This Week in Congress

July 19, 2010

Dear Friend,

Welcome to “This Week in Congress.” This week's headlines are:

- New Legislation Will Protect Local Immigration Laws
- Immigration Laws Must Be Enforced
- Subcommittee Approves Legislation to Help Severely Disabled Veterans
- Latest Attempt to Pass Cap and Trade Will Hurt Kansans
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- Accepting Ear of Agriculture Award
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New Legislation Will Protect Local Immigration Laws

I introduced legislation today to protect state and local governments from federal lawsuits filed against local immigration laws. The federal government's failure to enforce immigration laws is leading state and local governments to enact their own laws to address the problem of illegal immigration. Yet, the high cost of defending against a federal lawsuit may discourage local governments from enacting laws to address illegal immigration.

The legislation I am introducing, the Respect for Local Laws Act, will require the federal government to pay for any legal costs incurred by state or local governments if a court upholds a federal challenge to a local immigration law. If the Obama Administration will not enforce our immigration laws, it should not stand in the way of state and local governments from doing so. We are a nation of laws and they must be enforced. Senator Mike Johanns of Nebraska introduced companion legislation in the Senate this week. Click here to read more about the Respect for Local Laws Act.

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Immigration Laws Must Be Enforced

The State of Arizona should be applauded for trying to enforce our immigration laws—not sued. Yet, the U.S. Department of Justice and the America Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have filed lawsuits to prevent the implementation of Arizona's new immigration law. This week, I continued to support Arizona's immigration law by signing an amicus curiae, or "friend of the court," brief in defense of an ACLU legal challenge to Arizona's efforts to enforce federal immigration law.

The federal government's failure to secure the border has left states, like Arizona, to address this problem on their own. The legal brief I signed addresses the role of Arizona's law in assisting with federal enforcement of immigration laws and points out that federal law already solicits assistance with immigration enforcement.

Seventeen other representatives joined me in signing this legal brief Wednesday in support of Arizona's new immigration law, including Dan Burton (IN), Trent Franks (AZ), Sam Graves (MO), Wally Herger (CA), Duncan Hunter (CA), Steve King (IA), Doug Lamborn (CO), Cynthia Lummis (WY), Tom McClintock (CA), Gary Miller (CA), Sue Myrick (NC), Ted Poe (TX), Denny Rehberg (MT), Dana Rohrabacher (CA), Phil Roe (TN), Mike Simpson (ID) and Lamar Smith (TX).

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Subcommittee Approves Legislation to Help Severely Disabled Veterans

This week, the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity approved legislation I introduced to help more of our country's most severely disabled veterans take advantage of VA Adapted Housing Grants. These grants provide assistance to disabled veterans so they can achieve barrier-free homes by installing the necessary hand rails, wheel chair ramps or bathroom modifications. Despite their helpfulness, Adapted Housing Grants are used infrequently—a fact which the Government Accountability Office attributes to rules that require the assistance veterans receive to adapt their temporary homes to count against the total assistance they can receive later to adapt their own permanent residences.

My bill will benefit disabled veterans who reside in temporary housing with family or friends, which is often the case following injuries and especially in these difficult economic times. For the next year, the change will allow veterans to use Adapted Housing Grants to modify their temporary residences without being penalized for assistance they receive later to adapt their own permanent homes. Helping veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country is the right thing to do and I will continue to work to assist these heroes.

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Latest Attempt to Pass Cap and Trade Will Hurt Kansans

News reports indicated this week that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid plans to bring cap and trade legislation to the Senate floor before the end of July. The legislation is reported to contain provisions that would limit carbon emissions from power plants. I opposed cap and trade when it was considered last year in the House of Representatives and strongly oppose this latest attempt to pass this damaging legislation.

Cap and trade will have a devastating impact on our economy by raising the cost of energy for Kansas families, businesses and farmers. Majority Leader Reid claims the legislation will only impact the utility sector, but Kansas families will bear the cost of any regulations imposed by Congress.

As I travel across our state and listen to Kansans, I hear a consistent message: instead of putting new burdens on families, Congress needs to cut spending and focus on job creation. I agree. Kansans cannot afford the costs cap and trade would impose.

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NRA-Backed Initiative Will Improve Access to Hunting Land

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced that the federal Open Fields Initiative is now in effect through USDA for state governments interested in enrolling in the program. Senator Pat Roberts and I worked to include the Open Fields Initiative language in the 2008 Farm Bill to improve access to outdoor activities like hunting and fishing, while at the same time helping landowners to improve wildlife conservation.

Backed by the National Rifle Association, the Open Fields Initiative will support state efforts to develop voluntary, incentive-based programs that encourage private land owners to make their land accessible. The initiative is expected to voluntarily open up more than 10 million new acres of private land to the public each year. Click here to learn more.

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IRS Taxpayer Advocate Warns of Burdensome Provisions in Health Care Law

This week, the IRS National Taxpayer Advocate, Nina Olson, released a report to Congress about a burdensome provision included in President Obama's recently-passed health care reform law. Beginning in 2012, the new law requires all businesses, tax-exempt organizations and federal, state and local government entities to issue 1099 forms to vendors from whom they purchase goods totaling $600 or more during a calendar year. According to the report, about 40 million businesses and other entities will be subject to the new requirements, including 26 million small businesses, 2 million farming businesses, 1 million charities and other tax-exempt organizations and more than 100,000 government entities.

I am strongly opposed to President Obama's health care reform law, including this onerous provision. I am a cosponsor of H.R. 5141, the Small Business Paperwork Mandate Elimination Act, to eliminate this provision, saving businesses and non-profit organizations time and resources while also protecting taxpayers from having to pay for an increase in IRS personnel to enforce this requirement.

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Accepting Ear of Agriculture Award

Kansas is among the top ten corn producing states in the nation and its corn growers significantly contribute to the economic strength of our state. This week, I was honored to receive the first-ever Ear of Agriculture award from the Kansas Corn Growers Association (KCGA) for my support of Kansas agriculture and Kansas corn farmers.

During my time in Congress, I have worked hard to maintain domestic markets for Kansas corn farmers and open new foreign markets in countries like Columbia, Panama, South Korea and Cuba. Just last month, the House Agriculture Committee approved legislation I sponsored to expand agricultural sales to Cuba. I have also worked hard to maintain a market based safety net that included flexible risk management tools for corn farmers.

KCGA President Bob Timmons of Fredonia, Ken and Mary McCauley of White Cloud, Brian Baalman of Menlo, Charles Foltz and Jere White of Garnett, DeEtta Bohling of Ottawa and Kiley Stinson of Allen presented me with the award this week while visiting our nation's capital. Click here to read more about the Ear of Agriculture award.

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YouTube Page Shares Videos of My Work on Behalf of Kansans

Technology has improved my ability to connect with Kansans. As new online resources have developed, I have worked hard to share with Kansans my work on their behalf and also to provide an opportunity for Kansans to share with me their suggestions and thoughts about what is happening in our nation's capital. I encourage Kansans to visit my YouTube page to view recent speeches and other material from our nation's capital.

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In the Office

Duane Dorshorst of Oberlin, Chris Fall of Concordia, Eugene Haydock of Halstead and Deb Ayers-Geist of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals to talk about educating Kansas children. Jim Ludwig of Wichita and Mark Schreiber of Emporia were in with Westar Energy to update me on the Kansas V-Plan and explain how new EPA regulations could lead to higher utility bills. Diane Etzel-Wise of Topeka was in with the Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition to discuss homelessness in our state and the importance of supporting homeless veterans.

John Kane and Bill Junk of Liberal were in with the Kansas Environmental Management Associates to inform me about a project developed by Kansas Environmental Management Associates in Liberal that reduces the phosphorus content of cattle waste from feedyards. Dr. Saeid Sajadi of Overland Park was in to discuss U.S. policy toward Iran.

Lucas Heinen of Everest, Teresa and Luke Brandenberg of Russell, Kenlon Johannes and

Dennis Hupe of Topeka, Craig Gigstad of Valley Falls, Darrell Alexander of Kansas City, Raylen Phelon of Melvern and Bob Henry of Robinson were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to talk about extension of the biodiesel tax credit and initiatives to expand foreign markets. A group of 49 students from Bennington High School stopped by the U.S. Capitol building to visit. Thanks to Rick Reed of McPherson for helping arrange the opportunity to meet with these students.

Several Kansans were in this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol building, including Tim, Lori and Evan Penner of Clay Center; Leonard, Lynn, Ryan, Callen and Brennen Barlik of Lenexa; Barbara-Jean and Ashton Ottley and Steve Basgall of Hays; Vern and Ruth Steffen of Larned; Cindy Sheppard and Gayle Reece of Lawrence; Jack Dufield and Janice and Harriet Fitzgerald of Liberal; Karl, Brenda Tanner, Emily, Abby and Millie Sechrist of Hillsboro; Kevin, Bev, Cameron, Mackenzie and Carl Birney of Bucklin; Julie Taylor of Ford; Delwin Doherty of Kansas City; and Jim and Fran Smith and Caitlyn Hendersheid of Overland Park.

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Contact Me

It is an honor to serve you in Washington, D.C. Please let me know how I can be of assistance. To send me an email, click here . You can also click here to contact me through one of my Kansas offices or my Washington, D.C., office.

Very truly yours,

Jerry