

3/26/2007 This Week in Congress

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March 26, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House passed legislation this week to fund military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as agriculture disaster assistance. Although ag disaster is a top priority for me and this is the third time this year I have asked for its approval, I was not able to vote for the overall bill because it set an arbitrary date to withdraw troops from Iraq in March of next year. I would have preferred a separate vote on each of these issues. There are questions about what the Senate will do with this legislation and the President has already said he will veto it should it arrive at his desk. Despite having concerns about the way the war has been conducted, I cannot support something I believe will undermine our soldiers and embolden our enemies.

The House also passed legislation this week to assist veterans, including measures that would authorize a suicide-prevention program, a bill that would expand benefits for veterans with impaired vision and a cost-of-living increase for those receiving disability benefits.

Working to Modernize the GI Bill for Guard and Reserve Members

One of my legislative goals this year is to improve benefits for members of the National Guard and Reserve. Since the events of September 11, our nation has relied heavily on our citizen soldiers and they deserve benefits that reflect their increased sacrifice. Though more than 500,000 have been called up, our reserve forces have often been denied benefits equal to that service, especially in the area of education. To address this inequity, I have sponsored the Total Force GI Bill. This legislation would allow activated Guardsmen and Reservists to earn the same GI Bill benefits as active duty soldiers and enable them to use those benefits after they leave the service. The original GI Bill was authored by Kansas Legionnaire Harry Colmery in 1944 and has provided education benefits to millions of veterans.

This week, the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, of which I am a member, began a series of hearings on this issue. We heard from representatives of the Departments of Defense and VA, as well as the National Guard Bureau. It is time to modernize the GI Bill to reflect the reality of today's changing military and recognize the contributions of our citizen soldiers.

Meeting with Kansas Farm Service Agency Officials to Discuss Office Closings

On Sunday, I met with Bill Fuller, State Executive Director of the Kansas USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Galen Swenson, Chairman of the Kansas FSA State Committee, to discuss FSA's proposal to close 11 county offices across the state. FSA is going through the consolidation process and this week completed the last of 11 public meetings in each county where consolidations have been proposed. FSA officials will now consider the ideas they heard during the public forums. During my meeting with Bill and Galen, I raised my concerns about the potential office closings. I continue to oppose the closings, but will work with Kansas officials to see that all alternatives are being considered before any final decisions are made.

[Click here to read more about this topic.](#)

Discussing Criteria and Timeline for Location of New Veterans Outreach Clinic

Goodland Regional Medical Center submitted its application this week to the Denver Veterans Affairs (VA) office to be considered for the new veterans outreach clinic for the eastern Colorado, western Kansas area. Following submission, I visited with Denver VA Acting Director James Floyd to advocate for the Goodland location and also to visit about the decision criteria and timeline. According to Mr. Floyd, the VA expects to make a final decision in about 90 days. I will remain in close contact with VA officials as they make a decision.

Meeting with Secretary of Defense to Discuss the Needs of our Military

This week, I met with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Mr. Gates, a native of Kansas, became the 22nd Secretary of Defense in December 2006. He was the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from 1991-1993 and most recently served as the President of Texas A&M University. During the visit, the Secretary outlined the additional needs of today's military, which include improving the recruitment and retention time of our servicemen and women and making certain our military forces have the necessary equipment. The Secretary shared that these are very challenging times and it is important to pay attention to the military's manpower and equipment needs.

Working for Community Health Centers

Representatives from the Kansas State Primary Care Association were in Washington, D.C., this week to visit with me about Community Health Centers (CHC). In with the group were Marcia Hawkes and Lucy Corely of Salina, Karla Finnell of Lawrence and Katharine Weickert of Topeka. I was honored to receive the association's 2007 Distinguished Community Health Super Hero Award for my efforts to expand health care for all Kansans.

Community Health Centers are non-profit, community-owned centers that provide primary care and preventive services, including dental, pharmaceutical, mental health and substance abuse services, to low-income and medically underserved communities. Kansas has 10 Community Health Centers and served more than 62,000 individuals in 2004.

Biotech Company Relocates to Junction City

I joined local and state officials on Monday in announcing that Edenspace, a biotech company, is relocating its operations from Dulles, Virginia, to Junction City. Edenspace is a commercial leader in the use of plants for environmental protection and renewable fuels. In 2006, Edenspace was awarded a grant from the Department of Energy to develop corn hybrids to be used in the production of cellulosic ethanol. This is good news for the Junction City area and the state of Kansas as we become a leader in biofuels production and technology. Edenspace will bring more than 20 research jobs to the area.

Participating in Walk Kansas Fitness Challenge to Walk the Distance across Kansas

K-State Research and Extension recently launched its 2007 Walk Fitness Challenge. My staff and I have joined together to form three teams and participate in this state-wide fitness program where teams collectively walk the distance across Kansas - 423 miles - in a total of eight weeks. In addition to walking, miles can be tracked through other physical exercise like running, swimming, bicycling or playing team sports.

We talk a lot about health care costs in Washington, D.C., but we need to focus on preventative health care. Regular exercise is one of the best ways to stay healthy. Walk Kansas is a great way to start developing healthy habits and my staff and I are excited to be a part of this program.

[Click here for more information about Walk Kansas.](#)

Enjoying a Performance by the Tabor College Concert Choir

Robba and I enjoyed listening to the Tabor College Concert Choir perform during our church service in Hays on Sunday. The performance was part of the group's spring tour. Tabor College, based in Hillsboro, is a four-year Christian liberal arts school. The Concert Choir was founded in 1925 and is currently led by Director Dr. Bradley Vogel, who is in his tenth year as Associate Professor of Choral Music. In addition to numerous church appearances, the Concert Choir performs annual concerts, including a Christmas Festival, Handel's Messiah, the home tour concert and Vaughn Williams' English Folk Song Suite. I applaud Dr. Vogel and his students for the wonderful performance.

In the Office

Dr. Christopher Habben of Lenexa, President of the Kansas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, was in to present me with the national organization's 2007 Distinguished Service Award and to discuss the role of marriage and family therapists in the VA, Medicare and schools. Mike and Fran Hamilton of Paola, Debbie Schmidt of Spearville, Randy Collier of Towanda and Jo Ann Wells of Meade were in with the National Association of Postmasters to visit about the importance of continued mail service in rural areas.

Diane Gersted, Winston Brooks, Lynn Rogers and Jon Engelhardt of Wichita were in representing Wichita Public Schools to discuss No Child Left Behind. Bob and Dian Boaldin of Elkhart traveled to Washington, D.C. to talk to me about the proposed Farm Service Agency office closing in Elkhart. Nick Zerr of Grainfield and Linda Hickok of Ulysses were in representing the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science to tell me about the future shortage of laboratory workers in our health care system.

Geary County School District officials were in to discuss the importance of Impact Aid programs and the need to expand their elementary school capacity due to the growth at Fort Riley. In with the group were Superintendent Ronald Walker, Lisa Osbourn, Larry Dixon, LaMont Godsey and Major Colleen Wright of Junction City. Barb Pretzer of Manhattan was in with the Alzheimer's Association to advocate for funding for Alzheimer's research. Janet McCue of Hutchinson was in with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society to discuss the importance of blood cancer research.

Officials from Wilson County were in to tell me about alleviating delays from trains for emergency vehicles traveling to Wilson County Hospital in Neodesha. In with the group from Fredonia were Mayor Max Payne and City Administrator Randy Partington. In from Neodesha were City Commissioner Julie Nichol, City Administrator J.D. Cox and Wilson County Hospital Administrator Deanna Pittman.

Jeremy Essmiller of Pawnee Rock, Brittany Gaines of Logan, Catherine Jenkinson of Sharon Springs, Andrew Shaughnessy of McPherson and Kenzie Thomason of Elkhart were in Washington, D.C. participating in the People to People educational program. The students came by to learn more about my responsibilities in Congress. Ashley Crist of Johnson, Brittany McPherson of Clay Center, Kayla Wegner of Salina, June Bell of Junction City, David Elliott of Waldo, Kristy Stevenson of Ulysses and Ashton Archer of Sylvan Grove were in our nation's capital to participate in the Presidential Classroom educational program. The students visited my office to learn more about issues I am working on in Congress.

David Beck of Topeka, Keith Pankratz of Buhler, Valerie McGee of Wichita, Judy Miller of Hutchinson and Jolene White of Inman were in with the Kansas Association of Homes and Services for Aging to discuss the importance of Medicaid adequately reimbursing nursing homes. Justin and Doris Sage of Madison and Dirk Riniker of Wamego were in with the Kansas Land Improvement Contractors Association to talk about the importance of maintaining watershed programs in Kansas.

Dr. Gail Boyer of Lenexa, Dr. Kenyon Erickson of Manhattan, Dr. Travis Oller and John Kiefhaber of Topeka, Dr. Ed McKenzie of Holton and Dr. Tobi Jeurink of Gardner were in with the Kansas Chiropractic Association to discuss incorporating chiropractic care into the VA system. Pam Stanberry of Wichita was in on behalf of Wesley Rehabilitation Hospital to tell me about Medicare patients accessing rehabilitation services. Dr. Mark Sarver, Dr. Troy Peters and Al Massoni of Sterling were in representing Sterling College to talk about educational needs in science and technology.

Dan Fuhrman of Leawood and Steve Dailey of Kansas City were in with MO-ARK to discuss infrastructure maintenance projects on the Missouri River. William Saunders and his daughter Lauren of Olathe were in with the American Rental Association to talk about legislation that would help small businesses like his remain competitive and provide quality service. Steve Haynes, vice president of the National Newspaper Association, and his wife Cynthia of Oberlin were in to discuss legislation that affects newspapers in Kansas.

Bishop Gerald Mansholt of the Central State Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America was in to talk about humane immigration policies. Anne Behan of Rolla was in to tell me about a public relations class project she is working on at Emporia State University. Ron Drake of Salina, Scott Perkins of Overland Park and Dona Walters of Mission were in with Wilson and Company, Inc. to discuss aerial mapping and legislation dealing with the Federal Aviation Administration. Greg Hildenbrand of Topeka, Executive Director of Life Star of Kansas, was in to talk about issues facing the air ambulance industry.

Jeff Seibel of Hays and Missy Cox of Manhattan were in with Edward Jones to discuss identity theft legislation. Sandy Pickert and Lois Theis of Wichita were in with Pure and Simple - Abstinence Education, Inc. to tell me about their educational efforts. A.W. and Diane Pickel of Lenexa, Randy Anderson of Overland Park, Tim Wooding of Wichita, Craig Yaryaw of El Dorado and Shana Sowles of Olathe were in with the Kansas Association of Mortgage Brokers to talk about financial service issues.

Also stopping by my office this week were Jean and Charlie Popelka of Munden who were here visiting their son, Aaron, who is a legislative assistant in my office. Kyle Kitson of Hays was in to visit about internships in Washington, D.C.

Many Kansans were in my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Dale and Shirley Brownlee of Larned, Bill and Val Hagerman of Topeka, Brian and Jenny Danenberg of Manhattan, Kate Danenberg of Lawrence, Amy McIntire of Hutchinson, Ted Glasco of Bird City, Michael Raile of St. Francis and Mollie Parkin of Pomona. The Dechant's of Garden City were in - Robert, Bradley, Sally and Sarah - to visit Abby Dechant, who is serving as an intern in my Washington, D.C. office. Also in from Garden City were Lynn and Ben Ballinger. Stopping by from Ellis were Ed and Doris Collins, Derek Kvasnicka and Bernice Karlin. In from Republic were Randall and Phyllis Rahe, Marjorie Baxa and Mary Stenson. The Bannister's of Hays - Mark, Allison and Anne - also stopped by, as did the Angell family of Plains - Roger, Julia, Austin and Marissa. Cy and Gladys Moyer of Phillipsburg brought by their granddaughter, Arissa Moyer of Americus, and Clint and Kendra Thomason of Elkhart stopped by with their son, Reid.

Several school groups visited Washington, D.C. on spring break this week and stopped by to say hello. Among these were Hays High School, led by Gary Goodchuck, Bruce and Teresa Rupp, and Christopher Quigley of Hays; Plainville High School, led by Thomas and Cassie Nuckols of Plainville; Concordia High School, led by Elisa Gerrard of Concordia and Judy Hill of Jamestown; Decatur Community High School, led by Gregory and Mary Jo Lohofener of Oberlin; Council Grove High School, led by Jay Doornbos of Council Grove; and Phillipsburg and Smith Center High Schools, led by Barbara Dennis of Phillipsburg.

Very truly yours,

Jerry