

5/07/2007 This Week in Congress

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May 7, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House passed legislation this week to reauthorize the National Institute of Standards and Technology. This bill increases funding for basic scientific research and seeks to increase the number of students majoring in math, science and engineering. Also this week, the House attempted to override the President's veto of the Iraq spending bill, but failed.

Severe Weather Sweeps through Kansas, Community of Greensburg Devastated

This weekend brought numerous severe storms throughout the state of Kansas. On Friday night, an F-5 tornado - the most powerful tornado to hit the U.S. in the last eight years - devastated the community of Greensburg and storms continued on Saturday and Sunday across the state with more tornados, rain, hail and flooding. The weekend storms claimed 10 lives and caused numerous injuries.

The width of the F-5 tornado in Greensburg spanned more than a mile long and officials estimate up to 95 percent of the town was destroyed in the storm. I spent Saturday and Sunday in the area meeting with local officials and residents, including the city administrator, mayor, school superintendent and State Representative Dennis McKinney. The scene there is catastrophic. There is not a single building left undamaged.

President Bush declared parts of the state a federal disaster area following an expedited request from me and other members of the Kansas delegation. This declaration allows federal money to be used to help people in Kiowa County in recovery efforts, including individuals, households and public facilities. I have invited the President to Greensburg this week to view the destruction.

Today, I am hosting Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator R. David Paulison in a visit to Greensburg to view the destruction from the tornado. We will be joined by Governor Sebelius, Senator Sam Brownback and officials from the City of Greensburg and across the state for a briefing by local officials and a tour of the damage.

My heart goes out to the residents of this community who, in a matter of minutes, lost family members, homes and normal life as they know it. We are all thankful that the loss of life was not greater with the size and scope of the storm. There has been a tremendous response from across the state and nation and we now band together with area residents to begin piecing the community back together.

[Click here to view photos I took this weekend, as well as to find information about how to help the victims of this weekend's storms.](#)

[Touring Freeze Damaged Wheat Fields](#)

Three days of freezing temperatures in early April took a toll on many wheat fields in Kansas. It is disappointing that after back-to-back drought years, what was shaping up to be a good wheat crop was severely damaged by the spring freeze in some parts of the state. On Monday, I joined representatives from the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers to examine freeze damaged wheat fields in Russell, Saline, McPherson and Dickinson Counties. As the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Subcommittee that has jurisdiction over crop insurance and the commodity title of the farm bill, I wanted to see the severity of this damage firsthand so I can convey the urgency of passing a viable disaster package to my colleagues in Congress.

Among those participating in the tour were Rebecca Davis, Director of the Risk Management Agency Regional Office in Topeka; Jim Shroyer, Extension Agronomy State Leader from Kansas State University; John Thaemert, President of the National Association of Wheat Growers; Joe Kejr, President of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers; and Dale Lambley of the Kansas Department of Agriculture.

Wheat producers that suffered damage from this freeze have many things to consider. I encourage producers to contact their insurance company, local Farm Service Agency office and also review information recently put together by the Risk Management Agency (RMA) before making decisions on how to proceed. Information from the RMA can be found [here](#).

Introducing Legislation to Ease the Burdens of No Child Left Behind

This week, I introduced legislation to ease the unrealistic burdens of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. The Practicality in Education Act will utilize common sense ideas to make NCLB more realistic and effective. Congress is set to examine NCLB and reauthorize it this year.

I voted against No Child Left Behind in 2001 for fear it would place unnecessary restrictions on Kansas schools and increase costs to Kansas taxpayers without a corresponding improvement in the quality of education children receive. Since its passage, I have had numerous discussions with students, teachers, administrators, state officials and Department of Education officials to determine what measures are needed to fix some of the unintended consequences.

While we need to strive for improvements in our education system, we should be careful not to overregulate the classroom. We must not take the joy and passion out of this noble profession by requiring things that are simply not possible. This legislation takes a common sense approach to make this federal program more realistic and manageable.

[Click here to read more about the Practicality in Education Act.](#)

Sponsoring Legislation to Delay FSA Office Closures

I sponsored legislation this week that would postpone any potential Farm Service Agency (FSA) office closings until one year after the enactment of the 2007 Farm Bill. It is premature for USDA to assume this plan will result in better services for producers or significant savings of taxpayer money at a time when future administrative and programming needs have not been decided. The bill I sponsored would give Congress and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) the opportunity to further evaluate the needs for administering the next farm bill. Four offices in the First Congressional District are still slated for closing following the release of FSA's revised office restructuring plan.

Also this week, I expressed my concerns about FSA office closings to the FSA Administrator, Theresa Lasseter. Senator John Thune of South Dakota joined me in this meeting. I spoke to Administrator Lasseter about my belief that it does not make sense to close county offices before Congress writes the 2007 Farm Bill. While there is merit in looking for ways to

be financially responsible, I believe there are alternative solutions that we can pursue in order to find savings and create a more efficient delivery system for farm programs.

Participating in Agriculture Subcommittee Hearing on Crop Insurance

On Tuesday, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management held a hearing to review the crop insurance industry. Witnesses included representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, crop insurance companies and crop insurance agents. Among the witnesses was Robert Parkerson, President of National Crop Insurance Services in Overland Park.

Although the crop insurance industry has experienced exceptional growth and success in recent years, issues still remain. Certain crops continue to be uncovered by crop insurance policies. In addition, problems within existing crop policies continue to affect the system. In many parts of Kansas, multi-year droughts have caused declining yields and reduced the effectiveness of many producers' policies. The hearing provided a good opportunity to hear witnesses' ideas regarding how to address these issues and make the crop insurance industry more effective.

County Treasurers Allowed to Continue Serving Kansans

I joined county treasurers from across the state on Friday at the State Capitol in Topeka to discuss the ability of county treasurers in Kansas to continue issuing and renewing driver's licenses. The county treasurers presented me with a petition signed by 81,000 Kansans advocating for local access to continue renewing and obtaining identification documents. Last year, I worked to stop the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from changing the rules about who is able to issue driver's licenses and other identification documents. Thanks to these successful efforts, Kansas county treasurers will continue issuing and renewing driver's licenses.

Hosting Agriculture Forum this Weekend during 3i Show

The 53rd Annual Western Kansas Manufacturers Association 3i Show - Irrigation, Implements, Industry - will be held in Garden City this week beginning on Thursday and running through Saturday at the Finney County Fairgrounds. On Saturday, I will host an agriculture forum from 10:00-11:00 a.m. in the GMC tent. Also throughout the three day event, my staff will be available to visit and answer questions at booth I-171. This is my eleventh year attending the 3i Show. I look forward to seeing many of you there this weekend.

In the Office

Patrick Kuhn of Salina and Chris Howell of Topeka were in to tell me about the Poetry Out Loud National Recitation Contest. Patrick, who is a senior at Salina Central High School, won the Kansas contest and was in Washington, D.C. for the national competition. Congratulations to Patrick on his achievement. Kansas Cosmosphere President and CEO Christopher Orwoll and Senior Vice President Jim Remar of Hutchinson were in to tell me about plans to expand the Cosmosphere. Dennis Schwartz of Tecumseh, Patricia Shaffer of Benton, Larry Remmenga of Concordia, Pete Koenig and Elmer Ronnebaum of Baileyville were in with the Kansas Rural Water Association to discuss Kansas rural water district needs and ongoing projects. Hutchinson High School students Brandi Lamunyon and Brittany Reed were in with teachers Sheri Corwin, Debra Nienke and Brook Thompson of Hutchinson to learn more about my role in Congress.

Kevin Robertson of Topeka and Brick Scheer of Wichita were in with the Kansas Dental Association to talk about the need for a dental component to the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). George Dean of Wichita and William Ritter of Topeka were in representing the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers to discuss the importance of funding science research and the increased need for qualified math and science teachers in our schools. Mike Hammond of Topeka, David Wiebe and Ann Hodgdon of Mission, Pete and Robert Zevenbergen of Kansas City, and Jessica Kaye of Newton were in with the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas to talk

about the expansion of Medicare-reimbursed-providers and the need for parity among mental health insurance coverage.

Kansas Library Association representatives Rosanne Siemens of Topeka and Joyce Armstrong of Syracuse came by to express their support for E-rates, which help libraries and schools stay technologically competitive. Mary Lou Warren of Great Bend was in with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program to talk about the reauthorization of the Domestic Volunteer Services Act. Jeff Boerger of Kansas City was in with the Kansas Speedway to discuss a bill that gives speedways a seven-year depreciation for capital assets. Sean Williams of Ottawa and Richard Dalanno of Salina were in representing the National Association of Truck Stops Organizations to talk about the upcoming highway reauthorization.

FFA Risk Management Agency Essay Contest winners Katie Gillmore of Moundridge and Yance Farney of Stafford stopped by with their teachers Merlyn Spare of St. John and Jacob Lang of Buhler to tell me about their involvement in FFA. Dr. James McAtee of Manhattan and Dr. Howard Wilcox, Jr. of Olathe were in with the Kansas Orthopedic Society to discuss the need to change the formula Medicare uses to pay physicians for seeing senior patients in order to more adequately reflect the cost of the care provided. Corey Peterson and Tim Browder of Topeka, Mike Morrard of Paola and Don Clarkson of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Contractors Association and Associated General Contractors to tell me about the need to find an adequate source of funding for the trust fund that pays for, repairs and builds new highways.

Kansas Farm Bureau President Steve Baccus of Minneapolis was in with his colleagues Terry Holdren of Topeka and Harry Watts of Manhattan to express their concern for the future of rural Kansas and to share their ideas of how to breathe life into communities across the state. Steve Johnson of Lawrence was in with Kansas Gas Service to discuss a natural gas liquids pipeline that will cross western Kansas. Blake West of Overland Park and Mark Farr of Nickerson were in representing the Kansas National Educators Association to share suggestions on how to improve No Child Left Behind and to talk about the importance of small class sizes. Roger Bostwick of Ozwakie was in with Kansas State Grange to discuss the organization's farm bill priorities.

Susan Pompeo of Wichita, Linda Goff of Dodge City, Helen Norris of Wellington, Rick Knight of Parsons, Garth Stand of Hutchinson, Marla Marsh of Wichita, John Mills of Topeka and Jerry McReynolds of Woodston also all stopped by during their visit to our nation's capital.

Stopping by my Washington, D.C. office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol were Mark and Kristie Ohlemeier with their daughter, Hannah. Philip, Bill and Janet Ohlemeier of Topeka were also in for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry