

1/19/2009 This Week in Congress

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January 19, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Today I am traveling to Washington, D.C. to attend the Inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Today, the country celebrates the life and the dreams of the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We honor his life by recognizing the legacy that he established working to create race equality in America. The important issues that he taught during his lifetime have been carried onto each generation since his era. It is important for our children to understand how difficult the struggle for racial equality has been for our country. Tomorrow, as our country watches President-elect Barack Obama being sworn in as the first black president, we will also be observing the success of the efforts of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Supporting Aviation Production in Kansas

On Thursday, I spoke on the House Floor during the debate of a provision in H.R. 384, the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) Reform and Accountability Act. This is the bailout package passed by Congress last fall, without my support. Making matters worse, a provision in H.R. 384 would have devastated the general aviation industry so important to the Kansas economy. Within TARP was a restriction on businesses that accept TARP relief funds from using or leasing private planes for business purposes. More than 54 percent of our country's aviation products are manufactured in Kansas. Limiting businesses from leasing or using general aircraft for business purposes would have lowered national aviation production and hurt Kansas employees.

I wrote a letter to House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank, who introduced the provision in H.R. 384, stating my strong opposition to this provision. That same day, he and I discussed the negative impact his provision would have on aviation production in the nation and in Kansas. The provision has since been lifted from the legislation. This Thursday, I went to the House floor on to thank Chairmen Frank for removing the provision. [Click here to view my speech on the House Floor.](#)

Touring and Speaking in Leavenworth County

Fort Leavenworth: On Tuesday, I spoke to nearly one thousand military officers attending the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Ft. Leavenworth about national defense issues facing our country. Originally established in 1881 as an infantry and cavalry school, the CGSC today is a graduate school for U.S. military and foreign military leaders.

During my visit to CGSC, I discussed Iraq and Afghanistan, military spending and the importance of strengthening benefits to support service members, their families and veterans. I also discussed legislation that I sponsored, introduced by Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins (KS-02), which prohibits federal funding to transfer prisoners at Cuba's Guantanamo Bay detention center to Ft. Leavenworth's U.S. Disciplinary Barracks. Ft. Leavenworth military facilities simply do not have the resources necessary to house enemy combatants. I believe we should not jeopardize the safety of Kansans to hold detainees who pose a threat to national security. [Click here to view the legislation.](#)

Leavenworth U.S. Penitentiary: Also on Tuesday, I toured the Leavenworth U.S. Penitentiary. The facility was built in 1895 as an all male prison. On the tour I learned about current issues affecting the prison and details about the possibility of a new federal prison being considered in Leavenworth County. Thanks to Claude Cheste, the penitentiary warden, and Mark Swope.

Announcing Committee and Subcommittee Assignments

It was announced this week that for the 111th Congress, I will continue serving on the three committees I have been on throughout my time in Congress: the Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs, and Transportation and Infrastructure Committees. For the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I will continue to serve on the Subcommittee on Aviation and on the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials. I will also serve on the Subcommittee of Highways and Transit, a new subcommittee assignment. Serving on this subcommittee, I will have an opportunity to be involved with important issues regarding our nation's highway and transportation infrastructure.

Meeting the New Secretary of Agriculture

I had the opportunity this week to meet with former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, President-elect Barack Obama's nominee for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In the conversation, I invited him to visit Kansas so that he could learn about agriculture from our farmers and ranchers in the state. Agriculture is the backbone of the Kansas economy, and the position of Secretary of Agriculture plays an important role for the success of agriculture in our state. I will be eager for Gov. Vilsack to visit so that he becomes better acquainted with Kansas production and agricultural practices.

Participating in Press Conference for Smoky Hills Family Residency Program

I attended a press conference on Friday, along with several Kansas doctors and business leaders, to announce a grant for the Smoky Hills Family Residency Program in Salina. The mission of Smoky Hill, to prepare family physicians for rural practice, is very important for the success of health care for the state of Kansas.

Smoky Hill received a \$49,500 grant from the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund to establish a patient-centered medical home model of care. The grant allows Smoky Hill to be the first residency program in the nation to offer residency training in a medical home environment. The residency transformation project will focus on the introduction of electronic health records (EHR), application of health information technology, increased support for patients in managing their medical problems, improved scheduling innovations and alternatives to the routine office visit.

Thank you to Dr. Rick Kellerman, Professor and Chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine, KU School of Medicine in Wichita, for inviting me to speak. Also thanks to Dr. Robert Freelove, Program Director of the Smoky Hills Family Medicine Residency and Chief Medical Officer of the Salina Family Healthcare Center; and Virginia Elliott, Vice President for programs at the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund.

Dedicating the Kansas Grain and Feed Building in Topeka

I was in Topeka on Tuesday to participate in the dedication of the Kansas Grain and Feed Building. The ceremony was held to rename the building after a long-time personally friend and a significant leader in Kansas agriculture, Tom Tunnell. The Kansas Grain and Feed Association (KGFA) began serving Kansas businesses in 1896. KGFA provides education and communication to its members about Kansas grain receiving, storage, processing and shipping.

Thanks to Tom R. Tunnell, KGFA President, and to Jerald Kemmerer, KGFA Chairman, for inviting me.

From Washington to Home: Annual Listening Tour Continues

I continued my listening tour with stops in Rush, Edwards, Clay and Ellis counties. My tour will continue this week in Barton County on Saturday, January 24, from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. at the Kansas Oil and Gas Hall of Fame Museum, 5944 W. 10th in Great Bend. Each year during my annual tour, I look forward to the conversations that I have with Kansans to understand the issues important to them. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule and upcoming stops.](#)

In the Office

Fred Lucky of Topeka with the Kansas Hospital Association was in to discuss 2009 legislative priorities.

Wayne Sims and Bill Dunn Jr. of Olathe with KBC Behavioral Health Care, were in to talk about efforts to better train doctors in the behavioral and mental health fields.

Several members of the National Guard Association of Kansas stopped by to update me on a number of issues important to the Guard in Kansas. In were Col. Chris Strathmann of Topeka, Col. Derek Rogers of Lawrence and Executive Director Michele Henry of Topeka.

Scott Bergkamp of Salina and Bill Cooper of Wichita were in to talk about the benefits of pavement preservation projects for our nation's highways.

John Jackson, of Great Bend, with the Agricultural Management Group and Barry Michie, of Manhattan, with Kansas State University stopped by the office to introduce twelve Pakistani students who will begin a two month exchange program at Kansas State University.

Ron Roberson and Heidi Unruh, of Hutchinson, were in the office to discuss the growing need to address family and poverty issues in the potential economic stimulus package.

Curtis and Annette Hammeke, of Hays, visited my Washington, D.C. office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol Building.

Very truly yours,

Jerry