

5/30/2006 This Week in Congress

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May 30, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

Dedicating White City Veterans Memorial, Recognizing Memorial Day in Russell

On Sunday, I joined the community of White City for the dedication of the local veterans memorial. The community hosted a nice event and had speakers from the local VFW post and music provided by local students. By the building and dedication of this memorial, this community honors those who fought and continue to fight to keep our world safe and free. Inscribed on this memorial are the words, "Freedom is not free." Our veterans know the meaning of these words all too well. I expressed my thanks to the veterans of White City and each of their families. Because of their service and their family's sacrifice, we live with the blessing of freedom they fought, suffered and died for.

We have said goodbye to several Kansans during the last year as we continue to fight the war on terror - active military, reservists and members of the National Guard. This ceremony also provided an opportunity to remember these brave heroes. Memorial Day became a national holiday to "encourage the people of the United States to give something back to their country, which provides them so much freedom and opportunity." This memorial pays tribute to our military men and women and will forever stand as a monument to the veterans from White City and surrounding communities. It will also instill awareness in citizens about the contributions of veterans, so we can appreciate the sacrifices made by those serving our country and never forget them. Also on Memorial Day, I attended services in Russell at the local cemetery to pay tribute to our fallen service men and women.

Questioning the Security Breach within the Department of Veterans Affairs

Last week, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Jim Nicholson announced that information of some 26.5 million veterans was stolen from the home of a VA employee the first week of May. This employee was not authorized to remove the data from his office.

I am concerned that the personal information of our nation's veterans could be compromised due to a security violation. On Thursday, I joined other Members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for a hearing with Secretary Nicholson and other VA officials to question them about the security of a cabinet-level organization like the VA and this incident - what happened, how it happened and how we can prevent it from occurring again. I questioned the Secretary as to why the VA did not inform veterans sooner about this incident.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, local law enforcement officials and the VA inspector general are all investigating the incident. The VA is sending out individual notification letters to affected veterans. All veterans are advised to carefully monitor their financial statements and report suspicious activity. The VA has set up a special website and a toll-free telephone number for veterans to call for more information about the situation.

- Website: <http://www.firstgov.gov/>

- Toll-free number: 1-800-FED-INFO (333-4636)

FBI Raids Capitol Hill Office

Elected officials in our government are not above the law or entitled to special treatment that would not be available to the average citizen. On May 20, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) conducted a search of a House Member's Capitol Hill office. While he has not been formerly charged, it has been reported that this Member of Congress is under investigation for corruption and taking bribes. The leaders of both political parties in the House of Representatives, Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, have been very critical of the FBI's search saying it was in violation of the Constitution's separation of powers principle.

In this particular case, I strongly disagree with the Speaker and Minority Leader. The FBI has been trying for months to reach an agreement to look for files they think may be helpful in their investigation. This is not a situation where a Member of Congress is being persecuted for something they believe in or said, which is protected by the Constitution. This is a case about possible corruption and abuse of public trust. The FBI has a duty to investigate this matter to the fullest extent of the law.

Continuing Efforts to Reopen Foreign Markets to U.S. Beef

This week, I met with the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, Lee Tae-sik, to discuss the progress of reopening the Korean market to U.S. beef. I have continued my efforts to reopen foreign markets to American beef since a BSE case was first discovered in Washington State in December of 2003. This meeting followed my previous meeting with the

Ambassador of Japan to press for the reopening of its border. Yesterday, an official at the Korean Agriculture Ministry announced that beginning June 6, Korea will resume importing boneless meat from U.S. cattle less than 30 months old.

Also this week, I met with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns to discuss strategies and progress of reopening foreign markets like Japan. It is critical for us to keep pressure on countries that have delayed the resumption of beef trade. Our nation's ranchers should not be forced to idly accept punishment for a situation they did not create. I have asked House leadership to bring to a vote a resolution I introduced with 89 other Members of Congress calling for retaliatory trade sanctions to be imposed on Japan if it continues its ban on U.S. beef imports. Each day these beef blockades are allowed to continue, our Kansas ranchers suffer significant harm.

Meeting with the Family of Deceased Kansas Soldier, President Signs Protesting Bill

The Wagler family of Partridge visited me in my Washington, D.C., office this week before taking a tour of the U.S. Capitol building. I first met the Wagler family earlier this year at the funeral of their son and brother, Peter, who lost his life serving in Iraq. I hold much respect for David and Trish and enjoyed the opportunity to spend more time visiting with them and their children, Vanya, Bethany, Maria, Esther, Sarah and Josiah. The Wagler family is an amazing example of how love can comfort and sustain through a terrible loss.

Unfortunately, there are those that seek attention and notoriety by practicing hate. To help prevent disruptions of military funerals at national cemeteries, Congress passed the Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act which prevents protesting within 150 feet of the entrance and exit of national cemeteries. The President signed this legislation into law on Memorial Day.

