

11/22/2004 This Week In Congress

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November 22, 2004

Dear Friend,

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

Congress Passes Final Funding Legislation for 2005

This week, in its final action of the session, Congress finalized funding legislation for 2005. On Saturday afternoon, Congress passed the final appropriations bill that included funding for dozens of departments, ranging from transportation to education. The final legislation froze the line on non-defense discretionary spending to zero percent growth. The legislation contained expanded benefits for veterans and their families, state and local law enforcement, No Child Left Behind and programs to support farmers, ranchers and rural America.

I will continue working, on your behalf, to ensure that Congress continues working to hold the line on spending while funding initiatives that do a better job of keeping our families safe and our health care costs affordable.

House and Senate Continue Work on Intelligence Reform

The House and Senate continued discussions last week on recommendations that were made by the 9-11 Commission to reform the intelligence community. Unfortunately, after lengthy negotiations, lawmakers were unable to come to an agreement. The House passed its version of intelligence reform, HR 10, on October 8, but the Senate passed a separate version of the bill. The negotiations are designed to correct the difference between the two bills.

I am disappointed that Congress has been unable to act on such an important issue. It is past time for reform in the intelligence community, and I am hopeful that negotiators will be able to hammer out their differences in time to pass the comprehensive legislation before the end of the year. I will continue working to see that this happens.

Providing Additional Education for Americans with Disabilities

Last week, Congress approved and sent to the President H.R. 1350, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004. This legislation improves special education for both students and schools. This legislation reforms special education funding, ensures school safety and reasonable discipline, gives local schools more flexibility, reduces burdensome regulations and costly litigation, minimizes the paperwork burden on teachers, and expands choices, giving parents more control over their children's education.

I have long been a supporter of full funding for IDEA and special education, but the government has failed to fund it at the necessary levels. The passage of H.R. 1350 will bring us closer to reaching this goal and fully funding these important programs for those with disabilities. I will continue to work with Kansas' students, parents and educators as these changes to IDEA are enacted.

Improving Veterans Health Care Services

Health care, including veterans' health care, has been one of my top priorities during my time in Congress. Last week, I was pleased to support House passage of legislation that will improve veteran's health care services and benefits.

The legislation extends a national guard or reserve member's employer-based health insurance from 18 months to 24 months once they are called up to active duty; allows surviving spouses, with at least one child under the age of 18, additional compensation when their loved one is killed in the line of duty; increases the maximum VA Home Loan guarantee and increases assistance available under the Montgomery GI Bill for apprenticeships and on-the-job training.

This legislation is long overdue for our service men and women, veterans and their families. I appreciate their sacrifices.

Rice County Sheriff Testifies Before Congress

On Thursday, I had the opportunity to introduce Rice County Sheriff Steve Bundy to the Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources. Sheriff Bundy was in Washington, D.C. to testify before Congress on "Law Enforcement and the Fight Against Methamphetamine." The hearing was designed to examine how the federal government can best assist state and local law enforcement agencies in combating the growing problem of methamphetamine trafficking.

Meth use in Kansas remains one of the greatest challenges facing rural communities. In 1994, Kansas law enforcement officers seized four meth labs. However, this year, that number will skyrocket to between 500-600 labs seized. While this year's lab seizure rate represents the lowest in several years, we remain in the nation's top 10 states in such seizures. Sheriff Bundy is one of the many law enforcement officers on the front lines of this drug war and the insight that he provided to the committee will be valuable. I appreciate his efforts and those of other law enforcement officers who work to keep our communities safe and drug free on a daily basis.

Honoring Kansas Senator Lana Oleen

On Monday, I joined a number of business and community leaders in Junction City to honor retiring Kansas Senate Majority Leader Lana Oleen. Senator Oleen and I served together in the Kansas Senate for eight years where she was a tireless advocate for the people of Manhattan, Junction City and the rest of her district as well as Kansas as a whole. I wish Lana and her family all the best.

In the Office

This week, with Congress back in session, I was able to meet with many Kansans. On Monday, Homeland Security Honors Fellow, Bradley Hammerschmidt, who received his undergraduate degree from Kansas State University and is now finishing his graduate course work at Colorado State University, and Renee Ecklund, who is completing her degree at Kansas State University, were in Washington, D.C. to attend a career fair. Also in the office were Corey Hoover of McPherson, who is interning for House Majority Whip Congressman Roy Blunt, and Topekan, Matt Teagarden, with the

Kansas Livestock Association. Danen Rundle from Logan High School and Rachel Ohmes from Dodge City High School were in the office as part of the National Young Leaders Conference.

Very truly yours,

Jerry