

Education

Whenever possible, I visit schools all over the district. This is a great way to become familiar with our students, teachers and facilities and to better understand the needs of our school system. One visit in particular was especially heartening. I was invited to the Lincoln Park Community School in Somerville by an 8th grade student. The young man wrote me a very thoughtful letter on why he believed the Electoral College should be abolished in light of this year's Presidential election and asked me to come speak to his class on the issue. I accepted the invitation and spent two hours talking with the students about this historic election and the history of our democracy. I was impressed with how closely these young people had followed the election and how passionately they felt about the importance of voting.

While we have much to applaud about our schools, much remains to be done to provide the education our young people need and deserve. There are lots of federal proposals about education, but most would impose Washington's solutions on local schools. One area where communities need help and where it would be difficult for Washington to dictate policy is school construction and rehabilitation. That's why I supported \$1.2 billion in funding for school construction projects. Newer buildings are better equipped to handle new technology and our children deserve the best educational tools. Besides, however partisan Washington may be, there is no conservative or liberal way to build a school or run computer cables.

Or so you might think. However, in the last Congress, an attempt was made to exempt the proposed federally funded school construction from protections of the Davis-Bacon Act. This law requires that workers on federal construction projects receive not less than the local prevailing wage. It has worked, for generations, to insure fair play and expand opportunity. I fear that some in Congress will try again this year to split supporters of public education from supporters of organized labor.

But, beyond school construction, there are some other measures the federal government can adopt to improve education. Safety is essential, and I co-sponsored the Safe and Drug-Free School Program. Early childhood education can make a tremendous difference, and I supported an increase of \$ 1 billion for Head Start. Student creativity should be encouraged. I sought, for example, a \$ 10 million increase in the National Writing Project. Every year,

high school art is displayed in the passage that connects the Cannon House Office Building with the Capitol. My office is proud to participate in this program by nominating paintings each year.

In support of higher education, Congress also passed the largest expansion in Pell Grants since the creation of this financial aid program. Like many of you, I am helping my son pay for his college education. No child should be denied a college education because he or she cannot afford to pay for it. The federal government should devote as many resources as possible to making college more affordable for our young people and their families. Last year, I also supported funding for one million new work-study jobs, so more students might be able to afford a higher education.

Education will continue to be a hot topic of debate in the coming years. In light of the differences amongst the many approaches, no one can predict whether a majority of Congress can come to agreement on this critically important subject. Rest assured, our local communities and our children come first in Massachusetts.



Congressman Capuano reviewing notes during his visit to the Lincoln Park Community School in Somerville.

What do YOU think?

Last year, we started something new on our web site: the Question of the Week. Every Monday when Congress was in session, we posted information on a topic scheduled for discussion on Capitol Hill that week. Visitors to the site could express their opinion on the issue. There were a few bumps along the road, but the opportunity to be heard was embraced by virtually everyone who visited the site. Here are two examples from the questions we posted:-

1. Do you think the Administration should have tapped the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to stabilize the cost of home heating oil?

2. Do you think the House should override the President's veto of the Estate Tax repeal?

This year, we will continue to ask your opinion on important issues as they arise in Congress ... but it will only be helpful and worthwhile if you participate. As soon as Congress reconvenes, we will start posting new "Questions of the Week". Please, visit the web site at www.house.gov/capuano and let us know your opinions.

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

Home Heating Oil

It is hard to forget the plunging temperatures and skyrocketing home heating oil costs of last winter ... and we can't ignore the fear we all have about this winter. The sudden increase in prices made clear the need to develop a coherent long-term energy policy. In an attempt to address rising costs and supply shortages, I joined with many of my colleagues in the House to pass legislation establishing a Home Heating Oil Reserve in the Northeast and to force the President to release a portion of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Clearly these actions do not solve our country's underlying energy problem. However, they have already helped stabilize some of the fluctuating prices.

No member of the New England delegation is waiting for another cold snap before we consider long-term action. Some options being debated include: helping oil marketers increase their storage capacity; increasing domestic refining capacity; encouraging research in alternative fuels; and raising the fuel mileage requirements for sport utility vehicles. By taking these and other steps, we can begin to address the energy problem in the United States in thoughtful and practical ways.

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Dear Friend:

After completing my first term as your Congressman, it seemed a good time to catch up on what's happening in Congress.

