

## 8/18/2008 This Week in Congress

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August 18, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

### Need to Pass Comprehensive Energy Legislation

This week I called on the leadership of Congress to allow us to consider comprehensive energy legislation. After enduring months of record fuel and energy prices, Americans are demanding Congress take action. I believe an opportunity exists now to pass energy legislation that will increase domestic oil and gas supplies, promote renewable and alternative fuels and encourage energy conservation.

Kansans have told me how energy prices are affecting them. I was on the floor of the House of Representatives to represent their concerns with the price of gas and groceries, and for farmers, the fuel and fertilizer they need to grow their crops. Congress should not be on vacation when many American families are unable to afford to take a vacation of their own. This is not about Democrats or Republicans - this is about Americans paying nearly four dollars for a gallon of gas while the Speaker of the House refuses to bring a comprehensive energy plan to a vote.

Earlier this month, I voted to keep the House in session until an energy policy was voted upon. Unfortunately, House leaders adjourned Congress for the month of August without allowing a vote. I have also written President Bush to encourage him to call Congress back into emergency session.

[Click here to listen to my comments on the need for Congress to come together to pass comprehensive energy legislation.](#)

[Visiting Greensburg and Pratt with USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development](#)

At my invitation, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Under Secretary for Rural Development Thomas Dorr traveled with me on Wednesday to Greensburg and Pratt. The visit allowed Kansans to speak personally to one of the top federal officials in charge of helping rural areas grow and prosper. We viewed the rebuilding progress in Greensburg. In Pratt, we talked with technology providers and health care, education and business leaders about the need for broadband services in Kansas. [Click here to view photos from Greensburg and Pratt.](#)

Greensburg: Before joining Under Secretary Dorr, I stopped at the Greensburg Elementary and High School temporary facilities to welcome students and teachers on the first day of school. I met with USD 422 Superintendent Darin Headrick who was optimistic about the school year and told me enrollment is up ten percent from last year. This is a good sign as Greensburg continues the rebuilding process.

After leaving the school, I joined Under Secretary Dorr to start our full day of activities. We began by meeting with community leaders to learn more about the progress being made and the challenges Greensburg faces. USDA Rural Development has provided Kiowa County residents with more than \$7 million in funds to rebuild after last year's tornado. Under Secretary Dorr and I spoke with local leaders about the opportunities to capitalize on technology, new home building and business development.

Following our meeting, we toured Greensburg to see several construction projects that are underway, many of which have been funded by USDA Rural Development. Our tour included the new Greensburg Water Tower, self-help homes and the new BTI John Deere Dealership. We also visited the Greensburg State Bank to see the new facility and view the original vault of the building which had weathered the EF5 tornado 15 months ago. We also joined USDA Rural Development State Director Chuck Banks for two funding presentations. During the tour, we were able to view the construction of many energy-efficient homes being built by volunteer groups, including Mennonite Housing. Up to 200 new homes are being built in Greensburg right now, many of which are using energy-efficient materials that can save up to \$150 a month in utilities.

The funds provided by USDA Rural Development have been instrumental in helping Greensburg rebuild. It was important for Under Secretary Dorr to see first-hand how the hard-working people of Greensburg have put these dollars to good use. [Click here to read more about Under Secretary Dorr's visit.](#)

Pratt: In Pratt, Under Secretary Dorr and I met with rural technology providers and health care, education and business leaders at Pratt Community College (PCC). USDA Rural Development loans and grant programs help rural communities build the infrastructure needed to provide residents with telephone and broadband service. Participants in the meeting explained their thoughts on the future of technology in the state and how the federal government can support rural providers and improve technology services in rural Kansas. Special thanks to PCC President Bill Wojciechowski for joining us and allowing us to meet on campus.

I recently sponsored legislation to help Kansas and other Midwestern states recover and rebuild from devastating spring and summer weather, including tornadoes and flooding. Kansans in several parts of the state are continuing to clean up and rebuild from severe storms and tornadoes that hit earlier this year. As they continue moving forward, this legislation would provide needed assistance.

The Midwestern Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2008 is modeled after the tax assistance packages passed by Congress to assist the victims of the Greensburg tornado in 2007. States covered under the legislation include Kansas, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska and Wisconsin. The bill would help homeowners, businesses and communities by allowing victims to withdraw money from retirement plans without penalty and providing tax-credit bond authority to help local governments rebuild infrastructure. [Click here to learn more about this legislation.](#)

### Joining Sunflower Producers in Goodland

On Friday, I spoke to sunflower producers at the 10th Annual Sunflower Celebration in Goodland. The event is an opportunity for sunflower producers to discuss production, risk management and marketing opportunities in their industry. Between 250,000 and 300,000 acres of sunflowers are harvested in Kansas each year and Sherman County is responsible for approximately 50,000 of those acres. Goodland is also home to sunflower crushing and confection plants. These facilities, combined with a confection plant in nearby Colby, led the U.S. Department of Agriculture to recognize Goodland as one of only two sunflower market centers in the United States. I was pleased to hear from producers that efforts from several years ago to equalize the treatment of confectionary and oil sunflowers has contributed to the success of the industry. Thanks to Lynn Hoelting for introducing me at the event.

