

6/13/2005 This Week in Congress

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June 13, 2005

Dear Friend,

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

Discussing Kansas Health Care with HHS Secretary Leavitt

This week, I met with Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Mike Leavitt to discuss concerns about funding for Medicare and Medicaid. Congress is currently considering funding levels for these two heavily relied upon programs, and I wanted to convey to him what I am hearing from Kansans. The decisions made by HHS and Secretary Leavitt are tremendously important to our state, as the costs of prescription drugs and basic health care services continue to rise.

In the meeting, we discussed the levels of funding Congress is currently considering for both Medicaid and Medicare in 2006. Medicaid reform has come under scrutiny this year, and potential changes to the program would affect many Kansans. I conveyed that it is critical that Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements are maintained to improve beneficiaries' access to health care services, especially in rural areas.

In addition, we discussed the Medicare prescription drug benefit, which is set to go into effect on January 1, 2006. Many Kansans have expressed reluctance to sign up for the program due in part to a lack of information.

Congress and the Administration must work towards policies that will ensure Americans have adequate health coverage, and will also lower the underlying costs of health care services. Secretary Leavitt is the former governor of Utah and was sworn in as the Secretary of Health and Human Services this past January.

House Passes Agriculture Funding Legislation

On Wednesday, the House passed agriculture appropriations legislation that provides funding for the Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration and other related agencies for 2006.

During the debate on this legislation, I proposed an amendment calling for more funding for the eradication of noxious weeds. In 2004, legislation I introduced allocated funds for a program to battle noxious weeds such as sericea lespedeza, which has caused damage to the native tallgrass in the Flint Hills, in eastern Kansas. I look forward to working with the conference committee to see that this funding is included in the final legislation.

Human and animal health initiatives were a priority again this year. Increased funds were made available for the Food Safety and Inspection Service, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Food and Drug Administration, and \$90 million was again allocated to combat Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). In addition, the legislation provided increased funding for food and nutrition programs, including the Child Nutrition, Women Infants and Children (WIC) program and the Food Stamp program. I was also pleased to see an increase in funding for agriculture research and an increase in funds to allow the Farm Service Agency to better serve farmers and ranchers. These programs are all priorities for me as a member of the Agriculture Committee.

There has been a great deal of discussion recently about reductions in funding for farm programs over the next several years. While I believe that reducing the deficit and maintaining fiscal responsibility is important for the future of our children and grandchildren, I also believe that farmers, ranchers and rural communities should not bear a disproportionate share of this financial burden.

Open House and Ribbon Cutting at Solomon Corporation

On Monday afternoon, I joined members of the Hemmer family for a ribbon cutting on a major expansion of their family business, Solomon Corporation, in Solomon. The new project represents a nearly \$2 million investment in the company and the community. This expansion is not just good news for Dickinson County, but all of Kansas.

Economic development in rural America can sometimes be difficult to attain, but Solomon Corporation demonstrates the potential for growth and development that exists in our small communities.

Attending the FHSU President's Dinner

On Friday night, I joined Dr. Ed Hammond for the Fort Hays State University President's Dinner. This annual event recognizes the financial supporters of the university from across the state. At the dinner, I sat with President Hammond and Donna Shank of Liberal, who is a member of the Kansas Board of Regents.

Big First Tour Continues

My listening tour of the Big First Congressional District continued this past week. On Tuesday, I met with Dickinson County residents in Abilene before heading back to Washington, D.C. for votes in Congress. On Saturday, I met with Edwards County residents during a meeting in Kinsley.

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

Flags Available through my Office for Flag Day

Tomorrow is Flag Day across the country. As a reminder, my Congressional office offers American flags flown over the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Flags can be flown to honor family and friends of those in the First District. The flag service is available year round. Flags that are flown over the Capitol include a personalized certificate stating the date flown and specific occasion. Various sizes of flags are available in either nylon or cotton.

To obtain more information on Capitol flag services and a full list of prices, contact my office at (202) 225-2715 or order flags online at my website: <http://www.house.gov/moranks01/flags.shtml>.

In the Office

Many Kansans were in my office this week. The Kansas Agri-Women were in to discuss several agriculture issues. Among those in the office were Wanda Kinney of Carbondale, Leslie Kaufman of Topeka, Chris Wilson and Joanna Wilson both of Wamego, Dana Hoffman of Leonardville, Jean Pettibone of Kanorado, Marianne Falkner of Ogden and Janet McPherson of Manhattan. In to discuss television and technology were several Kansans from the Kansas Cable and Telecommunications Association. Members of this group included John Federico of Topeka, Tom Krewson of Kansas City and Coleen Jennison of Topeka.

Members of the Kansas Insurance Association were in to discuss insurance and tax. Among those present were Chris Brown from Junction City, Tom Dials from Ft. Leavenworth, Les Diehl from Topeka, Harold Dorssom from Marysville, Scott Forland from Overland Park, David Hanson from Topeka, Mindy Miller from Topeka and Rick Wilborn from McPherson. I also had the opportunity to meet with young ranchers representing the Kansas Livestock Association. Ryan Higbie from Quenemo, Chris Burris from Larned and Derek Martin from Dighton were in to discuss livestock issues and to learn more about the legislative process.

Lyle Gray of Leon and Bob Wietharn of Clay Center were in with U.S. Ag Bank. Representing the Mental Health Association of South Central Kansas were Gary Parker of Colby, Susan Budd of Kansas City and Rose Mary Mohr and Connie Fahrback, both from the Wichita area. In to discuss educational needs of migrant children was Sonny Rundell of Syracuse with the Interstate Migrant Education Council. Also in this week were representatives from the Inter-faith Ministries. Representing the group were Herb and Jeanne Smith of McPherson, Reverend Sam Muyskens of Wichita and Sister Therese Bangert of the Kansas City area. Also joining them was Laura Bryon, a student from Shawnee.

In for tours of the Capitol building this week were Ron and Karen Menefee of Hutchinson and their son Mark, as well as Cy and Gladys Moyer of Phillipsburg, with their two grandsons, Ryan Sutton and Samuel Moyer. Sharon Bradford and Jane Richardson, both of Hill City were in, as were Barbara Herbel and Nancy Kabler, both of Lawrence. Also in were David and Virginia Will from Norton, Bob and Susie Martin of Baldwin City, Virgil Augustine, Noni Strand and son Luke Augustine, Arlene Bassett and son Jordan, Amy Allen and Dylan Bassett all of Salina and Chuck and Joanna Vetter with their children Nelson, Taryn, Sam and Chuck Jr. of McPherson.

I had the opportunity to take a group of students from Fort Hays State University onto the floor of the House of Representatives, where we discussed my job as a Member of Congress before their tour. Chapman Rackaway and Shala Bannister, both professors at FHSU, were the leaders of this group. Also in were Steve and Joyce Brom of Ulysses and their sons Matthew, Cody, Andrew, and Dominick. Also, Laryl Rous of Hays and Liz Nicholas of Plainville were in, along with children Cole and Katie Nicholas, Ashleigh Turnbull of Plainville, and Ashley Beiker of Wichita.

Very truly yours,

Jerry