

2/28/2005 This Week in Congress

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February 28, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful. I spent this week in Kansas while Congress was out of session for the President's Day holiday. The time in the district gave me an opportunity to visit a number of communities and meet with Kansans to get their feedback on important issues.

Health Care - A Top Priority

On Friday, I joined Tom Bell, President of the Kansas Hospital Association, and Doyle Johnson, Administrator of Moundridge Mercy Hospital for a visit to the hospital and adjoining physicians' clinic in Moundridge. My visit to Mercy Hospital completes my efforts to have a discussion about health care at every hospital in the First District. There are more hospitals-seventy-five-in the First Congressional District than any congressional district in the country.

The visit to Moundridge gave me the opportunity to meet with administrators, staff and patients to discuss quality of care issues and other challenges facing Kansas in the delivery of health care. Mercy Hospital is owned by the Church of God and Christ Mennonite, which are headquartered in Moundridge. As an acute care facility, the dedicated staff at Mercy Hospital is able to provide lab, X-ray and emergency room services.

During my time in Congress, I have chaired the Rural Health Care Coalition (RHCC). This group of 180 members of Congress advocates for improvements in our health care system. Our most recent success occurred late last year with the passage of H.R. 4453, reauthorizing the J-1 Visa waiver program, which gives international medical graduates the opportunity to stay in the United States if they agree to practice in a medically underserved area for at least three years.

Keeping Manufacturing Jobs in Kansas

On Friday, I also joined David Cox, CEO of the Bradbury Company in Moundridge. Bradbury provides roll forming, cut to length and leveling of metal to suit any scale. The company employs over 250 people and occupies over 172,000 square feet of space. Mr. Cox and I discussed product liability concerns and correction of the uneven playing field between American manufacturers and their foreign competitors under the U.S. tax code. These issues are important to our Kansas businesses and their employees, and we must look at ways to ensure America remains competitive in the manufacturing sector.

The work that Bradbury is doing is important to the economic vitality of the Moundridge community and the surrounding area.

Meeting with Youth at Larned Juvenile Correctional Facility

On Thursday, I met with Superintendent Robert Rivenburg of the Juvenile Correctional Facility in Larned, which is administered by the Kansas Juvenile Justice Authority (JJA) for a tour of the facility. When I was a state senator, I was actively involved in the creation of the JJA to better serve our at-risk youth. The Larned facility has been especially successful at leveraging its resources by partnering with the state's correctional facility and mental health facility to offer various programs to offenders.

While at the facility, I was able to meet with staff and discuss the issues and challenges of the juvenile justice system. The facility has 88 young residents, with an average age of 17, who are being treated in the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment Program. This program is available in part through federal funding from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention program at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Discussing Issues with Students at Lincoln Elementary School in Great Bend

Also on Thursday, I visited Lincoln Elementary School in Great Bend. I spoke to Leslie Perkins' fourth grade class about how a bill becomes a law and about the three branches of government. Ms. Perkins' class had been studying government and the students had a number of good questions. The work that the students and teachers at Lincoln Elementary are doing to prepare for the future is commendable, and I look forward to visiting the school again in the future.

Joining the Salina Lions Club Meeting and Welcoming Sir Richard Branson

On Wednesday, I joined the Salina Lions Club for their weekly lunch at the Bicentennial Center. I attended the lunch as a guest and was able to speak with members about the projects that the group is involved in and the issues facing the Salina community as a whole. Thank you to club president Rick Weber for the invitation and the chance to get feedback from the Lions Club members.

On Sunday afternoon, I welcomed Sir Richard Branson, owner of Virgin Atlantic Airways, and a number of international press corps members to Salina for the launch of GlobalFlyer. The ceremony honored Steve Fossett, who will be piloting GlobalFlyer in his attempt to become the first to fly solo around the world without refueling. Fossett's journey will begin and end at the Salina Municipal Airport.

GlobalFlyer is scheduled to take off on Monday afternoon weather permitting.

In the Office

In the office this week as part of Presidential Classroom was Joseph Viron from Salina. Also in the office for tours of the U.S. Capitol this week were Richard and Kathleen Buessing of Axtell, James Swiercinsky, Annette Bredthauer and daughter Kristen Swiercinsky of Belleville.

Very truly yours,

Jerry