

11/17/2008 This Week in Congress

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November 17, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I will be returning to Washington, D.C. this week as Members of the House of Representatives have been called to reassemble for session. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Veterans' Travel Reimbursement Increases Today

Veterans driving to and from Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities will see an increase in their mileage reimbursement rate effective Monday, November 17. The rate is increased from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents per mile.

I have worked on this issue since first coming to Congress to assist Kansas veterans who must often travel long distances to the nearest VA medical clinic or hospital. Especially for veterans in rural areas, today's high gas prices have made it difficult for them to afford the trip to the doctor. Last year, I offered a successful amendment that increased the mileage rate for the first time in more than 30 years. I was pleased that the VA spending bill Congress approved this year included this additional increase supporting our veterans.

Observing Veterans Day in Medicine Lodge and Wichita

On Tuesday, I joined school children and residents of Medicine Lodge to honor area veterans. I spoke at the Veterans Day ceremony about the importance of veterans in defending our freedoms as well as the contributions veterans continue to make in our communities. They truly deserve our nation's gratitude. Thanks to Jerry Cullen, Superintendent for Unified School District (USD) #220, for the invitation to speak.

Later that day, I visited the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Wichita to personally thank veterans receiving care and to the volunteers and staff who serve them. The Dole VAMC has been serving Kansas area veterans for more than 75 years.

During my visit I toured the Transitional Living Center (TLC) and the newly updated facility that provides mental health services to address veterans' emotional well-being. Inside the TLC, I talked with veterans who served in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. These veterans talked about their tours and the years they served our country. Following these tours, I presented Tom Sanders, the Dole VA Medical Director, with a plaque of my remarks to the House of Representatives recognizing the Dole VA's 75th anniversary this past June. Thanks to Tom Sanders for his outstanding service. [Click here to view photos.](#)

Support for Education

Holy Family Elementary: On Monday, I visited Holy Family Elementary in Hays to read to 3rd and 4th grade students. Local officials were invited to the school to read to elementary students throughout the day. I appreciated the opportunity to take part in the students' learning process. Thanks to teachers, Principal Jana Simon, and Amadee Staab for inviting me. [Click here to view photos.](#)

Kansas State University Alumni Event: On Monday, I attended a Hays area Kansas State University (KSU) Alumni event hosted by KSU alumni and students at the Fox Pavilion in Hays. I spoke with KSU student ambassadors and student admissions representatives and answered their questions they had for me. Special thanks to Jarrod and Stacey Jones for hosting the event; to Kara Bowman and Robby Flack, KSU student ambassadors who attended the event; and to the Hays area KSU alumni and students for the invitation.

Kansas Association of Secondary Principals Conference: On Wednesday, I spoke at the Kansas Association of Secondary School Principals (KASSP) Conference in Wichita. During the conference, the KASSP provided informational speakers and seminars for Kansas middle school and high school principals. The topics I discussed during my visit to the conference included my position on No Child Left Behind, recruiting and retaining teachers, and the importance of fully funding special education programs that provide help to disabled students. I also discussed other federally mandated education initiatives and the educational outlook in Congress. Thanks to Marty Straub, assistant principal of Hays High School for inviting me to speak. [Click here to view photos.](#)

Attending Jana Mackey's 1100 Torches National Campaign Benefit

On Thursday, I attended Jana Mackey's 1100 Torches National Campaign Benefit in Lawrence. The benefit honored the life of Jana Lynne Mackey, from Hays, who became a victim of domestic violence on July 3, 2008. Those attending the event were able to participate in a silent auction to raise funds for the 1100 Torches Campaign in an effort to take it beyond Kansas to the national level.

Each year, nearly four million new incidences of domestic violence are reported in the United States, with many more unaccounted for due to fear and intimidation. Hopefully, with continued education, resources and support, that the victims of domestic violence can overcome their situation. The 1100 Torches Campaign was created by friend and family members of Jana following her death. The Campaign serves as Jana's call to action, that despite our personal politics, we can make a difference in the world and in turn make it a better place to live. It is the Campaign's hope that 1100 people will be inspired by Jana's story and through her death be motivated to answer her call to sever others and change the course of history. I encourage you to learn more about Jana's story and the impact of domestic violence by visiting the 1100 Torches campaign web site at <http://www.1100torches.org/>.

Thanks to Christie and Curt Brungardt for inviting me to speak. Also thank you to the many volunteers who gave their time to honor Jana Mackey, who gave to so many lives during her lifetime. [Click here to view photos of the event.](#)

Attending Local Leadership Events in Wichita

This week, I attended a Rotary Club meeting and the Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner in Wichita. I am honored to be given the opportunity to speak with community leaders throughout Kansas. Doris Kearns Goodwin was the keynote speaker and talk about her book, *Team of Rivals*. Thank you to Bill Maness for hosting me and to Bernie Koch for inviting me to attend the event.

National Association of Farm Broadcasters Convention

I attended the National Association of Farm Broadcasters (NAFB) Convention in Kansas City on Thursday. NAFB

members are television and radio farm broadcasters from around the nation. The convention provides them with information on how to better serve the agriculture community through agriculture related broadcast programs. It is always a great opportunity for me to attend this event and speak with broadcasters who do so much to keep our farmers and ranchers informed. Most of the discussion focused on the outcome of the recent elections and potential issues that will face Congress when the next session begins in January. [Click here to view photos.](#)

Kansas Hospital Association Awards Luncheon

While in the Kansas City area on Thursday, I attended the Kansas Hospital Association's (KHA) annual convention awards luncheon. I enjoyed celebrating the achievements of these dedicated professionals and hearing the stories from the communities they serve. Dr. John Jeter, of Hays Medical Center, was inaugurated as the incoming board chair and I congratulate him on his new leadership position. Furthermore, I was pleased to recognize Roger Pearson, of Ellsworth County Medical Center for receiving the Donald A. Wilson Visionary Award and Maynard F. Oliverius, of Stormont-Vail HealthCare, Inc., in Topeka who received the Charles S. Billings Award. A special thank you to Tom Bell, president of KHA, and Fred Lucky, vice -president of KHA, for the invitation and their hospitality.

Attending Dole Leadership Prize Ceremony for Former President George H.W. Bush

On Sunday, I visited the University of Kansas in Lawrence, where our nation's 41st president, George H.W. Bush, was awarded the 2008 Dole Leadership Prize from the university's Dole Institute. Bush was honored during a ceremony in the Lied Center at KU to recognize the leadership he displayed during his presidency. The Dole Institute, established at KU in 1997, was named after former U.S. Senator Bob Dole and is designed to encourage student participation and citizen involvement in public service. Thanks to KU Chancellor, Robert Hemenway.

Attending High School Performance

I attended a Hays High School musical for the performance of "Beauty and the Beast." My daughter Alex, was a member of the cast and my wife, Robba was the accompanist. Congratulations to the students and directors for their hard work in putting together a successful and entertaining performance. Thanks to Elise Peterson, the director of the show.

In the Office

Dwayne Dunn of Liberal, president of Seward County Community College, was in the office to discuss the Higher Education Act and how that legislation will affect community colleges.

Very truly yours,

Jerry