

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 7, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express concern about your recent budget and supplemental appropriations proposals as we do not believe that the priorities you have outlined match the priorities of the American people. As you know, governing is about making choices that benefit all Americans. The budget you have sent to Congress fails to meet that goal in a number of key areas, including managing taxpayers' money in a disciplined way, meeting the needs of our troops and veterans, and helping middle class families struggling to afford the rising costs of health care, tuition and energy. Democrats believe there is a better way to balance the priorities of the American people in our nation's budget and hope you will join us in supporting these priorities as Congress debates the budget in the coming weeks.

As you know, your budget assumes a record budget deficit of \$423 billion this year and proposes a substantial increase in debt over the next five years. Under your proposal, total debt, already about \$8.2 trillion, would increase to more than \$11.5 trillion by 2011. In fact, that figure understates the real impact of your budget, which largely ignores the long term costs of the war in Iraq and the need to fix the alternative minimum tax. This substantial increase in debt threatens to weaken our economy and force our children and grandchildren to pay higher taxes in the future. Such a large debt increase is especially troubling since the baby boomers will soon retire, substantially increasing demands on the Federal government in coming decades.

Families across our country make difficult decisions every day while living within their own budgets. We can and must do the same and hope you join with us to reinstate the congressional pay-as-you go requirement so we fully offset the costs of new legislation to increase spending or cut taxes.

In addition to our interest in restoring fiscal discipline, we want to express our strong support for our troops, especially those now participating in Operation Iraqi Freedom. These heroes deserve every bit of aid we can provide – be it the best body armor, the best equipment, or the best health care while they are deployed abroad and when they return home. Democrats are committed to doing whatever it takes to support the brave men and women in uniform who risk their lives every day on behalf of our country. That is why we are troubled by your Administration's failure to provide our troops the equipment they deserve and the health care and benefits they have earned. We hope you will support our efforts to recognize these brave Americans and their families.

Beyond the need to restore fiscal discipline and honor our heroes, we also believe it important that your Administration and Congress focus more on the problems facing America's hard working middle class families. Today, as wages continue to stagnate or decline, many families are finding it hard to afford even a basic middle class life. For example, since 2001, tuition and fees at public universities have increased 57 percent. Health insurance premiums also have shot up 57 percent. Gas has increased 60 percent. And the cost of home heating is up a remarkable 67 percent

Given the intensity of these pressures on millions of families, the Federal government should be looking for ways to help. Instead, we believe that your proposed budget either ignores these problems or actually makes matters worse.

For example, your budget would lock in the largest student loan cut in history, and then compound it by eliminating Perkins Loans and other important higher education initiatives. The budget calls for the promotion of health savings accounts, which would increase out-of-pocket cost for many Americans and increase premiums for those in comprehensive health insurance plans. The budget underfunds the Low Income Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP) program, thereby increasing burdens on many Americans facing rising heating costs this winter. Your budget also proposes to cut, by more than half, payments for education and roads to over 700 rural counties across rural America. Finally, the budget rejects Democratic proposals to crack down on price gouging and market manipulation, even though gas prices remain high.

Beyond our proposals to lower the cost of energy, Democrats have proposed a variety of measures to address the rising cost of middle class life. To take just a few examples, we have proposed to expand student aid, provide enhanced tax benefits to offset the cost of college, and allow the government to negotiate for lower priced prescription drugs. We do not expect you to endorse all these proposals, but we hope you will give them serious consideration and work with us to make middle class life more affordable.

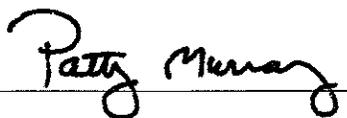
Unfortunately, your budget and appropriations proposals fail to adequately meet the challenges facing our nation. We therefore hope you will work with us in coming months when Congress acts on your budget and supplemental appropriations proposals to make needed improvements. We are convinced that, together, we can do better.

Sincerely,









Robert Mering.

Arnold O'Connell

Bill Nelson

Rebbie Stenew

James Johnson

Tom Wycher

Robert C. Byrd

Paul S. Sarban