

10/11/2004 This Week In Congress

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October 11, 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week-the last week of the Congressional session before the election-was busy for Congress. A number of legislative items that are important to me and to Kansans were approved in the House. These issues include drought assistance for farmers and ranchers, the reauthorization of the J-1 Visa waiver program and improvements to the short-line railroad system. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Providing Drought Assistance for Kansas Farmers

This week, the House passed an assistance package for drought-stricken farmers and ranchers in Kansas who have been hit hard by poor weather conditions. The assistance will apply to losses suffered in either 2003 or 2004, as determined by the individual farmer. According to Kansas State University research, Kansas has lost \$1.1 billion of its economy in 2001 and 2002 due to drought. In 2003, it is estimated that we lost \$275 million; and this year, wheat producers lost an additional \$150 million.

drought. Unfortunately, while some rain has fallen this summer, it's been too little, too late. But this disaster package will hopefully help as Kansans work to save their farms and their livelihood for future generations. This \$2.8 billion package will provide direct payments to producers who experienced more than a 35 percent crop loss in expected production. Producers could choose between either their 2003 or 2004 losses. Provisions have also been included for the Livestock Assistance Program within this legislation and will fall under the parameters of the 2001 agriculture assistance package.

Bringing More Doctors to Rural America

Access to health care is one of the biggest challenges facing our country and our local communities. This week the House passed legislation I introduced to reauthorize the J-1 Visa waiver program, in order to bring more doctors to rural America. The J-1 Visa waiver program, which expired May 31, 2004, will now be reauthorized, retroactively, for an additional two years, giving international medical graduates the opportunity to stay in the United States if they agree to practice in a medically underserved area for at least three years.

The passage of this legislation means that rural clinics and hospitals will have an additional opportunity to recruit and retain experienced physicians for their communities. In many of the small towns across America, this is the only way to bring doctors into communities. In Kansas, over 120 physicians have been placed in communities across our state through this program. Fifty-eight percent of them have remained at the end of their three-year commitment.

This legislation is pending in the Senate.

Tax Bill Passage Benefits Kansas Businesses, Agriculture

On Thursday, I supported House passage of the American Jobs Creation Act, which will repeal a portion of the U.S. tax code known as FSC/ETI. The repeal of this tax code ends European sanctions on American manufacturers and farmers. The legislation encourages the use of renewable fuels by extending the ethanol tax credit through 2010 and creates a new incentive for biodiesel through 2006. Bio-based fuels represent an increasing portion of the Kansas agriculture

economy, and these tax incentives will encourage continued market growth.

This legislation also includes provisions to help ranchers who suffered livestock losses during the drought. Under the current law, a rancher has two years after the weather-related sale of livestock to reinvest in his herd without tax consequences. This is often not long enough to rebuild a herd. I introduced legislation that would give ranchers up to four years after the sale of livestock or two years after the end of the drought, whichever is longer, to defer income and replace the herd without tax consequences. This legislation would be retroactive to December 31, 2002.

Improving Short-line Railroad Infrastructure

A recent Kansas State University study found that 70 percent of Kansas short line railroads would need improvements to efficiently and safely handle the heavier rail cars that are becoming the industry standard. The study also found that, without railroad track infrastructure improvements, more Kansas short lines would be abandoned, leading to a number of negative consequences, including lower grain prices received by farmers, and higher repair costs on the state highway system.

This week, legislation I introduced in February of 2003 passed the House. It provides short line railroads with the help they need to make the capital investments required to maintain and rebuild rail service. Short line railroads play an important role in Kansas and account for 44 percent of our state's rail system. Kansas ranks second in the nation in the amount of farm products it ships out of the state by rail. These railroads keep our farmers and small businesses connected to the national rail network and are crucial to our local economy.

House Votes Down Military Draft

There have been several recent news stories discussing legislation to reinstate the draft. I have spoken to many students and parents about this issue across the state and have assured them that these rumors are just that-rumors. On Tuesday, I voted against legislation that would require all citizens between the ages of 18 and 26 to perform a two-year period of service in the armed forces or in a civilian role that promotes national defense or homeland security. This legislation, H.R. 163, the Universal National Service Act, was rejected by the House overwhelmingly.

While I am a strong supporter of our military, a draft is not necessary at this time. The Department of Defense has said that there is no need for conscription, as our military is able to meet its requirements with those that volunteer. Moreover, our armed forces are stronger and more cost-efficient when relying on those who have made the choice to serve. I am proud of the brave men and women who enter into military service, and I am confident in the ability of our all-volunteer force to protect the United States against threats to our security.

Providing Additional Funding for Students

On Wednesday, I supported the Taxpayer-Teacher Protection Act of 2004, which passed in the House. This legislation halts excess subsidies to student loan providers and uses that money to expand student loan forgiveness programs for math, science and special education teachers who are serving in high-poverty school districts. This is defined as any school with 40 percent or more of their students coming from households with incomes lower than \$18,850 for a family of four.

This legislation increases the maximum loan forgiveness significantly. This is an important step forward for those who provide our children with a quality education. I was pleased with the outcome of this legislation and look forward to seeing more teachers in our most needy classrooms across the state.

Intern Applications Now Being Accepted

I am now accepting applications for the 2005 spring semester for Congressional internships in my Washington, D.C., Hays and Hutchinson offices. This is a great opportunity for bright and dedicated young adults to serve their country by participating in the field of public service. During my college years, I took advantage of this internship program, and it helped spark an interest in public service that has been undiminished over the years.

Applications for spring internships are due by November 19, 2004. Spring semester internships are flexible but generally run from mid-January to mid-May and are paid positions. To apply for an internship, students should submit the completed application form, available at www.house.gov/moranks01/internweb.htm or by calling (202) 225-2715. In order to ensure timely receipt of the application, students are encouraged to fax their applications to (202) 225-5124.

Visiting Chapman

On Monday, I visited Chapman and spoke with residents about a number of issues, including the prescription drug bill and challenges facing rural America. While in Chapman, I walked Main Street and spoke to folks at the hardware store, grocery store, post office, senior center, City Hall and bank. The advice that I received from residents stuck with me as I made a number of my votes this week in Congress. I appreciate all of their kind words and look forward to visiting again in the future.

In the Office

Geary County School Board President LaMont Godsey, Director of Business and Board Clerk Larry Schmidt and School Superintendent Ronald Walker of Junction City were in the office this week to discuss education issues. Also in the office was Fred Cholick, Dean of K-State's College of Agriculture from Manhattan. David Pope, Chief Engineer of the Kansas Division of Water Resources, was in the office with Leland Ralfs and George Austin, also of the Kansas Division of Water Resources from Topeka to discuss water issues between Kansas and Colorado. Emporia State University President Dr. Kay Shallenkamp from Emporia was in the office to discuss higher education.

Ken Jennison, the 2004 Outstanding Older Worker from Kansas, and his wife June, from Salina, were in the office. David Morrissey, of the United Way of Lawrence, was in to discuss funding for local volunteer centers. Students Angela Phillips from Bucyrus, Brian Saddler from Colby, Rejane Davis from Louisburg, Mark Bonetti from Anthony and Carolyn Codena from Louisburg were in the office for the TSA National Leadership Conference with their advisor, Carolyn Cole from Emporia.

In for a tour of the U.S. Capitol were Doug Staab of Lawrence and his father Charlie Staab of Hays and Ken and Lori Lyle from Natoma, as were David and Janet Lepold from Hoxie.

Very truly yours,

Jerry