# Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi

## Washington Update

April 2002

INSIDE:


Campaign Finance Reform.....2

Hunters Point.....2

Immigration Section 245(i)...2

Environmental Health.....3

September 11 Investigation.....3

Appropriations Update.....3

Unfinished Agenda.....4


Dear Friends:

As I write this letter, Congress is engaged in our annual battle of the budget. The tragedy of September 11 has had an impact on our budget priorities. We most certainly want to invest in protecting our country from future attacks, but we must also invest in our children's future.

The Republicans have proposed a budget that falls far short in its investments in education, health care, environmental protection, and housing. Their budget raids $1.6 trillion from the Social Security Trust Fund, depletes the Medicare Trust Fund, and fails in its proposal for prescription drug benefits for America's seniors under Medicare.

In six years, 77 million Baby Boomers will become eligible for Social Security. We must protect the Social Security Trust Fund without burdening our children and grandchildren with oppressive debt.

As House Democratic Whip, I have joined with Leader Richard Gephardt and the vast majority of our party in calling upon President Bush to hold a budget summit to help us reach our common goals.

To help keep you informed, this newsletter will provide updates on some of the critical issues facing Congress. I look forward to hearing your comments.

Nancy

## New House Democratic Whip

On February 6, I was sworn in as the new House Democratic Whip — the highest-ranking position for a woman in Congressional history — during a ceremony at Statuary Hall in the U.S. Capitol. Our guests, including many supporters from San Francisco, were welcomed by the Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, who graciously extended the hand of friendship across party lines. I was honored that Minority Leader Richard Gephardt and former Whip David Bonior participated in the ceremony.

Earlier that day, I held a thank-you luncheon for more than 60 current and former women members of Congress, of both parties. They are the pioneers who made my success possible, and I wanted to recognize their contributions to the advancement of women.

Since becoming Whip, I have received thousands of messages of congratulations and support, which have heartened and inspired me. One letter quoted a true trailblazer, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who said: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

Congresswoman Pelosi is sworn in as Whip by Leader Richard Gephardt. She is joined by her husband, Paul, and two of her grandsons, Alexander and Liam, who hold the Bible.

By electing a woman to its top level of leadership, the Congress has sent a clear message to American women and girls: anything is possible for you.

We have made history with the Whip election. Now, we must make progress.

# Congress Approves Campaign Finance Reform

"The corrosive effect of special interest big money in the political process is a danger to our participatory democracy."

~ Rep. Nancy Pelosi

Everyone who is elected to Congress takes an oath of office to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. One threat to our Constitution, indeed to our participatory democracy, is the role of special interest money in the political process.

On February 14, the House of Representatives took a huge step toward improving the quality of our democracy by passing the bipartisan Shays-Meehan Campaign Finance Reform Act (H.R. 2356). This was the first real opportunity to change our campaign finance laws in a generation. The Shays-Meehan bill will end the corrosive influence of special interest money and level the playing field so that all Americans can participate and be heard. By reforming the way we finance campaigns, we will help restore confidence in the political process, end the alienation of the American people, and give the government back to the people.

Passing the bill was no small feat. For more than 17 hours, we turned back 11 amendments offered by the Republicans in an attempt to defeat true reform. Finally, at 2:43 a.m., in a resounding victory, the Shays-Meehan Campaign Finance Reform Act passed by a vote of 240 to 189. Five weeks later, the Senate passed the bill by a vote of 60 to 40. On March 27, President Bush signed the legislation, which will go into effect in November.

# Transfer of Hunters Point Shipyard Underway

In January, as the first public event in my new Democratic Whip's office in the Capitol, I hosted a signing ceremony for an agreement between the City of San Francisco and the Navy on the full cleanup and transfer of Hunters Point Shipyard to the City. Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, whose leadership was essential to the day's success, also participated in the ceremony.

Under the agreement, the Navy will hand over 88 acres for the development of much-needed housing and retail space. The cleanup and transfer of the land brings us a step closer to realizing long-held dreams of more economic opportunity and a safer environment for the Bayview Hunters Point area.

The agreement creates a partnership with the City, the Navy, community groups, and the developer. The idea is to give faster, more effective feedback to the Navy on its clean-up efforts, and to commit the Navy to reexamine the status of the landfill at the shipyard. In addition to the agreement, Senator Feinstein took the lead in obtaining $50.6 million in federal funds for decontamination of other parcels of land at the shipyard.

Senator Dianne Feinstein and Congresswoman Pelosi look on as Mayor Willie Brown and Navy Secretary Gordon England sign an agreement on Hunters Point Shipyard.

## House Extends Section 245 (i) to Help Immigrants

In a victory that recognizes the critical contributions that hard-working immigrants have made to this country, the House voted in March to extend Section 245 (i) of the Immigration and Naturalization Act, which allows many undocumented immigrants to remain in the United States while they apply for permanent residency. Without this program, these immigrants would have to apply for visas from their home countries, which could keep them out of the U.S. for up to 10 years.

As the new Whip, I worked with members of the Hispanic Caucus to garner the support of our Democratic colleagues. I am proud that more than 90 percent of our party voted for this legislation, which needed two-thirds support of the House. The bill is now before the Senate, which I hope will act quickly. If we care about our families, we must keep them together.

