

9/02/2008 This Week in Congress

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September 02, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Talking to Senior Citizens about Improvements to Medicare

On Friday, I visited the Senior Center in Hays to talk to senior citizens about passage of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act, H.R. 6331. This legislation, which passed the House in June and has since become law, eliminated scheduled reductions in Medicare physician payments, extended physical therapy caps and delayed reductions in pharmacy reimbursement rates. Passage of this legislation was critical for Kansans as it allows hospitals, doctors, physical therapists and pharmacists to continue serving the more than 114,000 Medicare recipients in the First District.

I was joined at the Senior Center by David Wilson, president of AARP Kansas; Dr. Michael Machen of Quinter, president of the Kansas Society of Health System Pharmacists; Jim Rorstrom of Hays; Fred Lucky, with the Kansas Hospital Association; and Dave Sanderson of Salina, with the Kansas Physical Therapy Association. These experts were able to explain to folks how the legislation affected their profession and answered questions about what the new law means for Medicare recipients. Also discussed during the event was the AARP "Divided We Fail Pledge." This is a congressional pledge asking the nation's leaders to commit to working in a bipartisan way to provide Americans with actions and answers on health and long-term financial security. This is a pledge I strongly support and have signed my name to.

I enjoyed speaking to many of the seniors gathered for lunch, as well as Ernie Kutzley of Topeka, AARP Kansas; Mary Tritsch of Topeka, AARP Kansas; Gerald and Dianna Schmitt of Wichita, AARP volunteers; Alberta Klaus of Hays, president of AARP chapter in Hays; and Dan Morin with the Kansas Medical Society. Special thanks to Alice Herman, director of the Meal Site, for hosting the forum. [Click here to view photos from the event.](#)

Visiting North Central Kansas

On Monday, I visited several communities in north central Kansas. While in Blue Rapids, I visited the State Bank, Yungeberg Drug, the Post Office, Napa Auto Parts and several city offices. After my visit in Blue Rapids, I traveled to Marysville to attend the Rotary Club meeting. Thanks to Marysville Rotary president, Kate Manley.

Also while I was in Marysville, I made a trip into the Marysville Advocate, a 122 year-old community newspaper. There, I saw Sarah Kessinger, the new editor for the Marysville Advocate. She recently took over the paper from her parents, Howard and Sharon. I commend her and the Kessinger family for working hard to keep this local publication serving their community.

I also visited Hanover to talk with community members. There I visited with employees at Citizens State Bank, Hanover Professional Pharmacy, the Post Office, Hanover Hospital, Andy's Hardware and Lumber, Crome's Market, Blue Valley Insurance and Rural Water District #1.

In my visits with local residents, I was again reminded of my belief that Congress must immediately take up a comprehensive energy plan to assist those families who are struggling with gas prices.

Learning about Cancer Prevention and Treatment with the American Cancer Society in Alma

On Monday, I met with Tonia Carlson of Paxico and Lisa Benlon of Overland Park to discuss ways in which Congress can help increase cancer screening and prevention treatments. Ms. Carlson is the grassroots leader of the First Congressional District for the American Cancer Society. Ms. Benlon is a former State Representative who is now with the American Cancer Society

One of the issues we talked about was colon cancer. This disease is one of the leading preventable causes of death in the United States, with a five-year survival rate of nearly 90 percent when detected early. I am a sponsor of the Colorectal Cancer Early Detection, Prevention and Treatment Act, which would help those most likely at risk of colon cancer to receive screenings and treatment at an earlier age.

Speaking to Farm Bureau Members in Wabaunsee and Osage Counties

This week, I spoke at the Wabaunsee County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Alma and at the Osage County Farm Bureau Annual Meeting in Carbondale. I spoke to members about the 2008 Farm Bill and the need for Congress to pass comprehensive energy legislation. Attending Farm Bureau meetings across our state allows me to learn more about issues important to farmers and ranchers.

I appreciated the opportunity to meet many officers and members. Special thanks to Wabaunsee County Farm Bureau President Ken Flagler and Osage County Farm Bureau President William Prescott for inviting me to speak. [Click here for photos from the Osage County meeting.](#)

Speaking to the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association in Manhattan

On Tuesday, I joined the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association (KARA) for breakfast at their annual conference in Manhattan. Before introducing Senator Pat Roberts, I explained my plan for solving our nation's energy challenges and also talked about the 2008 Farm Bill. Both Senator Roberts and I talked about how Congress has become more urban and explained the difficulty in getting members from urban areas to understand the importance of agriculture policy in rural America.

I also expressed my condolences on the passing of one of KARA's outstanding leaders, James B. "J.B." Pearl. Mr. Pearl was the founder of J.B. Pearl Sales and Services in St. Marys, which was recognized in 2003 as the National Ag Retailer of the Year. My thoughts and prayers are with Mr. Pearl's family and friends. Thank you to President Tom Tunnel and KARA for inviting me to speak.

Observing Chapman Rebuilding and Recovering

On Tuesday, I visited Chapman to observe the town's recovery efforts and to visit with their community members. Chapman received extensive damage when a tornado touched down on the evening of June 12, 2008. While there this week, I visited the Unified School District (U.S.D.) 473 offices, City Hall, Chapman Public Library where I spoke with the Library Director Carol Frasure, Astra Bank, Londeen Hardware & Furniture Store, Insurance Store, Chapman Senior Center and Shamrock Cafe.

I was very interested in visiting Chapman High School. I believed it was important to congratulate the school's administration and teachers on beginning class this fall. The school faced tremendous circumstances following the tornado and I wanted to commend them for starting school up as scheduled.

Visiting Garden City

Garden City Community College: On Thursday, I made a visit to Garden City Community College. I had a good conversation with Dr. Carol Ballantyne, the president of the college. On my visit, I learned about the opportunity the planned Sunflower coal-fired power plant expansion presents for training construction trades at the college. We also talked about the Higher Education Act, education of health care professionals for southwestern Kansas and the TRIO program.

St. Catherine Hospital: I also toured St. Catherine Hospital (SCH) in Garden City. SCH is an affiliate of Catholic Health Initiatives, the largest Catholic not-for-profit health organization in the country. It is licensed for 132 beds, is an accredited regional health care center and has a medical staff that consists of specialists in family practice, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, gastroenterology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, pathology, pediatrics, podiatry, psychiatry, pulmonary medicine, oncology, radiology, general and thoracic surgery and urology.

During my visit, I had a great discussion with Scott Taylor, SCH President & CEO. We discussed Medicare billing and reimbursements, pricing privileges for prescription drug programs, pay for performance of providers and charity care. Following my visit with Mr. Taylor, John Yox, SCH Senior Vice President and Bonnie Peters, SCH Vice President for

Patient Services, gave me a tour of the hospital facilities where I was also able to meet a number of doctors, nurses and staff. Thanks to Beth Koksal for coordinating my visit. [Click here to view photos of my visit.](#)

Attending Fort Hays State University Foundation Board of Trustees Meeting

I serve on the Fort Hays State University (FHSU) Foundation Board of Trustees. Each year, the foundation helps make a college education a reality for young people by distributing approximately \$1.4 million in scholarships. On Friday, I attended a board meeting in Hays about promoting educational excellence. I enjoyed meeting with the other board members and President and CEO Tim Chapman. Congratulations to incoming chair Dr. John Tomlinson and job well done to outgoing chair Kerry McQueen.

Annual Kansas State Fair Beginning This Week

The annual Kansas State Fair begins Friday and lasts through Sunday, September 14. The fair is the largest event in the state and attracts some 350,000 people. Each year since being elected to Congress, I have attended the fair to gather input and suggestions from Kansans to take back to Washington, D.C. The fair gives me an opportunity to meet many people from all parts of the state to discuss current issues. After these discussions, I always have a fresh perspective on the topics most important to Kansans.

As in years past, I will have a booth in the Pride of Kansas Building. Members of my staff will be available to answer questions and provide information. I will also take part in several events at the fair, including the annual Kansas Farm Bureau Leadership Breakfast on Saturday, September 6. I hope to see you and your family at the fair in Hutchinson.

Attending Labor Day Events

To celebrate Labor Day this year, I attended the 112th Annual Labor Day Celebration in Hoisington. Thanks to Brian Harrison for participating with me in this year's parade.

I also attended the City of Chapman Labor Day Parade. It was encouraging to see the city's recovery efforts and their commitment to continuing this parade which was first celebrated in 1909. Thanks to Phil Weishaar for organizing my participation in the parade.

In the Office

Alan and Phyllis Shurts of Beloit, Sydney and Mary Holmes of Hutchinson and Zack and Gavin Lake of Emporia came by the office this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry