

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

Alabama Economic Summit Planned for Mobile

With each day, it seems there is a new report underscoring the difficult economic times we are now experiencing. In fact, the U.S. economy shed 598,000 jobs during the month of January as business after business was forced to shutter its doors.

Rightly so, many of us are genuinely concerned about what might come next.

While no area in south Alabama has been immune from these challenging economic times, we cannot lose sight of the fact that we are innately blessed with all the necessary ingredients for future economic success—an abundance of natural resources, a strong foundation for infrastructure expansion, and the hardest working, most dedicated workers to be found anywhere.

In fact, I strongly believe the coming years hold much promise for south Alabama as well as the entire Gulf Coast region.

As you know, nearly \$7 billion in industrial projects was announced for Alabama during 2007, including the biggest economic development project in the history of our state, ThyssenKrupp Steel.

ThyssenKrupp, one of Germany's leading steel manufacturers, is completing a \$4 billion state-of-the-art steel plant, which will ultimately employ 2,700 people.

In Mobile, the recently opened container facility holds tremendous potential for Alabama's industries. The new container terminal opens the Port of Mobile as the new gateway for containerized cargo to U.S. markets creating 300 permanent jobs, a number that is expected to increase to 470 jobs over the next 10 years.

Last fall, the Mitchell Cancer Institute officially opened its doors becoming the first academic cancer research institute in the upper Gulf Coast region.

In addition, job opportunities in shipbuilding and aerospace continue to brighten what are otherwise dark, cloudy skies.

That said, with a sluggish economy around the globe, now is perhaps the best time to work more closely together to develop plans for how to best position our region – not just south Alabama but the Florida panhandle and the Mississippi Gulf Coast – to take the greatest advantage of the opportunities in front of us.

To that end, I am pleased to announce that I will chair Alabama Economic Summit 2014: *Our People and Our Economy*

Following on our highly acclaimed Economic Development Leadership Summit five years ago, Alabama Economic Summit 2014 will be a must attend event for local and state officials, economic development leaders, workforce training directors and human relations specialists for many of the leading companies that call south Alabama and the Gulf Coast home.

The summit will be held February 20, 2009, in Mobile for business leaders, community leaders, public officials, educators and concerned citizens interested in the economic health of the region.

The purpose of the day-long summit will be to review recent changes to the economy, identify new challenges and opportunities for Alabama, and to determine how to position our region to make the most of these opportunities. In particular, special emphasis will be placed on workforce development in light of anticipated job losses in some areas and new job opportunities in others.

More specifically, the summit will:

- Provide an overview of the national and regional economy in 2009 and what it means for Alabama,

- Discuss new economic opportunities for Alabama in light of a possible increase in federal spending and changed marketplace for prospective entrepreneurs, and

- Examine the necessary steps to educate and train local residents to meet the growing demand for middle skills and establish guidelines for building service economy skills.

The summit will be coordinated by the Public Forum Institute, an independent, nonpartisan not-for-profit organization that planned our successful Economic Development and Leadership Summit in late 2003.

The summit is free to attend; however, there is an optional lunch available for \$25.

Governor Bob Riley, honorary summit co-chair, will be on hand to welcome our participants, and Mercedes' Bill Taylor is scheduled to give the keynote address.

The summit will be held on Friday, February 20, 2009, at the Arthur R. Outlaw Convention Center in Mobile. Registration begins at 8:00 a.m. and the program lasts from 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

For more information on this exciting day, including the agenda and registration information, please visit my website <http://bonner.house.gov> .

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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