



Congressman

Chris Van Hollen

REPORTS TO THE 8TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Serving the 8th District

This office, which is committed to providing the best representation possible for the residents of Maryland's 8th Congressional District, not only provides information on issues and legislation but also serves as a liaison between federal agencies and constituents to help solve problems and obtain information. Please feel free to call for any assistance you may need.

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Dear Friend:

It is a great privilege to represent you in the United States Congress, and I pledge to continue to work hard to uphold the trust of the people of our community. As we begin a new session of Congress, it is a fitting time to report to you on some of the issues we addressed last session and highlight a few of the upcoming challenges we face.

As we usher in the new year, thousands of American troops remain in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world. We should keep them in our thoughts and prayers. While I opposed President Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq, I will continue to do everything possible to provide our troops with the support they need.

On the last day of the 108th Congress, we passed legislation to implement many of the recommendations of the bipartisan 9-11 Commission. I supported the final bill and am pleased that it included provisions I proposed – and which were adopted on a bipartisan basis – to establish a better counterterrorism information-sharing network among different government agencies and to improve our foreign language translation capabilities. However, while this bill will improve our ability to gather and respond to information about terrorist threats, it cannot prevent the misuse of that information for political purposes. It is essential to our national security that we allow the facts to inform our policy rather than manipulate facts to support a predetermined agenda.

We face many challenges at home and abroad. The people of this congressional district closely follow the issues and your input and insights are greatly appreciated. I have worked to forge bipartisan coalitions on those issues that should unite all Americans. Wherever possible we should build consensus to achieve the common good – as we ultimately did with the 9-11 Commission legislation. At the same time, I have not and will not shy away from the contentious debates in Congress. I will continue to stand up for the values and priorities of our community. You may not always agree with my positions on the issues, but you will know where I stand.

It is an honor to serve you in the United States Congress.

Sincerely,

Chris Van Hollen

Higher Education

A Victory for Students and Taxpayers

In 2005 Congress plans to revise and update the Higher Education Act, which establishes policies and programs designed to make college more affordable and accessible for all. It is essential that we provide students with the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to compete in this era of stiff global economic competition. To that end, this year I will be re-introducing legislation to improve the student loan program and make more assistance available to students facing escalating tuition bills.

An important victory for students and taxpayers occurred at the end of this past session. A Government Accountability Office (GAO) report I commissioned found that certain student loan companies were exploiting a loophole in the law to pocket billions

of dollars of public funds that could otherwise be made available to help students. I joined with Rep. Dale Kildee (D-MI) to offer an amendment to stop the abuse and use the funds to help

more students pay for college. The amendment passed with an overwhelming bipartisan majority. Subsequently, the entire Congress and the President joined us in addressing this issue. ■



Congressman Van Hollen, pictured with Josh O'Neill, was honored with a Leadership Award from the National Down Syndrome Society in recognition of long-standing efforts on behalf of people with disabilities and his advocacy for children with special needs during the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Environment

We Must Act Now

The next four years will be critical for the environment – from effectively addressing global chal-

lenges like climate change to successfully restoring national treasures like the Chesapeake Bay. In light of the recently

released eight-nation Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA), which concluded that the Arctic was warming at twice the rate as the rest of the world due to human activity, I will once again help introduce the Climate Stewardship Act (the House counterpart to the McCain-Lieberman bill) to responsibly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As Vice-Chair of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Caucus, I will fight for increased use of clean renewables and cutting-edge efficiency technologies as part of a 21st century alternative to the current misguided energy policy. And as a Co-Chair of the bipartisan Chesapeake Bay Watershed Task Force, I will work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to push the federal government to provide the leadership needed to help meet the clean water goals of Chesapeake 2000. ■



A sponsor of the 7th Annual Congressional Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Expo at the U.S. Capitol, Congressman Van Hollen speaks with exhibitors from the 8th District about the importance of energy efficient technology.

Retirement Security

Don't Roll the Dice on Social Security

The Social Security system has been an economic lifeline to millions of senior citizens. The system is not in crisis. Adjustments must be made to ensure that the trust fund can pay full benefits beyond 2052, but there is no need for a wholesale restructuring of the program.

Proposals to privatize Social Security have two serious flaws. First, substituting investments in private accounts for Social Security payments will inevitably increase the financial risks for seniors. Second, the projected transition costs of plans to partially privatize Social Security amount to trillions of dollars. At a time when Uncle Sam is already running a huge \$7.5 trillion debt it would be unwise to add more red ink to the national credit card. We should not be gambling with the retirement security of America's seniors or the economic security of the United States.

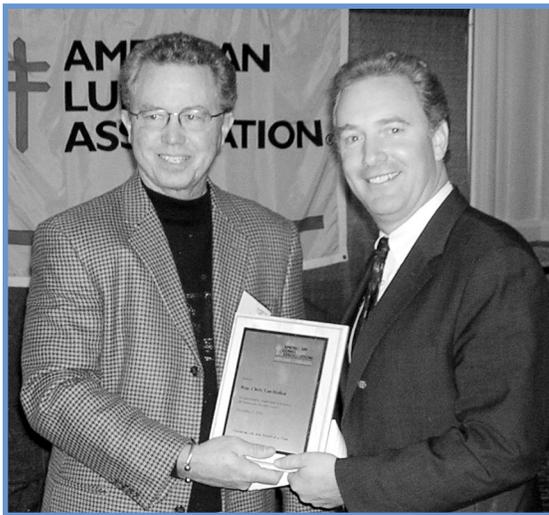
Many retirees rely on employer-based

pension plans to supplement their Social Security income. In recent years, many of these plans have failed to pay the promised benefits, leaving individuals without the pensions they worked a lifetime to secure. In the new Congress, we must

work together to ensure that workers are treated fairly and to shore up the solvency of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation – which was established to help meet the pension obligations of companies that go bankrupt. ■



Congressman Van Hollen met with students from Burning Tree Elementary School and talked with them about government and issues before Congress. Last fall more than 750 students from Maryland's 8th District visited Capitol Hill.



Congressman Van Hollen has made expanding high quality affordable health care for all citizens a priority. He was honored by the American Lung Association for his efforts in Congress to increase funding for NIH programs and for "outstanding leadership in helping all Americans breathe easier."

Fiscal Responsibility

Time to Restore "Pay As You Go" Rule

At top priority for 2005 must be getting our fiscal house in order. The FY2004 deficit was a record \$413 billion and the national debt is a whopping \$7.5 trillion. It is simply wrong to run up a huge debt on our national credit card, leaving our children to pay the bill. We must end the "borrow and spend" policies of the last four years. Interest payments on the debt for 2004 were \$159 billion, or 7% of the entire budget. That means a family of four pays a "debt tax" of over \$2000.

To help tackle these deficits, Congress should restore the "pay as you go" rule that governed the budget process until 2002. The rule is simple: to spend more in one area or reduce revenue through tax cuts, offsetting spending cuts or revenue increases must be made. Unfortunately, a vote to institute this common sense measure was opposed by the House leadership and it failed. In this new year both parties must work together to restore fiscal discipline.

There were a few victories for fiscal responsibility last year. The House originally passed a bill – over the opposition of many of us – that included a \$10 billion taxpayer-funded subsidy for the tobacco industry. I subsequently teamed up with Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) to offer an amendment to block this costly subsidy. The amendment passed and we ultimately prevailed on this issue. ■

Keeping Our Promises to Veterans

Legislation Supports Military Retirees



Congressman Van Hollen presents a long overdue Bronze Star, Purple Heart and other recognition to World War II veteran Leon Blum of Chevy Chase for his valiant military service during World War II.

Last year I introduced The Keep Our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act (H.R. 3474), a bill to restore health care coverage to retired members of the uniformed services. Although a majority of the House cosponsored the bill, the House leadership never scheduled any action on it, so I will reintroduce the bill in the 109th Congress.

Many people joined the military believing they would earn lifetime medical care in exchange for 20 years of service. But the care they were promised was not there

when they retired because Congress enacted laws that essentially pulled the health care rug out from under our most elderly military retirees. Congress has a moral obligation to keep the government's promise, so H.R. 3474 waives the Medicare Part B payments required to enroll in Tricare-for-Life (TFL).

For many younger retirees H.R. 3474 provides the option of FEHBP coverage, so they can have the same lifetime health care as other federal retirees without paying any more out-of-pocket expenses than they would under Tricare Standard. ■

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<http://www.house.gov/vanhollen/signup.shtml>



Congressman Van Hollen meets with members of the Yemin Orde Youth Choir to discuss their experiences and issues involving the Middle East. Yemin Orde is a year-round boarding school in Israel for disadvantaged youth. The choir recently performed in Bethesda.



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A handwritten signature of Chris Van Hollen in blue ink.

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