



Alabama's First District

CONGRESSMAN JO BONNER

THE WASHINGTON REPORT

2236 Rayburn House Office Building ★ Washington, DC 20515 ★ (202) 225-4931 ★ Winter/Spring 2010



Dear Friends,

It would be next to impossible for some Washington bureaucrat to try to convince the people of South Alabama that the recession is over and good times are here again.

And yet, to hear some in the administration tell it, the president's \$787 billion stimulus package is already doing the trick. Remember the promises made last February that borrowing another trillion dollars would create jobs "immediately" and unemployment would not rise above eight percent?

Try telling that to the people of Monroe County, who have seen their unemployment rate top 20 percent, or to the folks in Clarke and Washington counties, who are not that far behind.

Statewide, Alabama's unemployment rate climbed to 11 percent after the first of the year, a number we haven't seen since the early 1980s.

And nationally, more than 2.8 million jobs have been lost during the very time the president and his allies in Congress promised that 3 million jobs would be created or saved — we're still waiting!

Clearly, the euphoria some had just a year ago for the historic change that was coming to Washington has tempered — especially in recent months — by a much more sobering reality.

After all, there is little dispute that America is facing one serious challenge after another...from the economy — complete with record levels of borrowing and spending — to the latest national security threat, to the obvious need for America to finally become energy independent.

Unfortunately, rather than see their representatives work this past year in a bipartisan way to get the economy going in the right direction, the American people have instead seen disagreement grow wider and wider, especially on some of the major legislative initiatives sought by the majority.

Many of you have told me you can imagine how frustrating it is for those of us who would like to sit down and

offer more obvious, common sense solutions to some of these major problems.

Instead of just saying no all the time, conservative members of the House have tried repeatedly to offer viable alternatives to the "big government knows best" attitude that is so pervasive in Washington right now.

Unfortunately, many Americans have been left with a bad taste in their mouth as the more liberal majority passed a 1,990-page health care bill — with a price tag of nearly \$1.3 trillion and 120 new boards, bureaucracies and programs — right before Christmas.

August Town Meetings helped change the course

Last summer, as the health care debate was reaching a boiling point in Congress, the majority was doing all it could to get the bill passed out of the House and over to the Senate.

Not having the votes to get our conservative version of health care reform passed (it takes 218 votes to pass a bill in the House, and there are 256 Democrats and 178 Republicans), the "loyal opposition" instead went to work to slow down the legislative process long enough to allow the American people to see for themselves what was in the bill.

And once you did, the vast majority of citizens spoke up in ways not seen in my entire life.

One very crucial step toward the effort to slow down the government-regulated public option health care bill came last August at a series of town hall meetings held throughout the country.

In South Alabama alone, I hosted 19 meetings and watched as more than 5,600 citizens came out to share with me their concerns and to express their frustrations — and in some cases anger.

In this age of instant communication, I still believe our democracy works best when our citizens have the opportunity to share their views in person. In all 19 communities this past August, there were frank and civil discussions about what role the government should play, if any, in health care reform. In each case, I did my very best to present the facts and then

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Bayou La Batre Physician Sworn In

Before an audience of friends and family from Alabama, Dr. Regina Benjamin was sworn in as the 18th Surgeon General of the United States on January 11, 2010. The Washington, DC event made official Dr. Benjamin's appointment, originally announced by President Obama last July.



Dr. Benjamin is the founder and chief executive of the Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic in south Mobile County. In her medical practice, she has shown remarkable dedication to her patients' well being. In the days that followed the destruction from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, she rode from house to house in a pick-up truck, dispensing treatment to each patient, while repairs were made to her clinic.

The recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" and the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights, Dr. Benjamin has been featured in the national media for her devotion to delivering health care.

As the nation's new surgeon general, Dr. Benjamin is making preventative care a priority of her office.

Congratulations to Dr. Benjamin, an exceptional choice and a well respected South Alabama physician, who will serve our country well as surgeon general.

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step back to listen to you, the people for whom I work.

And the message you sent — and the one I took back to Washington — wasn't even close to being in dispute: *Slow down and get it right!*

To the numbers of people who took the time to come out and speak up, please accept my heartfelt thanks! Your persistence and passion emboldened my resolve to make my one vote even more powerful and persuasive.

That is why we'll be holding another series of town meetings later this summer — as well as bringing telephone town halls into your living room in the coming weeks. Please check our website or your local newspaper for the next schedule of town hall meetings to come your way.

Traveling District Offices

Meanwhile, you do not have to wait for a town meeting to utilize the services of our office. On a regular basis, my field representatives, Bryan Parker and Frazier Payne, travel to 13 different towns throughout South Alabama, literally bringing our office to you.

And, you can always call our office, toll free at 1-800-288-8721, whenever you need our help.

It is an honor and privilege to work for the best group of people in America...the 635,000

people who make up Alabama's First Congressional District. Hope our paths cross soon.

All the best!

To Bowyer



I was met by a capacity crowd at the Old Monroe County Courthouse in Monroeville last August as thousands of citizens voiced their strong views on health care during 19 town meetings held across the First District.



In January, it was my pleasure to welcome to the U.S. Capitol steps 100 8th-grade students from St. Paul's Episcopal School in Mobile who were in town for their annual civics trip to Washington, DC.

Congressional Art Competition

An Artistic Discovery, the annual Congressional High School Art Competition, was created in 1982 by the Congressional Arts Caucus to recognize and encourage the creative talents of young people from across the nation. This art competition provides each U.S. Representative the opportunity to conduct local contests from which a Best of Show entry is chosen.

I am honored to participate in *An Artistic Discovery* by hosting the local contest in Alabama's First Congressional District for high school students in grades 9-12.

Our local competition has been a highly successful way of showcasing talent from throughout South Alabama. This year's show will once again be held at the Mobile Museum of Art during the month of March, and the winners will be announced at the museum on Sunday, April 18, 2010.

Each district's winning entry is sent to Washington, DC, to collectively produce a remarkable exhibit that is displayed in the halls of Congress for an entire year. Each winning student is also eligible for a scholarship to Savannah College of Art and Design and is invited to the opening of the national exhibit in Washington, DC. For more information about the local competition, please contact Allison Jackson in my Baldwin County office at (251) 943-2073.



Escambia and Baldwin Flooding

Over a five day period in mid-December, a number of communities across South Alabama were inundated with torrential rains that flooded many areas, in particular Escambia and Baldwin counties.

Rainfall totals ranged from over 10 inches in Mobile to well above a foot in Brewton, as the heaviest of the stormy weather spread northeast from the Gulf.

Atmore, Flomaton, Brewton, East Brewton and surrounding communities, including Perdido and Rabun in Baldwin County, suffered flooding. In addition to property damage, a number of people were rescued from trees as they attempted to escape the surging waters.

During this ordeal, I lent my support to local and state efforts to seek a federal disaster declaration. On December 31, 2009, the White House approved a federal disaster declaration for southern Alabama, including Baldwin and Escambia counties.

The federal disaster declaration cleared the way for federal assistance to state and local governments for local infrastructure repairs, as well as U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans to residents and businesses affected by the severe storms.

Low interest loans of up to \$200,000 have been made available to eligible homeowners to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate. Eligible businesses and non-profit organizations may borrow up to \$2 million to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate, machinery and equipment, inventory and other small business assets. The SBA also offers Economic Injury Disaster Loans to businesses and most non-profits to help meet working capital needs resulting from the disaster.

During early January, the SBA established Disaster Loan Outreach Centers in Atmore and Brewton. Individuals and businesses unable to visit those centers have until March 1, 2010, to apply for loans by phone or the Internet. The deadline for filing for business Economic Injury Disaster Loans is September 29, 2010.

For information and loan applications, residents and businesses may call the SBA's Customer Service Center at 1-800-659-2955 (1-800-877-8339 for the hearing impaired), Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. They may also send an email asking for assistance to disastercustomerservice@sba.gov.

Residents affected by the flooding may alternatively apply for disaster loans via the SBA's secure web site: www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance.

Loan applications for businesses may be downloaded from the SBA's web site www.sba.gov/services/disasterassistance.



Much of Brewton, East Brewton, Flomaton, Atmore and outlying areas were flooded during heavy rains in mid-December. Above is an aerial view of flooding in downtown Brewton. Photo: Alabama Forestry Commission

First-Time Homebuyer Tax Credit Extended

Legislation passed by Congress in late 2009 extends the popular federal tax credit for qualifying first-time homebuyers.

The enactment of the Worker, Homeownership, and Business Assistance Act of 2009 extends the \$8,000 First-Time Homebuyer Tax Credit to April 30, 2010. The legislation also extends a \$6,500 homebuyer tax credit for certain long-time homebuyers purchasing a replacement principal residence.

Under the new law, an eligible taxpayer must buy, or enter into a binding contract to buy, a principal residence on or before April 30, 2010, and close on the home by June 30, 2010. For qualifying purchases in 2010, taxpayers have the option of claiming the credit on either their 2009 or 2010 return.

For more information on the First-Time Homebuyer Tax Credit and eligibility requirements, visit www.irs.gov.



Americans' Safety Should Come First



On December 15, 2009, the White House announced it would acquire the state prison in Thomson, Illinois — turning it into a federal prison to house up to 100 foreign terrorist detainees. The White House said thousands of jobs would be created in order to staff the new “Guantanamo in Illinois.”

I have long opposed bringing foreign terrorists to American soil for the same reasons I opposed the administration's decision last November to afford the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks a criminal trial in New York. Both threaten to undermine America's security. Furthermore, I believe the administration continues to demonstrate poor judgment in handling foreign terrorists. Reportedly, officials read Miranda rights to the Nigerian Al-Qaeda terrorist who attempted to blow up a U.S. airliner on Christmas Day potentially limiting his value in helping to thwart future such attacks.

By placing these terrorists in the United States, we provide a tempting target for future attacks. I believe the people of Thomson, Illinois would suddenly and unwillingly be thrust into a high risk environment. Imagine the uproar that would result if the administration decided to house foreign terrorists in Brewton, Jackson or Fairhope.

Equally unsettling, foreign terrorist detainees held in the United States could be entitled to more legal protections than those detained abroad. This administration seems to have no problem with affording foreign terrorists full U.S. Constitutional protections. It is my opinion that allowing terrorists to gain these rights will compromise our intelligence-gathering methods and sources — jeopardizing our efforts to locate and stop future terrorist attacks.

I have voted to withhold funding that would close Guantanamo, and I am a cosponsor of the “Keeping Terrorists Out of America Act” which would require Congress and local governments to pre-approve the transfer of terror detainees to U.S. soil. Americans' safety — not political correctness — should always come first.

ThyssenKrupp Eyes Spring Opening

After more than two full years of construction, ThyssenKrupp will open its giant state-of-the-art steel processing facility in southwest Alabama this year.

The company's 3,700 acre site in Calvert will be home to both its American carbon and stainless steel operations. As spring approaches, ThyssenKrupp Steel USA is expected to open its doors, with ThyssenKrupp Stainless USA going on-line this fall.

The new plant is one of the largest private industrial development projects in the United States — the result of a \$5 billion joint investment with the state of Alabama.

Despite the enormity of the project, each time I visit the work site in Calvert, the pace of plant construction has been impressive. Recently, I surveyed the progress with ThyssenKrupp Steel USA President and Chief Executive Officer, Christoph Lackinger. Clearly, much of the building exteriors were nearing completion and plant operations should begin within months.

Once both portions of the new facility are fully operational, ThyssenKrupp Steel and Stainless USA expect to employ 2,700 workers. Already, ThyssenKrupp has conducted 13 area job fairs and is aggressively seeking new hires.

Construction of the new plant has also benefited the regional economy, resulting in nearly \$1 billion in contracts with companies across the state.

At a time when many major manufacturers are exporting American jobs overseas, ThyssenKrupp's presence signals Alabama's return to its former steel producing heyday. Its factory will provide carbon and stainless steel for industries throughout North America for use in construction, as well as the production of automobiles and household appliances.

With high unemployment maintaining its grip on much of our state and the nation, it is very encouraging to see a new employer such as ThyssenKrupp investing in our community and preparing to begin significant hiring this spring.



I reviewed the construction progress — and discussed the new jobs that will soon be coming to the area — during a site visit last October with ThyssenKrupp Steel USA President and Chief Executive Officer, Chris Lackinger.

KC-X Aerial Tanker Competition: Round 2

As this newsletter goes to press, the U.S. Air Force is preparing to release its final Request for Proposal (RFP) — a blueprint of minimum requirements for a new aircraft to replace the aging aerial tanker fleet that has served our military for half a century. Mobile's Northrop Grumman-EADS team is poised to compete in the \$40 billion contest.

The Air Force has been waiting on a higher performance tanker since 2004, when a Pentagon contract to lease and purchase modified Boeing-built KC-767 tankers fell through in the wake of a corruption scandal that sent a Boeing executive and a senior Air Force official to prison.

As you may recall, southwest Alabama first emerged as a contender site to manufacture a new aerial tanker in 2005, when the North American division of the European Aeronautics Defence and Space Company (EADS) chose to locate its aerospace engineering center and tanker production facility at Mobile's Brookley Field. Shortly thereafter, Northrop Grumman then teamed up with EADS to officially enter the tanker competition.

Progress toward a next generation tanker was made in 2007 when the Air Force announced its RFP, and, as we all remember back in February 2008, Northrop Grumman-EADS was selected as the winner. The decision was hailed as a victory for the Air Force, which stood to gain from the significantly enhanced capabilities of the newer aircraft design.

Unfortunately, that forward movement was halted soon after Boeing protested the tanker contract award, and months later, the Pentagon terminated the competition and reset the bidding process.

Last September, the Air Force once again released a draft RFP to launch a new competition, but the new design guidelines were a disappointment. Instead of calling for the best aerial tanker for our military, the Air Force substantially lowered the bar. It reduced the new tanker's minimum standards to a level that even the current and obsolete KC-135 tanker design could meet. In the view of many, including Governor Riley, Senators Shelby and

Sessions and myself, this shift tilted the playing field largely in favor of the smaller, older, and less capable Boeing tanker.

Our military's ability to safely and successfully conduct missions anywhere in the world depends upon mobility. For decades, the Air Force has relied on an Eisenhower-era aerial tanker fleet of KC-135s to extend the operating range of its aircraft. Combatant commanders have repeatedly called for rapid deployment of a modern and more versatile fleet that will accommodate future military aircraft and more challenging missions.

I have joined other members of the Alabama Congressional Delegation in calling on Defense Secretary Robert Gates to revisit this flawed aerial tanker RFP and, instead, ensure that our military gets the most capable tanker.

However, Northrop Grumman-EADS has made its position clear — it will not participate in an unfair process in which it believes a winner has been predetermined. My hope is that the Pentagon will make the changes necessary to give both competitors a fair chance. A sole source contract would be especially bad for both our warfighters and the taxpayers.

Obviously, Mobile stands to gain up to 1,500 new jobs if the Northrop Grumman-EADS tanker is ultimately selected. In addition, the U.S. military would acquire the world's most advanced aerial refueling aircraft made right here in Alabama by Alabamians.



Last October, I joined other members of the Alabama congressional delegation at a press conference in the U.S. Capitol concerning the Air Force's new aerial tanker design.

No to Mandates, Yes to More Choice

A clear majority of Americans believe that health care should be more accessible and affordable. They also feel that there is no national emergency to warrant more government involvement in a health care system generally believed to offer the best quality in the world. They want to keep control of their personal health care decisions...and Washington had better listen.

I am completely — 100 percent — *opposed* to any government effort to restrict personal health care choices or vastly expand government's reach in the name of health care reform.

