. In 2010, the private sector has gained over 760,000 jobs. I am also pleased that Silicon Valley is beginning to show some signs of economic recovery. In May 2010, the unemployment rate in Santa Clara County was 11.0%, down from 11.4% the month before.

In California, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has created more than 76,000 jobs over the last year. To learn more about California's economic recovery, [click here to see a summary of recovery spending in California from the federal government](#), or [click here to visit California's recovery website](#) to learn about what the state is doing with the money it received.

Of course, more still needs to be done.

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Democrats in Congress and the Obama Administration recognize the struggles American households have endured during this economic crisis and have made it our top priority to create jobs and improve our nation's economy. Republicans have blindly voted against measures that would help small businesses and create American jobs, including:

- o The Small Business Tax Relief Act, which would have strengthened our economy in two ways: reducing the paperwork burden on small businesses, leaving them more time and resources to invest in job creation; and ending the tax loopholes that encourage large multinational corporations to ship jobs overseas;

- o The Small Business Jobs and Credit Act, which boosts lending to small businesses by investing capital in community and smaller banks under terms that become more favorable to participating banks as they increase their total loans to small businesses;

- o The Small Business and Infrastructure Jobs Tax Act, which would allow a 100% exclusion from gross income of gain from the sale of qualified small business stock acquired after March 15, 2010, and before January 1, 2012 and increases the tax deduction for business start-up expenditures in 2010 and 2011;

- o The Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment (HIRE) Act, which provides tax incentives for hiring new employees that were previously unemployed and extends the Recovery Act provision that would allow small businesses to write-off capital expenditures up to \$250,000; and

- o Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriations to revitalize the Small Business Administration (SBA) after eight years of Bush-era budget cuts and provides \$28 billion in new SBA lending.

While these bills are very important to get our economy back on track, I believe that we must also look at long-term solutions that will make the foundations of our economy strong and resilient for generations to come. That is why I was proud to support the [America COMPETES Reauthorization Act](#), which was passed by the House of Representatives on May 28th. This bill establishes, revises,

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While we are not all the way there yet, there are some good signs that the economy is finally starting to grow again. In the year since President Obama took office, the Democratic-led Congress has stemmed the tide of job losses. This combined with several key economic indicators are showing we are finally on the right track again:

- o The economy is growing again – GDP has swung from negative 6.4 to 5.7 percent growth—the biggest 9 month swing in nearly 30 years.

- o American's pensions and savings are rebounding – The stock market has increased from around 6500 when President Obama took office to over 10,000 now.

- o American companies are producing again – Manufacturing has grown 6 months in a row to the highest level in six years.

Despite all these signs, I know that what matters in the end are the things happening in your city, in your community and in your home. I know millions of families are hurting right now. I receive heart-wrenching letters every day from constituents worrying about where their next paycheck will come from, how they will put dinner on the table and where they will find the

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money to pay the next bill. These are proud people who have never asked for a hand-out, and yet they have nowhere else to turn to. I take this knowledge with me every day to the floor of the House of Representatives. I judge every bill that comes across my desk against this standard. In this regard, I have been fighting for a jobs bill to provide relief to Main Street, not Wall Street.

Financial Reform

On July 21st, 2010, President Obama signed into law the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. I was proud to support this bill that protects the American people and small businesses from the greed and recklessness of Wall Street.

As we rebuild our economy, it is important that we put in place common-sense rules to ensure big banks and Wall Street do not jeopardize this recovery and hurt hard-working families or small businesses again through inappropriately risky behavior. This law will finally restore some common sense to Wall Street.

For eight years, President Bush and his Republican allies looked the other way as Wall Street and big banks exploited loopholes, risked your money on complex schemes, and rewarded failures and recklessness. As a result, America's families and small businesses paid the price with the loss of 8 million jobs and \$17 trillion in retirement savings and Americans' net worth. Failure to properly oversee and regulate financial markets allowed Wall Street and the big banks to gamble with the American public's money and compromise our future, our savings, and the American Dream.

During the 111th Congress, I have worked with my colleagues and President Obama to make the tough choices and take the effective steps to bring our economy back from the brink of collapse. Now, while Wall Street is bouncing back, is the time to make sure that they aren't left to police themselves again. Under this reform package, we will institute stronger consumer protections, improve market transparency, and reward responsible investing in order to foster competitiveness, confidence in our financial sector, and robust growth in our economy. Over time, we will see new jobs and increased investment and entrepreneurship in our district.

This financial regulatory reform package implements common sense reforms that hold Wall Street and the big banks accountable, including:

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- o Ending the “too big to fail” concept by strengthening government oversight over big banks and large financial firms – putting an end to taxpayer bailouts;

- o Creating a Consumer Financial Protection Agency that will act as an independent watchdog on behalf of U.S. consumers;

- o Empowering the Securities and Exchange Commission with new enforcement powers to protect U.S. investors;

- o Regulating over-the-counter derivatives;

- o Auditing the Federal Reserve's emergency lending programs from the financial crisis and limit the Fed's emergency lending authority;

- o Installing new protections for grocers, retailers and other small businesses facing out-of-control interchange fees that banks and other debit card issuers charge these businesses for using their system, resulting in billions of dollars in savings for merchants;

- o Enhancing oversight of the credit rating agencies; and

- o Limiting inappropriate pay practices of bank executives that contribute to financial instability.

This legislation will safeguard our economy, help us create new jobs and put consumers first. I am proud to be a staunch supporter for this necessary financial reform and look forward towards implementing new measures that will safeguard American jobs, small businesses and savings in our district.

Deficit

o When will you stop deficit spending over \$1 trillion/year? What is realistic?

o How are we going to deal with our huge debt? What is your plan for balancing the budget?
PAYGO

The federal budget should be a statement of our nation's values that reflects the priorities of the American people: good jobs, safe communities, quality education, and access to health care. In recent years, however, Republican budget proposals have conflicted with these priorities and sent our nation into deeper and deeper debt.

When President Bush assumed office in 2001, he inherited a projected ten-year budget surplus of \$5.6 trillion. Unfortunately, this opportunity to make key investments in America's future was squandered, leaving President Obama with the worst budget deficit in our nation's history and an economic recession of a magnitude not seen since the Great Depression. The Obama Administration inherited an economy in recession after years of neglected oversight and careless deregulation of the financial markets, and as expected the top priority for the Administration and Congress is our economic recovery.

On February 1st, 2010, President Obama submitted his budget proposal for fiscal year 2011 (FY11). The President has proposed to continue the work he and the Congress have done to prioritize our nation's economic recovery through job creation strategic investments, and fiscal responsibility. Since its harrowing freefall in 2008, our economy is experiencing significant improvements, including 5.7% growth in the last quarter of 2009 – the largest increase in six years. The [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act](#), which was enacted in early 2009, has been a major reason for to this recovery, and we will continue to realize more of its benefits in 2010, such as tax relief for 9 in 10 families and small businesses, job creation through investments in infrastructure and other projects, and extension of unemployment benefits for millions of Americans.

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Despite encouraging reports of decreases in job losses, the unemployment rate remains unacceptably high. The President's budget calls for additional job creation initiatives including enabling increases in U.S. exports and providing small business with more access to needed credit.

President Obama also recognized the need to invest in our future with strong budgetary commitments to our [energy independence](#) , [healthcare reform](#) , [transportation infrastructure](#) and [education](#) . Key investments in these needy areas will return profound advancements to our economy and wellbeing.

Mindful of these urgent needs, the President was still careful to craft a budget that will restore fiscal responsibility. The budget includes a deficit of \$1.3 trillion for 2011, slightly less than the expected deficit for 2010. By 2014, the deficit is projected to fall to \$706 billion, or half of the 2009 deficit. In constructing his budget proposal, President Obama continued his commitment to examine every line of the budget to identify ineffective programs. His administration has already identified 126 programs that he proposes to eliminate or reduce, for an estimated savings of \$23 billion for FY11. In addition, the President's proposed fiscal commission will develop proposals to further reduce the deficit.

When Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives in 2007, we adopted a Pay-As-You-Go (PAYGO) budgeting rule. This rule forces all legislation in the House that increases mandatory spending or decreases tax receipts to be offset with a revenue increase or spending cut elsewhere. PAYGO rules played a large part in the budget discipline enjoyed during the Clinton Administration, which provided the projected ten year budget surplus that was squandered by the Bush Administration and Congressional Republicans who abandoned PAYGO rules in 2002. With a President that supports fiscal responsibility, Congress passed a statutory PAYGO rule which was subsequently signed into law on February 12, 2010. Surprisingly, not a single Republican member of Congress voted in favor of the measure.

You can find more detailed information in the [President's FY2011 Budget Request](#) and how it directly affects our state of [California](#) .

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Due to the large and erratic changes scheduled for 2010 and then again in 2011, there is general agreement in Congress that some sort of estate tax reform is needed. A proposal to make the 2009 rules (\$3.5 million exemption and 45% top rate) permanent was included in President Obama's 2010 and 2011 budget outlines and was passed by the House of Representatives on December 3rd, 2009 (H.R. 4154, Permanent Estate Tax Relief for Families, Farmers, and Small Businesses Act). Unfortunately, the Senate has yet to consider H.R. 4154 or other estate tax reform bills.

Although the estate tax affects a relatively small number of people, the tax does have problems that need to be addressed. The tax is complex and can have a detrimental effect on small businesses and families who live in areas that have high property values, such as Silicon Valley. I will continue to push for strong reform of the estate tax, so the lives of Silicon Valley residents will not be adversely affected.

Bush Tax Cuts

Without consideration to their impact on the national debt, the tax cuts enacted in the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act of 2001 (EGTRRA) and the Jobs and Growth Tax

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Relief Reconciliation Act of 2003 (JGTRRA) were one of the cornerstones of the failed economic policy of President George W. Bush's Administration and his Republican allies in Congress. Although they affected a large spectrum of Americans, the majority of the tax benefits were enjoyed by the highest-income Americans while costing over \$1.6 trillion. These Bush cuts are set to expire at the end of 2010.

I do not support an extension of the 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts for the highest-income households particularly during this economic crisis. However, I do support extension and -expansion of tax relief to medium- to low-income Americans that are experiencing the heaviest impact of the economic crisis.

Unlike the Bush tax cuts which heavily focused on the wealthy, this Congress has enacted more than \$800 billion in broad-based tax cuts for working American families. These include the Recovery Act, the largest health care tax cut in history, job-creating tax incentives to spur hiring of out-of-work Americans, and tax credits and accelerated write offs for small businesses. Bruce Bartlett, President Reagan's domestic policy advisor, noted that "federal taxes are very considerably lower by every measure since Obama became president."

Most people don't realize that tax cuts are the biggest individual piece of the Recovery Act. President Obama and Congress gave 95% of working Americans one of the largest tax cuts in history through the Recovery Act. In addition, you may qualify for a series of other generous tax cuts – for example, you could save money for attending college, making energy-saving home improvements, purchasing a home for the first time, or buying a new car. I encourage everyone to take advantage of these and other tax cuts. And if you missed out on any of these tax cuts, there is still time to amend your 2009 return to get the full benefits of the Recovery Act.

Pro-Taxes/Taxes ad Deterrents

- o Do you favor a tax on soda to fight obesity and reduce the debt?

- o What do you think of Pete Stark's bill to create a tiny tax on currency transactions to curb financial speculation and raise money for services?

Tax on Soda

Obesity is an escalating problem in the United States. According to the Surgeon General, 61 percent of adults in the United States were overweight or obese and 13 percent of children and adolescents were overweight in 1999. This prevalence has nearly tripled for adolescents in the past 2 decades. Overweight and obesity result from an imbalance involving excessive calorie consumption and/or inadequate physical activity. Soda and other similar beverages are contributing factors to obesity. Although I find taxing consumption of soda to be an interesting measure to raise funds, this initiative would be a State and local government proposition. Similarly, laws concerning the taxation of consumption of alcohol originate out of the State, county and city governments.

