

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

Bad News for Social Security and Medicare

Last week, the Social Security and Medicare trustees issued their annual report, and this year's report highlights the dire state of both programs if they are not reformed now.

It should come as no surprise that the ability of these programs to support the people who depend on them is in serious jeopardy.

In fact, according to the trustees, by 2016, Social Security will run out of funds – paying out more money than it takes in, and the reserves will be exhausted by 2037.

The report also indicated that Medicare's financial status is much worse. By 2017, Medicare will have exhausted all of its trust funds.

According to the report, “As was true in 2008, Medicare’s Hospital Insurance Trust Fund is expected to pay out more in hospital benefits and other expenditures this year than it receives in taxes and other dedicated revenues.”

The loss of these revenues has – for the third consecutive year – triggered a “Medicare funding warning,” indicating that primarily general revenues will soon account for more than 45 percent of Medicare’s outlays.

The trustees estimate that Medicare’s long term unfunded obligation – benefits promised but not paid for – totals \$37.8 trillion – or more than two and a half times the size of the economy.

The extreme stresses on our national economy this past year have only accelerated the inevitable. With nearly 80 million retiring Baby Boomers and rising health care costs, the time to reform Social Security and Medicare is now, or the benefits of future generations of Americans seniors will be threatened.

Sessions Named Ranking Member of Judiciary Committee

On a more positive note, Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions was named ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee earlier this month.

With the retirement of Supreme Court Justice David Souter, Senator Sessions, former prosecutor and former Alabama attorney general, will be at the forefront of the nomination process.

This is exceptional news for Alabama and for America. It's reassuring to have someone with his common sense and integrity in a position of such importance.

Saluting America's heroes this Memorial Day

As Americans prepare to celebrate the upcoming long Memorial Day weekend with family cookouts and trips to the beach, I hope we will also take a moment to consider the true meaning of the day.

In the 141 years since the holiday was officially established, we in this country have reflected on the sacrifices of the thousands of men and women who have lost their lives in the defense of freedom and liberty in this great nation.

Memorial Day – first known as Decoration Day – was originally instituted as a means of honoring the thousands of men who lost their lives in the Civil War.

Incredibly, it was five years before the first state, New York, began to recognize the holiday. Within another 13 years, every state in the northern part of the United States recognized Memorial Day.

Until the conclusion of World War I, when the holiday was changed to honor the war dead from all American conflicts, southern states refused to acknowledge May 30th as an official holiday. Instead, they chose to recognize their casualties on separate days; in fact, many southern states still have a different date for honoring their Confederate war dead.

There are many events each year to mark Memorial Day. The 3rd U.S. Infantry places American flags on nearly 260,000 graves at Arlington National Cemetery, and a solemn ceremony is held at the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Many cities and small towns hold prayer services and parades to pay tribute to our living veterans and honor the memory of the dead.

In the year 2000, Congress passed legislation providing for a “National Moment of Remembrance” to be held at 3 p.m. local time, for all Americans “to voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a Moment of Remembrance and Respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a moment of silence or listening to ‘Taps.’”

I’m sure each of you will honor the memory of those heroes who put their country above all else.

I hope you will also take a moment to remember some of south Alabama’s own who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defending liberty around the globe.

In the years ahead, may we never forget their struggles, their sacrifices, or their victories.

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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