

# An Update from Washington

By Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter

Last year, the House of Representatives passed many important measures that affect our lives here in New Hampshire. From lowering the cost of student loans, to raising the minimum wage, to protecting middle-class families from the Alternative Minimum Tax, Congress addressed a wide range of issues that will benefit New Hampshire families.

To help families afford the rising costs of higher education, we passed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, which will cut interest rates in half for federal student loans, and save a typical student in New Hampshire \$4,430 over the life of a loan. The bill will also increase funding for Pell Grants for low-income students and provide loan-forgiveness for talented students who pursue public service fields like teaching or emergency response.

Congress passed legislation to protect 23 million families from a tax increase of up to several thousand dollars this year under the Alternative Minimum Tax. In July, we raised the federal minimum wage, increasing it from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour by 2009. At the same time, Congress also passed tax credits for small businesses. To find out how businesses can take advantage of the new tax benefits, visit [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) or contact my office at (603) 641-9536.

With energy prices rising, Congress increased the fuel efficiency standards for vehicles for the first time in thirty-two years. I'm also pleased that we passed an increase in funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which supports New Hampshire's Fuel Assistance Program. If you or someone you know needs help affording the cost of heating fuel this year, please contact the New Hampshire Office of Energy and Planning at (603) 271-8317.

It was a busy year in my New Hampshire offices in Manchester and Dover as well, where we assisted over 1,200 individuals with inquiries to federal agencies including Social Security, Medicare, and the Veterans Administration. Last summer, when there were huge delays at passport offices around the country, my staff helped more than 200 people get their passports on time. To apply for a passport, visit [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov) and follow the online instructions, or see the Frequently Asked Questions section of my website for more information.

Representatives from my office regularly visit towns across the First District to assist constituents in working with the federal government. For more information about the services that my office provides, please visit: [www.shea-porter.house.gov](http://www.shea-porter.house.gov).

To keep up to date on the latest developments in Washington, you can also track legislation using the Thomas search engine provided by the Library of Congress at [www.thomas.gov](http://www.thomas.gov).

I am honored to serve you in Congress, and I wish you a happy and prosperous year in 2008.

*Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter represents the First Congressional District of New Hampshire, which includes communities from Manchester to the Seacoast and through the Lakes Region up to Conway.*

*Her Manchester and Dover District Offices can be reached by calling (603) 641-9536.*