

7/26/2004 This Week In Congress

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July 26, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

House Votes to Protect Marriage

On July 14, the U.S. Senate failed to pass S.J.Res. 40, to amend the Constitution to define marriage as a union between one man and woman. Since the Federal Marriage Amendment was not successful in the Senate, the House proceeded this week with legislation that would limit federal court jurisdiction over marriage to preserve marriage between one man and one woman, as it is defined in Kansas.

On Thursday, I supported House passage of H.R. 3313, the Marriage Protection Act, which prevents federal courts from striking down the provision of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that provides that no state shall be required to accept same-sex marriage licenses granted in other states. By giving individual states, not federal judges, the authority to define marriage, H.R. 3313 will preserve the Kansas law that defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The Marriage Protection Act now goes to the Senate for their consideration.

Unlike a constitutional amendment, H.R. 3313 is legislation that can pass with a simple majority of both the House and Senate. It provides more immediate protection for traditional marriage, as it does not require ratification by three-fourths of the states. I have received more mail and phone calls from Kansans expressing support for protecting traditional marriage than any other issue during my time in Congress. I appreciate you sharing your concerns.

Agriculture Committee Hearings Held on Crop Insurance, COOL

On Wednesday, I chaired a hearing of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management to review recent improvements to the federal crop insurance program. The hearing was a follow-up to a series of hearings I held in 2003, where producers provided suggestions to the subcommittee for changes.

Since those hearings, we've brought USDA the bottom line facts of what needs to change to make crop insurance a better program for America's farmers and ranchers. This week's hearing gave us some insight on what progress has been made, as well as an update on changes yet to come.

Multi-year losses are one of 25 general issues the subcommittee asked the panel to include in its report. A complete list of the issues discussed, as well as a current status report on each issue, can be found in the testimony of the Chairman of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, Dr. Keith Collins, who also serves as Chief Economist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Davidson's full testimony is available on-line at:
<http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/108/h40721w1.pdf>.

Also this week, the House Committee on Agriculture considered legislation pertaining to country of origin labeling (COOL). This issue has received a lot of attention since it was included in the 2002 farm bill. The legislation, which was introduced by the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee, Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), and the Ranking Minority Member Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) would allow producers to voluntarily participate in a COOL program. The committee approved this legislation by voice vote. Livestock production is critical to the Kansas economy and COOL is certainly an important issue for the Agriculture Committee.

House Agrees on Funding for Military Construction Projects at Fort Riley, Hays

This week, the House passed legislation to fund military construction projects for 2005. The legislation includes funding to improve the United States Army Reserve Center in Hays and to improve housing and construct a new communications center at Fort Riley.

The legislation includes \$7.451 million for construction of a storage building and warehouse in Hays that will provide the 388th Medical Logistics Battalion with adequate facilities to carry out their assigned duties. Currently, the center is located downtown in a flood plain area and is overcrowded.

At Fort Riley, the legislation includes \$41 million to construct new barracks with 312 units, a dining facility and a building for four company headquarters. In addition, the legislation includes \$3.05 million for a new communications center. The center will replace the existing telephone switch building on Custer Hill, which has sustained major damage, placing the switch system at risk for failure due to settlement.

It is important that our military men and women have the equipment and facilities necessary to guarantee that they are prepared to defend our country. The role of our guard and reserve troops in today's military is increasingly important, as we have downsized our active duty troops. Kansans have always taken great pride in hosting our troops, and we want to ensure that they have what is necessary to support our war effort.

McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program

On Monday, the House passed S.Con.Res. 114, which demonstrates Congress's support for expansion of the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. This program is named after former Kansas Senator Bob Dole and South Dakota Senator George McGovern, who championed its creation.

The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education program works to provide food to improve nutrition for mothers, infants, preschoolers and schoolchildren in developing countries. About 120 million school-aged children around the world are not enrolled in school, in part because of hunger or malnutrition. Through USDA, this program provides foods such as wheat, flour, rice, corn and other basic items to those children.

By providing food for schoolchildren in developing countries, we can help to reduce poverty and malnourishment. We can increase the number of children attending schools. By feeding and educating children around the world, we are able to open doors for these children and give them a real chance to someday achieve their dreams.

Speaking to Agriculture Groups in Washington, D.C.

On Tuesday, I was the keynote speaker at a joint meeting of the Kansas Grain and Feed Association (KGFA) and the Kansas Agribusiness Retailers Association. The two groups were in Washington, D.C. attending meetings and visiting with Members of Congress about the issues important to Kansas agriculture. With the two groups were members of the 2004 Tomorrow's Agribusiness Leadership Class. I spoke to the group about current activities in Congress dealing with agriculture, including the ongoing efforts of my subcommittee to improve crop insurance. Long-time friend and agriculture leader, Tom Tunnell, President of the KGFA, introduced me at the event.

On Wednesday, I was asked to speak to directors of the U.S. AgBank District Farm Credit Council at their annual fly-in to Washington, D.C. As Kansas is home to the central office of U.S. AgBank, many Kansans were also in Washington, D.C. to discuss the importance of access to credit in rural America. Farm Credit officials from Kansas included Paul Seib of Ness City, Keith Kennedy of Hoxie, Jerry Doornbos of Scott City, Larry Kepley of Ulysses, Larry Barrett of Colby and Joe Schoonover of Byers. Other Kansas officials included Michel Fawl of Overbrook, Donna Williams of Emporia, Doug Hofbauer and Janet McPherson of Manhattan, Ron Rahjes of Kensington, Ron Bach of Jetmore, Robert Wietharn of Clay Center and Alan Jaax, Jerold Harris, Jim Grauerholz and Deanne Sinnnett, all of Wichita.

Congressional Grains Caucus Briefing

As part of the first official Congressional Grains Caucus event, I spoke on Tuesday at a briefing on current food aid issues as they relate to the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations.

The briefing highlighted food aid in the form of U.S. agricultural commodities versus cash donations. During WTO trade negotiations, it is important that the U.S. is not penalized by delivering food aid in the form of commodities. U.S. producers have the capacity to distribute food aid to combat not only hunger and starvation, but also use food aid as a tool to reduce the environments that breed terrorism.

Kansans David Frey, Kansas Wheat Commission, and John Gillcrist, North American Millers' Association, also spoke at the briefing, along with Kenneth Roberts, USDA Foreign Agricultural Service, and Ellen Levinson of Coalition for Food Aid.

Joining me as co-chairmen of the Congressional Grains Caucus are Congressman Earl Pomeroy, Senator Pat Roberts and Senator Max Baucus.

In the Office

Representatives of the Association of Community Art Agencies of Kansas were in the office this week. Martin Bauer, Jennie Becker and Charla Sanderson of Wichita, Ann Evans of Lawrence and Ellen Morgan of Salina were in supporting additional funding for the National Endowment for the Arts. Michaela Sober and Justin Helmley from Kiowa, Zachary Rickett from Nickerson, Joseph Lauer from Cottonwood Falls and Perry Ozment from Junction City visited the office as part of the Lead America Students conference.

Amanda Bazari of Beverly was visiting D.C. with her grandmother, Fran Carlin Rogers of Orlando and stopped by to say hello, as did Paul and Marge Magnuson of Marquette. Jerry Peterson of Garnett, Jim Menze of Topeka, Faye Kuhn of Pratt, Andy Metsker of Easton, Sally Lundblad of Louisburg and Ron Keller of Hugoton were in representing elementary and secondary school principals. We discussed funding for the No Child Left Behind Act.

Stan Stark of Oakley was in the office to discuss his experience applying for a grant and working with USDA on a recent Value-Added Development Grant. Dr. Leo Pauls with the Renaissance Group, Emporia, was also in to discuss teacher education, as was Bill Hunter from Pratt Community College to discuss career and technical education programs and funding.

Many other Kansans were in Washington, D.C., on vacation and came by for a tour of the Capitol building. Don and Ginger Cates and Walter and Joyce Disque, both of Claflin, along with Thom Brown of Wisconsin were in, as were Terry Miller and his children Jeremy and Anna from Lake City. Downer and Tricia Hull of Woodston also visited.

Howard and Dorothy Spitzer of Scott City and Alex Spitzer of Dallas, Texas, were in, as was Paige Strecker of Topeka. From Liberal, Jeff and Stacia Long visited with their children, Kambrie and Kaiden. Louise Schutter from Emporia was in with her mother Henrietta Aubert of St. Marys, and Daran and Kendra Neuschafer of Salina visited with their children Kaitlyn and Braden.

Tim and Lisa Newell of Salina and Ron and Cindy Rahjes of Kensington visited, as did Martin and Mary Straub with their children, Stacia, Allie and Arin of Hays. Also in were John and Heather Helvie from Larned with their son, Gabriel.

Lance and Mary Pat Waymaster, Gloria Waymaster, and Mike and Diane Waymaster, all of Bunker Hill, were in, along with Angela and Clayton Leiker, Amanda Waymaster, Adam Waymaster, and Mitch and Amy Driscoll, all of Russell. Troy Waymaster of Plano, Texas, and Charles and Melanie Waymaster and Brian Waymaster of Lawrence were also in.

Very truly yours,

Jerry