

Alabama's First District

CONGRESSMAN JO BONNER

THE WASHINGTON REPORT



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Dear Friends,

It is hard to believe my first year in Congress has already come and gone.

As we begin 2004 and the new challenges that confront us, it is important to reflect on just how much our

world has changed in the past few months and how much these changes can — and will — affect our lives in the future.

Just a few years ago, not many of us had ever heard of al Qaeda, and there didn't appear to be any need for a Department of Homeland Security.

Only a year ago, Saddam Hussein was still in power as the ruler of Iraq and there was no end in sight to his brutal reign and the evil with which he terrorized his own people, not to mention the menace he was to the rest of the world.

Fast forward to today and you can easily see how much our lives — our spending habits, even our own economic security — are influenced by world events.

First year in review

The list of accomplishments for the first session of the 108th Congress is, as always, largely dependent on your own personal perspective.

For instance, some see H.R. 1, the landmark Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003 — which includes new prescription drug coverage for millions of seniors — as the largest expansion of the Great Society since Lyndon Johnson was president.

Others, including yours truly, saw this as an historic opportunity — championed by President George W. Bush — to modernize a program on which millions of seniors have grown to depend while, at the same time, giving individuals more control over the costs of their own health care and better access to affordable, flexible coverage.

Much the same can be said about many of the

other important pieces of legislation that passed the House in 2003. Go down the list for yourself: the far-reaching Energy Policy Act of 2003, the historic Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, and the economically-important Jobs and Growth Act of 2003. The degree to which you either support or

first 12 months often seemed like a marathon in terms of legislative action.

From modernizing Medicare, to supporting the war on terrorism, to identifying some \$100 billion that can be saved over the next 10 years in waste, fraud and abuse, we have gotten off to a fast start.

And when we return to Washington later this month, there will be no shortage of items on our agenda for the balance of the 108th Congress.

An important reminder of the price of freedom

On a mid-December trip to Iraq and Kuwait to visit our troops — my first overseas trip as your congressman — I was reminded at every turn of the tremendous sacrifice being made each day by hundreds of thousands of men and women in the volunteer Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard of the United States of America. Many of these individuals are your friends and neighbors who serve in the National Guard and Reserves and have been called to active duty. The sacrifices made by the families of these service members are no less important in fighting and winning the war against terrorism.

To a person, these exceptional men and women are truly an inspiration, as well as a model of what good training, adequate funding and strong public support can mean to the defense of this country.

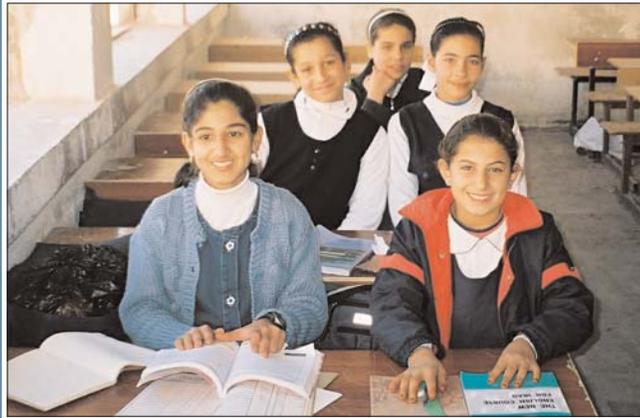
Whether it was visiting with a wounded soldier in a make-shift hospital at some remote air field in Iraq, or listening to the comments in the chow line with a group of young men and women who just a short while ago were still in high school, every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine I saw was proud of the job they have done and of the role they have played in taking the war on terrorism to the front steps of the enemy so that we will not have to fight that war here in our own communities.

That said, we should never think — not for even a moment — the world in which we live is free of danger and evil. It is not.

See *Letter* continued on page 2



It was a proud moment for me to be able to visit with so many South Alabamians who are serving their country in Iraq. See page 2 for more photos.



For the first time in their young lives, the children of Iraq have an opportunity to look to the future with optimism and hope.

oppose these bills is largely a reflection of your own political persuasion.

But no one can honestly say that this Congress has been devoid of activity. To the contrary, the

(Letter continued from page 1)

So much progress is being made in Iraq that it is simply impossible to list all the accomplishments in the confines of this newsletter. But when looking for milestones, consider the following:

- After World War II, it took Germany 14 months to establish its own police force; with our Military Police providing the training, it has taken Iraq just two months.

- The Germans took three years to establish a major reconstruction plan; this has occurred in Iraq in just four months.

- It took 10 years to train a new military in Germany; today, American soldiers are in the process of training the new Iraqi army just a few short months after the war ended.

Make no mistake — much more work remains to be done. Even the capture of Saddam Hussein doesn't guarantee that the job will get any easier, at least not in the short term. This fact was brought home at recent deployment ceremonies I attended throughout the First District.

But in thinking about our mission in Iraq, Afghanistan and wherever else our armed forces and intelligence officers must go to fight and win the war against terrorism, we must never, ever forget the tremendous cost of living in freedom and enjoying the fruits of liberty.

As British Prime Minister Tony Blair reminded us in an address to Congress last July: "I know out there, there's a guy getting on with his life, perfectly happily, minding his own business, saying to you, the political leaders of this country, 'why me, and why us, and why America?'" And the only answer is because



Sgt. Clemons McGill, of Brewton (actually of Pollard), and I stand in front of a make-shift Christmas tree in a building once used as a torture chamber by Saddam Hussein.



An American GI shows some Iraqi children how to write his name in English. Schools have been painted, wooden floors have been installed and for the first time ever, students have textbooks, pencils and paper.

destiny put you in this place in history in this moment in time, and the task is yours to do."

Tony Blair was right. There has never been a time when the power of America was so necessary or so misunderstood.

But in order for America to remain the beacon of hope and the "shining city on the hill," as President Ronald Reagan envisioned, we must persevere and we must prevail. With God's continued blessings, we will remain the land of the free and the home of the brave.



SSG Chastity Wassman, of Semmes, helped me distribute presents to the troops from South Alabama which were donated by the local community.

Call whenever we can be of service
The beginning of a new year is a time best known for resolutions: losing weight, curbing vices, doing the things we *know* we should do.

But for the fourteen people who work with me in this, *your* congressional office, our New Year's resolution is, in fact, a recommitment to provide you with the best, most prompt and most courteous service humanly possible.

Our offices in Mobile, Baldwin County and Washington are here to serve you and we are eager to be of help. Please don't hesitate to call on us whenever you feel we can be of assistance. I hope our paths cross soon in the coming weeks and months. It is indeed an honor and privilege to be your representative from South Alabama.

To Bowyer

More good news occurring in Iraq than is being reported in national press

During the intense media coverage of military activities in Iraq before and during Operation Iraqi Freedom, a tremendous amount of attention has been paid to the costs of war — not in terms of money or equipment but rather in terms of the fine young men and women who have been wounded and, in many instances, killed by anti-American forces still operating within that country.

The loss of any life is tragic, particularly for the many families and friends left behind. Having in recent months been present at the funerals for two young men from South Alabama who lost their lives fighting for the freedom of a people half a world away — Howard Johnson, II, and Paul "P.J." Bueche — I can tell you it has been quite difficult for me. This was certainly something I hoped would never happen while serving the people of the First District.

However, while mourning the loss of Howard, P. J. and many others, we should also take a moment to reflect on the positive things happening in Iraq as a result of their efforts and the efforts of thousands of their fellow soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines. Life is indeed changing for the better for an entire nation, and all too often we don't hear of these positive developments in the network news. Consider for a moment the following improvements in Iraq that have occurred in just a few short months:

- 1590 Iraqi schools were rehabilitated by the start of the school year this past October.
- 95 percent of Iraqi health clinics and all of

its hospitals are once again open and providing much needed medical care to the public.

- As of October 6, power capacity peaked at 4518 MW, far exceeding the 4400 MW level prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- Nine out of every ten villages, towns and cities are governed by a council of local officials.
- Water systems in Basrah, Baghdad, and An Najaf have been repaired and upgraded and are now providing much-needed water to millions of Iraqis.
- The World Food Program has delivered nearly 1.7 million metric tons of food to Iraq, enough to feed the people of that country for three months.
- Over 30 million doses of vaccines for measles, tuberculosis, whooping cough and numerous other diseases have been delivered to Iraq which will provide vaccinations to 4.2 million children.

With every day that passes, more and more success stories are coming out of Iraq — a strong demonstration of how quickly a nation can be turned around when an oppressive and restrictive dictatorship has been removed. It is indeed important that we remember our losses in recent months and honor their memories and their commitment to the preservation of freedom worldwide, but it is also important that we take note of the many successes that have resulted from their sacrifices. There is positive news coming out of Iraq daily, and I would encourage you to visit an informative web site — www.freedom.gov — to get news on these changes.

Landmark Medicare reform, prescription drug coverage signed into law

One of the most contested and debated issues in this country during the past ten years has undoubtedly been the provision of a Medicare prescription drug benefit to America's seniors. Organizations all across the country have weighed in, and my office and the offices of my colleagues in the House of Representatives have been flooded with telephone calls, e-mails, and letters urging Congress to take action.



President Bush signs the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003 on December 8, 2003.

Recently, I'm sure many of you saw on television a series of commercials imploring members of the House and Senate to pass a prescription drug plan. The commercials end with a shot of a senior citizen behind the wheel of a car who utters the line, "When are you going to get it done?"

In the early morning hours of Saturday, November 22, the House did "get it done." Following a marathon vote concluding just before dawn, the House passed the conference report for H.R. 1, the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003. Just a few days later, the Senate also passed this legislation, and the measure was signed into law by President Bush on December 8.

These votes have certainly been a long time coming, and they bring to fruition a promise made long ago to America's seniors to provide a quality, affordable prescription drug benefit.

This is indeed a major accomplishment, and the plan will provide significant benefits for families here in South Alabama. It is important to note at the outset that participation in the new plans included in this legislation is strictly voluntary, and no one will be required to enroll who does not want to take advantage of the changes in the Medicare system. Let me highlight

some of the major points of this legislation and how they may benefit each of you:

➤ Beginning in June, 2004 (six months from the date the legislation was signed by President Bush), Alabama residents currently enrolled in Medicare will become eligible for a prescription drug discount card. This card can be used immediately and will provide between 10 and 25 percent in "at-the-register" savings off the cost of prescription drugs. An average senior citizen who spends approximately \$1285 each year on their prescriptions could save as much as \$300 off this amount annually as a result of having this card. These benefits would remain in effect until the full drug benefit takes effect in 2006.

➤ Beginning in 2006, every Medicare beneficiary in Alabama and seniors without any drug coverage will be eligible for prescription drug coverage through a Medicare-approved plan. These plans will be made available for an approximate \$35 per month premium and will result in savings of more than 50 percent on the cost of prescriptions. As a result of this provision, seniors who spend between \$200 and \$800 each month on prescription drugs could expect to see annual savings of between \$1700 and \$5900.

➤ An additional \$600 in financial assistance will be provided annually to single beneficiaries with an annual income of less than \$12,123, or couples with a joint income of less than \$16,362. This money can be used along with the discount card mentioned previously for additional savings.

➤ The Medicare program will assume responsibility for the prescription drug costs of nearly 140,000 Alabamians currently eligible for coverage under both Medicare and Medicaid.

➤ Beneficiaries meeting the income criteria listed above will qualify for additional benefits including the elimination of the prescription drug premium. Additionally, the required co-payment on the cost of prescription drugs will be nominal, with a \$2 charge for generic and \$5 for brand-name medications.

➤ Seniors will have the option of adding a prescription drug benefit to their traditional Medicare fee-for-service program and will not risk the loss of any existing benefits.

➤ Medicare will cover up to 75 percent of prescription drug costs up to \$2250 per year. A new catastrophic coverage provision included in this legislation would call for Medicare to pay 95 percent of all drug costs exceeding \$3600 per year.

➤ Tax incentives will be provided to private businesses to encourage them to continue providing prescription drug coverage for their retirees.

It is certainly no secret that much of the focus of this legislation has been on the prescription drug benefits. However, it is important to note that the Medicare bill also includes changes that will provide significant benefits to hospitals in Alabama, particularly in rural areas, as a result of the Medicare modernization language that was included in the bill. The increase in reimbursement for Alabama hospitals should be almost \$1 billion over the next ten years. These funds will insure timely and quality care for all Alabamians as we move forward into the 21st century.

While acknowledging this was not a perfect bill (few are), I am proud to have supported this legislation and am pleased that so many Americans will benefit from the plan once it is implemented.

Naturally, I understand the critics who complain it is either too much or not enough. It would be unrealistic to expect that this measure would provide a complete solution to the challenges of providing drug coverage for millions of American seniors.

That said, the positive benefits clearly should not be ignored. This measure marks an important accomplishment and is one that will provide equal choices and equal coverage for the approximately 40 million Americans who depend on Medicare to meet their medical and prescription drug needs.

Congress Passes Bill to Give Seniors Prescription Drug Benefits

How This Benefit Works

- **100% VOLUNTARY:** If you like your current plan, stay with it. If you want more flexibility or better benefits, then switch to a more comprehensive plan. The choice is yours.
- **DEEP DISCOUNTS:** Seniors will save 25% and their overall out of pocket drug spending could fall by as much as 77% in exchange for a premium of about \$35 per month.



Economic Summit plants seeds for South Alabama's future

Mobile was the site for a truly remarkable event in Southwest Alabama's recent history as some 400 delegates gathered on November 17 for the Southwest Alabama Leadership Summit, held at the Adams Mark Hotel.

As you can imagine, it was a special privilege for me to be the host of the meeting in conjunction with the non-partisan Public Forum Institute of Washington, D.C.

The event — attended by business, labor and community leaders, as well as elected officials from throughout the area — provided perhaps the first-ever collective step toward an organized economic growth plan for the six counties that make up Alabama's First District.

Naturally, I was extremely pleased with the turnout, but more importantly, the response from those in attendance was very positive as well. Repeatedly, there were comments pledging cooperation between communities and counties, as well as a true sense of anticipation that the seeds were being planted for new ideas and greater economic success throughout the area.

Special thanks go to other officials — both from this region and throughout the state — who also welcomed the participants to the conference and offered their own remarks. Neal Wade, Director of the Alabama Development Office, gave his perspective on the state of the economy in Southwest Alabama and what steps we can take collectively to achieve the goals of further growth. Mobile Mayor Mike Dow was also on hand to welcome the delegates to the conference.

Perhaps the highlight of the daylong conference was the keynote address, delivered by Donald Evans, President Bush's Secretary of Commerce. Secretary Evans provided both thoughtful and insightful comments on the recent improvements in the state of the American economy (these improvements can be found in the box at right), and offered suggestions — and a great deal of encouragement — on how we can direct some of the momentum resulting from these national trends into successes in Southwest Alabama.

Among other things, the delegates were given an opportunity to participate in a series of individual breakout sessions focusing on specific areas of concern in our region: Innovation and Strengthening Our Existing Businesses, Expanding Opportunities for Minority and Women-Owned Businesses, Workforce Development, and Attracting and Creating New Entrepreneurs and Businesses.

With the assistance of four panels comprised of some of the brightest minds in the fields of education, business and industry from our region, the participants in these sessions were also able to target specific areas of potential improvement or growth. From these discussions, a series of highly useful suggestions was developed focusing specifically on ways to build upon our current infrastructure and workforce and bring even greater development to Southwest Alabama.

It says a great deal about the strong motivation of the people of our region that nearly 400 men and women would come together and take an important first step towards eliminating geographic barriers and working as a single body to achieve a brighter economic future.

I also feel the presence of Secretary Evans gives a strong endorsement to the potential he and our other national leaders see in Southwest Alabama. On the flight back to Washington, Secretary Evans confided that our conference was one of the most successful in which he has taken part.

The fact that a member of the president's cabinet would take time out



Members of Monroeville's "Mockingbird Court" and I helped welcome Secretary of Commerce Don Evans to South Alabama.

of his busy schedule to spend an afternoon in Mobile — and follow up on that visit with such positive comments on what he had seen and heard — is a strong indication that our region is on the radar of our national economic leaders.

Now, it is up to each of us to take the suggestions and constructive dialogue that was offered at this conference and turn them into positive results and a brighter future for South Alabama.

If you were unable to attend the Southwest Alabama Leadership Summit, but would like to view the final report from the conference, feel free to go to my home page at www.house.gov/bonner where you can make your views known as well.

National economy turning around

With the number of major events covered by the national media in recent weeks, one of the most encouraging stories — and one which has begun to draw increasing attention — has been the much-anticipated recovery of our national economy.

The national economy is indeed on an upswing and many of these positive indicators can be directly attributed to policies enacted by Congress and the Bush Administration.

At the recent Southwest Alabama Leadership Summit in Mobile, nearly 400 men and women from throughout our region looked at ways we can take these positive signs as the basis for addressing the pressing economic needs here in the First District.

In thinking about the economic future of South Alabama, it is worth noting some of the recent indicators that the national economy is finally moving in the right direction:

- The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased during the third quarter of 2003 by a 20-year high of 8.2 percent, far surpassing the 3.3 percent growth of the second quarter.
- Consumer spending increased at a rate of 6.4 percent during the third quarter of last year.
- Between July and October, retail sales increased at a rate of 8.5 percent.
- Over 300,000 new jobs have been created in the past several months alone.
- During the month of November, consumer confidence increased to a level of 91.7, much higher than the anticipated level of 85.
- The value of the Dow Jones Industrial Average increased by \$2 trillion since the beginning of 2003 and rose from a low of 7,200 in 2002 to a level over 10,000.
- The number of new single-family home sales and home mortgage applications has risen to record highs.
- Non-residential business and business capital spending both increased during the third quarter of last year.

These are all important statistics and they certainly bear out signs of an economic revival. But while things are getting better on the national front, there is admittedly more that can be done here at home.

You can rest assured your congressman will do everything humanly possible to ensure our region receives strong consideration for new business and industry, and that every man and woman who wants a meaningful job and a better future has access to these opportunities.

Sixty town hall meetings held in first year

One year ago, as I began my duties as your new congressman, I pledged to the people of Alabama's First District that during my first year in office my staff and I would hold at least sixty meetings in cities and towns throughout South Alabama.

In early December, this goal was realized with our latest series of town meetings.

Everywhere we traveled — from county seats like Bay Minette and Grove Hill, to smaller communities like Fruitdale, Magnolia Springs, Vredenburgh and Pollard — the reception we received was as warm and genuine as the people of South Alabama are themselves.



Mobile Mayor Mike Dow (center) attended our town meeting in Trinity Gardens. Shown with the mayor are Clint Gillespie, Raven King, Justin Stallworth, Jameisha Stallworth and Leevones Dubose.



Monroe County Sheriff Tom Tate and many of his fine deputies joined my staff and me for our town meeting in Frisco City to discuss issues of concern.

If you have never been to a town meeting with an elected official, you probably don't know what you've missed.

After making a few brief comments about what is



My staff and I were greeted with southern hospitality at our first town meeting in Magnolia Springs held at Jesse's Restaurant to discuss issues of concern to Baldwin County.

going on in Congress, I usually turn the floor over to those in attendance. From answering questions about the headlines of the day to helping constituents who are experiencing a problem with a federal agency, these meetings almost always vary from community to community.

But always — without exception — there is also a good suggestion or two about some common-sense solution that seemingly has been overlooked by everyone in Washington.

Not to sound self-serving, but holding sixty meetings throughout the six counties of the First District in the span of one year is a pretty ambitious goal. These town meetings, mind you, are in addition to the regularly scheduled visits to schools, civic clubs and other local organizations.

Was the pace tiring at times? You bet it was — especially considering the amount of time we spent in Washington last year voting on important legislation — but it was definitely worth the effort.

While it was certainly nice to visit the larger cities in the district, perhaps of greater importance were our visits to some of South Alabama's smallest communities and crossroads. Many people — in towns like St. Stephens, Perdue Hill and Riverview — said this was the first time ever that a member of Congress had held a public meeting in their area — and the reception in these smaller communities was especially cordial.

Special thanks to everyone who took advantage of these meetings to come out and voice their opinions and concerns during the past twelve months. Your involvement and input are an important part of what makes a representative form of government work.

Naturally, I look forward to the next group of town meetings — coming to a community near you — in the months ahead.



The site of historic St. Stephens served as the setting for one of our December town meetings.

Monthly Cyber Report latest way to stay in touch

As many of you have undoubtedly discovered, my staff and I recently introduced yet another service, a new monthly “cyber report,” which is designed to keep the people of South Alabama current on the latest events in our nation's capital.

In conversations with many constituents over the past several months, especially during our recent series of town hall meetings, it is becoming increasingly clear that an open line of communication is both needed — and appreciated — especially considering the wide range of issues on which Congress is working.

In addition to this newsletter (my second this term), my weekly news column, a weekly radio show, and “The Congressional Report,” our public affairs television show that airs Sunday mornings at 10 a.m. on WKRK-TV 5, my staff and I felt there was still more that we could do to provide timely updates on recent developments and how they will affect people back home in Alabama.

As a result, we have introduced our new online newsletter. This “cyber report” is published monthly and is designed to complement our weekly news column by providing appropriate updates of events in our nation's capital as well as back home in South Alabama. The new “cyber report” is a scaled-down version of the newsletter you are now reading and is distributed once each month via e-mail. Additionally, these reports, as well as my regular weekly columns, are posted on my Internet web site.

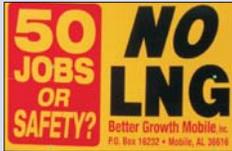
I am very excited to be the first member of Congress from Alabama to introduce a “cyber report” to his constituents. In addition to providing more regular updates on major issues of concern, we also take a moment to highlight area businesses and events. You should note that the “cyber report” is e-mailed in a .pdf format, so you will need to have Adobe Reader software installed on your computer in order to view it. It is my understanding a free software download of this product is available on the Internet.

If you would like to subscribe to this complimentary service, as well as my weekly news column, via e-mail, please don't hesitate to visit my web site at www.house.gov/bonner or call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

LNG Terminal Proposed for Mobile

The Alabama State Port Authority recently voted to give ExxonMobil an option to purchase the old Navy Home Port property for the location of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal. LNG is a form of natural gas that has been converted to a highly concentrated liquid form and can be transported by oceangoing tankers. Drastic increases in the cost of natural gas have made LNG economically feasible for the first time in many years, and the fuel is considered to be increasingly important in meeting the United States' growing energy requirements.

However, LNG is a potentially hazardous substance and residents in the Hollinger's Island community of Mobile County and others have raised serious safety concerns about a possible LNG



Signs like this are popping up in parts of Mobile to protest the LNG terminal.

terminal in their backyard. It was enlightening for me to meet with these concerned citizens on November 10 to hear first-hand of their fears.

At my invitation, an official of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the federal agency with the primary responsibility for licensing LNG terminals, came to Mobile on November 24 to meet with interested parties to explain the procedures for reviewing applications. We learned that this is a fairly lengthy process that will take some 18-24 months to complete and that numerous other federal agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security, also have roles in the regulatory process.

While I do not have the constitutional authority to kill or approve this project, I do intend to honor the commitment I have made to do my very best to insure that the federal permitting process works. This includes making certain that, throughout this entire process, our questions are answered, our concerns are addressed and if there are any gaps in the regulatory process that could become a loophole where safety is concerned, that we take whatever action is necessary to close those gaps.



Shown above is a depiction of an LNG tanker that has safely transported liquefied natural gas without incident for over 40 years.

Congratulations to our 2004 academy nominees!



Chaz Brown



Hank Bullock



Cole Callahan



Brandon Davis



Logan Donaldson



Sam Eubanks



Steven Gaffin



Chardette James



Mike Lane



Geoffrey Lerner



Daniel Lessard



Seth McDonald



Julia Miller



Tripp Noojin



Forrest Perkins



Jerry Pribyl



Michael Quinn



James VanCleave



Cliff White



Brian Williamson

Twenty South Alabamians receive nominations to U.S. Service Academies

There are few responsibilities that come with the job of a congressman that carry greater pride or meaning than being able to nominate some of the brightest young men and women from our area for consideration of an appointment to one of our nation's outstanding military service academies.

As history has shown, these institutions — the United States Military Academy at West Point, the Naval Academy at Annapolis, the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, the Coast Guard Academy at New London, and the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point — have produced some of the finest leaders in our nation's history. Moreover, the education these students receive is one of the best money can buy.

Recently, I was privileged to host my first Academy Night for prospective candidates for admission to one of the academies. The tremendous turnout for this event at the auditorium of UMS-Wright Preparatory School in Mobile was extremely encouraging. Moreover, it was a strong sign to me and the academy representatives in attendance that interest in these opportunities is very strong. I would like to take time to thank everyone who attended for their participation and desire to learn more about the nomination process.

It is certainly not too soon for young men

and women interested in attending a service academy to begin preparing for the selection process. Students currently completing their junior year in high school are eligible to apply for a nomination in Spring 2004, and the nomination file must be completed in my office by December 1, 2004.

Make no mistake, admission to one of the five academies is not easy; in fact, the process can be quite rigorous. In addition to basic age requirements, candidates for admission must also display significant degrees of academic achievement (displayed by high school transcripts as well as SAT and ACT scores); have demonstrated leadership in school, church, or community activities; be of good moral character; and successfully complete a medical review and physical aptitude examination.

The academy application process is a great opportunity for anyone interested in pursuing a degree and career through the military, Coast Guard or Merchant Marine. If you or a family member are interested in obtaining more information about this process, I would encourage you to call my academy coordinator, Dixie Patrick, in my Mobile office at 251-690-2811 or 800-288-8721. Additionally, information on the nomination process is available on my web site at www.house.gov/bonner.

Actions, not just words

As the members of our armed forces continue their efforts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, it is very important that we continue to support these brave men and women and their families. Congress has taken action on several important pieces of legislation designed to continue this support, and I would like to highlight a few of these measures:

Combat Pay and Family Separation Allowance: Last year, these allowances were temporarily increased to \$225 per month for combat pay and \$250 each month for Family Separation Allowance. Legislative action in 2003 ensured that these allowances will be maintained at the higher amount.

Military Benefits Bill: H.R. 3365, the Military Family Tax Relief Act of 2003, doubled the death gratuity to the survivors of deceased military personnel to \$12,000 and made the entire amount tax exempt. The bill also extended the capital gains exemption to military members when they sell their homes.

Force Protection: The recently enacted \$87 billion wartime supplemental appropriations act included significant funding for added protection for our deployed troops. This force protection funding will be used to purchase advanced body armor, equipment to clear mines and other explosive devices, and other measures such as armored personnel carriers and electronic jamming devices.

Hospital Meal Reimbursement: Many of us were shocked to learn that wounded soldiers were being charged for meals while in the hospital recovering. I co-sponsored H.R. 2998, a bill that will correct this unfair practice; the House passed this bill overwhelmingly, and I am hopeful the Senate will take similar action in 2004.

PROGRESS ON CONCURRENT RECEIPT

As far back as 1891, many of the men and women who have proudly worn the uniform of our country have been confronted with a disparity between their retirement benefits and their VA disability compensation.

Until this past year, an individual receiving both military retired pay and disability compensation had their retirement benefits reduced by the amount of their disability payments. Congress has for many years sought a solution to correct this inequitable system, a fix commonly known as "concurrent receipt."

At long last, a solution has been reached and is one that has the support of many major veterans groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Military Officers Association of America, and the Fleet Reserve Association.

The recently enacted FY 2004 National Defense Authorization Act allows the concurrent receipt of both military retirement pay and disability compensation for individuals who meet the following criteria:

- 20-year military retirees who have received the Purple Heart or suffer from a combat-related disability with a rating of 10 to 100 percent;
- Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) recipients with a disability rating of 10 to 100 percent;
- Members of the National Guard or reserves who have received the Purple Heart or are CRSC certified, with a disability rating of 10 to 100 percent; or
- Military retirees with a disability rating of 50 to 100 percent, with no Purple Heart or CRSC requirements (this section will be phased in over ten years).

The Defense Authorization Act also authorizes the creation of a 13-member, bipartisan commission to review the current VA disability system and make recommendations on ways to improve the system. The work put into this bill represents a great deal of commitment by Congress to provide these benefits to the veterans who most deserve and need them. I am hopeful this legislation will help rectify over a century of inequity to our retired veterans.

South Alabama fares well

With the close of the first session of the 108th Congress in early December, members of the House also reached the end of the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2004.

As you may know, the federal government is funded each year through thirteen individual appropriations bills that set the spending levels for everything from the Departments of Defense and Transportation to the Army Corps of Engineers and the Veterans Administration. The new fiscal year begins each October 1.

While most of the thirteen bills were completed by the House — and, in fact, six were also passed by the Senate and became law with the president's signature — it became necessary for Congress to bundle the remaining seven appropriations measures into one omnibus bill. This legislation passed the House on December 8 by a vote of 242 to 176.

What is particularly important for individual congressional districts is that, in addition to the operation of the federal government and its agencies, these appropriations bills also include funding for many worthy local projects. Despite being a freshman congressman, I am especially pleased that many worthy South Alabama projects received strong consideration as was evidenced by so many of them being included in the final bills, both in the six signed by the president and in the omnibus.

No one person alone could make all these requests a reality; it takes a true spirit of cooperation between the House and Senate, as well as a strong partnership with local and state officials.

Nevertheless, the list below represents a significant return on the tax dollars we send to Washington in the first place. Special thanks to the many educational, community and business leaders who worked so aggressively to make your needs and priorities known to those of us on Capitol Hill.



Alabama School of Mathematics and Science.



Sign indicating the future home of the USA Cancer Institute.

Federally funded South Alabama projects

Alabama State Docks - Choctaw Point.....	\$8,900,000
Alabama School of Math and Science.....	\$118,000
Atmore Industrial Park.....	\$47,000
Southwest Alabama Water Authority.....	\$423,000
Fairhope Public Library.....	\$235,000
Fort Morgan/Dauphin Island Ferry.....	\$2,350,000
14-Mile Bridge.....	\$5,250,000
Mobile Port Waterfront and Transportation Terminal.....	\$4,234,000
Mobile Saenger Theater.....	\$47,000
Mobile - Tensaw Delta.....	\$3,000,000
Mobile - Hamilton Boulevard grade crossing.....	\$1,200,000
Monroe County - U.S. Highway 84 Corridor Study.....	\$235,000
Orange Beach - Robinson Island.....	\$1,900,000
Prichard comprehensive water study.....	\$235,000
South Alabama Utilities.....	\$188,000
Spring Hill College Library.....	\$846,000
USA Youth Violence Prevention Research.....	\$753,000
USA Oyster Bed reseeded.....	\$1,900,000
USA Cancer Institute.....	\$3,550,000
USA Diabetic Lower Extremity Amputation Prevention Program.....	\$376,000
USA Telemedicine.....	\$305,000
USA Birth Defects Monitoring.....	\$216,000
USA Gulf Coast Transportation Center.....	\$7,000
USA Center for the Study of Rural Vehicular Trauma.....	\$941,000
USA Center for Estuarine Research.....	\$941,000
USA Mitchell College of Business.....	\$376,000

Staff Travel Schedule

One of the most important aspects of being your representative in Washington is having the opportunity to address your needs and concerns and to assist your families whenever possible. While my schedule prevents me from being available to personally meet with my constituents as often as I would like, I have a very talented staff of men and women who, like me, are dedicated to providing the best representation possible for the First District.

In addition to the staff members who work in my district offices in Mobile and Foley, I have two field representatives who travel throughout the district each month. Frazier Payne (who travels in Mobile, Washington, and Clarke Counties) and Jon Hand (who travels in Baldwin, Escambia, and Monroe Counties) make themselves available at locations in each of the six counties of the district in order to meet with constituents who might otherwise not have access to the services of my office.

I would encourage anyone experiencing problems with the federal government and who may need the assistance of my office to check the schedule below and find the most convenient location. In addition to this schedule, the local media in the district is provided with press releases announcing Frazier and Jon's specific travel dates.



Frazier Payne
690-2811

Fourth Monday of Each Month

9:30-10:30 a.m.	Citronelle City Hall
11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	McIntosh Town Hall
1:00-2:00 p.m.	Chatom-Washington Co. Public Library
2:45-3:45 p.m.	Grove Hill City Hall

Fourth Tuesday of Each Month

9:00-10:00 a.m.	Jackson City Hall
12:15-1:15 p.m.	Bayou La Batre City Hall (even months)
12:15-1:15 p.m.	Dauphin Island Town Hall (odd months)



Jon Hand
943-2073

Second Monday of Each Month

9:00-10:00 a.m. Brewton City Hall
(following three locations rotate every three months)

10:30-11:30 a.m.	Flomaton City Hall (first month)
10:30-11:30 a.m.	East Brewton City Hall (second month)
11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Poarch Creek Reservation - Main Office (third month)

1:00-2:00 p.m.	Atmore City Hall
3:00-4:00 p.m.	Monroeville - Old County Courthouse

Second Tuesday of Each Month

9:00-10:00 a.m.	Bay Minette City Hall
11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Fairhope City Hall - Mayor's Office

For more information on this schedule, or to schedule an appointment with one of my representatives the next time they are in your area, please call my Mobile office at 251-690-2811 or 800-288-8721 or my Baldwin County office at 251-943-2073.

HOW TO CONTACT US...

DC office: 315 Cannon HOB Washington, DC 20515 Phone: (202) 225-4931 Fax: (202) 225-0562	Mobile office: 1141 Montlimar Drive Suite 3010 Mobile, AL 36609 Phone: (251) 690-2811 Fax: (251) 342-0404 Toll Free: 1-800-288-8721	Baldwin County office: 1302 N. McKenzie St. Foley, AL 36535 Phone: (251) 943-2073 Fax: (251) 943-2093
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Web site: www.house.gov/bonner

Helpful numbers and links

U.S. Capitol Switchboard - (202) 224-3121

Congressman Jo Bonner

Mobile Office - (251) 690-2811 or 1-800-288-8721
Baldwin County Office - (251) 943-2073
Washington Office - (202) 225-4931

Senator Jeff Sessions

Mobile Office - (251) 414-3083
Washington Office - (202) 224-4124

Senator Richard Shelby

Mobile Office - (251) 694-4164
Washington Office - (202) 224-5744

The White House

Main Operator - (202) 456-1414
Comments Line - (202) 456-1111

Alabama Legislative Delegation Office

Mobile County - (251) 208-5480
Baldwin County - (251) 937-0240

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Information - 1-800-375-5283
Forms line - 1-800-870-3676

Cancer Information Service- 1-800-4CANCER

AIDS Hotline - 1-800-342-AIDS

FIGHT (Families in Grief Hold Together) - (251) 990-8644

Consumer Product Safety Commission - 1-800-638-2772

Department of Veterans Affairs - 1-800-827-1000

Federal Information Center - 1-800-346-3364

IRS Taxpayer Assistance - 1-800-829-1040
TTD for Hearing Impaired - 1-800-829-4059

Medicare - 1-800-292-8855

Passport Services (New Orleans) - (504) 412-2600

Secret Service - (251) 441-5851

Social Security Hotline - 1-800-SSA-1213
TTD for Hearing Impaired - 1-800-325-0778

State Department Travel Advisory & Visa Information

Citizen Emergency Center - (202) 647-5225

To Report Illegal Drug Smuggling - 1-800-BE-ALERT

To Report Toxic Chemical & Oil Spills - 1-800-424-8802

Need to locate information about a federal agency? Try this helpful link that lists all the federal agencies:

<http://www.infoctr.edu/fwl/fedweb.exec.htm#feddept>.

Get the latest on federal legislation: www.congress.gov.

Get the latest news on events taking place in Alabama at www.al.com.