

## 5/08/2006 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

May 8, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

### Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Enrollment Deadline Quickly Approaching

The May 15 deadline for seniors to enroll in the Medicare Prescription Drug benefit is quickly approaching. Despite my efforts to push back this deadline, it unfortunately does not appear this will happen. Those who miss this deadline will not be able to sign up again until November and will then face higher premiums as a penalty for late enrollment.

While I was back in Kansas this weekend, I traveled to Russell to visit with local pharmacists at Gregwire Pharmacy and Don Dawson Drug about Part D. I encourage seniors to consult with their local pharmacist about the variety of available plans. Though some seniors question the need for this program because of their good health, it may be needed at a later stage in life. Unfortunately, they will be burdened with a permanent penalty fee.

In addition to local pharmacists and volunteers, there are other resources available to assist Kansans in making this important decision:

## Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)

- 1-800-MEDICARE
- <http://www.medicare.gov/>

## Senior Health Insurance Counseling for Kansas (SHICK)

- 1-800-860-5260
- <http://www.agingkansas.org/shick/>

Thanks to our Kansas pharmacists, CMS staff, and other local outreach volunteers for their tireless efforts in educating people about this program. As we near the May 15 deadline, I encourage seniors to seek answers to their questions and determine if enrollment is in their best interests.

## House Passes Measures to Address Corruption in Congress

As elected officials, Members of Congress have been entrusted by the American people with the responsibility of making our society a better place to live. As such, we all must be held to the highest ethical and moral standards. The recent stories of corruption and bribery coming out of our nation's capital have disappointed and saddened me.

On Wednesday, I supported House passage of the Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. This legislation includes many common sense remedies and punishments to address corruption. Provisions of the legislation would require Members of Congress to forfeit their pensions and retirement benefits if convicted of bribery, make lobbyists disclose more frequently who they are lobbying and what they are lobbying for, and reform the earmark process by making public any request a member has made.

I have also sponsored a separate bill that would establish an independent Office of Public Integrity to oversee all Members of Congress. Please know that my first priority has always been the well-being of the people of Kansas.

#### Weighing in on Disaster Assistance for Kansas Farmers and Ranchers

Farmers and ranchers suffered significant losses last year as a result of adverse growing conditions. In 2005, all but 4 of the 105 counties in Kansas were declared primary or contiguous disaster areas. For this reason, I have asked House leaders to support agriculture disaster assistance as part of supplemental appropriations legislation currently working its way through the legislative process. I pledged to work with leaders to deliver fiscally responsible, yet effective disaster assistance.

A variety of natural disasters, including drought in Kansas and the hurricanes along the Gulf Coast, have caused devastating losses that are either not covered by crop insurance or are not adequately addressed by available policies. In addition, multiple year droughts result in reduced coverage to producers who hold even the best available crop insurance policies.

These crop losses have occurred at a time of significant increases in cost of production. Unless the immediate emergency needs of the producers in Kansas and across the country are met, the lack of adequate coverage coupled with the tremendous increase in fuel, fertilizer and natural gas may force many farmers and ranchers out of business.

## House Approves Legislation Strengthening Port Security

The House passed legislation this week to enhance the security of our seaports and cargo entering the country. The recent controversy over Dubai Ports World, a United Arab Emirates-owned company that unsuccessfully attempted to purchase operations at several U.S. seaports, called attention to security vulnerabilities in American ports. U.S. ports handle more than 95 percent of our foreign trade, totaling more than \$1 trillion annually. A terrorist attack on our ports could have a devastating effect on our economy. The Security and Accountability for Every (SAFE) Port Act authorizes programs to assist ports in making security improvements, requires the installation of radiation detectors at U.S. ports, and directs the Department of Homeland Security to develop plans for the restoration of commerce in the event of a disaster to prevent economic loss. Similar legislation is under consideration in the Senate.

## Hearing from Agricultural Producers in Arizona

I spent the beginning of this week in Coolidge, Arizona, where my Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management held the second in a series of field hearings to review various aspects of the 2002 Farm Bill. Four of my fellow Committee members joined me for the hearing to learn about a variety of farm policy issues, including livestock programs; cotton, fruit and vegetable production; weather and water issues; land values; and crop insurance from Arizona producers. At least 60 members of the community attended the hearing.

With roughly 7,300 farms and ranches throughout the state, Arizona produces a wide variety of commodities from lettuce and cotton to beef and dairy products, among many others. My Subcommittee went to Coolidge to gather feedback about

our current farm policy and hear the concerns facing producers in this region of the country.

## Honoring Kansas Governor John Anderson

This week, I honored John Anderson, our state's 36th governor, in a statement to the House of Representatives. His service to our state occurred during the middle part of this century in all three branches of our state government. During his two years in the state's top position, Governor Anderson used his experiences to help reform and restructure several institutions, including the state's pardon and parole systems, the public welfare system, and the state's public school system. To honor Governor Anderson's contributions as a public servant, the House passed legislation introduced by Congressman Dennis Moore designating a post office in Olathe as the "Governor John Anderson, Jr. Post Office Building." The entire statement is available at: [http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01\\_moran/](http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/)

sp050206GovernorAnderson.html

## Hays Resident Testifies in Washington, D.C., on Rural Telecommunication Needs

Johnie Johnson of Hays was in Washington, D.C., this week to testify in a congressional hearing held by the House Small Business Subcommittee on Rural Enterprises, Agriculture, and Technology. Mr. Johnson is the CEO and General Manager of Nex-Tech Wireless, a wireless service provider serving rural Kansas. He contributed to the discussion of the sustainability of the Universal Service Fund (USF) and whether reform of this program is needed. USF was created to help ensure that telecommunications services are available to all Americans, including those in rural areas, at reasonable rates. Mr. Johnson played an important role in the hearing by providing feedback on the situation in Kansas and rural America. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with him while he was in our nation's capital.

## Meeting with Families Involved in Northeast Kansas Community Action Programs

On my way home from Washington, D.C., I visited the Northeast Kansas Community Action Programs (NEK-CAP) office in Hiawatha to discuss the Head Start program. I had the opportunity to meet with a group of about 25 parents, staff and students who participate in the Head Start program. It was helpful for me to learn about their concerns with the program, as well as to hear some of the local success stories. It is the caring people that work in these programs that truly make a difference in the lives of others.

#### Visiting with Frankfort High School Senior Government Class

After being in Hiawatha, I traveled to Frankfort to speak with Mr. Bruce Gunter's high school senior government class. The class of 19 students was very attentive and we had a great conversation about fuel prices, immigration and how government and news affect them on a daily basis.

#### In the Office

Kansas Library Association representatives Marc Galbraith, Rob Banks and Rosanne Siemens of Topeka; Sue Blechl of Emporia; Laura Loveless of Kansas City; Eldora McMinimy of Ashland; Michelle Swain of Arkansas City; Lori Goetsch of Manhattan; and Tim Rogers of Shawnee came by the office to express their support for E-rates, which help libraries and schools stay technologically competitive. Representatives of Vermillion School District #380, Beth and Seth Reust and Martha and Joe Parthemer, were in to discuss the funding challenges associated with No Child Left Behind and the continued need for E-Rates to help provide technology to rural schools.

Clare Gustin and Earl Watkins of Hays, Stuart Lowry of Topeka and Mark Calcara of Great Bend were in the office to update me on Sunflower Electric's recent projects in Kansas. Members of Kansas Electric Cooperatives (KEC) came by to discuss legislative priorities, recent projects and accomplishments. In with KEC were Ron Holsteen of Altamont, Dave Holthaus and Mike Peters of Topeka, Marvin Hampton and Jerry King of Dodge City, Ken Maginley of Wamego, Keith Ross of Norton, and Earl and Erik Steffens and Issac Levin of Dighton. In representing the American Agriculture Movement was Larry Matlack of Burrton to share his proposal for a tax credit for businesses that adopt biomass energy technology.

Keith Yehle of Lawrence was in representing the University of Kansas to talk about research projects going on at the university. Jeff Peier of Wichita and Kay Julian of Leawood were in representing the National Multiple Sclerosis Society to discuss the need for continued research for Multiple Sclerosis and other health conditions. In representing the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging was Julie Govert Walter of Manhattan to describe the importance of reauthorizing the Older Americans Act.

Members of the Kansas Hospital Association were in the office to discuss price transparency, Medicare Advantage, and patient rehabilitation rates. Representatives included Tom Bell, Melissa Hungerford, Fred Lucky and Maynard Oliverius of Topeka; David Bradley of Junction City; Rita Buurman of Sabetha; Vicki Hahn of Leoti; Roger and Jackie John of Phillipsburg; Terry Lambert of Emporia; Greg Lundstrom of Lindsborg; Blaine Miller of Belleville; Randy Peterson of Salina; and Gene Schmidt of Hutchinson. In my office with the Kansas Optometric Association to describe the importance of children's eye exams and to express the need for student loan forgiveness programs were Dr. Troy Maydew of Pratt, Dr. Bruce Boyle of Wichita, Dr. Mike Hattan of Hays and Dr. Mike Malone of Topeka.

Dr. Leo Pauls of the National Teachers Hall of Fame in Emporia stopped by the office to give an update on the progress of the 2006 inductees and the efforts being made to increase the Hall of Fame's visibility. Tom and Linda Brungardt of Junction City and Pam Taverner of Wichita were in with the National Education Association to discuss education funding and the Voting Rights Act. Kansas Community Mental Health Center Directors Mike Hammond of Topeka, David Wiebe of Mission, Pete Zevenbergen and Karen Suddath of Kansas City, and Dwight Young of Great Bend came by to talk about the expansion of Medicare reimbursed providers and the proposed changes to rehabilitative services.

William Jones of Manhattan, Howard Wilcox of Olathe and Gary Caruthers of Topeka were in representing the Kansas Orthopedic Society to discuss liability reform and the pay-for-performance plan. Ken McCauley of White Cloud came in on behalf of the National Corn Growers Association to talk about my visit to Geneva. He thanked me for speaking up on behalf of American agriculture not only to our negotiators, but also to our world competitors.

Trace Walker of Salina stopped by my office to let me know about issues important to the National Association of Travel Plazas and Truckstops. We discussed Ultra-low Sulfur Diesel Fuel and proposals to commercialize public rest stops along our nation's interstate system. Bob Riordan of Lawrence and Scott Heidner of Topeka were in representing the American Council of Engineering Companies to explain the challenge of providing affordable health care for employees. Mr. Riordan and Mr. Heidner also asked for my continued support for our nation's water infrastructure needs.

Caleb Alexander of Garden City was in Washington, D.C., this week to meet with USDA officials and Members of Congress as part of an award he received from FFA. Caleb is a sophomore at Friends University and was one of ten winners of the FFA National Risk Management Essay Contest. Caleb represents the future of agriculture in our state and hopes to return to his family farm after completing his education. Joining Caleb were his father, Eldon, and Jill Casten, originally from Quenemo, with the National FFA Organization.

Kansans in my office this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol included Monroe and Carol Funk of Salina and Mike and Linda Ringwald of Ellinwood. Doyle and Charlotte Rahjes of Agra brought their grandson, Grant Rahjes of Lexington, Nebraska, by my office. The Minnix family - Jim, Eilene, Gayle, Carl and Luke - of Scott City was also in, along with Wanda Minnix of Garden City and JoAnn Radiel of Salina. In from Larned for a tour were Galen Green, Kevin and Leann Simmons, and Mark Jantz.

Very truly yours,

Jerry