

10/13/2008 This Week in Congress

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October 13, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Selection Board Interviews Applicants for the U.S. Service Academies

The 2008 First District Service Academy Selection Board met this weekend at the Kansas Cosmosphere and Space Center in Hutchinson to interview students applying for admission to the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. The opportunity to meet with these bright young men and women as they apply to become the next leaders in our military is one of my favorite responsibilities as a Member of Congress.

Following the morning interviews, the applicants, their parents, the selection board and I were delighted to hear from Nathaniel Swank, a native of Holcomb, who is currently completing his last year at the U.S. Naval Academy. Midshipman Swank received a nomination from me in 2004 to attend the Naval Academy. He talked to the audience about his

academy experiences and how he hopes to begin pilot training after graduation. Accompanying Midshipman Swank to the luncheon was his grandmother, Jan Combs of Hutchinson.

This important process would not be possible without the help of my selection board, which is made up of community leaders from across the state who take a great interest in seeing our students succeed. The members review applications and conduct interviews before making recommendations to me.

This year's board members included Shirley Braxton and Mike Junk of Salina, Jean Clifford and Andrew Mahoney of Garden City, DeLany Fawkes of Liberal, Ruth Browne of Clay Center, Steve Harmon and Ron Whitney of Emporia, Glennys Doane of Downs, Dr. Kate Lehner of Junction City, Ron Lucas of Goodland, Bekki Pribil of Pratt, Chris Orwoll of Hutchinson, Paula Ripple of Dodge City, Mike Streit of Sabetha and Tobias Wood of Marysville.

Visiting Health Care Facilities

Rooks County Health Center: On Monday, I was in my hometown of Plainville to visit the new Rooks County Health Center (RCHC). The health center is double the size of the original facility and offers new and expanded health care services including a new laboratory, new radiology services and two labor and delivery suites. Last month, I delivered the keynote address at the RCHC opening dedication, and this month I was able to get an update on how things are progressing in the new facility.

It is important for the health and well-being of citizens in rural areas to have a community hospital. I was happy to be able to visit with many hometown friends during my visit. A special thank you to Bill Stahl, RCHC Chief Operating Officer and to Kathy Ramsay, RCHC Communications and Development Director, who took me on the tour. Thanks also to RCHC staff members who visited with me. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Cloud County Health Center Building Project Event: On Sunday, I attended a health care event for the Cloud County Health Center in Concordia and discussed the challenges facing rural health care. In addition to my thoughts regarding the future of health care in rural communities, the hospital provided information about plans to build a new hospital in Cloud County. A panel discussion was held explaining the importance of health care in rural areas and the need for the new hospital. The current facility has served the community for 57 years and many believe it is in need of modernization. The citizens of Concordia will vote to approve the new hospital in November.

It is important for rural communities to have access to quality health care. Elderly citizens typically use medical facilities more frequently and must have close access to medical centers, especially those in rural communities. Residents in rural Kansas who have virtually no access to public transportation and who must drive long distances to access health care must have access to rural health care facilities.

Thanks to Jim Wahlmeier, hospital CEO; Dr James Douglass, president of the hospital Board of Directors; Tom Tuggle, of the hospital Foundation and to the members of the panel.

Touring KYLE Railroad in Phillipsburg

I visited KYLE Railroad in Phillipsburg on Monday to meet with company managers to learn more about the company and the work they do. KYLE Railroad, which is headquartered in Phillipsburg, employs approximately 60 Kansans and is one of 42 railroads owned and operated by RailAmerica. The railroad serves 35 customers at 60 different locations in Kansas and Colorado and operates 510 miles of track in both states.

The RailAmerica Transportation Logistics Center (TLC) is located at the KYLE Railroad location in Phillipsburg that was opened in 2008. TLC supports nine railroads in Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas.

During my visit, I spoke with both KYLE Railroad team members and TLC employees about the current economic situation. I discussed recent legislation passed in Congress that extends the short line rail tax credit that I authored which helps to ensure a strong rail system for our nation.

Thanks to Todd Bjornstad, General Manager for KYLE Railroad and to Mike Erhart, General Manager for Prairie Horizon Agri-Energy, LLC, and KYLE customer.

Discussing Current Events with Students

Meade High School: On Thursday, I visited Meade High School to speak to a high school government class. I talked with students and listened to their comments and concerns on current political and government issues. I discussed the current state of the economy, recent legislation and the presidential election. I was very encouraged to see the students involved and interested in events that are currently shaping their environment around them. Thanks to Ron Ryckman and Principal Jack Pavlovich for allowing me to come and speak. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Kansas State University: I spoke with Dr. Joe Unekis' U.S. Politics class at Kansas State University on Friday. The students and I discussed current events, including the economic situation, the financial bailout package and the presidential election. I enjoyed visiting with the students and hearing their ideas on topics that are so important to our country's future. Thanks to Dr. Unekis for the opportunity to speak with his students and Dr. Joe Aistrup, the Chairman of

the Political Science Department at K-State, for attending.

Learning about Arrowhead West, Inc. in Dodge City

On Wednesday, I visited Arrowhead West, Inc. in Dodge City to learn more about the services the agency provides. Arrowhead West, Inc. is a non-profit organization that provides support to children and adults who have developmental and physical disabilities. Funded through grants, the agency's mission is to discover methods to promote the needs of those individuals with disabilities by enhancing their choices and participation within their community. The agency is supported by mill levies in the counties they serve, including Ford, Barber, Pratt, Edwards and Sedgwick.

During my visit, I toured the child services, life skills and adult services departments to learn more about the different services the agency provides for their clients. I was able to meet with agency staff and managers to discuss the various funding sources that provide financial assistance for the programs Arrowhead West, Inc. provides. Funding comes from Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Thanks to Lori Pendergast, director of Arrowhead West, and to the agency staff for the tour. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Wreath Laying in Memory of President Dwight D. Eisenhower

On Saturday, I was in Abilene to participate in the annual Presidential Wreath Laying Ceremony on the grounds of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum. I joined Director Karl Weissenbach and others to lay a wreath in the chapel in memory of President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The event was preceded by an all night vigil by Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) members and followed by the American Legion Pilgrimage.

It was an honor to take part in the wreath laying in Abilene, the boyhood home of President Eisenhower. President Eisenhower is one of the most beloved military and presidential leaders in American history. This event is an important annual observance to remember one of Kansas' most famous sons and his contributions to our world.

Also in attendance was retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Carl Reddel, executive director of the Eisenhower Memorial Commission. I serve on the Eisenhower Memorial Commission, which was formed in 1999 to establish a memorial to President Eisenhower in our nation's capital. The memorial is now in the design procurement stage.

Thanking Fire Fighters and Emergency Service Personnel in Claflin

This week, fire departments across the country marked National Fire Prevention Week by educating community members about the dangers of home fires. There were an estimated 399,000 home fires in America last year that resulted in more than 2,800 deaths. Were it not for the brave men and women who fight fires and respond to emergencies in our communities, more Americans would have surely lost their lives.

On Saturday, I attended the annual open house and soup supper fundraiser at Claflin Fire and Emergency Medical

Services (EMS). Fire fighters were on hand to demonstrate equipment, citizens were able to get their blood pressure checked and children were able to learn how to remain safe in different emergencies. The department is run by volunteers and supported by the community. It is always good to see neighbors support one another in making their communities better places to live. I thanked the volunteer fire fighters and EMS personnel for their bravery and service. Special thanks to Kevin Donecker and Fire Chief and EMS Director Doug Hubbard.

[Click here to learn from the National Fire Protection Association what steps you can take in your home to decrease the risk of fire.](#) [Click here to view photos from the event.](#)

Visiting Telecommunications Company Embarq

On Wednesday, I visited Embarq Corporation in Overland Park, which is the fourth largest local exchange carrier in the United States. Employing nearly 18,000 workers and operating in 18 states, Embarq is included on the list of Fortune 500 companies, making it one of the largest employers in Kansas. In 1899, Embarq was founded as a landline telephone company in Abilene under the name of the "Brown Telephone Company." Currently, Embarq provides local, long distance, high-speed and wireless services to residential and business customers, which include 119 Kansas territories.

I met with company executives and employees to learn more about their services and to learn about challenges and opportunities they face given recent economic developments. It is critical to the future of our state that all Kansans have reliable access to the most current telecommunication technology and services available. It was good to meet with executives of Embarq to better understand the issues facing our rural technology providers in accomplishing this goal.

Thanks to Mike Murray for inviting me to visit. A special thanks to Embarq executives Doug Galloway, Ellen Martin and Colleen Floyd for hosting me.

Speaking about Economic Growth in Kansas

From Garden City to Kansas City, I am interested in seeing our state's economy grow. On Wednesday, I attended the monthly meeting of the Kansas City Area Development Council. This group of area business leaders meets regularly to advance the economic interests of the 18-county region of Greater Kansas City. Together with other groups, like the National Institute for Strategic Technology Acquisition and Commercialization (NISTAC) at Kansas State University, the council is making Kansas a better place to do business.

I spoke to the group about transportation and the potential to expand agri-science research. Special thanks to Chairmen Karen Pletz and Mark Jorgenson for their hospitality, as well as Kansas City Area Development Council President and CEO Robert Marcusse for the invitation to attend. Also thanks to Kent Glasscock, president of NISTAC and Kansas City Area Development Council board member.

In the Office

Leaders from Junction City and Manhattan were in this week in conjunction with the Association of the United States Army's (AUSA) annual meeting to discuss Ft. Riley, the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF), transportation, housing and other issues in their communities. In with the group from Junction City were Mike Rhodes, Ken and Sarah Talley, Denise Ott, Jack Taylor, Terry Heldstab, Ed Hooker, Rod Barnes and Mike and Susan Guinn. Representatives from Manhattan included Lyle Butler, Ron Fehr, Mark Hatesohl, Bevin Landrum, Linda Weis, Fred Willich, Tom Phillips and Bob Strawn.

Bret Healy of Olathe was in with the Kansas Bioscience Authority to talk about implementation of the energy title of the 2008 Farm Bill. Vern Otte of Leawood was in with the Legislative Advisory Committee of the American Veterinary Medical Association to discuss the Prevention of Equine Cruelty Act.

Emporia State University (ESU) President Michael Lane, ESU Foundation President Judith Heasley and Vice President of Strategic Affairs Jim Williams of Emporia were in to provide an update on ESU's enrollment and future plans and to talk about the importance of student loans. Sam Starr of McPherson was in with the National Youth Leadership Conference to learn about my role in Congress.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Debbie Cook of Hays, Patricia Skolout of Atwood and Cheryl Wilkinson of McDonald were in for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry