

5/27/2008 This Week in Congress

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May 27, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Remembering the Sacrifices of our Veterans this Memorial Day

This Memorial Day, I want to call attention to a worthy program and the work of the volunteers who make it possible. A few months ago, Senator Bob Dole - a World War II veteran who led the charge to build the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. - told me about a grassroots, non-profit organization called Honor Flight. Staffed by volunteers and funded by donations, Honor Flight enables World War II veterans to travel to our nation's capital to see the Memorial created in their honor. Honor Flight operates across the country using commercial and chartered flights to send veterans on a one-day, expenses-paid trip to Washington. I have had the honor of joining Senator Dole to greet these veterans at the World War II Memorial. The time we spend with these proud men and women is very moving.

Of the 16 million veterans who served in World War II, only three million are alive today. We are losing them at a rate of 1200 each day. Honor Flight is working against time to say "thank you" to these veterans. For more information or to

donate to this program, call Pat Hageman, a Kansas coordinator, at (785) 737-6024 or visit <http://www.honorflight.org/>.

I attended the Memorial Day service at the State Veterans Cemetery in WaKeeney. It was a moving ceremony thanks to the efforts of Father Donald Pfannenstiel, Retired Lieutenant Colonel Jim Dyer, Heidi Goff, Steve Phelps, WaKeeney VFW Post 3449 and VFW Auxiliary Post 3449. [Click here to view photos from the service.](#)

In recognition of Memorial Day, let us be grateful to the men and women who answered the call in service to our country, remembering their sacrifices and recognizing the debts we owe. [Click here to read an editorial I wrote about Memorial Day and the Honor Flight program.](#)

Fort Riley, Dodge City Military Construction Projects Approved by the House

On Thursday, the House approved the annual policy and funding blueprint for the Department of Defense. The 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, H.R. 5658, authorizes more than \$210 million for military construction projects at Fort Riley and \$8.1 million for a new U.S. Army Reserve Center in Dodge City. The bill also enhances benefits for military personnel, families and retirees. Passage of this authorization legislation is the first step in order to allow the funding of these projects. The legislation now awaits action by the U.S. Senate.

The legislation approves several Fort Riley construction projects, including a battalion complex, brigade complex, hospital addition, commissary and fire station. The legislation also authorizes the construction of an Army Reserve Center at Dodge City to house the area's units, including a new military police unit now forming.

This bill also improves military pay, health insurance and family benefits as we demonstrate our thanks for the sacrifices our service members and families make each day on our behalf. This legislation provides a 3.9 percent pay raise for all service members and blocks the Administration's proposed increases in TRICARE premiums and co-pays and pharmacy user fees for service members and retirees. It also authorizes \$50 million for Impact Aid funding to help local educational agencies providing support to military children and authorizes an additional \$800 million for securing National Guard and Reserve equipment. [Click here to read more about this legislation.](#)

House Passes Legislation to Ensure Rural Areas Continue to Have Doctors

I am pleased this week the House passed legislation I sponsored to reauthorize the J-1 visa waiver program for five years and to create additional flexibility within the program. The J-1 visa waiver program allows foreign-born, U.S.-educated physicians to work in areas that have a shortage of physicians. This legislation has been sent to the Senate for their consideration.

The J-1 visa waiver program, which is set to expire on June 1, 2008, is important to making sure Kansans have access to health care. [Click here to read more about this program.](#)

House Approves Renewable Energy Incentives

I supported House passage of legislation this week that extends important tax credits to expand the use of renewable

energy such as solar and wind. As a supporter of the 25x25 initiative, which challenges the U.S. to obtain 25 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2025, I believe we must pursue aggressive policies to expand renewable energy. The legislation passed by the House extends business and residential tax credits for the installation of solar energy equipment through 2014. It also raises the individual credit limit from \$2,000 to \$4,000. Also included in this bill is a new \$6,000 tax credit for the purchase of plug-in hybrid automobiles and non-energy related measures, such as the extension of the refundable child tax credit and allowance for tax-free IRA distributions by seniors to charities.

House Approves Measure to Improve Physician Assistant Care for Veterans

The House this week approved legislation I introduced with Congressman Phil Hare of Illinois to create a Director of Physician Assistant Services within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This legislation, H.R. 2790, is beneficial in improving patient care for our nation's veterans and ensuring the 1,600 physician assistants employed by the VA are fully utilized to provide veterans medical care. It will now go to the Senate for consideration.

Physician assistants are a key to providing medical care in underserved areas, especially rural Kansas. Often, they are the only health care professional available. I want to be certain that physician assistants are appropriately utilized by the VA to serve our veterans. Like our armed forces that have full-time directors of physician assistant services, this legislation will establish a dedicated expert in the VA to fully integrate the profession into VA health care, helping those who live in our communities receive timely access to quality health care.

Speaking in the House about the Air Force's Recent Tanker Decision

I spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives this week to voice my opposition to the Air Force's decision to give the \$35 billion government contract to build the next generation of refueling tanker to a foreign company instead of awarding it to American-owned Boeing. As it stands now, some 19,000 jobs will go to Europe. Boeing's proposal to build these needed planes would have created or sustained 3,800 jobs in Kansas.

This decision is not only bad for our economy but also for our service members and our national security. I have joined the other members of the Kansas congressional delegation is requesting President Bush and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates block this decision. The defense bill that passed the House this week attempts to prevent such a decision from happening again by requiring the Air Force to review the potential impact of subsidies foreign companies receive. This will help restore fairness to future competitions. [Click here to view my remarks.](#)

Attending a Congressional Hearing on the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility

This week, I joined the Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee for a hearing regarding the relocation of national foot and mouth disease research from Plum Island, New York, to the new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). The hearing gave me an opportunity to learn more about animal disease research and containment facilities around the world and to promote Kansas' capabilities to Department of Homeland Security officials as they determine a location for NBAF.

In July, Kansas received the good news that Manhattan was chosen as a site finalist for the facility. NBAF will be a state-of-the-art bioscience research lab and will house scientists from the Homeland Security Department, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services. This \$451 million, 500,000 square-foot federal research laboratory would be a tremendous opportunity for our state to advance the science of fighting animal and plant diseases. In addition, it would add up to 500 jobs to our economy. A final site announcement is expected later this year. As a member of the Kansas NBAF Task Force, which has the goal of bringing the federal research facility to Kansas, I will continue working to promote Kansas as the ideal site for the facility.

Addressing the National Community Pharmacist Association Annual Meeting

This week, I spoke to members of the National Community Pharmacist Association during their annual conference about efforts being made in Washington, D.C., to address the challenges facing independent pharmacists. Community pharmacists are struggling to keep their doors open in the face of proposed rule changes that decrease reimbursement rates for Medicaid prescriptions. I have led congressional efforts to convince the Administration to delay or suspend implementation of this rule change. I have sponsored legislation for pharmacists to be reimbursed in a timely manner and to allow them to band together to increase their bargaining power. I also helped create the Congressional Community Pharmacy Caucus to help educate my colleagues about the importance of pharmacy issues.

Members of the Kansas Pharmacists Association in town for the annual meeting stopped by my office for a visit. Thanks to Don Hill of Emporia, Patrick Hilger of Russell, Joseph Brummer of Anthony, Van and Jeannette Coble of Winfield, Darrel and Sylvia Steinhouser of Wichita, Peter Stern and Mike Larkin of Topeka and Mike Coast of Cimarron for their work on behalf of independent pharmacists.

Delivering the Commencement Address at Bethany College in Lindsborg

On Sunday, I delivered the commencement address to about 100 graduating students at Bethany College in Lindsborg. I was also awarded an Honorary Degree from the college. Bethany College provides students an opportunity to further their education in a small community rich with culture and heritage. Outside of family and community support, the students advance their knowledge with the assistance of great faculty and staff. Thanks to President Edward F. Leonard III for the invitation to speak during the ceremony. [Click here to read my commencement address.](#)

Touring Solomon Corporation's New Transformer Receiving and Storage Facility

I was in Solomon on Friday to tour Solomon Corporation's new transformer receiving and storage facility. The \$4.5 million facility is specifically designed for the safe handling of hazardous materials and for the protection of human health and the environment. Solomon Corporation employs approximately 500 people.

The new facility is permitted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to handle and store electrical equipment containing regulated levels of PCBs. The facility and permitting will allow Solomon Corporation to better serve its electric utility customers by offering a convenient, environmentally safe and regulatory compliant means of testing, storing and disposing of PCB material. It was an informative visit. Thank you to Tom Hemmer for the invitation to tour the new facility. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Visiting with Area Residents in Alma

En route back to Washington, D.C., this week, I stopped in Alma in Wabaunsee County to visit with local residents. I stopped at the U.S. Department of Agriculture offices to talk to employees and farmers about the implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill and its effects on the county's operations. I also visited Alma Creamery and the Wabaunsee County Commission meeting where I enjoyed talking to Commissioners Ervan Stuewe, Rodney Allen and Maurice Gleason.

Kansas Company Plays Important Role in National Defense

After my visit to Alma, I stopped in Lawrence to visit Cottonwood Industries. This Kansas company has a contract with

the Defense Logistics Agency to provide cargo tie-down straps that are used to secure many of the supplies and equipment our military transports. Cottonwood's contract is part of an effort by the Department of Defense to award a portion of contract work to companies that employ handicapped Americans. The work these employees do is not only important to them, but also to the Kansas economy and our military.

Thanks to CEO Sharon Spratt and Director JR Condra for the tour. It was useful for me to see the good work the employees of Cottonwood do to support our national defense before the House voted on legislation approving military and defense spending for 2009.

Meeting with Kansas Engineers and Rotarians

Also while in Lawrence, I met with the American Council of Engineering Companies. We discussed the recertification of levees that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is requiring as the agency updates its flood plain map. Thanks to Scott Heidner, Craig Denny, Paul Weida, Bob Riordan, Clint Robinson and Troy Eisenbraun for bringing me up-to-date on issues important to the engineering profession. I also had the opportunity to join fellow Rotarians at a Lawrence Rotary meeting at the Holidome.

In the Office

Ken and Susan Kreissler of Olathe and Steve Barnhart of Wichita were in with the Kansas Rural Letter Carriers' Association to discuss legislation that would compensate federal employees for unused sick leave upon retirement. Jesus Mendez of Kansas City and Martin Eddy of Wichita were in with the International Association of Machinist and Aerospace Workers to express their support for Boeing's proposal to build new air force tankers. Tom Thorton of Olathe, Ed McKechnie of Pittsburg and Bret Healy of Topeka were in with the Kansas BioScience Authority to bring me up-to-date on the state's renewable fuel initiative.

Don Clarkson of Kansas City, Kip Spray of Great Bend, Corky Beachner of St. Paul, Bob Totten and Jim Jones of Topeka and Ed Sexe of Shawnee Mission were in with the Kansas Contractors Association to talk about the need to invest in our highway infrastructure and shore up the highway trust fund. Catherine Moyer and Dick Veach of Ulysses, Tom Gleason and Gordon Mikesell of Lawrence, Larry Seiver of Lenora and Greg Reed of Udall were in with the Organization for Promotion and Advancement of Small Telephone Companies to discuss reform of the Universal Service Fund.

Dr. Rick Kellerman of Wichita, Dr. Lee Milles of Newton, Dr. John Delzell Jr. of Kansas City and Dr. Robert Moser of Tribune were in representing the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians to discuss the shortage of family physicians and the need to prevent physician payment cuts. John Lohnes and Dan Gillespie of Wichita and Will Allen of Pratt were in with the Kansas Radiological Society to share their thoughts about Medicare reimbursement rates and proposed physician payment cuts. Sue Peterson of Manhattan also stopped by to visit.

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including David and Bethany McCowan of Clay Center; Kevin, Michael and Andrew Maher of Overland Park; and Blake Schmidtberger and Laura Zadina of Lenexa. In from Hays were Lois Meredith and Lori, Richard and Meredith Rigmaiden.

Very truly yours,

Jerry