

5/21/2007 This Week in Congress

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May 21, 2007

Dear Friend,

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

Viewing Storm Damage in Barton County; More Counties Receive Assistance

On Friday, I was in Claflin and Ellinwood surveying storm damage from the tornados and flooding earlier this month. After seeing the extent of the damage, I requested that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) approve Barton County for Individual and Public Assistance. Later in the day, we received the good news that not only Barton County, but also Edwards, Phillips, Pratt, Osborne, Ottawa and Stafford counties qualified for a Presidential disaster declaration. State and local units of government in Barton, Edwards, Pratt and Stafford counties will receive federal funds to repair or replace disaster-damaged public facilities and infrastructure. Citizens in Barton, Osborne, Ottawa and Phillips counties qualified to receive help from federal programs including housing and small business.

I appreciated the opportunity to join State Representative Bill Wolf, county commissioners, county staff and about 30 citizens in Claflin at Bailey's Food Court to hear individual concerns about the storm damage. After the meeting, I took a

driving tour of area farms that sustained damage, including the Liebl family farm. Thanks to Amy Miller, Barton County Emergency Management Director and Richard Boeckman, County Administrator, for setting up the tour.

While in Barton County, I also met with city staff and local folks in Ellinwood to view flood damage. I was invited to view two local homes that were severely damaged in the flooding. Thanks to Dale and Jonita Masten for opening their homes to me while they were busy cleaning. It was a good chance for me to see how individual assistance from FEMA will help Kansans make needed repairs to their homes.

Calling on FEMA to Provide More Support for Greensburg

I also urged President Bush this week to authorize FEMA to assume 100 percent of federally authorized costs associated with rebuilding Greensburg after their storms the same night as those that hit Barton County. The tornado that swept through Kiowa County on May 4 completely destroyed the community. After natural disasters, FEMA typically covers 75 percent of federally authorized rebuilding costs. In this case, however, the damage is so catastrophic that I encouraged FEMA to help relief efforts by providing this additional cost share assistance. U.S. Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback and fellow Members of Congress Todd Tiahrt, Dennis Moore and Nancy Boyda joined me in making this request.

In my numerous trips to Greensburg since the tornado hit, I have seen not only the devastating damage but also the inspiring actions of Greensburg residents. Their commitment to one another and desire to rebuild their community are a testament to the spirit of Kansans.

[Click here to read the request I made to President Bush.](#) More information about the severe storms that hit Kansas earlier this month and information about how you can help is available on my Web site.

Preparing to Work on the 2007 Farm Bill

I joined House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson, Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte and other members of the committee this week to outline the schedule of the 2007 Farm Bill process. The Agriculture Committee will begin considering portions of the bill in subcommittees beginning this week.

At the same time this schedule was announced, I was disappointed the Democrat-crafted budget also announced this week does not include enough funding to meet the needs of our nation's agricultural producers, fulfill the environmental and conservation needs of our country and satisfy the demand for food stamps and nutrition programs. Although the House Agriculture Committee is committed to working in a bipartisan way to produce a farm bill that allows American agriculture to prosper, the Democratic budget passed this week prevents us from doing so.

Increasing costs of production and multiple weather-related losses have put many producers in a tough position. This is not the time to reduce the safety net provided in the current farm bill. Despite the current crop conditions and the financial circumstances our farmers and ranchers face, the commodity title of this year's farm bill will have 43 percent less funds available compared to the funds available for the 2002 farm bill.

House Bill Enhances Benefits for Military and Approves Fort Riley Projects

I supported House passage of legislation this week that enhances benefits for military personnel and retirees as well as authorizes more than \$260 million for military construction projects at Fort Riley. The 2008 Department of Defense Authorization Act makes improvements to military pay, retiree health insurance and other benefits that are essential to showing our support for those who serve our country. It also lays the groundwork for providing service members the facilities crucial to their training and the quality of life they deserve.

Specifically, the legislation provides a 3.5 percent pay raise for all service members and blocks the Administration's proposed increase in TRICARE and pharmacy user fees for service members and retirees. For more information on this legislation, [click here](#).

Testifying about No Child Left Behind before House Education Committee

This week, I testified before the House Education and Labor Committee about the challenges No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has caused in many schools in Kansas and across the country. I spoke to the committee about legislation I introduced that provides sensible solutions to make this federal program more realistic and manageable.

As Congress looks to improve NCLB, I have proposed the Practicality in Education Act, which places special emphasis on individual student progress to give a more accurate picture of improvements and problem areas. The legislation also provides states with the flexibility to consider special education and rural teachers who teach multiple academic subjects as "highly-qualified" in all subject areas if they meet certain requirements. This is particularly important in rural Kansas, where flexibility is needed in hiring school professionals who often teach several subjects and find it difficult to become certified in all areas.

Although I originally voted against NCLB in 2002 for fear it would place undue hardships on Kansas teachers and students, I look forward to working with the Education and Labor Committee as Congress seeks to make changes to NCLB this summer.

Speaking Out About the Challenges Facing Community Pharmacists

This week, I joined members of the National Community Pharmacist Association (NCPA) and other Members of Congress at a press conference to raise awareness about the challenges facing independent pharmacists. Community pharmacists are struggling to keep their doors open in the face of proposed rule changes that decrease reimbursement rates for Medicaid prescriptions. I have led congressional efforts to convince the Administration to delay or suspend implementation of this rule change. I have also sponsored legislation that allows pharmacists to be reimbursed in a timely manner and allows them to band together to increase their bargaining power.

Members of the Kansas Pharmacists Association were in town for the NCPA annual meeting and joined me at the press conference. Thanks to Sam Boyajian of Gardner, Brian Caswell of Baxter Springs, Jack and Doris Tebow of Quinter, Don Hill of Emporia, Doug and Kathy Funk of Concordia, Gary Haulmark of Prairie Village and Pete Stern of Topeka for their work on behalf of independent pharmacists.

New Regulations Cause Delay in Obtaining Passports

Due to new regulations imposed by the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security and State, many Kansans are experiencing delays with the processing of U.S. passport applications. Beginning earlier this year, the new regulations require all U.S. citizens to present a valid U.S. passport in order to travel by air to any part of the Western Hemisphere. Though passports were not required in the past, Americans flying to Canada or Mexico now need a valid U.S. passport.

Because of the new regulations, the processing time for passport applications is now taking approximately 13 weeks. I have contacted the State Department to express my concern with the delays as many Kansans' travel plans are being held up and Kansans are experiencing difficulties with the passport toll-free hotline. If you or your family has plans to travel outside the country, I encourage you to apply for your passports at least 13 weeks in advance. If you have any questions with the application process or are having problems obtaining information about your pending passport application, please contact one of my district offices. For more information about U.S. passports, you may also visit the State Department's website.

Speaking to the 2007 Graduating Class of Greensburg High School and Attending D.C. Benefit for Greensburg

I joined Senator Pat Roberts and Lt. Governor Mark Parkinson on Saturday to speak at the graduation ceremonies for the 2007 graduating class of Greensburg High School. Due to the high school being destroyed in the Greensburg tornado, the ceremonies were held in front of nearly 1,500 people at the Greensburg golf course.

The theme of the ceremonies was "Let this be our beginning - Seniors and Community." Two weeks ago, these 25 seniors saw the remaining days of their high school careers end abruptly. However, with efforts by the community and volunteers from all over, this event celebrated the bright futures of these young people. My message to these seniors was that everything they needed to know in life, they have learned in Greensburg in the last two weeks. These students and this community have endured tremendous challenges, but the character they've shown gives us all hope for tomorrow.

On Wednesday evening I attended a benefit event hosted by the Kansas State Society of Washington, D.C. to raise money to assist tornado relief and recovery efforts in Greensburg. The Kansas State Society is composed of Kansans living in our nation's capital. I applaud their generosity in support of the residents of Greensburg. The event was a touching

reminder of the bond that ties Kansans together in concern for the well-being of their neighbors, no matter where our travels take us in life.

Speaking at McPherson High School Graduation

On Saturday, I also delivered the commencement address to the 2007 graduating class of McPherson High School in McPherson. I appreciated the opportunity to share this important milestone with these 174 students and their families. I wish the students all the best and hope they continue to pursue educational opportunities throughout their lifetimes. [Click here to read the speech I delivered to the class of 2007.](#)

In the Office

Dr. Chuck Rice of Manhattan was in with Kansas State University to talk about the efforts of the Consortium for Agricultural Soils Mitigation of Greenhouse Gases. Nicholas Brown of Olathe was in with Appalachian Voices to tell me about the effects of mountaintop-removal coal mining. Dr. Matt Floersch of Manhattan, Dr. Donald Hatton of Lawrence and Dr. Donna Sweet of Wichita were in with the American College of Physicians to discuss Medicare reimbursement rates and the potential shortage in primary care doctors. Dale and Dorothy Grothusen of Ellsworth were also in to visit.

Deliah Davis of Hutchinson was in with the Partnership for Prescription Assistance to share her story about how this program helped her secure necessary prescription drugs. Blaine and Michele Saunders of Leavenworth, Pete Story of Leawood and Scott Lopez of Olathe were in with the ALS Association to describe the need for a national registry for Lou Gehrig's disease and to advocate for increased research and designation by the Department of Defense. Dale and Erin Patrick of McPherson, Wayne and Mandi Dotts of Hays, Merl and Brandy Ney of Russell, Mario Rios of Manhattan, Mark and Tamatha Engholm and Mike Hulsey of Larned were in with the Kansas Highway Patrol to visit.

Kansas State Representative Pat Colloton of Leawood was in to promote a program with an aim to reduce crime. Jim Schuster, Chairman and CEO of Hawker Beechcraft Corporation in Wichita, was in with the General Aviation Manufacturers Association to discuss new proposals that are being considered to fund our nation's airports and the effect some of these plans would have on the general aviation plant in Salina. Paul Cooper of Washington, Catherine Moyer and Dick Veatch of Ulysses, Larry Sevier of Lenora, Janet Bathurst of Allen and Tim Gleason of Lawrence were in to advocate for legislation important to small rural telecommunication companies.

Dr. Rick Kellerman and Dr. Jennifer Koontz of Wichita and Dr. Robert Moser of Tribune were in representing the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians to discuss improving rural veterans' access to health care and the need to prevent physician payment cuts. Rob Manes of the Nature Conservancy dropped by to talk about the Conservation Reserve Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program. Mr. Manes also gave me an update on his daughter Aubrey who is attending the Naval Academy.

Leslie and Jessica Seidel of Topeka were in to advocate for increased awareness and research for Eosinophilic Disorders. Greg Nelson of Manhattan was in with the National Egg Producers to talk about his poultry operation in Kansas and the organization's farm bill priorities. Also this week, I met with members of the Kansas Association of Realtors to discuss legislation before Congress affecting the real estate industry. In with the group were Luke Bell and Mike McGrew of Lawrence, Delores Dalke of Hillsboro, Diane Green and Connie Goodnow of Topeka, Trista Curzydlo of Wichita, Pat Tholen of Leawood and Rob Curtis of Overland Park.

In this week to talk about conservation programs in the 2007 Farm Bill were Cherrie Nolden of Pratt with Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Troy Schroeder of Pratt with Kansas Rural Center and Barth Crouch of Salina with Pheasants Forever. Tom Shanower, Director of the USDA Grain Marketing and Production Research Center in Manhattan, stopped by to introduce himself and tell me about the research being done to solve agriculture problems.

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C. office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol. Gordon Kuntz, of Hays came by with his son Chad Kuntz of Olathe. Tammy Ellis and Cal Lantis of Ottawa, Tonya and Kelly Bell of Topeka, Brian Jones of Pittsburg and Lee McClelland of Overland Park also stopped by for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry