

10/30/2006 This Week in Congress

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October 30, 2006

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." As Congress is out of session at the moment, I am spending time in communities across the district examining how federal programs are working in our state and visiting with Kansans.

Mourning the Loss of Sheridan County Sheriff James Johnson

On Thursday, I was shocked to hear of the death of Sheridan County Sheriff James Johnson. Sheriff Johnson was shot and killed on Thursday at the Sheridan County Sheriff's Department while trying to help a citizen seek help for mental health problems.

Robba and I offer our deepest sympathy to the Johnson family for their loss. Words cannot express the sadness that comes with losing a loved one, especially under these circumstances. People in Sheridan County lost a community leader, role model and hero. Members of our law enforcement constantly work to keep us safe without fanfare or glory. These men and women are just another example of the many unsung heroes we have in this country. I join Kansans in mourning the loss of Sheriff Johnson.

Presenting Ralph Marts of Junction City with World War II Medals

This week, I presented Ralph Marts of White City with his World War II medals. Ralph entered the Army Air Force in October 1942 and was deployed with the 8th Air Force in England and served as an aerial engineer on B-17 bombers. On May 2, 1944, Ralph's B-17 bomber was shot down over Germany and he spent one year in a prisoner of war camp in Germany. Upon his discharge in October 1945, Ralph moved back to Kansas where he attended Chillicothe Business College and then worked for the Rock Island Railroad for 21 years and the Civil Service for Fort Riley for 17 years. He retired in December 1984.

Ralph previously received his Prisoner of War Medal. I was pleased on Friday to present him with the American Campaign Medal, European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal and the WWII Victory Medal. Many local residents joined me at the American Legion for the event. It was an honor to recognize Ralph for his service to our country and present him with his long-awaited medals. He represents an important part of our nation's history that we must not forget.

Attending the Biosecurity Research Institute Dedication at K-State

I attended the dedication of Kansas State University's new Biosecurity Research Institute (BRI) on Friday. Scientists at BRI will conduct research to learn how to better protect animal and plant-based agriculture from biological threats like bacteria and pests. The newly constructed building, which will be home to BRI, is named in Senator Pat Roberts' honor. As chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Senator Roberts has played a key role in bringing attention to the widespread threat terrorists pose to our food supply. This state of the art facility has a unique opportunity to help protect our country from dangers not being addressed on any other campus in the nation.

Visiting with Kansas Students

This week, I attended four high school senior government classes to talk to students about my role as a representative in Congress and to discuss current issues facing our country. Civic involvement is an important trait to foster in young people and it is my hope that these discussions will encourage our students to become more active in public affairs.

Thanks to Alice King and her students at Valley Heights High School in Blue Rapids; Amy Johnson and her students at Marysville High School; Scott Schechter, Activities Director, and Bob Eyestone and his students at Hugoton High School; and Dennis Hermreck and his students at Nemaha Valley High School in Seneca for hosting me.

Visiting Kansas Health Care Facilities

Rural communities face unique health care challenges. This week, I visited Community Memorial Healthcare Center in Marysville and Sabetha Community Hospital in Sabetha. These visits gave me an opportunity to learn from doctors, nurses and administrators about the health care needs in these communities and how they are working to provide Kansans with the care they deserve. I appreciate CEO John Howard and Joyce Maddox, Director of Nursing, for showing me around the facility in Marysville and CEO Rita Buurman for her time at Sabetha Community Hospital.

Visiting Kansas Communities

Hays: I visited the Hays Medical Center Inpatient Pharmacy to see firsthand the services provided by these types of pharmacies. Thanks to Director Jim Rorstrom for his time visiting with me. Also in Hays, I attended my hometown Rotary Club meeting, where Fort Hays State University men's basketball coach Mark Johnson was the program.

Ulysses: On Tuesday, I was joined by State Senator Steve Morris and Representative Bill Light at Columbian Chemicals Company to learn about a planned project for an ethanol plant in Grant County. A unique opportunity exists for Columbian Chemicals to use a byproduct of their operation to supply the energy to operate the ethanol plant. We discussed the importance of rail transportation to this project and the area. I met with Columbian plant manager Keith Steele and Director of Global Manufacturing John Laudermilk. Also present were Grant County and Ulysses City officials including Mayor Ed Wiltse, County Commissioner Matt Traster, Economic Development Director Gene Pflughoft, and Donnie Young. I look forward to working with these individuals as this project progresses.

Solomon: I attended the St. Ann's Altar Society Annual Chicken Dinner at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Solomon. This is an annual fundraiser that supports the Altar Society's outreach. It was great to visit with those in attendance.

Sylvan Grove: This weekend, I stopped in Sylvan Grove to attend a soup supper at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. This event was a benefit for Gary and Jai Frederking of Sylvan Grove.

Selden: Also this weekend, I joined community residents in Selden for the grand opening of the Selden Community Center. The Community Center was funded with a Kansas Small Town Environmental Program (KAN-STEP) grant and was completed in August. I enjoyed visiting with local residents.

Participating in K-State Homecoming

On Saturday, I participated in Kansas State University's homecoming celebration and Ag Alumni Weekend. It was wonderful to see and visit with many alumni and I also enjoyed visiting with folks at the Frontier Farm Credit tailgate. Finally, I enjoyed watching K-State beat the Iowa State Cyclones.

In the Office

Nathaniel Garlow, Samantha Jordan and Erik Norris of Salina were in with People to People to learn more about Congress and how our government works. Danny Thomas and Darren Dishman of Pittsburg were in to explain a problem their television stations are having with the mandated transition from an analog to digital signal. Bill Hargrove and Janice Cole of Manhattan were in with Kansas State University's environmental center, KCARE, to discuss their research projects.

Stopping by my Washington, D.C., office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week were Hays residents Ray and LaNelma Johnson, Dr. Jeff Curtis, Dr. Terry Redetzke and Dr. Justin Baalman. Kevin and Michelle Reimer of Inman also received a tour from my office.

Very truly yours,

Jerry