

7/28/2008 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

July 28, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

House Passes Legislation to Keep Kansas Highway Projects on Schedule

The House passed legislation this week that I sponsored to ensure state highway projects can continue as scheduled. A shortage of funds in the federal account for highway maintenance and construction meant that Kansas was facing a \$115 million gap in funding. Some 90 projects and 8,250 jobs were in jeopardy. The bill passed this week fixed the shortfall by returning previously borrowed money from the General Treasury to the Highway Trust Fund.

Our economy in Kansas depends on our infrastructure. Without good highways, we are unable to ship our products to the rest of the country and around the globe. While this week's legislation fixed the problem in the short-term, a long-term solution is needed. We must determine how to better fund highway and transportation needs in the future. I look forward to working with members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee next year as we begin drafting a new five-year highway authorization bill.

[Click here to view my comments on the floor of the House in support of this legislation.](#)

Expanding Affordable Housing Opportunities for Soldiers

Our nation's military families deserve access to safe, decent, affordable housing. Unfortunately, many soldiers are being unfairly disqualified under current law. This week, the House passed legislation to correct this inequity by removing barriers for military families seeking affordable housing. I introduced the Military Access to Housing Act with Senator Pat Roberts to expand affordable housing opportunities for enlisted service members, particularly soldiers locating to Kansas as Fort Riley continues to grow. The bill was approved by the Senate over the weekend and now goes to the President to be signed into law.

This provision will enable more military families to qualify for affordable rental housing financed with tax credits and tax-exempt bonds through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program. The LIHTC program was created in 1986 to finance affordable housing in private developments. Current rules require the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to account for housing allowances to military men and women when determining if a family qualifies for low-income housing. This is inconsistent with guidelines for other recipients of government assistance and often disqualifies military families from low income housing. This legislation will remove the basic housing allowance from the formula for determining eligibility for low income housing so that it does not count against servicemen and women living in Geary and Riley Counties and the surrounding counties of Clay, Dickinson, Marshall, Morris, Pottawatomie, Wabaunsee and Washington.

Agriculture Committee Looks at Hunger, Renewable Fuel and Market Issues

I participated in three House Agriculture Committee meetings this week, all on different topics. The first hearing studied the cost of hunger to America. Researchers have found lowered workforce productivity, lost educational opportunities for children, the work of charities, and additional health care expenses due to hunger cost Americans more than \$90 billion dollars every year. My colleagues and I questioned experts in the field to find ways individuals, churches and communities can feed the hungry and help lead them out of poverty.

The second hearing I participated in was to examine implementation of the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), which seeks to increase the amount of renewable fuel blended into gasoline. Last December, Congress expanded the RFS by requiring 36 billion gallons of renewable fuels to be used by 2022. The new standard only allows for 15 billion gallons of ethanol to be derived from starch based feedstock such as corn and grain sorghum and requires the other 21 billion gallons to come from advanced biofuels. The committee examined the ability of the industry to meet both the 15 billion gallon traditional biofuel goal and the 21 billion gallon advanced biofuel goal.

The Agriculture Committee has jurisdiction over the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), which is responsible for preventing fraud and manipulation in agricultural and energy markets. Many Americans are concerned about speculation in futures markets. On Thursday, the Committee passed legislation to amend the Commodities Exchange Act.

Learning about Aviation Security

On Thursday, I participated in a Transportation Subcommittee on Aviation hearing that examined security at our country's airports. Kip Hawley, the Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), testified before the committee on the agency's efforts to improve screening at U.S. airports while trying to avoid long lines and other inconveniences for passengers. My questions for Mr. Hawley focused on general aviation and small airports. The committee was also informed of new technology TSA is implementing to better screen airline passengers. I will continue to work with TSA officials to provide the security needed at our airports while at the same time reducing hassles for travelers.

Visiting Kansas Communities

Colby: I was in Colby on Monday to meet with Thomas County Commissioners and tour Citizens Medical Center. My visit to Citizens Medical Center gave me the opportunity to tour the newest addition and visit with doctors and administrators about the health care challenges facing northwest Kansas. The costs of prescriptions, services and insurance are increasing at a rate faster than incomes. Finding solutions to these problems is one of my top priorities. Thanks to President and Chief Executive Officer Janice McCart for the tour of the hospital and County Commissioners Bryon Sowers, Paul Steele and Ken Christiansen for visiting with me.

Wilson: I joined the residents of Wilson and visitors from across the country on Saturday to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Wilson and enjoy the festivities of the After Harvest Czech Festival. For 48 years, the residents of Wilson have celebrated their Czech heritage with traditional food, dancing, games, crafts and other activities. During the parade, I presented Wilson Mayor Eleanor Hunter with the Grand Marshal plaque on behalf of the Wilson Chamber of Commerce. In honor of the town's 125th anniversary, the town itself was named this year's grand marshal and Mayor Hunter accepted the plaque on behalf of the city. Thanks to Ray Frederick for letting me ride in his convertible and Season Mog for driving me in the parade.

Honoring Russell Doctor for 50 Years of Service

I recently attended a reception to thank Dr. Earl Merkel for serving the residents of Russell for 50 years. Physicians are part of the cornerstone of any community and Dr. Merkel has worked tirelessly to see that his patients get the care they need. Dr. Merkel loves medicine and the patients he serves. His dedication to his practice, patients and community is an inspiration to many, including me. I enjoyed visiting with Dr. Merkel and his wife Kathy. I wish him many more years of practicing medicine.

Discussing Agriculture Issues with Kansas Farm Bureau President

On my way back to Washington, D.C., I stopped in Manhattan to visit with Kansas Farm Bureau President Steve Baccus. Kansas Farm Bureau represents thousands of Kansans and advocates for issues members care about. It was good to talk to Steve about issues important to Farm Bureau members and to update him on action in our nation's capital. Our conversation centered on the recently passed farm bill, input costs, challenges faced by livestock producers, the World Trade Organization and trade, and pending legislation regarding speculation in futures markets.

In the Office

Members of the Kansas Grain and Feed Association and the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association were in to introduce members of its "Tomorrow's Agribusiness Leadership Class" and discuss recent issues affecting the members. In with the group were Tom Tunnell, Ron Sieber and JJ Jones of Topeka; Alan Stone and Jack Dutra of Overland Park; Jerald Kemmerer of Dodge City; Gary Gantz of Ness City; Johnny Schaben of Ellinwood; Lana O'Connor and David Rethman of Seneca; Marc Hoobler and Robin Pitman of Tecumseh; Jon Ingebretson of Leawood; Roland Martin of Larned; Clark Pearson of Reading; Drew McIntire of Sublette; Jan Pruitt of Hutchinson; Devin Schierling of Moundridge; Phillip Van Court of Wellington; and Shane Eck of Jetmore.

Mike Beam of Topeka was in with Ranchland Trust of Kansas to discuss implementation of the Grassland Reserve Program and Farmland Protection Program. Candace Dixon of Hutchinson was in with the Coalition Against Domestic Violence to advocate for full funding of the Violence Against Women's Act and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act. Lou Ann Kibbee and Jennifer Martinson of Hays and Don Dew and Brad Rohr of Gorham were in with the National Council on Independent Living to talk about legislation that would help individuals with disabilities live more independent and active lives. Ron Bach of Jetmore, Russell Smyth of Larned and Larry Barrett of Colby were in with the

Farm Credit Council to give me an update on Farm Credit issues.

Wichita State University Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Deltha Colvin of Wichita and Executive Director for the Kansas African American Affairs Commission Danielle Dempsey-Swopes of Topeka were in to discuss funding for the state GEAR-UP program. Members of the Kansas Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals were in to talk about No Child Left Behind. In with the group were Deb Ayers-Geist of Kansas City, Billie Jo Drake of Fort Scott, G.A. Buie of Gardner, Duane Dorshorst of Oberlin, Gene Haydock of Burrton and Chad Higgins of Douglass.

Catherine Moyer of Ulysses was in with Pioneer Communications to discuss legislation that could negatively impact the Universal Service Fund. Emily Surdez of Sabetha and Jennifer Butler of Ark City were in with FFA to tell me about the benefits of agricultural education. Allison Penner of Clay Center and Libby Marden of Olathe were in with Girls State to learn more about my role as a representative. David and Sharyl Johnson of Cimarron and Mary Robinson of Derby were in with Christians United for Israel to explain the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship. Steve Johnson of Overland Park was in with Kansas Gas Service to discuss recent developments in installing the Overland Pass Pipeline, which will connect into Kansas.

Several Kansans were in to take a tour of the U.S. Capitol building this week, including Bruce and Diane Otte of Moundridge, Nancy Jones of Ingalls, Bonnie and Paige Finney of Buhler and Lori and Vicki Minor of Wichita. In from Salina were Helen Gillmore; Kurt and Thomas Fredrickson; Nicholas Stuart; and Keith, Sandy, Grant, Kate and Conner Marten. Also in for a tour were Tim, Vonda and Cody Persson of McPherson; John, Donna, Megan and Ryan Leeper of Olathe; Robert, Mary and Nicholas Genz of Basehor; Duane, Karen, Kyle, Austin and Braden Unruh of Canton; and Vicky Henning, Stephanie Eilts, Mike Manteuffel and Aaron Rockers of Hays. In from Elmdale were Tony, Dusty, Scott and Brock Hazelton and Galen and Gwen Simmons.

Very truly yours,

Jerry