

January 2004 - The Road Ahead

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

January 16, 2004

I have reached the halfway point of my annual "Big First" Listening Tour, allowing me to meet with Kansans in all 69 counties in the First Congressional District. Holding the tour at the beginning of the year gives me the opportunity to learn first-hand the issues important to Kansans and to develop my priorities for the 2004 Congressional session.

Much of what I have heard on the tour this year is similar to years past. Across Kansas, people are concerned about the high costs of health care and prescription drugs, the ability to keep our main street businesses open, supporting our military and veterans, the need to improve educational opportunities for our youth and providing the necessary tools for our family farmers to stay in business.

In December, the first U.S. case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was confirmed in a Canadian dairy cow. Many Kansans have expressed their concerns about what this will do to the cattle industry. I have shared these concerns with members of the House Agriculture Committee and U.S. Department of Agriculture. When Congress reconvenes on January 20, I will participate in Congressional hearings on BSE and the effects of USDA's new animal processing regulations on producers. We must be certain that the response was appropriate and that every measure is being taken to help the industry recover.

As Chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, I will also work to improve risk management tools available to farmers and ranchers in the new year. Multi-year losses continue to be a problem that crop insurance does not adequately address, especially in light of the continuing drought conditions.

Improving the access and affordability of health care continues to be one of my highest priorities. Last year, Congress passed a sweeping change to Medicare, which will have long-term consequences for the program's solvency and cost. We must also continue to improve the delivery of health care services in rural areas and continue efforts to lower the overall cost of prescription drugs.

Last fall, I cosponsored the federal highway bill, which will authorize funding for highways, public transportation programs and safety initiatives for the next six years. In Kansas, this bill would invest more than \$2.7 billion in transportation programs and is estimated to create 47,500 jobs. As a member of the House Transportation Committee, my goal is to see that Kansas receives adequate funding for our transportation infrastructure system in these tight financial times.

During Memorial Day 2004, veterans from Kansas and across the country will gather in Washington, D.C. to dedicate the new World War II Memorial on the National Mall. At the dedication, we will recognize the contributions that veterans from WWII and all other wars have made to protect this nation and to preserve our freedoms. This will also be a time for us to remember the promises we made to those who answered the call to serve and for us to keep those promises. As veterans fulfilled their commitment to our country, we must fulfill our commitment to them by providing them with quality health care services. This year, as a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, I will continue to work to see that health care funding for veterans is adequate to meet their needs.

As Kansans, we enjoy a unique quality of life - one that is worth fighting to preserve for the next generation. With half of the tour yet to go, I look forward to visiting with you when I am in your community. It is an honor to serve you in Congress, and I look forward to working with you in 2004.