

*This Week in Washington*



WITH CONGRESSMAN  
JO BONNER

### Opportunity to Witness Progress in Afghanistan and Iraq

Earlier this month, I made my third trip to Iraq as part of a six-member congressional delegation, led by Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH).

House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA), Armed Services Committee Ranking Republican John McHugh (R-NY), Intelligence Ranking Republican Pete Hoekstra (R-MI), and Rep. Tom Latham (R-IA) were also part of the trip.

Since my first trip to Iraq in December 2003, our servicemen and women have made tremendous progress. Our visit came just one week after the country successfully held provincial elections without any significant violence, an important milestone that reinforced the progress achieved by the surge.

However, as General Raymond Odierno and Ambassador Ryan Crocker reminded us, these gains are still very fragile, and it is imperative we sustain the successes and gains we have made.

While in Baghdad, we met with President Jalal Talabani who discussed the Status of Forces Agreement, which guides our security relationship with Iraq and governs our presence and eventual withdrawal from Iraq. This was negotiated during former President Bush's last few months in office.

We then traveled to the Al Asad Air Base in Anbar province where we met with Major General John Kelly, outgoing commander of Multi-National Forces West. Here I visited with Alabama troops, and to give them a touch of home, I hand delivered Mardi Gras beads and moon pies.

We spent Saturday and Sunday in Afghanistan, first landing in the capital city, Kabul. The visit gave us an opportunity to see firsthand the long-term challenges our military face.

The landlocked Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest and least developed nations.

With a life expectancy of 44 years and illiteracy rates reaching as high as 75 percent, there are very real challenges making a successful mission much more complex. General David McKiernan, head of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan as well NATO's International Security

Assistance Force, briefed us on the security situation there.

It has become increasingly apparent that more troops are needed, especially in the southern portions of Afghanistan along the border of Pakistan, which have become terrorist strongholds.

At Camp Bastion in the Helmand province of southern Afghanistan, we also met with Helmand Provincial Governor Gulab Mangal.

Here I had another opportunity to visit with Alabama troops. Every soldier, sailor, airman, and marine with whom I spoke expressed extreme pride in the job they have done and the role they are playing.

Without question, we have the most well-trained, most capable men and women serving in our military. We are very fortunate to have them representing the very best of America while, at the same time, trying to bring peace and freedom in some parts of the world that have never known it.

### Trillion Dollar Spending Plan Signed Into Law

Even as details of the Democrats' trillion-dollar spending bill were coming to light, the so-called "compromise bill" was rammed through Congress and to the president's desk late last week.

Littered with billions of dollars in wasteful spending – millions of dollars for the federal government to buy plug-in cars, \$30 million to protect San Francisco's salt marsh harvest mouse, and \$1 billion for a new "Prevention and Wellness Fund," which would be available for education programs on sexually transmitted diseases – it is hard to understand how this spending will provide Americans with jobs and get our economy out of a recession.

Sadly, only a small number of legislators – all from one side of the aisle – wrote this bill behind closed doors. Incredibly, the American people and most Members of Congress had to find out – after the fact – from press reports exactly what was in this bill.

From an Administration and a Congress that promises more openness and more transparency, we all deserve better.

Now Accepting Internship Applications

Each summer my office sponsors a Congressional Intern Program for students from southwest Alabama. If you are from Baldwin, Clarke, Escambia, Mobile, Monroe, or Washington County and have completed one semester of college, you are eligible for a congressional internship in my Washington, D.C. office, my Mobile office, or my Baldwin County office.

The application for summer 2009 internships is posted on my website <http://bonner.house.gov>. The deadline for submission is Friday, February 27, 2009.

Please mail your completed application to 11 North Water Street, Suite 15290 Mobile, AL 36602, or fax to 202-225-0562.

Every effort will be made to accommodate all applicants; however, in the event more applications are received than can be accommodated, priority will be given to rising seniors who currently reside in the First District of Alabama.

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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*For release the week of Monday, February 16, 2009. For more information please contact Mike Lewis at (202)225-4931.*