

3/01/2004 This Week In Congress

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March 1, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Improving Services for Veterans

This week, the House Veterans Affairs Committee approved the budget recommendations for next year. The committee has urged Chairman Nussle of the House Budget Committee to increase the funding for veterans medical care. This additional funding is necessary to meet the needs of our veterans who still face long waiting time at VA facilities. As Congress moves through the budget process, I will continue to work to improve the benefits and services our veterans are now receiving.

Recognizing the Champions of Rural Health

On Tuesday morning, I attended the annual meeting of the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) in Washington, D.C. Every year, NRHA recognizes the outstanding work of legislators and congressional staff who work to improve rural healthcare in America. This year, the legislative director in my office, Kim (Rullman) Keymer, was the recipient of the NRHA 2004 Congressional Staffer of the Year Award. Kim assisted me in my efforts as co-chair of the House Rural Health Care Coalition and as Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health.

I am very proud of Kim, not only for her efforts to improve rural healthcare, but also for the care and concern she shows for Kansans. I am privileged to have her working for Kansans as part of my staff. Also representing Kansas at the meeting was Chris Tilden, the interim director of the Office of Local and Rural Health in the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Speaking at the TRIO Banquet

On Friday, I spoke at the TRIO banquet at Emporia State University. TRIO provides financial aid counseling and work-study employment primarily to individuals who are low-income, disabled or first-generation college students. More than 873,000 students across the nation are involved in the TRIO program, and I was proud to be included in this year's celebration.

Attending Dodge City Area Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting

On Saturday evening, I attended the Dodge City Area Chamber of Commerce Annual meeting in Dodge City. Jeff Thorpe was the emcee. Dave Wetmore, the new board chairman for 2004, and Tom Taylor, the 2003 chairman of the board, also spoke at the meeting. I commend the Dodge City Area Chamber of Commerce for their efforts to bring new businesses and opportunities to the area during the past year.

Working on Behalf of Kansas Businesses

On Wednesday morning, I was recognized by the United States Chamber of Commerce for my support of pro-business issues in Congress and received the "Spirit of Enterprise" award. This award is given to Members of Congress who support legislation that creates jobs, increases productivity and strengthens the economy.

Meeting with the Kansas Ophthalmology Board

On Friday morning, I met with members of the Kansas Ophthalmology Board at Emporia State University. Dr. Bill Clifford from Garden City, Dr. Wayne Anliker and Dr. Mike Reynolds from Emporia and other representatives from across the state and I discussed the eye care that veterans receive at the Veterans Affairs hospitals in Kansas.

In the Office

Father Ed Fellhauer, Cory Rathbun, Sharon Ringler and Melanie Owens, with the St. Francis Academy in Salina, were in the office this week to discuss child welfare issues. On Tuesday, Chris Tilden, the interim director of the Office of Local and Rural Health in the Kansas Department of Health and Environment in Topeka, was in the office to discuss improving rural healthcare in Kansas. As part of the Silver-Haired Congress, Mr. and Mrs. Don Hanson from Ellsworth were in to discuss aging and health care issues. Leadelle Ediger of Salina and Jeanne Thyfault of Colby were in the office on behalf of the Kansas Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies to discuss early childcare and education.

The City Administrator in Great Bend, Howard Partington, and Ken Roberts, in addition to Randy Partington with the City of Fredonia, were in the office to discuss firefighter training and ways to improve the Cheyenne Bottoms Visitor Center. Mike Schmidt of Strong City and Steve Lundeen of Fowler were in the office on behalf of the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development to discuss ways to expand and improve natural resources and rural development. In addition, I met with Kyle Hoffman of Coldwater.

Several Kansas members of the National Pest Management Association were in the office this week. Vernon and Nancy McKinzie of Emporia; Shonda Meitler of Sylvan Grove; and Scott Smith, Terry Savoy and Al Wells of Hutchinson were in to discuss pest control and the Endangered Species Act. On Wednesday, I met with members of the Disabled American Veterans Department of Kansas. David Brader of Parsons, Franklin Bergquist of Wichita, Charlie Stephens of Salina and Kenneth Ketchum of Lansing and I discussed improving the availability of healthcare services for veterans in Kansas. Other issues discussed included the enhancement of specialty services, expanding the number of military retirees eligible for both retirement and disability pay, and legislation regarding the retirement benefits of military spouses.

Members of the Kansas Credit Union Association were in the office this week to discuss bankruptcy reform, and pension and retirement savings. Chairman of the Hutchinson Credit Union, Roy Broxterman; President of the Hutchinson Credit Union, Garth Strand; and President of the Kansas State University Federal Credit Union, Vickie Hurt, and I also discussed the Credit Union Regulatory Improvements Act and the Regulatory Relief Act. On Thursday, I met with Earl Watkins of the Sunflower Electric Power Corporation in Hays to discuss their recent activities to provide adequate and reliable power to 34 counties in western Kansas. John Hass of Larned, and Charlie Rife and Bill Heer of Kansas State University were also in the office to discuss ways to improve canola research.

In the office this as part of the Close Up Foundation was Darya Zakharova, a Russian exchange student attending Olpe High School.

In for a tour of the Capitol this week from Great Bend were Marcia Johnson, her daughter, Stacy Johnson, and her five grandchildren. Also in for a tour was Charlotte Shawber of Riley.

Very truly yours,

Jerry