

3/15/2004 This Week In Congress

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March 15, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Cleaning Up the Media by Increasing Penalties

This week, I supported House passage of H.R. 3717, the Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act of 2004. This legislation would increase the Federal Communication Commission's maximum fine from \$27,500 to \$500,000 for violations by television and radio broadcasters of the transmission of obscene, indecent, or profane language. The fine for performers would increase from \$11,000 to \$500,000.

During the "Big First" Listening Tour, I heard from folks across the state who were concerned about the recent broadcasting of indecent material on television and the radio, including the Super Bowl halftime show. It is my hope that an increase in penalties will send a clear message that significant consequences will await those who broadcast inappropriate material. This legislation now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Meeting with Secretary Snow

On Tuesday, several Members of Congress and I had the opportunity to meet with the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Treasury, John Snow. This meeting gave us the opportunity to share with Secretary Snow the challenges we face and to discuss ways to preserve and create jobs in the United States. I appreciated the opportunity to share with Secretary Snow the problems that Kansans are facing and to discuss ways to strengthen the economy.

House Blocks Obesity-Related Lawsuits

On Wednesday, the House overwhelmingly passed a bill that would prevent frivolous lawsuits against the food industry. The bill, HR 339, would protect food manufacturers, sellers and trade associations from being held legally liable for their customers' health problems. The measure was in response to a lawsuit, in which the plaintiffs claimed that a fast-food chain was responsible for their obesity.

In the weeks prior to this vote, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that new data indicates that obesity

could become the nation's top cause of preventable death in this nation, surpassing smoking. As a country, we should be responsible for our own health, and not blame others. This bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Veterans Hearing on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a hearing this week to look at the treatment of veterans who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a mental health disorder that can occur from exposure to a traumatic event involving the threat of death or injury. In the military, it is the most prevalent mental disorder arising from combat. According to witnesses, it is also a consequence of exposure to the rigors of hardship deployments, such as responding to acts of terrorism, and peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Prevention and early intervention are essential to combating PTSD. At the hearing, witnesses testified that, as more and more troops return from combat missions, it is important that the VA has programs available to address their mental, as well as physical, health care needs.

Assistance to Firefighters Program Accepting Grant Applications

The Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program is designed to help our firefighters by enabling departments to increase the effectiveness of firefighting operations, to improve firefighter health and safety programs and to establish or expand fire prevention and safety programs. For many of our rural fire departments, obtaining these grants is the only way they are able to update their equipment.

The Department of Homeland Security's Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program is accepting applications through April 2, 2004. Since the program was implemented in 2001, millions of dollars have been granted to fire departments across our state.

Departments can find more information at <http://www.firegrantsupport.com/> or call 1-866-274-0960.

City Officials Visit Washington, D.C.

Throughout the week, I met with mayors, city managers and other city officials from many communities across Kansas. Local officials from Abilene, Emporia, Hutchinson, Ottawa and Manhattan traveled to Washington, D.C. for the Kansas League of Municipalities annual legislative event. These meetings provided me with the opportunity to discuss with local officials their needs and concerns. During the meetings, we discussed a wide range of topics, including homeland security, job creation, the future of Ft. Riley, the federal highway bill, energy and water issues.

Reading Across America

On Monday morning, I read to third and fourth grade classes at Schilling Elementary School in Salina to celebrate "Read Across America" and to promote the joy of reading. This year marked the 100th birthday of the late Theodor Geisel, better known to millions as Dr. Seuss. Through the generosity of the Kansas National Education Association (KNEA), a collection of Dr. Seuss books was donated to the school. I was joined in the presentation by Don Anderson, a UniServ Director with KNEA, from Lindsborg.

Visiting Rush Center and Gorham

On Saturday afternoon, I joined with citizens in Rush Center to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. Folks from Rush Center and the surrounding communities were dressed in green as they watched the annual St. Patrick's Day parade. Later that day, I joined with residents in Gorham for a fish fry hosted by the Community Development Association.

In the Office

On Tuesday, I met with Scott Stuckey and Dr. Casey Thomas of Junction City, with Kansans for a Strong Ft. Riley, to discuss ways to protect and promote Ft. Riley and the surrounding communities. Suzanne Bollig of Hays was in the office this week to discuss legislation that would reimburse respiratory therapists for their treatment of Medicare patients. Members of the Kansas Dairy Association, including Warren Winter of Hillsboro, Christy Ratliff of Garnett, Steven Ohlde of Linn, Chris Wilson of Wamego and Frank Pretz of Osawatomie, were in the office to discuss irrigation legislation and the promotion of dairy products. Greg Shelor of Minneola and other members of the National Grain Sorghum Producers were in the office to discuss crop insurance.

Lt. Katrina (Gier) Lewison and her husband, Tyler, visited my office this week. The Lewisons recently returned from

service in Iraq. When I visited Iraq this past August, I had the opportunity to pin a Purple Heart on Katrina, who was injured in a grenade attack. A Hutchinson native, Katrina attended West Point Military Academy. She went on to become a Black Hawk helicopter pilot and served in Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am very proud of her, and of all of our military men and women who are serving our country with such bravery and honor. The Lewisons are currently stationed at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.

Members of the American Legion were in the office this week to discuss funding for veterans healthcare. I met with Wayne McReynolds of Great Bend, Ruth Dirreen and Dave Warnken of Hutchinson, Laura and Damon Christensen of Concordia, Gene Heiman of Garden City, Jim Gravenstein of Topeka, Neal and Patti Warnken of Hutchinson, Gus Bosetti of Frontenac, Lee Stolfus of Emporia and Charles Yunker of Tecumseh.

Members of the Kansas Public Transit Association, including Ron Straight with the Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas in Hays, were in the office to discuss support for public transportation. Members of the Kansas VFW, including McKinley Smith of Junction City, Larry Graham of Tribune, Charles Shoemaker of Leavenworth, Vernon Russell of Lawrence, Eloise Hunter and Orlin Wagner of Wichita, and Jeff Lawson of Edwardsville were in the office to discuss funding for Veterans' Affairs programs and expanding VA services in Kansas.

In for a tour of the Capitol this week were Ken and Dottie Kraus of Hays, Kellan Kopfer and his daughter, Kelby, of Clay Center. Also in for a tour were John Zutavern, Diane Miller and Mark Arbuthnot of Abilene, and Melissa Law and her son, Alex, of Hutchinson.

Yvonne Braun and her daughter, Cheryl Rohleder, both of Hays, along with Ms. Braun's son, Kent Rohleder of Odenton, Maryland, were in the office for a tour. Ms. Braun was in the D.C.-area to watch her son defend his thesis at John Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Also taking a tour were students from Haven High School including, Krista Clark, Tiffany Kirkman, Dusti Rogers, Brannon Bontrager, Vanessa Mayo, Breanna McMurry, Weston Pohl, Julian Doering, and their teacher, Dick Kaufman. Also in for a tour was Daniel Shumate from Liberal and Tom Loudis of Salina.

Very truly yours,

Jerry