

4/24/2006 This Week in Congress

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April 24, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I return to Washington, D.C., tomorrow as Congress reconvenes after a two-week district work period. While I was back in Kansas, people expressed concern with gas prices every where I went. I believe it is imperative the Administration launch a formal investigation into the causes of high gas prices and whether price gouging has occurred. Also this week the House of Representatives will be discussing lobbying reform. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Agriculture Chairman Travels to Kansas to Study Conservation Practices

Congressman Bob Goodlatte, Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, joined me in Kansas this week for my eighth "Partners in Conservation" tour. This year's tour in north central Kansas featured stops in Republic, Jewell, Cloud, Mitchell, Lincoln and Saline Counties.

Having the Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee spend time on our Kansas farms and ranches is important in helping me advocate on behalf of our agricultural producers. Kansas depicts a very different perspective of agriculture than Chairman Goodlatte's home state of Virginia, where poultry and forestry are the top agriculture products. This tour marked Chairman Goodlatte's first trip to Kansas and provided me an opportunity to share the efforts of conservation stakeholders in Kansas as they work together to improve our state's natural resources.

This tour focused on a variety of conservation issues important to Kansas, including water use and conservation; wildlife habitat protection; Conservation Reserve Program re-enrollment, quality and maintenance issues; Environmental Quality Incentives Program; the Conservation Security Program; Lovewell Reservoir; the Republican River; watershed structures, protection and restoration strategies; and the future of the Ogallala Aquifer.

Conservation efforts and issues affecting rural areas are at the forefront in Kansas and will be an important part of the next farm bill. Chairman Goodlatte can now utilize what he learned while in Kansas when making important decisions that affect our Midwest farmers and ranchers.

This tour was made possible with the help of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency. I also appreciate David and Franklin Heyka of Republic County; Steve Boehner, Keith Houghton and Harry Schmitt of Mitchell County; and Steve Schneider of Lincoln County for welcoming us on their farms and land for tour stops, as well as the efforts of officials from Kansas State University Research and Extension, K-State Salina, the Bureau of Reclamation, Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, CloudCorp, Spillman Creek Watershed, The Nature Conservancy, Ringneck Ranch and Formoso Senior Center.

Representing the Interests of U.S. Agriculture with Trade Officials in Geneva

On behalf of the House Agriculture Committee, I traveled to the headquarters of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva to meet with top U.S. and WTO officials. I visited with trade ambassadors from six different continents to discuss progress on the Doha round of trade negotiations, which focuses on lowering trade barriers around the world.

After spending time with negotiators from several countries, it is apparent the April 30 deadline for an agreement on broad formulas to cut farm subsidies and tariffs will not be met. I made it clear to U.S. negotiators that while reaching an agreement is important, the first priority must be that any agreement be good and fair for our farmers and ranchers. The United States has already placed a very generous offer on the table. Reduction of domestic subsidies will not gain congressional support without real and significant gains in market access. I conveyed to representatives from other organizations, particularly those of the European Union, that it is time for them to make an offer that provides comparable benefits to the U.S. through reduced tariffs and increased market access. The ability to sell our products around the world is vital to the success of America's producers.

Due to the lack of progress on these WTO negotiations, many in Washington have suggested extending the current 2002 Farm Bill. This is a poor reason to delay a new farm bill. Extension of the farm bill is only acceptable if it is determined to be the best deal for American agriculture. The Senate and House Agriculture Committees need to determine what farm policy is best for American agriculture, not negotiators in Geneva. Ultimately, the lack of progress in the WTO negotiations makes the desirability of moving forward with a new farm bill even greater.

Touring Home Depot of Hays

This morning I spent time at the Hays Home Depot with store manager Jeff Bergstrom. Mr. Bergstrom gave me a tour of the facility and I had the chance to meet several employees and learn more about the company. I appreciated the hospitality of the manager and that of the employees.

In the Office

In my office for a tour of the United States Capitol this week were Loren and Alice Arnold of Hutchinson, Richard and Jeanette Schneider of Emporia, Jack and Marilyn Gregory of Independence, and Rita Kofoid of Hays. Also in from Salina were John Wood and his daughter, Katie, and Nellye Bell and her daughter, Elizabeth.

Very truly yours,

Jerry