

9/26/2005 This Week in Congress

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September 26, 2005

Dear Friend,

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

Learning About Kansas Energy as Part of Congressional Gas Price Task Force

In an effort to learn more about the production and escalating price of fuel, I visited the National Cooperative Refiners Association in McPherson this week. As part of my recent appointment to the Congressional Gas Price Task Force, I plan to visit several energy production facilities across the state in the coming weeks in order to gather information to better educate my colleagues in Washington, D.C.

Every American is feeling the strain of rising energy costs, but Kansans are in a position to make a difference. With wind, ethanol, oil and fertilizer production all located in our state, the answer to high energy costs is right in our backyard.

Also in response to high fuel prices, this week I sponsored H.R. 3836, the Fuel Supply Improvement Act. This legislation works to expand America's refining capacity by decreasing regulations and expediting the permit process for new refineries.

The U.S. now imports nearly 60 percent of its oil, and no domestic refineries have been built since 1976. This legislation is about reducing barriers to allow new refineries to be built and help America become more self-sufficient in our energy needs.

Asking President Bush to Push the Opening of the Japanese Border

This week I led an effort of more than 100 Members of Congress to urge President Bush to make restoring Japanese market access for U.S. beef his highest economic priority with Japan. The U.S. beef and cattle industries are losing \$100 million each month that Japan's borders remain closed to U.S. beef. My patience, and that of my colleagues, has worn thin on this issue.

I have met with House Leadership and hope to move forward soon on the resolution I introduced earlier this year to impose sanctions on Japan for its continued inaction. The time for Japan to act has passed, and I will continue working with the President and Congress to reopen this important market to American beef producers.

Doha Trade Negotiations Discussed at Ag Committee Meeting

This week I joined members of the House Agriculture Committee in meeting with Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman to discuss the upcoming Doha Trade Round. These negotiations will take place in December in Hong Kong.

The Doha Trade Round Negotiations began in 2000 as part of the World Trade Organization and aim to prevent restrictions in world agricultural markets. As of November 2001, more than 100 governments were involved in the negotiations, each committed to addressing market access, export subsidies and domestic support programs.

The priority of the United States in these talks is to improve market access to foreign trade by eliminating barriers to U.S. agricultural exports and reducing tariffs. Too often, countries have found excuses to limit the sale of our products in their country, even after agreements have been made. They can't have it both ways.

It was important for me to talk to the Secretary and Ambassador about how crucial these discussions are for the future of agricultural policy and the development of the 2007 Farm Bill.

House Reauthorizes Early Childhood Education Program

On Thursday, the House passed H.R. 2123, the School Readiness Act of 2005. This legislation will allocate \$6.89 billion for Head Start in 2006 and reauthorize the program through 2011. This legislation will also help align Head Start curriculums with the skills children need to enter kindergarten.

I have heard from many Head Start teachers and parents about the importance of this program. I believe H.R. 2123 makes important updates and improvements to the Head Start program, while maintaining provisions that Kansans value.

Kansas Sites Designated as National Scenic Byways

Two stretches of highway in Kansas were named National Scenic Byways by the U.S. Department of Transportation this week: the Wetlands and Wildlife Scenic Byway in central Kansas, a 77-mile stretch through Barton, Stafford and Reno counties, and the Flint Hills Scenic Byway on Highway 177, from Council Grove to Cassoday.

I joined Kansas byway representatives at a ceremony announcing the designations Thursday at Union Station in Washington, D.C. In with the Wetlands and Wildlife group was Richard Boeckman, Cris Collier and Janet Crane, all of Barton County. In with the Flint Hills group was Debby Divine of Salina, Charlie Klamm of Cottonwood Falls and Jan and Hank White of Council Grove.

These two roadways are the first in Kansas to be named National Scenic Byways. Each has already received state designation, but the national designations will provide additional funding to promote tourism in our state. I commend the local efforts that made these designations a reality and encourage Kansans to visit these routes to experience the scenic beauty of our great state.

Visiting with KU Students and Celebrating Zurich's 125th Birthday

I joined Professor Paul Shumaker's honors political science class this week at the University of Kansas for a discussion about the consequences a global economy has on Kansas and its effects on agriculture, education and transportation. I enjoyed participating in such an engaging discussion with this group of students. It was valuable for me to hear their thoughts and views on how international issues affect our state.

I also joined Zurich community members for hot dogs and ice cream as they celebrated their 125th anniversary on Saturday. Zurich, a community of about 100 people, is located in Rooks County.

In the Office

This week, Gina and Terry Marx of Augusta, Craig Shove of Turner and Marceta Riley of Hoyt were in my office representing the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development to discuss education policy. Dr. Charles Decedue of the University of Kansas was in to discuss federal funding and efforts to study Lou Gehrig's disease.

Kathy Karr of Kansas City and Linda Chase of Winfield visited my office to talk about funding for the National Senior Volunteer Corps, which includes the Foster Grandparents, Senior Companion and Retired Senior Volunteer Programs. State Representative Carl Holmes of Liberal was in to discuss oil and natural gas issues in Kansas.

Representatives of the Kansas Contractors Association were in to talk about their support for repealing the estate tax, water infrastructure financing and concerns about high gas prices. Attendees included Dan Ranlow and Mike Welch of Topeka, Mary Sullivan of Kansas City and Lee Wray Russell of Eureka. Blue Cross Blue Shield representatives Fred Palenske and Michael Mattox, both of Topeka, were in to discuss the high cost of health insurance and the importance of consumer protections.

In to talk about the effects of telecom legislation and regulation on rural Kansas were representatives from the Kansas Telecommunications Industry Association. Representatives included Carl Krehbiel of Moundridge, Archie Macias of Udall, Mike Foster of Miltonvale, Tom Gleason of Lawrence, Brian Boisvert of Wilson, Nathan DeWitt of Madison and Thomas Neal of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Jane Rhys of Topeka was in representing the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities to discuss Medicaid and Social Security. Also in was Kyle Covell of Prairie Village to talk about oil drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge.

In my office this week for tours of the Capitol building were Rachel Cooper-Zimmermann of Overland Park; Jerry and Cece East of Hutchinson with their son, Aaron; Russell and Lona Dittmar of Marysville; and Ryan and Lucia McKeithan of Ozawkie. Also in were Jerry and Renee Michaud of Hays with their daughters, Monica and Hannah.

Very truly yours,

Jerry