First, we finally have a President! Yes, the process was messy and tainted. Regardless, I believe that the political process will adapt to the new rules of engagement and, more importantly, America's greatness will endure. Our country will transfer power peacefully once more.

The new Congress is even more divided than the last - a tiny 5 seat margin in the House and an even split in the Senate will ensure that few dramatic changes occur. We may make some advances on highly publicized issues, but I suspect that any improvements will be minor.

Last term was busy, educational and productive. I traveled throughout the district, meeting constituents and listening to their views. I hosted town meetings all across the district so people could bring their concerns and questions directly to me. These efforts will continue.

Congress achieved some legislative victories: assisting grandparents raising their grandchildren, increasing the value of eligible section 8 vouchers to offset rising housing costs, and strengthening the Violence Against Women Act. I supported full funding of both the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the "Ryan White" programs for persons living with HIV/AIDS. We also obtained funds for important projects in the 8th District: improvements to the Muddy River, planning for the Urban Ring, computers for Roxbury Community College, rehabilitation of Symphony Hall, support for the Children's Hospital, the Boston Empowerment Zone, the Harbor Islands, and much more.

We fought to protect young witnesses willing to testify against criminals. We sought Medicare coverage for vision rehabilitation services. We filed an amendment prohibiting insurance companies from receiving federal subsidies for natural disasters if they engage in discrimination. We haven't won these battles yet, but we will continue the fight in the next Congress.

I served as President of the Democratic Freshman class and as a Democratic Whip. After my "freshman" term in office, I received a few "grades" on my voting record. The American Public Health Association scored me at 100%, as did, among others, the League of Conservation Voters, the NAACP, the Humane Society, the AFL-CIO, and the American Association of University Women.

I very much look forward to the 107th Congress so I can continue fighting for you. Please feel free to stop by our offices or call anytime you have a question or need assistance. It is my honor and privilege to serve as your Representative in Congress.

Constituent Services

Every day, constituents call our office seeking some sort of assistance. In fact, helping individuals with their problems is the most rewarding aspect of government - real people have real problems and, sometimes, government can help.

The requests we get cover every aspect of life - from the mundane to the extraordinary. We thought a few stories might give you a sense of our work. We have deleted particulars to maintain the constituents' privacy.

Human Rights

One of our most satisfying cases involved rescuing the young daughter of a legal permanent resident of the United States from female genital mutilation. The mother was forced to leave her family behind when she fled persecution and wanted desperately to save her child from this barbaric custom. This rite is inflicted by some tribes when a girl reaches puberty. Although immigration cases can sometimes take years to resolve, we were able to convince the Immigration and Naturalization Service that this young woman was in imminent personal danger and must be admitted immediately. I am happy to report that mother and child are together now, free and safe, in Massachusetts.

Housing and the Elderly

Working together with other members of the Massachusetts delegation, we changed federal law to save 18 elderly Brighton tenants from eviction. The tenants were served with eviction notices because they could not afford the periodic rental increases imposed by their landlord. Although they have section 8 vouchers, the value of those vouchers had not increased since 1995, even though their rents continued to rise. Under the new law, these 18 seniors, some of them Holocaust survivors, can now stay in their homes.

Veterans

When we received a letter from a World War Two veteran asking us to help him obtain the service medals he earned so valiantly, we jumped at the chance. He had been trying for years without success. Our office cut through the bureaucratic tangle, identified the medals he won, and made arrangements to obtain them. I was honored to present this Boston resident with a piece of his own personal history and the thanks of a grateful nation. Since this initial case, we

have also helped other constituents obtain long overdue war medals.

Education and Technology

In November, our office delivered 75 surplus computers to a number of schools and non-profit organizations throughout the 8th District. The Social Security Administration was kind enough to donate them after upgrading their own computers. In this technology-driven age, such resources are increasingly important. It was a pleasure to facilitate this generous donation.

Business Assistance

Over the past few years, the City of Chelsea stabilized its fiscal situation. Much of their recovery was based on an aggressive business development effort. An important part of that effort was the construction of a new hotel - both for its economic and symbolic value. When the project ran into financial concerns, the city leaders asked for our assistance. Acting as moderators, we got all parties to reconsider their decisions and rework their figures. Happily, the review worked and the hotel is now open for business.

These are only glimpses of the work we do every day on behalf of our constituents. We hope these stories help you better understand the challenges we all face and how government can help meet them.



Congressman Capuano recently met with Dr. Grace C. Brown, President of Roxbury Community College, and Keith McDermott, Director of the Reggie Lewis Track and Athletic Center, to discuss events of the past year, including education and technology issues.

Foreign Policy and Human Rights

During my first term, I educated myself about the wider world to make responsible decisions. As a member of the Banking Committee, I worked on a bipartisan bill that provided debt relief to developing nations so that more of their resources could be used to invest in education and public health. I also supported the World Bank AIDS Trust Fund to finance prevention and treatment.

This year, one of the hottest votes was whether to grant Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) to China. I joined the minority in opposing PNTR for China. We believe this agreement does not adequately protect our national interests or uphold our principles. Many labor, religious, environmental, and human rights groups agreed that China should first be required to respect religious freedom, accept the right to organize and adopt some environmental standards.

Recent events in the Middle East must not make us despair of peace in that region. I remain hopeful that Israel and Palestine will, one day, be able to live in peace with secure and internationally recognized borders. Fighting may continue for years or generations. But, in the end, Jews and Arabs must find a way to coexist. I continue to hope that all parties will recognize this truth and end the killing. I believe, too, that the U. S. must help all who seek peace.

Health Care

Whether the subject is community health centers, the Patients Bill of Rights, prescription drug coverage, or biomedical research, I am constantly working on health care issues. Not only are they critical issues, they are vital to the economy of our district.

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 imposed dramatic cuts all across the health care field. We have enjoyed considerable success reversing those cuts. Teaching hospitals in Massachusetts (mostly in the 8th District) have received an additional \$155,000,000 during the past two years. The Children's Hospital (also in the 8th) received \$4,500,000, plus funds to build a new research center. I formed the Congressional Caucus on Community Health Centers (CHCs) to raise awareness about the critical role they play in providing health care. Over 50 members joined this bipartisan

caucus and CHCs in the 8th received an increase of \$6,000,000 over the last two years. HMOs, Home Health Care, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and many more agencies have also been helped.

In addition, hundreds of millions of dollars have poured into our district to fund scientific research, mostly in the various fields of medicine. It is no accident that we are home to the largest concentration of bio-medical researchers in the world.

Prescription drug coverage was the greatest health care debate last year. The 106th Congress agreed that something had to be done. Unfortunately, we couldn't agree how to do it. We will renew the debate this year, and work to create a bipartisan proposal that provides real relief for people who need it most.

Affordable Housing

As a resident of the 8th Congressional District, you already know that housing costs in Greater Boston are among the highest in the nation. Recognizing that fact, I have been working diligently to educate my colleagues in the Congress on the difficulties we face here, and to advance legislation that will help ease this burden.

I was successful in getting several important provisions attached to "The American Homeownership and Economic Opportunity Act". One amendment would have created the Multi-



Family Affordable Mortgage Program. This program would provide down-payment assistance to those wishing to purchase a multi-family home. Buyers must agree to live in the homes themselves and keep the rental units affordable. This provision would help more people achieve the American dream of home ownership. The House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed this legislation. Unfortunately, one Senator opposed the bill and succeeded in killing it for the past session. Rest assured, however, this fight is not over.

At the very end of the session, Congress did pass a housing bill that contained a few very important components. In addition to helping the elderly tenants at Brighton Village, we also provided assistance for the development of new intergenerational housing, building on the success of the Grandfamilies program in Dorchester. This development offers services, as well as housing, for grandparents raising their grandchildren. In addition, we were able to fund small increases for several housing programs, including Housing for People With AIDS (HOPWA). These are small gains, but we won't stop fighting for more.

Congressman Capuano talking with Brighton Village resident Alex Voronov about legislation that recently passed Congress which increases the value of certain section 8 vouchers.

Tax Cuts

Last year there were several attempts to cut taxes. I thought most of those proposals were written to help the wealthiest among us rather than the majority who struggle to make ends meet. Furthermore, the cuts were so large that they jeopardized the future solvency of Social Security and Medicare, and they ignored the best attempts to pay down the national debt. Therefore, I opposed most of them and they

failed. Certainly, there are tax cuts that should be passed. In fact, the typical tax bill that reaches the floor for a vote does contain a few good proposals; but they usually cloak a huge core of bad proposals. This coming year will be no different. There will be huge tax cuts suggested and we will fight to gear them towards people struggling to make ends meet and to keep them affordable for America.