

1/26/2009 This Week in Congress

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January 26, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

President Barack Obama Inaugurated in Washington, D.C.

On January 20, President Barack Obama was inaugurated as our country's 44th president. With a new president, I now hope Congress and our country will be able to put aside the unnecessary political bickering that has hindered legislative progress and prevented this country from moving forward in the right direction.

I look forward to working with the president and his new administration on the issues that are important to Kansans. [Click here to view photos from the Inauguration ceremony.](#)

Working to Expand Pharmacist Services

This week, I was pleased to introduce legislation that will preserve Kansan's access to affordable health care equipment and supplies. Pharmacists are currently forced to complete a costly accreditation process in order to sell medical equipment and supplies. This legislation, H.R. 616, will exempt community pharmacists from this burdensome process thereby ensuring they will be able to provide needed services without extensive government bureaucracy interfering. [Click here to learn more about the legislation.](#)

Hearing Testimony on Pros and Cons of Economic Spending Bill

On Thursday, I attended a hearing of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on the proposed economic spending bill that will soon come before Congress for consideration. The committee heard from a variety of witnesses, who testified that direct spending in infrastructure projects could produce a boost in jobs and help stimulate the economy.

I am greatly concerned that infrastructure investments only make up a small part of the entire \$825 billion spending bill. Although many experts agree that investment in infrastructure, along with targeted tax breaks, may be a good way to stimulate the economy and create jobs, only a small fraction of the total amount is spent on infrastructure needs. Instead of being a construction bill, this legislation recklessly spends billions of dollars on other programs that will not create jobs or help the economy.

I will continue to work to change this legislation so that it provides the needed stimulus in a fiscally responsible manner. Tomorrow, I will be meeting with President Barack Obama and will continue to advocate for a narrowly focused economic spending bill that helps create jobs and stimulate the economy instead of the big-spending free-for-all that exists in the current legislation. While it is important to address the current economic situation, Congress must be mindful of the enormous national debt that we are accruing. We should not mortgage our children and grandchildren's futures for a limited short term gain.

Continuing Service on the Veterans' Affairs Committee

I will continue to serve on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for the 111th Congress. Veterans have done so much by protecting our country, and I look forward to continuing my work to ensure they have the services and benefits they deserve. Kansas houses a strong military presence, and serving on the Veterans' Affairs Committee gives me the opportunity to help determine if we are taking care of our veterans' needs.

On Veterans' Affairs, I will serve as the Acting Ranking Member on the Subcommittee on Health. This subcommittee oversees the health care system for the Department of Veterans' Affairs, which serves nearly 250,000 veterans in Kansas. I will also continue serving on the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. This subcommittee oversees veterans' issues regarding housing, education and other benefits, including the newly enacted Post 9/11 GI Bill that will help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans afford a higher education.

Meeting with Kansas Right to Life

On Thursday, I met with representatives from Kansas Right to Life. It has been 36 years since the Supreme Court decision on Roe vs. Wade. The group was in Washington, D.C., to advocate for pro-life legislation and the rights of the unborn as well as to participate in the Right to Life March. [Click here to view a photo from the group's visit.](#)

Visiting with Kansans during Smoky Hills Public Television Program

I appeared on a live call-in show on Smoky Hills Public Television on Friday night. The show gave me an opportunity to hear what issues were on the minds' of Kansans. I was glad to take several calls and share my thoughts on a number of topics, including the economic spending bill, health care and energy. Thank you to Dr. Richard Heil, of the Docking Institute at Fort Hays State University and Patrick Lowry, editor and publisher for the Hays Daily News, for joining me on the program.

Supporting Employees with Disabilities

On Friday, I was at Cottonwood, Inc. in Lawrence, to receive the AbilityOne Champion Award from the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped. Cottonwood, Inc. is a nonprofit organization established in 1972 to provide services for people with developmental disabilities. The award recognizes those who have demonstrated their support for the AbilityOne Program by becoming involved in community-based, not-for-profit agencies in their state.

AbilityOne is a federally funded program that currently employs more than 40,000 people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. The program is the largest source of employment for people with these disabilities in the country. I hope my involvement can help highlight the good things that are happening at Cottonwood, Inc. and the contributions many disabled Kansans are making as a result of this program.

Attending Events in Topeka

Associated General Contractors of Kansas Convention: On Friday, I addressed the 75th Annual Convention of the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Kansas. AGC is a statewide trade association representing general contractors, subcontractors and suppliers of the commercial construction industry. Much of the conversation involved the condition of the Kansas economy and the upcoming economic spending bill. Thank you to the members who invited me to speak.

Visit to Jayhawk Pharmacy in Topeka: On Friday, as a guest of the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), I visited Jayhawk Pharmacy in Topeka to talk with the store owner, Mike Conlin, and his customers about health and business concerns. Much of the conversation revolved around the increasing cost of prescription drugs. Thank you to Gary Haulmark and to Mike Larkin, both of NCPA.

Attending Humane Society Benefit in Hays

I attended the Humane Society of the High Plains "Soup'R Bowl XII" event on Saturday to benefit the animal shelter in Hays. Guests at the event were able to sample more than twelve different types of soup made by local residents and then cast votes for their favorite soup. A silent auction was also held to help raise money for the shelter. I enjoyed seeing many familiar faces including the Fort Hays State University men's basketball team and Head Coach Mark Johnson, who helped serve soup and signed autographs. Thanks to all who participated to support the proper care and treatment of animals.

Accepting Applications for Summer 2009 Internships

I am now accepting applications for congressional internships in my Washington, D.C., Hays, Hutchinson and Salina offices for the summer 2009 term. The goal of congressional internships is to give young adults the opportunity to participate in public service.

Applications for the summer are due by March 6. To apply for an internship, students should submit a completed application form, cover letter, résumé, college transcript and three letters of reference. The cover letter should explain the student's interest in public service and the goals they hope to achieve by participating.

Students may call (202) 225-2715 with questions or to obtain more information. [Click here for application information.](#)

Annual Listening Tour Continues

I continued my listening tour with a stop in Barton County this week. My tour will continue with a stop in Lyon County on Thursday, January 29, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. at PrairieLand Partners, 1744 County Rd. F in Emporia. Residents are invited to attend to share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule and upcoming stops.](#)

In the Office

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week, including Verlean Brown, Kimberly Howard, Bethany Cauble Janssen, Rebecca and Gautham Reddy, Adam McGonigle, Jim Ward and Jamie Woodworth of Wichita. Cayn Tyson of Parker; Rachel, Andrew and Bryce Loder of Lindsborg; and Dr. Ginger Senseman and Brock Kuhlman of Salina also stopped by to visit the office.

A group of 12 students from Washington County High School led by Teryl Goeckel and Debbie Bokelman of Washington also stopped by during their visit to the nation's capital for the Inauguration ceremony. Also stopping in were Margie Bouchard of Shawnee; Jeff Sigler of Lawrence; Richard Pinaire of Junction City; Jackie Boreli of Montezuma; Codi Fenwick of Hays; and Jim Davis, Becky Fast and Trist Rose of Hutchinson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry