

11/21/2005 This Week in Congress

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November 21, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, I am reminded how much I have to be thankful for. I am always grateful for the opportunity to serve you in our nation's capital and wish you and your family a safe and happy Thanksgiving holiday. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

House Passes Legislation to Reduce Federal Spending

This week the House passed legislation to reduce spending by \$50 billion over the next five years. H.R. 4241, the Deficit Reduction Act, saves money by reforming future funding of mandatory federal programs. This legislation will slow the growth of spending on mandatory programs from 6.4 percent to 6.3 percent over five years.

There has been much confusion surrounding the Deficit Reduction Act. This legislation made changes to the Food Stamp program including requiring legal immigrants to reside in the U.S. for seven years, rather than the current five years. This change does not apply to children, the disabled, people over 60 years of age, or immigrants with a pending application for naturalization. This legislation also made changes to Medicaid, including long term care coverage; however, it did not increase co-payments, as some have suggested.

I recognize that nearly every federal program touches the lives of Americans, but Congress must set budget priorities and work toward reducing the national debt and ultimately, balancing the budget. There is a serious economic and moral price to pay for our nation's soaring debt. While we receive government benefits and services today, future generations will bear the burden we create. This is the wrong way to govern. The federal government must learn to achieve a balance between its needs and the resources available.

The Senate has also passed deficit reduction legislation, and a conference committee is now meeting to work out the differences between these two bills. At this time, no final decisions have been made.

Enrollment for Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Begins

On Tuesday, November 15, enrollment for the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit began. During its consideration in the House, I did not support the creation of this benefit. I do believe seniors should have a prescription drug benefit, but this new program is complex and ignores the underlying problem, which is the high cost of prescription drugs.

Despite its flaws, the Medicare prescription drug benefit is now law, and seniors must begin making decisions. Seniors should keep in mind that not all pharmacies will be participating in all drug plans. If seniors want to continue purchasing their drugs at their same pharmacy, they need to ask the pharmacist what plans the pharmacy will accept.

Resources are available to seniors who have questions. The following telephone numbers and websites have been developed specifically for this purpose:

Medicare

1-800-MEDICARE

(1-800-633-4227)

www.medicare.gov

Social Security Administration (SSA)

1-800-772-1213

www.ssa.gov

Senior Health Insurance Counselors of Kansas (SHICK)

Hotline: 1-800-860-5260

House Debates U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Iraq

This week witnessed much partisan debate in the House of Representatives. While I believe our country's future military role in Iraq requires evaluation, its discouraging when this issues becomes so partisan. Congress should be working to find ways to develop strategies for success in Iraq.

Our troops' efforts to provide security and empower the citizens of Iraq so that Iraqis can take responsibility for its own future should be the goal. Future developments will provide us with a clearer understanding of whether enough stability can be established for the Iraqi people and ensure a better way of life. Many challenges remain, and we offer our continued support and prayers for our troops during this holiday season for their safe return.

Recognizing the Leadership of Coach Bill Snyder of Kansas State University

This week I recognized the leadership of Kansas State University football coach Bill Snyder in a speech to the U.S. House of Representatives. At a press conference Tuesday, Coach Snyder announced his retirement as head coach of the K-State Wildcats after 17 seasons.

Snyder took over K-State's football program in 1988, the year Sports Illustrated identified K-State as the worst college football program in the nation. Snyder took on the challenge, and within five years K-State had won the Copper Bowl. During the next ten seasons, K-State football advanced to bowl games, including the Cotton Bowl and Fiesta Bowl, and defeated first-ranked Oklahoma in 2003 to seize the Big 12 Championship. Today, with 136 victories, Coach Snyder has achieved the most wins in K-State football history.

Coach Snyder leaves behind a legacy of success for a football program, a university and a community that is stronger and better because of his leadership. His successes on the field are matched by his achievements off the field. Coach Snyder has used his prominence in the hearts of K-State fans to promote causes that have strengthened the Manhattan community and the state of Kansas.

On behalf of many grateful Kansans, I thank Coach Snyder for his contributions. It will be hard to imagine K-State football

without this legendary coach.

To read the full text of my speech, visit here:

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ks01_moran/sp111505BillSnyder.html

Agriculture Committee Reviews Safety of U.S. Poultry

This week the House Agriculture Committee reviewed prevention, detection and eradication issues of avian influenza. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. poultry industry have a variety of safeguards in place that have ensured the Asian bird flu is not in North America.

USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Administrator Ron DeHaven testified about protecting the U.S. from the introduction of Asian bird flu and the safety of our nation's poultry products. He said that with a surveillance program, annual testing and biosecurity measures, APHIS and the U.S. poultry industry have helped producers maintain healthy flocks and prevented the spread of avian diseases.

Americans can be reassured that as we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, each of these safeguards contribute to a safe U.S. food supply. For more information about safe storage, handling or preparation of meat, poultry or egg products, visit the USDA's website: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>

Combating Methamphetamine Through Prevention and Education

Cristi Cain of Topeka was in Washington, D.C., this week representing the Kansas Methamphetamine Prevention Project. Cain was on hand to testify before the U.S. House Education Reform Subcommittee. The subcommittee's hearing focused on national and local meth prevention and education strategies in local communities, schools, families and child protection services.

Cain explained that meth production and use results in tremendous economic and social costs to communities across the nation. She also testified that children in meth environments are at a greater risk for physical, emotional and developmental harm.

Cain's testimony is valuable to me and fellow members as we work to develop federal policies to address this nationwide problem. She has done a tremendous job with the project in Kansas and we have made progress in this fight. As Cain testified, the battle with meth production and use begins with prevention and education. If we can stop it before it starts, we are protecting children, families and communities from this dangerous drug.

Hays Woman Begins Walk Across America in Celebration of Life

On Sunday I joined Phyllis Burdge at Hays Medical Center in a send off for her walk across America to deliver the message that life is worth celebrating. Phyllis has multiple sclerosis and was reliant upon others for 12 years of her life. She now walks with the assistance of her dog, Justice, and will be sharing her inspiring message with people in her "PB&J American WalkAbout" with stops in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and ending in Florida in February.

I first met Phyllis when I was a state senator in 1989. Phyllis and her support dog were refused service at a local restaurant. The first legislation I ever introduced as a public official that was signed into law was a change to allow support dogs, like seeing-eye dogs, to be used by those with disabilities in public facilities.

Phyllis' positive outlook on life and determination is an inspiration to us all. I wish her all the best in the upcoming months as she shares her special story with others.

Visiting Junction City Elementary School in Recognition of National Reading Week

This week I visited Sheridan Elementary School in Junction City to read to Ms. Stephanie Speer's fifth grade class in recognition of National Reading Week. These fifth graders are studying government as they prepare to take a trip to the State Capitol. I always enjoy stopping in at our local schools and learning about the variety of efforts taking place everyday in our Kansas classrooms.

In the Office

Sister Therese Bangert of Kansas City was in on behalf of Kansas Action for Children to talk about the importance of food stamps. John Thaemert of Sylvan Grove was in with other representatives from the National Association of Wheat Growers to discuss energy disaster assistance. Cameron Werth of Hays was also in my office this week with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council.

In my office this week for a tour of the Capitol building was John and Lois Colburn of Jetmore and Mike and Mari Tucker of Topeka with their son, Lee.

Very truly yours,

Jerry