

7/05/2005 This Week in Congress

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July 5, 2005

Dear Friend,

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

Celebrating our Country's Independence

Monday of this week was Independence Day, a time to celebrate the birth of our country and the freedoms we have today. I hope you had an enjoyable holiday.

To help honor the day, my wife Robba and I visited several Kansas communities for celebrations. On Monday, we took part in the annual Patriots Parade in Hutchinson. This is one of the largest parades in the First Congressional District. On Saturday, we took part in the Wild West Fest Parade in Hays, and I joined Lacrosse area residents for their annual Fourth of July Parade.

Honoring our Veterans and Increasing VA Health Funding

Yesterday morning, I also spent time thanking veterans for their service during a visit to the Robert J. Dole Veterans Medical Center in Wichita. The men and women who have served our country in the armed forces are among our greatest citizens, and I was proud to thank them for their service.

The visit also gave me a chance to discuss the measure passed this week to increase funding for veterans' health care. On Thursday, the House passed legislation that adds \$975 million to the budget of the Department of Veterans Affairs to cover a shortage in health care funding for 2005. The funding came after a House Veterans Affairs Committee hearing I attended, where Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Jim Nicholson revealed that the VA is facing a nearly \$1 billion shortfall.

The shortfall in funding stems from apparently inaccurate forecasting by the VA on the needs of America's veterans. Thousands of new veterans have entered the system in recent years after serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. Secretary Nicholson testified that the current forecasting model used to determine demand and develop budgets has proven inadequate. To cover the shortage, the VA has been forced to delay spending on equipment and maintenance in VA facilities, as well as borrow funds from future years.

It is unacceptable to make up for the shortfall by delaying spending or borrowing money, as it will only postpone the problem while reducing the quality of service. After my visit to the Wichita VA, I will continue to see that our current veterans, and the next generation of veterans, receive the health care they have earned.

Working to Increase the Use of Renewable Fuels

This week I joined fellow members of the House Agriculture Committee to introduce legislation calling for an increase in the use of renewable fuels produced in Kansas and other farm states. The legislation, the Renewable Fuels Act of 2005, would establish a renewable fuels standard that requires eight billion gallons of renewable fuel to be used per year by 2012.

The increased use of renewable fuels, made from agriculture products produced in Kansas, will help lower fuel costs, enhance our environment and reduce our country's dependency on foreign oil.

This week, the Senate passed a comprehensive energy bill. The House passed similar legislation in April. The differences between the two measures will now be worked out in a conference committee of members from both the House and Senate.

The increase in use of renewable fuels is a win, win, win situation. It is a win for the environment, a win for the Kansas economy and most importantly, a win for consumers at the gas pump.

Supporting Amtrak in Kansas

This week, the House passed legislation providing 2006 funding for the Department of Transportation and other federal programs. During the debate on this legislation, I supported House adoption of two amendments that help ensure the future viability of Amtrak.

I recognize that passenger rail service is important to Kansans, especially those who live in rural areas. Amtrak's Southwest Chief makes six stops in Kansas and provides transportation to over 290,000 passengers. The amendments I voted for would increase funding for Amtrak in 2006 by \$626 million and help preserve long distance routes, such as the Southwest Chief. This legislation also includes funding for essential highway and aviation transportation programs in Kansas. It now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Providing Funding for Housing to Accommodate Fort Riley Soldiers

On Monday, I joined Senator Pat Roberts; Major General Dennis Hardy, Commander of the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Riley; Linda Hoeffner, Deputy Garrison Commander; Gilbert Gonzales, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Acting Under Secretary; and Chuck Banks, the USDA State Director for Rural Development to announce \$25 million in guaranteed lending assistance through USDA's Rural Housing Program. The program will assist Fort Riley soldiers and their families by providing financing opportunities to help purchase homes in rural communities. The funding will help address the projected housing shortage resulting from additional troops arriving at Fort Riley. The additional 3,400 troops are part of the 6th Brigade, 25th Infantry, and will be arriving at Fort Riley over the next six months.

Also on Monday I attended an awards ceremony for the 1st Battalion, 41st Infantry, 3rd Brigade, 1st Armored Division at Calvary Parade Field on Fort Riley. The ceremony recognized soldiers of the battalion, family readiness leaders and

community members for their selfless service and support during the battalion's year-long deployment to Iraq. Eighteen soldiers received medals, including the Bronze Star with Valor, the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart and the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

Visiting Manhattan

On Friday, I stopped in Manhattan on my way back to Hays from Washington, D.C. In Manhattan, I visited with the city manager, Ron Fehr, as well as the Chamber of Commerce President, Lyle Butler.

At Kansas State University, I visited with the Dean and Associate Dean of the Agriculture Department, Dr. Dean Cholick and Dr. Larry Erpelding. I also visited with the Head of the Political Science Department and old friend, Dr. Joe Aistrup.

Taking Calls, Questions from Kansans on Kansas Public Television

This coming Thursday, I will take calls from Kansans to discuss current issues facing Congress during a live television appearance on Smoky Hills Public Television. The program, entitled "Mid-America Life: A Conversation with Jerry Moran," will air on Thursday, July 7, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. Chris Crawford, Vice Provost and Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at Fort Hays State University, will host the program for Smoky Hills Public Television. Joining him will be Dale Hogg, editor of the Great Bend Tribune.

The program will air live on Thursday, July 7, 2005 from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. Viewers will be able to call in toll-free at 800-337-4788 with questions.

Barton County Town Hall Meeting Cancelled as Big First Tour Continues

This week, Congress is out of session for the Independence Day holiday. This break from Washington, D.C. gives me an opportunity to visit many Kansas communities as part of my Big First Listening Tour.

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

However, I have cancelled the town hall meeting planned for Thursday morning in Great Bend, in order to attend the funeral services for Gary Gore. Gore, the president of the Great Bend Chamber of Commerce, was killed in a boating accident over the holiday weekend. Gary was a good friend and a great representative for Great Bend and Barton County. He will be missed.

In the Office

Many Kansans were in my office this week. In to discuss education issues, specifically the We The People program, were Sue Boldra of Hays and Lynn Stanley of Topeka. Catherine Rickbone of Emporia and Ken and Annette Van Blaricum of Pratt were in representing the American Association of University Women. They discussed trends and solutions for issues facing women and girls. Also in the office were representatives from the Kansas Association of School Nurses, who discussed insurance issues and the health needs of children. Those attending were Mandy Pilla of Wichita, Cindy Poteete of Goddard, Polly Witt and Jill Mayfield of Garden City and Sue Holmes of Salina.

In to discuss telecommunications issues were representatives from Kansas phone companies, including Mike Foster and Ben Foster of Miltonvale, Dick Veach and Catherine Moyer of Ulysses and Jesse Gailey of Ochelata, Oklahoma. USDA Deputy Under Secretary, Dr. Chuck Lambert was in to talk about the most recent case of BSE and efforts to restore exports of beef to Japan and Korea. Under Secretary Lambert is directly involved in the negotiations between the U.S. and these countries and is a fellow Kansan. Joining Lambert was his nephew, Shay Keith of El Dorado. Also in were Bob and Barbara Unell of Leawood to discuss their education program, "Uncle Dan's Report Card."

Chuck Banks of Topeka, director of the USDA's Rural Development program in Kansas was in, as was Case Collard of Leavenworth, a Kansas University law student. Collard is interning at a Washington, D.C. law firm this summer. In from Fort Hays State University were Cindy Elliott and Ann Gustad-Leiker of Hays. I also had the chance this week to meet with Kyle Koupal of Topeka and Rebecca Vitztum of Hays, students in the Congressional Youth Leadership Council and Presidential Classroom programs.

In this week for a tour of the Capitol building were Larry and Cyndie Carter of Liberal with their children Cathi, Cherie, Berakah and Larcyn; Pamela and Darlene Patrick of Ulysses and Antonio and Cathy Cavasos of Ulysses with their children Leo and Jesse. Also in were Bernie and Janet Schulte of Ellsworth.

Very truly yours,

Jerry