As I promised thousands of people who came to my 19 town hall meetings in August, it is not enough to "just say no." Instead, I voted for the Republican health care reform alternative which focuses on lowering premiums for families and small businesses, while increasing access to affordable care, without growing government. Unfortunately, our alternative was voted down, but it is still a positive start toward improving our health care system.



In November, I met with Sandra Sharpless of Orange Beach in my Washington office to discuss her concerns over the health care bill, which we are shown holding above.

From the beginning, both the administration and the majority in Congress have chosen a different path. Rather than working with the minority, they have instead held private negotiations to draft a final bill without conservative input.

It is ironic that in the majority's attempt to impose a reshaping of health care in the name of all Americans, some states have been favored over others. Moreover, to help fund the plan, the majority is going to tax some people's existing health care for being "too generous," and this is called fair?

Throughout this health care debate, it has been greatly disappointing that the conservative alternative health care plan has been ignored.

While conservatives do not control Congress, we do have some great ideas to lower health care costs and improve accessibility.

Real Health Care Reform

Our health care plan was the result of listening to the American people's choices for reform. It incorporates the most common sense ideas voiced by people who wish to preserve the best of our present health care system, while increasing access to care and lower costs. These are

not radical ideas but long overdue reforms.

Among other things, our alternative would:

- ▶ Lower health care premiums for families and small businesses
- ▶ Create universal access programs to help Americans gain access to health care, regardless of pre-existing conditions
- ▶ Stop abuse of medical malpractice lawsuits
- ▶ Prevent insurers from unjustly cancelling a policy or imposing annual or lifetime spending caps
- ▶ Permit Americans to buy health insurance across state lines
- ▶ Allow small businesses to pool together to obtain health care at lower prices
- ▶ Prohibit federal funds from being used to pay for abortions

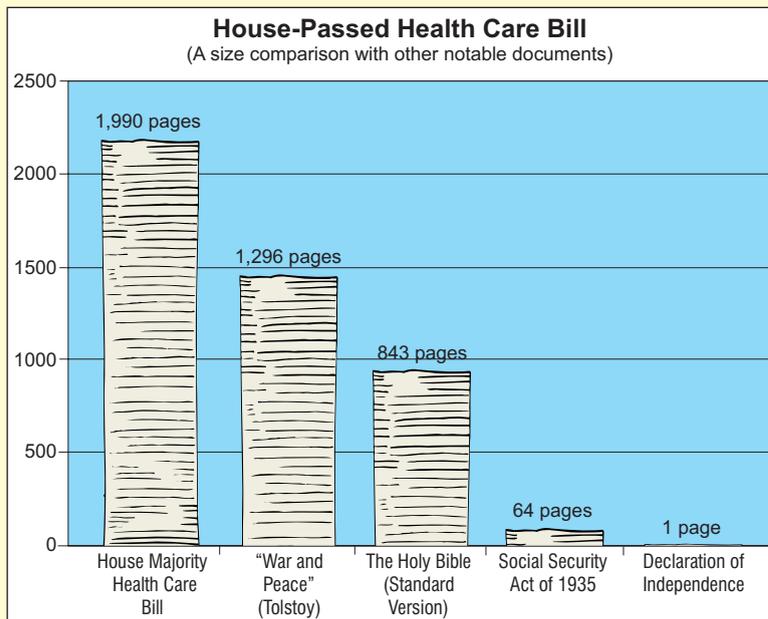
In fact, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office says our health care plan would reduce health care premiums by up to 10 percent and lower the federal budget deficit by \$68 billion over the next 10 years.

As you know, I voted against the majority's 1,990-page health care bill that narrowly passed the House last November. I also oppose the health care bill that was passed in the Senate on Christmas Eve. I don't believe real health care reform should include \$500 billion in cuts to Medicare, fine people for not buying insurance, or grant federal bureaucrats unprecedented power to choose who gets what type of coverage.

At the time of this writing, the fate of health care reform is unclear.

But one thing is for certain, health care reform can — and should — be done right. Rather than passing a government-regulated health care bill that was crafted in private negotiations, Americans want targeted reforms to address flaws in our current health care system.

If the president and his congressional supporters truly desire to help improve health care access and bring down insurance costs, they are welcome to work with us on a real reform bill. We will be happy to meet with them in the full light of day with the American people watching.



111th Key Votes

During the First Session of the 111th Congress, there were 991 total votes cast on the House floor. Among the major votes of the past year are the following:

My Vote: **Stimulus Act (HR 1)**

\$787 billion stimulus bill
Passed House on 1/28/09 – (244 to 188)
Passed Senate on 2/10/09 – (61 to 37)
Signed into law by the president on 2/17/09
(PL 111-005)



Stimulus Act II (HR 2847)

\$151 billion second stimulus bill
Passed House on 12/16/09 – (217 to 212)
Awaiting Senate consideration



Cap and Trade Bill (HR 2454)

National energy bill increasing energy costs through new energy taxes
Passed House on 6/26/09 – (219 to 212)
Awaiting Senate consideration



Alternative Energy Act Substitute to HR 2454

Alternative energy bill encouraging energy production without new energy taxes
Failed to pass House on 6/26/09 – (172 to 256)



Health Care Reform Act (HR 3962)

\$1 trillion health care reform plan including public option
Passed House on 11/7/09 – (220 to 215)
Awaiting Majority action on House and Senate bills



