

3/27/2006 This Week in Congress

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March 27, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

From Hope to Paradise: Concluding My Tenth Annual Big First Listening Tour

On Friday I concluded my 2006 Big First Listening Tour in Paradise, Kansas. This year's tour marked the tenth year in a row that I have traveled the roads of the Big First District to meet with Kansans. To date, I have conducted 675 town hall meetings.

Each town hall meeting provides me with an important opportunity to hear what is on the minds of Kansans, and I always learn something new. Despite concerns about Iraq, increasing fuel and fertilizer costs and confusion about Medicare Part D, Kansans remain optimistic and want to see good things happen in their communities, our state and nation.

My Listening Tour wrapped up this week with stops in Jewell, Smith, Pratt, Barber, and Russell counties. Matt McCabe of Kansas Farm Bureau joined me for my tour stops in Pratt and Kiowa.

The comments and suggestions I heard during this year's tour gave me information I need to represent your interests in Washington, D.C. Thank you to all who attended and for the gracious hospitality I received.

If there were any issues that we did not get to discuss, or if you were unable to attend, you can always contact me through my website at: www.house.gov/moranks01/.

Discussing Economic Competitiveness in the Kansas Aviation Industry

On Wednesday I participated in a hearing of the Aviation Subcommittee of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure at Wichita State University's National Institute for Aviation Research. I am a member of this subcommittee, and I was pleased that the committee came to Kansas-the Air Capital of the World-to learn more about economic competitiveness in the aviation industry.

Along with Subcommittee Chairman John Mica of Florida and Congressman Todd Tiahrt of Wichita, members of the subcommittee and I had the opportunity to hear from several representatives of local aviation manufacturing companies.

In addition to Wichita large-scale manufacturers-Cessna, Raytheon, Boeing and Airbus-I invited three First District manufacturers to present testimony. Craig Mullins, General Manager of Lyons Manufacturing in Lyons, Kevin Hawley, President of Aerospace Systems and Technologies in Salina, and Finley Nevin, President of Global Engineering and Technology in Hutchinson/Wichita testified about the costs of providing health insurance to their employees, the complexity of the certification process of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the necessity of recruiting highly educated and trained employees.

The aviation industry contributes significantly to the Kansas economy and employs more than 45,000 Kansans. It is important to our state that we continue working to ensure that these manufacturers are able to compete in the global market.

Introducing Legislation to Bring Physicians to Underserved Communities

I recently introduced legislation to permanently reauthorize the J-1 visa waiver program, which is set to expire on June 1, 2006. This program allows foreign-born, U.S.-educated physicians to serve in areas that have a shortage of physicians.

For many rural hospitals and clinics in Kansas and across the country, this program is the only way patients are able to have access to an experienced, qualified doctor. The J-1 visa waiver program allows international medical graduates to stay in the U.S. in exchange for three years of practicing in areas experiencing a shortage of doctors. Since 1994, 115 doctors participating in the program have served in Kansas communities, and 67 physicians, or 58 percent, have remained in practice in the state following the completion of their three-year service obligation.

Under the program, states are allowed to sponsor up to 30 doctors per year. Kansas allows visa waivers for 15 primary

care physicians and 15 specialists. Primary care physicians include general medicine, internal medicine, family practice, general pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine and psychiatry.

The J-1 visa waiver program has been successful not only in Kansas, but across the country. Permanent reauthorization would be a significant achievement in the quest to improve access to health care.

Taking Kansans' Calls on Smoky Hills Public Television

On Wednesday I traveled to Bunker Hill to do a live call-in show for Smoky Hills Public Television. This show is a recurring event for me, during which I discuss current events and legislative issues as well as take calls from Kansans to answer their questions and hear their concerns.

Joining me on the show were John Montgomery, editor and publisher of the Hays Daily News, and Dr. Richard Heil from Fort Hays State University, who moderated.

The show reinforced what I heard from Kansans during my Big First Listening Tour. The issues of high energy costs, changes in Medicare, tax policy and education affect us all. I take my responsibility as a U.S. Congressman and public servant very seriously, and I will continue working hard on all of these issues.

Visiting Kansas Communities During the Congressional Recess

This week Congress was in recess to give members an opportunity to meet with residents of their districts. In addition to completing my Big First Listening Tour, I took this opportunity to make several community visits.

On Wednesday I met with Kirby List, Executive Director of the Hutchinson YMCA. Kirby gave me a tour of the facility and briefed me on its history. The Hutchinson YMCA has close to 600 members.

Also on Wednesday, I visited with residents of Lyons as I made stops at the courthouse, drug store, and Lyons Daily News.

I had the opportunity on Friday to join residents of Collyer at a fish fry. The fish fry was a fundraising event sponsored by the Collyer Community Alliance Association to raise funds for the preservation of historic sites in town. It is exciting to see Kansans come together to help preserve our unique heritage.

Congress reconvenes tomorrow and will meet until Easter. While I look forward to returning to work on your behalf in Washington, I enjoy being in our state and meeting with Kansans.

Celebrating the Life of Former Speaker Bill Mitchell

On Wednesday afternoon I attended funeral services for William (Bill) L. Mitchell in Hutchinson. Bill was a gentleman in every sense-a devoted family man, a skillful attorney and a dedicated public servant and citizen. His commitment to his state and country, always striving for excellence and optimism, is legendary.

Bill was a Hutchinson native and attorney, who served in the Kansas House of Representatives for five years, ultimately serving as Speaker of the House from 1960 to 1962.

Robba and I extend our deepest sympathies to Bill's wife, Norma, and their daughters, Derenda and Mollie, as well as their extended family.

In the Office

Rex Buchanan of Lawrence was in my office to discuss the Kansas Geographical Survey's projects regarding enhanced recovery of oil near Russell. Winston Brooks, Connie Dietz, Lynn Rogers, Diane Gjerstad and John Engelhardt, all from Wichita, with the Council of Great City Schools, also dropped by the office.

Jean Anna Sellers of Fort Hays State University (FHSU) visited my office with two teacher educators from Tajikistan, Sulhiya Bahodurova and Mahbouba Avezova, as well as their interpreter, Zaure Haynes, and a representative from the Cooperative Education Exchange Program, Patricia Elder. They shared the success of cooperative education at FHSU and also the benefits of economic education here at home and overseas in countries like Tajikistan.

Ken Morgan of Topeka with the Kansas Department of Commerce was in to talk about the Community Development Block Grant and the projects it makes available in Kansas communities.

A group of high school students from Phillipsburg and Smith Center, led by Barbara Dennis of Phillipsburg, was in Washington this week. Before touring the nation's capital, the group also visited Gettysburg and New York City.

Society of American Florists representatives Ben Miller of Hutchinson and Lynne Moss of Pratt discussed immigration reform, the need for small business health plans, estate taxes, as well as the need for continued horticulture research.

Bob Wing and Dan Porter of Kansas City were in my office with Kathy Elkins of Lawrence and Matt Jackson of Junction City to describe issues important to firefighters. They focused on retiree health care and the need to fund programs that help ensure there are enough firefighters across America.

Charles Atkinson and Kent Romine of Great Bend, Bill Wiley of Lyndon, Bob Henry of Robinson, Dennis Hupe of Topeka and John Wray of Ottawa were in the office to share the Kansas Soybean Association's 2007 budget concerns, farm bill priorities, trade issues and the soybean industry's recent research and development activities.

Jolene Niernberger of Hays, Connie Stewart of Topeka, Linda Chase of Winfield and Kathy Karr of Kansas City were in the office representing the Corporation for National and Community Service. They expressed the importance of federal funding for the Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent programs.

Karol Pykiet of Conway Springs, Randell Collier of Towanda, Milo Smith of Clearwater, Bill Reynolds of Lawrence, Debbie Wilson of Jetmore, Marty Wright of Council Grove, Connie Sheldon of Kanorado, Rose Crum of Sublette, Ginger Dody of Emporia, and JoAnn Wells of Meade, all members of the Kansas Chapter of the National Association of Postmasters, were in the office to discuss issues related to the postal service. Also dropping by to say hello were Judy Cundiff of Medicine Lodge and Ron Wood of Chetopa. Judy and Ron are also members of the National Association of Postmasters.

Brooke Tyler of Ulysses and Jeremy Martin of Hanover were in Washington this week participating in the Presidential Classroom program and stopped by my office to visit.

George Webb, Executive Director of the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs from Topeka, stopped by to update me on the proposed Fort Riley Veterans' Cemetery for veterans and their dependents in north-central Kansas. The land for the Veterans' Cemetery is in the final stages of being transferred from Fort Riley to the State of Kansas, at which point the design and construction will move forward.

A number of people stopped by my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Among those touring were Mickey and Nancy Mosier; Greg and Bobbie Bengtson and their sons, Blaine and Justin; Paula Wright and her daughter, Eryn; Eric and Bonnie Anderson and their daughter, Carly; and Mike Alley, all of Salina. Also in for a tour were Wesley and Nancy Jensen of Lincoln, with their son, Alex; Bob and Kathy Booth of Sterling; and Larry and Michelle Wittman of Hays, with their daughter, Rachel Schmidt. George Webb of Topeka came by with his daughter, Sydney. Charles and

Melanie Bayles of Wichita came by with their son, Tabor. Ken and Melissa Weishaar of Salina were in with their children, Evan, Cameron, Benjamin and Addie. Jim and Kathie Winter of Concordia were in with their son, Greg, and friend, Jake Redmond. Ron and Kim Eakes of Plains came by with their children, Laura, Kathy and Jason, and Kim's father, Don Davis, also of Plains. Elaine Urban of Bison toured with her son, David Urban and his wife, Gail, of Manhattan, and their children, Morgan, Grant and Madison, and friend Jessica Blasi, also of Manhattan.

As this week was spring break for many Kansas schools, a number of school groups came for a Capitol tour, including Hays High School, Garden City Middle School, Liberty Middle School in Pratt and Council Grove High School. Chapman Rackaway of Hays also brought a group of Fort Hays State University political science students for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry