

The Social Security Administration stunned many South Alabama seniors when it announced Friday that there would be no cost of living adjustment in retirement benefits for 2011 – marking the second year in a row that Social Security checks will not see a COLA increase.

Unfortunately, the formula the government uses to determine the annual COLA failed to measure enough growth in consumer prices this year - compared to the previous high-water mark in 2008 - to warrant a benefits increase. However, for many seniors struggling to make ends meet, the government's COLA trigger fails to factor in the full effect of the worst recession in 50 years.

While the Social Security Administration is prohibited from lowering seniors' benefits in a COLA, freezing benefits for two years in a row is unacceptably harsh. The fact is seniors living on fixed incomes are among the most vulnerable and susceptible to price increases, particularly as food, gas and prescription drug prices continue to rise.

I would like to thank those seniors who've called my office to express concern about the negative impact of this COLA decision. I am cosponsoring legislation to help offset the lack of a Social Security COLA next year by providing seniors with a \$280 payment from the unspent portion of the "stimulus." Seniors received a similar payment last year.

During these tough times, I also share the view of many Americans that Congress should lead by example. Accordingly, Congress has not taken a pay raise in two years and I support House Republican efforts to freeze congressional and most non-security, non-mandatory government spending.

Now Accepting Military Service Academy Applications:

As a member of Congress, each year I have the distinct privilege of nominating qualified young men and women from Alabama's First District to our United States Service Academies.

To receive an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, or the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point, you must first have a nomination.

My office is currently accepting applications for the class of 2015, whose students will enter the academies in June 2011. The deadline for all applications is December 1, 2010. Students who have an active military parent who has served at least eight years are also eligible to apply to the president's and vice president's offices for a nomination.

Students interested in receiving a congressional nomination should contact my office to receive an application packet. This information is also available on my website at <http://bonner.house.gov>

By law, I am permitted to have up to five constituents from the First District at each academy at any given time. In late December, I will review all applicants' information and make my nominations. I can nominate up to 10 students for each vacancy to each academy. Once nominations from my office are made, the selection process at each academy begins.

In addition to the basic age requirements, candidates for admission must also display significant degrees of academic achievement (indicated by high school transcripts as well as SAT and/or ACT scores); have exhibited leadership in school, church, or community activities; be of good moral character; and successfully complete a medical review and physical aptitude examination.

Each of these factors is carefully considered by the academies when making their final evaluations to choose those candidates most qualified for the demands of military academies and service as military officers.

Nominees will receive notification of their selection for an appointment between January and May 2011. If you are not selected by a service academy, you can apply the following year. Any one between the ages of 17 and 22 on the proposed date of entry may apply for a nomination as long as they are not married or supporting children.

Each of the service academies does an excellent job of preparing students for a challenging future by providing rigorous academic and physical training. If you think you qualify for admission, I encourage you to apply early.

I invite all interested high school juniors and seniors to my annual Academy Night on Monday, October 25 from 7:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. in the auditorium of St. Paul's Episcopal School in Mobile.

At Academy Night, representatives from each of the service academies will give a short presentation on their respective institutions. For more information, please contact Ms. Brooks Chew in my district office at 251-690-2811. My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.