

5/16/2005 This Week in Congress

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May 16, 2005

Dear Friend,

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

Good News for Kansas Military Bases From BRAC Recommendations

On Friday, the Department of Defense released their recommendations to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission on which U.S. military bases should be closed or realigned with another base. This is the fifth BRAC round since 1988, a process used to better align our military forces and reduce surplus capacity in U.S. installations. The BRAC report held great news for Kansas, as all four major military installations were recommended to remain open and, in some cases, be significantly expanded. The report recommends an additional 3,600 jobs for our state as more military personnel are added among Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, Forbes Field in Topeka and McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita. Perhaps the best news came to Fort Riley, where the report recommended that the division headquarters of the Army's First Infantry Division, also known as the "Big Red One," be brought back to Fort Riley from its current location in Germany. The BRAC recommendations demonstrate that our Kansas installations are essential to meeting today's war fighting requirements and have the training and deployment capabilities our nation needs. Additionally, they each have strong community support that is necessary to provide a high quality of life for our soldiers and their families.

As a member of the Governor's Strategic Military Planning Commission, I have worked with community, government, and military leaders to prepare for this BRAC round. Thanks in part to the hard work of Kansas' military communities, our installations were well positioned throughout this process. I'm impressed with the way Kansas' military communities have stepped up and worked hard to show the Department of Defense that Kansas is the best home for our troops and that our military installations are vital to our nation's defense. In the First District, Junction City and all of Geary County have always worked together with Fort Riley and have been very supportive of this installation to help make it a success.

The economic impact of Kansas' military installations is greater than the 8 largest employers in the state combined, bringing \$2 billion to the state's economy and providing nearly 70,000 jobs. An independent BRAC Commission will now review the report, before forwarding a revised list of recommendations to Congress for approval, and to the President, where it will become law. I will continue to be involved in the BRAC process until a final decision is reached this fall.

Providing for a Better Future for Kansas National Guard, Reservists

Also this week, I continued my work to provide better support for members of the Kansas National Guard and Reserve and their families by sponsoring legislation to lower the retirement age and help troops in combat save for retirement. Today's soldier is not just the enlisted men and women - it's the local teacher, banker or small business owner who is part of the National Guard and Reserves.

This week I sponsored H.R. 783, legislation to lower the age for receipt of retirement pay for Guard and Reservists from 60 to 55. Guard and Reserve members are currently ineligible to receive retirement pay until they reach age 60, regardless of the age they actually retire. However, active duty forces have no age restrictions and instead begin collecting retirement pay any time after their 20 years of service is complete. I have also sponsored H.R. 1499, the Heroes Earned Retirement Opportunities (HERO) Act, which makes adjustments in the federal tax code to allow combat soldiers to use their hazard pay to make contributions to their Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs). Currently, soldiers serving in a combat zone are not able to contribute their hazard pay towards their IRA.

Despite ranking thirty-third nationally in population, Kansas ranks eighth nationally in number of troops per capita deployed from the Guard and Reservists. As we call upon these citizen soldiers more and more to serve in the line of fire, we need to make sure that the benefits they receive reflect their sacrifice.

Meeting with Kansas City Community and Business Leaders

This week, I had the opportunity to meet with members of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce to discuss issues of common interest - agriculture and agribusiness, trade, transportation, health care and Social Security. While the divide between rural and urban areas' interests may seem large, in many respects we are only a few generations removed from one another. It is common for many in western Kansas to have children or grandchildren who have moved to the Kansas City area.

Protecting and preserving the rural way of life remains one of my leading objectives in representing Kansans in Congress. These meetings were useful in providing some insight on life in the western part of the state to those in the east. We have a diverse state, but we must all work together in order to accomplish good things for Kansas.

Meeting With National Crop Insurance Services

On Tuesday, I met with representatives from National Crop Insurance Services (NCIS) of Overland Park, to discuss the recent hearing I chaired of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management to review the Federal Crop Insurance System. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss crop insurance program delivery and effectiveness with leading experts in this field. Those attending the meeting were Bob Parkerson, President; Tom Zacharias, Senior Vice President; John Owen, General Counsel and Bob Vancrum.

NCIS is an international organization that represents the interests of more than 60 crop insurance companies. In today's agriculture environment, more and more producers are relying on crop insurance as a way to manage their risks. I will continue my work to make this a user-friendly program for Kansas crop producers.

House Passes Legislation to Decrease Gang Violence

On Wednesday, I supported House passage of H.R. 1279, the Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act. This comprehensive legislation is designed to increase gang prosecutions and prevent gang-related crimes. H.R. 1279 authorizes increased federal funding to support federal, state and local law enforcement efforts against violent gangs, and to coordinate law enforcement agencies' efforts to share intelligence and jointly prosecute violent gangs. The act also creates new criminal gang prosecution offenses, enhances existing gang and violent crime penalties to deter and punish illegal street gangs, and proposes violent crime reforms needed to effectively prosecute gang members.

Recent reports indicate that there are more gang members in the U.S. than sworn police officers - even in Kansas. Violent gang-related crimes are becoming a problem for rural and urban communities across the country. Gang activity is also frequently linked to the illegal drug trade. Additional federal resources and cooperation will help law enforcement and prosecutors fight back against the increasing gang related violence. This legislation now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Ensuring Adequate Rail Service for 2005 Harvest

On Thursday, I met with Diane Duren, Vice President and General Manager of Agricultural Products for Union Pacific. I visited with Duren about the approaching harvest and the availability of rail cars to handle a larger crop volume. Many Kansas farmers and grain retailers depend on reliable rail service to deliver their commodities to market.

Duren assured me that UP is aware of the rail service needs in Kansas and that they are working to ensure that the rail cars, tracks and service are able to keep up with the harvest demands. Ensuring that this vital transportation infrastructure is maintained and that it can efficiently transport our agriculture products is critical to remaining competitive in a global market. With the potential of a larger harvest, demands on these transportation resources will be even more significant.

As a member of both the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads and the House Agriculture Committee, I will continue to monitor this issue and work to improve the availability and cost of transporting our agriculture products across the country and around the world.

Big First Listening Tour Continues

On Saturday morning, I met with Trego County residents in Ogallah as part of my 69-county Big First Listening Tour. In Ogallah, Cedar Bluff Lake was a significant topic of conversation. Area residents agreed that the lake is an important component of the area, providing opportunities for recreation as well as wildlife habitat.

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

[/press/ks01_moran/041105TheTour.html](http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ks01_moran/041105TheTour.html)

Attending Eagle Court of Honor Ceremony in Hays

On Sunday, I attended an Eagle Court of Honor ceremony for Jack Jeter, in Hays. This is the highest award in the Boy Scouts of America. Jack, the son of John and Mary Jeter, is a member of Troop 101 in Hays. This is a significant accomplishment in this young man's life, and it was an honor to be able to attend.

In the Office

Community bankers from across Kansas were in Washington, D.C. this week to discuss issues related to the banking industry. Among those in my office were Paul Boeding and Marilyn Boeding, both with the Baileyville State Bank in Seneca; Dan Coup of First National Bank in Hope; Joe Kennedy of First National Bank in Frankfort; Mike Johnson of Swedish-American State Bank in Courtland; Bruce Morgan of Valley State Bank in Roeland Park; and Richard Ciemny of First National Bank in Wichita. Also in this week was Steve Parkin of Salina, a fellow at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Steve was recently appointed to be the Conservation Security Program Manager within the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

In to discuss capital gains tax cuts was Brad Seibel, from Edward Jones Investments in McPherson. Representatives from the Propane Marketers of Kansas were in to talk about energy policy and issues affecting small businesses. Here as part of that group were Greg Noll and Justin Holstin of Topeka, Jerrod Wanklyn of Frankfurt, Don and Colleen Reinert of Peabody and Marvin Spees of Topeka. Also in this week were a large group of realtors from across Kansas with the Kansas Realtors Association. They discussed the Community Choice in Real Estate Act, which is currently being considered by Congress.

Those in the office for a tour of the Capitol building this week included National Guard members Teresa Laffery of Clay Center and Sarah Behan of Rolla, as well as Greg and Kathleen Norris of Salina, Norbert and Margie Bollig of Hays, and Lana Stueve of Olpe, sister of Lea Stueve, who is interning in my Washington, D.C. office this spring.

Also in this week for tours were Richard and Becky Sook of Hays, Ken and Carol Sook of Topeka, Jim and Karen Gilliland of Hutchinson and their daughter, Whitney of Arlington, Virginia; Mike and Sherry Stucky of Ness City, Eric Haskin of Greensburg, Mary Dinkel of Kinsley, Toyia Bulla of Mount Hope, Tracy Pribbenow of Sedgwick, Marc and Karla McCune of Emporia , Lonnie and Debra Whitten of Lebanon, and Martin and Jonnie Berneking and their sons, Daniel and Brian of Salina.

Very truly yours,

Jerry