

3/20/2006 This Week in Congress

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March 20, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

The Million Dollar Snow

I was happy to return to Kansas this weekend from Washington, D.C., to rain and snow. Most of the Big First District is in a winter storm warning for today and is expecting several inches of snow throughout the day. Kansas farmers can breathe a sigh of relief for this desperately needed moisture for the wheat crop.

Commending the Patriot Guard for Shielding Military Families from Protesters

This week I introduced legislation to commend the Patriot Guard Riders for shielding military families from protesters at funerals. In 2005, a small group of American Legion riders in Mulvane, Kansas, began this movement as a service to

families of fallen soldiers. Calling themselves the "Patriot Guard," these motorcycle riders waved American flags and revved their engines to serve as a barrier between mourning families and picketers.

The Patriot Guard Riders have since grown into a nationwide network of tens of thousands of members who volunteer their time to come to the aid of military families and show their respect for fallen service members at funerals. Appearing at the request of families, they drown out the jeers and hateful signs of protesters to allow the memories of the deceased service members to be remembered with honor and dignity.

I first experienced the power of the Patriot Guard last year when hundreds of riders showed up to the funeral of a Kansas soldier who gave his life serving in Iraq. Regardless of one's opinion of our country's military commitments, we can all be thankful for these patriots who provide the families and friends of our fallen soldiers the peaceful time of mourning they deserve.

This legislation is to express the U.S. House of Representatives' deepest appreciation to Patriot Guard Riders across the country. More than a dozen states are considering legislation that would restrict protesting at funerals. Representatives Todd Tiahrt, Jim Ryun and Dennis Moore of the Kansas delegation have joined me in sponsoring this legislation.

Ensuring Children Get Parental Support

This week Congressman Dennis Moore (KS-03) and I introduced bipartisan legislation that would allow the federal government to revoke the existing passport of any parent who falls \$5,000 behind in his or her child support payments. Under current law, non-custodial parents who owe \$5,000 or more in child support payments are restricted from receiving new passports, but may keep their current passport. This situation could potentially allow a parent to flee the country on an existing passport and avoid fulfilling child support responsibilities.

According to Jim Roberston, Director of Child Support Enforcement with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, this holds great promise for increasing child support payments to parents and children who depend on them. "This legislation would impact persons who actually possess the resources to provide for their children but choose not to do so. We estimate that this legislation would result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in collections for the children of the State of Kansas alone."

Clearly the consequences we have in place are not getting through to some parents. We owe it to children to strengthen child support enforcement. This legislation adds one more disincentive to fall behind in child support payments.

Reviewing Current Issues of the Federal Crop Insurance Program

Producers from across the country have raised concerns about crop insurance at each of the four farm bill hearings that have been held by the House Agriculture Committee. In light of these concerns, this week I chaired a hearing of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management to review current issues facing the federal crop insurance program.

Farming is a high-risk business. American farmers can use the best seed, chemicals and superior management practices, but the weather can still destroy their crops. Since our farmers cannot control the weather, it is often the right decision to defray some of the risk by purchasing crop insurance.

The hearing marked the first time USDA Risk Management Agency Administer Eldon Gould has testified before the Committee since assuming the position last year. Keith Collins, USDA's Chief Economist for the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, joined Mr. Gould. The Subcommittee also heard from representatives of the crop insurance industry, including William Hanson of Manhattan, President of Kanok Inc., who testified on behalf of the Crop Insurance Professionals Agency and Robert Parkerson of Overland Park who serves as President of National Crop Insurance Services.

Celebrating National Agriculture Day and Meeting with Kansas Ag Groups

This week I joined Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and Senator Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, for a luncheon in celebration of National Agriculture Day. National Agriculture Day is celebrated each spring to highlight the importance of agriculture to America's economy and society. More than 22 million people work in the agriculture industry and contribute to the daily lives of Americans.

Also in Washington, D.C., this week I met with several Kansas agriculture organizations including Young Farmers and Ranchers and County Presidents of Kansas Farm Bureau, as well as Class VIII members of the Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership (KARL) program. I enjoy the opportunity to meet with these groups representing the current and future leaders of the Kansas agriculture industry. The discussions with each group centered on current issues of the agriculture industry including crop insurance, the 2007 Farm Bill, grain based fuel and world trade issues.

Harry Watts and John Schlageck with Kansas Farm Bureau in Manhattan accompanied the Kansas Farm Bureau groups. In with Young Farmers and Ranchers were Stacey and Lauren Forshee of Delphos; Lance, Cathy, Lyle and Brooke Russell of Hays; Dana Pieper of Zurich; Wesley Hobbs of WaKeeney; Brad Black of Hutchinson; Greg Sederstrom of Goodland; and Larry and Edie Dahlsten of Lindsborg.

Members of the KARL program included program director Jack Lindquist of Manhattan, Thad Arganbright of Waterville, Todd Barrows of Manhattan, Don Beesley of Hugoton, Chris Burris of Larned, Verle Carlson of Lyons, Barb Downey of Wamego, Janna Dunbar of Lawrence, J. L. Evins of Great Bend, Doug Gerber of Beloit, Dan Grafel of Oberlin, Hallie Hasel of Leoti, Harmony Kistler of Garden City, Mary Ann Kniebel of White City, Ginger Kopfer of Junction City, Gary Millershaski of Lakin, Marcine Moldenhauer of Valley Center, Jeff Morgan of Clyde, Jeff Reinert of Ensign, Gabe Schlickau of Dodge City, Matt Schweer of Moundridge, Julie Spiegel of Manhattan, Jason Stallman of Abbyville, Lance Tischhauser of Wilsey, Scott Vander Hamm of Dodge City, Matthew Welsh of Meade, Brian Wilborn of Kingman and Bill Wood of Eudora. Members from Topeka were Doug Bassett, Gary Haag and Alan Cobb.

Discussing WTO Negotiations with Recently Appointed U.S. Trade Representative

At my invitation this week, recently appointed U.S. Trade Representative Dr. Richard Crowder visited my office to discuss new developments in the World Trade Organization Doha round of negotiations. We talked about ways we can work together to get an agreement that would put American farmers on a more level playing field with other countries and that would benefit Kansans.

House Passes Additional Funding for Troops in Afghanistan and Iraq

This week the House passed additional funding for ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and for hurricane disaster assistance in the Gulf. Included is funding for upgrading Army combat vehicles for the National Guard and for providing soldiers more access to armor to counter Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The Senate will be considering similar legislation next month.

Taking Viewers' Calls During Appearance on Kansas Public TV this Wednesday

This Wednesday I will be taking calls from viewers to discuss current issues facing Congress during a live television appearance on Smoky Hills Public Television. The program will air from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Viewers can call in toll-free at (800) 337-4788 with questions for me.

From Hope to Paradise: Continuing My Big First Listening Tour

As part of my Big First Tour, I visited Scott City, Dighton, Bern, Axtel, Washington and Cuba last week. This week I will conclude the remaining stops of my tenth annual listening tour. Today's stops include Norcatur and Norton. Tomorrow I will visit Mankato and Smith Center and continue on to Pratt and Kiowa on Thursday. My final stop will be Friday in Paradise. Visit my website at www.house.gov/moranks01/ for times and locations of these stops.

Celebrating the 50th Wedding Anniversary of Danny and Darlene Biggs

This weekend I attended the 50th wedding anniversary celebration for Danny and Darlene Biggs of Great Bend. Danny is an outstanding community leader, industry leader and Kansan. He and Darlene have been good friends to me. Robba and I enjoyed sharing in their celebration.

In the Office

Representatives from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation visited my office this week to discuss the need for continued support of the National Institutes of Health and other research to find a cure for diabetes. Attending the meeting were Michelle, Robert, Marcia and Mike Hammer of Overland Park. Patrick Zollner of Topeka was in representing the Kansas State Historical Society to talk about historic preservation efforts in Kansas. Last year, 42 Kansas properties were listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In representing the Kansas State Parent Teacher Association were Laura Kaiser of Overland Park, Gail Vertz of Kansas City, and Peggy Davis and Debbie Lawson of Lenexa to discuss the importance of parent involvement in education.

Dr. Ralph Richardson was in representing Kansas State University's College of Veterinary Medicine to talk about legislation to begin a competitive grant to help expand the veterinary work force in areas such as food safety and animal disease control, as well as homeland security. Ann Rollins, Executive Director of the Salina Housing Authority, stopped by to discuss anticipated changes to federal public housing programs.

Ellen Morgan of Salina and Carrie Patterson of Yates Center were in my office to advocate for the National Endowment of the Arts. The NEA is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts in communities across America. Dr. Donna Sweet of Wichita was in with the American College of Physicians to discuss her nomination to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission.

Eric and Barbara Allen of Hutchinson were in to share information about Farm Credit. Cory Vercher and Steve Reitan of Manhattan were in to discuss the Flint Hills Job Corps Center. Job Corps is a federal program administered by the Department of Labor and is the nation's largest residential education and job training program for at-risk youth ages 16 to 24.

