

3/05/2007 This Week in Congress

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March 5, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House passed legislation this week reforming how the government oversees foreign investments that have potential national security implications. The House also passed legislation changing the process for a union to organize in the workplace. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Remembering the Lives of Kansas Soldiers, Praying for Recovery of Wounded

On Monday, I joined the family and friends of Lance Cpl. Brian Escalante for funeral services at First Baptist Church in Dodge City. Brian, 25, died on February 17 in Iraq when a bomb exploded near the vehicle he was riding in. He graduated from Dodge City High School and attended Dodge City Community College before enlisting in the Marine Corps. He was awarded a posthumous Purple Heart for his brave service.

On February 22, the Kansas Army National Guard's Battery B, 1st Battalion, 161st Field Artillery was attacked in Iraq. Battery B is headquartered in Dodge City with a detachment in Pratt, and other units on this mission are from across south central and southwest Kansas. Several service members were wounded. The attack also resulted in the death of Staff Sgt. David Berry, 37, originally of Anthony, when his vehicle was struck by an improvised explosive device. He had more than 16 years of military service and received numerous awards throughout his military career.

My prayers are with the families of these service members. We will not forget their courage and sacrifice on our behalf.

Opposing the Proposed Farm Service Agency Office Closings

Farm Service Agency (FSA) officials recently announced their proposal to close 11 offices in Kansas. Every closing is painful as each county office makes a significant contribution to the community where it is located. Farmers should have local access to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) services and representatives. Although I appreciate the lengthy and thorough process by which FSA determined its office consolidation plan, I oppose any plan that eliminates county FSA offices.

The decision to pursue office consolidation was made by USDA, not by Congress. FSA is holding meetings in each location slated to be eliminated. Concerned residents should attend these meetings to express their opinions to FSA. Officials indicated a willingness to consider information that shows FSA should reconsider its decisions.

Each county meeting is scheduled to begin at 2:00 p.m.

- Barber County: March 13, Heritage Center, KAN 1056 SE Isabel Road, Medicine Lodge.

- Comanche County: March 14, South Central High School Gymnasium, 600 N. Leavenworth, Coldwater.

- Morton County: March 15, City Hall, 433 Morton, Elkhart.

- Gove County: March 16, Gove County Office Building, 520 Washington, Gove.

- Chase County: March 19, Chase County Community Building, Swope Park, Cottonwood Falls.

Department of Energy Announces Grant for Kansas Cellulosic Ethanol Plant

The Department of Energy announced this week that Abengoa Bioenergy Biomass of Kansas was selected for up to \$76 million in federal funding to build a cellulosic ethanol plant in Kansas. The Kansas plant - one of six projects selected nationwide - will produce 11.4 million gallons of ethanol annually. Cellulosic ethanol is an alternative fuel made from a wide variety of non-starch based plant materials. These materials include perennial grasses and annual crop residues, such as corn stover, sorghum stover and wheat straw.

[Click here to listen to audio I recorded on this topic.](#) For more information, the Department of Energy press release is available [here](#).

Presenting Arnold Prather of Gove with the Purple Heart

This weekend, I presented Arnold Prather of Gove with the Purple Heart medal he earned while in the Army. Mr. Prather was wounded in action while serving in the Korean War in August 1951. It was my pleasure to present this long overdue medal to Mr. Prather with his friends and family in attendance. It is touching to join Kansas veterans for medal presentations when they have waited many years for something so deserved. I am grateful for their service to our country, but also for the continued roles they fulfill in our communities.

Attending the 148th Landon Lecture Given by Former President Bill Clinton

On Friday, my daughter Kelsey and I attended the 148th Landon Lecture given by former President Bill Clinton. This prestigious lecture series at Kansas State University continues in honor of the late Alfred M. Landon, former Kansas governor and the 1936 Republican Party nominee for president of the United States. Recently, President George Bush and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld delivered Landon lectures that I was able to attend. President Clinton talked about globalization, the need to embrace our equality and our differences, the importance of getting an education and the need for citizen civic action. Thank you to Dr. Charles Reagan and Edward Seaton for their work in organizing these events and bringing these prominent speakers to Kansas.

