

3/08/2004 This Week In Congress

This Week In Congress

March 8, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Good News for Kansas VA Facilities, Veterans

After more than four years of gathering data about Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities, the Department of Veterans Affairs Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission recently released its findings on the efficiency and necessity of the VA facilities in Kansas. The CARES Commission recommended expanding all Kansas VA facilities after reviewing all of the VA facilities in the United States to ensure that the current and future health care needs of veterans will be met.

The commission also recommended enhancing the primary and specialty care services at the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical and Regional Office Center in Wichita, as well as continuing the operation of the Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center in Leavenworth. The board recommended continuing inpatient psychiatry services at Topeka, expanding outpatient substance abuse treatment at Leavenworth, and maintaining nursing home care beds at Leavenworth. Emergency care services would continue at the Topeka and Leavenworth campuses. The commission also recommended an additional community-based outpatient VA clinic for Kansas.

This report is good news for veterans because it recommends that all Kansas VA facilities increase their services and expand their facilities. Since more and more veterans are entering the VA system, now is not the time to cut services. It is important that we meet their healthcare needs and that we keep our Kansas VA facilities in full operation.

Mandatory Animal Identification Reviewed By House Agriculture Committee

On Friday, I participated in a House Agriculture Committee field hearing in Houston, Texas, to review the development of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal Identification Program. Animal traceability has become a priority in the wake of the recent case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) discovered in Washington State. Among the witnesses testifying before the committee was the President of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Jan Lyons, from Manhattan.

Even though the United States has the safest food delivery system in the world, recent events will require additional measures to improve that system and to reassure foreign and domestic consumers. As the USDA works toward implementing a tracking system, we must ensure that it is done in a way that does not burden our producers and that it protects their privacy. A new system should be based on common sense, and it should be flexible to meet producers' needs and allow for new technology. The system should also not place a tremendous financial burden on our producers or expose them to a liability that could shut down their operations.

Promoting and Protecting the Future of Ft. Riley

On Monday morning, I attended the first meeting of the Governor's Strategic Military Planning Commission. The commission was formed to protect and promote all of Kansas' military installations during the Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. During the next 18 months, the BRAC commission will review the relevance and necessity of all military installations in the United States. The commission's findings are then submitted to the President and Congress for approval. In the end, some bases will be closed, while other installations will see an increase or decrease in troops.

Our military installations are an important component to our state's economy, representing thousands of jobs and billions of dollars. I will be working closely with state officials and the Kansas delegation to ensure that good things happen for all military installations in Kansas.

Meeting with Boeing CEO, Harry Stoneciper

On Wednesday, Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts, Congressman Todd Tiahrt and I met with Boeing CEO, Harry Stoneciper. We discussed reports that Boeing was leaving Wichita and also the future of the 767 tanker deal. Boeing is important to Kansas and the First District, from the companies that contract with Boeing to the hundreds of folks from the First District who work there. My colleagues and I will continue working to help keep Boeing and the jobs they provide in Kansas.

In the Office

On Tuesday, Barth Crouch of Salina, was in the office on behalf of the Playa Lakes Joint Venture to discuss wildlife and grasslands conservation. Karl Sprague of Great Bend and Connie Vogts of Sublette, along with other members of the Kansas School Food Service Association were in the office to discuss child nutrition programs.

The Kansas Farm Bureau brought their county presidents to Washington, D.C., this week. This was a great opportunity for me to meet with many people directly affected by the farm policies we develop in Congress.

On Wednesday, members of the Girl Scouts of the USA were in the office. Lynn Smith and Candy Johnson of Emporia, Susan Kendall of Hutchinson, Linda Taylor of Colby, Debbie Cowl of Hutchinson, Linda Mills of Hays and Karin Bigler of Salina were in to discuss the release of the Girl Scout Research Institute Report, "Feeling Safe: What Girls Say," and how the report applies to local Girl Scout Councils and programs. During our meeting, the group also gave me a box of Girl Scout cookies. As a former Boy Scout and now an adult scouter, I believe that scouting plays a positive influence in the lives of our youth, and I encourage folks to support their local scout troops.

This week I also meet with Carson McMullen of Plainville. For the past few years, Carson has been suffering from leukemia. It has always been his dream to visit Washington, D.C, and his dream came true with the help of the Dream Foundation. This young man has a tremendous amount of courage and strength, and it was an honor to have him in our nation's capital. Also accompanying Carson to Washington, D.C. was his brother, Connor, his mother, Karen, and Patrick Hageman, all of Plainville.

In the office this week for a tour of the Capitol were Barry and Linda Hinkle of Hudson; and Peggy Camp of Haven and her grandson, Zach Slayden of Lincolnville. Kevin Kerns, Wendy Stein and Bill Greenwood of Salina were in for a tour, as

was Leslie Berndt of Salina.

In with the National Young Leaders Conference was Ameer Gusman of Dodge City. Also in the office on behalf of the Presidential Classroom were Malatone Bouasym from Salina and Jake Edgington from Ulysses.

Very truly yours,

Jerry