

Prepared Statement of
Congresswoman Carol Shea-Porter (NH-01)
before the
Committee on the Budget
March 18, 2009

Chairman Spratt, Ranking Member Ryan and Members of the Budget Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to highlight just a few priorities for the Fiscal Year 2010 budget on behalf of the First Congressional District of New Hampshire.

The budget that the President will present and the Congress will consider for Fiscal Year 2010 will reflect very difficult choices. These choices must be made in the face of an economic crisis and years of harmful cuts and inadequate funding for critical programs by the previous Administration.

Over the past eight years we have seen cuts to programs like the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, a war in Iraq that has cost the country hundreds of billions, if not trillions of dollars, and budgeting gimmicks that hid the true cost of a failed fiscal policy. Now, with a new Administration and President, we have the opportunity to develop a budget that is both honest in our assessment of the country's finances and adequately reflects the needs of the country.

Mr. Chairman, the LIHEAP program is one of the most crucial support structures for millions of families throughout the country. Every winter, tens of thousands of New Hampshire households – over 40,000 each of the past two years – apply to our Fuel Assistance Program for help with their heating bills. The committed people who run this program work long hours to deliver assistance to those who need it most.

In 2006, the New Hampshire Fuel Assistance Program was able to provide an average benefit of \$638 per applicant. In 2007, the average benefit fell to \$533.

Last year, in the face of skyrocketing oil prices, Congress responded by fully funding the LIHEAP program – providing \$5.1 billion. In 2008, thanks to Congress' work to increase funding for the program, the average benefit in New Hampshire is about \$1,000. For the first time in many years, the program is able to provide a significant benefit.

If oil prices go back up, fully funding the program will be even more important. If prices stay low, continuing to fully fund the program will mean that next winter a meaningful benefit can be provided once again.

In the President's summary of his budget, \$3.2 billion was set aside for LIHEAP. This is a welcome change from proposed budgets of years past, but it does not fully fund the program. Mr. Chairman, as you begin work on the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Resolution, I urge you to include full funding of \$5.1 billion for the LIHEAP program. Too many people in my state and across this country rely on LIHEAP to keep their heat on, or their houses cooled.

There are many priorities that require Congress' attention in this budget process. As a Member of the Armed Services Committee, I would also like to talk briefly about the services we provide to our veterans.

This Committee and this Congress have made great strides over the past two years in improving veterans services. The historic funding levels approved by this Congress are helping the Veteran's Administration tackle some of the long standing problems that have plagued that agency. Now, with President Obama's and General Shinseki's pledges to increase funding for the VA and to improve VA benefits, our nation's heroes stand to see even further progress.

I urge you to work with the Administration and the VA Secretary to provide funding that will further reduce the back log and wait times that our veterans suffer while waiting for their claims to be approved. I also urge you to increase funding for the Veterans Health

Administration and to provide the resources so that the VA can deliver more care in communities throughout the country.

New Hampshire remains the only state in the country without a full-service VA hospital or access to a comparable facility in-state. This is simply outrageous and intolerable. New Hampshire's veterans have fought as bravely and honorably as the veterans in every other state. We must keep our promises to them and their families. We must give them access to full-service medical care in New Hampshire. I have been working to fix this inequity since I came to Congress two years ago and I look forward to working with you to pass a budget that will give the VA the resources needed to provide more medical services to New Hampshire's veterans.

Mr. Chairman we face incredibly difficult financial decisions that we must make over the next few months. While we must rein in spending where we can, these are two areas where I believe we must continue to invest.

Again, thank you, Chairman Spratt and Ranking Member Ryan, for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to working with you to pass a strong budget resolution that reflects the moral and fiscal priorities of this Congress and the American people.

Thank you.