

3/30/2009 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

March 30, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Introducing Legislation to Improve U.S. Trade with Cuba

This week, I introduced legislation to improve the ability of U.S. producers to market food and agriculture commodities to Cuba. This legislation, the Agricultural Export Facilitation Act of 2009, will remove barriers for cash sales of U.S. agricultural products to Cuba.

Cuba is an important market for U.S. agriculture. As the current economy is placing new hardships on our producers, this is an opportune time to encourage the United States to change its trade policies toward Cuba.

For U.S. agricultural representatives engaging in sales and transport-related activities with Cuba, this legislation will eliminate delays and denials for obtaining licenses to travel to Cuba. It will also allow Cuban officials to obtain visas for meetings with prospective U.S. exporters and for conducting sanitary and phytosanitary inspections of U.S. agriculture facilities. Finally, H.R. 1737 permits direct payments between Cuban and U.S. financial institutions.

Ninth "Partners in Conservation" Tour

This week, I announced my ninth "Partners in Conservation" tour to learn more about conservation and environmental quality efforts in Kansas. The tour will take place in Reno, Marion, McPherson and Saline counties and will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, April 7 and 8.

I have held regular conservation tours during my time in Congress to study conservation practices in various parts of the state. This year's tour will focus on a variety of conservation issues important to Kansas including water and soil conservation practices, wildlife habitat protection, grazing lands management, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and preservation of wetlands.

Kansans have a vested interest in the wise use of our natural resources because we depend on them to make a living. The conservation tour is an opportunity to learn how private landowners, conservation groups and government programs are partnering to protect Kansas' environment. The public is invited to join the tour on either day.

[Click here for details on the agenda and for more information.](#)

Attending House Committee Meetings

House Veterans' Affairs Committee: On Wednesday, I attended a House Veterans' Affairs Committee meeting that considered several bills. During the meeting, we discussed measures to ensure payments to qualified veterans. We also discussed annual cost-of-living adjustments for veterans and their family members who receive disability, dependency and indemnity compensation payments. The committee passed an amendment to legislation that will better address the needs of homeless women veterans. We need to continue to ensure that our veterans are provided the benefits they deserve.

Agriculture Subcommittee Hearing: I also attended a hearing held by the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy, and Research on Wednesday. The hearing was held to review the USDA administration of conservation program contracts. Recently an audit was conducted of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that showed some administrative deficiencies within the agency. The hearing gave Members the opportunity to discuss the audit and what the Department of Agriculture was doing to improve operations.

Also, the hearing gave me an opportunity to question the Farm Service Agency (FSA) about a recent proposal to require farms to sign a waiver that will allow FSA to obtain tax information from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to determine farm program payment eligibility. I expressed my concern to administration officials about FSA having access to sensitive tax information and whether the information would be appropriate to properly determine compliance.

I asked FSA officials about whether the agency was planning a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) general sign-up in 2009 to allow some of the CRP contracts that expire on September 30, 2009, to remain in the program. FSA indicated it would not hold a general sign-up, but was considering a potential one-year extension that would allow a larger general

sign-up in 2010. I will continue to encourage FSA to announce its final decision as soon as possible to allow producers to make informed decisions about expiring CRP contracts.

Announcing Tribute to Hays Army Veteran

The Army Reserve Center in Hays will be named in honor of First Sergeant Robert L. Kuhn for his service to his country and community. First Sergeant Kuhn passed away last April after 32 years of distinguished military service. I joined several of First Sergeant Kuhn's fellow Army Reservists and members of the community in making a request to memorialize the facility in his name. The facility will soon be known as the First Sergeant Robert L. Kuhn United States Army Reserve Center.

First Sergeant Kuhn was drafted to serve in Vietnam in 1969 where he earned a Bronze Star. He remained on active or reserve military status for a total of 32 years before retiring from the Army. For 28 years, First Sergeant Kuhn was a teacher and coach at Hays High School. He also served as a member of the USD #489 School Board and in various other community groups. This tribute to First Sergeant Kuhn will memorialize the devotion he practiced to his country, state and local community.

