

7/20/2009 This Week in Congress

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July 20, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Health Care Reform Debate

This week, House Democratic leaders released their \$1.3 trillion health care reform proposal. Health care reform legislation is one of the most important items Congress will consider. As introduced, I do not support this legislation. I believe our health care system is in need of reform to enable access to quality health care for all Americans and to slow runaway costs. Basically, I will insist that reform legislation address the unique health care needs of rural Americans and that health care decisions are made by physicians and their patients.

To address the recent release of the legislation, I responded to several questions during a taped interview discussing several issues about the current health care reform debate. My taped responses are available on my Web site, or by clicking [here](#).

Also this week, I sponsored legislation calling for Members of Congress who support government-run health care to automatically enroll in the "public plan." In some of the health care bills being crafted by Congress, Members are exempt from participation in the public plan. I am concerned that an expansion of government-run health care will inevitably lead to rationing of care and higher taxes for the middle class. If Members are convinced that the public, government-run option will deliver the same quality of care as their congressional health plans, then they should be willing to enroll in the public option automatically. Congress should stop asking the American people to make sacrifices they are not willing to make themselves.

I have been pushing for health care reform and am encouraging Kansans to let me know where they stand on the health care reform debate. Please click [here](#) to vote in an on-line poll on my Web site to voice your opinion about health care reform.

Supporting Investigation Into FEMA Flood Maps

This week, the Republican members of the Kansas delegation requested an investigation into the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) flood map upgrading methods under its Flood Map Modernization Initiative (FMMI). We notified U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Acting Comptroller General Gene Dodaro of possibly flawed methods used during the FMMI that changed the floodplain map for Finney County and other Kansas counties.

Protecting Kansans and businesses in flood-prone areas is always a first priority for our state. However, inaccurate flood

maps will fail our communities, such as Garden City, that have for 100 years grown responsibly around designated floodplain areas. It is FEMA's responsibility to provide consistent analysis of collected data. This GAO investigation will go a long way to ensure that this happens.

[Click here to read more.](#) [Click here to view the letter the Kansas Republican members sent to GAO.](#)

Veterans Affairs Committee Approves Legislation

On Wednesday, in the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, I supported approval of several bills that would improve benefits and services to veterans. Approved were legislation to expand life insurance options available for veterans and their families, a bill to support the caregivers of wounded veterans, and a measure to increase home adaptation grants to veterans who require in-home medical care.

The Committee also approved legislation that I introduced to increase the participation of physician assistants within the VA. Physician assistants are crucial to providing medical care in rural and other underserved areas. This bill will help ensure that physician assistants are fully integrated and well utilized to provide veterans living in rural communities timely access to quality care. Last year, this legislation was passed by the House but unfortunately was not considered by the Senate.

Agriculture Committee Hearing on Food Safety

On Thursday, I participated in a hearing about food safety conducted by the House Agriculture Committee. The primary focus of the hearing was to review H.R. 2749, the Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009, which was recently approved by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. We had the chance to hear from a diverse group of farmers and ranchers. Most of the witnesses - ranging from an organic produce farmer to the American Farm Bureau - opposed the bill. Much of the opposition to H.R. 2749 is centered on the part of the bill that would allow the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to set agricultural performance standards and allow on-farm inspections.

I am opposed to this ill-conceived legislation. Farmers should be in the business of farming, not the FDA. We will improve food safety by allowing farmers and ranchers to do something that they and their ancestors have been doing for generations. [Click here](#) to view my recent remarks about H.R. 2749 before the House of Representatives.

Visiting with Crop Life America

On Wednesday, I spoke to a group of representatives from Crop Life America. Crop Life America was established in 1933 and represents more than 80 developers, manufacturers, formulators and distributors of virtually all the crop protection products used by American farmers and growers. The group shared with me their concerns about the increasing regulatory burden that will make production agriculture more expensive and less profitable.

Congratulating Kansas Tar Wars Poster Winner, Robin Ritsema

This week, I met with Robin Ritsema of Lakin, the poster winner of the Kansas Tar Wars. Tar Wars is a tobacco-free

education program for fourth- and fifth-grade students. The program is operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), and is implemented in classrooms across the country to teach children about the short-term, image-based consequences of tobacco use. The program also teaches the cost associated with using tobacco products and the advertising techniques used by the tobacco industry to market their products to youth. The Kansas Tar Wars is sponsored by the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians.

I was glad to have the opportunity to meet with Robin and her mother, Yoka Ritsema, to congratulate her during their visit to Washington, D.C. [Click here to view a photo.](#)

Meeting with Kansas Community Bankers

Recently, I met with the Community Bankers Association of Kansas (CBA) to discuss the current state of the economy at their 31st Annual Convention. Formed in 1978, the Kansas CBA is a statewide organization of locally owned and operated banks intent on preserving local credit for local development. Throughout Kansas, community banks provide the needed services and supply the capital to create and expand businesses. CBA's outgoing Chairman is Galen H. Pelton, of Grant County Bank in Ulysses, and the incoming Chairman is Gary L. Kay, of Nekoma State Bank in LaCrosse. Thanks to CBA's President and CEO, Shawn Mitchell, for his help and hospitality.

During the annual convention, bankers expressed concern with the Administration's proposed new consumer regulations. These regulations, in addition to increasing FDIC insurance premiums and the uncertainty of examinations standards, will make it more difficult for Kansas banks to make loans hurting Kansas individuals and businesses and slowing the economic recovery. Additional regulations should be focused on Wall Street financial institutions that were the real cause of the financial crisis, not on Kansas banks.

I was in Pretty Prairie on Saturday where I visited with community members at the City Office, the Pretty Prairie Public Library, Citizens Bank of Kansas, the Pretty Prairie Civic Theatre and Strohl Oil. The town was busy Saturday as it was the last day of the Pretty Prairie Rodeo. For the 72nd year, the community welcomed folks from across the state and Midwest for the 4-night rodeo. The Pretty Prairie Rodeo is the largest nighttime rodeo in the state and attracts thousands of spectators each year. In addition to the rodeo events, there are also dances and other activities.

Supporting Music Education

On Saturday evening, I attended a reception at the home of Dick and Kay Werth in Hays to recognize the sponsors and faculty of the High Plains Band and Orchestra Camp and Summer Music Festival. Kay is the director of the camp, which has offered middle and high school students the opportunity to learn from nationally recognized musicians and instructors from across the state since 1947. This year's camp, hosted at Fort Hays State University, began yesterday and ends Saturday. Thanks to the Werth's for hosting the event and to all the sponsors of this year's camp for supporting music education.

Visiting Anthony

Downtown in Anthony: On Saturday, I traveled to Anthony to visit the community following a gas explosion that happened earlier this month. The explosion damaged several buildings, forced the evacuation of two downtown blocks and caused injuries. I was encouraged to see the community's recovery efforts in the downtown area following the accident.

Thanks to Mayor Barbara Muse; Don Heidrick, City Administrator; and Kenny Hodson, Fire Chief; for inviting me to view the recovery.

Anthony Downs Races: While visiting Anthony, I was also able to attend Anthony Downs Races. This year is the 105th consecutive edition of the Anthony Downs Races. It is the longest running simultaneous horse and dog track in the United States. Before the races, I was grateful to have the opportunity to present a U.S. flag to the Anthony Fair Association to commemorate 105 years of running at the Anthony Downs.

Annual Listening Tour Continues

This week, I will be in Wilson in Ellsworth County at the Senior Center conducting my town hall tour stop. These meetings help me stay in touch with Kansans and learn about what issues continue to be important to them.

Here is a list of my upcoming stops:

Saturday, July 25

Ellsworth County Tour Stop, Wilson

Time: 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. CST

Location: Senior Center

Address: 511 25th Street

Tuesday, August 4

Greenwood County Tour Stop, Madison

Time: 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. CST

Location: Sauder Community Center

Address: 110 South 1st Street

Thursday, August 13

Marion Country Tour Stop, Hillsboro

Time: 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. CST

Location: Wolhgemuth Music Education Center lobby, Tabor College

Address: 400 South Jefferson Street

Chase County Tour Stop, Cottonwood Falls

Time: 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. CST

Location: TBD

McPherson County Tour Stop, McPherson

Time: 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. CST

Location: Chamber of Commerce

Address: 306 N. Main Street

Residents are invited to attend the town halls to share their thoughts with me on current issues. [Click here to view the listening tour schedule and the areas I have stopped this year.](#)

In the Office

Kansas Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh, Bill Roe and Brad Bryant of Topeka were in to visit. Representatives of U.S. AgBank and members of Farm Credit institutions were in to tell me about issues impacting Farm Credit and its members. In with the group were Alan Jaax, Greg Reno and Greg Somerhalder of Wichita; Don Wissman and Doug Hofbauer of Manhattan; Bill Fleming of Lawrence; Danny Koehn of Montezuma; Ron Rahjes of Kensington; Larry Kepley of Ulysses; Larry Barrett of Colby and Joe Schoonover of Byers.

Lena Kisner of Hutchinson was in with the Kansas Association of School Psychologists to discuss the role school psychologists play in children's lives. Michael Schuttloffel of Topeka was in with the Kansas Catholic Conference to talk about health care reform. Gary Du of Overland Park, Xinyi Griffin of Lenexa and Feifei Meng were in to update me on the continued persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China, which began 10 years ago. Jim Loving of McPherson was in with the National Cooperative Refinery Association to discuss cap and tax legislation.

Larry Pitman of Topeka was in with the Kansas Foundation for Medical Care to support cutting health care costs and improving the quality of health care. Duane Dorhorst of Oberlin, Deb Ayers Geist of Kansas City, Deb Watson of Lindsborg, Jackie Feist of Dodge City and G.A. Buie of Gardner were in with the National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals to support investment in education to increase student achievement. Michael Lerner of Overland Park stopped by to visit. Robin and Yoka Ritsema of Lakin were in to visit before taking a Capitol tour. Robin is this year's Kansas Tar Wars Poster Winner.

James Hissong and Ron and Marilyn Bowling of Lenexa and Kerri Spielman and Larry Magill of Topeka were in with the

Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers of America to discuss comprehensive health reform. Pam Stanberry, CEO of Wesley Rehabilitation Hospital in Wichita, was in to tell me about the role that inpatient rehabilitation providers play in the health care delivery system. Donna Smith of Salina and Jarrett Broukhouser of Junction City were in with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council to learn about my role as a Member of Congress and to tell me about their experience in Washington, D.C.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Michael and Rebecca Stoppel of Holcomb, Isaiah and Tanya Freeman of St. Mary's, Zack and Nichol Gallegos of Wamego, Megan Mallon of Manhattan and Mary McCauley of White Cloud. Also in for a tour were Steve, Barbara and Kayly Schoming and Colton and Malea Hill of Solomon; Mike, Susan and Brett Mallon of Hutchinson; Samantha Schuster and Brian, Keli, Matthew and Andrew McDonough of Wichita; and Jack Dufield and Janice and Tara Fitzgerald of Liberal.

Very truly yours,

Jerry