

3/23/2009 This Week in Congress

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March 23, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Supporting VA Health Care Benefits

I joined members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs in opposing the administration's plan to charge veterans' private insurance for care related to service-connected injuries. We should keep our commitment to those who have sacrificed to protect our country. I believe it is the wrong approach to bill veterans for the care they deserve after they have sustained a service-connected injury. Congress has a responsibility to make sure veterans continue to receive the benefits and services they have earned-without the bill attached. [Click here to view my remarks on the House floor.](#)

Attending House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee Hearing

On Thursday, I attended a House Veterans' Affairs subcommittee hearing on rural health care. It is important to make sure rural veterans have the medical care they deserve. During the meeting, I discussed the progress being made to improve access to care for the veterans who live in rural areas. VA services have been brought to these veterans by the establishment of additional VA outpatient clinics, Vet Centers and mobile Vet Centers.

I also discussed implementation of the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, which I introduced and was passed last year. This legislation will allow rural Kansas veterans to participate in a demonstration project to obtain health care in their home communities so that they avoid traveling long distances to VA facilities.

Recovering Taxpayer Money from AIG Employees

I have consistently opposed every stimulus and bailout plan championed by both the Obama and Bush administrations. This week we were reminded why the federal government should not have gone down the bailout route in the first place.

I spoke on the House floor this week only to express my strong disgust to the bonuses AIG granted to high-level executives of the company. I also reminded my fellow Members of Congress that the fault also lies with Congress and the administration. This kind of situation is to be expected when the government intervenes and risks taxpayer dollars into private businesses. It is not a surprise. History has proven that the federal government has little ability to manage private business well.

Later in the week, the House passed legislation seeking a return of the AIG bonuses utilizing the tax code. While I voted in favor of this resolution, it was done to express my outrage at Wall Street's disconnect with the American taxpayer and a message to Treasury Secretary Geithner that we must put accountability in place and protect the taxpayers. The tax code should not have to be used as a weapon against unethical behavior. [Click here to view my remarks on the House floor.](#)

A Nuclear-armed Iran is Unacceptable

I spoke on the floor of the House of Representatives this week to draw attention to the serious threat posed by Iran. Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and is pursuing a nuclear program. Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons threatens Israel, friendly nations in the region and U.S. security interests. No government that calls for the complete destruction of another should be allowed to have nuclear weapons.

I believe appropriate economic, political and diplomatic means are the best tools we have to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. A nuclear-armed Iran is unacceptable. While there are problems at home that require attention, we must not waiver in our efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. [Click here to view my remarks.](#)

Attending Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee Meeting

On Wednesday, I participated in a Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Aviation hearing on the modernization effort for Air Traffic Control. The committee heard from several witnesses about short term goals that can be achieved. The Federal Aviation Administration has a severe need to update their antiquated equipment that they use to make sure our skies are safe. I will continue to support measures that modernize our air traffic control facilities.

Visiting with AgriTalk Radio in Washington, D.C.

This week, AgriTalk Radio broadcast their daily radio show from the House Agriculture Committee room in Washington, D.C. AgriTalk is a talk radio program for rural America and agriculture. I stopped by to talk with the host, Mike Adams, during his live radio program. We talked about the President's proposed budget for agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency's recent proposed regulations and other issues pertaining to agriculture in America.

Thanks to Mike Adams and John Herath, AgriTalk producer, for inviting me on the show. [Click here to view a photo of me talking to Mike.](#)

Presenting Medals to Special Olympic Athletes in Hays

On Saturday, I joined athletes, parents and volunteers at the annual Special Olympics Basketball and Cheerleading Competition at the Gross Memorial Coliseum in Hays. The annual event draws hundreds of athletes and teams to compete in the state event. Following the competition, I was able to present the medals to the competing athletes and teams.

Since 1968, Special Olympics has empowered individuals with disabilities and given them confidence to face challenges in their daily lives. Through Special Olympics, athletes develop improved physical fitness and motor skills, greater self confidence and a more positive self image.

I was honored to be able to take part in an event that brings much deserved reward to its participants. Congratulations to all of the athletes who participated in Saturday's events. Thank you to Sheila Rehder for inviting me to participate. [Click here for photos.](#)

Annual Listening Tour Continues in the Big First

I added the following upcoming town hall tour stops to my annual listening tour schedule this week. These town hall meetings help me stay in touch with Kansans and learn about issues important to them.

Monday, April 6

Gray County Tour Stop, Cimarron

Time: 4:00 to 5:00 PM

Location: Public Library, upstairs meeting room

Address: 120 N. Main Street

Monday, April 13

Norton County Tour Stop, Norton

Time: 1:15 to 2:15 PM

Location: Public Library

Address: 1 Washington Square (downtown Norton along U.S. Hwy. 283)

Decatur County Tour Stop, Oberlin

Time: 3:00 to 4:00 PM

Location: Gateway Civic Center

Address: 1 Morgan (intersection of Hwy. 36 and Hwy. 83)

Cheyenne County Tour Stop, St. Francis

Time: 7:00 to 7:30 PM

Location: Church of Christ, Meeting Room

Address: 502 W. Spencer

Residents are invited to attend and share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here to view the complete listening tour schedule and the areas I have already visited this year.](#)

In the Office

Cindy Eschliman of Hutchinson was in with Ecumenical Advocacy Days to express support for children's health care programs. John Ward of McPherson was in with Foods Resource Bank to update me on the organization's various projects that help feed hungry people in the developing world. Miriam Glueck of Leawood and Michael Lerner of Overland Park were in with AIPAC to advocate for continued support for Israel. Ottawa City Commissioners Blake Jorgensen, Rocky Fleeer and Sara Humm and Kelly Jorgensen of Ottawa were in with the City of Ottawa to talk about their city's priorities.

John Kaul of Clay Center and Larry Hopkins of Topeka were in with the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials to talk about the importance of affordable housing. Members of the University of Kansas Student Senate were in to discuss student loans, study abroad legislation and the challenges posed by the rising cost of higher education. Kansas members of the group included Alyson Rodee and Adam McGonigle of Wichita, Michael Gray

of Buhler, Mandy Shriwise of Overland Park, Allison Zeigler of Lawrence, and Michael Gillaspie of Ashland.

Bob Wing, Dan Porter and Tom Kanatzar of Kansas City; Nathan Coffman and Brandon Holloman of Lawrence; and Matt Jackson of Junction City were in with the Kansas State Council of Fire Fighters to inform me of several issues important to fire fighters. Bob Johnson and Mark Mergen of Leawood, Doug Vance of Topeka, Betty Zeka of Hutchinson and Michael Meadors of Shawnee Mission Park were in with the Kansas Recreation and Park Association to tell me about the many roles recreation and parks play in our communities. Diane Gerstad and Rev. Kevan Harding of Wichita were in with Wichita Public Schools to update me on how stimulus funding will impact their school district.

Marla Staab of Hays was in with the American Speech Language Hearing Association to advocate for the need to provide follow up for newborn screenings and about student loan forgiveness for those professionals who work in underserved areas. Connie Richmeier of Garden City was in with National Conservation District Employees Association to tell me about the work of conservation districts in Kansas. Mike Stamm, Vic Martin and Gary Pierzynski of Manhattan; John Haas of Larned; and Bill Heer of Hutchinson were in with the U.S. Canola Association to update me on winter canola research and development of the canola industry in Kansas.

Lee Thaete of Overland Park and Sandy Braden of Topeka were in with the National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors of Kansas to share their thoughts on insurance tax incentives, health care reform and insurance regulation. I met with Kansas National Guard leaders to discuss military construction priorities and disaster response. In with the group were Major General Tod Bunting and Max Miller of Topeka, Brigadier General Ed Flora and Richard Fisher of Wichita, Dallas McMullen of Manhattan, Tracy Vanstory of Maple Hill and Colonel Jeff Jordan of Salina.

Harold Baalman of Wichita and John Duncan of Topeka were in with the Mid-America Lumbermen's Association to visit with me about the Innocent Sellers Fairness Act and other issues affecting lumberyards in Kansas. Barth Crouch and Kathleen Hargis of Salina and Rob Manes of Ellsworth were in with Playa Lakes Joint Venture to discuss wildlife conservation efforts in Kansas, including efforts to preserve the lesser prairie chicken. Abilene Mayor Lynn Peterson, City Manager Allen Dinkel and City Commissioner Judy Burgess of Abilene were in with the City of Abilene to update me on the city's priorities.

Brandon Wilson of Lyndon, Ernie Battin of Syracuse, Marsha Gerstner of Great Bend, Sean Safferty of Wichita, Myron Stroup of Fontana and Darin Slack of Oakley were in with the Kansas Association of County Office Employees to inform me of how Farm Service Agency employees are assisting Kansas farmers and how that service could be improved if the House Agriculture Committee considers USDA modernization. Rod Kreie and Amber Kissell of Ulysses and Rocio Crosetto, a Rotary Exchange Student from Argentina studying in Ulysses, stopped by to visit.

Kim Parker of Wichita was in with the National District Attorneys Association to discuss the benefits of a national training program for prosecuting attorneys and a student loan forgiveness program for attorneys who choose to enter public service. Tom Herald of Manhattan; Paul Kerens of Leawood; Charles and Jean Popelka of Munden; and Lisa Weakley, Scott Miller, Ken Bower and Andrea Adkins of Leavenworth stopped by to visit.

Manhattan Mayor Mark Hatesohl, Jim Sherow, Ron Fehr and Lauren Palmer of Manhattan were in with the City of Manhattan to tell me about the newest developments in their city. Ryan Branfort, Ron Drake and Scott Perkins of Salina and Doug Leibberandt of Mission were in with MAPPS to talk to me about legislation to improve the Federal Aviation Administration. Roy Myose of Bel Aire and Bob Stuever of Colwich were in with the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics to discuss funding for math and science.

Several Kansans were in my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Joe, Joyce, Lundee and Kolton Beck of Clay Center; Javier and Michelle Ahumada and Darren, Laura, Tanner and Colton Brennan of Topeka; Bradley, Natalie, Jane, Sheldon and Brooklyn Wiens of Hillsboro; and Neal, Anita, Kyle, Joni and Jeff Buller of Inman.

In from Goodland were Patrick, Lisa, Jeffery, Matthew and Levi House and Brett Messinger. Mike, Jacob, Tyler and Joe Kongs of Washington were in our nation's capital to visit their daughter Ashley who is serving as an intern in my D.C. office. While in Washington, the Kongs family took a tour of the Capitol. Cy and Gladys Moyer of Phillipsburg were also in for a tour with their grandchildren Sarah Moyer of Emporia and Michaela Moyer of Borger, Texas.

Also receiving tours this week were Doug Reed and Jodee Rummel of Oakley; Gene and Tyler McIntosh of Iola; Rob Farwell of Manhattan, Yesenia Garcia of Ulysses, Merlin and Cameron Reece of Sawyer; Drew Miller of Neodesha; and Clint, Dimity and Hayden Rogers of Ellsworth. In from Hays were Dustin, Kristy, Mattison and Keaton Schlaefli and Dr. Jerold Akers.

I was also happy to assist several folks who do not live in Kansas with Capitol tours, including Bruce Lisner and Devota DeMarce of Virginia, Michael Akers of Texas and Steve McIntosh of Virginia.

Very truly yours,

Jerry