[This question was asked and answered in Campbell Town Hall - http://www.mercurynews.com/campbell/ci_15689631]

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Tax on Currency Transactions

On July 20, 2010, Representative Pete Stark introduced H.R. 5783, the Investing in Our Future Act of 2010. This bill would amend the Internal Revenue Code to impose an excise tax on currency transactions exceeding \$10,000 equal to 0.005 percent of the value of the currency acquired in the transaction, and use these collected funds to pay for investments in children, global health, and climate change mitigation. Studies estimate that a worldwide 0.005 percent tax on dollar transactions would raise \$28 billion a year and reduce speculative currency trading by 14 percent.

During tough economic times, I appreciate Rep. Stark's efforts to find creative ways to fund important federal priorities, and will continue to work with my colleagues to find common sense solutions to our nation's deficit and economic problems.

Social Security

Both at my town halls and in our community, many people have recently contacted me regarding their concerns about the structure and the future of the Social Security and Medicare programs.

Social Security is one of our most important safety net programs, which ensures a reliable source of income for millions of Americans. In 2004, it constituted more than half of the income of nearly two-thirds of retired Americans, and for one in six, it is their only source of income.

I believe it is critical that we take steps to preserve and strengthen Social Security for the next generation. Like the majority of the American public, I believe that we need to establish a solid, long-term source of funding for Social Security, rather than making the problem worse by draining from the Trust Fund and endangering retirement benefits for millions of deserving Americans.

Privatization

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o Over the last few years, we have heard many arguments from the Right in favor of privatizing Social Security program. Unfortunately, also over the last few years, we have learned that private investments are not always dependable. In addition, if we were to put Social Security accounts in the hands of private institutions, it is likely that a good portion of the money invested would be paid in fees and would become profits for the managing institutions, rather than being reserved for American seniors.

o While I believe that we need to take measures to address the deficit, I do not believe that Social Security or other safety net programs would benefit from privatization, nor do I believe that it is appropriate to once again trust banks and private companies with managing the savings of American seniors.

o I feel that there are many better options to strengthen Social Security, such as raising the earnings cap on the employment tax. While in Congress, I will continue to work with my colleagues to come up with a solution that preserves and protects Social Security benefits for all Americans, now and in future generations.

o To learn more about my position on this issue, click [here](#) .

Cost-of-Living

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o During the first few decades of our country's Social Security program, Congress periodically granted across-the-board increases in Social Security benefits, in order to make sure recipients' incomes were keeping up with increases in the cost of living. In 1975, however, at the recommendation of the Social Security Advisory Council, Congress voted overwhelmingly to adopt automatic [cost-of-living adjustments \(COLAs\)](#) each year, with the increases based on the Consumer Price Index for Wage and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

o Under this system, benefits increase, on average, at about the same rate as the average cost of living in the United States, without the risk of being stalled by political debates or posturing. Unfortunately, in years when we are in an economic downturn like the one we are in now, seniors often do not see the benefits increases they had hoped for.

o Regionally, there is no system to address disparities in the cost-of living. Benefits for a senior in rural Arkansas may be the same as the benefits provided to seniors in the Silicon Valley.

Long term, I believe that many adjustments need to be made in order to improve the solvency, the fairness, and the efficiency of our Social Security system. I will continue to support our Social Security programs, while advocating for ways to improve them so that they can better serve the needs of seniors everywhere.

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Education

o How can we justify the federal takeover of education? Common Core are led by states, national STEM efforts, Equity Commission is to support the work of the states.

o When Is NCLB going to pass? This coming year NCLB on the table, Student Privacy Protection re-up

o How can deal with cuts to the UC system? State Reps. w/ support with Recovery & Student loan reform

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Federal Role in Education

Some people may have heard about “national” Common Core standards. The [Common Core Standards](#) project is a state level initiative. State education leaders have been working to gain nation-wide adoption of a [Common Core](#) set of academic standards. The voluntary adoption of the Common Core Standards needs to be approved by each state, and are not mandated by the federal government. The [California State Board of Education](#), with the support of the state [Superintendent Jack O’Connell](#), voted to adopt the standards with some modifications. Your state education leaders felt it was in the best interests of California students to adopt these standards. Please contact your state education leaders, or consult the [Common Core Standards](#) website for any questions you may have with this state level initiative.