Alternative Health Care Reform Substitute to HR 3962

Alternative health care bill expanding access to care without government intrusion or a public option
Failed to pass House on 11/7/09 – (176 to 258)



Defunding ACORN (HR 3221)

Prohibiting federal funds to organizations indicted for or employing persons indicted for violating election laws
Passed House on 9/17/09 – (253 to 171)
Awaiting Senate consideration

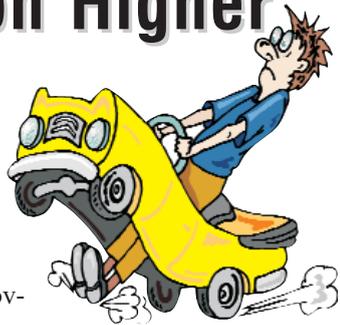


Cash for Clunkers – CARS ACT (HR 2751)

\$2 billion in stimulus money to promote automobile sales
Passed House in Supplemental Appropriations (HR 2346) on 6/16/09 – (226 to 202)
Passed Senate on 6/18/09 – (91 to 5)
President signed into law on 6/24/09 (PL 111-032)



Putting the Brakes on Higher Federal Spending



For millions of Americans, the worst economy since the Great Depression has forced dramatic changes in their lives. The loss of jobs and reductions in personal earnings have forced many to rein in their spending.

But many Americans cannot understand why their government does not do the same.

I fully agree. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office recently concluded that the federal government's habit of living beyond its means is unsustainable. The administration's first budget set the stage for a \$9.1 trillion deficit in 10 years — the largest in history.

One year ago, under the promise of rescuing the economy, the administration, with the consent of Congress, borrowed \$787 billion for "shovel-ready jobs." But a year later, unemployment is two percent higher than it was when this spending spree began. And Alabama's unemployment rate has followed a similar course — from 6.5 percent in December 2008 to 11 percent in December 2009. A second stimulus bill, spending another \$151 billion that we do not have, awaits Senate passage as this newsletter goes to press.

I voted *against* both of these stimulus bills and *opposed* the taxing and job-killing Cap and Trade energy bill and the trillion dollar health care bill. Out of control spending is not going to restore our floundering economy; it only undermines the confidence of business and slows any recovery.

While the president's proposal to freeze a small portion of the federal budget for three years would begin in 2011, it is too little too late. Not only is the amount rather small — just 17 percent of the total budget — but much of what he is freezing has already experienced significant budget increases (many at his request) over the last year.

I believe the overspending is occurring simply because there is very little accountability for the consequences. Unlike ordinary Americans who lose their ability to borrow and spend when they "max out" their credit cards, Washington can simply raise its own credit limit and keep on charging.

I have cosponsored a Constitutional amendment to balance the budget that would prohibit Congress from spending more money than the government collects in revenues. I have also cosponsored a Constitutional amendment to prohibit the federal government from owning private corporations as we have seen with the taxpayer buyout of General Motors and the further loss of billions of tax dollars.

It is time for Congress to balance its checkbook and make sacrifices like ordinary American families.

Key Reform Bills Cosponsored

Below are major spending restraint and government reform bills I have cosponsored this Congress. Not one of these bills has yet come to the House Floor for a vote.

- **Balanced Budget Amendment (H.J.RES.1)**

Constitutional amendment requiring Congress to spend no more than it receives in revenues; requires a 3/5 majority vote to increase the debt limit; and provides for exemption in time of national emergencies

- **Prohibiting Federal Government Ownership of Private Corporations (H.J.RES.57)**

Constitutional amendment prohibiting the United States from owning stock in private corporations

- **Requiring 72-Hour Prior Public Disclosure of House Bills (H.RES.554)**

Requires that legislation and conference reports be available on the Internet for 72 hours before consideration by the House

- **Calling for Disclosure of the Duties and Powers of "Czars" (H.CON.RES.185)**

Expressing the sense of Congress that the president should issue and Congress should hold hearings on a report and certification regarding the responsibilities, authorities, and powers of his "czars"

- **Members of Congress Should Enroll in Government Health Care (H.RES.615)**

Calling on members of Congress who vote in favor of the establishment of a federal government run health insurance option to enroll themselves under that public option

- **Public Access to Congressional Health Care Bill Negotiations (H.RES.847)**

Calling for public access to conference committees or other meetings held to determine the content of national health care legislation

Austal Marks Two Milestones

Mobile's first naval shipbuilding complex since World War II saw two significant milestones over the last six months. In November, Austal USA officially dedicated its cutting edge "modular" ship manufacturing facility.

Just two months later, Austal garnered even more attention when it turned over its first Littoral Combat Ship, the *U.S.S. Independence*, to the U.S. Navy. Both events were proud moments for Austal USA, Alabama's talented workforce, and all who live along the Gulf Coast.

Modular Manufacturing Facility Ribbon Cutting

The November 9, 2009, dedication of Phase 1 of Austal's \$81 million Modular Manufacturing Facility appropriately capped a decade of steady growth for the shipbuilder in Mobile.

When finally completed, the colossal new facility will enable Austal to accommodate construction of both the U.S. Navy's Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and the military's Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV), pending contract approval — meaning the possibility of even more jobs for South Alabama families.

Ten years ago, when Austal first arrived in Mobile, they only had one employee, and today, they have close to 1,000 on their local payroll. If they are successful in landing the future LCS and JHSV contracts, employment could reach over 3,000.

