

10/25/2004 This Week In Congress

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October 25, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Tour Highlights First District Conservation Efforts

On Thursday and Friday, Congressman Frank Lucas (OK-03), Chairman of the Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, joined me and many other Kansans for a conservation tour of south central Kansas. The tour was designed to highlight the various efforts being made by private landowners, conservation groups and government programs with stops in Barber, Barton, Pratt, Reno and Stafford Counties. The tour covered many conservation issues important to Kansas, including water quality, wildlife habitat protection, grazing lands management, and the preservation of wetlands.

I would like to thank all of those who were involved with this year's tour, but especially the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who were key in organizing the stops on this event. I would also like to thank the farmers

and their families who hosted us, as well as all the participants. The tour was a success, and I will take the knowledge that I gained back with me to Congress as we look for better ways to preserve our environment and natural resources.

Working to Upgrade Short Line Railroads in Kansas

Before Congress adjourned earlier this month, we passed legislation I introduced to provide tax incentives to improve short line rail service in Kansas. This legislation encourages railroads, railroad customers and suppliers-who depend most on short line railroads-to invest directly in maintaining the 2,000 miles of short line rails in our state.

The short line railroad network is a significant component of our transportation system and provides a critical role in helping Kansans to transport their goods-both manufactured and agricultural-to market. This year, while some areas of the state dealt with drought conditions, others could not get their grain from the elevators to the market fast enough and were stalled due to capacity limitations. The passage of this legislation means that rail operators will be able to increase their capacity and service to transport goods.

The legislation will provide a 50 cent on the dollar tax credit, when investment in railroad infrastructure is made, for a period of three years. Short line rails are today being threatened due to the use of new, heavier 286,000 pound railcars that have become the industry standard. The use of these cars has strained existing tracks, making the upgrades necessary.

I hope that short line rail operators will move quickly to make these upgrades so that the repairs will be done in time for the next harvest.

Meeting Planned for Veterans in Hutchinson

On Monday, November 1, I will host a public forum designed to give veterans in south central Kansas an opportunity to discuss the delivery of benefits and health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). My guests for the event will be Charles Woolford, Director for the Robert J. Dole VA Regional Office, and Tom Sanders, Director for the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center.

I hope this forum will provide veterans in the Hutchinson area with an opportunity to discuss their needs and the challenges they face directly with those who are responsible for their care. Our country owes a tremendous debt to our veterans, and by hearing directly from them, we can do a better job of providing veterans with the highest quality of care possible.

This is the fourth such forum on veterans issues I have hosted. Previous forums have been held in Salina, Clay Center and Goodland.

The forum will be held on Monday, November 1, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. in Hutchinson at Hansen Auditorium in the Encampment Building on the Kansas State Fair grounds. I will have members of my staff on hand along with caseworkers from the VA to handle any concerns that veterans or their families may have.

I would encourage all area veterans as well as other members of the public to attend this event; it will be an excellent opportunity to hear from these distinguished guests.

Assisting Soldiers Serving Overseas

This week I joined Congressman Tom Osborne (NE-03) in asking the Department of Education (DOE) to provide an interest waiver on federal subsidized loans for all of our deployed troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. These brave men and women, many of whom have been forced to delay their college education, should not be penalized for defending our country's freedom. Under the HEROES Act (HR 1412), Congress granted temporary authority to the DOE to provide an interest waiver to those soldiers who are currently enrolled in school and who intend to return to school after their deployments. Unfortunately, to this point, the DOE has not implemented the new rules.

In the course of a year, the average college graduate with a \$17,000 school debt could accrue as much as \$1,400 in interest. Our soldiers have been asked to make many sacrifices, and they should not be penalized for serving in the military. I will continue working with my colleagues in the House to ensure that our soldiers are honored and respected.

