

6/05/2006 This Week in Congress

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June 5, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

Receiving Positive Feedback at Seventh Kansas Veterans Forum in Marion

This week, I hosted a veterans forum at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post in Marion. Tom Sanders and Charles Woolford, officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Wichita hospital and regional center, joined me to provide updates to veterans about health care, benefits, and other veteran-related issues. This is the seventh veterans forum I have hosted since coming to Congress. Previous forums have been held in Salina, Clay Center, Goodland, Sabetha, Hutchinson and Cimarron.

The forum provided an opportunity to take questions, concerns and ideas from the veterans in attendance. Many veterans complimented the care they receive through the Wichita VA. For this, I thank people like Mr. Sanders and Mr. Woolford who work each day to serve our nation's veterans.

I appreciate the people who were able to attend and for the feedback we received, as well as Marion VFW members for their hospitality. Marvin Rediker, Commander, and Dan Holub, Vice Commander, of the Marion VFW were both helpful in making this forum happen. Since my arrival in Congress, I have served on the Veterans Affairs Committee and worked to ensure that the needs of our veterans are met.

Encouraging USDA to Release Counties for Emergency Haying and Grazing

Last week, Bill Fuller, Kansas State Farm Service Agency (FSA) Executive Director, requested FSA officials in Washington, D.C., release Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in 45 western Kansas counties for emergency haying and grazing. I have been working with state FSA officials to have this request approved and last week met with Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns to ask for his support in immediately releasing acres in these drought-stricken areas.

The 45 counties contained in this request are in a five to six year drought. Lack of precipitation during the winter and spring has led to significant forage shortages. In addition to degraded pasture conditions, recent fires resulting from unseasonably dry foliage have further worsened the problem in some counties. Producers in western Kansas are experiencing extreme conditions. They will have to begin selling portions of their herds if extra forage sources are not made available soon.

Breaking Ground for Ellis County's First Habitat for Humanity Home

Friday in Ellis, I attended the groundbreaking ceremony for Habitat for Humanity of Ellis County. The groundbreaking was for the first Habitat home to be built in Ellis County. Jason and Nan Brown and their children, Harley, Kassi and Abby, will be the happy residents of this new home. The Brown family is a well deserving family for Ellis County's first Habitat home.

Projects and organizations like Habitat for Humanity provide us the ability to truly make a difference in the lives of our neighbors. The Brown family will contribute at least 200 hours of sweat equity as a down payment for their home.

About 80 residents, friends and dignitaries were present for the ceremony. I look forward to Ellis County being home to many more Habitat homes in the future. Congratulations and best wishes to the Brown family and Bill Ring and Jennie Straight with Ellis County Habitat for Humanity.

Spending Time in Sharon Springs and Weskan

This weekend I spent time visiting Sharon Springs and Weskan. In Sharon Springs, I made a stop at the library to participate in a story hour. My thanks to local librarian Cathy VanAllen for her help in coordinating the visit. I then continued on to Weskan where I walked Main Street and had the chance to visit with residents and area farmers.

In the Office

Several families and school groups made their way to my office this week during the Memorial Day break for tours of the United States Capitol. Jan Garrett of Hope stopped by with her mother, Gwen Lewis, and son, Israel Campbell, who is stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland. In from Salina were Pastor Loren and Erie Houlberg and Glen and Sharon Pummel, along with their friends Mike and Christine Kinney of Colorado. Lana Dietz of Great Bend and Devota Nunn of Topeka came by with Angela and Alex Veatch of Nebraska and Tracy Brown of Virginia.

Randall and Michelle Spare of Ashland came by for a tour with their children, Bethany, Mark, Abigail and John, as did Paige Domoney of Downs with her friend, Corey Pottberg of Texas. In from Russell were Case and Debra Morris with their children, Coady and Kale; Dennis and Donna Albrecht; and Rich and Tammy Krause with their children, Nathan and Ryan. Carol Shepherd and Emery Folkers of Hays stopped by with Michael Shepherd of Virginia and Janet Fallon of Washington, D.C. Also in were Todd and Tina Shepherd of Derby with their children, Tylor and Treyton.

School groups in my office this week for tours of the Capitol included Haven Middle School, led by Judy Henry of Hutchinson; West Middle School in Liberal, led by Naomi Vargas of Liberal; and Rolla High School, led by Mary Courtney of Rolla.

Very truly yours,

Jerry