Commissioning the U.S.S. Independence

On January 16, 2010, thousands braved a cold and persistent rain to witness history as Mobile was the scene of the first naval ship commissioning since World War II.

I was pleased to join Senator Jeff Sessions, Under Secretary of the Navy Robert Work, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead, other dignitaries and the new crew of the *U.S.S. Independence* for the commissioning along our waterfront.

Special thanks is due to the entire *U.S.S. Independence* Commissioning Committee and its many supporters for their invaluable role in making the patriotic commissioning such a success to Mobile and our area.

For Austal's skilled workers, the commissioning of their first such vessel was the culmination of four years of hard work. For the citizens of Mobile and the region, it was a moment of great pride and an emotional reconnection with our past.

The handover of the *U.S.S. Independence* will give the Navy a chance to fully evaluate the superior capability of this exceptionally fast, highly-maneuverable vessel that combines the most state-of-the-art engineering with the talents of a highly-dedicated local workforce.

Both Austal and General Dynamics teamed up to produce the LCS for the U.S. Navy, and the two companies, along with an eager local workforce, are now seeking additional Pentagon approval to build more such ships as the Navy prepares to award the next round of littoral combat ships later this year.

Austal's local expansion is the latest sign of growth in our Gulf Coast shipbuilding industry which injects billions of dollars annually into our regional economy and provides tens of thousands of jobs.



In November, I joined Austal Managing Director Bob Browning, Mobile Mayor Sam Jones, Governor Bob Riley, Austal President and CEO Joe Rella, and Navy Program Executive Officer Rear Admiral Bill Landay to cut the ribbon officially opening Austal's new local shipbuilding facility.

Photo: Austal



In January, thousands attended the commissioning of Mobile's first U.S. Navy littoral combat ship, the U.S.S. Independence.

Photo: U.S. Navy

Unveiling Helen Keller in the Capitol

After a process that began nearly a decade ago, the statue of one of Alabama's most famous citizens was finally unveiled in the U.S. Capitol late last year.

Governor Bob Riley participated in the dedication in the Capitol Rotunda along with the Alabama Congressional delegation, the leadership of the U.S. House and Senate, descendants of Miss Keller, and students from the Alabama School for the Deaf and Blind.

Each state is authorized to provide two statues of distinguished citizens to be displayed in the U.S. Capitol. Since 1925, Alabama has been represented by the statues of military leader and former House Member "Fighting" Joe Wheeler and educator and former House Member Jabez Curry. While Mr. Curry is credited with making significant advances in public education in Alabama in the 1800s, he is no longer a famous name whose statue is sought out by tourists to the Capitol. Miss Keller's statue replaced that of Mr. Curry at the request of a resolution passed by the Alabama legislature.

Governor Riley began his remarks at the Helen Keller statue dedication event by reciting five letters, "W-A-T-E-R." These letters were signed into the hand of the seven-year-old deaf and blind girl by her teacher, Anne Sullivan. At the time, the two were standing at the water pump of Helen's home in Tusculum, Alabama, and it was at that moment when Helen began to associate language with objects around her.

Fittingly, this is the scene that is memorialized in the new statue. Many will relate to the scene from the dramatic depiction in the 1962 motion picture, "The Miracle Worker."

Helen Keller went on to become the first person with her disabilities to graduate from college. Years later, she became a noted author, activist and advocate for people with disabilities. In 1964, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon Baines Johnson. In 2003, the state of Alabama honored Miss Keller by placing her image on the state's quarter.

Of significance, Helen Keller's statue is the first in the Statuary Hall Collection to honor a child, and it is the first depiction of a person with a disability.

We should all be proud that this Alabamian, who overcame and accomplished so much, is now representing our state in our nation's Capitol.

When you visit Washington, DC, be sure to contact our office for more information on how to locate both of Alabama's statues in the U.S. Capitol.



Overregulation Detrimental to Gulf Coast Seafood Jobs

Rocked by a string of vicious hurricanes followed by the one-two punch of higher fuel costs and an economic recession, our Gulf Coast fishermen face enough challenges without Washington bureaucrats piling on even more unnecessary regulations. Yet, that is exactly what they have experienced this past year.

Just as Mother Nature eased her assault on our local oyster and red snapper fishermen, federal agencies stepped in with regulations that defy common sense and threaten to do even more damage to our local economy.

Gulf Coast Raw Oysters Under Threat

Last fall, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced it would begin imposing costly new post-harvest processing requirements on raw oysters taken from the Gulf of Mexico during warm weather months.

The FDA said it was "reformulating its policy" in order to lower levels of a type of potentially harmful bacteria sometimes found in unprocessed raw oysters. However, the FDA failed to show that the potential presence of the bacteria presents a significant health threat. Furthermore, the Gulf oyster industry is already working with the FDA on a long-term program to manage bacteria risk.

Some 70 percent of raw oysters consumed in the U.S. come from the Gulf of Mexico, and 40 percent are harvested during warm weather months. The impact of this ruling would mean the virtual shut down of the Gulf raw oyster industry for approximately half of the year, while non-Gulf raw oysters would not be subject to such restrictions.

In November, I joined with fellow Gulf Coast lawmakers in opposing these needless limitations on our Gulf oyster industry and cosponsored legislation prohibiting any federal funding to enforce the new FDA regulations.

