

## 2/02/2009 This Week in Congress

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February 2, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Kansas became a state on January 29, 1861. To help mark this occasion, my wife Robba and I joined many Kansans for Kansas Day activities in Topeka this weekend to celebrate our state's 148th birthday. One event we attended was the 91st Annual Meeting of the Native Sons and Daughters of Kansas. This group was formed to preserve our state's history and traditions and to honor outstanding citizens of Kansas. Those honored this year included the city of Greensburg, Kansas University men's basketball coach Bill Self and former U.S. ambassador Delano E. Lewis. I hope you find this week's newsletter useful.

### Voting Against Irresponsible Economic Spending Legislation

On Tuesday, I joined other Republican House Members to meet with President Barack Obama to discuss concerns with the economic spending bill. The President met with us this week in an attempt to gain support for this legislation to address the country's economic circumstances. The President was unable to convince anyone at the meeting to change their mind about this legislation. [Click here to read more about my meeting with the President.](#)

On Wednesday, the House approved an \$819 billion "stimulus package," but did so with no Republican votes. I joined my colleagues in voting "no." I have several concerns with the economic spending bill. The legislation started out as an infrastructure bill, designed to put people to work on construction projects. In the end, only seven to eight percent of the total amount spent was for infrastructure and transportation projects. It includes the spending of billions of dollars for programs that simply will not stimulate the economy. [Click here to read more.](#)

We need to get the country moving. An effective stimulus would create jobs and encourage business growth. An appropriate package would consist of a mix of infrastructure investments and targeted tax reductions. It would include an energy policy and affordable health care. It would spur a stronger economy and get people to work.

Americans are struggling and the economy needs help. Unfortunately, I was not able to support this bill because it included unnecessary spending, did not create enough private sector jobs and significantly increased the national debt. The legislation will now be considered by the U.S. Senate.

#### Attending Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Meeting on Rail Needs

On Wednesday, I participated in a Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing on the needs of freight and passenger rail. The U.S. railroad system employs more than 200,000 Americans and is comprised of 140,810 miles of track. Freight rail moves more than 40 percent of all goods between American cities. One theme from the hearing was the need to expand capacity of our rail infrastructure and ways we might accomplish this goal.

Rick Webb, CEO of Watco Companies, Inc. in Pittsburg, Kansas, testified. He gave a complete overview of the challenges that short line railroads face. I will continue to support measures that will help expand our rail infrastructure.

#### Continuing to Serve as Ranking Member of Agriculture Subcommittee

During a House Agriculture Committee meeting this week, I was renamed the Ranking Member on the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management for the 111th Congress. In this role, I will lead discussions about commodity programs and markets, operations of the Commodity Credit Corporation, and risk management, including crop insurance and commodity exchanges. I will also serve on the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research and the Subcommittee on Horticulture and Organic Agriculture.

Also during the Agriculture Committee meeting this week, committee members adopted committee rules for the new congressional session and were informed about the committee oversight plan. Additional topics discussed in the meeting included possible legislation that would modify the laws governing the commodity futures industry and that would modernize the structure of U.S. Department of Agriculture. [Click here to read more.](#)

My involvement with the Agriculture Committee allows me the opportunity to oversee the issues that affect Kansas farmers and ranchers. Serving on the committee, I will work hard to make sure that producers' have opportunities to remain profitable through access to strong safety net programs, such as crop insurance and direct payments. Protecting and preserving our farms and ranches is vital to the health of the American economy.

#### Touring Aviation Production and Research Facilities in Wichita

Boeing: On Friday, I visited Boeing Integrated Defense Systems (IDS) in Wichita for a tour of the facility. As a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Aviation Subcommittee, it was a good way for me to get an update on the aviation industry in our state.

During my visit, I was given a tour and was provided an update of the 767 tanker program and the E-4 program. The Advanced Airborne Command Post (E-4) is a command post aircraft that would provide a safe airborne headquarters for military and civilian leaders in times of emergency, including a nuclear war. The 767 tanker and the E-4 programs have a tremendous impact on Boeing jobs and to our state's economy. From the companies that contract with Boeing to the thousands of folks in the state who work there, aviation production must continue in Kansas. We were successful in stopping the Air Forces' bidding process last year for the aerial refueling tanker contract. I will be closely watching as the Department of Defense begins the next aerial refueling tanker competition under the new administration this year. Boeing should have a fair shot at this contract and I will continue working with my colleagues to find ways to keep Boeing jobs in Kansas.

Thanks to Scott Strobe, vice president of IDS; Tom Conard, director of 767 Tanker Program Business Development; Leanne Caret, director of Global Transport and Executive Systems; John Frederick, director of state and local government affairs; Brad Gorsuch, director of 767 Tanker Operations; Andy Reheis, senior manager of the E-4 Program Global Transport and Executive Systems; and Roberta Crawford, manager of the Program Planning and Execution B-52 Programs/Refueling Systems Support.

National Institute for Aviation Research at Wichita State University: Also on Friday, I toured the National Institute for Aviation Research at Wichita State University. It was a good opportunity to again view the facility that provides research and training for aviation industry in Kansas. It will be vital for these companies and their workers to have the resources necessary to be successful. Providing employees with the latest technologies will improve their skills and help the overall industry remain competitive.

During my visit, I was able to meet with Dr. Donald Beggs, president of Wichita State University. Thanks to Dr. John Tomblin, executive director, for giving me the tour. Also thanks to Wichita State University for hosting me.

#### Speaking to Agribusiness Council of Wichita

On Monday, I met with members of the Wichita Agribusiness Council. The Agribusiness Council is a group of agriculture business leaders in the Wichita and surrounding area.

Agriculture is a significant component of the Kansas economy and it faces many challenges. To guarantee the future success of agriculture in our state, we need to bring rural and urban interests together. I discussed with the group how vital it is to educate the public, Members of Congress and those outside agriculture and rural communities the importance of agriculture on our state and our everyday lives.

Also during the meeting I talked about energy development, electricity transmission and energy conservation and its impact on Kansas. I discussed possible agriculture legislation that may come up in the next congressional session and what we may expect from the administration. I mentioned that in a meeting this month with U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, I invited him to Kansas to become better acquainted with production and agriculture and agribusiness in our state.

#### Visiting Via Christi Health Center

I visited Via Christi's eCare facility to speak with doctors and staff about current issues affecting health care. Via Christi's eCare-ICU facility partners trained critical care physicians and nurses with bedside staff to identify small changes in patients' conditions before there are complications. Via Christi Health System was formed on October 1, 1995. Today, it is the largest provider of health care services in Kansas. It is necessary that we do everything possible to provide quality and affordable health care to the people of our state. Visiting health care facilities allows me to see firsthand the issues facing health care in Kansas.

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Thank you to Kevin Conlin, president and chief executive officer of Via Christi Health System; and to Dr. Elizabeth Cowboy, eCare medical director, for taking me on the tour. Also thanks to Mark Gagnon, ePharmacy director; Mark Bailey, vice president of Integrated Home Solutions; Jerry Carley, president and chief executive officer of Via Christi Senior Services; Janell Moerer, vice president of Business Development; and Carolyn Smith, director of public policy and legislative advocacy.

#### Attending Meetings in Kansas City

Johnson County Community College: On Thursday, I made a visit to Johnson County Community College in Overland Park. I had a good conversation with Dr. Terry Calaway, the president of the college. On my visit, I learned about the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad training center. Thanks to Sue Kuder, executive assistant to the president, for setting up my visit.

Attending Kansas Contractors Luncheon: I attended the 86th annual Kansas Contractors Association's convention luncheon in Kansas City on Thursday where University of Kansas men's basketball coach Bill Self was the featured speaker. At the luncheon, I learned how the economic downturn is affecting contractors in Kansas. I told many of the folks I visited with that true economic stimulus legislation is needed to create jobs and help grow the economy.

#### Talking Transportation at Tyson Distribution Center

On Monday, I met with company leaders at the Olathe location of Tyson Foods, Inc. The distribution facility employs 260 people and is one of five Tyson locations in Kansas. I appreciated learning about the operation in Olathe and speaking with employees about the importance of good roads and highways to get products to consumers quickly. I also discussed the five year highway funding legislation that will come up later this year. Thanks to Facility Manager Chris Sparks for the tour.

#### Annual Listening Tour Continues: New Stops Added for This Week

This week, I conducted my Lyon County town hall meeting at PrairieLand Partners. My tour will continue this week with the following stops:

Thursday, February 5

Nemaha County Tour Stop, Sabetha

Time: 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

Location: Buzz Cafe

Address: 820 Main (across the street from city hall)

Saturday, February 7

Lincoln County Tour Stop, Sylvan Grove

Time: 9:00 to 10:00 a.m.

Location: Sylvan Grove Senior Center

Address: 109 S. Main

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

Jane Faubion and Jessica Willard of Topeka, Michael Kennedy of Kansas City, Stacey Dimitt of Gardner, Rachel Tindall of Berryton, Megan Brown of Hutchinson, Dan Kuhlman of Athol and Jodi Schmidt of Hays were in with the National Rural Health Association to discuss the need to support state offices of rural health and the need to invest in health information technology.

Dr. Robert Morrison of Hutchinson was in with the American Association of Orthodontists to talk about the need for student loan interest deductions and the importance of good primary dental care for children. Earl Carter of Wichita was in with Spirit Aerosystems to discuss the Air Force tanker competition and the aircraft industry. Dr. Lynley Britt of Kansas City was in with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to talk about the cost savings that can be generated from good prenatal care. Dr. Britt also received a tour of the U.S. Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry