

4/10/2006 This Week in Congress

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April 10, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

Sponsoring Legislation to Prohibit Protesting at National Cemeteries

This week I voiced my support for legislation I have sponsored to prohibit protesters from disrupting funeral services at national cemeteries during a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs hearing. This legislation protects mourning military families during funerals at Arlington National Cemetery and at national veterans' cemeteries across the country.

When our servicemen and women make the ultimate sacrifice to protect Americans, we have a responsibility to ensure the families of our fallen heroes can bury their loved ones with dignity. The Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act, H.R. 5037, prevents disruptions of military funerals at national cemeteries for one hour before and after services. It also prohibits protesting within 500 feet of funerals.

The hearing also provided me an opportunity to highlight legislation I have introduced to commend Patriot Guard Riders for shielding military families from protesters at funerals. I recognized Loren and Lynette Stenzel, riders from Ness City, who joined me for the hearing. We can all be thankful for these patriots who provide families and friends the peaceful time of mourning they deserve.

Addressing Genocide in Sudan

On Tuesday, with my strong support, the House passed the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, H.R. 3127, by a vote of 416-3. This legislation states the sense of the Congress that atrocities occurring in the Darfur region of Sudan are genocide and outlines punishments for countries and individuals that are aiding the current Sudanese regime. The bill prohibits foreign assistance to any government of a country that is in violation of the United Nations embargo on military assistance to Sudan. It also gives the President power to block the assets of any individual involved in acts of genocide or crimes against humanity in the Darfur region of Sudan.

Helping Protect our National Forests

This week I joined members of the House Committee on Agriculture in approving legislation, H.R. 4200, that helps protect our national forests by giving the U.S. Forest Service the ability to more quickly respond to catastrophic events that endanger our forests, such as fires and strong storms. The Agriculture Committee's actions clear the way for this legislation to now be considered by the full House.

Our public forests provide critical habitat for wildlife and provide recreational activities for many Americans to enjoy. It is our responsibility to properly care for them so that they may be preserved for future generations. H.R. 4200, the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act, helps ensure these lands will be properly managed so they remain a special part of the American landscape.

Speaking at the Annual Banquet of the North American Agricultural Journalists

This week I joined the North American Agricultural Journalists for their annual banquet in Washington, D.C. This professional organization has been around for more than 50 years and is made up of editors and writers from across the United States and Canada who report on the field of agriculture. I helped recognize fellow Hays resident Larry Dreiling, Senior Field Editor for the High Plains Journal, for his service as the organization's president. I have known Larry for many years and appreciate his efforts in representing Kansans and his work in sharing the story of agriculture and rural life. I visited with the group about the current issues of agriculture, including the upcoming farm bill, immigration and world trade. I appreciated the group's hospitality and the opportunity to meet with those working hard to keep readers informed about what's going on in the world of agriculture.

Western Kansas Community Leaders Visit Washington, D.C.

This week community leaders from Dodge City, Garden City, Liberal, Hays and Great Bend visited my office to discuss issues facing these western Kansas cities. Issues discussed included air and rail transportation, economic development, health care, immigration, energy and alternative fuels. In from Dodge City were Bob Wetmore, Kim Goodnight, Ken Strobel, Erin Goodnight, Ron Allen, Jeanie Zortman, Jerry King and Ed Elam. In with the City of Hays were Barbara Wasinger, Kent Steward, Troy Hickman, Toby Dougherty and Henry Schwaller. In representing the City of Liberal were Jack and Georgetta Taylor, Rozelle and Darrel Webb, Roger and Michelle Crossman, Steve Eisenhauer and Colleen Towns. In from Garden City were David Crase, Carol Meyer, Don Doll and Gary Fuller. In with the City of Great Bend were Mike Allison, David Thill, Jennifer Shartz, Jan Peters, Richard Boeckman and Howard Partington.

Honoring Cory Sager of Colby as an Eagle Scout

On Sunday I attended an Eagle Scout Court of Honor Ceremony for Cory Sager at the United Methodist Church in Colby. Cory is a freshman at Colby High School and was recognized Sunday for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout, which is the highest honor offered by Boy Scouts. The Eagle Scout rank is a performance-based achievement of which a Boy Scout must fulfill requirements in the areas of leadership, service and outdoor skills. Only about four percent of all Boy Scouts earn the Eagle Scout rank.

As a former scout and adult scouter, I see the significance of scouting in the values acquired and refined in the young men who participate in Boy Scouts. I paid tribute to Cory for his determination, dedication and the bright future he has ahead of him. Attaining the rank of Eagle Scout carries with it a special significance, not only in Scouting but also in higher education, business or industry, and community service.

Cory, who is a member of Troop 141, was joined by many community members, as well as his family for this celebration. His father, Alan, is the Scout Master and his mother, Tonya, is also involved in Scouting. It was good to see the community come together to recognize the achievement of this young man.

Enjoying the Music of Fort Hays State University Faculty at a Sunday Recital

I returned Sunday from Colby in time to attend a Fort Hays State University (FHSU) Department of Music faculty recital in

the Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center on the FHSU campus. Robba was the accompanist for performers Kay Werth on the oboe and the FHSU flute choir. This event is a great example of the cultural opportunities in western Kansas and the important role that music plays in our lives.

Stopping at Maple Hill Businesses to Visit with Community Members

En route to Washington, D.C., I made stops last Monday in Maple Hill to visit local businesses and talk to community members. I met with Wabaunsee county residents at Stock Growers Bank, Puffy's Steakhouse, the grocery store, post office and insurance agency for discussions about many current issues, including crop insurance, Medicare Part D, beef trade issues with Japan and community development projects.

In the Office

Cliff Mayo and J.R. Behan of Garden City and Ron Allen of Dodge City were in my office this week to discuss current progress on the HorseThief Reservoir project and to voice their support for federal funds to help construct the project. Michael Leitch of Manhattan with Frontier Farm Credit stopped by this week to share information about the Local Emphasis Agricultural Development (LEAD) program. Representatives from the Williams Company were in to brief me on a new natural gas pipeline that will run from Opal, Wyoming, to Conway, Kansas. The \$500 million project will run through Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas and will provide additional jobs for the facility in Conway.

In representing the Kansas Dental Association were Dr. Bill and Erin Donigan of Osage City, Dr. Cindi Sherwood of Independence, Dr. Mark and Dr. Melodee Armfield of Augusta, and Kevin Robertson of Topeka to talk about the need to provide increased care to disabled adults and elderly Kansans on Medicaid, as well as the importance of letting business and trade associations band members together to offer health care coverage. Debra Zehr of Topeka and Jim Morford of Ellsworth were in my office representing the Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging. They gave an

account of the challenges associated with providing long term care to elderly Kansans and described the need to find innovative ways to provide health care in rural Kansas.

Judy Billings of Lawrence and Annette Thornburg and Marion Cott of Topeka were in with the Kansas Humanities Council (KHC) to describe programs offered by KHC and explain the importance of federal funding. Last year, KHC sponsored 805 activities and grants throughout our state. Dan Senestraro of Johnson was in to discuss topics specific to Kansas dairy producers, including immigration and market issues.

Representatives of the National Association of Postal Supervisors visited my office to communicate their position on postal reform legislation. Representatives included Philip Wolke, James Thompson, Glenda Littlejohn and Gary Townson of Wichita; Albert Esquivel, Larry Ewing, Todd Larson, and Larry and Charlotte Tiffany of Topeka; and Peggy Bradfield, Larry Krouse, Herbert Schnieders, Larry Byers and Will McIntyre of Kansas City. In representing the Kansas Hospice and Palliative Care Organization were Vicki Fell of Emporia and Sandy Kuhlman of Phillipsburg to discuss the important role Hospice care plays in meeting rural health care needs.

Jean Curry of Salina, Jim Waters of Wamego and Sandy Braden of Topeka were in with the Kansas Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors to voice their support for allowing insurance and financial advisors to give 401(k) investment advice. Dale and Patricia Shaffer of Benton, along with Elmer Ronnebaum of Seneca were in the office to discuss rural water projects in Kansas and the National Rural Water Association's 2007 budget concerns. Harold Baalman of Wichita visited my office representing the Mid-America Lumbermen's Association to talk about the need for product liability reform.

Dr. Bill Wentz of Wichita was in the office representing the National Institute of Aviation Research to voice his support for increasing science, technology, engineering and math education for students of all ages. I am a member of the House Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education Caucus, which promotes the importance of these subjects to our nation's future.

Iral Porter of Kansas City visited my office to talk about Title VII funding and to explain the impact budget cuts would have on the University of Kansas Medical Center. He also discussed the health careers pathways program, the Centers of Excellence for minority health professions education program and the continued need for recruiting and training physicians. Representatives of the National Association of Professional Insurance Agents were in to voice their support for regulatory modernization that leaves regulatory authority to states. In with the group were John Crain of Ft. Scott, Chuck Simpson of Kansas City, Sue Peachey of Pratt and Gregg Langton of Manhattan.

Sandra Ferguson and Bette Kohman of Salina and Ed Pyle of Lenexa were in representing the Southern Oncology Association of Practices to talk about increasing Medicare reimbursements, the challenges in recruiting oncologists and other health professionals to rural areas, and the impact that cancer has on people's daily lives. Richard Epard of Colby stopped by the office this week to discuss the position of Land O'Lakes on legislative issues, including the next farm bill, international trade and immigration.

Virginia Beesley of Quinter and Todd Goolson of Manhattan were in to share information about the National Writing Project and the importance of helping teachers develop their abilities to teach writing to their students. Sandy Barnett of Topeka was in representing the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence to discuss the current status of sexual assault and domestic violence crimes in Kansas and the need for additional resources to continue efforts to help victims.

Dr. Michael and Catherine Whitehair of Abilene dropped by my office for a courtesy visit, as did Steve Bennett of Salina. State Senator John Vratil of Leawood and State Representatives Jo Ann Pottorff of Wichita, Melvin Neufeld of Ingalls and Don Hill of Emporia also stopped by my office this week.

In my office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week were Luis and Jean Fuertes of Manhattan, with their children, Heather and Joseph; as well as Bill Selby, Gene Hawkins and Lawrence Mayer of Brewster. Eileen Baerg of Salina brought a group of people from Hillsboro, Salina and the surrounding areas to Washington, D.C., and also took a tour of the Capitol building.

Very truly yours,

Jerry