

*This Week in Washington*



WITH CONGRESSMAN  
JO BONNER

## President Delivers his Final State of the Union

Last week, members of the House of Representatives, the Senate, the cabinet, the Supreme Court, and the diplomatic corps gathered in the House chamber to listen to President George W. Bush deliver his eighth and final State of the Union address.

Each year, as required by the Constitution, the chief executive must deliver an address at the beginning of each session of Congress in order to report on the state of the nation.

Standing where only 42 other individuals in history stood before him, the president used the opportunity to focus on the issues of greatest concern to America's working families: improving our national economy, keeping the American people safe, reducing the cost of energy, and improving education and healthcare.

In this election year, the president called on Congress to come together in a bipartisan manner and pass an economic growth package and permanently extend intelligence reforms.

He said, "The actions of the 110th Congress will affect the security and prosperity of our Nation long after this session has ended. In this election year, let us show our fellow Americans that we recognize our responsibilities and are determined to meet them.

And let us show them that Republicans and Democrats can compete for votes and cooperate for results at the same time."

As I mentioned in this column last week, House leadership and the White House reached an agreement last month on an economic stimulus package designed to boost our national economy.

At the writing of this column, the Senate had postponed debate on its version of an economic stimulus package. The Senate version is expected to go beyond the House version – extending benefits to low-income seniors and disabled veterans, among others.

The differences between the two bills will have to be ironed out before a final bill can be sent to the president for his signature. I am hopeful that the Senate will act quickly, so we can put this money back into the hands of working Americans.

It does not appear that this delay by the Senate will impact how quickly payments will be mailed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The IRS is expected to begin the process of cutting checks in mid-March, and they will be ready to send in mid-May.

The president also urged Congress to make permanent changes to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). FISA allows our intelligence community to monitor terrorist communications. The 1978 statute was set to expire February 1, and after already delaying the debate for six months, the Democratic majority voted to extend FISA for fifteen days instead of passing a long-term bill.

I commend the president for calling on Congress to reform the current earmark process in Washington. In his address, the president said, "The people's trust in their government is undermined by congressional earmarks"

It is all too apparent that Republicans lost the majority in Congress in 2006 because we did not show restraint with the taxpayers' dollars. While I do not believe that all earmarks are bad, the explosion of earmarks we have seen in the last several years shows that the process must be reformed.

That is one of the reasons why I recently cosponsored the Kingston-Wolf Bill, H. Con. Res. 263, to establish a Joint Select Committee on Earmark Reform. While, admittedly, this effort alone is not a cure-all to the lack of transparency found in the current process, it is an important step towards demanding accountability in all government spending.

The president also addressed our military men and women and thanked them for their sacrifice and service. On the troop surge, he said, "While the enemy is still dangerous and more work remains, the American and Iraqi surges have achieved results few of us could have imagined just one year ago"

"Some may deny the surge is working, but among the terrorists there is no doubt. Al Qaeda is on the run in Iraq, and this enemy will be defeated."

I have only touched on a few of the proposals and statements made by the president during his address. During the weeks and months ahead, I will continue to update you on the progress of the president's proposals as well as the work undertaken by my colleagues and me in the House of Representatives.

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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