Annual Listening Tour Continues

I will continue my Annual Listening tour over the next few weeks with stops in Gray, Norton, Decatur and Cheyenne counties. During each town hall, I am able to listen to the concerns of Kansans and take that information back with me to Washington, D.C.

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

Thursday, April 9, 2009

Mitchell County Tour Stop, Beloit

Time: 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.

Location: Hilltop Lodge Assisted Living Facility

Room: Dining Room

Address: 815 N. Independence Avenue

Cloud County, Glasco

Time: 10:15 to 11:15 a.m.

Location: The Corner Store

Address: 129 E. Main

Ottawa County, Minneapolis

Time: 12:30 to 1 p.m.

Location: VFW Post 3201

Address: 311 W. 2nd Street (south side of 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 the town halls to share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule and to see where I have already stopped this year.](#)

Attending the Kansas Prayer Breakfast

On Friday morning, I joined members of the Kansas legislature and other Kansans at the annual Kansas Prayer Breakfast in Topeka. For 48 years, state and community leaders have come together to experience the comfort and encouragement that comes from prayer. In addition to prayer, scripture readings and music, we heard from the Honorable Tony Hall, the U.S. Ambassador to United Nations for Food and Agriculture. The Prayer Breakfast, sponsored by Topeka Fellowship Inc., has always been a good opportunity for folks to come together to recognize the power of prayer.

In the Office

Lou Ann Kibbee and Jennifer Martinson of Hays, Shannon Jones of Topeka and Don Dew of Gorham were in with SKIL of Western Kansas to tell me about legislation that would help individuals with disabilities live more independently. Jane Kelly of Topeka and Judy Bellome of Lawrence were in with the Kansas Home Care Association to talk about home care services in rural areas. Kathy Sikes of Wichita was in with the Alzheimer's Association's Central and Western Kansas Office to advocate for increased funding for research.

Mohammad Amawi of Dodge City was in with the Joint Surgical Advocacy Conference to talk about the need for Medicare to adequately reimburse surgeons. Nick Zerr of Grainfield and Suzanne Campbell of Liberal were in with the American Society of Clinical Laboratory Scientists to tell me about the potential shortage of laboratory workers in our health care system. Vicki and Cody Howe of Hanston, Peggy Marlar of Emporia and Karl Koob of Kansas City were in with the American Health Information Management Association to discuss the need to update medical codes.

Tommie Marie Cassen of Lawrence and Ginnie Job of Leawood were in with the Immune Deficiency Foundation to discuss the need for Medicare to fully cover home infusion treatments. Lynne Brown of Leawood and Rob Johnson of Mission were in with the American Stroke Foundation to tell me about the important post-rehabilitative work they are doing for stroke victims. Also in Washington, D.C., this week was the Kansas Federation of Republican Women (KFRW). In with the group were Brenda and Linda Smith of Salina, Becky Johnson of Parker, Alberta Brinkman of Emporia and Denise Byrd of Overland Park.

Linda Gronewaller of Hutchinson was in with Prairie Star Health Center to discuss the impact that the dental program is making in the community. Cathy Harding, Bryan Brady, Connie Hubbell and Carol Ramirez of Topeka; Verneda Robinson and Jimmy Brown of Kansas City; Suzanne Schwartz of Wichita; and Mary Miles of Great Bend were in with the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved to visit with me about successful programming, Medicaid payments and the continued need for community health centers in Kansas.

Chris Habben of Wichita was in with the American Association of Family Therapy to talk about the role of marriage and family therapists in the VA, Medicare and schools. Sandy Barnett of Topeka was in with Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence to visit with me about funding domestic violence programs. Tom and Shelly Lippert of Hays, Milo Smith of Clearwater, Sherry Jones of Mulvane, Karol Pykiet of Conway Springs, Judy Wasko of Hanston and Linda Fuller of Wichita were in with the National Association of Postmasters of the United States to talk about legislation important to U.S. Postal Service employees.

Dr. Mo Hosni of Manhattan was in with the Kansas State University Nuclear Engineering Department to give me an update on the Big XII Engineering Consortium and the ways nuclear science affects our everyday lives. Clint Tyler of Sawyer, Dan Brenn of Colby and Dale Hayse of Mullinville were in with the National Groundwater Association to visit with me about the important role groundwater plays in Kansas and about how using groundwater in heat pumps can contribute to the use of renewable energy in Kansas homes.

Steve Hunt, Tracey Thomas and Scott Shearer of Kansas City were in with U.S. Premium Beef to visit about the current status of U.S. Premium Beef and National Beef Packing Company and the where the companies are headed in the future. Debbie Berkley, Rebekah Fitzpatrick, Bianca Martinez, Michelle Hernandez, Noe Garcia Mendoza and Miguel Angel Ramos of Garden City were in with the Garden City Community College TRIO program to visit.

Larry Sevier and Rhonda Goddard of Lenora were in with Rural Telephone to discuss stimulus funding for rural broadband deployment. Tom Thull of Topeka was in with the Office of the State Bank Commissioner to visit with me about their work with Kansas banks. Mike Armstrong of Lenexa and Jim Epp of Kansas City were in with WaterOne to discuss the need for our country to invest in water infrastructure.

Jeff Turner, Debbie Gann and Brian Black of Wichita were in with Spirit Aerosystems to give me an update on how the economy is affecting their company. Randy Riggs, Mickey Fornaro-Dean, Jim Nickel and Kevin Pouch of Newton and Troy Carlson of Lenexa were in with the Newton City Commissioners to share their plans for an economic development opportunity. Charlie Fletcher and Victor White of Wichita were in with the Wichita Airport Board to talk about the new terminal project at Mid-Continent Airport in Wichita.

Rick Wienckowski, Chairman of the Board-Elect of the Topeka Chamber of Commerce; Coleen Jennison, Topeka Chamber of Commerce board member; Topeka City Manager and CEO Norton Bonaparte, Shawnee County Commissioner Vic Miller, Topeka City Council Representative John Alcalá, and Topeka City Council Representative Deborah Swank were in with the City of Topeka to discuss stimulus funding, the economy and its impact on Topeka, and how different pieces of legislation before the Congress would affect the city.

Annette Karr of McPherson was in to advocate for legislation creating a U.S. Department of Peace dedicated to providing nonviolent solutions to domestic and international conflict. Michael Nuffer and Sidney Ziegler of Lawrence; Wess Gaylon, Carl Harris, Thomas and Kurt Baalman, Don Klausmeyer, John McKay and M.S. Mitchell of Wichita; and Farrol Brown

of Pretty Prairie were in with the Kansas Building Industry Association to brief me on the housing economy in Kansas, financing for housing production, and housing tax incentives. Chester Daniel, Frank Chappell and Trish Thelen of Wichita were in with the Urban League of Kansas to talk about their efforts in education, workforce development, housing and economic development in Kansas.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Jeff, Charity, Emma, Annie, Alice, Eden and Wyatt Bathurst and Lydia Cooper of Abilene; Dusty Zerr of Grainfield; Nickolet Cox of Hoxie; Randall and Blake Allen of Topeka; and Linda Gronewaller of Hutchinson. Students from Concordia High School also received a tour this week. In with the group were Elisa Gerard, Nathan Sicard, Luke Miranda, Carson Timmons, Cassie Lowell, Megan LaBarge, Kasey Gumm, Corey Timmons and Kaylee Conwell of Concordia.

A group of students from Lakeside-Downs High School were in for a tour this week as well. In with the group were Jodi and Adrienne Koops, Sydney Doane, Vanessa Trotter and Charlene and Cory Beougher of Downs; Cory Frasier, Olivia Aramendi, Nick Weeks, Cassidey Storer and Taylor Wiese of Cawker City; Sara Winkel of Glen Elder; and Mariah Wiles of Hunter. Also receiving tours this week were Tom and Shelly Lippert of Hays, Linda Fuller of Wichita, Cal and Tam Jost of Hillsboro, Lane and Linda Dyck of Abilene and Paul and Deborah Joseph of Garden City.

Very truly yours,

Jerry