

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

Where Are the Jobs?

Last week, I, along with 75 percent of the House Republican conference and the Alabama House Republican delegation, went to the House floor to ask one simple question that is on the mind of many Americans, “Where are the jobs?”

Back in February, the Democratic leadership of Congress – without a single Republican vote – passed a \$787 billion “stimulus bill” with one simple promise – this “stimulus bill” would keep unemployment below 8 percent and would create 3.5 million jobs over the next two years.

Well, today the national unemployment rate has risen to 9.5 percent and is expected to be even higher once the July numbers are released.

Alabama’s unemployment topped 10 percent in June, the highest level since 1984. This time

last year, Alabama's jobless rate was only 4.6 percent.

Instead of creating new jobs, almost 2.5 million jobs have been lost since the stimulus bill passed. In five of the six counties I represent in south Alabama, the unemployment rate has already hit double-digits.

There is a serious lack of credibility in our nation's capital, and the American people are hurting and continuing to lose jobs.

When the administration and the Democratic leadership in Congress made a promise that if we go into debt for the purpose of creating jobs, and six months later, none of these promises has been kept; asking "Where are the jobs?" is a fair question.

Protecting Small Businesses

While my colleagues and I continued to ask, "Where are the jobs?" last week, I also worked to add a jobs amendment to the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education (Labor-HHS) Appropriations bill.

When the spending bill was first considered by the House Appropriations Committee, of which I am a member, I attempted to have this important amendment included as part of the bill, but it was defeated on a party-line vote.

The Democrats' healthcare reform bill hits small businesses hard with taxes and regulations. These mandates would affect millions of businesses, reaching down into the pockets of small business owners, operators, and investors with as few as five employees.

My amendment would restrict the use of funds in the spending bill for new employer mandates, protecting small business owners in southwest Alabama and around the country from the mandates this Congress is preparing to force onto them in the form of universal health care.

These so-called "play-or-pay" mandates in the House's health care reform bill are a job killer. One small business owner called my office last week worried that he would no longer be able to employ some of his 30 employees at his Mobile-area security company.

These employees guard the shipyards and chemical facilities around the Port of Mobile – their services are essential and their jobs would be threatened by this employer mandate.

We cannot expect our economy to recover by imposing more costly mandates and restrictions, but we can strengthen and support small businesses, the engine of our economy.

When the appropriations bill was brought to the House floor last week, I tried once again to have my amendment included. Congressman Sam Graves of Missouri, the top Republican on the Small Business Committee, and I attempted to have the full House debate and vote on the amendment, as is long precedent for appropriations bills.

When Republicans were in the majority in the House – and following a time-honored practice, spending bills were considered under an open rule on the House floor. There was an unlimited opportunity for Members of both parties to offer and debate amendments.

Sadly, that is not the case today.

In 2005, 27 amendments were offered on the House floor during consideration of the Labor-HHS bill. Today, only five amendments were made in order.

Our amendment was not ruled in order and was not allowed to be considered for debate on the House floor. Our amendment was held hostage by the House majority's closed floor proceedings.

More than half of all taxpayers who file in the top brackets are small businesses, and they can already expect a tax hike to pay for government-run health care.

My amendment would have protected small businesses from having to provide services they cannot afford or face an additional payroll tax. Protecting small businesses is, in turn, protecting the employees that work for them.

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.

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