I do think the federal government has a role in driving science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education efforts. I so strongly believe that the future competitiveness of United States economy and education system depends on a solid foundation in math and science that I authored legislation that would affect all federal agencies and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. I am happy to see the White House taking a strong lead in raising awareness, but perhaps the single most important bill Congress has passed is [the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2010](#). The COMPETES Act supports research and investments that encourage the creation of a more dynamic business environment based largely upon on the STEM fields. The Act invests in science, technology, engineering and math [\(STEM\) education](#), which is [important for our nation’s long term economic health](#) and a critical driver of the economy in our District. This bill is supported by [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#),

[National Association of Manufacturers](#)

, and the

[Business Roundtable](#)

, among others. While more than 90% of Republicans voted NO on this legislative package, I was proud to support H.R. 5116, which authorizes much needed investments in research and businesses.

I am also extremely pleased that several of my amendments and legislative sections were adopted in The America COMPETES Act reauthorization.

[Equity in education](#) is another area in which I believe the federal government has a significant responsibility. The United States Department of Education officially announced the creation of the [National Commission on Education Equity and Excellence](#). I've spent the last year working in Congress to establish and provide funding for the Commission and believe it to be a key part of bringing equity to America's public education system. My "equity framework," is rooted in a child based approach. In our current system, federal dollars are funneled to high poverty schools to attempt to achieve funding parity (equal dollars per student). In an equitable system, the full range of abilities of each student are formally documented and funds allocated to meet those diverse needs, creating true equity (providing a diversity of resources for each student). The Equity Commission represents a critical step towards realizing this framework. The Commission will be made up of a diverse group of experts in education finance, pedagogy and civil rights. They will provide all stakeholders an opportunity to play a role in the process. Ultimately, the Commission will issue a report with recommendations for changing the way public education is financed to achieve equity. I am excited for the Commission to start its work and eager to continue partnering with the Department of Education and my colleagues in the House to rebuild the public education system so that it is rooted in equity.

Elementary & Secondary Education Act, aka NCLB

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In the near future, Congress will take up reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). ESEA has been up for discussion in committee for a few years, and I am taking an active role in proposing changes to ESEA in order to enable our students to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. I have been meeting with local, state, and national leaders as part of a continuing campaign to modify ESEA so that resources and incentives are aligned with our educational values of equity for each child, efficient financing structures to eliminate waste, and effective laws to protect students, family and teacher rights. I am supportive of much needed reforms, such as including science and arts education. I am extremely hopeful that ESEA reauthorization will come to about next year, with strong leaders like Rep Nancy Pelosi and Rep George Miller committed to bringing ESEA before the full House of Representatives for a vote in 2011.

You can read my entire education agenda on my website, but I wanted to highlight one specific legislative item, the [Student Privacy Protection Act](#).

Did you know that the [No Child Left Behind](#) law requires your child's high school to divulge his or her personal information to military recruiters? I respect the right of an individual to choose to enter the military. I also respect the duty of the armed forces to engage in a recruiting process. Recruiting efforts, however, should honor the privacy rights of individuals and families. Many constituents brought this matter to my attention in 2005. Parents expressed frustration that their children were persistently being contacted at home by military recruiters, and wanted to know how the military gained access to their personal contact information without their consent. My [Student Privacy Protection Act](#), H.R. 1091, seeks to reverse a little known provision of the No Child Left Behind Act which requires school districts to give military recruiters the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of students, unless their parents "opt-out" of the list.

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I have extensive experience in education and understand the strengths and weaknesses of our educational system. As your federal representative, I will continue to fight for a more equitable education for each student.

Higher Education and California's Budget Cuts

Budget cuts to California's education system are devastating. With the [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, money was made available](#) to universities for research, college education tax credits and tuition assistance, and to Local Educational Agencies to prevent teacher layoffs. However, the ultimate responsibility for funding higher education institutions lies with your State representatives and governor. The [California Legislative Analyst's](#) office has an extensive library of information, with objective reports providing a clear picture of the education funding.

At the federal level, I and my democratic colleagues worked hard to pass [The Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act](#).

While this bill does not prevent cuts being made to the higher education system, it does provide more support for tuition assistance where California's schools find it necessary to increase their students' costs.