Obviously worried about what kind of economic situation the current generation in power will leave them, Holyoke junior high and high schoolers had some tough questions for Congresswoman Betsy Markey when she addressed them at an assembly Monday afternoon, April 6.

Having recently been elected to her position as representative of Colorado's fourth district, Markey told the student body the last few months have been a whirlwind for her and her staff. Because of her busy schedule, she admitted many letters and emails she has received have yet to be read and addressed, and she is using her week off from Congress to travel across the district and meet with residents to hear their concerns directly.

One reason she is visiting high schoolers across the district, she added, is because of Ault High School, whose students have sent her 40-50 letters since she took office. Rather than answering through a letter, she decided to address high schoolers directly.

"High schoolers ask great questions, too," she said. "Sometimes, much better than adults."

Markey then guided the students through her typical day in Washington, D.C. Beginning at 8 a.m., she said, she holds breakfast meetings with her staff and/or other public officials, and is usually in committee meetings during the rest of her day, except when called to vote.

Voting in the House of Representatives, said Markey, is not done by raising hands or yelling, like many people imagine. Instead, each member of Congress has their own card, which looks very similar to a credit card. On the seat in front of them is a slot for the card, which is inserted when House members are ready to vote. They then must choose between a green button for "yes" or red button for "no."

On the wall of the chamber is a list of all the Congress members' names. Next to each name, either a red or green light will come on when that rep. has cast a vote, showing how each member voted.

Recently, said Markey, the House has been busy working on the stimulus package. The current House of Reps., she added, has four areas of emphasis it wants to address. They include investing in education, affordable healthcare for everyone, reducing the country's dependence on foreign oil and cutting the nation's deficit.

Allowing time for the students to ask her a few questions, Markey was hit with demands to explain how more spending is supposed to get the country out of the current economic

recession, and if she was worried about causing inflation by doing so.

Markey replied the recession is the result of the government's former hands-off approach to business. "We have to do something or the recession will become a depression," she said.

The key, she continued, is to target the spending and invest it in areas like transportation and energy, which badly need the funding anyway and will provide more jobs. She noted she does not approve of the bailouts that were given out, particularly those to the auto industry, as they were handed out with no regulations on how the money should be spent.

Markey also pointed out she did vote against the last budget, saying it was too big and there were areas in which she felt spending could be cut. However, she added, Americans spend more than $789 billion every year on foreign oil. The stimulus package, at least, more aggressively attempts to put an end to America's energy crisis so that money can be put back into the economy.

One other issue addressed by female students was the female-to-male ratio in Congress. When asked how many women are in Congress, Markey replied 17 percent. "That's actually higher than any Congress in the past," she said.

When asked why she thinks the ratio is so low, Markey answered that positions of power in government have traditionally been held by men, and the process of changing that perspective has been slow. Also, many women choose to put their political careers on hold to raise families. "I chose not to run for Congress until my kids were grown," she added.

As a way to end the assembly on a positive note and to reassure the audience, Markey had this to say about the recession: "We are a country that bounces back; we are a country of entrepreneurs, and we will bounce back from this recession."