City officials from Manhattan, Abilene and Emporia were in Washington, D.C., this week to share their support for Community Development Block Grants. Representatives from Manhattan included Ron Fisher, Jayme Morris-Hardeman, Tom Phillips, Ed Klimek, Bruce Snead, Ron Fehr, Diane Stoddard and Jason Hilgers. In from Abilene were John Zutavern, Lynn Peterson and Judy Leyerzapf. City officials from Emporia included Tom Myers, Raymond Toso, Blain Plummer and Bobby Angler.

Karl Sprague of Great Bend, Connie Vogts of Liberal and Jill Vincent of Emporia were in representing the Kansas School Nutrition Association to discuss the importance of funding for child nutrition, school lunch, school breakfast and international school lunch programs. John Gillcrist of Kansas City was in Washington, D.C., this week to present as a part of a panel discussion on U.S. food aid programs. Earl Watkins of Hays was in representing Sunflower Electric to provide an update on the company's recent acquisition and expansion plans in Kansas.

Kari Bruffett of Kansas City was in to talk about Medicare and Medicaid issues affecting the University of Kansas Hospital. Troy Munsch with the Natural Resources Conservation Service stopped by to explain his duties in the Salina field office. Dr. Howard Rodenberg of Topeka, Director of Health for Kansas, was in to discuss avian flu prevention efforts and federal funding for public health.

Patty Richardson of Dodge City and Bill Bolin of Wichita were in to discuss rural development opportunities and share news of growing companies that are providing more jobs for Kansans. Beth Southern and Candy Jones of Hutchinson stopped by my office to talk about hunger issues in Kansas.

Carolyn Williams of Wichita and Kim Moore of Hutchinson were in representing the Kansas Health Foundation and the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund to talk about tax-exemption status on donations and how it relates to the pending budget. Angela Kreps of Lenexa and Joni Cobb of Shawnee Mission were in representing the Kansas Bioscience Organization to discuss research and development of agriculture, environment and healthcare biotechnology products.

Kansas Medical Society representatives Dr. Debra Doubek of Manhattan, Dr. Richard Warner of Overland Park and Nancy Sullivan of Topeka were in to talk about possible long-term solutions to the healthcare system, Medicare reimbursement and consumer driven healthcare plans. City of Junction City officials were in my office to describe the many challenges and opportunities resulting from the growth of Ft. Riley. I am impressed with Junction City's efforts to step up and get programs in place for the more than 30,000 troops, families and others who are expected to move into the Junction City area in the next few years. City officials included Jack Taylor, Rod Barnes, Sam Robinson, Mike Guinn, Terry and Peggy Heldstab, Mike and Len Rhodes, Ken and Sarah Talley, Cheryl Lyn Higgins and Josh McKim.

Bethany College students Kimberly Streit, Chris Deines and Chelsea Longhofer were in my office advocating for fair trade, changes to immigration policy and an increase to the federal minimum wage. Lindsey Coggins of Waterville stopped by to visit about her participation in the Congressional Youth Leadership Council.

Keith Miller of Great Bend was in representing the U.S. Meat Export Federation to discuss current beef trade issues with Japan. Adrienne Baxter of the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Valentina Remig of Kansas State University in Manhattan, Susan Kuriem of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Leavenworth and Shelby Dederick of Tecumseh were in representing the American Dietetic Association to talk about the importance of school and senior nutrition and wellness programs.

Elaine Edwards of Salina, President of the Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children, was in to discuss federal funding for Head Start and the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Dr. David Downing of the University of Kansas and Dr. Scott Miller of Wichita State University were in my office to talk about the funding Space Grants provide students at Kansas universities. Dr. Downing and Dr. Miller are members of the Kansas Space Grant Consortium, which promotes aviation and space research and education.

-Terry Lee, Mayor of Dodge City, came by my office to discuss Amtrack funding, cable and video franchising and the continuance of Community Development Block Grants. Also visiting my office this week were John Armbrust of Manhattan, Paul Kaeb of Sabetha, Allen Dinkel of Hoisington, Christina Hammond of Dodge City, Brenda and Linda Smith of Salina, Alberta Brinkman of Emporia and Ginny Graham of Reading.

Several people came by for a tour of the United States Capitol this week, including Tom and Anne Sellers of Hutchinson with their children, Katherine, Andrew and Laura; Tom and Susie Corbin of Kansas City with their daughter, Alexandria; August and Pamela Grasis of Kansas City with their daughter, August; and Pat and Judy Henke of Nickerson with their children, Kristin, Kathryn and Garth. Paul and Joan Kaeb of Sabetha were also in, as were Kermit and Connie Dorf of Assaria and Leslie Roederer of Haven, with her daughter, Carolyn.

Very truly yours,

Jerry