

## 3/02/2009 This Week in Congress

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March 2, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Visiting with a Kansas Military Hero

This week, I attended the President's State of the Budget speech. President Obama delivered his speech to a Joint Session of Congress on Tuesday night. During his address, the President laid out his economic priorities for the year, which included a focus on energy, education and health care.

I was honored to have Army Sgt. Ryan Newell as my guest. Sgt. Newell grew up in Goddard, Kansas and has served tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Last year in Afghanistan, an improvised explosive device (IED) exploded beneath his armored Humvee. The attack caused Sgt. Newell to lose both legs. For the past 12 months he has been recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and has learned to walk again on prosthetic legs.

Sgt. Newell expects to leave Walter Reed in the coming months for Marion County, Kansas to live with his wife and children. I was honored to be able to talk with him and am grateful for his service to our country. His actions and his attitude are an inspiration. I wish him and his family the best of luck as they return to Kansas. [Click here to view a photo.](#)

### Announcing a Military and Veterans Advisory Committee

This week, I announced the formation of a Military and Veterans Advisory Committee that is made of Kansas leaders with expertise in military and veteran issues. The members of the Committee will assist me with issues that affect service members, veterans, Kansas military installations and communities. This Committee will provide me with advice and insight to make sure that our state's military and veterans have a strong voice in Washington. As we approach the next few years, Kansas will face many challenges and opportunities, such as the possible transfer of Guantanamo detainees to Ft. Leavenworth and the continued growth at Ft. Riley. Having this Committee will ensure that these important issues are addressed properly.

The Committee includes the following:

- Robert Arter, Lansing. Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (retired). Arter served as a Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army.

- Rhonda Edens, Benton. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (retired). Edens supported veterans for over 30 years at the Dole VA Medical Center in Wichita.

- Mark Edwards, Junction City. Edwards served as a Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army.

- Tom Fryer, Manhattan. Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force (retired).

- Gene Heiman, Garden City. Korean War Veteran, U.S. Army. Heiman served as a past State Commander of the American Legion.

- Richard F. Keller, Leavenworth. Lieutenant General, U.S. Army (retired). Keller is the outgoing President of the Military Officers Association for Kansas (MOAA).

- Gary LaGrange, Manhattan. Colonel, U.S. Army (retired). LaGrange is the President of the Military Officers Association for Kansas (MOAA) and Coordinator for Help us Learn...Give us Hope.

- Richard B. Myers. General, U.S. Air Force (retired). Prior to his retirement, General Myers was our nation's highest-ranking military officer serving as the 15th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Myers joined the Air Force in 1965 through the ROTC program at Kansas State University.

- Robert R. Ulin, Lansing. Colonel, U.S. Army (retired). Ulin is the Co-Founder and CEO of the Command and General Staff College Foundation, Inc.

- Dave Warnken, Hutchinson. Navy Seabees. Warnken is currently serving on the Kansas Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee and as a National Executive Committeeman of Kansas for the American Legion. He is a Past State Commander of the American Legion and is also a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

#### Fiscal Responsibility Working Group

This week, I joined with members of the House and Senate in a press conference to announce the House-Senate Fiscal Responsibility Working Group. The group was developed in order to examine how the President and his administration will spend the massive \$787 billion spending package passed by the Congress. During current economic conditions, as families and businesses are experiencing financial challenges, the government cannot afford to spend taxpayers' dollars irresponsibly. Fiscal responsibility needs to be an important component of the spending package. I am glad to be participating in the effort that will monitor how American taxpayers' dollars are spent. [Click here for photos of the press conference.](#)

The Members of Congress who attended the press conference to announce their participation with the Working Group included: Senator John Thune (SD), Senator John Cornyn (TX), Senator Johnny Isakson (GA), Congressman Eric Cantor (VA), Congressman Paul Ryan (WI), Congressman Jeb Hensarling (TX), Congressman Darrell Issa (CA) and Congressman Kevin Brady (TX).

#### Opposing Changes to Farm Policy in President's Budget

This week, President Obama released his budget proposal. The proposal stated the President's intention to phase out direct payments to farmers and substantially changes the crop insurance program. Both programs are important tools Kansas farmers use to manage their risks. If the administration is successful in implementing its proposal, it will severely hurt farmers in Kansas and frustrate the very economic recovery the President is promoting.