House Approves Agriculture Appropriations

The House passed H.R. 5384, the 2007 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act this week to provide funds for agriculture programs and agencies. H.R. 5384 decreased total government agricultural appropriations by 8 percent from last year's levels. While reducing overall spending, the bill refused deeper cuts and eliminations proposed by the Administration in areas such as the Agriculture Research Service; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; conservation programs; and farm loan programs. The legislation now moves to the Senate for consideration and approval.

Announcing Help for the City of Lyons to Replace Natural Gas Lines

This weekend, I joined the city of Lyons officials and rural development officials from the Kansas Department of Agriculture for a ceremony announcing help to replace the city's leaky natural gas lines. A USDA Rural Development Community Facility Program loan will go toward replacing approximately 35 miles of natural gas lines that serve nearly 2,000 members of the community.

More than 200 leaks were discovered in 2005. As lines were uncovered to reveal the extent of the deterioration, it was determined that the system was not repairable. The natural gas distribution system is a necessity for the city of Lyons. It is the only means by which residents and business owners have access to natural gas for their homes and businesses. Due to the extreme deterioration of the existing system and the inherent dangers natural gas possesses to both life and property, the city plans to have the system replaced within 12 months.

Chuck Banks, state director of USDA Rural Development, was also in attendance at the event. I commended Clarence Moses, the mayor of Lyons; John Sweet, City Manager; and city council members Chris Haas, Gary Spellman, Joseph Ceden, Robert McClure IV, Pat Briggs, James Cowan, Charlotte Larsen and Marion Latiolais for working in cooperation with state USDA officials to make this project happen.

In the Office

This week, I joined the National Community Pharmacist Association (NCPA) and other Members of Congress for a press conference highlighting H.R. 5182, the Fair and Speedy Treatment (FAST) of Medicare Prescription Drug Claims Act. Members of the Kansas Pharmacists Association were in town for the NCPA annual meeting and joined me for the press conference. With the group were Sam Boyajian of Gardner, Brian Caswell of Baxter Springs, Michael Coughlin of Shawnee Mission, Don Hill of Emporia, Merlin McFarland of Kingman and Megan Way of Kansas City. In with the group from Lawrence were Amanda Hurley, Kelly McKee, Morgan Saylor and Nathan Wiehl.

Kelly Robbins and David Fyler of Scott City were in my office this week representing the Western Kansas Child Advocacy Center to discuss their efforts to help traumatized children in Kansas and to express the importance of the Victims of Child Abuse Act. Ken and Sue Kreissler of Olathe and John Cochran of Oxford were in representing the National Rural Letter Carriers Association to talk about aspects of postal reform legislation making its way through Congress. In my office from Hugoton were Dora Hermocillo, Tonya Hill, Melisa Norton, LaDonna Hall, Phyllis Beadles, Melynn Hale and Catherine Losey to inform me of the positive results taking place in their community because of after school programs. Rob Harmon and Karyn Page of Wichita were in representing the Kansas World Trade Center to discuss promoting international trade in Kansas.

Kansas Community Bankers were in Washington, D.C., this week for their association's annual meeting and were in my office to share their opposition to a proposal by the Farm Service Agency to increase user fees for its guaranteed loan program. I have weighed in against these fee increases to USDA officials. Representatives included Dale Bradley of Miltonvale, Richard Ciemny and Frank Sullentrop of Wichita, Dan Coup of Hope, David Fowler of Burlingame, Steve Handke of Everest, Mike and Maggie Johnson of Courtland, Joe Kennedy of Frankfort, Gregg Lewis of Osawatomie, and Paul and Marilyn Boeding of Seneca.

Several Kansans were in my office this week representing the Kansas Disability Community to talk about the need for affordable and accessible housing and the Money Follows the Person program. In with the group were Marilee Brown, Anita Casey, John Gatlin, Donald Lawton, Sue Laymon, Ruth Mounkes, Garry Warren, Shari Coatney, Jeanette Pruitt, Skip Smith, Dave Sorrick, Blake Knoll, Morris Taylor, Sandee Alters, Bob and Becky Blick, Mike Oxford and Edward Reynolds.

In representing the Mid-Kansas Affiliate of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation were Peggy Johnson and Teresa Carter of Wichita and Terry Burnett of Derby to discuss the need for translational cancer research, the importance of nurse education and training, and the value of the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection program.

Several people came by my office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol, including Bill McKown of Great Bend, Cathi Hylton of LaCrosse, and Stacy and Odessa Snyder of McPherson. In for tours from Salina were David and Carlene Stueve with their children, Christian and Michael; Brett and Jackie Matherly with their children, Kaitline and Hannah Beth; and Steve and Patsy Stockham with their children, Karissa and Eric. In from Hays were Michael and Laurie Konz with their children, Augustus and Regan.

The Ziegler family of Oakley - Ken, Linda, Amber and Brett - along with Reg and Lou Tryon of Salina with their family members Kara and Krista Willis of Texas, were in for a tour on Friday, but were unable to take one due to the disturbance that resulted in a temporary lockdown of the Rayburn building, in which my office is located.

Very truly yours,

Jerry