



COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Contact: Kirstin Brost, Full Committee, 202-225-2771

APPROPRIATIONS: CHANGING AMERICA'S PRIORITIES

Since the American public gave us an opportunity to affect the direction of the country, House Democrats have been working overtime to reshape the nation's priorities.

Last year, Congressional Republicans produced a budget that so squeezed domestic programs that they could not get their own members to support the cuts it created and they were unable to complete work on a single domestic appropriations bill. In January, faced with having to do two years work in one year, Democrats ran a clean up brigade and finished the work Republicans had failed to do. We cut or eliminated some 60 low priority programs and moved \$17 billion to high priority areas.

In February, the President sent the Congress a 2007 emergency funding request for Iraq and Afghanistan. For three months Democrats held the President's feet to the fire and fought to deny him the blank check he was used to. Congress sent the President a bill that set a reasonable plan for ending our military's participation in Iraq's civil war. After the President's veto, we passed a second proposal to end combat operations in Iraq, but the Senate could not move that proposal, and so the struggle continues.

Next, the House tackled the 2008 appropriations bills. The Appropriations Committee held over 200 hearings, nearly doubling the number Republicans held last year and keeping Democrat's commitment to increase oversight. Subcommittee Chairs worked with their Republican colleagues to produce bi-partisan bills, and each bill has passed the House with bi-partisan support.

Between the work we did in January finishing up last year's bills and the work we have done this summer on the annual appropriations bills, we have moved \$40 billion into high priority programs:

- **Our first priority was Veterans**, providing the largest increase in the history of the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- **Our second priority was Healthcare**, including five initiatives to improve healthcare access for the uninsured and the underinsured;
- **Our third priority was Education**, increasing Pell Grants so that working families will have more help in sending their kids to college;
- **Our fourth priority was medical research**, growing the number of grants for scientists to research diseases like cancer, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, leukemia, and diabetes;
- **Our fifth priority was law enforcement**, putting more cops on the street and making sure they have the resources they need; and
- **Our sixth priority was energy independence**, addressing high gas and energy prices by finding solutions that reduce our reliance on foreign oil and attack the problem of global warming.

All of these bills were passed with bi-partisan support, with an average of over 50 republican votes. In the six months since Democrats took power, we have already accomplished more than the Republicans did during all of last year.

PRIORITIES: THE DEMOCRATIC RECORD

Providing Veterans with First Rate Healthcare

The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 5.8 million patients in 2008 including more than 263,345 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Democrats have passed the largest increase in Veterans Healthcare in the VA's history. This includes programs specifically targeted toward treating veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan – including those with post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries, adding over 1,000 new claims processors to reduce the backlog of 400,000 benefits claims, and ensuring that facilities are maintained at the highest level.

Higher Education Access Deficit

Between 2001 and 2006, the cost of attending a four-year public college increased by \$3,764; however, the maximum Pell Grant increased by just \$300. In seven short months, House Democrats have raised the maximum Pell Grant by a \$650, from \$4,050 to \$4,700, benefiting over 5.5 million low and middle-income students.

Attacking the Family Health Care Deficit

44.8 million Americans do not have health insurance. Democrats have passed 5 initiatives to address problems faced by the uninsured and the underinsured, including new investments in:

1. **Community health centers** – serving an additional 2.2 million uninsured people;
2. **State health access grants**, a new initiative to provide start up grants to States that have plans to expand health care coverage to targeted groups;
3. **High risk insurance pools** to help states provide affordable insurance for almost 200,000 people who are medically high risk and are not able to obtain health insurance;
4. **Health insurance counseling** so that 45 million Medicare beneficiaries can understand and use their benefits; and
5. **State “gap filler” grants** to increase the number of trade-impacted workers who are able to take advantage of the Health Coverage Tax Credit.

Reducing the Medical Research Deficit

Between 2003 and 2006, the annual number of research grants that the National Institutes of Health could support for research into things like heart disease, cancer, Parkinson's and diabetes actually declined by 1,282 research grants, a drop of 12%. In the two bills passed by the House this year, Democrats would fund 1,265 more grants than the President's request and increase the average cost of new research grants in order to support the next generation of researchers.

Energy Independence and Climate Change

This year Democrats provide unprecedented investments for addressing rising energy prices and the problems of global climate change investing \$6.7 billion, \$2.1 billion or 30% above the President's request, for programs throughout the appropriations bills. This includes a 50-percent increase in a broad range of energy efficiency and renewable energy programs including solar, biofuels, hydropower, and geothermal, as well as new vehicle technology and energy efficient buildings and homes.

Strengthening State and Local Law Enforcement

From 2001 to 2006 funding for state and local law enforcement grants, including COPS and Byrne Grants, was cut from \$4.4 billion to \$2.5 billion - 43%. Last year, the FBI reported that violent crime had its biggest increase in over a decade. Democrats are working to reverse that trend, restoring these funds to \$3.3 billion in 2008, including \$100 million for the "COPS on the Beat" hiring program putting 2,800 new police officers on America's streets.

Homeland Security

- **First Responders and Port Security** - Since September 11th our state and local governments have been working around the clock to keep us safe. But since 2004, funds for first responder and port security grants have been steadily cut. This year Democrats rejected the President's proposed cuts and increased funds by 20% for Emergency Management Performance Grants, Fire Grants, Metropolitan Medical Response System, Interoperable Communications Grants, Port Security Grants, State Grants, Urban Area Grants, and Transit Grants.
- **Improving Security at Airports and on Airplanes:** Despite increased threats, we are not using the best equipment to screen checked baggage and are not routinely screening carry-on baggage for explosives. Funding (\$560 million) in the 2008 House Homeland Security appropriations bill, when combined with \$315 million in the 2007 supplemental, make a down payment on the needs identified in the most recent aviation baggage screening study. In addition, cargo carried on passenger aircraft is not routinely inspected for explosives. The 2007 supplemental provided \$80 million for inspectors and equipment to screen more cargo carried in the belly of passenger aircraft and the 2008 House bill mandates a doubling of this screening.
- **Border Security** - Critical investments are made into border and immigration security, providing for record numbers of border patrol agents (17,819 in total), and detention beds (28,450).
 - **Customs and Border Protection:** \$8.9 billion, \$139 million above the request and \$886 million above 2007 fully funding border security fencing and tactical infrastructure and 3,000 additional border patrol agents.
 - **Criminal Alien Program:** \$180 million, including \$15 million for a new requirement that DHS contact every prison, jail, and correctional facility in U.S. monthly to identify incarcerated and convicted aliens who are candidates for deportation and to start removal proceedings where ordered.
 - **US-VISIT:** \$462 million, \$99 million above 2007 to track foreign visitors to the U.S.

Helping Local Communities with Clean Water and Sewer Systems: From 2004 to 2006 funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund was cut 35%, from \$1.35 billion to \$877 million, preventing communities around the country from providing clean water for their citizens. Democrats have added \$634 million to this program, helping hundreds of local communities.

Fighting HIV/AIDS Around the World

In January, Democrats increased funding for AIDS by \$1.3 billion, and then again by an additional \$1.2 billion in 2008 for prevention, treatment and care programs around the world.

These are forward looking investments to try and meet the economic, social and military challenges that our nation will confront over the next decade. We believe that they represent better investments than the President's decisions to spend almost \$600 billion for a misguided war in Iraq and providing over \$50 billion in super-sized tax cuts for folks who make more than a million dollars a year.