### Visiting Brewster

After leaving Goodland on Friday, I stopped in Brewster to visit with area residents. I enjoyed visiting with many folks including Betty Baird at the Senior Center, Anne Lowe at Prairie Land Insurance and Jon Eicher at Farmers Bank and Trust. After talking with Mr. Eicher, I walked across Main Street to talk with his wife Reva, who was putting the finishing touches on a beautiful "Welcome to Brewster" mural that she has been painting for the last month. I also visited S&T Telephone Cooperative Association and enjoyed visiting with several employees. S&T employees 70 people in offices in Goodland, Brewster, Colby, Oakley and Dighton. In addition, I stopped at the Farmers Cooperative and visited with several local farmers and at the elementary school to visit with teachers preparing for another school year.

#### Joining Farm Bureau Members at Annual Meetings in Elk and Riley Counties

This week, I spoke to two Kansas county Farm Bureau meetings. Tuesday, I spoke at the Elk County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Howard. On Friday, I spoke at the Riley County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Manhattan. Thanks to Sam Funk for introducing me at the Riley County meeting and congratulations to the following Riley County award recipients:

Farm Family of the Year - Mark and Donnell Scott Family

Century Farm Award winner - Carl and Jane Larson

Natural and Environmental Resources Award - Ed and Mickey Bergsten

Distinguished Service to Ag Award Nominee - Karen Visser

Volunteer of the Year Award - Bill Kauer. I offer a special congratulations to Bill for having this award named in his honor and for being its first recipient.

I always appreciate the opportunity to visit with Farm Bureau members as they keep me informed about issues important to Kansas farmers and ranchers. It was great to meet Elk County Farm Bureau President John Black and Vice President David Griesel. Thanks to Lynne Thompson for the invitation to attend. It was also good to see Riley County Farm Bureau President Bob Mertz.

#### Larned Dedicates New Wastewater Treatment Plant

I was in Larned on Saturday to participate in the dedication of the city's new waste water treatment plant. The city was able to move forward on the construction of the new plant with the help of federal funding included in legislation that passed the House of Representatives in December. The new waste water treatment plant, which will use advanced technology, was needed to comply with more stringent federal pollution permit requirements.

Small communities frequently lack the resources to finance major infrastructure projects. Federal assistance will make sure the city, the Larned State Hospital, Larned Juvenile Correctional Facility and the Larned Correctional Mental Health Facility have clean water. Thanks to Larned City Manager Don Gaeddert and Mayor Robert Pivonka for the invitation to attend.

#### Speaking to Employees at John North Ford-Nissan in Emporia

On Monday, I visited the John North Ford-Nissan dealership in Emporia to learn about issues affecting the auto industry and meet with employees. I enjoyed speaking to employees about a wide range of issues, including our nation's energy crisis, rising health care costs and Social Security reform. Thanks to Tim North and General Manager Ron Carlson for inviting me and to Melanie Batenchuk with the American International Automobile Dealers Association for helping arrange the visit. On the way to the dealership I stopped and visited with Jeff Longbine of Longbine Auto Plaza in Emporia.

#### Meeting with Kansas Banking Leaders

I met with several banking leaders in Hays this week to talk about housing legislation Congress passed in July and other issues important to community bankers. Throughout Kansas, community banks provide needed services and supply the capital to create and expand businesses. I enjoyed visiting with Golden Belt Bank CEO Ron Wente of Hays, First Federal Savings and Loan CEO Darrel Gottschalk of WaKeeney, Lyons Federal Savings CEO Kevin McClure of Lyons and Heartland Community Bankers Association President Jim Turner of Topeka.

#### Visiting With Small Oil and Gas Producers

On Sunday, I attended the 71st annual Kansas Independent Oil and Gas Association Convention in Wichita. I have attended this event nearly every year I have been in Congress to meet with small oil and gas producers that provide American energy to American consumers. I enjoyed visiting with folks from across the state.

## Mourning the Loss of Bill Reece

I attended the funeral service of H.W. "Bill" Reece in Scandia on Monday. Mr. Reece was a World War II veteran and president of Reece Construction. He was involved in many civic causes and was a founder of The Road Information Program, which advocates for policies that would improve highway safety and relieve traffic congestion. Mr. Reece was a good friend of mine and will be missed by many. My thoughts and prayers are with his wife Marynell and their family.

## In the Office

Greg Shelor of Minneola was in with the National Sorghum Producers to discuss implementation of provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill.

Several Kansans were in this week to take tours of the U.S. Capitol. Norman and Joan Frederick and Lynn Harris of Hutchinson, Dan and Cameron Nedland of Oberlin, Larry Kucharo and Drew Vining of Wichita, Lana Kephart of Hoisington, Krissie Hutchins of McPherson, Leshia Hansen and Darcy Osterhaus of Topeka and Lena Simmons of Medicine Lodge took tours this week.

Very truly yours,

Jerry