

**Renewed Hope Rings in New Year**

**By Sam Farr**

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As 2009 draws to a close, our country is still deep in the clutches of a recession. Millions of families around the country, and many thousands right here in Monterey County, are feeling the pain.

But Washington is abuzz with efforts to get the economy moving. We've seen some hopeful signs in the past few months, but unfortunately, job creation often lags behind a broader economic recovery.

To fill the gaps, Congress has been at work on additional job-creation strategies, and the Obama administration has been working to expand mortgage-assistance programs and other initiatives.

I truly believe this year showed us just how effective government can be. No, the federal government can't and shouldn't solve every problem. But in the last year, we've seen what happens when deregulation reaches a tipping point.

I've heard a lot of criticism that the government is spending too much money. You know what? I agree.

I guarantee you that every single member of Congress would prefer the government didn't have to step in as the bank of last resort. But we live in the real world, and that was the only option we had. What we saw was an example of government working as a partner with the private sector to keep things moving.

We've lived through the bursting of an enormous housing bubble, and few places were hurt

more than California. We saw Wall Street crumble, which put the credit system at risk. We continue to see small businesses struggle and millions of Americans lose their jobs.

But we're also starting to see a recovery because of investments by the federal government.

Yes, the unemployment rate has hit 10 percent, simply too high. But consider that without the Recovery Act, and other programs to prop up our economy, economists report that unemployment could easily have reached 25 percent.

Congress just extended unemployment benefits and COBRA medical coverage subsidies through February, and the House recently passed a bill to extend through the middle of the year. Congress also expanded feeding programs, providing food stamps to millions. Congress stepped up to the plate during a crisis and kept the situation from getting worse.

So how do we move forward?

I believe there's more Congress can do to support job growth. The House just passed the Jobs for Main Street Act. It diverts funds repaid by banks to the Troubled Asset Relief Program. I strongly believe that one of the most important factors in putting Americans back to work is reforming our health insurance system.

I'm not a fan of some of the changes the Senate has made. I firmly believe that a public option is necessary to cut costs for all Americans. The negotiation process to reconcile differences between the two bills won't be easy. In the next several days, my office will be sending out a newsletter explaining the House bill.

The next step for me will be to study the costs and benefits of a final compromise bill once negotiations conclude before deciding how to vote. It won't be an easy decision, nor one that I will take lightly.

I want to wish everyone a happy holiday season, and I look forward to getting back to Washington in January and picking up right where we left off.

Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, represents the Central Coast in Congress.