

2/21/2006 This Week in Congress

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February 26, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

Introducing Legislation to Improve the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

On Thursday I introduced H.R. 4796, the Medicare ABC for D Act - to bring Accountability, Bargaining and Compassion to the Part D drug benefit. I voted against the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan in November 2003 because I was concerned the plan would fail to meet the needs of Kansas seniors. I have been hearing from seniors across Kansas about their difficulties with the complexity and confusion surrounding the Part D benefit. This legislation is a comprehensive approach to improving this program.

The Medicare ABC for D Act extends the enrollment deadline through December 31 of this year to allow seniors more time to determine which plan best fits their needs. It also requires insurance companies to register with state insurance departments in each state where they offer their drug plans. This helps keep insurance departments informed so they can advocate on behalf of seniors and their pharmacists.

In addition, this legislation will help seniors get better prices on prescription drugs by authorizing the Department of Health and Human Services to negotiate with drug manufacturers. Finally, more funding will be provided for outreach and education at the local level. Efforts by local volunteers need to continue, but they must have resources in order to do this. Now is not the time to turn our backs on this problem. Kansas seniors need help.

Visiting with USDA Secretary about Investigation into Japan Beef Shipment

On Friday Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced the results of an investigation into the ineligible shipment of veal that was sent to Japan last month. He also released a USDA report that detailed the findings of the investigation and actions taken by USDA. The report, which totals 475 pages, establishes several facts surrounding the shipment and notes that it posed no risk to human health.

I visited with the Secretary one-on-one later that day to discuss these findings and the steps that need to be taken next. Japan must examine these findings. We will be patient, but that patience will soon come to an end. Japan has no reason to not resume beef trade with our American producers.

I have requested a meeting with the Ambassador of Japan, Ryozo Kato, to discuss Japan's reaction to this report and find out how soon we can expect the border to be reopened.

Hearing from Secretary of Homeland Security about Hurricane Katrina Response

This week the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure heard from the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, during a hearing on the federal government's response to Hurricane Katrina. The hearing covered ways to improve emergency management capabilities and readiness at all levels - local, state and federal.

Hurricane Katrina showed us that our response system does not work. The federal emergency management system clearly needs improvement. Secretary Chertoff acknowledged the mistakes made during the government's response to Katrina and outlined some steps the Department of Homeland Security plans to take to improve future disaster preparedness and response.

Addressing the Kansas House and Senate Agriculture Committees

On Friday I met with members of the Kansas House and Senate Agriculture Committees at a joint meeting in Topeka. I had the opportunity to provide a federal legislative update and answer questions from committee members regarding the Farm Bill, world trade, high energy costs, budgetary concerns and water and conservation issues. I am glad that Chairman Dan Johnson and Chairman Mark Taddiken provided me with this opportunity, and I am proud of our cooperative efforts to address important issues at the state and federal levels.

Discussing Kansas' Role in Aeronautics and Space with NASA Administrator

At my invitation, NASA Administrator Mike Griffin met with me this week to discuss Kansas' role in aeronautics and space. Kansas has a proud history of aviation and space achievements and continues to make strides in these important fields.

Kansas State University at Salina's College of Technology and Aviation contributes new advances in aviation and engineering, trains young Kansans in these fields, and last year had the opportunity to work with the Global Flyer on its record-setting flight. In addition, the aviation industry is a major economic contributor in south-central Kansas, and the Kansas Cosmosphere is one of the world's leading institutes for the preservation of space history.

Administrator Griffin acknowledged the important role Kansas plays in our nation's aviation and space programs. I look forward to working with Administrator Griffin and strengthening the ties between Kansas and NASA.

Recognizing Young Kansas Artists in the Congressional Art Competition

Yesterday, I presented awards to young Kansas artists for the Congressional Art Competition in a ceremony at the Barton County Arts Council in Great Bend. Kansas high school students are eligible for the annual competition.

This year's competition was divided into four categories: drawing, painting, photography, and mixed and other media. Jordan Zerr of Wheatland received best of show for his drawing entitled "Earthmovers." This was Jordan's second year to receive the best of show award. His artwork will be on display this year in the U.S. Capitol.

Second place in the drawing category went to Rebecca Woodall of Wheatland, third place to Jennifer Robl of Ellinwood and fourth place to Maranda Trimpe of Little River. In the painting category, Casey Wohletz of Little River received first place, Jennifer Robl of Ellinwood received second place, Tucker Applebee of Hoisington received third place and Lauren Sturn of Ellinwood received fourth place. Receiving first place in photography was Kandice Hall of Lawrence, second place went to Maggie Barnes of Lawrence, third place to Jillian Strobel of Great Bend and fourth place to Kelsey Starks of Lawrence. In the mixed and other media category, Natalie Ricke of Hoisington was awarded first place, Tasha Deckers of Hugoton with second place and Damion Lucero of Great Bend with third place.

