

9/06/2005 This Week in Congress

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August 2005

Dear Friend,

Congress was out of session during the month of August. This gave me the opportunity to spend time in Kansas completing my annual listening tour, meeting with Kansans and spending time with my family. This newsletter covers the month of August. My weekly updates will resume next week. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Hurricane Katrina

Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast region in the early morning hours of Monday, August 29, devastating parts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Officials estimate thousands dead. This estimate, if accurate, would make Hurricane Katrina the nation's deadliest natural disaster since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Congress reconvened on Friday, September 2, to pass \$10.5 billion in emergency disaster relief funds for those affected by Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, \$10 billion is for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The additional \$500 million goes to the Department of Defense for hurricane expenses, including evacuation costs.

We in Kansas are helping by sending about 150 Kansas National Guard troops to the Hurricane Katrina-damaged areas of Louisiana and Mississippi.

Though the devastation of this event will not soon fade, I have faith that our people will recover, rebuild and be stronger for it. Our prayers go out to everyone affected by Hurricane Katrina. Those interested in more information or donating money to aid the victims may contact the following:

Federal Emergency Management Agency

<http://www.fema.gov/>

American Red Cross

(800) HELP NOW (435-7669)

<http://www.redcross.org/>

Secretary of Agriculture to host Farm Bill forum at Kansas State Fair

I will join U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns in hosting a Farm Bill forum at the 2005 Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson. The purpose of the forum is to seek input from Kansas farmers and ranchers on the development of the 2007 Farm Bill.

I am pleased the Secretary will be joining us at our state fair to meet with Kansans involved in agriculture. It's good to see the Secretary taking these initial steps in the Farm Bill process and considering the concerns of Kansas farmers and ranchers.

The Kansas State Fair visit is part of a nationwide Farm Bill listening tour to gain input from America's agriculture community. The Farm Bill forum will be Monday, September 12, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the Encampment Building at the Kansas State Fairgrounds in Hutchinson.

In addition to the Farm Bill forum, I will attend other events in conjunction with the 2005 Kansas State Fair, September 9 through 18, including the annual Kansas Farm Bureau Leadership Breakfast on Saturday, September 10. I attend the state fair each year in order to hear suggestions from Kansans to take back to Washington, D.C.

I will also have an information booth throughout the state fair with members of my staff available to answer questions and provide information to fairgoers. The booth will be located in the Pride of Kansas Building.

Conclusion of Ninth Annual Listening Tour

This month I concluded my annual Big First Listening Tour with stops in Wilson, Sharon Springs, Goodland, Bird City, Atwood, Colby, Montezuma, Sublette, Hugoton, Elkhart, Johnson, Ulysses, Liberal, Meade, Lakin, Syracuse, Tribune and Leoti.

Again this year, as in years past, my tour was useful as I was able to meet with numerous constituents and receive feedback on a variety of current issues affecting Kansans, such as education, fuel prices and health care costs.

Thank you to each community for being gracious hosts and to everyone for taking time to come and visit with me. I will be working hard to address the concerns of our district as we resume the legislative session in September. As we return to session, Congress will be addressing such issues as high energy prices, immigration reform and finalizing 2006 funding legislation for federal programs.

Japanese Media Visit Kansas Ranch

Last week, I hosted Japanese media in Kansas to discuss Japan reopening its borders to U.S. beef. The Japanese market has been closed to U.S. beef since the discovery of a single case of BSE in a Canadian dairy cow nearly two years ago.

During the visit, the Japanese press toured a cattle ranch in Wabaunsee County and met with Kansas ranchers as well as representatives from extension and the veterinary college at Kansas State University. Following the tour, the group enjoyed a lunch of Kansas beef in Maple Hill.

Since the Japanese border closed, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has implemented additional safety checks in the beef system to guarantee the safety of American beef. The result is that U.S. standards now exceed international beef safety standards. The steps by USDA were taken to fulfill an agreement Japan reached with U.S. trade negotiators in October 2004. Despite USDA's significant enhancement of safety checks and standards, the Japanese border remains closed.

In March, I introduced a resolution calling for immediate economic sanctions to be used against Japan if it fails to abide by its October 2004 agreement to reopen its border. Since Japan closed its market to U.S. beef in December 2003, the U.S. has lost more than \$2 billion in sales.

Learning about Reusable Fuel Production

Ethanol is a bright spot in American agriculture. It increases our energy independence, is beneficial for the environment and is good for the Kansas economy, both our farmers and consumers.

In an effort to learn more about the latest in ethanol production, I visited the U.S. Energy Partners, LLC ethanol plant in Russell, where I met with general manager John Neufeld and plant manager Ron Dunbar. I toured the ethanol facility, the wheat gluten facility and also learned about their production of pet products. This plant currently produces 40 million gallons of ethanol annually from milo and wheat starch. The plant captures excess heat from two city gas turbine generating units and uses its excess heat to dry distillers grain.

In response to high gas prices and with the recent passage of the Energy Policy Act, the supply and demand for ethanol will increase nationwide and help the Kansas economy.

After the Storm: A Visit to Great Bend

After tornados and straight-line winds caused heavy damage on Friday, August 19, I traveled to Great Bend to meet with city and county officials and assess the damage to the area. I visited with county sheriff Buck Causey and city administrator Howard Partington.

Though Kansas storms often cause much damage to our communities, Great Bend is a great example of how a disaster can bring communities together. I applaud the efforts of the citizens in Great Bend as they work together, neighbors helping neighbors, to recover from the damage the storm left behind.

