

7/12/2004 This Week In Congress

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July 12, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Hearing Planned to Review BSE Testing Process

This week it was announced that the House Agriculture and Government Reform Committees will hold a joint hearing this coming week, to review the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) process of testing for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman will be among those testifying before the committees.

Since the first case of BSE was discovered last December, USDA has been attempting to get a testing process in place that works well for the industry, for producers and for the consumer. While we're not there yet, I think progress has been made, and the nation's cattle industry remains strong. My hope is that this hearing will be a good opportunity to question the Secretary directly about USDA's procedures and policies and help her to better understand what I'm learning from Kansas cattlemen.

On December 23, 2003, the first U.S. case of BSE, commonly referred to as "mad cow disease," was confirmed in a Canadian dairy cow on a farm in Washington State. This hearing will review the effectiveness, appropriateness and

adequacy of the surveillance program that has been implemented by USDA since that time.

I've encouraged the government and the industry to respond with sound science and common sense. These are difficult times in agriculture, and we cannot afford to lose even a penny a pound due to faulty governmental policies.

Senate Intelligence Committee Releases Report on Iraq

On Friday, the Senate Intelligence Committee released its report on the information that led to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. When the Administration was making the case for the War in Iraq, one of the justifications for the war was that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons and was seeking to make more, as well as working on a nuclear weapons program. However, the study showed that this was not the case. The report alleges that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein had no nuclear weapons program, no biological weapons and only small amounts of chemical weapons. Kansas Senator Pat Roberts chairs the Committee that compiled the report.

In a press conference on Friday, Chairman Roberts indicated that many factors contributed to the failures and that there are ongoing problems within the U.S. intelligence community that cannot be fixed with additional funding alone. Apparently, analysts ignored the conflicting information because of their assumptions that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

With this latest information, I believe that the way our intelligence community is structured needs significant changes. A number of ways to overhaul and improve the system have been proposed, including grouping all of our country's intelligence gathering into one cabinet-level department with a single intelligence secretary.

While we see now that the basis for war may not have been completely accurate, we must finish the job we started to assist in establishing stability in Iraq and get our troops back home safely.

House Passes Legislation to Help Support Small Businesses, Fight Meth

On Thursday, the House passed funding legislation for the Department of Commerce, Department of Justice and Department of State for 2005. This comprehensive legislation included provisions supporting small business loans and state and local law enforcement initiatives.

For small business, I supported an amendment to preserve federal funding for a Small Business Administration (SBA) program that provides loans to small businesses. The Administration and some in Congress proposed ending all federal funding for the SBA's Section 7(a) loans - a primary, multi-purpose small business loan program. To pay for the program, some suggested raising fees on those who use the program. Such cuts would hurt small businesses starting up or expanding, and could force small community banks out of the program. I was pleased that a large majority in Congress rejected the cuts in funding.

The legislation also includes new funding for state and local law enforcement assistance and the COPS program, which makes grants available to state and local law enforcement to help in the fight against methamphetamine production and distribution. Knowing of the importance of these programs to Kansas, I supported an amendment that would restore additional funding to the COPS program for hiring and training more officers and help them acquire new crime-fighting technologies. Although this amendment was not adopted, I will work to see that adequate resources are provided to state and local law enforcement. With the national focus on homeland security, we must ensure that fighting crime and protecting our local communities remain a priority, as well.

I also supported an amendment that would protect our privacy and civil rights by making it harder for the government to review records of library and bookstore patrons under the PATRIOT Act. Earlier this year, individuals representing libraries throughout Kansas asked me to support efforts to amend the PATRIOT Act to restore privacy of library users. A provision in the PATRIOT Act left our libraries and bookstores subject to law enforcement authorities' efforts to gather information about a specific patron's reading activity. While I remain committed to securing and protecting our country, I also want to be certain that legislation put into place for the purpose of homeland security also protects the personal freedoms we enjoy.

Legislation Passed to Alleviate Wind Damage

This week, I voted in favor of H.R. 3980, the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program, to establish a program to develop methods for reducing damages and losses of life and property caused by windstorms. This legislation will help Kansans be more prepared and will help minimize the consequences of strong wind storms, like the storm that hit parts of Kansas earlier this week.

House Approves Additional Funding for Algal Bloom Research

This week I also supported legislation that would better fund research into the cause of and ways to combat algal bloom. The Marion County Lake, between Hillsboro and Marion, has been forced to deal with this problem during the past two years.

These algae can cause significant damage to a community's water source, as we've seen in Marion County. This additional funding for research will help us to identify the causes of this disease and better equip us to deal with its damage.

All the House-passed legislation now moves onto the Senate for their consideration.

Speaking to the House Prayer Breakfast

On Wednesday, I was honored to speak at the monthly prayer breakfast for Members of Congress. The bipartisan group of Members meets each month for fellowship and features a guest speaker. I talked to the group about how I came to be a Member of Congress and the important role that God has played in my life.

Visiting Emporia and Olpe

On Saturday, I had the chance to stop by the Farmer's Market in Emporia. Every Wednesday and Saturday, area farmers, church and civic groups set up booths behind the Chamber of Commerce to sell locally grown fruits and vegetables and baked goods.

Devin Arndt and Jase Hubert, two 12 year olds from Emporia, were selling vegetables from the garden they planted earlier this year. On my way out, the friends gave me a sack of cucumbers and asked that I get them to the President.

In Olpe, I attended the annual community celebration, "Olpe Days." In visits to the bank, local gas station, post office and to the park where activities were taking place, I met with many area residents. We discussed the abundance of rain and the recent wheat harvest. I appreciate the hospitality extended to me by the people of Lyon County, and I value the many suggestions I received from area residents.

In the Office

Several students stopped by the office this week. Melissa Fett of Marysville, Margaret Gabelmann of Great Bend and Alicia Russell of Liberal were in as part of the Presidential Classroom program. In as part of the Lead America Student program was Jenny Whisenhunt of Hillsboro.

A number of Kansans were in the office this week for tours of the Capitol. In from Ashland were Don and Phyllis Hasty with their family, Justin, Jordan and Emily. Cathi Cay Carter of Liberal was in, with her uncle, James Mitchell of Maryland. Angela Zajac of Salina and her children, Nicholas, Sarah, Ethan, Noah, Alissa and Jaime were in, as were Larry, Charlotte and Jonathan Schmucker of Abbyville.

Heath and Sarah Rae Hensley of Pratt toured, as did Rick and Jackie Bowman of Hutchinson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry