

1/20/2004 This Week In Congress

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January 20, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Working to Reopen Beef Markets

This week, I urged the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Ann Veneman, and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick to push countries banning U.S. beef to reopen their markets. Fifty countries closed their borders to American beef exports after a single case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was confirmed in a Washington state dairy cow last month.

There is no reason that these export markets should remain closed. The cow has been confirmed to be from Canada, and the U.S. has taken additional steps to ensure the safety of our food supply. The United States' detection and response programs continue to ensure the health of our entire livestock population, as well as assuring consumers at home and abroad that the U.S. food production and processing system is safe.

Awaiting Response from USDA

Also this week, I urged Secretary Veneman to approve drought designations for 81 counties across Kansas. Approving the disaster designations may give producers who were forced to sell off all or part of their livestock due to weather-related disasters the option of deferring taxes from the sales until next year. If the applications are approved by the USDA, then all counties in the state would qualify as a primary or contiguous disaster areas. In addition to the tax deferment, the designation would also make producers eligible for low interest operating loans.

During a time when producers are experiencing the devastating results of multi-year drought, we must do everything possible to ensure that government decisions affecting their operations are made promptly. These applications were submitted to the USDA in 2003, and with tax season just around the corner, our producers need an answer.

Speaking at the Junction City Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet

On Saturday, I spoke at the annual Chamber of Commerce Banquet in Junction City. Citizens representing all aspects of Junction City's business community and leaders from Ft. Riley attended the dinner.

I spoke about the importance of local governments and the federal government working together to ensure that good things happen in our communities. This partnership is especially important in Junction City because over the next few years, the Department of Defense will be reviewing the efficiency and importance of every U.S. military installation. I will be looking for every opportunity and working with folks in the community to convince the military that Ft. Riley can handle another Army division, and that the "Big Red One" should return to Ft. Riley.

Celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

On Monday, I was honored to provide a few remarks at the Hutchinson celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The Hutchinson community gathered at the Macedonia Baptist Church under the theme "Remember! Celebrate! Act!"

Nearly 50 years ago, Dr. King gave a sermon titled, "Rediscovering Lost Values." The message and beliefs that Dr. King shared with people in Detroit in 1954 are still relevant today. To celebrate Dr. King's life and to honor his accomplishment, I wanted to share an excerpt from the sermon.

"If we are to go forward today, we have got to go back and rediscover some mighty precious values that we've left behind. We need to rediscover that all reality hinges on moral foundations. The thing we need in this world today is a group of men and women who will stand up for right and to be opposed to wrong, and people who will stand for right and goodness. If we are to go forward, we've got to go back and find God."

Continuing the "Big First" Listening Tour

I held 14 town hall meetings this week as part of my annual "Big First" Listening Tour and will be visiting with folks in Richfield, Johnson, Ulysses and Satanta later this week.

For more information about the tour stops and for a complete schedule, please visit my website at:
http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ks01_moran/prTourSchedule04.html

I look forward to visiting with you when I am in your area.

The Road Ahead: 2004

As we head into the second session of the 108th Congress, I will be using what I learned from residents who attended my town hall meeting as a blueprint 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.

When Congress reconvenes, I will participate in congressional hearings on BSE and the effects of the 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 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. It is an honor to serve you in Congress, and I look forward to working with you in 2004. Best wishes in the new year.

Meeting with Kansans

This week, I met with Dr. Steven Duvall of Fort Hays State University to discuss research about the federal education program, "No Child Left Behind." I also met with members of Protect the Flint Hills to discuss wind energy development in the Flint Hills.

In the Office

In this week for a tour of the Capitol were Clayton Schmeidler and Nolan Schmeidler of Hays, as were Ann Sellers and her son, Sam, of Hutchinson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry