

Dear Friends,

Life is often compared to a roller-coaster ride and in many ways, it is.

For me, March 21st, 2010, will certainly go down as one of those days where the high was really high... and the low was really, really low.

First, the High

Sunday sessions of Congress are pretty rare; I've seen a handful of Sunday sessions during my years working for the people of South Alabama. As someone who would much prefer to spend his weekends back home in Mobile with his wife and two children, a day of votes on Sunday goes against the whole "day of rest" belief that most of us grew up with.

However, if I had to be away from Janee, Lee and Robins on this particular weekend, then starting my morning with a Sunday worship service in the old House Chamber made for a special, moving and truly memorable experience.

Most of my constituents might be surprised to learn that Congress actually approved the use of the Capitol as a church building back on December 4, 1800. Clearly, that was before the American Civil Liberties Union – and other so-called do-gooder groups – came into being.

From 1807 to 1857, weekly church services were held in the House Chamber – known today as Statuary Hall. In fact, the Speaker's podium was actually used as the preacher's pulpit.

Over the years, these services have always been Interdenominational. By 1867, the church at the Capitol was the largest church in Washington, DC, with up to 2,000 people a week attending Sunday service. From Thomas Jefferson all the way through Abraham Lincoln, many presidents attended the services at the Capitol. For some reason, the church services ended about 130 years ago.

While there was no reference during the service to the health care debate that had been taking place just a few steps away, in the current House chamber, the fact is that for the dozens of Members of Congress, their families and staffs, as well as the visitors who were able to make it into the building – I think it is safe to say that we were all looking for an opportunity to think about something other than controversy.

And while legislation wasn't discussed during this bipartisan service, it was truly a moving, emotional hour to sing the words of "*Amazing Grace*," and "*America the*

Beautiful,” and to hear the promise of God’s awesome love from colleagues like Heath Shuler (D-NC) Louie Gohmert (R-TX) and others.

Finally, the service ended with a prophetic prayer that had been delivered 63 years ago, to the day, by the late Peter Marshall, who was the longtime chaplain of the U.S. Senate.

In many ways – especially given the many challenges and deep divisions – that face our great country – it was as though the chaplain had written the prayer for our moment in time. The prayer went like this:

“O Lord our God, in this midst of the troubles that surround us, when compromises come home to roost and expediencies return to plague us, keep us from adding to the mistakes of the past. Save us from accepting a little of what we know to be wrong in order to get a little of what we imagine to be right. Help us to stand up for the inalienable rights of mankind and the principles of democratic government consistently and with courage, knowing that Thy power and Thy blessing will be upon us only when we are in the right. May we so speak, and vote, and live, as to merit Thy blessing. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

The Lowest of Lows

For a day that started with such purpose and meaning, the day ended long after the sun had set on Washington with a 219-212 vote in favor of the largest expansion of the federal government into our lives since Medicare was created in 1965.

Democrats needed 216 votes to pass this landmark bill; all 178 Republicans, plus 34 Democrats, joined in bipartisan opposition to the bill, unfortunately falling just four votes shy.

For the entire week leading up to the actual vote, the drama and suspense was so thick you could literally cut it with a knife. In fact, for most of the weekend, the fate of the bill remained very much up in the air.

Tens of thousands of patriotic Americans came to Washington for the weekend for one last stand, surrounding the Capitol building, at times, chanting, *“Kill the Bill.”*

In fact, my office welcomed several constituents from South Alabama who had taken the time to leave their families and come to their nation’s capital to, as one man told me, “leave no stone unturned in an effort to keep this from happening to our country.”

A farmer from Monroeville, a soft-ware executive from Fairhope, a tea party activist from Mobile... everyone who came had a similar story of concern and love for their country.

The tension continued to build until late Sunday afternoon when, just a few hours before the vote, Michigan Democrat Bart Stupak announced that he had secured a commitment from President Obama to issue an executive order to clarify that no taxpayer dollars could be spent on abortion in the newly reconfigured health care system.

Sadly, to those of us who are also “pro-life,” Congressman Stupak must have forgotten what he learned about the Constitution in law school, as executive orders issued by the president don’t carry the same weight as the law of the land.

Regardless, when Bart Stupak announced that he was satisfied with the “fig leaf” he had received from President Obama, it was obvious that his opposition to the bill would be dropped, along with that of at least a half a dozen other Democrats who also claim to be pro-life and had been holding out. In the end, the Stupak-led coalition proved to be the deciding votes needed to assure passage of health care reform.

So, now, the obvious question is this: What does this new law mean to the rest of America?

Shortly after its passage, both President Obama and Speaker Pelosi rushed to the microphones and news cameras to hail the fact that about 32 million people who currently lack health insurance coverage will one day have it.

But as I said in my statement – which obviously got much less attention – the action Congress took Sunday night clearly drove a stake into the heart of both freedom and liberty.

In one fell swoop – and under the Democrat’s heavy-handed rule – personal responsibility no longer appears to be an American virtue. And the federal government – with some 16,000 new IRS agents – will soon be watching our every move.

Sadly, with a national debt over \$12 trillion – and growing every minute – this was not a day for celebration; it was a moment I fear we will all come to regret one day.

While both House and Senate Republicans have promised to repeal this government takeover of health care, the fact is our options are limited until after the November general election and even then, only if the American people will entrust us again with another opportunity to lead.

Meanwhile, while Senate Republicans are identifying possible problems with the reconciliation bill that accompanied the H.R. 3590 (the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act), and there are numerous court challenges that are already lining up. As you can appreciate, mistakes are common when legislation is written on the fly and special deals are being made to gain last-minute votes. Only time will tell whether either of these two options remain viable.

For now, however, here is what we know:

Raises Taxes and Cuts Medicare: The bill will increase taxes by more than \$569 billion over the next ten years. This will undoubtedly harm many small businesses and middle-class families. The bill also includes \$528 billion in cuts to Medicare, cutting benefits and raising premiums on seniors. Regretfully, these cuts will not extend the solvency of Medicare by a single day but, instead, will go toward creating this new entitlement program.

Medicare Tax: The bill also increases the Medicare payroll tax 0.9% on individuals making \$200,000 and families making \$250,000 (*this is not indexed to inflation*) which will create a new marriage penalty and over time, will hit more of the middle class. Furthermore, the bill adds an additional 3.8% tax on net investment income for these same individuals, estates and trusts (net gain from selling property).

Employer Mandate: The employer mandate imposes a new tax on business which will destroy current and new jobs during a time when millions of Americans are already unemployed. Employers who do not offer coverage would face a \$2,000 fine per employee – if at least one full-time employee is enrolled in an exchange plan *and* receives a premium subsidy. Even if an employer offers coverage, he/she will have to pay up to \$3,000 per employee if the coverage is deemed “unaffordable” by the federal government.

Unfunded State Mandate: The bill will add a \$20 billion unfunded mandate to state-run Medicaid programs, drastically expanding the currently unsustainable Medicaid program from 100% of the federal poverty level to 133%, and hurting already thinly stretched state budgets. Governor Riley has estimated that this will cost the state of Alabama, alone, an additional \$61 million per year.

Costs: Finally, the total cost of the bill is more than *\$1.33 trillion* (not including the \$371 billion “Doc Fix” proposed in the President’s budget). And when you throw in the “Doc Fix,” this legislation will increase the federal deficit by another \$59 billion over the next ten years.

In summary, while President Obama, Speaker Pelosi and Democrats, in general, were celebrating, the American people are clearly the big losers. And while House Republicans may have lost the vote, it is clear that we were standing with the vast

majority of the American people throughout this issue. Over the past 15 months, we have demonstrated a resolve to fight for more freedom, not more government.

As always, thank you for being so very supportive of what we are trying to do. Your cards, letters, phone calls and prayers continue to be a source of inspiration to Janee and me. We'll keep you posted as new developments continue to unfold.

With warmest regards, I remain

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jo Bonner', written in a cursive style.

Jo Bonner