Visiting Kansas Communities

Salina

On Monday, I joined Phyllis Anderson, Director of Community Resource Development, for a tour of the Occupational Center of Central Kansas (OCCK). OCCK averages over 10,000 rides per month for residents of Saline County. I have worked in the past to secure federal funding for this program, and the visit allowed me to see the good that this program is doing and what more can be done on a federal level to ensure that it continues.

Council Grove

Monday evening, I traveled to Council Grove to speak to approximately 20 members of the Council Grove Kiwanis Club. The concerns that I heard about from attendees dealt primarily with transportation issues and access to affordable health care. The meeting gave me an opportunity to discuss these and other important issues.

Lawrence

On Tuesday, I met with Dr. Stuart Bell, Dean of the School of Engineering, for a visit and tour of the Transportation Research Institute located in Eaton Hall on the campus of Kansas University. While at the institute, I was able to visit with Glen Marotz, Associate Dean of Research and Graduate Programs at KU, and we discussed alternative fuels and observed a hybrid-bus display. Graduate student Guangyn Lin spoke about fuel cells while another graduate student, Scott Chapman, provided an alternative fuels test lab display. Associate Professor of Engineering Richard Colgren spoke about autonomous vehicles, and Professor of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering Dave Darwin provided a tour of the Corrosion Lab.

As a member of the House Transportation Committee, this visit to KU was a valuable opportunity for me to find out more about what is being done in the area of alternative fuels, including ethanol. I have long said that our country must become less dependent on foreign sources of energy, and the faculty and students in the Transportation Research Institute are helping to make this happen. As Congress works to pass a comprehensive energy plan, I will take the knowledge that I gained here back to my colleagues in the House.

Junction City

Tuesday afternoon, I traveled to Junction City to meet with approximately 50 Junction City Rotary Club members and their guest, Jim Kalkofen, Executive Director of In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail. While at the Rotary meeting, I provided an update on what is happening in Congress. Rotary members were interested in homeland security and the prospects for having the First Infantry Division return to Ft. Riley. They were also concerned with what efforts are being made to help small businesses.

Following the meeting, I met with Kalkofen and Rick Dysktra of the Geary County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Kalkofen was in Junction City to visit Milford Lake, which will serve as the site for the "2005 In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail National Mercury Championship." This walleye fishing tournament will bring 52 of the world's best professional walleye anglers to Kansas. The anglers will be competing for over \$300,000 in prize money, and the tournament is expected to bring thousands of dollars to the area economy, including \$150,000 in advertising for the Junction City area.

In the Office

In the office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week were Terry Camp of Hillsboro, Roger and Dorothy Cook of Shawnee and Floyd and Mary Fugate of Lenexa. Mary is the aunt of Lisa Dethloff, who works in my Hutchinson office. Also in the office for a tour were Bob and Sharil Carlson of Clay Center, Roy and Jean Keller of Hillsboro, Brad Kliever of Newton, Beverly Rue and her daughters, Elizabeth, Michelle, Nicole, Cara and Rebecca of Valley Center.

We also had a large group of Kansans who were in as a part of Sunflower Tours out of Salina led by George Doerksen. Visitors included Margaret Dicks of Hutchinson, Arliss and Pat Wineinger of Tribune, Bill and Marilyn Bleier of Topeka, Darrel and Irma Copeland of Lincoln, John and Ruth Lawson of Tribune, LeRoy and Janice Reimer of Hesston, Ray and Alberta Fitzpatrick of Salina, John and Patricia Wright of Oberlin, Kenneth and Faith Hays of Almena, Gene and Suzanne Thompson of Clay Center, Maurice and Frances McDonald of Beloit, Jerry and Julie Connet of Woodbine, and George and Beverly Doerksen of Wichita, Julia Lambert of Winfield, Linda Hankins of Winfield, Richard and Ruth Johnson of Norwich, Tom and Dee Duggan of Tampa, Joe and Joyce Cox of Abilene, Louis and Ruthella Wagner of Garden City, Margaret Richards of Eudora, JoAnna Kerschner of Hutchinson and Helen Johanning of Hutchinson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry