

2/17/2004 This Week In Congress

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February 17, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Beginning the Budget Debate

On Wednesday, I joined with other members of Congress to discuss the federal budget. Earlier in the month, the President submitted his budget proposal to Congress for 2005. The budget becomes the blueprint for the year - dictating how much money is expected to come from the tax collector and how much can be spent on all the federal programs and departments.

During 2003, more than 55 percent of all federal spending was on mandatory programs: Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, income assistance, military and civilian retirement and student loans. Mandatory programs, or entitlements, are not regulated through the annual appropriations process and are instead funded by permanent laws. Entitlement spending is the fastest growing share of federal funds.

As Congress debates the budget and the levels of discretionary, or optional spending, I believe it is imperative we begin paying down the national debt and limiting federal spending. However, spending on defense, homeland security, and federal mandates have made the battle over the budget more difficult. It is important that we work together during these tough economic times to hold the line on discretionary spending, and reign in new federal programs that increase required spending.

Dedication of Hays Library

On Saturday morning, I joined with folks from Hays and the surrounding communities to mark the grand opening and ribbon cutting of the Hays Carnegie Library. Through the efforts of Dave Goodlett, the chairman of the library board, and Library Director, Melanie Miller, the library underwent more than \$2.5 million in renovations, including a new addition and facade. As a former president of the Hays Library Board of Trustees, I was honored to be included in the celebration and ribbon cutting. I believe that libraries are vital components of our communities, and I am proud of the efforts to expand and improve our library in Hays.

Raising Awareness of Sexual and Domestic Violence

On Thursday, I joined with members of the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence at an event in Topeka. Members of KCASDV were in Topeka to raise awareness to the problem of sexual and domestic violence in Kansas with our state legislators. We must continue to work together to provide safe environments for victims and end the tragic cycle of domestic violence.

Hearing to Discuss Aviation Safety

The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure held a hearing this week to look at issues ranging from baggage and passenger screening to overall aviation safety. The committee also discussed screening techniques that would improve airport operations while reducing costs. It is important that we continue to improve the safety of airline passengers without compromising the efficiency of air travel.

Final Week of the "Big First" Listening Tour

Because of the President's Day work period, Congress will be out of session this week, allowing me to complete the final stops of my annual "Big First" Listening Tour. If you haven't had a chance to attend one of the town hall meetings, I hope you can make it out to one of the final town hall meetings. It has been a pleasure meeting with folks during the tour, and I look forward to meeting with you when I am in your area.

The stops for today and the remainder of the week include:

Tuesday, February 17

Rawlins County - Atwood

My Place Cafe, 305 Grant Street

8:30-9:30 a.m.

Decatur County - Oberlin

County Courthouse, 120 East Hall Street

10:00-11:00 a.m.

Norton County - Norton

American Legion Building, US 283

12:00-1:00 p.m.

Wednesday, February 18

Meade County - Meade

Chuck Wagon Restaurant, 807 West Carthage

12:00-1:00 p.m.

Seward County - Liberal

Rock Island Depot, 4 Rock Island Road

2:00-3:00 p.m.

Stevens County - Hugoton

Ranchito Cafe, 611 South Main Street

4:00-5:00 p.m.

Thursday, February 19

Ford County - Dodge City

Chamber of Commerce, 311 West Spruce

10:00-11:00 a.m.

Hodgeman County - Jetmore

Wild Willie's Restaurant, 617 Main Street

12:00-1:00 p.m.

In the Office

Representatives from Kansas Community Colleges were in the office this week to discuss higher education funding and nursing recruitment and retention. In the office were the president of Hutchinson Community College, Dr. Ed Berger and HCC Board of Trustees, Bud Janner; president of Colby Community College, Mike Ary and CCC Board of Trustee members, Curt Stephens and Don Kready; and Pratt Community College president, William Wojciechowski and Darrell Sheer.

Also in the office this week were representatives of the Kansas Rural Water Association. I met with Elmer Ronnebaum of Seneca and David Mueller of Tampa to discuss the Post Rock Rural Water District in Ellsworth County.

Members of the Kansas Fraternal Order of Police, including James Morton from Dodge City, were in the office to discuss expanding the Kansas Law Enforcement Memorial and to share their support for HR 218. This bill would allow qualified current and former law enforcement officers to carry concealed handguns.

Jack Taylor and Max Zimmerman of Liberal, along with other members of Spirit 54 Highway, were in the office to discuss expanding U.S. Highway 54 into a four-lane highway.

In the office as part of the National Young Leaders Conference was Holcomb High School student, Abby Rivers. Also in the office was Dr. Paul Formo, president of Bethany College in Lindsborg.

Faculty from the University of Kansas, including Chancellor Robert Hemenway, Dean of the School of Engineering, Stuart Bell and Bob Woody were in to discuss ways to improve transportation research at KU during the next year.

In for a tour of the Capitol this week was Joe Rohleder of Hays, and his son, Eric.

Very truly yours,

Jerry