Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi

Washington Update - August 2002

Dear Friends:

Since becoming House Democratic Whip in January, I have worked to build unity in the party, to protect Social Security, to create a Medicare prescription drug benefit, to preserve the environment and to win funding for education.

At the same time, my colleagues and I have been working with the Administration to develop a Department of Homeland Security. The purpose of this new agency is to reduce risk and to provide comfort for the families of the victims of the September 11th attacks and for all the American people.

At this writing, we have differences with the Administration about the size and the scope of the new department. We all agree that protecting and defending our country is the government's top priority. But we must also protect and defend the Constitution and our civil liberties.

We are also working to protect our nation's economic security, which has been shaken by corporate irresponsibility. The actions of a few major businesses have helped to undermine the stock market and have devastated the savings, pensions and college funds of America's working families. Working with Democrats in the Senate, we have passed a strong corporate governance bill that will restore confidence in the stock market by reducing the opportunity for fraud and financial mismanagement.

Congress continues to debate budget priorities. As is so often the case, San Francisco leads the way on issues relating to transportation, affordable housing, access to quality health care and environment protection. As always, I look forward to hearing your views on these and other issues.

Nancy

Homeland Security Update

Almost one year ago, terrorists launched vicious attacks that devastated our country. We have a responsibility to the families of survivors, indeed to every American, to reduce the risk of future attacks. That is why we began the joint House-Senate inquiry in June into the September 11 attacks with a moment of silence. That extraordinary investigation continues and will produce a product that will help make Americans safer.

Our government's most important responsibility is to protect and defend our citizens. The question before us is how to best carry out that duty in a way that guards both our physical well-being and our civil liberties.

In July, the House voted to create a Department of Homeland Security. The idea is a good one, but the details are complex. To be effective, such a department must be streamlined, agile, and equipped with technology that will enhance communications among those who have access to information and those who need it.

At this writing, Congress is in the process of working through those details. While there is disagreement over the particulars, we are all united in a single goal: Protecting and defending our communities and our founding principles.

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San Francisco Conservation Corps

Congresswoman Pelosi met with participants of the San Francisco Conservation Corps, who receive academic training while working on community service projects, to discuss environmental conservation at the Presidio.

Breaking Ground on a New Federal Building in San Francisco

Breaking ground on San Francisco's new federal building in July was a special event for me. Nearly 15 years in the making, funding for this project was the first appropriation I won during my first term as a Member of Congress.

Finally, agreement has been reached to construct a building in an environmentally sound way that retains jobs in San Francisco and promotes economic development. Mayor Willie Brown deserves a great deal of credit for his steadfast commitment to the project.

The 18-story tower at Seventh and Mission Streets will be a symbol of San Francisco's creative spirit. The innovative design was developed with input from the surrounding neighborhood. Environmentally conscience building techniques will save taxpayers at least $500,000 a year.

Construction is expected to last three years. With windows that open, shared spaces, natural light and a day-care center, this building is designed to meet the public's needs. San Francisco is again setting the standard for the nation.

Congresswoman Pelosi joins Mayor Willie Brown and General Services Administration officials to break ground on a new federal building that will consolidate services in a space that is attractive, inviting and energy efficient.

HIV/AIDS Update

New treatments may be on the horizon to fight HIV/AIDS. Promising advances were reported at last month's international HIV/AIDS conference in Barcelona, Spain.

The entire Bay Area was blessed that Congresswoman Barbara Lee of Oakland traveled to Barcelona to represent Congress at the conference. Rep. Lee and I recently attempted to secure an immediate increase of $500 million for global AIDS treatment and prevention. Unfortunately, the Bush Administration intervened to reduce that amount to $200 million.

That brings the United States commitment to the United Nations to fight AIDS to just $500 million, far short of the global commitment of $7 billion to $10 billion the U.N. estimates it needs each year to effectively stem the tide of AIDS in the developing world. The huge disparity between worldwide need and the limited U.S. commitment was strongly demonstrated as protesters interrupted the speech of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson.

Funding for domestic AIDS programs also remains insufficient. House Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt and I continue to build support for the Early Treatment for HIV Act, which would give low-income people with HIV access to Medicaid earlier in the course of their disease.

As a senior Member of the Appropriations Committee, I will continue to push for funding to close the gap between need and resources to treat and prevent AIDS around the world and here at home.

Providing a Prescription Drug Benefit for Seniors

When Medicare was created in 1965, it unfortunately did not include a prescription drug benefit. At that time, prescription drugs were used largely in conjunction with hospitalization and physician care. Since then, advances in biomedical research have made self-administered prescription drugs a substitute for other kinds of care, not just an addition. Prescription drugs can help prevent serious illnesses, saving the taxpayers' money by reducing the need for costly doctor visits and hospital stays.

However, the high cost of prescription drugs in our country has been an obstacle to access for many of America's seniors. The debate in Congress this summer on providing a prescription drug benefit presents two completely different views on how to proceed.

The Democratic plan would guarantee a prescription drug benefit to all seniors under Medicare. This voluntary plan would carry an affordable $25 monthly premium with a $100 deductible and a $2,000 annual out-of-pocket limit per beneficiary. Low-income seniors would pay even less.

The Republican bill provides neither guaranteed access to the drugs seniors need, nor access to their local pharmacies. Instead, it is only a suggestion to the private sector. Seniors will not be able to count on a benefit being affordable or even available from year to year and place to place.

Regrettably, the Republican majority's bill passed the House in June. At this writing, the Senate bill is being debated. When the two bills are reconciled, we will strive to ensure that America's seniors get a prescription drug plan that is comprehensive, affordable and guaranteed. The Greatest Generation deserves no less.

Congress Approves Tough Corporate Reform

From Enron to WorldCom, the massive financial scandals that have dominated the headlines have severely shaken public confidence in the stock market. For many Americans, the financial future looks uncertain. Thousands have lost their jobs. Countless others have lost their children's college funds, their pensions, their retirement savings and their dreams for a better future.

In late July, Congress took a major step toward stemming the tide of loss by passing tough Democratic legislation promoting corporate responsibility. This bill imposes the most significant financial regulations since the Great Depression, mandating comprehensive reform to protect investors and creating a strong, independent oversight board to serve as watchdogs over public companies. The legislation removes conflicts of interests in business, banking and accounting that create the opportunity to mislead investors.

These measures will help to restore faith in the stock market, reminding the American people that despite the perilous plunges of the last few months, the system remains fundamentally sound.

But this bill is only the beginning. I am hopeful that the President and Republicans in Congress will join Democrats in looking beyond the current crisis toward restoring basic fairness to the free-enterprise system.

As we go forward, we must be careful not to paint all businesses with the same broad brush. Most corporate executives operate with integrity and deserve our trust. But the greed of the few can have devastating consequences for the many, and it is our responsibility to restore confidence in the stock market and protect investors and workers. The bill passed last month will begin to do just that.

Work Begins on Third Street Light Rail

Work has begun on a new light rail line that will help San Franciscans travel quickly, easily, affordably and comfortably from Bayview-Hunters Point and other neighborhoods to downtown.

This has been a cooperative effort. The City, state and federal governments collaborated to secure resources for the project. Muni and the City worked with communities affected by the construction to minimize disruptions to businesses and residences.

While this is a signficant first step, we must ensure that the funding continues to successfully complete the project. I have submitted a request for $5 million to begin federal funding for the Central Subway. I am working closely with Mayor Willie Brown and with Members of Congress responsible for funding transportation projects to ensure that this request is included in the upcoming spending bill.

When Phase II, the Central Subway, is completed, we will be able to ride public transit from Bayview to the Sunset.

In May, after the groundbreaking for the Third Street Light Rail, Congresswoman Pelosi talks with Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, far right, Congressman Charles Rangel of New York and Ms. Maxwell's mother, Enola Maxwell, Director of the Potrero Hill House, about the importance of continued federal funding for the Third Street Light Rail Project.

Committee Approves Measure to Help Airport Security Screeners

Airport security workers facing layoffs because they are not U.S. citizens are a step closer to getting employment and training assistance. Last month, Congress passed an emergency appropriations bill that contained my amendment urging the Department of Labor to provide retraining and placement services to those workers.

Aviation security legislation passed last year requires screeners to be U.S. citizens – though pilots, flight attendants and members of the National Guard can be legal permanent residents. At San Francisco International Airport, about 80 percent of security screeners are legal permanent residents. Some will be able to earn citizenship before the November deadline, but many others will need to find new jobs.

Mayor Willie Brown, Congressman Tom Lantos of San Mateo and I have written to the commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, urging the agency to expedite citizenship applications for permanent legal residents who want to keep their jobs as airport screeners.

Women's Voices on National Security

In Washington and across the nation, women have a critical role to play in national security and foreign policy. In June, I convened a daylong conference at the Library of Congress on Capitol Hill that brought together experts in domestic security, defense, and international relations. The conference included an inspiring keynote address by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, as well as substantive discussions among leading academics and women Members of Congress.

Panelists briefed attendees on world trouble spots such as the Middle East and Central and South Asia. Participants discussed threats to world stability and what we are doing to ensure safety at home and abroad.

During the conference, we developed strategies for public policy initiatives and brainstormed about how best to expand our network of women leaders.

The meeting highlighted the depth of knowledge, experience and authority women have on issues ranging from transforming the military, to leadership in the Middle East, to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Women leaders must be full participants in every aspect of setting public policy, including the complex issues that we face in the areas of defense and foreign policy.

Congresswoman Pelosi is joined by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Congresswoman Louise Slaughter. Albright was the keynote speaker at Rep. Pelosi's conference on women and national security.

Head Start Grant Gets Funding Boost

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded San Francisco State University a continuing $11.4 million grant to administer San Francisco's Head Start Program. Since 1965, the Head Start Program has provided nutritional, health development, parenting and childhood development services to low-income communities across the country.

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Please join
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for a
Neighborhood Meeting
Saturday, August 24
10:00 a.m.
Chinatown YMCA Gymnasium
855 Sacramento Street
Muni Bus Lines: 45, 30, and 1.

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M.C.

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