

1/08/2007 This Week in Congress

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January 8, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." On Thursday, I was sworn into office for the 110th Congress. I am ready to begin work this legislative session on several important issues. This will be a big year for Kansas agriculture as we write the new farm bill and continue fighting for disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers. My other priorities will be continuing to find ways to improve current policies like No Child Left Behind and the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit. It is a critical time for Republican and Democrats to set our differences aside and come together to work for the good of Kansans and Americans. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Kansas Declared Federal Disaster Area - Counties Eligible for Assistance

I received word yesterday from the White House that President Bush has declared a major disaster for the State of Kansas following the severe winter storms that swept the western part of the state December 28-31, 2006. This announcement makes federal funds available for recovery efforts in affected communities.

At this time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is authorized to provide funds for public assistance

and hazard mitigation measures for 44 counties: Cheyenne, Clark, Comanche, Decatur, Edwards, Ellis, Finney, Ford, Gove, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Hamilton, Haskell, Hodgeman, Jewell, Kearny, Kiowa, Lane, Logan, Meade, Morton, Ness, Norton, Osborne, Pawnee, Phillips, Rawlins, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Scott, Seward, Sheridan, Sherman, Smith, Stafford, Stanton, Stevens, Thomas, Trego, Wallace and Wichita. The categories of public assistance available are for debris removal on public right-of-ways and emergency protective measures, which include funds to assist in activities like restoration of public utilities. Additional public assistance categories, like assistance to rebuild public infrastructure, may be added once a preliminary damage assessment is completed. The cost of approved public assistance projects will be shared 75 percent by the federal government and 25 percent by the state and local government. Also available will be hazard mitigation assistance. This assistance will provide additional funds for damage prevention measures from future natural disasters.

I visited western Kansas with Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Adrian Polansky, Adjutant General Tod Bunting and Regional FEMA Director Dick Hainje on Wednesday. During the trip to Colby, Ulysses and Satanta, we visited with local officials and viewed the results of the winter storms. The electrical infrastructure was badly damaged in northwest and southwest Kansas and left thousands of Kansans without power. It is estimated that more than 9,700 electric poles and hundreds of miles of electric wire were damaged by ice, snow and high winds. In addition to electrical infrastructure damage, many ranchers are experiencing difficulties getting water and feed to stranded livestock. Although there are no reliable estimates at this time, preliminary estimates indicate that more than a thousand head of cattle were lost to the storm.

Since my visit to western Kansas, I have had conversations with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture (USDA) Mike Johanns and FEMA Director David Paulison. During these conversations, I relayed the extent of the damage and the need for assistance. I am continuing to work with officials from USDA concerning what assistance the department can provide. Upon a Presidential Disaster Designation, USDA can provide assistance once a determination is made, using loss estimates, that production losses merit a response. However, before USDA can make that determination, it must receive and review an estimate of agricultural related losses. If a determination is made, USDA can make assistance programs, such as emergency low interest loans, available to producers as funding allows.

I have spent my entire life as a resident of western Kansas and have not seen such dramatic damage. The damage clearly met the threshold for becoming a federally designated disaster area and I applaud the White House for making federal assistance available to these Kansas counties in need.

The House began the first week of the new Congress by adopting several ethics reforms. Approved was a requirement that all Members' spending projects, known as earmarks, and their sponsors be publicly disclosed, similar to legislation I sponsored last year. Additionally, gifts and travel from lobbyists are now banned. The House also adopted pay-as-you-go budget rules that restrict new deficit spending. I support these changes because I believe Members of Congress must be held to the highest ethical standard and taxpayers deserve an open and accountable government. These reforms are a good step toward integrity and fiscal responsibility.

Eleventh Annual Big First Listening Tour Continues

This weekend, I was in Clay Center in Clay County to visit with area residents. Due to changes in the Congressional voting schedule, my previous plans to be in Seward and Meade Counties today have been postponed until a later date. Rather, today I am making stops in Canton in McPherson County and Marion in Marion County. Tomorrow I will be in LaCrosse in Rush County and Ness City in Ness County. Next Monday, I will visit Chapman in Dickinson County. [Click here to view times and locations and to stay up-to-date on tour stops still being scheduled.](#)

In the Office

Nate Davis of Pratt and Hibbard Davis of Wichita stopped by the office this week to express their thoughts on the war in Iraq. In for a tour of the United States Capitol were Morgan Snapp of Washington and Mark Lister of Eudora.

Very truly yours,

Jerry