

5/02/2005 This Week in Congress

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May 2, 2005

Dear Friend,

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

House Reaches Agreement on 2006 Budget

After several weeks of negotiations, the House and Senate this week reached an agreement on the budget numbers for 2006. This budget provides a sound plan for our nation's finances as it works to better control spending. As it is at home, by finding ways to save money, our country will be able to reduce the amount of debt owed. Congress must make these tough choices to get spending under control. This is one of my most important priorities as a Member of Congress. Our country should not continue to operate in the red and pass off the enormous debt to future generations.

With this budget we will continue reducing the deficit and stay on track to cut the deficit in half by 2009. The budget resolution provides a blueprint for Congress to determine spending and revenue levels for the coming fiscal year and the following four years. Based on the framework passed this week, action on specific programs will be discussed and finalized by Congress in the coming months.

During the course of this debate, one area that was disproportionately targeted for cuts was the agriculture sector. Originally, the President proposed over \$9 billion in cuts to agriculture - a higher amount relative to other programs. However, I worked with House leaders to negotiate significantly lower reductions in the final resolution - just over \$3 billion. Other good news in this legislation is that funding for veterans programs will not be reduced, but rather increased by nearly \$1 billion.

Ethics Impasse Cleared to Make Way for Investigation

On Wednesday night, I supported efforts to revert House ethics rules back to the standards of 2004, in order to clear a partisan impasse and allow the committee to operate. Since the beginning of the year, Republicans and Democrats have been in a stalemate over the rules governing the committee. With Wednesday's passage, the House Committee on Ethics can move forward with their business, including an investigation of House Majority Leader Tom Delay (TX-22). Congressman Delay has asked for the investigation to take place, in order to deal with numerous allegations about possible improper trips he has taken.

Members of Congress must adhere to high ethical standards. When an individual's actions are called into question, it is important that those allegations be investigated. Members of Congress are elected to represent the people of their state, and I am proud of Kansans' steadfast sense of right and wrong. Unethical behavior is not tolerated at home and should not be tolerated in Washington, D.C. I firmly believe that it is of utmost importance that elected officials act with integrity in carrying out their responsibilities. Members of Congress have a duty to maintain the public's trust and to respect the honor of the offices we hold.

Chairing Joint Hearing of Agriculture Subcommittees on Soybean Rust

Wednesday morning, the subcommittee I chair, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, held a joint hearing with the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research, chaired by Congressman Frank Lucas (OK-03), to review the effects of Asian Soybean rust on the U.S. farm economy. Soybean rust, first discovered in the U.S. in November 2004, is a fungal disease that affects the growth of soybeans. While rust did not have a significant effect on the 2004 soybean production, it is expected to do more damage, and be more widespread, in 2005.

During the hearing, the subcommittees heard from two panels of witnesses representing the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and various industry groups. They reported that since rust was discovered late in the 2004 crop cycle, it has given the U.S. soybean industry time to prepare strategies to guard against possible rust damage to the 2005 soybean crop and beyond.

According to the EPA, now that the disease is here, eliminating it is unlikely. Producers will have to work to contain it. Heavily infected plants will have fewer pods and lighter seeds, thus reducing yields. Soybean rust spores, once airborne, can move quickly, reportedly traveling up to 400 miles in a single day.

Soybean rust is now in the U.S., and all indications are that it's here to stay. Keeping up coordinated and cooperative communication efforts is essential to our producers' ability to respond to this disease. The USDA has done a good job of providing information to farmers, and I will continue working with them to see that we reduce the damage to the American soybean industry.

House Votes to Limit Abortions for Minors

This week, I supported House passage of legislation upholding parental involvement in minors' abortion decisions. H.R. 748, the Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act, would uphold state laws that require parental involvement in minors' abortion decisions by prohibiting the transport of a minor across state lines to obtain an abortion. This legislation makes it a crime if an abortion provider does not notify the minor's parents or legal guardian 24 hours before the procedure, if the minor is from a state with parental notification laws.

Currently, a total of 44 states have enacted some form of a parental involvement law. Of those, Kansas is one of 24 states that enforce laws requiring the consent or notification of at least one parent, or authorization from the court, before a minor can obtain an abortion. This legislation is consistent with the laws in Kansas and helps ensure the safety of children in Kansas and across the country.

Federal Update on Livestock Identification

This week, I joined other members of the House Committee on Agriculture for a briefing with USDA officials to discuss their plans for a National Animal Identification System. Next week, the USDA plans to roll out a draft plan that discusses the current status of the system and what the future course of action will be. The USDA officials indicated there will be a 30 day comment period following the release of this plan. I encourage Kansas farmers and ranchers to look over the plan and contact USDA with their questions and comments.

The National Animal ID System is a national program that will attempt to keep track of all livestock across the U.S. The goal is to create a 48-hour trace back of the movements of any diseased or exposed animal in order to ensure maximum protection of America's livestock. It is important for the health and safety of our livestock and of the American people that

disease outbreaks be identified quickly. This also helps reduce damage to the markets. It is my hope that this ID program can be implemented in a manner that offers a low cost, minimal hassle, and flexible solution for our ranchers as they manage their herds. I am not yet convinced that this is the case and welcome input from livestock producers in Kansas.

Reverend Fred Hollomon Gives Opening Prayer Before U.S. House

On Wednesday morning, I was honored to have Reverend Fred Hollomon of Topeka give the opening prayer before the U.S. House of Representatives. Reverend Hollomon is a familiar face around Topeka, serving as the chaplain in the Kansas State Senate for the past 24 years, including during my time as State Senator.

Reverend Hollomon is a retired minister in the Southern Baptist Church and is currently a member at the New Beginnings Baptist Church in Topeka. He retired in 2002 after 50 years in ministry. Reverend Hollomon attended seminary at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, after graduating from the University of Alabama. After serving in Oklahoma and Missouri, Reverend Hollomon moved to Kansas in 1958. He was a pastor in Baxter Springs, Manhattan, Lawrence, and Kansas City before finishing his career in Topeka.

I was pleased to have Reverend Hollomon open the day with his prayer. I was also glad that his family, including his wife, Pat, and many of their nine children, were able to attend.

Congressional Rural Caucus Looks at Meth Problem

On Thursday, I took part in a briefing, hosted by the Congressional Rural Caucus, on the increase in methamphetamine production and use in rural areas and the associated effects on our rural communities. County officials, representing the National Association of Counties, described how local and federal officials can cooperate to address meth prevention, enforcement and treatment.

County officials echoed many of the same concerns I hear from Kansans. Meth is a dangerous scourge on our rural communities. We must all work together to reclaim our communities, combat this meth problem and take every step necessary to tell meth dealers that they are not welcome in our state.

According to the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, in 2004, Kansas law enforcement officials seized 583 meth labs, ranking Kansas eleventh in the nation for total meth lab seizures. However, meth abuse is no longer just plaguing rural communities in Kansas, as it has infiltrated urban and suburban regions of the country. It is time for comprehensive federal legislation to reduce the use of methamphetamine. I recently sponsored several legislative measures designed to combat methamphetamine use including H.R. 314, the Combat Methamphetamine Act and H.R. 13, the Clean, Learn, Educate, Abolish, Neutralize and Undermine Production (CLEAN-UP) of Methamphetamine Act. This legislation would provide more resources to law enforcement, reclassify pseudoephedrine as a Schedule V drug to make it more difficult to access for illegal use, and include provisions to help clean up farms and parks damaged by meth labs.

I commend the efforts of those engaged in the battle against meth. I will continue working with local officials and my colleagues in the Congressional Rural Caucus to find ways to assist on the federal level.

Attending the 3i Show in Garden City

On Saturday, I joined farmers, ranchers and many other Kansans at the 51st annual 3i Show in Garden City. During my visit there, I held my Finney County town hall meeting, as part of my annual Big First Listening Tour.

Earlier in the day, I held the Hodgeman County town hall meeting in Hanston. Other stops this past week included Ottawa County, in Minneapolis; Geary County, in Milford; and Saline County, in Salina.

The tour continues over the coming months. For a full list of the times and dates of when I'll be in your county, visit my website here: <http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press>

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In the Office

On Tuesday afternoon, I attended a reception held to honor Kansas teachers, hosted by the Milken Family Foundation. The foundation presents National Educator Awards each year to provide recognition to teachers, principals and other education professionals who excel in education. There to receive awards for 2004 from Kansas were Jaime Armendariz, Principal at Ogden Elementary School, and Victoria Seeger, teacher at Pleasant Hill Elementary School in Topeka. Joining them was 1998 Kansas Milken National Educator Kathi Flexman of Kansas City.

In the office this week was Mary Arlington, owner of High Plains Camping in Oakley, who was in to discuss transportation and camping ground issues. Also in were Joe Conroy of Emporia, Vance Crain of Leawood and Ruth Morris of Overland Park, representing the Kansas Association of Nurse Anesthetists. They discussed Medicare reimbursements and other nursing issues. Daniel Clawson, CEO of Virtual Team Works, Inc. of Manhattan was in to discuss his concerns as a small business owner. In representing the Kansas Wheat Commission from Ulysses was Larry Kepley who discussed wheat trade with Cuba. In to discuss dairy issues as part of the Kansas Dairy Association were Jim Reed of Esbon, Dennis Metz of Oxford, Lynda Foster of Ft. Scott, Mike Bodenhausen of Muscotah and Chris Wilson of Belvue.

A large group of Kansans were in representing the Kansas Contractors Association. The group talked about the highway reauthorization legislation currently under consideration in the Senate. Physical therapists Carolyn Bloom of Topeka and Ric Baird of Silver Lake, and students Jill Harris and Uzma Hasan were in as part of the Kansas Physical Therapists. They discussed repealing caps on outpatient therapy and direct access to physical therapy services.

In the office this week for a tour of the Capitol building were Lon and Brenda Seaman of Portis; Bill and Carol Engelland of Hutchinson and Wichita-area residents Donna and Brian Westhoff, along with Ed and Stephene Bridwell and their sons, Dylan and Trey.

Very truly yours,

Jerry