

## 6/04/2007 This Week in Congress

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June 4, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Congress was out of session for the week of Memorial Day which gave me the opportunity to spend time meeting with many Kansans. I will return to Washington, D.C., tomorrow following the Agriculture Committee hearing in Salina. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Touring Reno County Flood and Levee Damage, More Counties Receive Assistance

Local, state and federal officials joined me Friday for a tour of flood and levee damage in Reno County. In addition to the tour, we discussed county-wide recovery efforts and funding options to repair the levee. That afternoon, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) notified me that Reno County was designated to receive Public Assistance for recovery efforts from the recent severe storms and flooding. The designation also includes Chase, Clay, Lyon, Nemaha, Osborne, Reno, Rice, Saline and Washington Counties. A Public Assistance declaration means state and local units of government can be partially reimbursed to repair or replace disaster-damaged public facilities and infrastructure.

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Thanks to the following individuals for joining me: State Senator Terry Bruce; State Representative Mark Treaster; Bill

Guy, Reno County Emergency Management Director; Tim Davies, Reno County Administrator; Shari Gagnebin, Reno County Clerk; Paul Taylor, Sedgwick County Public Works Director of Storm Water Management; Mike Abate, Tulsa Army Corps of Engineers; Ouida Taylor and Ross Fredenberg, FEMA; Jess Crockford and Paul Gallagher, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Frances Garcia and Francis Schoepf, Reno County Commissioners; Ken King, Dick Kauffman and Richard Seck, Yoder Drainage District; Jim Bogner, Reno County Drainage District No. 2; and Jerry Schmidt and Dale Kauffman, Reno County Drainage District No. 3.

Special appreciation goes to Bill Guy and Jerry Schmidt for arranging the tour. I am pleased that officials from the appropriate federal agencies were able to personally witness the extensive levee damage and resulting jeopardy in which citizens of Reno County find themselves. I am hopeful that FEMA, NRCS and the Corps of Engineers can work in cooperation with local officials to find a solution to this pressing problem. [Click here](#) for more information on federal assistance for areas affected by the May storms and for a list of counties now eligible for public and individual assistance.

#### Studying Hunger Issues in Kansas

This week, I visited Salina, McPherson and Wichita to learn more about hunger issues in Kansas. As the House Agriculture Committee begins writing the 2007 Farm Bill, I took this opportunity to hear from Kansans about how to make food stamps and other programs more accessible and efficient. I also wanted to learn about how Kansans are working in their own communities, as well as across the state and around the world to address the needs of those who are hungry.

I met with Social and Rehabilitation Service (SRS) Secretary Don Jordan in Salina to discuss how the Food Stamp Program is working in Kansas. He shared ways that the federal government can change the program to help include more households who may be facing hunger. I look forward to working with the SRS to make sure elderly and rural Kansans who qualify for food stamps are participating in the program.

My thanks to all of the others who hosted and joined us for the stops, including Reverend Steve Kmetz at the Rescue Mission in Salina; Cindy Foley, Director of Salina's USD 305 Food and Nutrition Services; Sherie Rhoder at the Foods Resource Bank in McPherson; and Brian Walker, President and CEO of the Kansas Food Bank in Wichita. [Click here](#) to see where I visited and what hunger and nutrition topics were discussed.

## Recognizing the Community of Tipton with Building Better Communities Award

I was in Tipton this week to recognize residents with my Building Better Communities award. This small community of 250 people has come together to keep vital services in its town, as well as creating new opportunities for area residents.

In the summer of 2003, residents came together to create Tipton Christian School in less than two months after it was announced the local public school was closing. The private K-6 facility was constructed entirely with volunteer labor and funded through private donations. The community then utilized the closed elementary school building to start Tipton Academy. The Academy focuses on placing troubled boys in a positive environment through community involvement. Tipton has also maintained an active business community, including companies like Great Plains Manufacturing, which recently doubled the size of its agricultural equipment manufacturing plant, and Hollerich Construction, which is expanding its Tipton-based operation.

[Click here to read more about the community of Tipton.](#) You may also read about other community award recipients [here](#).

McPherson Site of Ninth Kansas Veterans' Forum

On Wednesday, I hosted a veterans' forum in McPherson. Tom Sanders, Director of the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Wichita, and Daniel Umlauf, Director of the Robert J. Dole Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office also of Wichita, joined me to provide updates to veterans about benefits, health care and other veteran-related issues.

About 90 veterans from the area attended and asked questions ranging from access to mental health care to the current backlog of pending claims at the VA. While we have had several recent successes for veterans, more work and funding for mental health and family services must be accomplished to ensure adequate and accessible health care for the men and women who have served our country. I appreciate the people who were able to attend and the hospitality of VFW Post #2715 in McPherson. Thank you to Post Commander Bobby Cox for leading the Pledge of Allegiance and to Kansas VFW State Commander James Graham for introducing me at the beginning of the forum.

#### Receiving Plaque from the Kansas Patriot Guard

Before the start of the veterans' forum, I was honored to receive a plaque of appreciation from area Patriot Guard members. The Patriot Guard began in 2005 when American Legion Riders from Mulvane responded to protestors disrupting funerals of service members. These Kansas motorcycle riders provide an invaluable level of comfort to families and friends during the funerals. I am honored to receive this recognition, but the real recognition goes to these individuals for their service to military families.

#### Inviting Kansans to Attend Agriculture Committee Hearing Tomorrow in Salina

Tomorrow, I am hosting members of the House Agriculture Committee in Salina for a hearing on Kansas agriculture. Not every Kansan is a farmer, but every Kansan is affected by agriculture. As the House Agriculture Committee continues writing the next farm bill, I wanted to give Kansas farmers a chance to share their views on this important legislation.

The Committee will hear from witnesses from all parts of the state that represent a variety of agricultural experience. The hearing is open to the public. I invite you and anyone interested in agriculture policy to attend. Although the witness list is complete, any individual or organization will be able to submit written testimony tomorrow at the hearing or to the House Agriculture Committee in the following ten days. I also welcome Kansans to visit my Web site to share their thoughts with me.

The hearing will be Tuesday, June 5 from 9:00-11:00 a.m. at the K-State at Salina College Center Conference Room, 2310 Centennial Road, in Salina. Parking is available to the south of the building.

[Click here for the list of Kansans testifying and to listen to my audio on this topic.](#)

Thanking Kansas Bureau of Investigation Director Larry Welch

On Friday evening, I attended the retirement dinner for Kansas Bureau of Investigation Director Larry Welch in Wichita. Former Kansas Attorney General Bob Stephan led the evening events and numerous friends, family and colleagues were in attendance. Director Welch has given back to his state and country for 46 years with much of his career dedicated to making Kansas a safe and desirable place to live and visit.

Director Welch has been a strong advocate in the fight against methamphetamine and its devastating impact on communities across Kansas. He is also known for his care and compassion for the law enforcement community in Kansas. I commend Director Welch's service as a leader and innovator in law enforcement and join his many friends and admirers in thanking him for his great service to our state and country. [Click here to read my remarks to the U.S. House of Representatives honoring Director Welch.](#)

### Supporting Special Olympics through the Kansas Law Enforcement Torch Run

I joined Special Olympics Kansas athletes and law enforcement officers from across the state on Friday for the opening ceremonies of the 2007 Summer Games. I am serving as the Honorary Chairman of the Kansas Law Enforcement Torch Run (LETR) this year. LETR is a year-round fundraising and awareness initiative that is the single largest supporter of Special Olympics Kansas. Kansas law enforcement officers volunteer hundreds of hours each year and in 2006 raised more than \$239,000 in support of Special Olympics Kansas programs.

The dedication of our Kansas law enforcement officers to this worthy cause is admirable and I am honored to be a part of it. By supporting Special Olympics, we provide encouragement and an avenue for those with disabilities to grow personally, as well as within their communities.

### Joining Ellinwood Residents for Memorial Day

On Memorial Day, I joined Ellinwood residents for a Memorial Day Ceremony at the Lakin-Comanche Cemetery. I appreciated the invitation to attend the community's annual event to honor the men and women of Ellinwood and surrounding communities who have answered the call of service to our country. [Click here to read my Memorial Day](#)

remarks.

#### Meeting with North Central Kansas Hospital Administrators

I joined the hospital administrators and board members of north central Kansas hospitals this week to talk about hospital reimbursement issues and the current outlook for health care legislation in Washington, D.C. The group was together as a part of the Sunflower Health Network, which consists of 16 hospitals in central and north central Kansas. The network's mission is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of health care in the region. I appreciated the opportunity to join the group during their conference in Salina.

#### Remembering the Life of John Brethour of Hays

On Friday, I attended the funeral services for John Brethour of Hays. Mr. Brethour was a research scientist for 46 years at the Kansas State University Agricultural Research Center where he focused on beef cattle production. He is known for his development of ultrasound technology to determine the optimal time to feed and market beef cattle.

Mr. Brethour received numerous awards for his work, including being named one of the top 40 people in the U.S. cattle industry by Beef Magazine in 2004. In addition to his involvement in the agriculture industry, Mr. Brethour was an active member of the Hays community. My and Robba's thoughts and prayers are with his wife and son, Carole and Johnny, during this difficult time. John will be greatly missed, but his years of research and work will continue to be instrumental in the cattle industry for years to come.

## In the Office

Several Kansans were in my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including Kenneth and Wilma Thomas of Clay Center and John and Carolyn Smith of Johnson. In from Hays were Dave and Karen Coen with their children, Kaitlyn, Kellye and Kristin, as were Steven and Lucinda Martin of McPherson with their children, Rebecca, Joseph, Hannah and Maria. Students from Sabetha Middle School also stopped by for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week.

Very truly yours,

Jerry