

This Week in Washington



WITH CONGRESSMAN
JO BONNER

A Post Office Congress

While it is no secret that our economy in Alabama is booming in many sectors, the national economic forecast is not as bright. In recent weeks, the headlines have told of rising gas prices, a slumping housing market, and a dollar that is steadily losing its value.

Many in Congress, myself included, are hearing loud and clear from the American people that they're frustrated and concerned about whether their elected leaders are even focused on these issues.

So far this year, however, the Democratic leadership, which sets the House agenda, has chosen not to focus on issues critical to our national security or to improving our national economy.

Almost every day someone from southwest Alabama asks me what Congress is going to do to address these problems. Sadly, I am just as perplexed as so many of you.

In fact, last week the House wrapped up another unproductive legislative week after naming five post offices. Clearly, with so many critical issues facing our country, Congress needs to pay attention.

Last week, oil hit an all-time high of \$103 a barrel. And here at home, Mobile saw its highest recorded gas price, \$3.16 a gallon, up from \$2.30 a gallon this time last year.

Prices this high are taking even more of a pinch out of everyone's wallet.

Another area of concern deals with the national housing market, which has slowed considerably. In fact, in a Financial Services subcommittee hearing last week, I heard testimony that this may be the largest slump in the housing market in the past 40 years.

Many of you are also concerned about the U.S. dollar steadily losing value overseas, and yet, sadly, what you're getting in return are hearings on the illegal use of steroids by Major League Baseball players.

While it is a legitimate concern that a growing epidemic of illegal drug use among professional baseball players may trickle down and become an epidemic among high school athletes throughout the country, there are certainly many other concerns that pose very real threats to the health of our national economy.

The American people see Congress focusing on issues that don't affect their day-to-day lives, all the while ignoring the big issues. These issues deserve – at the very least – the same scrutiny baseball has received by this Congress.

Another area of concern deals with America's national security. Sadly, the House adjourned for yet another week without taking a vote on a critical anti-terror law, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Three weeks ago, due to inaction by this Congress, the temporary updates that modernized this 30 year old legislation were allowed to expire.

The update filled gaps and loopholes in the original, dated legislation.

Yet another week has passed, and the House leadership still refuses to bring the bipartisan Senate FISA bill to the House floor for a vote, legislation that has broad support in the House.

Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell has even said, "You're less safe today because we lost some of our ability to monitor."

Friends, let us not forget we are a nation at war, and by allowing this legislation to expire, the Democratic majority has undermined the ability of our intelligence officials to protect us.

Over the past 12 months, we have seen record progress in Iraq since the troop surge has been underway. The government in Iraq is showing more productivity than at anytime since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Our military men and women have made yeoman's progress on the streets of Baghdad.

Just last week, it was reported that paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne captured the senior leader of a criminal Special Groups network in Baghdad, who has been identified as a key facilitator in the procurement and movement of weapons in northeast Baghdad, as well as the kidnapping, torture and the death of Iraqi civilians.

Coalition forces in cooperation with local Iraqis and Iraqi forces continue to discover weapons caches. In fact, a local Iraqi turned in a rocket-propelled grenade, a grenade, and two improvised-explosive devices at a joint security station last week.

Incredibly, with clear indications the troop surge is achieving success, there are some in Congress who want to call for yet another round of debate to withdraw our troops within the next 120 days, abandoning the progress that has been made.

I want the people of southwest Alabama to know that while I know you are frustrated, I am too. I know you're concerned that Congress is not focused on the issues you're concerned about, and I agree with you.

I am hopeful that our leaders in Congress – who set the legislative agenda – will respond very soon.

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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