

7/06/2004 This Week In Congress

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July 6, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Celebrating Our Nation's Independence

In honor of the Independence Day holiday, Congress was not in session this week, allowing me more time to visit with Kansans. Amidst the fireworks and fun of this holiday weekend, this is a time to reflect upon the independence of our nation. 228 years after gaining our independence, our citizens still enjoy the greatest freedoms in the world. Despite the struggles we face in Kansas and around the world, the determination and fortitude that has made our country great for two centuries will continue.

Transferring Power to Iraq

On June 28, two days before the set deadline, the United States transferred the governing of Iraq over to its own people. It was a ceremony lacking fanfare, but an important step in bringing stability to the country.

My wife recently received a letter from an old friend who is working in Iraq. He wrote, "The Coalition staffers and the Iraqi interim government leaders are the most idealistic bunch of people on the face of the earth. In the face of incredible discouragement, the visiting Coalition workers continue with big projects such as pumping oil, starting a stock market and establishing a judicial and penal system from scratch. In our 'slack' time, some of us are also restarting the Boy Scouts, and Optimist Club and helping orphanages. I could go on."

Our troops and our country have sacrificed much to give Iraqis the opportunity for a stable and free country. Now it is up to the Iraqis to see that those goals are fulfilled.

Traveling to Kansas Communities

The July Fourth district work period allowed me the opportunity to travel to many communities in Kansas. From Johnson to Marysville, I visited with people in cafes, hospitals, senior centers and along parade routes. I always appreciate the chance to talk to Kansans to gather your thoughts and input to take back to Washington, D.C.

I celebrated Independence Day with several Kansas communities. I was joined by my family as Grand Marshall in the Hays Wild West Festival parade and participated in Independence Day parades in Marysville and Sterling. Marysville was celebrating the Fourth, but also celebrating its 150th anniversary. At the events in Marysville, I presented a letter from President Bush, commending the community on its sesquicentennial. Congratulations to all those who made possible these celebrations across our state. I consider it an honor to be included.

I also had the chance to visit many Kansas businesses during the week. On Monday, I toured Flame Engineering, Inc., in Lacrosse. This small business manufactures a variety of weed burners and torches for agricultural and industrial use. They also built the eternal flame that was installed in Battery Park in New York City, as a memorial to the victims of September 11.

Also on Monday, I attended the Burdett Senior Citizens luncheon and visited about the new Medicare and prescription drug legislation, and toured Wheelchairs of Kansas in Ellis. Wheelchairs of Kansas designs, engineers, manufactures and produces durable bariatric medical equipment, including manual chairs, power chairs, beds, mattresses and bath products.

On Tuesday, I stopped at the Gregwire Pharmacy in Russell and had coffee with area residents. We discussed the wheat harvest, the transfer of power in Iraq and high gas prices. One of the things I heard that disturbed me during my visit at the pharmacy was that prescription drug prices have increased an average of ten to twelve percent - the same amount of savings anticipated with the new prescription drug card.

I spoke to the Johnson Rotary club on Wednesday about energy legislation in Congress and current activity in Congress with agriculture.

Fighting for Access to Affordable Health Care

On Monday, I visited Hodgeman County Health Care Center in Jetmore as part of my effort to evaluate the effects of legislative changes in Medicare reimbursements. Since coming to Congress, I have traveled to nearly all First District hospitals in an effort to learn about each one and to better understand the difficulties facing hospitals, doctors, nurses, home health care, nursing homes and ambulance services. The survival of our Kansas communities depends on access to health care.

On Thursday, I visited three more hospitals: Stanton County Health Care Facility in Johnson City, Hamilton County Hospital in Syracuse and Greeley County Health Services in Tribune. All four of the facilities I visited this week operate fewer than 25 hospital beds each and have nursing home facilities attached to the hospital. It is critical that Congress continue its efforts to support physician and nurse recruitment in rural areas. Several years ago, Congress passed legislation to encourage nurses to locate and remain in underserved areas. It was clear to me during the visits that this legislation is not yet meeting the needs in Kansas and deserves a closer look. We must also ensure that health care providers are not burdened by unnecessary federal rules and regulations that only impede the delivery of quality health care.

In the Office

Sue Rouse, Executive Director of the Ellis County United Way, was in the office this week to discuss the nationwide implementation of an FCC-designated national telephone number for accessing community services. Jaziel Tan, an exchange student from Malaysia living in Garden City, was in to learn more about the legislative process.

Kansas students participating in the Congressional Youth Leadership Council were in the office, including Kellen Ebert of Kinsley, Meredith Minear of Lincoln and Caleb Wieneke of Beverly.

In for a tour of the Capitol this week were Barb Fowler of Emporia, and her children, Kelsey and Matthew, as was Leona Zirnstein of Emporia. Also in were Joe and Cindy Hertel of Hays, and their children, Seri and Drew, as was Shana Lambert of Palco. Steve Thomas and Sharon Steimel of Hays and their children, Kelly, Eric and Drew, also visited our Nation's Capital this week.}

Very truly yours,

Jerry