

Like many Americans, I have been closely following the conflict between Israel and Hamas, the terrorist group which controls the Gaza Strip. While no one – Israeli or American – wishes for violence, Israel has an absolute right to defend itself and cannot be expected to tolerate bombardment of its citizens, mainly civilians including many women and children, by terrorists who are committed to the destruction of their state.

Hamas and affiliated militant groups in Gaza have been lobbing rockets and mortars into southern Israel for months, targeting towns like Sderot, where bus stops and even playgrounds must now be equipped with fortified concrete structures to protect Israeli civilians from attacks. It is worth noting that Hamas chooses to launch many of its rockets from Gaza neighborhoods deliberately placing at risk the very citizens for whom it claims to advocate.

After Israel responded to this aggression last week with a precision strike to take out one of Hamas's leading military commanders, hundreds of rockets and mortars have been fired into Israeli territory. Some, assembled in Gaza from Iranian components with Iranian technical assistance, have flown as far as Tel Aviv – Israel's largest city and its commercial capital.

Israel has responded with precision-guided strikes on rocket and mortar installations, and on the Hamas commanders and operatives who are responsible for the indiscriminate targeting of Israeli civilians. Israel has also deployed its Iron Dome missile defense system, which according to Israeli Defense Forces statements, has intercepted more than one hundred rockets aimed at Israeli towns and cities. The Iron Dome, which Israel developed in partnership with the United States, has been very successful in protecting the lives and property of Israeli citizens and I am proud to have supported funding for its development.

It is my hope that Hamas will immediately cease its aggression against Israeli civilians and military personnel, and that the two sides will be able to agree to a cease fire that prevents further casualties on all sides. This violence is a vivid illustration that our close ally Israel lives in a very tough neighborhood, and that they must have our full support.

***Service Academy Applications Deadline December First:***

As the deadline to submit applications is quickly approaching, I want to remind all interested high school seniors to contact my office as soon as possible if you are interested in applying for an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, the U.S. Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, or the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at King's Point.

My office is currently accepting applications for the class of 2017, whose students will enter the academies in June 2013. The deadline for all applications is December 1, 2012. Students who have an active military parent who has served at least eight years are also eligible to apply to the president's and vice president's offices for a nomination.

Students interested in applying for a congressional nomination should visit the "Academy Nominations" page under the "Students" section of my website at <http://bonner.house.gov> to download a fact sheet and application.

By law, I am permitted to have up to five constituents from the First District at each academy at any given time. In late December, I will review all applicants' information and make nominations. I can nominate up to 10 students for each vacancy to each academy. Once nominations from my office are made, the selection process at each academy begins.

In addition to the basic age requirements, candidates for admission must also display significant degrees of academic achievement (indicated by high school transcripts as well as SAT and/or ACT scores); have exhibited leadership in school, church, or community activities; be of good moral character; and successfully complete a medical review and physical aptitude examination. Each of these factors is carefully considered by the academies when making their final evaluations to choose those candidates most qualified for the demands of the academies and service as military officers.

Nominees will receive notification of their selection for an appointment between January and May of 2013. If you are not selected by a service academy, you can apply the following year. Anyone between the ages of 17 and 22 on the proposed date of entry may apply for a nomination as long as they are not married or supporting children.

Each of the service academies does an excellent job of preparing students for a challenging

future by providing rigorous academic and physical training. If you think you qualify for admission, I encourage you to apply by December 1, 2012. For more information, please contact my Mobile office at 251-690-2811.

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