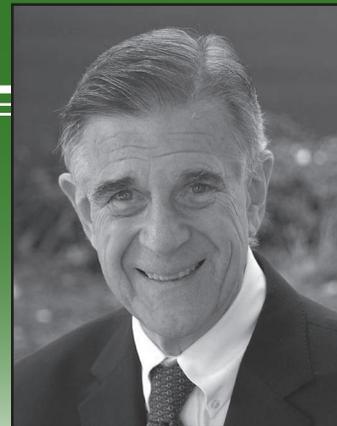


FEBRUARY 2012

PETE STARK'S LEGISLATIVE REPORT



CONGRESSIONAL OUTLOOK FOR 2012

As Congress begins 2012, we have a lot of work ahead of us. Despite signs that the economy is moving in the right direction, too many people are still searching for work and too many families are struggling to make ends meet. Congress needs to work together and with the President to implement policies to keep this recovery on track and protect those impacted by the recession.

Unfortunately, Congress finished last year with another manufactured crisis. Three critical programs were at risk: the temporary payroll tax cut and extended unemployment insurance (UI) benefits were set to

expire, and Medicare physician reimbursements were facing a 27% cut.

The House Majority refused to go along with a bipartisan Senate compromise to extend these three programs for two months, which would buy time for further negotiations on a longer-term package. Fortunately, after digging in their heels, House Republicans finally relented to public pressure and passed the Senate bill.

Now back after the New Year, we must pass a longer-term extension of UI and the payroll tax cut, and

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TAX TIPS: FILING YOUR 2011 RETURN

Deadline: This year, your 2011 tax returns must be postmarked by Tuesday, April 17th because April 15th falls on a weekend.

Refunds: The IRS will issue refunds to taxpayers in as few as 10 days to those who e-file and elect to use direct deposit. The IRS "Where's My Refund?" tool on www.irs.gov will help you track the status of your refund after your return is filed.

Tax Forms: Forms will not be mailed to your home. Tax forms can be downloaded for free at www.irs.gov. If you would like tax forms mailed to you, call 1-800-TAX-FORM (1-800-829-3676).

Using "E-File": All taxpayers can file electronically for free on the IRS website. If you earned less than \$57,000 in 2011, you can also use brand name tax software free of charge to help you complete your tax return. The electronic forms and free tax software are available online at: www.irs.gov/efile.

The IRS Website: IRS answers many common taxpayer questions on its website, www.irs.gov. New website features can help people get answers to their tax questions, figure out if they qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, securely pay owed taxes, and file tax returns.

Phone the IRS: If you'd prefer to call, the IRS's toll free phone number is: 1-800-829-1040.

In-Person Help: The IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program and the Tax Counseling for the Elderly Program offer free tax help to taxpayers at more than 12,000 centers nationwide. Taxpayers can find the closest center by calling 1-800-906-9887.

As always, if you need assistance with anything relating to the Federal government,

please visit www.stark.house.gov for information on constituent services or call my Fremont office at (510) 494-1388.

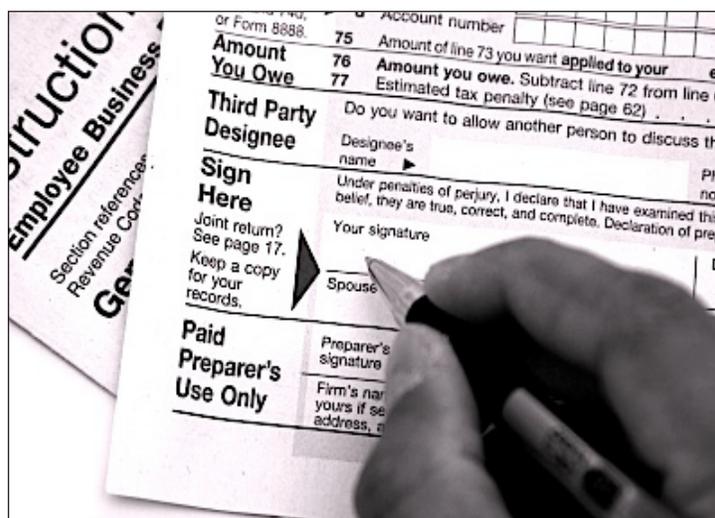


Image: Arvind Balaraman / FreeDigitalPhotos.net

PROTECTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

One of the primary functions of government should be protecting citizens from discrimination and ensuring that everyone has the chance to succeed.

For this reason, I asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to examine how students with disabilities are provided accommodations by testing companies on exams used to gain admission to college, graduate school and certain professions like law and medicine.

The GAO report came out in December and highlights significant barriers that individuals with disabilities face when they take high stakes tests, such as the SAT, GRE, LSAT, or medical boards.

(Link to the GAO report: <http://go.usa.gov/nqr>)

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), testing companies must provide accommodations to students to ensure that the test results reflect that person's aptitude and skill, not their disability.

For a blind person, this could mean providing the test

in Braille. For a person with a learning disability, such as dyslexia that causes slower reading, an accommodation usually means a little extra time.

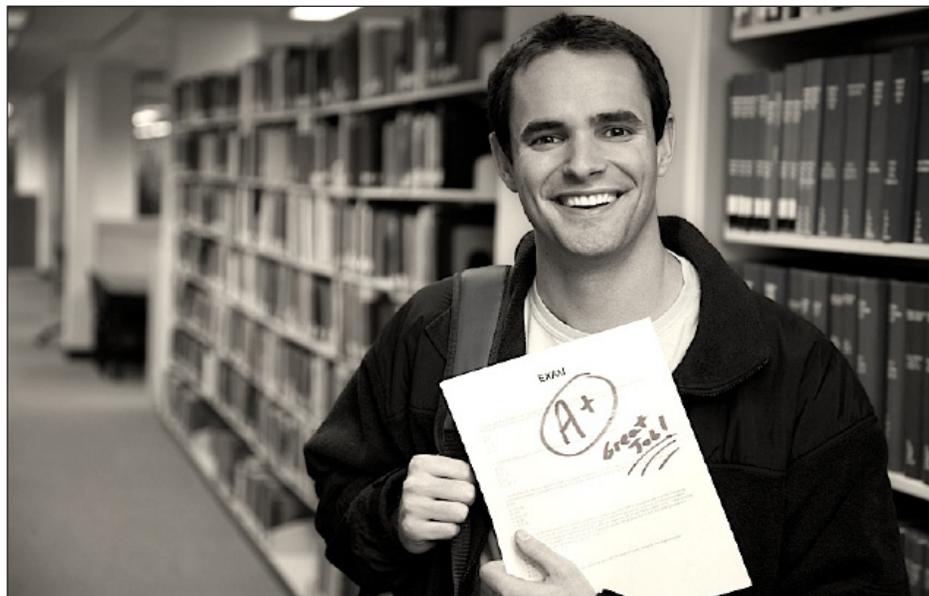
The GAO found that many testing companies are not providing these accommodations and that the Department of Justice, the federal agency in charge of enforcing the law, is not doing enough to ensure the law is

followed. Testing companies need to start following the law and the Department of Justice needs to start cracking down on those that do not.

In light of this disturbing report, I sent a letter to Attorney General Holder urging him to improve the DOJ's efforts

and offered to help the agency get the tools needed to stop discrimination against intelligent, talented people who happen to have a disability.

I have also formed the bipartisan Congressional Dyslexia Caucus. Through this caucus I will be working across the aisle to increase opportunities for people with dyslexia and other learning disabilities.



INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY

In late December, the Obama Administration announced that the Hayward Promise Neighborhood Program and California State University-East Bay will receive a five-year, \$25 million implementation grant to strengthen schools and improve educational outcomes for children in Hayward's Jackson Triangle Community. The grant is part of the Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods Program and Hayward is one of only five communities in the country to receive this funding.

The goal of the Promise Neighborhoods Program is to break the cycle of generational poverty by improving the educational outcomes and life prospects of low-income children and their families through great schools and strong community supports.

The Hayward Promise Neighborhood Program will

benefit our community by providing critical cradle-to-college academic supports and other services, including tutoring, after school, and summer programs. This will improve the educational achievement of children and make Hayward an even stronger community. The program will also support parents through parental education programs and health care to make sure they have the tools they need to raise healthy children.

It is essential to connect our community with federal resources that can help innovative local projects grow. I've been a strong advocate for maintaining federal funding for the Promise Neighborhood Program during these tough budgetary times. I supported the Hayward Promise Neighborhood Program grant application and will keep working to make the program and the Jackson Triangle neighborhood a success.

HEALTH REFORM UPDATE

As implementation of the Affordable Care Act continues, more and more Americans are benefiting. According to the Administration, since passage of the law in March of 2010:

- 2.5 million more young adults have coverage.
- More than 2 million seniors saved an average of \$550 per person on prescription drugs in 2011.
- Tens of thousands of Americans with pre-existing conditions now have affordable coverage.
- More than 22.6 million seniors and people with disabilities received free preventive care in 2011.
- Taxpayers saved nearly \$3 billion thanks to provisions in health reform that crack down on waste, fraud, and abuse.

This March, the Supreme Court will hear arguments on the constitutionality of the law with a

decision expected by late June.

- Rep. Stark and other Democratic leaders in the House and Senate filed a "friend of the court" brief supporting the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act.

Despite Washington Republicans' continued calls for repeal, states are moving forward with implementation because they know health reform will benefit their residents.

- So far, 28 states -- including those with Republican governors and/or legislatures -- are working hard to ensure they meet the promise of providing affordable, quality health insurance options by the January 1, 2014 deadline.
- California is a leader in implementation. To learn more about what's happening in our state, visit www.healthcare.ca.gov.

GOOD NEWS FROM THE IRS

Individuals can sometimes face tax liability because of the illegal actions of their spouse -- even if they were not aware of the misdeeds. This is unfair and it's why I've been working with the IRS to protect innocent spouses, who are often victims of abuse or have not had access to household financial records.

Last month, the IRS announced that they've issued guidelines to better protect innocent spouses. Each year the IRS receives some 50,000 innocent spouse claims. The new IRS guidelines mean that more of these requests for relief will be granted at the initial stage of the administrative process, saving victimized taxpayers time and money.

The guidelines expand the factors the IRS must use when considering these cases. Specifically, they require the IRS to look at whether the relationship was abusive and whether the spouse seeking relief was prevented access to financial information. The new criteria will mean that more spouses are protected.

These changes build on the July 2011 repeal of an arbitrary and harmful two-year limit on innocent spouses seeking relief from the IRS. That change was spurred by action I took in April 2011 to organize nearly 50 Democratic colleagues to pressure IRS Commissioner Doug Shulman to repeal that limit.

AN END TO OUR WAR IN IRAQ

I've spent years speaking out against the war in Iraq, signing letters and cosponsoring legislation to bring this senseless war to a close. Finally, President Obama fully withdrew our military from Iraq in December.

This will save lives and taxpayer dollars and is a major accomplishment of 2011. The costs, however, were extraordinary: nearly 1.5 million men and women have served, more than 30,000 have been wounded, nearly 4,500 have died and almost \$1 trillion was spent in Iraq.

Where does this leave us, now? We are still entrenched in a war with Afghanistan, which, if it stays on its current trajectory will cost even more than Iraq. While some troop withdrawal from Afghanistan has begun, it is at much too slow of a rate.

Maintaining a large military operation in Afghanistan until 2014, as is the President's current plan, places an undue burden on military families, first and foremost. But, it also places a heavy burden on our entire country as other important federal programs will face cuts in order to offset continued war spending. I will continue to work for a quick and responsible withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Diplomacy, not war, is the better way to address conflicts around the world.



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Pete Stark
 M.C.
 PRESORTED STANDARD

NEXT TOWN MEETINGS: SATURDAY, FEB. 11TH

UNION CITY

9:00 AM — 10:30 AM

Ruggieri Senior Center
 33997 Alvarado Niles Road

HAYWARD

11:00 AM — 12:30 PM

Hayward City Hall, Council Chambers
 777 B Street

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also prevent the Medicare physician payment cut now pending for March 1st. A conference committee has begun its work on a deal. I am hopeful it will prove successful.

While those policies will help prevent our economy from sliding backward, the Federal government must propel our economy by making smart investments. Construction workers, engineers, and others in the East Bay and elsewhere should be put to work modernizing our aging transportation, sewer and water systems, and our communications infrastructure. Teacher and public safety jobs currently on the chopping block due to local budget cuts have to be spared.

Our staggering income inequality must be addressed. The Bush era tax cuts for the very wealthy should expire at the end of the year. Tax loopholes that reward well connected corporations and individuals and help to drive up our deficit have to be closed.

While our deficit needs attention, I remain committed to protecting bedrock programs, including Medicare, Social Security, and Medicaid from devastating cuts, and to reining in defense spending, which accounts for half of our annual discretionary budget.

Americans deserve far better. It's time for Congress to step up.

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