

7/27/2009 This Week in Congress

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July 27, 2009

Dear Friend,

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

Strengthening Medicare to Protect Seniors

This week, I introduced a resolution to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid programs before funding a new government-sponsored health care program. The resolution urges Congress to invest Medicare and Medicaid savings back into these programs before creating additional government programs.

During the health care reform debate, as we work to fix our health care system, we must preserve Medicare and protect the 45 million seniors across the country that depend on Medicare for their health care needs. Also, right now, states are struggling to pay their Medicaid obligations and need to be shielded from unfunded Medicaid mandates.

We need to bring some common-sense thinking to health care reform. Swapping money from cash-strapped programs simply to expand other government programs will not help seniors or the disadvantaged. [Click here to view my remarks on the House floor about protecting seniors.](#)

Controlling Government Spending

I supported passage of legislation this week to control government spending and to prevent the U.S. deficit from growing. The House passed legislation that would reinstate a "pay-as-you-go" (PayGo) process that requires new spending to be paid for from cuts to other programs.

Congress needs to get responsible with government spending. American families make tough decisions each month as they struggle to balance their budgets - Congress should do the same. I never want our deficit to burden future generations. This PayGo legislation will make it more difficult for the White House and Congress to enact mandatory spending changes that increase the U.S. deficit.

Amendments were offered to make this legislation more restrictive, and I was disappointed that they were not adopted. However, Congress needs to demonstrate fiscal discipline and this legislation is a modest effort to control government spending and decrease our bloated government programs.

[Click here to listen to my comments on the need to control government spending.](#)

Eisenhower Memorial Architect

As a member of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission, I had the opportunity this week to meet Frank O. Gehry at an event in Washington, D.C. Gehry was selected by the Eisenhower Memorial Commission to be the lead designer for the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial in Washington, D.C. Members of the Eisenhower Commission, members of the Eisenhower family and leaders of Eisenhower legacy organizations also attended the event.

Gehry is a world-renowned architect who has designed buildings such as the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles; the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain; the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park in Chicago; and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, Canada. Once built, this memorial will officially celebrate the life and contributions Eisenhower made as one of our nation's great presidents.

[Click here to read my editorial on President Dwight D. Eisenhower.](#) [Click here to view photos from the event.](#)

Tele-Town Hall Meeting

Wednesday evening, I conducted a Tele-Town Hall meeting from my office in Washington, D.C., to discuss current issues with Kansans. Hosting a Tele-Town Hall allows me to conduct a telephone conference call with up to 25,000 Kansans. Those who choose to participate have the option to ask questions during the call. The conference call provides me the opportunity to listen and to speak directly with Kansans who have issues or concerns on their minds.

During this call, Kansans primarily focused discussion on health care reform and the recently passed cap and tax legislation. Other items mentioned during the call included: wind technology in Kansas; Veterans' Affairs issues; the recent closure of General Motors dealerships; and stimulus legislation. I was glad to talk to a number of callers about issues that are important to them. Thank you to those who were able to participate in the Tele-Town Hall.

Short Line Railroad Tax Credit

On Thursday, I testified before the House Ways and Means Committee to voice my support for the short line railroad rehabilitation tax credit. This tax credit was originally enacted for a three-year period in 2005 and was then extended for two more years in 2008. I have sponsored H.R. 1132, which would extend this tax credit for another three years.

There are more than 500 short line and regional railroads operating over 50,000 miles of track in our country today. Particularly in rural states, small businesses and farmers rely on short lines as they are the only connection to the national railroad network. Without these important transportation pathways, Kansas farmers would have a much more difficult time shipping commodities.

[Click here to watch my speech before the committee.](#) [Click here to view a photo.](#)

Foreign Service Officer Swearing-In for Travis Murphy

On Thursday, I attended the swearing-in ceremony for Travis Murphy into the 146th Foreign Service Officer Class. Murphy served Kansans for many years as a member of my staff. Members of the U.S. Foreign Service formulate and implement U.S. foreign policy around the world. They serve as diplomats who spend most of their careers overseas at U.S. embassies, consulates and other diplomatic missions. Murphy's first assignment as a Foreign Service Officer is a two-year assignment to serve in Ecuador. I was glad to have the opportunity to attend his swearing-in, and wish him the best as he represents our nation overseas. [Click here to view a photo.](#)

Sponsoring Tax Credit for Teachers

As we approach the start of another school year, I am reminded that many teachers spend their own money on school supplies for their classrooms. This week, I sponsored legislation that will lessen the financial burden on teachers when they go above and beyond to meet the needs of their students. The Teacher Classroom Expenses Tax Credit allows teachers to deduct some expenses that they incur to provide books, supplies, and other equipment and materials for their classrooms. This legislation, H.R. 2329, would extend this tax credit until December 31, 2011.

Ask anyone to name a person in their life who inspired them and most people will name a teacher. The dedication and determination of Kansas teachers change the world. This legislation is one way in which we can say thanks to our teachers.

Speaking to the Agriculture Retailers Association

On Monday, I addressed the National Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA). Among the group were 16 Kansans who traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss how to improve the transportation of agricultural goods, as well as voice concern about pending climate change legislation and increasing environmental regulations that will likely increase costs on businesses. Of particular interest to ARA members was whether agriculture would retain its highway hours of service exemption in the highway reauthorization legislation, hazardous materials regulations and rail service access to rural communities.

Sunflower Foundation Advocacy Fellowship Program

On Wednesday, I met with participants in the Sunflower Foundation Advocacy Fellowship program to discuss non-profit health care issues in Kansas. The Sunflower Foundation was developed in August 2000 to help serve the health needs of Kansans. The Sunflower Foundation Advocacy Fellowship Program is a year-long leadership class for 15 health care leaders from across the state. The program trains health care leaders in an effort to promote effective health care policy at the local, state and federal level.

Participants of the Sunflower Foundation Advocacy Fellowship group in to visit with me about the important work of Kansas non-profit health care organizations included: Rick Cagan, John Carney, Michael Mayberry, Kara Lineweber and Phelps Murdock of Kansas City; Vicki Worrell of Emporia; Larry Tobias, Cathy Harding, Shannon Cotsoradis and Billie Hall of Topeka; Chrysanne Grund of Sharon Springs; Mitzi McFatrach and Elizabeth Weeks Leonard of Lawrence; Krista Postai of Pittsburg; Stephanie Waggoner of Garden City; Rosa Molina and Brian Walker of Wichita; Heidi Cashman of Lenexa; and Jennifer Schmidt of Independence.

[Click here to view a photo of me with members of the Foundation's Advocacy Fellowship Program on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C.](#)

Autism Research and Treatment

I recently sponsored the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act of 2009, H.R. 2413. This legislation would aid research and treatment for autism. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 150 children born today will be diagnosed with autism. The Autism Treatment Acceleration Act would create Autism Care Centers that will develop comprehensive treatment facilities to provide a full array of medical, behavioral, mental health, educational and family care services. Additionally, the bill would create a national training initiative on autism to develop and expand interdisciplinary training and continuing education on autism.

Pediatric Cancer Caucus

I am a member of the Pediatric Cancer Caucus. Members of Congress form caucuses and coalitions to represent issues and to raise awareness for causes important in their state.

The Pediatric Cancer Caucus provides information on pediatric cancer and is a bipartisan forum to aid Members of Congress in working together to address pediatric cancer. As a member of this caucus, I help raise awareness about pediatric cancer, advocate in support of measures to prevent the pain, suffering, and long-term effects of childhood cancers, and work toward the goal of eliminating cancer as a threat to all children.

From Washington to Home: Listening Tour Continues

I continued my listening tour with a stop this week in Ellsworth County, at the Senior Center in Wilson. During the town hall, area residents talked with me about health care reform, cap and trade legislation, and other issues. I learn something from every conversation I have with Kansans during each town hall stop. I encourage Kansans to join me when I am in the area. [Click here to view photos from my town hall stop.](#) [Click here to stay up-to-date on additional stops being scheduled for next month.](#)

Celebrating Czech Heritage in Wilson

After my Ellsworth County town hall meeting on Saturday, I joined residents at the After Harvest Czech Festival and participated in the parade. For almost 50 years, the residents of Wilson have celebrated their Czech heritage with traditional food, dancing, games, crafts and other activities. During the parade, I presented a plaque to the Grand Marshals Bill and Joyce Podlena. Thanks to Ray Frederick for letting me ride in his car and to Darin Frevert for driving me in the parade. [Click here to view a photo.](#)

In the Office

Dr. Terry Calaway and Joe Sopcich of Shawnee Mission and Dick Carter of Topeka were in with Johnson County Community College (JCCC) to discuss JCCC's efforts to address the need for more health care professionals in Kansas. Bob Henry of Robinson, Craig Gigstad of Winchester, Charles Atkinson of Great Bend and Dennis Hupe of Topeka were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to talk about legislative initiatives, like climate change and food safety, that could affect the Kansas soybean industry. Nancy Jackson of Eudora and Chuck Linderman of Stockton were in with the Land Institute to tell me about wind energy and projects in Kansas.

Jannette Luthi of Independence and Robin Wiebe of Hays were in with the NEA Republican Leaders Conference to discuss public education initiatives in Kansas. Lyndsi Oestmann of Ottawa was in with the American Nursery & Landscape Association to visit about the need to reform the H-2A visa program and how landscapes can contribute to energy efficiency. Earl McVicker, Jeannette Richardson and Piper Hoskins of Hutchinson; Chuck Stones and Jim Turner of Topeka; Dave Herndon of Kansas City; Craig Meader of Waverly; and Mike Stevens of Sublette were in with the Kansas Bankers Association to discuss their concerns about additional regulations and the creation of a consumer financial product board.

Dr. Richard Warner of Overland Park was in with the KMS Coalition to Protect Patients' Rights to discuss improving our nation's health care system. Garrett Lister of Marysville and Nellie Hill of Pilsen were in with the Kansas FFA Association to tell me about their roles as young leaders in the FFA Association. Garrett is President and Nellie is Vice President. Bill and Ellen Dorsey of Mulvane, Kristen Hymer of Lawrence, Jane Weidemeyer of Overland Park, Martha Sehlstrom of Horton and Larry Graber of Topeka were in with Christians United for Israel to talk about the importance of supporting our closest ally in the Middle East.

Pat and Robin Lehman of Lawrence, Eric Banks of Salina, Gene Albers of Cunningham, Ron Brown of Ft. Scott, Jon Starns of Winona and Connie Richmeier of Garden City were in with the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts to discuss the conservations districts' work in Kansas. Steve and Joan Stoller of Sabetha and Harold Heubaum of Ness City came by to visit.

Members of the Kansas Grain and Feed Association and Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association, who are participating in Tomorrow's Agribusiness Leadership (TAL) Class, were in to talk about the organizations' legislative priorities. The TAL group is comprised of agribusiness leaders that are trying to improve their leadership skills through a greater awareness of public policy. In with the group were Tom Tunnell, Ron Seeber, Shari Bennett and Sarah Sexton-Bowser of Topeka; Gary Gantz of Ness City; Randy Whisenhunt of Hillsboro; Troy Coon of Nickerson; Joshua Dechant of Goodland; Kevin Dieckmann of Olathe; Jerry Forst of Greenleaf; Ryan Gale of Hesston; Kevin Lueger of Seneca; Jeff

Naysmith of Walton; Kyle Sorensen of Goodland; Ron Sothers of Clyde; and Craig White of Ulysses.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office to receive a tour of the United States Capitol, including Beth, Paxton and Raef Rein of Great Bend; James and Nancy Hayes of Lyons; David and Mary Richardson of Marysville; Monte and Michelle Cross of Buhler; Jennifer and Lauren Cross of Solomon; Taylor Parr of Larned; Valerie Kasselmann and Eva Banks of Salina; Connie Richmeier of Garden City; and Steve, Heidi, Jack, Sam and Luke Cashman of Lenexa. Also in for a tour were Frank and Wilda Offutt of Utica; Steve and Joan Stoller of Sabetha; Monty, Lois and Summer Smith and Mariah Haley of Hays; and the participants in the Sunflower Foundation Advocacy Fellowship.

Very truly yours,

Jerry