

7/13/2009 This Week in Congress

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July 13, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Kansas Is Not Wall Street

On Friday, I questioned Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner as he testified during a joint hearing of the House Financial Services and Agriculture committees on the Obama Administration's plan to regulate financial instruments used in the trading of securities and commodities.

As we are trying to improve the economy, the Administration's proposed regulations will make it more difficult for Kansas

banks to make loans. This makes it uncertain whether otherwise financially-sound Kansas business owners will be able to secure the credit necessary to operate.

I explained to Secretary Geithner, without exception, that Kansas banks are not like the financial institutions on Wall Street, whose risky activities placed our country in its current financial mess. I also reiterated this fact to Kansas Community Bankers recently during a meeting with them. Kansas banks did things right. They did not give out loans to borrowers who could not afford to repay them. I wanted the Secretary to know that the inappropriate and unnecessary regulations on banks, uncertain bank examination standards and increasing FDIC premiums, will affect Kansas banks and their individual and business borrowing, business owners and will slow the economic recovery. [Click here to see a photo from the hearing.](#) [Click here to view the video of my conversation with Secretary Geithner.](#)

Discussing Kansas Health Care Priorities with Secretary Sebelius

This week, I met with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius in her office in Washington, D.C. to discuss health care reform and critical health care issues affecting Kansans.

Right now, we stand at an important juncture in our health care system. The Obama Administration and Democratic congressional leaders have vowed to pass a comprehensive health care reform bill before the August congressional recess - which is just a few weeks away. I am concerned about the rapid pace that reform legislation is being drafted. Therefore, I requested to meet with Secretary Sebelius to see that Kansas priorities are identified and sufficiently addressed in any health care legislation. [Click here to read my recent editorial regarding rural health care needs that should be addressed in health care reform.](#)

During my meeting with Secretary Sebelius, we discussed a wide range of health care issues including: the proposed closure of St. Joseph Memorial Hospital in Larned, the possible loss of Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation for

hospitals in Wamego and Onaga and Kansas' possible participation in the Rural Community Hospital Demonstration Program. [Click here to read more about my meeting.](#)

Secretary Sebelius and I had a productive meeting. As a former governor of our state, the Secretary has insight into the unique health care issues that Larned and other small towns face. I appreciate her meeting with me and her willingness to help with Kansas health care issues.

Opposition to Cap and Tax Bill

Results from a poll posted on my congressional Web site demonstrate Kansans are overwhelmingly opposed to the Waxman-Markey cap and tax bill passed by the House of Representatives on June 26, 2009. Approximately 92 percent of Kansans who voted in this online survey opposed the legislation that will increase energy prices on families and small businesses.

Reports estimate the cost of cap and tax legislation on each household is an additional \$2,979 per year. I voted against this legislation that will cause a significant increase in the price of utility bills, transportation, agriculture production and most everyday products. In the midst of this economic slump, American families simply cannot afford an increase in cost for basic necessities. While the legislation passed the House, prospects for passage in the Senate are uncertain. [Click here to view my comments on the cap and tax bill during House debate.](#)

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

On Wednesday, I spoke at the annual meeting of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives in Washington, D.C. Representatives from farmer cooperatives across the nation, including Leslie Kaufman with the Kansas Cooperative Council in Topeka, attended the meeting. I discussed topics with the Council members like climate change legislation, pending food safety legislation and the increasing amount of burdensome federal regulations that are making it tougher to do business in rural America. [Click here to see a photo from the meeting.](#)

Fighting for Kansas Livestock Producers

This week, I led a group of members of Congress in an effort to support cattle producers, beef processors and rural communities by recommending that the Obama Administration adopt new strategies to recover lost beef export markets. We recommended that U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack change negotiation strategies to allow a more flexible approach to achieving access for U.S. beef in foreign markets.

U.S. farmers and ranchers have experienced significant economic harm from unjustified trade restrictions and we need to identify new methods to open overseas markets. For instance, the discovery of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in the United States in 2003 caused the beef industry to struggle to reclaim lost export markets. Japan prohibited U.S. beef imports until July 27, 2006, at which time Japan agreed to accept beef from cattle less than 21 months of age.

I asked Ambassador Kirk and Secretary Vilsack to work toward agreements with Japan, China and Taiwan that recognize the science behind World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines on BSE, but allow a more flexible, staged OIE compliance schedule to allow the U.S. to break the stalemated negotiation process. For instance, I requested that the Administration pursue an agreement with Japan that will allow immediate access for beef from cattle less than 30 months of age. Given our nation's current economic condition, now is the time that we need every possible market available for Kansas cattlemen. [Click here to read more about my efforts.](#)

Introducing the Homebuyer Tax Credit Expansion Act

I have heard from many Kansas home buyers, home builders and real estate agents about the success of the first time homebuyer tax credit program in improving the housing market in our state. This tax credit for first time home buyers was created in 2008 to assist those purchasing homes and to stabilize the struggling housing market. Kansans have told me about the value of the program, but also the need for improvements so the credit can be better utilized.

To ensure this program's continued success, especially in encouraging the construction of new homes, I have introduced the Homebuyer Tax Credit Expansion Act, H.R. 2905. This legislation would expand the current \$8,000 credit beyond first time home buyers to include all home buyers of a principle residence. This tax credit would be extended for two years, from November 30, 2009, until December 31, 2011. In addition, my legislation would allow those who purchased homes using the tax credit in 2008 to keep the \$7,500 they are required to pay back.

House Nursing Caucus

This week, I joined the House Nursing Caucus. Members of Congress form caucuses and coalitions to represent issues and to raise awareness for causes important in their states.

The House Nursing Caucus currently has 126 members and was established to educate Members of Congress on the issues important to nurses and the impact nurses have on the health care delivery system. [Click here to see what other](#)

caucuses and coalitions I am a part of.

Meeting New K-State President

On Tuesday morning, I met the new president of Kansas State University, Dr. Kirk Schulz. President Schulz is the 13th president of the university and comes to Manhattan from Mississippi, where he was the vice president for research and economic development at Mississippi State University. I appreciated the opportunity to get acquainted with President Schulz and learn more about his goals for K-State. His goals include: making K-State's relationship with K-State Salina and K-State Olathe very strong; helping to make the first year for K-State students a remarkable one; and collaborating with other state universities in Kansas.

During my campus visit, I was able to talk with the new K-State Athletic Director, John Currie. I also appreciated the opportunity to speak with the President's Cabinet, which was meeting that morning. K-State plays important role in our state and provides education and research opportunities to students from Kansas and all over the country. Thanks to President Schulz for his hospitality and time. [Click here to view a photo.](#)

Wesley Medical Center in Wichita

On Monday, I toured the Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, which is an acute-care center that is licensed for 760 beds. The medical staff of 700 physicians and 3,000 employees provides a full range of diagnostic and treatment services for patients from throughout Kansas and northern Oklahoma. Every year, more than 25,000 adults and children are inpatients and more than 6,000 babies are born at Wesley.

During my visit, I toured the Neonatal Intensive Care and Pediatric Intensive Care units and the Emergency Department, which is the largest in Kansas. I also had the opportunity to discuss health care reform and the impacts of such reform to Kansas hospitals with the Wesley staff.

Thanks to Hugh Tappan, President and CEO of Wesley Medical Center; DeAnn Most, Manager Senior Services; Sam Serrill, Chief Operating Officer; Steve Edgar, Chief Operating Officer; Don Morris, VP Human Resources and Support Services; Greg Gawlik, Controller; Matt Leary, Chief Financial Officer; Kathy Neely, Chief Nursing Officer; Francie H. Ekengren, MD., Chief Medical Officer; John Marker, Associate Chief Nursing Officer; and Jason Whinham, Administrative Fellow.

Congratulating 2009 Congressional Art Winner Katie Wolters

Recently, I met with Katie Wolters of Osborne, the winner of the 2009 Congressional Art Competition, and her family in Washington, D.C. Katie received the Best of Show award for her drawing entitled, "Girl Undefined," in the art competition that was held at the Denies Cultural Center in Russell in May.

The annual Congressional Arts Competition showcases the artistic abilities of Kansas high school students. This year, more than 100 entries were submitted from 11 schools throughout the First Congressional District.

I was glad to have the chance to congratulate Katie in Washington, D.C., where, for the next year, her artwork will be displayed in the Capitol. [Click here to view a photo from Katie's visit.](#)

In the Office

Bret Healy of Topeka and Steve McNinch of Oakley were in with Western Plains Energy to discuss regulation of the renewable fuels industry. Leslie Kaufman of Topeka was in with the Kansas Cooperative Council to visit about the concerns of Kansas cooperatives, including pending climate change, food safety and labor legislation. Jackie Clark and Charles Hansen of Kansas City were in with Ash Grove Cement to visit.

Robin McClean and Meg Marshall of Kansas City were in with Cerner Corporation to talk about the benefits of electronic medical records. Tom Bell and Fred Lucky of Topeka, John Jeter of Hays, Roger John of Phillipsburg, Leonard Hernandez of Elkhart and Jim Reagan of Council Grove were in with the Kansas Hospital Association to discuss health care reform and potential impacts on Kansas hospitals.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Tyler Stalder of Wichita and Jordan Stalder of Chapman; Keith and Alice Tallent of Dodge City; Frank and Doris Waite of Great Bend; Dennis, Wendy, Brody, Shelby and Collin Queal of Hutchinson; Chris Brown of Kansas City; Fred Britten of Hays; Lindsy Britten of Overland Park; and James, Kacey, Javon, Terrell, Isaac, Jada, James and Jaylese Burse of Salina.

Very truly yours,

Jerry