

## 4/26/2004 This Week In Congress

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April 26, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

### Allowing Penalty-free Withdrawals for Guard, Reservists

On Wednesday, I supported legislation that will allow guard members or reservists who are activated for more than 179 days to make penalty-free early withdrawals from their IRA or pension fund. This bill will be retroactive to cover those called to service since September 11, 2001, and extends for those who may continue to be called to active duty through September 12, 2005. In addition, to ensure their future retirement financial security, this legislation also encourages repayment of the withdrawn funds to the IRA/pension account within two years of ending this active duty. It also temporarily lifts the contribution cap up to the amount of the withdrawn funds to allow the repayment. As our country depends more and more upon guard and reservists, it is important that they be able to access their money when difficult financial situations arise.

This week, I requested a regulation change to allow for the incidental grazing of buffer strips on ground enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). My request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is to amend regulations in the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP). Currently, incidental grazing is allowed for producers of corn, grain sorghum and soybeans. However, wheat producers are not allowed to incidentally graze buffer strips while grazing livestock on growing wheat.

The USDA conservation programs allow producers to plant grass buffer strips to improve water quality and habitat for wildlife. However, these strips must be fenced off from livestock grazing on growing wheat. It is often impractical and expensive to fence off these strips, and by modifying these regulations in CCRP, producers will have more incentive and flexibility to participate in the program.

This is an important issue for our Kansas producers who have land enrolled in CRP. Changing these regulations will allow producers to graze growing wheat without having to go through the cost and effort of fencing off narrow buffer strips.

Inviting Local Veterans to World War II Memorial Reception in Washington, D.C.

During this year's Memorial Day weekend, thousands of World War II veterans from across the country will gather in Washington, D.C. for the dedication of the National World War II Memorial on the National Mall. For the Kansas veterans

and their families traveling to Washington, D.C., I would like to invite you to attend a reception on May 29, 2004. This reception will be an opportunity to come together and thank those veterans for their service and to celebrate the completion of the memorial.

The reception will be held on Saturday, May 29, 2004, from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m., at the atrium of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, in Washington D.C. The building is located about four blocks from the National World War II Memorial dedication site. For more information about the Kansas veterans' reception or to RSVP, please contact my Hays district office at (785) 628-6401. For more information about the dedication, please visit the National World War II Memorial website at <http://www.wwiimemorial.com/>.

#### Donating Calling Cards to Troops Overseas

The Department of Defense announced on Friday that any American may now help troops call home. The Defense Department has authorized the Armed Services Exchanges to sell prepaid calling cards to any individual or organization that wishes to purchase cards for deployed troops. The "Help Our Troops Call Home" program is designed to help service members call home from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

For those wishing to donate a prepaid calling card to a military member, you may log on to any of the three Armed Services Exchange web sites: the Army and Air Force Exchange Service <http://www.aafes.com/> , the Navy Exchange Service Command <http://www.navy-nex.com/> and the Marine Corps Exchange <http://www.usmc-mccs.org/> . Click the "Help Our Troops Call Home" link. From there, a prepaid calling card may be purchased for an individual at his or her deployed address or to "any service member" deployed or hospitalized. The Armed Services Exchanges will distribute cards donated to "any service member" through the American Red Cross, Air Force Aid Society and the Fisher House Foundation.

The Armed Services Exchanges operate telephone call centers in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, and other countries and aboard ships - anywhere service members are deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. All of these locations stay busy around the clock to keep up communication between deployed troops and their loved ones. The cards available through the "Help Our Troops Call Home" program offer the best value for calls made from the call centers, never expire, and result in no added charges or connection fees.

### Reading to Sabetha Elementary School

On Friday morning, I visited Sabetha Elementary School and read the book "House Mouse, Senate Mouse" to the entire third grade. The children's story walks children through the legislative process and shows how ideas can become law. I also stressed to the children the importance of reading.

Visiting with teachers, principals and superintendents allow me the opportunity to see firsthand what is going on in our schools. I was invited to the school by Mr. Michael Streit, the principal. When I was in Iraq in August 2003, I met Drew Streit, Mr. Streit's son. Drew has finished his tour in Iraq and is currently stationed at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.

### Viewing Photographs of Cuba

I visited the community of Cuba on Friday, to view the photographs taken by Jim Richardson of Lindsborg which will appear in the May issue of National Geographic magazine. During the past 30 years, Mr. Richardson has traveled thousands of miles across the Midwest to chronicle the lives of people in small towns. Mr. Richardson's photos were on display at the Two Doors Down Cafe in Cuba. I was impressed by the caliber of the photographs and the messages they conveyed. Mr. Richardson is truly an exceptional photographer, and I am pleased that he will be able to share his work with Kansans and the country in the May issue of the National Geographic magazine.

### Visiting Concordia Rotary

I attended the monthly meeting of Concordia Rotary on Friday. During the meeting, three Concordia High School seniors were recognized for their excellence in academics. Danielle Weisner, Wendy Mitchell and Jonelle Forshee represent the top 10 percent of their class and received the C. Carl Cunningham Scholarship. These students have a bright future, and I wish them the best in their endeavors. I would also like to thank Dana Brewer and Bev Mortimer, the superintendent of U.S.D. 333, for their efforts as the co-chairs of the Rotary scholarship committee.

### Presenting Grant to Trego County Rural Water District #2

On Friday afternoon, I joined Chuck Banks, state director of USDA Rural Development, to present a check for \$2.18 million to the Trego County Rural Water District #2. The district received a grant of \$980,00 and a loan of \$1.2 million through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Rural and Community Development. This funding will be used to update and expand the district's water delivery system, bringing better water service to customers.

### Attending the 3i Show in Great Bend

On Saturday morning, I attended the Western Kansas Manufacturers Association 3i Show - Irrigation, Implements, and Industry - in Great Bend. For the past 50 years, the 3i Show has been an excellent resource for people to learn about the newest technologies in agriculture production. This was my eighth-straight year at the show, and it was a pleasure to meet with people in the agriculture industry to discuss ways to improve and strengthen the farm economy.

Also at the 3i Show, I visited with several farm broadcasters, including Dane Daniel with Mid America Ag Network in Wichita, Kyle Bauer with KFRM in Clay Center, and Don Norman with KRVN in Lexington, Nebraska. We discussed the much-needed rain in some parts of the state, the USDA decision regarding testing all cattle for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and crop insurance.

#### In the Office

In the office this week were representatives of the Geary County School District, including Dr. Mary Devin, superintendent; Ron Winkler, superintendent-elect; LaMont Godsey, board of education; and Lisa Osbourn. After more than four decades in the Geary County School District - the past 12 years as superintendent - Dr. Devin will retire this summer. Mr. Winkler will succeed her as the new superintendent of schools. The group was in town for the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools Conference.

Elmer Ronnebaum of Seneca, David Mueller of Tampa and Dennis Schwartz of Topeka were in the office to discuss ways to improve rural water programs. Lori Jacobs of Great Bend was in on behalf of One Voice Against Cancer to discuss funding for cancer research. Members of the American Quarterhorse Association, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Fletcher of Lakin, were in to discuss issues relating to the breeding and owning of horses.

Veronica Alvarado of Ulysses was in Washington, D.C. as a participant in the Foundation for Rural Education and Develop Leadership Through Learning Program, and came past to discuss rural education issues.

Members of the Kansas Association of Insurance Agents, including Don Morris and Vicki Wyatt of Paola; Al and Donna Shank of Liberal; Scott Stuckey of Junction City; Dale and Sherry Chaffin of Hays; Ron Dupy of Salina; and Larry Magill and Bill and Nancy Neiswanger of Topeka were in to discuss tax reform, state insurance regulations, federal crop insurance and health insurance reform.

In for a tour of the Capitol this week were Gary and Nyla Dickinson of Hutchinson and Terri McDonald of Hays, as was Alice Stuckey of Junction City and her children, Sam, Molly and Max. Also in for a tour were Bruce and Tracy Wells of Cottonwood Falls, and their daughter, Maci.

Very truly yours,

Jerry