

8/04/2008 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

August 4, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Congressional Leaders Fail to Address High Energy Costs

Congress must move forward on a comprehensive energy policy. The American people can no longer afford the partisan bickering that has stalled meaningful action. This week, I voted against the resolution allowing Congress to adjourn for the month of August in order to force action. Congress should not take a month off when many families are unable to afford to take a vacation of their own. Despite my best efforts to convince my colleagues to stay and work, congressional leaders chose to break for five weeks without voting on legislation to lower energy prices for Kansas families, businesses and farmers.

Although Congress traditionally puts its legislative work on hold during the month of August to allow representatives and senators to spend time in their districts and states, this year should be different. We must have a national energy policy that increases the supply of energy, promotes renewable and alternative fuels and encourages conservation now. The price of gas at the pump and the cost businesses and farmers face for fuel and fertilizer means that it should not be business as usual in Washington, D.C.

Even though congressional leaders have decided to go on break, the President is able to call Congress back into session. I urged President Bush this week to use his constitutional authority to call Congress into emergency session to address high energy costs. In addition to voting against adjournment, I am also the sponsor of legislation that would prohibit the House of Representatives from adjourning for more than three days in August until an energy policy is approved.

[Click here to listen to my comments on the need for Congress to address high energy costs.](#)

[Veterans' Programs Get Spending Boost; Fort Riley, Dodge City Projects Approved](#)

On Friday, I supported House passage of the 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (VA) spending bill. The legislation provides a significant increase in funding for veterans care, including an increase to the mileage reimbursement rate for veterans traveling to VA facilities. It also includes more than \$210 million for military construction projects at Fort Riley and \$8.1 million for a new U.S. Army Reserve Center located in Dodge City. [Click here to read more about Fort Riley projects](#) and [click here to read about funding for the Dodge City Army Reserve Center.](#)

Last year, the House approved an amendment I offered to raise the travel reimbursement rate for the first time in more than 30 years from 11 cents to 28.5 cents per mile. This week's bill increases the travel reimbursement rate even more, raising it from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents per mile. The medical services offered at the VA can only be enjoyed by veterans if they have access to this care. Especially with today's high gas prices, the increased mileage reimbursement will help many veterans who would not otherwise be able to afford the trip to VA facilities.

The legislation also includes additional funding for fee-based services to improve access to care where VA services are not available and an increase in enrollment of Priority 8 veterans in VA medical care by 10 percent. This will begin the enrollment of this service group for the first time since 2003 and includes veterans with moderate income levels and no service-related disabilities.

Support for our nation's service men and women and veterans is a priority and this legislation ensures we continue our efforts to provide better facilities and care for those who serve and have made sacrifices on our behalf. The bill now awaits the approval of the Senate.

[Click here to view my comments in support of our veterans.](#)

Learning about Electricity Supply in Rural America

I attended a House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research hearing this week where the topic was the supply of electricity in rural America. Witnesses on two different panels spoke about providing electricity in rural areas and addressed concerns that the demand for energy in these areas is increasing more quickly than the supply.

Many rural residents get their power from electric cooperatives. Across the country, more than 900 electric cooperatives provide power to 40 million Americans. Although these electric cooperatives represent the smallest segment of the electric utility industry, they are experiencing the highest growth percentages. Kansans require an abundant energy supply that is affordable, reliable and environmentally responsible. I will continue working to find solutions to increasing

demand and rising electricity prices including expanding our current capacity and allowing for greater use of alternative resources.

Working to Implement Veterinary Medical Service Provisions of the Farm Bill

This week, I spoke to officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) about implementation of the National Veterinary Medical Service Act (NVMSA), as directed by the 2008 Farm Bill. The NVMSA was passed in 2003 to provide student loan reimbursements to veterinarians who agree to work in underserved areas. For five years, regulatory delays prevented the program from being implemented. The 2008 Farm Bill contained provisions to speed up the process.

USDA informed me that implementation is underway and a stakeholder meeting should occur in September. The stakeholder meeting will be followed by a formal rule making process that will include an opportunity for public comment. It is expected that implementation could be complete by as early as June 2009. I will continue to monitor this process and encourage USDA to make this program available as soon as possible.

Taxpayers Should Not Bailout Irresponsible Lenders

Before adjourning for the month of August, Congress passed legislation to bailout irresponsible mortgage lenders and put taxpayers at risk by making them guarantee questionable home loans. I did not support this legislation because I thought it a poor use of taxpayer dollars. While there were good aspects of the legislation that would help Kansans hurt in the housing market, the legislation contained too many provisions I could not support. Most troubling to me were provisions that made taxpayers liable for \$5 trillion in potential losses should housing lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac fail. The bill spent \$300 billion to bailout sub-prime lenders and established \$4 billion in grants to purchase and rehabilitate foreclosed properties. Perhaps most alarming is that it also increased the national debt limit to \$10.6 trillion. Congress has to learn to set priorities and start acting responsibly with taxpayer money. Using the hard-earned money of

Kansas taxpayers to bailout giant housing corporations is the wrong approach to take.

Visiting Kansas Critical Access Hospitals

On Monday, I visited Greenwood County Hospital in Eureka and Anderson County Hospital in Garnett. Both of these hospitals are designated as Critical Access Hospitals (CAH) by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Often CAHs are in rural areas and serve a high percentage of patients on Medicare. This designation helps keep hospital doors open and infrastructure in place by providing the hospital with a greater reimbursement for providing care to Medicare patients.

Greenwood County Hospital Administrator Bruce Birchell gave me a tour of the facility. I enjoyed visiting with him about the challenges of providing care in rural areas. Tom Bell, President of the Kansas Hospital Association, joined me at Anderson County Hospital to tour the hospital. Anderson County Hospital is part of the Kansas City based St. Luke's Health System and offers a range of outpatient services including laboratory, radiology, respiratory, pharmacy, physical therapy and speech therapy. Thanks to CEO Dennis Hachenberg for allowing me to visit.

Touring Monarch Cement Company

I visited Monarch Cement Company in Humboldt on Monday to talk to company leaders about transportation issues. Last week, I supported House passage of legislation that will temporarily fix the funding gap in the federal account for highway maintenance and construction so that state highway projects can continue as scheduled. Making sure there is sufficient money available for transportation projects is not only important to all of us who drive, but also to Kansas companies such as Monarch Cement that help build the roads.

Monarch Cement does business across Kansas and in Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma. The company has subsidiaries in Dodge City, Garden City, Hutchinson and Salina. Thanks to President and CEO Walter Wulf, Jr., Vice President of Operations Harvey Buckley, Vice President of Sales Joan Perez, Vice President of Subsidiaries Rick Rush, Chief Financial Officer Debbie Roe and Woody Moses, Managing Director of the Kansas Ready Mixed Concrete Association, for visiting with me.

Attending Parish Picnic Benefiting Tipton School

I was in Tipton on Saturday to participate in a picnic and auction to raise money for Tipton Catholic High School. For 62 years the community has been coming together to raise money for the school, which relies on this yearly picnic as its main source of funding. I enjoyed eating dinner with members of the community and discussed their ongoing efforts in maintaining their community's schools.

In the Office

Ken Laudan of Mission Hills and David Kirkendall of Stafford were in to visit this week.

Several Kansans were in for a tour of the U.S. Capitol, including Alex Ewy of Newton, Jessica Adams of Wichita, Luke

Monaldo of Lawrence, Kayla Hill of Burrton and Josh Cromer of Topeka. In from Hutchinson were Carol Engelland, Martha Smith, Dana Bird and Shirley Reser. Betsy and Justin Brownlee, Jordan Ayers and Ron and Suong Nguyen of Overland Park were also in for a tour, as were Phat Nguyen and Ngochoa Tran of Derby and Darlene and Logan Fritz of Salina.

Very truly yours,

Jerry