The FDA has since backed away from imposing the new regulations, announcing that it would first seek the outcome of a comprehensive study before making a final decision.



Red Snapper Fishing Limit

As you know, red snapper fishing is extremely popular in the Gulf of Mexico. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), recreational and charter fishing in Alabama alone has an annual economic impact of over \$325 million. In recent years, the federal government imposed increasingly restrictive limits on fish catches — causing both commercial and recreational fishermen to suffer financial loss. There is clear evidence from fishermen that the Gulf red snapper population is on the rebound, including reports of larger fish being hauled in — in fact, some say they cannot catch anything *but* red snapper because they are so plentiful.

I have called on NOAA to use independent fishery data in order to determine the red snapper population.

Furthermore, I authored language included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act (HR 3288) that passed in December urging NOAA to solicit and incorporate independent fishery data and to take into account the economic impact any new restrictions would have on local communities and businesses.

In a positive development, NOAA released a statement in mid-December acknowledging that red snapper levels are indeed rising; however, the latest recommendation to shorten the season to 60 days or less is a long way away from ensuring the economic viability of this industry.



NOAA Gulf of Mexico Disaster Response Center

In late January, I was pleased to participate in the groundbreaking of the new Gulf of Mexico Disaster Response Center (DRC) to be located on Zeigler Boulevard, near the Mobile airport.



The new federal facility, which will be operated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), will provide full-time assistance to regional and local officials in times of ecological emergency.

Alabama's senior Senator, Richard Shelby, secured the funding for this new facility, and it would not have been located in Mobile without his assistance.

The DRC will house the NOAA Response and Restoration's Gulf Coast office, leading efforts to effectively respond to both natural and man-made disasters that threaten our coastal areas and marine environment.

When completed, the hurricane-hardened, 15,000-square-foot response center will employ up to 25 persons.

The new center is expected to open in the spring of 2011.

WWII Veterans visit Washington, DC



I was proud to welcome nearly 100 WWII veterans from South Alabama as they toured the World War II Memorial last September.

Last September, almost a hundred South Alabama veterans traveled to Washington, DC, to see and experience the patriotism of the World War II Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

I was honored to welcome these true American heroes to our nation's capital and listen to their stories about their service to our country as well as their concerns over veterans' benefits and health care.

Our aging veterans, including many from the World War II generation, often find it difficult to journey long distances to access VA health care. In recent years, Congress and the Veterans Administration have been working to bring VA health care to rural communities.

Accordingly, I am lending support to ongoing efforts to locate a VA community-based outpatient clinic in Monroeville this year. If the new clinic is approved, it will provide valuable medical services to the surrounding veteran population, including in Monroe and Clarke counties. Currently, veterans in those areas are forced to make long trips to Montgomery for doctor appointments.

Without a doubt, our veterans are the real heroes of our country. Lest we ever forget, America owes our freedom and liberty to them.



After the veterans returned home to Alabama, I was pleased to present each of them with a U.S. flag flown over the Capitol, a copy of a tribute entered in the Congressional Record, and a certificate honoring their service to our great country.

Congratulations 2010 Academy Nominees!

Each year, it is a personal honor to nominate South Alabama's brightest young men and women to our nation's service academies.

The quality of education at the U.S. Air Force Academy, the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy is among the finest in the world. Many of the graduates will go on to become the next generation of America's leaders.

This year, I have nominated 27 young men and women to be considered for an appointment to the Class of 2014. Those who are ultimately selected will begin their school year this July.

My office is currently taking applications for the Class of 2015, which will enter the academies in the summer of 2011. Interested students may apply for a nomination now, and the nomination file must be completed in my office by December 1, 2010.

For those interested in learning more about the academies and to submit an application for a nomination, please contact Brooks Chew in my Mobile office at (251) 690-2811 or 1-800-288-8721. Information is also on my web site at <http://bonner.house.gov>.

Congratulations to the following students who have received nominations to the various U.S. Service Academies for the Class of 2014!



*John Curtis Andrews
Mobile
Davidson High School*



*Brandon Bannon
Mobile
Baker High School*



*Vaughan Blacksher
Mobile
Cottage Hill Christian Academy*



*James Burch
Fairhope
Fairhope High School*



*Davis Coker
Mobile
St. Paul's Episcopal School*



*Ben Cole
Mobile
Baker High School*



*Jean-Luc Currie
Mobile
Cottage Hill Christian Academy*



*Blaize Dunn
Chunchula
Satsuma High School*



*Meagan Glidden
Mobile
Murphy High School*



*Quintin Howard
Mobile
Murphy High School*



*Thomas Jackson
Mobile
LeFlore High School*



*Chris Lee
Mobile
Davidson High School*



*Allie Lozano
Foley
Foley High School*



*Briana Moore
Mobile
Baker High School*



*Patrick Myles
Mobile
St. Paul's Episcopal School*



*Sidney Odom
Robertsdale
Robertsdale High School*



*Paloma Perez
Mobile
U.S. Naval Academy Prep School*



*Nathan Petty
Mobile
University of Alabama*



*Chris Pierce
Daphne
Daphne High School*



*Jake Spaulding
Mobile
McGill-Toolen High School*



*Asia Terrell
Eight Mile
Davidson High School*



*Mason Thames
Mobile
St. Paul's Episcopal School*



*Jacob Turk
Semmes
M. G. Montgomery High School*



*Dana VanderLey
Mobile
UMS-Wright Preparatory School*



*Turner Walton
Spanish Fort
Spanish Fort High School*



*Madison Wohlers
Beatrice
Monroe Academy*



*Shawn Wright
Daphne
Daphne High School*

The Power of One Vote

President Obama referred to the Senate's "super-majority" rules during his State of the Union Address earlier this month. Many people are confused with the difference between the U.S. House and Senate voting rules and often ask me "how can one person – or one vote in the Senate – really make that much of a difference? And what is a filibuster, anyway?"

A filibuster allows a senator to speak on the Senate floor for an unlimited amount of time in order to block or delay consideration of legislation. Although not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, the practice of "filibustering" has been used for many decades.

And at one time, up until the mid-1800s, members of the House also used the filibuster in debates. This changed as the membership of the House grew much larger than the Senate (currently 435 Representatives and 100 Senators), reflecting the population growth of our country.

Over the years, the filibuster has been used on everything from halting legislation to blocking a judicial nominee (as in the case when former Alabama Attorney General — and Mobile native — Bill Pryor was nominated by then-President George W. Bush to a federal judgeship).

A 60-vote threshold is required under Senate rules to block a filibuster. So when the president arrived in Washington, he was greeted, as he stated in his State of Union address, with "the largest majority in decades," and a soon-to-be all-important 60-vote, filibuster proof Senate. But, that recently changed, and the Senate is now divided 59 to 41.

With 41 members, the Senate minority will now be better able to exercise its traditional prerogative for unlimited debate, dramatically changing the tone and shape of the upcoming legislative session.

Keep in mind that the founders of our Republic had a deep knowledge of classical history and a strong belief that the legitimacy of government is derived from the consent of the governed. They believed any democracy in which citizens make the laws must have strong protections against both the tyranny of a king as well as the tyranny of popular opinion, which they saw as fleeting.

For this reason, they established a legislative branch — the Congress — with two chambers, instead of one, to protect against these twin dangers.

The House is composed of members who serve for two year terms, and legislation in this chamber — according to its self-adopted rules — requires a simple majority of support to pass, making it an expression of majority will. Oftentimes, one vote is enough to make a difference in the House.

The Senate, by contrast, is composed of members serving six year terms. This chamber has long been seen as a guardian of minority views, in particular due to its unique tradition of unlimited debate that can only be ended — and a bill brought to the floor for a vote — when 60 or more senators agree.

So can one person truly make a difference in Washington? The answer is absolutely yes!

New Office Web Site

It is hard to believe that we are already into the second decade of the 21st Century. So much is changing around us, including our reliance on exciting new technologies to enhance our lives.

With the new year, I have also launched a completely new congressional web site to better serve you. The new web site address is the same as the old: <http://bonner.house.gov>.

The First Congressional District web site sports a fresh, new look and displays links to office services and information in a format that is more user-friendly.

The new site also makes it easy to email my office, search my recent news columns and press releases, watch videos of my speeches on the House floor, and listen to my weekly radio shows. You can also sign up for email updates and visit my Facebook page from the new web site.

As always, your comments on the web site are welcome.



Where is the "Energy" in the Cap & Trade Energy Bill?

An energy policy that raises prices on most goods and services while blocking access to abundant and potentially cheaper domestic energy ought to make very little sense, even in the best of economic times. Yet, when millions of Americans are out of work and many more are struggling just to make the monthly house payment and keep the lights on, it is hard to believe the majority would push such an upside down energy strategy.

The administration's controversial Cap and Trade energy bill is, in my opinion, just such a policy. I believe this bill is really more about forcing Americans to change their ways of living than about addressing America's energy needs.

The Cap and Trade bill gets its name from its requirement that all carbon emitters, including U.S. oil refineries, purchase allowances for every ton of carbon they discharge. These allowances can be traded among the emitters while ever tighter restrictions are imposed by the government.

While all this is going on, these industries are raising their prices on everyone else in order to cover the extra expense of the allowances they are forced to pay. Depending on different analyses, the impact of this new government "tax" could raise energy costs on the average American family anywhere from \$400 to \$1,300 annually.

In mid-January, a Louisiana energy exploration company announced what it said could be "one of the largest discoveries (of oil and natural gas) on the shelf of the Gulf of Mexico in decades." The Gulf is already home to over 50% of U.S. oil and natural gas production, and policies which encourage domestic exploration will help ensure that we have a continued reliable supply of energy.

Despite our abundance of energy resources, the administration and the majority in Congress are pursuing a national policy that restricts energy supply and discourages exploration for oil and gas on the outer continental shelf as well as use of an abundant American energy resource — coal.

I voted against the Cap and Trade "energy" bill last year and instead supported an alternative real energy bill — the American Energy Act — which encourages a responsible balance of new energy development and energy efficiency. Unfortunately, this bill failed to pass the House.

The American Energy Act would increase production of American-made energy in an environmentally-sound manner and promote new, clean and renewable sources of energy such as nuclear, clean coal technology, wind and solar energy.

Our real energy independence bill also would encourage greater efficiency and conservation by extending tax incentives for energy efficiency and rewarding development of greater conservation techniques and new energy sources. Finally, the American Energy Act would cut red-tape and reduce frivolous litigation that hinders energy production.



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