Ransom Dedicates New Fire Truck and Honors Two Longtime Firefighters

The Ransom Fire Department was recently awarded a federal grant that enabled them to purchase a new fire truck this month. I joined the community for the dedication of the fire truck and to honor two local firefighters, Bill Oliver and Jeb Klitzke. Bill Oliver was recognized for his service of 50 years, and Jeb Klitzke for his service of 29 years. The 1946 Ransom fire truck was also on display at the dedication ceremony.

Many communities like Ransom rely on federal grants to improve the safety of their community. New and up-to-date equipment plays a vital role in increasing safety.

Roundtable with Sunflower Health Network Hospital Administrators

I recently met with Sunflower Health Network hospital administrators in Salina to discuss Medicare issues including the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, managed care plans, along with reimbursements for laboratory and ambulance services.

Sunflower Health Network is a group of 17 hospitals in central and north-central Kansas. The network's mission is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of health care in the region. Administrators work together on management techniques as well as ways to improve patient care.

McPherson Retirement Community Groundbreaking

Also this month, I participated in a groundbreaking ceremony at The Cedars, a retirement community in McPherson. The Cedars, which currently has independent living, assisted living and skilled nursing services, is now beginning

construction on four group homes.

These four buildings will house 14 residents each and will focus on person-centered care. This type of housing is a new concept in skilled nursing services, and I am proud of McPherson for being a frontrunner in quality care for the elderly.

At the event, I enjoyed meeting staff members Shari McCabe, CEO; Carla Lehman, Vice President of Health; Mike Harold, Vice President of Environment; Dell Reese, Vice President of Independent Living and Dave Chartier, Vice President of Finance.

Promoting Gun Safety in Reno County

I joined Reno County law enforcement officials in an event at Heartland Outdoor in South Hutchinson this month to advocate for the use of gun locks and to promote gun safety.

As the fall hunting seasons approach, it is important to remind gun owners to have guns safely secured to prevent tragic deaths. We have a responsibility as gun owners to secure our firearms and prevent accidents in our homes. Gun locks are a common-sense and simple way to keep children safe.

Project ChildSafe, an expansion of the Project HomeSafe program developed by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), promotes safe firearms handling and storage practices among all gun owners. The nationwide project is supported by a U.S. Department of Justice grant and is a component of Project Safe Neighborhoods, the nationwide commitment to reduce gun crime. Safety kits, which include a free gun lock and safety education materials, were distributed at the event in a joint effort between the NSSF and local law enforcement agencies.

Through Project ChildSafe, Kansas was provided with 155,000 locks in 2005. Locks are available at local law enforcement agencies in all 105 Kansas counties.

Kansas Events

Summers in Kansas are filled with the excitement and pride of county fairs. This month, I attended the Rooks County Free Fair in Stockton and participated in the Saline County fair parade.

Throughout the month, I joined Kansans for meetings and events across the state.

I spoke at the Wichita Chamber Federal Issues Forum and the annual meetings of the Kansas Electric Co-Op and the Kansas Bankers Association. I also met with the Ness City Farm Credit Board of Directors and the U.S. Ag Bank Farm Credit Management Team.

I joined Associate Professor Bruce Anderson's political science class at Baker University for a discussion of the legislative process and also visited the TRAMCO facility in Wichita. TRAMCO manufactures and sells conveyor product lines around the world.

Other meetings and events I attended included a Salina Rotary Club meeting, a reception at the Pheasants Forever annual meeting, the Sunflower Electric board meeting and the St. John's Military School Muleskinners Chuck Wagon Feed.

I was honored this month to receive the Distinguished Community Health Champion Award from the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved. The award was in recognition of my efforts to increase federal funding for community health centers nationwide.

In the Office

In my office this month to discuss the energy bill was Colin Hansen with Kansas Municipalities. State Senator Dennis Pyle of Hiawatha stopped by my office with his wife Jennifer and their children, Kristen, Kathleen, Karen, Kourtney, Kimberly and Kellee. Also in was Jill Casten of Quenemo and Lindsey Small of Manhattan with the National FFA office.

In my office this month for tours of the Capitol building were Tammy Britting, originally from McPherson, now of Waldorf, Maryland, and her children, Aaron, Jeremy, Marc and Derek; Richard and Geraldine Scott of Newton; Richelle Knotts of Andover and her daughter, Mariah; Richard Rhea of Overland Park; Joseph and Jayme Hulse of Lindsborg and their

children, Jillian, Jenell and Jacquelyn; and Chris, Roberta, David and Ann Stark of Allen.

In from Atwood were Kathy Vrbas and her children, Benjamin, Margaret and Andrew, as was Bryan Miller. Also in were Teresa Laffery of Clay Center and her son, Chase; Don and Joan O'Dell of Berryton and their children, Eddie and LeeAnna; Alan and Peggy Neelly of Hutchinson; Rock and Vicki Neelly of Hamilton, Ohio; Dan and Karen Billinger of Ulysses and their children, Brandon and Amy; Dustin Wise of Melvern; and Amanda Neilson of Waverly.

Also in for Capitol tours were Mark and Heather Dick of Hays; Steve and Ginger Sedbrook of WaKeeney and their sons, Casey and Jake; Don and Karla Ezell of Shawnee and their sons, Jack and Bryan; and Brett Zollinger of Hays and his son, Allen. In from Hutchinson were Alvin L. Sewers, Jr., and Jack Sutton with his granddaughter, Whitney Hartzler of Harrisonville, Missouri.

Members of the Kansas Board of Emergency Medical Services, Francis and Mary Mulryan of Topeka, were in for a tour, as were Patty Sellers of Salina and her daughter, Katie. In from Colby were Frances Smith, Scott Smith and Karen Davis, as was Blake Stoppel of Osage City. John and Carman Davis of Concordia and Tracey Davis and Mike Marenkovich of Santa Clara, California also toured the Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry