

9/22/2008 This Week in Congress

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September 22, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Advocating for Energy Solutions

American families around the nation continue to experience difficult financial challenges as groceries, fuel, and even fertilizer prices have gone up due to the increased price of energy. This week I continued to request that Congress bring forward a comprehensive energy policy that will ease effects of the energy crisis. On Tuesday, the House considered the Comprehensive American Energy Security and Consumer Protection Act (H.R. 6899). Despite its title, however, this legislation is not an effective comprehensive energy policy. The bill bans oil and gas exploration 50 miles from the U.S. coast, where most of the accessible oil and gas lie on the Outer Continental Shelf. Also, it only allows exploration between 50 miles and 100 miles if a coastal state chooses to allow exploration.

There are many other aspects of the legislation that I do not agree with. Not only did the legislation fail to include any meaningful provisions to allow oil and gas exploration on the Outer Continental Shelf, it did not address energy

exploration in Alaska. The legislation also failed to put in place a long-term extension of the production tax credit for electricity produced from renewable energy sources like wind, coal, solar and geothermal. Finally, it raised taxes on the refining industry, including the three refiners in Kansas. Not only would this endanger Kansas jobs and limit refinery expansions, but it would likely increase the cost of gasoline at the pump.

It is time for Congress to stop playing political games. It is possible to provide meaningful access to domestic oil and gas reserves, enact a long-term production tax credit for renewable electricity, and do so without raising taxes. I have sponsored a bill, The American Energy Act (H.R. 6566), which accomplishes that goal. I hope the House will be allowed to consider this legislation or one similar to it before Congress adjourns.

Addressing America's Economic Health

Over the last few weeks, the troubled state of our nation's financial markets has received much attention. The Administration has now announced a \$700 billion plan to stabilize the financial sector by buying up troubled mortgage assets and an \$85 billion emergency loan to insurance company American International Group (AIG) Inc. These actions come on the heels of the recent \$300 billion takeover of mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and news of outgoing executives receiving millions of dollars in severance pay from these institutions.

Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke are requesting that Congress approve a plan that would grant the Secretary of the Treasury the authority to acquire "illiquid assets," which may include mortgage backed securities, car loans, student loans and credit card debt. It is estimated that acquiring this debt could cost taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars. I wrote Secretary Paulson and Chairman Bernanke this week to express my concerns that federal intervention has exposed taxpayers to billions of dollars of new risk, and that it pardoned - not punished - company executives that made poor decisions and took excessive risks. I have also sponsored legislation to stop the outgoing executives and board members of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac from walking away with millions of dollars in severance pay.

Much is at stake in the coming weeks and months and I welcome your input on the appropriate action for the federal government given these financial conditions. Please visit my website or [click here](#) to express your opinion if Congress should approve a plan for the federal government to acquire high-risk loans from financial institutions. This issue will be the number one topic of discussion this week while I am in Washington.

Overseeing the Commodity Markets

In response to the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission's (CFTC) careful recommendations and input from industry experts, I introduced H.R. 6921. This legislation will improve market oversight without discouraging credible market participants which is important now that businesses have the ability to manage their market risk. It will also allow the understaffed CFTC to hire additional employees to carry out these new market surveillance tasks.

Attending Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Meetings

This week, I attended two House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearings on matters that have received quite a bit of attention lately. The first examined the decision between UPS and DHL Express to pursue an agreement where UPS would take over North American air shipments for DHL.

The second hearing examined the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certification process for the Eclipse EA-500 light jet. There have been some allegations in the press that the FAA rushed to approve the type and production certifications of the new Eclipse EA-500 despite safety concerns raised over the design of the aircraft. The Committee heard from numerous witnesses and I will continue to work to make sure the FAA conducts the certification process in a professional manner.

Committee Passing Legislation to Fix to Farm Bill Provision on Base Acres

Before I left Washington, the Agriculture Committee considered a bill I introduced that will help small farmers. After an amendment, the legislation approved by the Committee will suspend for the 2008 and 2009 crop years a provision in the Farm Bill that denies payments to farmers with 10 base acres or less. Once the Committee has additional time to find sufficient offsets to pay for a long-term correction, the Committee intends to fix the provision permanently. The bill approved by the Committee is now eligible to be voted on by the full House, hopefully before Congress adjourns before the November elections.

I was encouraged that Members of the Agriculture Committee understood the urgency to fix this provision by calling a meeting to pass the legislation out of committee before we left Washington this week. However, there remain additional implementation challenges with the permanent disaster program and the Average Crop Revenue Program Election (ACRE) program within the Farm Bill. I will discuss these challenges with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Charles Conner next week and relay my concerns about implementation. [Click here to read more about the legislation.](#)

Visiting Maple Hill

On my way back from Washington, D.C., I stopped in Maple Hill to visit local businesses and talk with community members. While I was there, I visited City Hall, the post office, Stock Growers State Bank, the senior center, St. John Vianney Latin School, Puffy's Steak and Ice House and Maple Hill Market. I was able to discuss current issues with local residents and give an update on the activities going on in Congress.

Speaking to Greater Kansas City Jewish Community

On Sunday, I visited the Greater Kansas City Jewish Community at the Congregation Ohev Sholom synagogue in Prairie Village to speak about the trip I took to Israel earlier this year. Israel is America's closest ally in the most important region of the world. What goes on there has significant consequences to our national security. Members of the Greater Kansas City Jewish Community are interested in this part of the world and I was pleased to be able to share my experiences and learn from them.

Like the U.S., Israel is deeply concerned about the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons. A report issued this week by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said Iran continues to evade questions about its nuclear research. The IAEA also presented intelligence that Iran may be redesigning missiles to carry nuclear material, which would put Israel and much of the Middle East at risk. I am a sponsor of legislation that calls on the President to impose certain sanctions on Iran in an effort to force that country to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons. While Iran's desire to possess enriched weapons grade uranium is a threat to our security, all peaceful and diplomatic options must be thoroughly pursued to help mend the differences between our two nations. Appropriate economic, political and diplomatic means are the best tools we have to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons and for avoiding the use of force.

I was also able to talk about the recent energy crisis and how Congress must immediately take up energy legislation that will address the high cost of fuel and that will allow America to become less dependant on foreign sources of oil. Thanks to Rabbi White, Jonathan Greenburg, and Dr. Robert Glueck.

In the Office

Brock Thurman of Kiowa and Chris Ostmeyer of Grinnell were in with Farmer's National Company to talk about the services their company provides and how it is being affected by new provisions in the farm bill. Travis Hansen of Meriden was in with the American Traffic Safety Services Association to advocate for increased funding for highway safety programs when Congress considers a bill to reauthorize highway programs next year. Don McNeely of Topeka, Jim Hattan of Wichita, John Schmid of Coffeyville and Dale Willey of Lawrence were in with the Kansas Automobile Dealers Association to discuss total loss disclosure legislation. This disclosure legislation would help keep totaled automobiles off of the road.

Ken Stodgell of Topeka was in with the Veterans of Foreign Wars' National Legislative Committee to discuss improving Reserve Component retirement, the VA budget and VA facilities in Kansas. David Brax of Buhler and Mike Cook of Wichita were in with the Association of Educational Services Agencies to discuss No Child Left Behind reauthorization and the importance of funding technology and special education programs. Dr. Curtis Cain of Overland Park, Sherry Reed of Pomona, Steve Splichel of Hiawatha, Jean McCally of Ottawa and Edwin Splichel of Belleville were in with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development to share ideas about how to improve No Child Left Behind and student performance in Kansas.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. In for a tour were Robbie and Kathy Sweet of Colby, Mike and Emily Schrage of Salina, Robert and Connie Dombroski of Hill City, Mary Ann Conrardy of McPherson and Carol Jean Downey of Wright.

Very truly yours,

Jerry