Please join
Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi
*for a*
Neighborhood Meeting
Saturday, April 20
10:00 a.m.
San Francisco City College
Southeast Campus Community Center
1800 Oakdale Avenue
*Take Bus Lines 23, 24, 44, or 15 to Palou*

# Improving Public Health

## Nationwide Health Tracking Network

Chronic disease is responsible for seven out of every 10 deaths in the U.S. each year, and costs our nation $325 billion in annual health care expenses and lost productivity. Each year, 150,000 babies are born with significant birth defects, 183,000 American women are diagnosed with breast cancer, and 1.8 million Americans visit hospital emergency rooms because of asthma.

In many cases, these diseases have been linked to environmental factors. However, our public health system does not have the ability to track comprehensively when and where exposure to environmental pollutants leads to disease. Tracking programs that do exist at the state and local levels are a patchwork due to the lack of agreed-upon minimum standards or requirements for environmental health tracking.

In March, I introduced legislation to create a Nationwide Health Tracking Network to collect, analyze, and report data on the rate of chronic disease and the presence of relevant environmental factors and exposures. Specifically, the legislation instructs the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop national standards for data collection and reporting, provide technical assistance to states as they build the capacity to meet those standards, and make grants to states for data collection and analysis. This information will be used to target resources and strengthen our capacity to identify, understand, rapidly respond to, and prevent chronic disease.

Recent events have demonstrated the need to strengthen our public health infrastructure. The creation of a nationwide health tracking network will help our nation meet this vital goal.

# September 11

## House-Senate Joint Investigation

One of the top priorities of Congress today is to make sure that we take the steps necessary to prevent another devastating terrorist attack. In February, as the senior Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, I joined other leaders of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees to announce a joint inquiry into the September 11 tragedy. A shared investigation is an unusual step, but the events of September 11 call for extraordinary measures.

As we protect and defend our country, we must protect and defend our Constitution, and we must be vigilant and respect our civil liberties. Former Republican Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft of Ohio said it well during World War II: "Criticism in a time of war is essential to the maintenance of any kind of democratic government."

Tibetan Youth

Congresswoman Pelosi with Tibetan Youth Leadership program participants who came to Washington in March to discuss human rights in Tibet.

# Appropriations Update

As a senior Member of the House Appropriations Committee, I successfully fought for significant increases in the current federal budget for vital programs that directly benefit San Francisco. These projects will help improve public health, protect the environment, and boost our transportation infrastructure.

**Transportation**

- $75.67 million for extending BART to San Francisco International Airport;
- $5.25 million for Muni for cleaner buses and improved communications and fleet efficiency;
- $2 million for seismic retrofits for the Golden Gate Bridge;
- $900,000 to help pay for designing new environmentally-friendly ferry service;

**Environment**

- $23.125 million for operation and maintenance of the Presidio;
- $5.8 million for San Francisco Bay environmental projects, including harbor safety, dredge disposal, and beach erosion;
- $1 million for an alternative-fuel shuttle system within the Presidio;
- $500,000 for wetlands restoration at Crissy Field;

**Health**

- $1 million for the City's Drug Treatment on Demand Program;
- $650,000 for the Department of Public Health to provide HIV care and related services through San Francisco General Hospital;
- $500,000 for the San Francisco Community Clinics Consortium for facility upgrades;
- $200,000 for the University of California to prepare and support students seeking to enter nursing.

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# Unfinished Agenda: Health Care

After the tragedy of September 11, Congress lost no time in bailing out the airline industries, which was necessary. At the same time, we should have passed legislation to help those workers who were left unemployed by September 11 and the declining economy — but we did not.

It has been more than six months since September 11, and we still have an unfinished agenda that we simply cannot afford to neglect any longer, particularly when it comes to health care.

In March, Congress finally passed minimal legislation to extend unemployment benefits for workers. But many people cannot take advantage of those benefits, and the new law did nothing to address the issue of loss of health benefits by America's workers. As workers are losing their jobs, they are also losing health benefits provided by those jobs. Without jobs, they cannot afford to pay insurance premiums.

The Democrats have organized a petition drive to force the Republican-led majority to bring a comprehensive unemployment insurance bill to a vote in the House. The proposed legislation would pay for 75 percent of COBRA health care benefits for those who have lost their jobs and would provide money to the states to pick up the other 25 percent. It would also expand the number of people who can obtain assistance by including some workers who were not eligible for COBRA to be included in Medicaid.

In addition, we must rein in the rising costs of prescription drugs. The current situation devastates our seniors living on a fixed income who rely on certificates of deposit to supplement Social Security. We must provide a real prescription drug benefit for all Medicare beneficiaries. Seniors should not have to choose between buying groceries or the medication they need to maintain their health.

We Democrats are also pushing for long-overdue patients' bill of rights legislation that would protect patients from unfair denials of health care coverage. Working families are tired of having their health placed in the hands of insurance company bureaucrats.

Our party has been united and clear in our support for strong patient protections that make HMOs legally accountable for decisions that lead to serious injury or death. Unfortunately, the Republican policy has been to back a weaker bill that favors HMOs over patients.

Nancy Pelosi
M.C.



Grand Opening

Congresswoman Pelosi with Pat Martel, board president of the San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, during opening ceremonies for the facility in March.

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This mailing was prepared, published and mailed at taxpayer expense.

printed on recycled paper

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
2457 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

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