Congratulations to all of the winners and participants in this year's competition. I would also like to thank the Barton County Arts Council for hosting the competition this year and for judging the entries.

Reviewing the Cost of Jet Fuel and Its Effects on the Airline Industry

The U.S. airline industry lost an estimated \$10 billion last year. One of the reasons for this loss was the soaring costs of jet fuel. The price for commercial jet fuel has almost doubled in the last five years. This week the House Transportation Subcommittee on Aviation heard and discussed possible solutions to this problem with representatives from the U.S. Department of Energy, the Federal Aviation Administration and the aviation industry.

Highlighting the Needs and Goals of Community Colleges

On February 9, after visiting with several representatives from Kansas community colleges, I joined the Community College Caucus. This caucus is designed to highlight the needs and goals of community colleges, as well as the contributions they make to our nation's workforce and economy. Since coming to Congress, I have been a supporter of higher education and will continue to support federal financial aid programs and the Carl D. Perkins career and technical education programs.

From Hope to Paradise: Continuing My Big First Listening Tour

As part of my Big First Tour, I was in Madison and Emporia last week. I also visited the community of Marion. On President's Day, I was in St. John and Great Bend. Today I will be making southwest Kansas stops in Lakin, Ulysses, Johnson City and Syracuse. Also this week, I will be making stops in Dodge City, Cimarron, Colby, Atwood and Belpre. On Monday, March 6, I will visit Larned.

Visit my website at www.house.gov/moranks01/ for times and locations of the remaining stops of my Big First Listening Tour, scheduled to end in Paradise on Friday, March 24.

Attending the K-State versus Colorado Basketball Game

This weekend I was in Manhattan for Kansas State University's basketball game against the University of Colorado. It was an exciting game with the Wildcats coming out on top with a score of 72 to 60. I appreciated the hospitality of President and Mrs. Jon Wefald.

In the Office

Barth Crouch of Salina was in my office representing Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever to talk about designating Playa lakes as a National Conservation Priority Area under the Conservation Reserve Program. Doug Garman of Topeka and Tim McClure of Dodge City were in representing the Kansas Narcotics Officers Association to discuss the issues affecting law enforcement officers in Kansas and future funding requests.

Cristi Cain of Topeka and Loretta Severin of Lawrence were in the office to provide an update on the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project. Also in this week were Kansans attending the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America conference, including Deone Wilson, Margi Grimwood and Teresa Walters of Emporia; Ann Sparke and Cynthia Engle of Council Grove; Brenda Haaga and Ann Winters of Abilene; and Sue Evans and Diane Stithem of Colby. They came by my office to discuss the problems and challenges they face while conducting drug and alcohol prevention projects. They also showcased successful outcomes and initiatives.

In this week to talk about science and math education were the deans of Kansas colleges of engineering, including Terry King of Kansas State University, Stuart Bell of the University of Kansas and Zulma Toro-Ramos of Wichita State University. Raymond Rhodd of Topeka was in representing the Military Order of the Purple Heart to discuss their 2006 legislative goals, including increasing veterans' health care funding, improving concurrent receipt and awarding the Purple Heart medal to Prisoners of War who died in captivity.

In Washington, D.C., this week I met with rice producers from across the country to discuss the upcoming Farm Bill and issues of concern to their industry. They explained to me that they have announced public support of a one-year extension of the current Farm Bill.

Sandy Pickert of Wichita was in the office to discuss abstinence education programs. She discussed government funding for abstinence education in general and, more specifically, local initiatives in central Kansas that are funded by federal grants. Terry Montgomery of Sabetha, Allan Sents of McPherson and Larry Kendig of Osborne were in representing R-CALF to talk about animal identification systems, Country of Origin Labeling and re-opening the Japanese border to beef exports.

Larry Holden, General Manager of Smoky Hills Public Television (SHPTV), of Bunker Hill was in to discuss the groundbreaking for the new Colby TV station and the need for continued congressional support of public broadcasting and television. SHPTV serves about 485,000 Kansans in 52 counties. Marian Adams of Wichita was in representing Taxpayer Advocate, an organization aimed at helping taxpayers resolve problems with the Internal Revenue Service, to talk about the services offered in their Wichita office.

Tim Oldhe of Clyde was in with the American Bankers Association (ABA) to discuss issues important to Kansas bankers in relation to the agriculture industry. Tim is the President of Elk State Bank in Clyde and is serving as the National President of the Agricultural Lenders section of the ABA.

Jon Goscha of Salina was in Washington, D.C., participating in the Congressional Youth Leadership Council and came by my office to visit. Also stopping by my office while in Washington, D.C., this week were Lloyd Matther and Merlin Oswald of Herington to talk about economic development opportunities in the Herington area.

In my office this week for a tour of the Capitol building were John Lynn and Susan Nuss of Jetmore with their children, Kyle, Zach and David.

Very truly yours,

Jerry