

4/13/2009 This Week in Congress

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April 13, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you and your family had an enjoyable Easter. This is the second week of the spring district work period, so I will continue to travel around Kansas conducting town hall meetings as part of my annual Listening Tour. Congress will be back in session on April 20. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Celebrating Easter and Attending Messiah Performance in Lindsborg

On Easter Sunday, I was invited to attend the performance of Handel's Messiah at Bethany College in Lindsborg. The first ever Messiah performance was performed on April 12, 1742, in the Music Hall in Dublin, Ireland. Pioneers who founded Lindsborg established the Bethany Oratorio Society, or the Messiah chorus, to honor the musical tradition. Since March 28, 1882, the group has traditionally performed Messiah in Lindsborg. The annual performance is the longest annual consecutive performance of Messiah in North America and was called "The Oberammergau of the Plains," by Readers' Digest magazine in the 1940s. The group has performed Messiah across Kansas, in Carnegie Hall and on national television.

Congratulations to the performers and directors for their hard work in putting together a successful performance. Thanks to Dr. Edward Leonard, III, president of Bethany, for inviting me to attend the show.

Needing to Reform the Tax Code

Recently, I gave a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives about the need to fix the tax code. Americans are approaching one of the most dreaded days of the year, Tax Day. In my speech, I asked Congress for an overhaul.

The tax code is complex, confusing and burdensome to taxpayers. It is impeding our nation's potential for economic growth. Instead of tax simplification and tax relief, Americans this year are again facing the same broken system that increases their taxes to pay for more spending. Kansans are upset with massive government spending that increases our national debt at a time when most American families are forced to tighten their belts and make tough choices. We desperately need a better tax system. [Click here to watch my speech.](#)

On April 15, over 300 Tax Day tea parties are planned across the country, many of them in Kansas. Hopefully, this Tax Day will serve as a reminder for Congress and the Administration to put the taxpayer first, to spend less and to create a tax system that is simple, fair and efficient.

Ninth Annual Conservation Tour Held in Central Kansas

On Tuesday and Wednesday, I held my ninth annual "Partners in Conservation" tour to learn more about conservation and environmental efforts in Kansas. The protection of our natural resources is an issue every Kansan should care about. The conservation tour provides me the opportunity to learn how private landowners, conservation groups and government programs are partnering to protect the environment.

During the two day tour, we traveled through Reno, Marion, McPherson and Saline Counties. The tour began on Tuesday discussing the Conservation Reserve Program. A variety of prescribed burning techniques were described along with an explanation of the effort of landowners and fire districts to ensure a safe and proper burn.

The second stop on the tour was near Peabody on Fred Berns' ranch where Fred, Ted Alexander and Mike Collinge shared the benefits of using fire as a range management tool. They explained that not only does fire control invasive species and allow for new growth of native grasses - which can lead to greater weight gain in cattle - but it is an element that for centuries has naturally occurred in the Flint Hills. Thanks to the Berns family for hosting the tour and lunch at their ranch.

We made another visit in Marion County at Marion Reservoir where the focus was on water quality. During this part of the tour, I learned that the presence of blue-green algae and anoxic levels of water have an impact on the quality of the public water supply for both Hillsboro and Marion. We were joined by the Army Corps of Engineers, Tulsa District, as we discussed the monitoring and remediation practices that are being conducted at the lake. Before departing, Doug Spencer, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Rangeland Management Specialist, demonstrated one of NRCS' mobile offices. These technologically equipped vehicles allow NRCS staff the ability to provide on-site service to farmers and ranchers.

Later that day, in McPherson County, Baron Shively, NRCS District Conservationist, lead our tour to a field that implemented parallel grass strips to reduce soil erosion and help keep moisture in the field. He also showed the tour a

subsurface drip irrigation (SDI) system. Baron described the SDI process and the differences from traditional flood irrigation, including water and energy conservation.

The last stop on Tuesday was at the McPherson Valley Uplands Youth Outdoor Life Center where Mike Westerman took us on a walking tour of the facility. The purpose of the habitat is to provide youth the opportunity to learn, observe and participate in wildlife and natural resources conservation activities, as well as a site for hands-on hunter safety education. McPherson Valley Uplands, Inc., was founded by the McPherson Area Pheasants Forever Chapter through the contributions of the National Cooperative Refinery Association.

The second day began Wednesday morning at the farm of Larry and Edie Dahlsten near Lindsburg. In 2006, the Dahlsten's, with the help of NRCS, the Kansas Alliance of Wetlands and Streams, the Kansas Water Office, the State Conservation Commission, KSU Research and Extension and the McPherson County Conservation District, worked to stabilize a portion of the Smokey Hill River bank where stream bank erosion was occurring. After establishing seven weirs, the Dahlsten's were able to secure the bank, improve water quality and better guarantee the future of their land.

Another conservation practice the Dahlsten's have adopted is the practice of no-till farming. They have made a smooth transition to this practice without experiencing a lag in crop yields. The Dahlsten's explained that since switching to no-till nine years ago, no-till has improved soil structure and fertility, increased water available to growing crops, reduced soil erosion and decreased input costs. Not only is no-till a useful conservation practice, but it can help farmers become more profitable.

The conservation tour ended at the City County Building in Salina Wednesday afternoon. Martha Tesker, Director of Utilities in Saline County, spoke about the efforts the county has made to ensure safe and adequate water to the county. As the watershed throughout the state has been reducing, the county has begun to look at future conservation measures that will continue to provide the county with adequate water.

Thanks to everyone who participated and joined the tour, especially Eric Banks, NRCS Kansas State Conservationist; Mary Shaffer, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist; Jack Salava, Farm Service Agency (FSA) Acting Kansas State Executive Director; Rod Winkler, FSA Program Specialist; Barth Crouch, Playa Lakes Joint Venture; Tim Christian, Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition; Traci Robb, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Martha Tasker, City of Salina Director of Utilities, for helping to schedule and coordinate the tour. I would also like to thank David Munden, Fred Burns and family, Larry and Edie Dahlsten, for allowing me and the others on the tour the opportunity to visit their farms and observe their conservation efforts. [Click here to see photos from the tour.](#)

Continuing Annual Listening Tour in the Big First

This week, I was in Gray, Mitchell, Cloud and Ottawa Counties holding town hall meetings. Today, I will be visiting Norton, Decatur, Rawlins and Cheyenne Counties at the following locations:

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)

Rawlins County Tour Stop, Atwood

Time: 4:30 to 5:30 PM

Location: Rawlins County High School, Auditorium

Address: 100 N. 8th

Cheyenne County Tour Stop, St. Francis

Time: 7:00 to 7:30 PM

Location: Church of Christ, Meeting Room

Address: 502 W. Spencer

In each town hall this week, I discussed the concerns that I have with the trillion dollar budget just passed in the House of Representatives and my reasons for opposing it.

On Thursday, April 16, 2009, I will be in Colby at the Colby/Thomas County Chamber of Commerce meeting room, 350 S. Range Suite 10, from 8:30 to 9:30 am CDT.

Residents are invited to attend the town hall meetings 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.

Touring Collins Bus Corporation in South Hutchinson

On Tuesday, I toured Collins Bus Corporation in South Hutchinson to visit with company leaders. Established 35 years ago, Collins Bus currently operates as a producer of the most extensive line of Type-A buses. On the tour, I learned that Collins Bus is the leading manufacturer of small school buses. The company also has a policy to assist employees to further their education while they are employed with Collins Bus so they can gain new skills and knowledge.

Thanks to Kent Tyler, the president of Collins Bus, for hosting my tour. Also thanks to Collins Bus employees for

participating in my visit. [Click here to see photos from my visit.](#)

Touring Hays Chamber of Commerce and Convention Visitors Bureau

On Friday, I toured the Hays Welcome Center and Visitor Information Office complex. The new building was completed on November 7, 2007, and currently houses the offices for staff from the Hays Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Hays Area Chamber of Commerce and the Ellis County Coalition for Economic Development. It is a beautiful facility that provides a good welcome center for out of town visitors and supplies guests with State of Kansas Visitor Guides, Kansas maps and local information.

Visitor's bureaus and chambers play a vital role for guests to learn more about any area and to promote local attractions and events for those visiting from out of town. Thanks to the staff at the Welcome Center who participated in my visit.

In the Office

Brenda Ulbrich of Hutchinson was in with the American Speech and Hearing Association to discuss Medicare caps and the role speech pathology plays in our education and health systems.

Robert, Jamie and Jarret Steele; and Gera Beach of Manhattan received a tour of the U.S. Capitol building this week.

Very truly yours,

Jerry