

7/24/2006 This Week in Congress

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July 24, 2006

Dear Friend,

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

Agriculture Committee Hears from Virginia and Minnesota Producers

The Agriculture Committee continued this week to meet with producers in various parts of the country to gather input on the current farm bill. On Monday, I joined Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte in his home district in Staunton, Virginia, to hear from dairy, poultry, cattle, cotton, wine grape, apple, lumber and peanut producers about Virginia's agriculture economy. Approximately 250 producers and agriculture officials attended the hearing. Also while in Staunton, I attended a ceremony celebrating the 90th anniversary of the Farm Credit Act. The Farm Credit Act was signed in 1916 by President Woodrow Wilson, who was born in Staunton.

On Saturday, the Committee continued on to Marshall, Minnesota, where about 150 producers and local officials attended the hearing to hear from Minnesota and South Dakota grain and livestock producers. Producers highlighted the state's role in alternative energy production. Minnesota was the first state to implement a 10 percent ethanol requirement

and of the 200 E-85 fueling stations in the U.S., Minnesota is home to 130 E-85 fueling stations.

In a continuing effort to gather the thoughts of Kansans, comments may be submitted on the farm bill page of my website.

Discussing World Trade with Agriculture Secretary and U.S. Trade Ambassadors

This week, members of the Agriculture Committee met privately with U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and Ambassador Susan Schwab, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), to discuss the status of the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations of the Doha Development Round. It was the Committee's first meeting with Ambassador Schwab since her confirmation in early June.

I also had a discussion with Ambassador Richard Crowder, USTR Chief Agriculture Negotiator, in my office this week about the ongoing agricultural trade negotiations around the globe. The Ambassador just returned from Russia where negotiations were held regarding Russia becoming a member of the WTO. The Ambassador said that an agreement was not reached in part due to Russia's non-tariff barriers in beef and pork, as well as Russia's failure to abide by intellectual property standards established by the WTO.

The Secretary and USTR Ambassadors informed me that there is another meeting next week between trade ministers to try and move the stalled Doha Round trade talks forward. They said the key to moving the negotiations was sufficient market access for U.S. products in foreign markets. I urged Secretary Johanns, Ambassador Schwab and Ambassador Crowder to hold the line and not compromise the current offer the United States has placed on the table. No WTO deal is better than a bad deal. I also visited with Secretary Johanns about the continued need for disaster assistance in the High Plains region where producers are suffering from a multi-year drought.

The Lower Republican River Basin Study Act to be Voted on in the House

This week, the House Resources Committee passed H.R.4750, the Lower Republican River Basin Study Act. I introduced this legislation with Congressman Tom Osborne of Nebraska to authorize the Bureau of Reclamation to conduct a study of the Republican River Basin to improve water supply reliability, increase the capacity of water storage, and improve water management efficiency in the Republican River Basin. The study was one of the requirements agreed upon by the parties in the suit filed by the State of Kansas against the States of Nebraska and Colorado over delivery of water on the Republican River. This legislation will now be voted on by the House of Representatives.

In the Office

Kansas Wesleyan University President Philip Kerstetter of Salina was in the office this week to tell me about the school's nursing program and the potential for future expansion. Dr. Bill Hunter was in with Pratt Community College to discuss the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Education Act and the importance of agriculture education priorities in the upcoming farm bill.

Bob Riedel of Abilene was in representing the Kansas Council for Exceptional Children to discuss the funding needs for special education and gifted students, the value of Head Start programs, and the need to encourage higher education programs to meet the needs of the special education field. Charles and Brenda Bates of Garden City and Darcy and Pamela Kells of Satanta were in representing Christians for United Israel to express their concern over current events in the Middle East and support for U.S. policies that help Israel.

Several Kansans were in my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Ben Taylor of Emporia, Karl and Melanie Bergstrom of Salina, and Julie Sterling of Kiowa. Todd and Pam Pflughoeft of Dodge City were in with their children, Abigail and Matthew, as were Kevin and Teri Dwyer of Lyons, with their children, Megan, Casey and Allie. Kenneth and Mary Gerstberger of Leoti also came by, as did Gene and Ethel Westphal of Wichita, and Erma Schmidt of Lenexa.

Very truly yours,

Jerry