

**TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN TIM WALZ BEFORE THE HOUSE  
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET, MARCH 11, 2009**

Chairman Spratt, Ranking Member Ryan, members of the Committee on the Budget, thank you. I appreciate the very important work that you do, and it is an honor to be able to contribute in a small way to that work by testifying before you about some of the issues that I have focused on as they relate to the Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2010.

This year, Congress is crafting the budget in the midst of the worst economic crisis most of us have ever seen, which gives us an incredibly difficult task. The budget has to reflect the reality of this crisis, which means it must be focused on short-term economic recovery while at the same time start to bring about a long-term economic transformation that will leave us stronger than ever. And it must do this while also putting us on a path of fiscal responsibility.

I was certainly encouraged by the commitments the President's budget outline makes on these fronts, not just to tackle our current crisis, but to do so in a thoughtful way that will transform our economy in the long term. And I was impressed by the President's commitment to reduce the budget deficit in half by the end of his first term. I hope that we can work with him to accomplish these goals.

Of course, when it comes to the budget, the President suggests, and Congress legislates. In that regard, I want to address a couple of areas where I think the President has made important, good suggestions, and make a couple of suggestions of my own.

First, I'm very pleased with the President's commitment to funding for clean energy technologies. This is both a crucial, sustainable investment over the long term and one that will create many jobs, helping to spur economic recovery in the short term. The time has come for us to harness the innovation and ingenuity of the American people to develop the long-term solutions that will help make America energy independent. By developing renewable sources of energy such as wind and solar power, biofuels, and geothermal heat, we can move beyond fossil fuels to an energy policy which is sustainable, renewable and produced in America by American workers.

At the same time, investments in clean energy technologies help create millions of good-paying American jobs in the renewable energy industry and can begin to break the grip that foreign oil has over America. In my district in Southern Minnesota, our wind industry in particular is poised to reap huge benefits from a serious funding commitment to renewable energy. And all over America, we will reap the benefits in jobs, in the development of new industries, and in our environment as well as our national security.

The President's budget makes a serious commitment to research, development, demonstration, deployment, and commercialization of clean energy technologies.

Whether it be solar, wind, biomass, geothermal or other, we have to invest in the future of our energy production – a future that will really help to fuel an economic recovery that is no longer bubble-based. The President's budget also includes loan guarantees that are meant to spur and sustain the early commercial deployment of innovative clean energy – something we can certainly capitalize on in my district.

Second, veterans' issues. As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and a 24-year veteran myself, I have spent a lot of time focused on veterans issues and I believe we have to provide the highest quality of benefits and care to our veterans. You will never hear anyone say anything negative about our veterans. So the budget, funding priorities, is really where you have to look – it is the test of whether we put our money where our mouth is. Are we fulfilling our moral obligations to our veterans?

In his budget, the President shows his incredible commitment to our nation's veterans. For FY2010, the President proposes a 10 percent increase in veterans discretionary funding over Fiscal Year 2009, which represents the second of two years of historic increases in VA funding since Democrats regained the majority in Congress. I applaud him for taking this strong stand in support of our veterans – as we deal with third-party medical collections and other issues, we may in fact have to propose an even larger

increase in discretionary VA spending than the Administration to arrive at the same overall total, but again, it is so refreshing to see this strong commitment from President Obama.

I do want to mention a few areas of focus at VA that I hope will not be forgotten as Congress and the President work out the details of the budget. First, we know that one of the things that has made VA health care the best care anywhere is VA's innovative use of electronic medical records. And I know that Secretary Shinseki has expressed his commitment to the expansion of the use of electronic records. I hope that VA gets the funding it needs in that regard. Second, on a related note, those records need to be interoperable with the Department of Defense. This is one of the keys to an issue I care very deeply about: making sure that our returning servicemen and women make that seamless transition from military to civilian life, which requires real cooperation and coordination between DoD and VA. Everything I have heard from Secretary Shinseki indicates a real determination on his part and on Secretary Gates' part to cooperate together in an unprecedented way to make sure that our servicemen and women get the best possible care, and make the easiest possible transition from military to civilian life. We need to support those efforts. As I understand it, they are working on what they call uniform registration in VA – making it possible for service members to be enrolled in VA when they enter service. We must do whatever we can to help make that happen.

At the same time, I do just want to make sure that with all of the new priorities VA faces, which the Secretary is quite right to focus on, we are still properly funding VA's core, existing services. If VA health care is to remain the best care anywhere, our VA Medical Centers need to remain adequately funded to provide that care.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, and I want to thank you again for your efforts on behalf of our nation.