

3/28/2005 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

March 28, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful. This week Congress began its two-week Easter work period. This break from Washington, D.C. allowed me to spend time with Kansans and travel to Cuba to work toward opening its market to Kansas commodities.

Visiting Cuba and Working to Open Its Borders to Trade

This week, I traveled to Cuba to discuss trade and agriculture exports with Cuban government officials. Cuba represents the twenty-third largest export market for the U.S. and ranks as the twelfth largest wheat market. Recently, it was announced that Cuba would be purchasing approximately \$6 million worth, or 1.84 million bushels, of Kansas wheat.

In 2000, I introduced the measure that became law that partially lifted the trade embargo with Cuba. Since that time, Cuba has grown to a \$750 million trading partner, importing many Kansas commodities. Last month, I introduced legislation to further clarify federal regulations for agriculture trade with Cuba.

Our policy toward Cuba is not working. We have had our trade embargo in place for 40 years, and it has done nothing to weaken the government, led by Fidel Castro. In fact, the embargo has given Cuban leaders an excuse for many of their failed policies. In Kansas, we understand that if you try something once or twice and it doesn't work, then you need to change course. This common sense lesson has not yet reached Washington, D.C., and this failed policy continues.

My belief is that the only true way the Cuban people can start down the path toward democracy is if their economy is free. Historically, we have seen that unilateral embargoes do not work. In fact, the U.S. has made it easier for Cuba-a country just 90 miles off our shores-to form relations with other communist nations like China.

The good news is that Cuban officials would like to continue purchasing agriculture products from U.S. farmers and ranchers. I will keep you updated on the work being done in Congress to open Cuban borders to Kansas goods.

Receiving Wheat Leader of the Year Award

On Monday, I joined wheat producers at the Wheat Profit Conference in Salina, where I provided an update on agriculture issues in Congress. Recently, the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers (KAWG) was in Washington. D.C., where they presented me with the 2004 Wheat Leader of the Year Award-the highest Congressional honor bestowed by the wheat organizations.

KAWG members who were in Washington, D.C. were President Jerry McReynolds of Woodston, Executive Vice President Brett Myers of Manhattan, Vice President Kendall Hodgson of Little River, Secretary-Treasurer Joe Kejr of Brookville and immediate past-President of KAWG and current National Association of Wheat Growers Vice President John Thaemert of Sylvan Grove. House Agriculture Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) also joined us for the evening.

I am particularly honored to receive this award because of the importance that wheat plays in the Kansas economy. Since coming to Congress, I have worked to see that farmers have the ability to get crops from their fields to market quickly and efficiently, and I will continue these efforts on behalf of Kansans to ensure that the "Big First" remains wheat country.

In the Office

Among those visiting my Washington, D.C. office this week were Chris Tilden, Interim Director from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment in Topeka, who was in with Shelly Boden and Jodi Schmidt to discuss rural health care issues. Also in was Mary Lou Warren, Director, Foster Grandparent program in Great Bend, which is part of a network of national service programs known as Senior Corps. Senior Corps. provides seniors with an opportunity to serve in a number of various capacities from mentors and tutors to caregivers for at-risk youth.

With many schools in Kansas celebrating spring break this week, we had a number of visitors in for tours of the U.S. Capitol. In for individual tours from Hays were Ben Peeler, Derek Johnson, Jan Burkholder, David and Kristen Stoecklein and daughter Jessica, Marilyn Timbers and her daughter Cianna and Robert and Susan McQuilliam. Also in the office were Shawn Schieber of Merriam, Dean and Marge Wineland of Natoma, Layton and Diane Nance and their daughter Kaitlin of Cheney, Clarence and Shelly Boden and their son Joel of Waldo and Dale Sader and Karil Bellah and children Lisa Sader, Eric Sader and Rachel Bellah of Lindsborg. Also in were Milford Mayor, Morris Greenwood, and his wife Beverly.

Kent and Suzanne Moore and their children Brian and Madison were in from luka, as were Larry and Louann Karl and their children Evan and Rachelle of Abilene. Also in were Nara and Jenna Newcomer of Salina, as well as James Swiercinsky and Annette Bredthauer and daughter Kristen Swiercinsky of Belleville. David and Linda McQuilliam of Hutchinson, Kenny and Barbara Sewing and daughters Ashley Sewing and Amy Glaves of St. John were in the office. Also in for a tour were Bryan Emel of Hutchinson, brother of my staff member Crystal Emel, and Monica Fix of McPherson for a tour.

We also had a few large groups in this week for tours. A group of students was in from Centre High School in Lost Springs, as was a group of students from Hays High School. Smoky Valley High School sent a group of students, and Lt. Col. Terry Maple of the Kansas Highway Patrol brought a group of students and parents from the Topeka, Mayetta, Tecumseh, Berryton and Lyndon areas. Hutchinson Boy Scout Troop #313 also brought a group of scouts to Washington, D.C. for a tour of the Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry