

5/14/2007 This Week in Congress

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May 14, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Spending Time with Residents in Greensburg, Hosting President Bush

After spending much of last weekend in Greensburg, I returned there on Monday with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator R. David Paulison and on Wednesday with President Bush to show him the destruction from the F-5 tornado. We spent nearly four hours walking around town viewing the damage and visiting with local residents. We also spent time with Mayor Lonnie McCollum, City Administrator Steve Hewitt and School Superintendent Darin Headrick. The story of Greensburg has made news not only in Kansas, but around the world. I appreciate President Bush joining us in Kansas.

I returned to Greensburg on Saturday and spent several hours with residents, city officials and volunteers. Next Saturday, I will join the community in recognizing the 2007 graduating class of Greensburg High School by speaking at the commencement ceremony to be held in Greensburg.

I also spoke to the U.S. House of Representatives this week about the devastation in Greensburg. [Click here to view the video.](#) You may also visit my website to learn more about the storm damage and for information about how you can help.

Additional Counties to Receive Assistance from FEMA

On Friday, FEMA added Edwards, Pratt and Stafford Counties to the list of counties able to receive individual assistance. FEMA's Individual Assistance program makes funds available to assist individuals and households recover from the severe storms, tornadoes and flooding that occurred last week.

Touring Tornado Damage in Ottawa County

Storms beginning late Saturday, May 5, dumped inches of rain in Saline and surrounding counties and also produced a tornado in Ottawa County that claimed the life of one resident and damaged nearly 40 homes. Others experienced flooded basements and were evacuated from homes.

I visited the area around Ottawa County State Lake on Friday. I met with Sheriff Kenneth White and County

Commissioners Kathy Luthi, Harold McCullick and Ray McGavran, as well as with Emergency Management Director Janice Davidson and State Representative Elaine Bowers.

Sheriff White and the County Commissioners gave me a driving tour around the lake where the tornado damaged numerous homes. I was also able to walk around the area and meet with residents. I was encouraged by the optimism of the local residents and their willingness to clean up the area and rebuild.

[Click here to view photos from around the lake.](#)

House Passes Agriculture Disaster Assistance for Kansas Farmers and Ranchers

Late Thursday night, the House passed agriculture disaster assistance for Kansas farmers and ranchers. This legislation covers crop losses for years 2005 and 2006, as well as through February 28, 2007. Similar legislation passed the House last month. The bill passed by the House this week, however, does not include funding for the war in Iraq with withdrawal requirements for U.S. troops, which would likely be vetoed by the President.

Congress has been considering agriculture disaster assistance for far too long and this is a major step forward. The First Congressional District of Kansas is expected to receive more assistance under this proposal than any congressional district in the country. Although I support this overall legislation and have advocated for it for more than a year, I am disappointed that it only covers losses through the end of February 2007. With our recent spring weather in Kansas - the late spring freeze and now hail, tornadoes and flooding - there is a need to extend the timeline. I will work to see that more losses are covered as this bill makes its way through the legislative process, which still must come before the U.S. Senate and be signed by the President.

[Click here to watch a speech I delivered to the House of Representatives advocating for passage of this bill.](#)

House Passes Legislation to Study Water Resources of the Republican River Basin

The House this week passed legislation I introduced earlier this year to study water use in the Republican River Basin. The Lower Republican River Basin Study Act authorizes a federal study to determine solutions to increase water supply reliability, storage and management efficiency between Harlan County Lake in Nebraska and Milford Lake in Kansas.

Water is the single most important resource we have in Kansas. This legislation is of value to residents in Kansas and in Nebraska because it will ensure the availability of water resources in both states.

The bill now awaits approval by the Senate. [Click here to read more about this legislation.](#)

Agriculture Hearings Focus on Ag Research Programs and Food Aid

I attended two subcommittee hearings of the House Agriculture Committee this week. On Thursday, I attended a hearing of the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research to review the various proposals to modify the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) agricultural research programs. The committee heard from the USDA Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics, as well as from agricultural researchers from across the nation. The information provided by these witnesses will help the Committee determine what changes may improve agricultural research as the Committee writes the next farm bill.

Also on Thursday, I attended a hearing of the Subcommittee on Specialty Crops, Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture. The hearing was held to review food aid and agriculture trade programs operated by USDA and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Among the witnesses testifying was John Gillcrist. John is the Chairman of Bartlett Milling Company of Kansas City and testified on behalf of the North American Millers' Association and Agricultural Food Aid Coalition.

Attending the Funeral of Macksville Police Officer Robert "Tim" Buckman

On Saturday, I attended the funeral of Macksville Police Officer Robert "Tim" Buckman. Pastor David Crook conducted the services at the Macksville Christian Church where hundreds of mourners, Kansas law enforcement officers and Patriot Guard members from across the state overflowed the church. Officer Buckman was critically injured during last Friday night's severe storms as he was bravely trying to warn rural residents of the approaching storm. He passed away early Tuesday in Wichita. Officer Buckman served with the Macksville Police Department for five years. His efforts that horrific Friday evening helped save the lives of many area residents. My prayers are with his wife and three children.

Attending Hays High School Chamber Singers Dinner Show

This weekend, I attended the 18th annual Hays High School Dinner Show - "Dancing through Life" - hosted by the Hays Chamber Singers. The director is Elise Peterson and the group is accompanied by my wife, Robba. The group is comprised of sophomores, juniors and seniors from HHS. It was an enjoyable evening of dinner and entertainment and I applaud the students for their efforts and performance.

In the Office

Tom Moxley and Mike Beam of Topeka and Mike Collinge of Hamilton were in with the Kansas Livestock Association to express their support for conservation programs such as the Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). Cindy Luxem of Topeka was in with the Kansas Health Care Association to discuss retirement home standards and the need to preserve Medicare funding. Doug Hofbauer of Manhattan was in with Frontier Farm Credit to explain Farm Credit's proposal to do bond financing to help fund improvements to Critical Access Hospitals.

Bill Rupp of Wichita and Bill Buckner of Minneapolis were in with Cargill to talk about immigration issues in the meat packing industry. Members of the Kansas Hospital Association were in to discuss Medicare Advantage, inpatient rehabilitation rates and the need for rural representation on the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. In with the group were Tom Bell, Melissa Hungerford, Gary Fleenor and Maynard Oliverius of Topeka; Dick Allen of Manhattan; David Bradley of Junction City; Rita Buurman of Sabetha; Vick Hahn of Leoti; John Jeter of Hays; Terry Lambert of Emporia; Fred Lucky of Lenexa; Greg Lundstrom of Lindsborg; Blaine and Kathy Miller of Belleville; Randy Peterson of Wichita; and Gene Schmidt of Hutchinson.

Dr. Roy Jensen and Dorothy Hughes of Kansas City were in with KU Medical Center to discuss the importance of funding cancer research at the National Institutes of Health. Wade Culwell and Bob Totten of Topeka, Corky Beachner of St. Paul and Mary Sullivan of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Contractors Association to tell me about the need to make sure the Highway Trust Fund is made financially sound in the next highway reauthorization bill due to be considered in 2009.

Kevin Honomichl, Lee Mixon and Robert Riordan of Overland Park; Scott Heidner of Topeka; and Roy Wilson of Lenexa were in representing the American Council of Engineering Companies to discuss our nation's highways and waterways. Dr. Gregory Unruh of Olathe and Dr. Mark Brady of Overland Park were in representing the Kansas Society of Anesthesiologists to explain the need for equality in services under Medicare and the importance of funding anesthesiology teaching programs. Jeff Borchardt and Frank Stone of Shawnee Mission were in with the Kansas City Board of Trade to discuss recent events affecting the commodity futures trading industry.

Debbie Giles of Lawrence was in with a group of students from the American School of Abuja in Niger, Africa, to learn more about Congress and American government. Keith Yehle, Prasad Gogimen and David Braater of Lawrence were in with the University of Kansas to tell me about research conducted by KU faculty and students at the Center for Remote Sensing of Ice Sheets. Kim Barnes of Larned was in with the Pawnee County Cooperative Association to visit about issues impacting Pawnee County, including the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, No Child Left Behind and funding for Critical Care Hospitals.

William Hanson of Manhattan, Carol Bloesser of Tribune, Sherrill Tubbs of Scott City and Ron Miller of Olathe were in representing the Crop Insurance Professional Association to discuss the farm bill and issues affecting crop insurance agents. Phil Jarvis and George Bronson of Winfield were in representing the Public Gas Policy Council of the American Public Gas Association to express their support for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and regulation of natural gas markets to prevent market manipulation. Robert Nattier of North Newton was in with CoBank to advocate for the Farm Credit HORIZONS proposal.

Kansas Secretary of Revenue Joan Wagon of Topeka was in to discuss a number of federal legislative proposals affecting the state of Kansas, as well as efforts to assist Greensburg residents. Members from Kansas Electric Cooperatives across the state were in to talk about new generation projects, the affects of recent natural disasters on electrical infrastructure and railroad shipping problems. In with the group were Stuart Lowry and Phil Wages of Topeka, Earl Watkins of Hays, Alan Miller of Norton, Joe Conley of Delia, Scott Whittington of Burlington, Mike Rogers of St. Francis, Terry Janson and Josh Schmidt of Dodge City, Alan Henning of Cheney, Charles Ayers of Leoti, Perry Rubart of Ulysses and Phil Irwin of Olathe.

Scott Braun of the Ellis County Sheriff's Department stopped in on Friday with his wife, Terry. Scott was honored with a Top Cops Award from the National Association of Police Organizations at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., over the weekend. I congratulate Scott and thank him for his outstanding service to Ellis County. Father Felix Petrovsky of Hays also stopped by the office this week to visit.

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Paul and Dixie Kinney of Salina and Brenda Barrett and Pam Caldwell of Garden City. Robert and Norma Ohlde of Linn also came by with their daughter, Gwendolyn Hovorka.

Very truly yours,

Jerry