

7/18/2005 This Week in Congress

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July 18, 2005

Dear Friend,

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

Working to Better Fund Special Education

This week I sponsored legislation designed to fully fund the federal government's obligation to special education. H.R. 3145, The Mandatory IDEA Full Funding Compromise Act, would incrementally increase the amount of funding for special education until the government pays its full 40 percent share, by 2010.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), passed in 1975, the federal government agreed to pay 40 percent of the additional cost of educating students with disabilities. However, it has never fulfilled that obligation. Since coming to Congress, we have been successful in almost tripling the federal funding for special education - from 7.3 percent in 1996 to 18.6 percent in 2005. The legislation I sponsored would take the current funding level and gradually increase it over the next five years until it reaches the promised 40 percent level.

The lack of adequate federal funding places an unfair burden on local school districts working to meet the education needs of all students, including a growing number of students with special needs. As Kansas struggles to come up with court-ordered state funding, the federal government needs to make sure it is doing its part. This legislation would set an achievable deadline by which the government would have to fund special ed as originally promised. It's long past time for the federal government to fulfill its commitment to our dedicated special education professionals, our students and the taxpayers of Kansas.

More Attention Needed on Methamphetamine Problem

The National Association of Counties recently released the results of a survey that identifies methamphetamine as the leading drug-related local law enforcement problem in the United States. This study echoes much of what I hear from Kansas law enforcement officials and other community leaders as I travel around the state. Kansas has worked hard to confront this drug problem, and I believe it is also time for our national drug control strategy to make methamphetamine a top priority.

This week, I joined my colleagues on the bipartisan Congressional Caucus to Fight and Control Methamphetamine in sending a letter to President Bush, drawing his attention to the survey regarding the meth epidemic in America. While I applaud the work of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, it is necessary that Congress and the Administration recognize the devastating effects meth has had on our local communities and join together in this fight against meth. I will continue working to support federal efforts to enhance education, prevention, enforcement and treatment of this dangerous drug.

House Passes Regulations to Improve Worker Safety

On Tuesday, I supported House passage of legislation that would help improve the relationship between businesses and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the federal agency responsible for worker safety. While OSHA has been effective in reducing on-the-job deaths and injuries, some businesses have found the investigation process overly burdensome.

The legislation passed this week would allow OSHA to waive the deadline for challenging citations, expand the OSHA Review Commission, require courts to defer to decisions of the review commission and also included other provisions to provide some relief for small businesses. The legislation now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Visiting the USDA Rural Development Office

On Friday, on my way home from Washington, D.C., I stopped by the USDA Rural Development Office in Topeka and met with the Director, Chuck Banks. Banks updated me on several recent projects they have been involved in across the state. He is also a frequent visitor to my office in Washington, D.C.

One of the most recent issues I have been working with Banks and the Rural Development Office on is the effort to add additional housing in communities around Fort Riley. Earlier this month, I attended an event at the Fort, announcing \$25 million in guaranteed lending assistance through USDA's Rural Housing Program. This program will help Fort Riley soldiers and their families with financing opportunities to purchase homes in rural communities. With over 3,000 new troops arriving at the Fort over the next six months, this funding is very beneficial.

Big First Tour Continues in Gove County

This week, the Big First Listening Tour took me to Grinnell, in Gove County, where I joined area residents for the annual Harvest Festival Parade. This gave me the opportunity to see many Kansans during the parade, and to meet and talk with folks afterwards.

There are 18 more stops to go. 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

Also this weekend, I visited with central Kansas residents during the After Harvest Festival Parade in Ellinwood.

In the Office

Many Kansans were in my Washington D.C. office this week. Great Bend City Administrator Howard Partington and City Councilman Bill Berryman were in to talk about their discussions with the Federal Aviation Administration about the Essential Air Service program and maintaining air service in smaller communities. Other local officials in were representatives from Labette County. Jerry Carson, Labette County Commissioner; Mike Reynolds of Parsons; Carolyn Kennett, Director of Parson's Economic Development; and Ron Fundis, President of Labette Community College, were in with John Armbrust of Manhattan, to discuss the Base Realignment and Closure process. In from Topeka was Stan Smith with the Glass Association of North America. He was in to talk about the energy bill and trade issues.

In to discuss trade issues, specifically the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) was Kansas Farm Bureau President, Steve Baccus of Minneapolis. Also in to talk about CAFTA were representatives from the Kansas Corn Growers, including John Tibbits of Minneapolis; Danny Guetterman of Bucyrus; Bob Timmons of Fredonia; Charles Folz and Jere White, both of Garnett; and Ken McCauley of White Cloud. I also had the chance to congratulate McCauley, who is the President-Elect of the National Corn Growers Association. In representing Rural Telephone Services Company were Larry Sevier and Rhonda Goddard, both of Lenora. In the office to discuss hunger issues, food stamps and Medicaid with the RESULTS organization were Monsignor George Weber of Salina, Nancy Daniels, Kay Powell, Colette Hernandez and daughter Emily, all of Topeka; as well as Kate Hamilton and son Noah of Topeka.

Representatives from the Statewide Independent Living Council of Kansas were in the office. In were Lou Ann Kibbee of Hays; Phyllis Burge, and her dog, Justice, of Washington; Audrey Philips of Wamego; Marilee Brown and Dawn Lines, both of Auburn; and Dan and Christine Owens, their daughter, Danielle, and Stephanie Sanford, all of Hutchinson. Also in were Positive Changes representatives Rick Davidson and Michelle Bradley, both from Olathe. Stopping by the office to speak about renewable fuel standards were Kansas Soybean Association members, Kenlon Johannes of Topeka, Bill Wiley of Lyndon, Raylen Phelon of Melvern and Dennis Hupe of Topeka. Also in was Tom Karst of Lenexa, a reporter with The Packer.

Also in the office this week was Kansas Chief Judge of the Federal District Court in Kansas, John Lundstrom of Lawrence, who discussed judiciary appropriations. Bob Parkerson of Overland Park was in with National Crop Insurance Services. Senior Policy Analyst for Kansas Action for Children, Cindy D'Ercole of Topeka, was in to discuss children's issues, while Randi Haun of Wilson was in to discuss Global Health and HIV/AIDS. Randi is a pre-med student at Fort Hays State University. I also met with a group representing the Blue Valley West Teenage Republicans. Those attending were Christopher Valencia of Olathe; Tim Conley of Leawood; Adam Tank; Hogan Miller; Julie Orris; Christie Besinger; and Kristina Visk, all of Overland Park.

In my office this week for tours of the Capitol building were Mary Gantz of Concordia; Andy and Renee Miner of Beloit; Adam North of Stockton; Tricia North of Sharon Springs; and Daryl and Linda North of Hays. Also in were Michael and Robin Hodges of Salina and their children, John and Rachel; as were Lois Rhoades of WaKeeney; George and Virginia Sanders of Stafford; Douglas and Karen Todd of Seneca and their children, Jonathan, Susan and Andrew; and Ken and Helen Hall of Burlington and their son, Andrew. Brian Deering of Marysville and his sons John and Andrew were in for a tour, as were as Dana Swan of Hugoton; Raylen and Kanen and Emily Phelon of Melvern; and Craig and Natalie Rust of Milton and their children, Shelby, Haley and Brady. In addition, Rick Reed and a large group of students and parents from Bennington High School were in town this week for their annual visit to Washington, D.C.

Very truly yours,

Jerry