This is an extremely important issue to me.

In 2003 a large section of east Omaha was declared a Superfund site due to high levels of lead contamination that resulted from a lead smeltering plant that operated for more than a century. Additionally, soil clean up projects have been further complicated because of contamination by lead-based paint on many older homes in east Omaha.

The potential for lead poisoning poses a risk to many residents in our community, especially children who live in the affected areas. I have made it a priority to restore funding for the state grant program, which helps pays for lead cleanup projects in Nebraska. In June 2006, I offered an amendment to an annual spending bill to restore funding for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Lead Control Hazard for fiscal year 2007 by $35 million. The amendment was approved 233-190.

I also successfully amended a spending bill during the previous year to restore funding for the Office of Lead Control Hazard by $48 million; this became law in November 2005.

To put these numbers in perspective, according the Environmental Protection Agency it has spent a total of $35 million on the lead site in Omaha, and EPA estimates it will spend $15 million this year for Omaha.

While I am very aware of the tight budget under which Congress is operating, these programs are critical to the health of many in Omaha, and the funding should not be cut. I will continue to protect the state grant program for lead remediation.

If you need information on local lead poisoning prevention programs, including lead screening, please contact the Douglas County Department of Health at (402) 444-7825.