

Congress of the United States
Joint Economic Committee
Democrats

For Immediate Release
March 10, 2006

Contact: Nan Gibson
office: 202-224-0377
cell: 202-320-4545

**71 Senators, Members of Congress Ask President Bush to Maintain
Survey for Evaluating Living Standards and Government Programs**

Washington, D.C. – Twenty-nine U.S. Senators and forty-two Members of Congress have sent a letter to President Bush asking him to reverse the administration’s decision to eliminate a Census Bureau survey that is critical for evaluating American living standards and the effectiveness of government programs such as unemployment insurance, food stamps, Medicaid, and welfare. The President’s budget would eliminate the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), the only large-scale government survey that collects high-quality, policy-relevant data on the economic well-being of American families over time.

“This survey has long been a critical source of data on living standards, because it provides valuable insights into the real-world impact of policy decisions made in Washington,” said **Sen. Jack Reed** (D-RI), Ranking Democrat on the **Joint Economic Committee (JEC)**. “The SIPP helps Congress make good policy choices and be good stewards of American tax dollars. The Bush Administration should continue to conduct this survey until a coherent plan is in place for a new system of data collection on income, wealth, and program dynamics that meets the policy needs of Congress and the nation.”

“This is a budget-driven cut, not a policy decision aimed at improving government data,” said **Rep. Carolyn Maloney** (D-NY), Senior House Democrat on the JEC. “Without this survey, Congress won’t be able to track the impact of various government programs – or program cuts – on the people we are trying to help. Abandoning the survey this year would make it particularly difficult to understand the impact of cuts to programs such as Medicaid, student loans, child-support enforcement, and SSI that the Republican-controlled Congress has passed.”

The Survey of Income and Program Participation was started by the Census Bureau in 1984 to gather more detailed information about the impact of government aid on people’s lives and how they move into and out of government programs. Rather than just capturing information at a point-in-time, the SIPP survey is unique because it questions thousands of the same people every few months for several years, providing a greater understanding of transitions into and out of government programs.

The rich and detailed data generated by this survey allow researchers and lawmakers to examine the real-world impact of a wide variety of government programs, such as welfare reform, Medicaid, child-support enforcement, and unemployment insurance. The survey provides essential information on the extent to which programs meet families’ basic needs and promote upward mobility. The SIPP also provides more in-depth information than other government surveys on work-family issues, such as maternity leave, child care usage and costs, and the work schedules of couples.

Letter link: <http://jec.senate.gov/democrats/Documents/Releases/sippletter10mar06.pdf>

The Joint Economic Committee, established under the Employment Act of 1946, was created by Congress to review economic conditions and to analyze the effectiveness of economic policy.