

Making The Federal Government Work For New Jersey (Op-Ed)

April 29, 2004

Making The Federal Government Work For New Jersey
By Congressman Steve Rothman (D-Fair Lawn)

Perhaps at no other time has New Jersey needed the assistance of the federal government more than it does today. Our state is at a unique moment in its history in which, among other things, it needs to foster an economic environment that will create more jobs, while also paying for homeland security initiatives to protect the people of our state, education programs that will allow our children to succeed, and environmental programs that will help us continue our clean-up of the Garden State. With all these pressing priorities, it is critical that the federal government start to invest more in helping states like New Jersey cover these expenses during these difficult times.

It would be naïve to think that the years of robust surpluses are still here and that paying for these priorities will not be a problem. However, with more fiscal prudence and a better prioritization of where our federal taxes should be spent, the federal government can go a long way toward helping New Jersey cover these costs, without state and local property taxpayers having to contribute more than they already do.

Over the last three years, New Jersey has lost nearly 70,000 manufacturing jobs in a U.S. economy that in no way resembles the prosperous economy of the 1990's. A combination of the September 11th terrorist attacks, along with a natural recession, and quite frankly, poor economic policies of the Bush Administration and the Republican-controlled Congress have resulted in a record federal deficit of \$521 billion this year. The deficit is so deep that in order to balance the budget this year, the average taxpayers in New Jersey would have to pay an additional \$1,392 - a deficit tax - in order to cover the gap. With New Jersey residents already committing significant amounts of their money to taxes, that is the last thing we need.

The federal government can and must do a better job of helping our state. In reviewing President Bush's budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2005, I was disappointed to see the extent to which New Jersey gets a raw deal. Under President Bush's proposal, roughly 50,000 New Jersey children will not get the help with reading and math through the No Child Left Behind Act that they were promised. This will require New Jersey property taxpayers to come up with \$225 million to make up for President Bush's shortfall in his previously promised No Child Left Behind Act budget. And college students, who are facing steep tuition increases, get no help either because the President calls for a freeze in funding for Pell Grants, while eliminating \$100 million in new funding for Perkins loans.

On the homeland security front, I applaud President Bush for increasing homeland security funding by \$726 million for densely populated areas such as New Jersey, but am disappointed that he has cut other homeland security programs. The Bush budget cuts more than \$23.4 million from homeland security formula grants in New Jersey. These grants would have provided police, firefighters and emergency management teams with the training and equipment they need to keep communities safe.

On the environmental front, the Bush budget proposes cutting funding for the EPA by \$606 million -- 7.2 percent below this year. New Jersey has 113 sites contaminated with toxic waste and many of those will be affected by President Bush's refusal to require polluters to pay for this cleanup through the Superfund Trust Fund. Without this additional revenue from the polluters, clean-ups either will not take place, or the burden will fall on local taxpayers. New Jersey also stands to lose more than \$20 million in Clean Water funding.

As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I have been pleased to bring back hundreds of millions of dollars to New Jersey for transportation projects, homeland security initiatives, new after-school programs, environmental

protection and cleanup initiatives, and other important projects. These federal funds have helped create jobs, improved our quality of life and spared state and local property taxpayers from the cost of these projects.

But New Jersey needs even more federal dollars. However, this gets extremely difficult when our federal government faces a \$521 billion deficit this year. To accomplish these important goals, it is time to stop the massive federal government transfer of wealth that leaves all but an elite few behind. Experts estimate that if the top two tax brackets, which apply only to Americans making roughly \$200,000 or more annually, were to be brought back to the levels they were paying during the Clinton Administration, our nation would save approximately \$223 billion over ten years. Doing so would help avert even more property tax increases and fee hikes for state programs paid for by New Jersey residents, who have been forced to pick up the tab for these important projects that have been neglected by the federal government.

Also, if we were to commit a portion of those funds to infrastructure projects, homeland security, education, health care, and the environment, among other things, we could help create jobs in the short term -- which would generate tax revenue as well. We could also help to ensure our safety against terrorism, we could provide the best education possible to the next generation of workers and entrepreneurs, we could make quality health care affordable for all, and we could help make sure that our air and water are clean. These issues affect the lives of New Jersey residents on a daily basis. As a federal legislator, I will continue to work toward establishing the right relationship between the federal government and the State of New Jersey so that all New Jerseyans can enjoy the better quality of life that they deserve.

###

[Go back](#)