

2/09/2009 This Week in Congress

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February 9, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Selected as Co-Chairman for Rural Health Care Coalition

Fellow Republican members of the Rural Health Care Coalition (RHCC), this week, selected me to serve as the Co-Chairman for the RHCC. The group was created more than 25 years ago by members of Congress who felt that that the federal government had been overlooking the health care needs of people in rural areas.

that concerns millions of people across the country. Health care is not just about the quality of life, it is about the lives of our citizens and the survival of their communities. I am honored to lead in this effort and I am encouraged to find ways to bring solutions for this issue.

Agriculture Committee Holds Hearings on the Commodity Futures Markets

This week, the Agriculture Committee held two days of hearings with 23 witnesses to allow several market participants to discuss drafted legislation submitted by Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (MN).

I believe the hearings were productive and provided committee members with valuable information about how the commodity markets function. Most witnesses expressed that they were interested in an improvement of transparency of markets. They also emphasized there is a need to improve certain provisions of the draft legislation that could restrict market liquidity, increase volatility and reduce opportunities for market participants to manage risk.

This information will be useful as the Committee tries to craft final legislation to improve laws governing the commodity markets.

Meeting the New Veterans Affairs Secretary

In my Washington, D.C. office, I met the newly-confirmed Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary, Army General Eric Shinseki, to discuss the importance of strong VA services for Kansas veterans. As a senior member of the House Veterans' Affairs, I am very aware that providing quality care for our veterans takes top priority.

I told General Shinseki my top VA priorities this year will be ensuring the implementation of two important bills that were approved in 2008. One is an improved GI Bill to help Iraq and Afghanistan veterans afford an education, and the other is my Rural Veterans Access to Care Act. Under this legislation, Kansas veterans will participate in a demonstration project to obtain health care in their home communities to avoid traveling long distances to Veterans Affairs facilities. [Click here to view the photo of my meeting with General Shinseki.](#)

Job Corps Prepares Kansas Youth to Enter Workforce

Earlier this year, I was appointed to help lead the Friends of Job Corps Congressional Caucus, which advocates for Job Corps. Job Corps is a federal program administered by the Department of Labor and is the nation's largest residential education and job training program for economically disadvantaged youth. Across the country, at 122 Job Corps facilities, young men and women receive the training and personal support they need to overcome difficult circumstances. Equipped with employable skills and new-found confidence, young people leave Job Corps with the tools necessary for success.

Many lives have been changed through the Job Corps program. I was again able to see the impact the program has on young people this week, when I visited the Flint Hills Job Corps Center in Manhattan. The only Job Corps center in our state, Flint Hills serves approximately 250 students and was ranked last year as one of the top Job Corps centers in the country. I appreciated the opportunity to tour the center, speak with students and learn from staff about the needs of the program. Thanks to Steve Reitan, center director; Johnny Taylor, programs director; Tauna Spain, business community liaison; and members of the Community Relations Council who were in attendance, including Dr. Dee McKee, Paul Fleener, Ed Klimek and Manhattan Mayor Mark Hatesohl. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

In Support of Providing Health Care and Ensuring Healthy Kansas Kids

The House passed a bipartisan bill this week that provides health care coverage for low-income children through the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The Kansas program operating under HealthWave - the private insurance provider - currently has 39,483 Kansas children enrolled in the program.

Without this legislation, medical costs for the uninsured would be passed on to the local communities, local hospitals and emergency rooms. Also, Kansas citizens would incur higher medical costs and higher insurance premiums due to cost-shifting. [Click here](#) for additional facts on this legislation and to view the list of Kansas organizations that support the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

Speaking with Kansas State University Veterinary Students

This week, I visited with students at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Kansas State University. The college has nationally recognized instructional and research programs that provide a professional standard of veterinary education. During my visit, I was able to discuss with students and faculty the issues facing veterinary medicine and current legislation affecting colleges and universities. I also discussed my efforts to get the U.S. Department of Agriculture to quickly implement a loan forgiveness program that was created by Congress to increase and retain veterinarians in underserved areas. Thanks to Dr. Melinda Wilkerson, Associate Dean of Academic Programs, for hosting my visit.

Touring NanoScale Corporation in Manhattan

On Tuesday, I toured NanoScale Corporation in Manhattan to visit with company leaders. NanoScale Corporation originally operated as a self-funded advanced research facility focusing on government sponsored programs. Today the corporation markets, commercializes, and manufactures products to meet a variety of customers' needs.

Thanks to the Aaron Madison for setting up my tour and to the NanoScale Corporation employees for participating in my visit.

Visiting with Staff and Students at Head Start in Hiawatha

It is important that every child enters our school system on the right path for educational success. On Thursday morning, I visited the North East Kansas Community Action Program (NEKAP) Head Start in Hiawatha. The Head Start programs in Nemaha and Marshall counties are part of NEKAP. Head Start prepares children for school by enhancing their social and cognitive development through the provision of educational, health, nutritional and social services to children and their parents. During my visit, we discussed provisions that may be included in the pending stimulus legislation that would provide additional funding for Head Start. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with the students, teachers and the staff. Thank you to director, Lu Hangle, for inviting me. [Click here to view photos of my visit.](#)

Touring Horton Community Hospital

On Thursday, I visited the Horton Community Hospital in Horton. Horton Community Hospital provides health care services to the community by operating a rural health clinic, a pharmacy, an outpatient clinic, medical equipment clinic and a health and wellness center. During my visit, I was able to talk with the hospital staff about some of their recent concerns with the health care industry.

Thanks to Dale White, CEO of Horton Community Hospital, for giving me a tour of the facility. I enjoyed visiting with him and Larry Arthur, the CEO of the company that owns the hospital, about the challenges of providing care in rural areas and learning about the future expansion plans of the hospital. Also thanks to the Mayor of Horton, Tim Lentz; Joey Montes, president of the Horton Chamber of Commerce; R.J. Wilson, former State Representative; and Tom Bell, Kansas Hospital Association for participating in the tour.

Visiting with Business Leaders at the Kansas Chamber of Commerce Annual Reception

This week, I attended the Kansas Chamber of Commerce Annual Reception and Dinner in Topeka. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with business leaders from across Kansas about current issues affecting our state. I was able to discuss economic development opportunities, the economic stimulus plan and health care reform with some of the Chamber members.

During the event, Cobalt Boats of Neodesha, a successful and privately owned business, was given the "Ad Astra Award" from the Kansas Chamber of Commerce. Thanks to Amy Blankenbiller, president of the Kansas Chamber, for inviting me.

Visits in Topeka

Board of Regents: I met with Reggie Robinson, the president and CEO of the Kansas Board of Regents, when I visited Topeka this week. The Kansas Board of Regents is made up of nine members, who are all appointed by the Governor. The members of the board oversee issues that affect education and serve on various committees that address higher education issues. Thanks to Kip Peterson with the Board of Regents, who also took time to meet with me.

Kansas State Capitol: Also while in Topeka, I visited the Kansas State Capitol. During my visit, I had an opportunity to talk with Senator Mark Taddiken who represents District 21 and serves on a Senate Committee that oversees state prison closings. I discussed my opposition to closing the Stockton Correctional Facility, located in Rooks County. I also talked to a group visiting the capitol that was from Stockton and who shared my support in keeping the Stockton facility open. Thanks to Sen. Taddiken for talking with me.

Annual Listening Tour Continues

This week, I made stops in Nemaha and Lincoln counties for my town hall tours. During the town halls, I was able to explain my concerns with the economic spending bill, and why I did not support it.

Residents are invited to attend the town halls to share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule to see where I have been.](#)

In the Office

Howard Blankenship of Olathe was in with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association to visit with me about FAA reauthorization. Eileen Arnhold of Dorrance, Judy Smith of Muscotah, Randy Caprez of Russell, Janet Harness of Troy, Judy Raney of Lawrence, Elaine Montgomery of Effingham and Tamara Pruchazke of Assaria were in with the Kansas League of Postmasters to tell me about proposals that would help the Postal Service meet its financial obligations during the recession.

Gina Bowman of Kansas City was in with CVR Energy to discuss the status of CVR's refinery and fertilizer production facility in Coffeyville, Kansas. Kara Cunningham of Baldwin City and Judi O'Grady of Eudora were in with Curesearch to talk about the need to fund childhood cancer research. Mike Oxford of Lawrence was in with the Topeka Independent Living Center to visit with me about providing in-home services for the disabled. Jeffrey Black of Junction City was in with Junction City Economic Development to talk about current development projects in the Junction City area.

Rick Cagan of Lawrence, Rhonda Moreland of Americus and Sharon Mason of Overland Park were in with the National Alliance for Mental Illness Kansas to discuss how budget cuts would impact services for those struggling with mental illness. Mark Farr of Nickerson, Verlean Brown of Wichita and Todd Roberts of Emporia were in with the Kansas National Education Association to talk about funding priorities in the economic stimulus bill. Sunee Mickle of Topeka was in with Blue Cross/ Blue Shield of Kansas to tell me about a new insurance policy being introduced that is designed to keep costs low and provide Kansans with increased access to insurance.

Emil Ramirez, Mike Jones and David Agnew of Topeka and Nancy Jackson and Eileen Horn of Lawrence were in with the Kansas Blue-Green Alliance to talk about opportunities to bring new manufacturing jobs associated with the renewable energy industry to Kansas. Sandy Pickert, Karen Rogers and Ruth Wetta-Hall of Wichita were in with

Abstinence Education, Inc. to discuss the effectiveness of abstinence education programs.

Jim Edwards and Cynthia Lutz Kelly of Topeka, Keith Becker of Galva, Rodney Roush of Stafford, John Scheopner of Garden City, Rod Stewart of Washington and Mary Trickle of Salina were in with the Kansas Association of School Boards to tell me about how the economic downturn is negatively affecting the financial decisions of local schools. Dr. Maria Pena and Sidonie Welsh of Kansas City were in with the American Burn Association to talk about funding for burn victims to receive treatment and burn research. Charlie Griffin of Manhattan was in with Kansas State University to visit.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive tours of the United States Capitol including Vaughn Grizzle, Rachel Cunningham, Dawn Johnson, Denis Goble and Cliff Dungy of Wichita. Steven and Susan Layton of McPherson and John and Liz Scheopner of Garden City and their grandchildren Trevor Scheopner of Wichita and Emilee Ellis of Holcomb were also in for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry