

Congress Opens as Country Faces Major Challenges

On Tuesday, January 6th, I was sworn into the 111th Congress along with 434 of my colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives. It was a very special moment, and I couldn't help but be humbled by the tremendous trust the people of the Second District of Alabama have put in me. I was extremely proud to be an American, and proud to be an Alabamian.

The new Congress begins during trying times for America. Our economy is in recession, and folks across the country and Alabama are worried if their jobs will still be there in a month. A recent jobs report by the U.S. Department of Labor underscores the seriousness of our economic problems. The U.S. economy shed 525,000 jobs in December, which capped the worst year of job loss since the 1940s. Unemployment is now at 7.2%, and 3.6 million jobs have been lost since December 2007.

When I campaigned for Congress, I pledged to work with both parties in Congress to find real solutions to problems that ordinary Americans face. This was not just a campaign pledge; these conditions require that we unite and work together. After being sworn in and speaking to my colleagues, I can truly say that the spirit of bi-partisanship is in the air. Now, we have to work to make sure that Congress doesn't do what it has done in the past and not live up to its promises.

I went to work last week with these promises and challenges at the center of my attention. On the day I was sworn in, I co-sponsored a bill that would prevent Congress from receiving its automatic annual pay raise next year. It is unconscionable for members of Congress to receive a \$4,700 annual pay raise when families across the country are struggling. I believe Members of Congress are paid too much as it is, and H.R. 156 is a strong, bi-partisan bill that would, at the very least, prevent us from getting paid even more.

I also sponsored my first bill last week. H.R. 361 extends a much needed tax deduction for small businesses. Specifically, it allows businesses to write off a greater amount of certain capital expenses in 2009 and also provides an additional bonus depreciation in the first year those expenses occur. My bill will give small businesses needed incentives to expand and create jobs even as the economy is in a recession. This same provision was included in an economic stimulus package in 2008, but expired at the end of last year. I will be pushing for it to be included in the economic stimulus package that will be proposed in the near future.

Finally, passing legislation is only one aspect of a congressman's job. Constituent outreach is very important to me and will be a top priority for my staff. In less than a week, my office was able to contact former Congressman Everett's open constituent casework and let them know that we are here to help.

My offices in Washington, Montgomery, and Dothan are open and ready to serve you. If there's anything my office can do to assist you, don't hesitate to call my Dothan office at 334-794-9680.

Sincerely,

Congressman Bobby Bright