Continuing to Advocate for a Veterans Clinic in Goodland

I continued to advocate for a Goodland location as the site of the new Veterans Affairs (VA) outreach clinic by joining Senators Sam Brownback and Pat Roberts this week in sharing our support with VA Secretary Jim Nicholson and Denver VA Acting Director James Floyd. [Click here to read the press release and full text of the letter.](#)

Receiving "Service to Kansas Families" Award

On Friday, I was honored to receive the Kansas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy's (KAMFT) 2007 "Service to Kansas Families" Award. At the awards presentation in Kansas City, I spoke about the importance of family and in particular, the need to support our military families. As thousands of servicemen and women return to their families from combat overseas, we must make sure that those who struggle with war experiences have access to the best mental health services available. In December, Congress approved a bill I introduced, the Veterans Mental Health Care Access Improvement Act. This legislation gives veterans access to a full range of qualified mental health providers within the VA health system, including Marriage and Family Therapists and Licensed Professional Counselors. Previously, only active duty personnel could seek this care. This legislation also helps ensure the VA has the capacity to provide timely and quality care. Thank you to Dr. Christopher Habben, KAMFT President, and Brenda Harvey-Smith, KAMFT Past President, for this honor and the opportunity to join members at their annual conference.

Continuing the First District Listening Tour

This week, I visited Plains and Liberal. After visiting with people in attendance at my Plains town hall meeting at Plains State Bank, I visited several local business and offices. I stopped at EZ Shop convenience store, City Hall, Daylight Donut, the post office, the city library, JB Supply, the ADM elevator and the senior center. In Liberal, I attended the local Lions Club meeting. Thank you to Club President Dru Richard for the invitation to visit with the group. Also while I was in Liberal, I visited with State Board of Education member Sally Cauble, as well as the Leadership Liberal group. [Click here](#) to view times and locations and to stay up-to-date on other tour stops still being scheduled.

In the Office

Members of the Kansas branch of the National League of Postmasters were in talk about the need to eliminate provisions that reduce Social Security benefits for some individuals. In with the group were Eileen Arnhold of Dorrance, Judy Smith of Muscotah, Randy Caprez of Russell, Janet Harness of Troy, Dolores Servaes of Nortonville and Judy Raney of Lawrence. Vira Dobbins of Kansas City was in with Laborers' International Union of North America to discuss issues important to federal employees. Richard Lisichenko of Hays was in representing the Kansas Geographical Alliance Department of Geosciences to talk about the need for increased geography education.

Marvin Szneler of Overland Park was in with the Jewish Community Relations Bureau to express concern about the situation in Darfur, Sudan. Patrick Zollner, Vance Kelley and Christy Davis of Topeka were in representing organizations that work to protect historic places in Kansas. We talked about preservation efforts in our state. Douglas Moorman of Kansas City was in with the National Treasury Employees Union to discuss government contracting and federal employee pay. Scott Miller and Linda Cory of Wichita were in with NASA in Kansas to advocate for science, math and technology education.

Mike Friesen of Meade and Riley Walters of Cassoday were in representing their respective County Weed Departments to discuss funding priorities for noxious weed and invasive species programs. Robin Jennison of Healy and Dave Brenn of Garden City were in with Kansas Groundwater Management District One to talk about weather modification legislation.

Melinda Sorem of Jetmore was in representing Women Involved in Farm Economics to discuss the farm bill. Roland Rhodes of Gardner was in to visit about potential changes to pest management laws and talk about a proposed railroad facility in Gardner. Jolene Niernberger of Hays stopped by to explain the importance of the Senior Companion and Foster Grandparent programs.

Michael and Ann Byington of Topeka were in with the Kansas Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to discuss the importance of accessing telecommunications systems and the need for retaining private and independent access to the voting process. Chris Tilden and Gloria Vermie of Topeka were in with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to talk about rural health programs. Joining them were Jodi Schmidt of Hays with Hays Medical Center and Chad Austin of Topeka with the Kansas Hospital Association.

Mike Mayberry of Kiowa, Jeff and Stacey Hofaker of Logan, Ronnie Brown of Fort Scott, Malinda Lehman of Tribune and Glenda Harvey of Ashland were in to discuss the Rural Communities and Development Act. Alan Hess of Alma, Janet McPherson of Manhattan and Mike Fawl of Overbrook were in with the Farm Credit Council to explain Farm Credit's Horizons proposal.

Dr. Fred Cholick, Steven Graham and Dr. Curtis Kastner of Manhattan, Steve Irsik of Garden City and Connie Pelton Kays of Pittsburg were in with the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges to talk about land grant colleges. Britt Gates of Anthony was in this week representing the Zoie Foundation to inform me about child safety concerns with power windows in vehicles. Grant Prusa of Ulysses was in Washington, D.C., with the National Young Leaders Conference (NYLC). NYLC provides high school students an opportunity to discuss current issues with policy makers in our nation's capital.

Lana Messner of Wichita, Linda Childress of Manhattan and Misty Elder of Hunter were in with the Kansas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to explain the importance of educated child care professionals and the need for child care development block grants. Terry Holdren and Steve Swaffar of Topeka were in with Kansas Farm Bureau to discuss the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program proposal in Kansas. Sandie Hampton of Topeka was in with the American Federation of Government Employees to visit about personnel issues at the Topeka VA Medical Center.

Jim Guikema and Sue Peterson with Kansas State University and John Blair and Bancroft McKittrick with M2 Technologies of Manhattan were in to brief me on joint efforts of the Urban Operations Laboratory to develop non-lethal capabilities for use by the military. Col. Barney King of Salina, Commander of the Kansas Wing of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP), was in to discuss CAP's support during the winter storms in western Kansas and legislation assisting CAP personnel. Mark Swope and Brett Dahmer of Lansing and Mike Gutierrez of Kansas City were in representing Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary to advocate for building a new prison.

Kansas members of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) were in to express their views on improving the timeliness of veterans' claims, VA healthcare funding, and legislation providing concurrent receipt of retirement and disability pay for disabled veterans. In with the group were Frank and Veronica Berquist and Charles Lovings of Wichita, James and Ellen

Price of Salina, and David and Kimberly Brader of Parsons. Kelley Pfannenstiel of Dodge City was in the office representing the National Court Reporters Association to request support for more court reporters that provide closed captioning services for the hearing impaired.

Marla Marsh, John Davis and Mike Welli of Wichita; Robert and Sue Reeves of Manhattan; John Smith of Shawnee; Garth Strand of Hutchinson; Greg Winkler of Topeka; Jerel Wright of Merriden; and Jim Holt and Susan Shelby of Larned were in with the Kansas Credit Union Association to talk about the effects of bankruptcy reform and advocate for regulatory relief for credit unions. In representing Youthville was Shelley Duncan of Dodge City to discuss a new kitchen and dining facility on Youthville's Dodge City campus. Provost Richard Lariviere, Keith Yehle and Amy Jordan Wooden of Lawrence were in with the University of Kansas to talk about priorities for the university and the KU Medical Center.

Jim Ogle and Harriet Lange of Topeka, Mark Vail of Hays, Wayne Godsey of Kansas City, Rob Burton of Wichita, Rich Wartell of Manhattan and Hank Booth of Lawrence were in with the Kansas Association of Broadcasters to update me on issues facing local television and radio broadcasters and to discuss the proposed merger between XM and Sirius satellite radio. In representing the American Society for Engineering Education were Dr. Stuart Bell with KU, Dr. Zulma Toro-Ramos with Wichita State University and Dr. Richard Gallagher with K-State to advocate for research in the physical sciences. They also updated me on research and projects at their respective universities. Also stopping by office this week while in Washington, D.C., were Thelma and Keith Bray of Silver Lake.

David and Linda Miller of Salina came by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Also in were Laine Rundus of Manhattan with his niece, Alexys Meier of Mankato.

Very truly yours,

Jerry