I oppose these farm policy changes. As rural America faces economic challenges, this is not the time to re-visit debate on the Farm Bill, where farm safety net programs were significantly cut less than one year ago. The President and Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, have taken a position that is out of touch with production agriculture in Kansas.

#### \$410 Billion Omnibus Spending Bill

This week, the House approved a \$410 billion spending bill for foreign and domestic programs. I could not support the bill because it involves a 6.7 percent increase from last year's government spending totals. This bill contains many bills rolled up into one giant bill, and it is difficult to determine what is included in the overall bill. We need more fiscal restraint and responsible government spending, and this bill does not offer either.

#### House Hunger Caucus Learns about Innovation in Agriculture

As a co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I was pleased to hear reports from the Alliance for Abundant Food and Energy at a House Hunger Caucus briefing on Wednesday. The Alliance for Abundant Food and Energy is a coalition of companies and organizations committed to responsibly improving diets and reducing dependence on fossil fuels through agricultural productivity worldwide. Members of the Alliance are leaders in biotechnology research, equipment manufacturing and food processing. Representatives from ADM, DuPont, Monsanto and John Deere spoke to the caucus about how new technology is transforming agriculture to feed more people by increasing crop yields and improving food production.

The developing world has great potential to increase agricultural productivity. Technological innovations in drought- and disease-resistant seeds, farming equipment and infrastructure will allow developing nations to better feed themselves. By empowering farmers in the developing world with new technology, we will reduce the number of hungry people and lift folks out of poverty.

#### Meeting with Kansas Municipal Utility Leaders

On Wednesday, I met with Kansas Municipal Utility leaders from Ottawa, McPherson, Wamego, Newton and Wichita in my Washington, D.C., office. We discussed the adverse impact climate change legislation could have on Kansas municipal utilities, financing of water and wastewater infrastructure projects, electric power wholesale markets and the status of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) repair reimbursements from the December 2007 winter storms. We also discussed the importance of developing baseload power as a means for reliable power supply.

Thanks to Jim Bradley, Director of Utilities for the City of Ottawa; Colin Hansen, Executive Director of Kansas Municipal Utilities of McPherson; Merl Page, City Manager for the City of Wamego; Randy Riggs, City Manager for the City of Newton; and Colin Whitley, General Manager for Kansas Power Pool from Wichita for visiting with me. [Click here to view a photo.](#)

### Attending 3-2-1A State Wrestling Tournament in Hays

On Saturday, I joined thousands of Kansans from across the state at Gross Memorial Coliseum on the campus of Fort Hays State University to watch the 3-2-1A State Wrestling Tournament. Each year, people travel to Hays for the culmination of their wrestling season. Congratulations to all of the participants for their hard work and success. Special congratulations to the Smith Center Redmen and Coach Brock Hutchinson for capturing their third consecutive team state title.

### Enjoying Annual Supper at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Munjor

I joined members of the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church of Munjor for their annual parish supper on Sunday night. Thank you to all who worked to prepare such a wonderful meal. I enjoyed visiting with several friends and community members while there.

### In the Office

Allison Hamm and Jan McLaughlin of Wichita were in with the Friends of Great Plains Nature Center to talk about the importance of wildlife refuges. Vern and Carol Osborne of Saint George came by to tell me about their support for trails and to talk about the economy. Ross Marshall of Merriam was in with the Partnership for National Trails to discuss land management legislation and his support for enhancing the network of national trails.

Ken Gorman of Topeka, James Morton of Dodge City, Rick Mosicki of Wichita and Scott Howard of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Fraternal Order of Police to talk about legislation important to police officers. Mario Velazco of Garden City told me about his business' need for temporary workers. Kenneth Brock, Blake Benson and Mary Beezley of Pittsburg; Jim AuBuchon and Lavern Squier of Overland Park; and Dean Mann and Joe Turner of Fort Scott were in with the Highway 69 Association to discuss the need to finish the widening of US-69 in Kansas to four lanes.

Tom Whitaker of Topeka, Mike Miller of LaCrosse, John Prather of El Dorado and Ken Leicht of Eskridge were in with the American Trucking Association to discuss legislation that addresses highway funding programs. Members of the Kansas Credit Union Association updated me on legislation that affects the financial industry. The group included Troy and Jeanne Miller of Garden City; Jerel Wright and Marla Marsh of Topeka; Jim Holt, John Sherwood, Mike Greene and John Davis of Wichita; Jane Hammil of Great Bend; and Robert Reeves of Manhattan.

Rod Barnes, Jeffrey Black and Sarah Talley of Junction City were in with the City of Junction City to talk about issues important to their community. Michael Boehm, Ashley Sherard and Molly Deckert of Lenexa briefed me on priorities for the City of Lenexa. Scott Henson of Topeka and Deb Ayers-Geist of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals to visit with me about the need to empower principals in order to transform schools.

Michael Byington of Topeka was in with the Kansas Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired to discuss the Pedestrian Safety Enhancement Act. Steve Solomon of Lawrence was in with TFI Family Services to tell me about the need for a national conference to promote and discuss issues that affect child welfare. Sherry McCool of Kansas City was in with Children's Mercy Hospital to discuss funding opportunities for Kansans with Downs Syndrome. Marian Adams of Goddard, a Taxpayer Advocate, came by to discuss problems encountered by taxpayers in Kansas. Donn Teske of Wheaton stopped by to visit.

Doug Byers of Lawrence and Dr. James Guikema of Manhattan came to talk about the National Science Foundation's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) and the National Institutes of Health's Institutional Development Award (IDeA) grants. Funds awarded through these grants have helped further research at the University

of Kansas and Kansas State University. Alisa Hart of Emporia was in with the National Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance to tell me about the need to create awareness and fund research to combat this disease.

Eric Munson and Keith Yehle of Lawrence were in with the University of Kansas to discuss the need for research behind drug development. John Harrington of Manhattan and Dr. Paul Phillips of Hays were in with the Kansas Geographic Alliance to advocate for directing education resources to geography and to share their support for legislation. Troy Schroeder and Brady Butler of Albert came in to tell me about the importance of wildlife grants to Kansas.

Members of the Kansas Chiropractic Association visited with me about increased access to chiropractic services through the President's health care plan and increased chiropractic services for veterans. The group included: Dr. Kenyon Erickson of Manhattan; Dr. Paul Brackeen of Derby; Dr. Travis Oller of Topeka; Dr. Ed McKenzie of Holton; Dr. Steven Gould of Cheney; Mark Wade, Brooke Young, Alan Yoder, Devin Mobley, Rebecca Lindesmith, Kerri Houerton and Larissa Rice of Overland Park; and Kyle Wertin of Lawrence.

Christian and Christine Kraemer of Topeka, David Thompson of Wichita and Jim and Ellen Price of Salina were in with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to visit with me about VA health care funding, mental health treatment and other issues important to disabled veterans. Craig Yaryan of El Dorado, Dave Ingerson of Wichita, A.W. Pickel of Overland Park and Ann Wilkinson of Shawnee were in with the Kansas Association of Mortgage Professionals to talk about changes to appraisal rules and federal housing loan fees. Riley Walters of El Dorado was in with the Butler County Noxious Weed Department to tell me about the importance of noxious weed control. Darin Altenburg of Holton and Captain Michael Utz of Garden City came to discuss the Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center and the Regional Information Sharing Systems.

Steve Johnson of Overland Park was in with ONEOK to discuss the status of a liquid natural gas pipeline that runs from Wyoming to Kansas and is nearing completion. Scott Goshri of Kansas City and Terry Towner of Pittsburg were in with WATCO to visit with me about shortline railroad issues. Doyle Pearl of St. Marys, Tom Tunnell of Topeka, Jerald Kemmerer of Dodge City, Randy Whisenhunt of Hillsboro and Doug Wright of Inman were in with the Agricultural Retailers Association to discuss hours of service issues in an upcoming highway bill and potential changes in environmental regulations. Evan Zarchan of Kansas City and Kristin Anderson of Kansas City also stopped by to visit.

Brady Butler of Albert, Craig Richey and his daughter Katie, Amy Parady and her son Connor, and Ace Matthews of Pittsburg were in my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry