

5/04/2009 This Week in Congress

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May 4, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Voting 'No' on Congressional Budget

I opposed passage this week of a \$3.4 trillion dollar budget, which determines spending and tax decisions for the next year. This trillion dollar federal budget will create a \$1.7 trillion deficit. The U.S. has not seen a deficit in our economy like this since WWII. This tremendous deficit damages the U.S. economy, hurts family budgets and undermines any hope for a timely recovery to our economy.

Our government is spending at an alarming rate and must realize that spending trillions of dollars, that we simply do not have, will not help our economy today or future generations who will have to pay our debts. [Click here to listen to my comments on the budget.](#)

Funding for Veteran Health Care

On Wednesday, I participated in a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing where my colleagues and I pushed for the final 2010 federal budget to include an "advanced appropriations" provision for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care. Although Congress has made progress improving VA funding over the past few years, usual funding delays have jeopardized medical care services at VA hospitals and clinics.

Funding delays reduce the ability of the VA to provide quality care to veterans and hamper the VA's capacity to recruit trained medical professionals, operate facilities and purchase new equipment. An "advanced appropriations" provision in the 2010 budget will allow Congress to provide funding for VA medical care one-year in advance of the regular appropriations process. It will result in improved quality of care for veterans, better use of taxpayers' dollars and will ensure that veterans receive uninterrupted medical care.

Celebrating Progress with Greensburg Citizens Two Years after Tornado

On Saturday, I joined the citizens of Greensburg to celebrate the community's two-year progress for recovering from the devastation of the May 4, 2007, tornado. There are also several other communities that were affected by storms that same weekend two years ago and I am glad to see Kansans in these areas rebuilding and progressing after the damage.

BTI Inc. Grand Opening: During the anniversary, I joined local and area residents for the grand opening of BTI Inc., the John Deere dealership in Greensburg. It is good to know that businesses returning to the area, like BTI Inc., will provide an important service to local residents. Congratulations to the members, businesses and organizations of the community for further restoring faith and hope to their town. Thanks to the Estes family, the owners of BTI Inc., for their dedication to Greensburg.

Kiowa County Town Hall: Also during my visit to Greensburg, I hosted my Kiowa County town hall meeting at the 5-4-7 Arts Center. The town hall was my 39th of the 69 I will host as part of my annual Big First Listening Tour. It was good to hear from local residents to understand the concerns on their minds. I was grateful to have met with so many local residents and business owners willing to share their experiences and challenges with me. Thanks to those who participated in the town hall.

Grant Extension for Greensburg Rebuilding Process: On Friday, I announced with Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts that the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has extended the time period for the City of Greensburg to be able to use funds that have already been appropriated through a DOL grant. The DOL grant was scheduled to expire on Monday, May 14, 2009, but will now fund professional service positions through December 26, 2009. These funds will employ critical public sector employees who, through their employment, can continue rebuilding Greensburg. This was great news for the community as it celebrated its two-year anniversary of rebuilding this week.

It was good to see that DOL agreed to this grant extension that will provide employment and benefits for many individuals in Greensburg and the surrounding areas. Funding these positions will be vital to the county's long-term recovery effort. [Click here to read more about the grant extension.](#)

Kansas State Society Cherry Blossom Banquet

On Tuesday, I joined fellow Kansans for the annual Cherry Blossom Banquet hosted by the Kansas State Society of Washington, D.C., The event is always a great opportunity to visit with many Kansans who work in our nation's capital and share my dedication to preserving our way of life back home.

During the event, I was honored to introduce one of the two 2009 Kansans of the Year, Chancellor Robert Hemenway. Chancellor Hemenway of the University of Kansas and President John Wefald of Kansas State University were both recognized by the Kansas Society as this year's 2009 Kansans of the Year. Both Chancellor Hemenway and President Wefald were honored for their dedication and loyalty to the universities and state they have served so well.

Congratulations also to the 2009 Kansas Cherry Blossom Princess, Danielle Coffman, from Topeka, who is an intern in my office this semester. Danielle is currently a student at Washburn University and will be finishing school next year with a degree in business economics and marketing. Danielle will also compete in the 2009 Miss Kansas Pageant this June, which is a preliminary to the Miss America Pageant and will be held in Pratt. Good luck to Danielle, who will return to compete for the fourth time after being named a runner-up in last year's competition.

CRP Extension Decision

On Friday, I learned that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will offer the opportunity to land owners to modify and extend certain expiring 2009 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts. A few weeks ago, I recommended that the Secretary of Agriculture make a timely decision about whether expiring CRP contracts would be eligible for extensions. Producers need to make informed decisions, and to do that, they need to know whether they should begin to prepare land for production or be allowed to continue to participate in the CRP contract during the next crop year.

Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that FSA will offer certain producers the opportunity to modify and extend CRP

contracts that are scheduled to expire on Sept. 30, 2009. FSA will issue a three to five-year extension for approximately 1.5 million acres out of a total 3.9 million acres that are expiring this year. I thank Secretary Vilsack for making a timely decision about USDA's intentions with expiring 2009 CRP contracts.

[Click here to read more about the announced extensions.](#) For information about CRP and other FSA programs visit your county FSA office or [click here](#).

Iran Remains a Threat to Israel, U.S.

This week, I spoke about Iran and the serious threat that country poses to the United States and the Middle East. I was reminded how threatening the country is after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad denounced Israel on the opening day of a United Nations anti-racism conference a few weeks ago. In February, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported Iran had enough low-enriched uranium that if further processed could produce a nuclear bomb. Amid the myriad of issues affecting Americans, we must remember that Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons is not only a threat to the people of Israel but a danger to the rest of the world. [Click here to view my entire speech.](#)

Speaking to Farm Broadcasters at Annual Washington Watch

This week, I spoke to the National Association of Farm Broadcasters while they were in our nation's capital for the organization's annual Washington Watch. I discussed my concerns with over-regulating and the new administration, CRP contract extensions and possible Environmental Protection Agency guidelines for livestock producers. Thanks to Ken Rahjes, agriculture broadcaster from KRVN radio, who introduced me during this year's Washington Watch.

It was good to see regional and Kansas broadcaster Greg Akagi of WIBW Radio in Topeka, and his wife, Lisa, and their daughter, Sarah in our nation's capital.

Visiting with Madison High School Students from Washington, D.C.

While in Washington, D.C., on Thursday, I visited with Toby Countryman's Madison High School senior class via video teleconference. I talked with the students about my role in Congress and answered their questions about relevant issues and how I came to be a public servant. It is important that students have an understanding of how our government works, but it is also always a good opportunity for me to learn from the students. I was very impressed with the class and all of their questions. Thanks to Toby Countryman for allowing me the time to visit with his class.

Annual Listening Tour Continues at 3i Show in Garden City

I will be in Garden City at the Finney County Fairgrounds for the 55th Annual Western Kansas Manufacturers Association 3i show, Friday, May 8, 2009, where I will host my Finney County town hall meeting.

I will hold the town hall from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. in the General Motors (GM) tent where KBUF Radio - Garden City, will be broadcasting the town hall live. Also throughout the three-day event, I will have a booth, located at I-171, where members of my staff will be available to answer questions. For more information about the 3i Show, please visit

<http://www.3ishow.com/>.

Friday, May 8

Finney County Tour Stop, Garden City

Time: 12:00 to 1:00 PM

Location: 3i Show, in the GM tent, live with KBUF radio

Address: 409 Lake Avenue, Finney County Fairgrounds

[Click here to view the listening tour schedule and the areas I have stopped this year.](#)

Presenting Awards to Kansas Students for the 2009 Congressional Art Competition

On Saturday, I presented awards to young Kansas artists who entered the 13th First District's 2009 Congressional Arts Competition at the opening reception of "An Artistic Discovery" in Russell at the Deines Cultural Center. I was able to recognize young artists for Best of Show, Runner-up and Honorable Mention. I also presented first and second place awards in painting, drawing, collage, printmaking, mixed media, computer generated art and photography.

Katie Wolters received the Best in Show award for her drawing "Girl Undefined." Her work will be on display this year in the U.S. Capitol. The Runner-up was Joel Auer for his mixed media titled, "Triangular Escapade." Jacy Porter received Honorable Mention for her photography work titled, "Farmer's Helper." Congratulations to all of the students who entered the competition. [Click here for photos.](#)

Also thanks to Nancy Selbe, Director of the Denies Cultural Center; Tobias "Toby" Flores, Assistant Professor of Art at Fort Hays State University, and a judge for the Congressional Arts Competition; Sandy Daugherty, Vice President of the Denies Cultural Center Board who presented Best of Show with a check award from the Friends of the Denies Cultural Center; Thurlene Ruggels, the owner of the United National Bank who presented Runner-up with a check award from the United National Bank; and Darlene Woelk, the owner of Woelk's House of Diamonds who presented Honorable Mention with a check award from Woelk's House of Diamonds.

In the Office

Jim Clark of Lawrence, Gary Boomer of Manhattan and Kyle Hawk of McPherson were in with the Kansas Society of Certified Public Accountants to tell me about CPA regulatory practices and licensing guidelines. Bill Haggarty of Beattie was in with the American Cable Association to update me on the expansion of broadband access to Kansas communities. Roy Wilson of Lenexa, Keith Warta of Topeka, Kenzl Lynn of Minneapolis and Mike Olson of Ellsworth were in with the American Council of Engineering Companies to discuss road and water infrastructure legislation.

I spoke with the 2009 class of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Excellence in Public Service Series about political participation and issues important to Kansans. In with the group were Connie Presley, Gail Regier and Susan Estes of Wichita; Nicole Alexander of Goddard; Terry Happer Scheier and Cindy Eaton of Overland Park; Jana Taylor Goodman of Leavenworth; Macie Houston and Devona Troutman of Shawnee; and Emily Wellman of Lawrence. Also this week, I met with Brad Simmons of Liberal, who is a Marine serving as a Legislative Fellow this year for Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio.

Judy Burgess, Chris Cooper, Darcy Hocker, Thomas Cooper and Jane Foltz of Abilene were in with the Afterschool Alliance to tell me about the positive effects of their after school program as well as the need to expand these opportunities to more Kansas school districts. Trace Walker of Salina was in with the National Association of Truck Stop Operators to talk about certain credit card company practices along with his opposition to expanding the use of toll roads in Kansas. Louis Goseland and Paul Gebos of Wichita were in with Sunflower Community Action to discuss community issues regarding health care, education and worker protection.

Cindy, Roger and Lauren Hower of Holton; Bob and Suzanne Wood of Parsons; Larry Magill and Kerri Spielman of Topeka; Rick Elliott of Louisburg; Roy Frey of Sabetha; and Greg Renn of Wellington were in with the Kansas Association of Insurance Agents to express their opposition to federal regulation of insurance. Pam Schrag of Moundridge was in with the Mobilization to End Poverty to talk to me about how local organizations can work with the federal government to reduce poverty. Greg, Lisa and Sarah Akagi of Topeka stopped by to visit.

Members of the Kansas Hospital Association were in to discuss health care reform and reimbursement rates. In with the group were Leonard Hernandez and Jim Reagan of Elkhart, Tom Bell of Topeka, David Bradley of Junction City, Vicki Caywood and Linda Harrison of Hutchinson, Kevin Conlin and Randy Peterson of Wichita, Jonathan Davis of Pittsburg, John Kuhn and Bob Driewer of Emporia, Mark Miller of Abilene, Dallas Polen and Genny Nicholas of Kansas City, Roger and Jackie John of Phillipsburg, Frank Ortiz of Stafford and Vicki Hahn of Leoti.

A group of students from the McPherson Church of the Brethren, led by Pastor Shawn Flory Replogle, were in to tell me about modern-day slavery. In with the group from McPherson were Ashley Allmon, Gulnara Anzarova, Jakoe Barnes, Kelsi Beam, Bunga Carnadia, Evan Clay, Maria de las Heras, Max Goering, Kate Johnson, Jennifer Jensen, Kolby Martin, Todd Flory, Taylor Stevens and Sam Starr. In from Quinter were Haley Funk, Aubrey Roesch, Addie Johnson, Ana Clara Gampaire, Chelsea Sitfen, Alyese Crist and Michele Roesch Johnson.

Kendra Tomes of Kansas City was in with the Mortgage Bankers Association to advocate for increasing the availability of financing for building and updating Kansas hospital facilities. Col. Roger Wilson, Steve Iverson and David Combs of Kansas City were in with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to give me an update on projects in Kansas. John Doswell and Kent Tyler of Hutchinson were in with Collins Bus Corporation to tell me about the hybrid bus the company is developing. Tom Roberts of Lenexa, Todd Herrenbruck of Salina and Howard Wilcox of Olathe also came by to visit.

Jim Lindquist of Manhattan, Larry and Judy Turner of Wichita, Lori Sporer of Oakley, Brad Fuller of Lakin and Susan Schlichting of Hays were in with Kansas State University to brief me on how K-State extension is helping communities in Kansas. Dr. Jane Rhys of Topeka, Scott Shepherd of Johnson County and Stephanie King of Ottawa were in with the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities to tell me about their efforts to support and enhance the lives of Kansans with developmental disabilities. Verlean Brown and Todd Roberts of Emporia and Mark Farr of Nickerson were in with the Kansas National Education Association to update me on important issues currently affecting educators and students in Kansas.

Dr. Richard Hart of Overland Park was in with the American College of Gastroenterology to brief me on preventive health care for colorectal cancer examination and screening. While colorectal cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S., it is highly detectable, treatable and curable if found early. Peggy Johnson, Mary Anne Carter, Georgia Ellis and Gwendolyn Anderson of Wichita were in with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Advocacy Alliance to express their support for federal investment in cancer research focusing on the prevention and early detection of breast cancer and other cancers. Walter and Polly Berry of Wichita were in with Berry Companies to talk about the current economic situation and the enormous amount of federal spending. Cindy Couchman of Lindsborg, who was named the Kansas Teacher of the Year, came by to visit.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Mark and Kathy Schepers of Liberal, Anthony and Anita Hapgood of McPherson and Mark and Sandra Bailey of Wichita. Also in for a tour were Brooke Taylor and Gina Raymode of Manhattan; Doug Keiswetter and Lynn and Diane Engle of Great Bend; Kim and Karolyn Schroeder and Wayne and Cindy Tate of Hugoton; Monte, Cindy, Clayton and Carter Couchman of Lindsborg; and Ed Slavik of Belleville.

Very truly yours,

Jerry