

6/11/2007 This Week in Congress

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June 11, 2007

Dear Friend,

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

Funding Available for Reno County Levees

Following a meeting on Thursday in Kansas City with officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, I am pleased to report that severely damaged levees in southeastern Reno County are now eligible for funds to help with flood fighting, such as sandbagging and debris removal, as well as emergency repair activities.

After viewing the damage and meeting with local officials two weeks ago, I am glad to see federal officials coming together to help address this tremendous challenge. The input of local community leaders was beneficial in convincing FEMA that assistance was warranted.

Funding is provided through the FEMA Public Assistance program, which helps state and local units of government repair or replace disaster damaged public facilities and infrastructure. This morning, an information meeting about the Public Assistance declaration is going on in Hutchinson with representatives from FEMA, the Kansas Division of Emergency Management and Tulsa Corp of Engineers. I am also scheduled to visit with FEMA Administrator David Paulison tomorrow about the need for FEMA's continuing response to disasters across Kansas.

[Click here to read more details about the assistance for the Reno County levees.](#)

House Agriculture Subcommittee Hears from Kansas Farmers in Salina

On Tuesday, I hosted members of the House Agriculture Committee in Salina for a hearing on the state of agriculture in Kansas. The hearing was conducted by the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management of which I serve as the senior Republican member.

It is important to hear from Kansas farmers and be able to take their common sense approach back with us to Washington, D.C., as we begin drafting the Commodity Title of the 2007 Farm Bill. The nine witnesses talked about the major issues confronting agricultural producers in Kansas, including recovering from weather related disasters, incentives for new farmers, farm program payments and high energy costs. Thanks to witnesses Bill Miller of Princeton; Steve Rome of Hugoton; John Pracht of Westphalia; Barry Childs of Belleville; Gary Parker of Moran; Mark Meisinger of Lincolnville; Lee Robbins of Yates Center; Troy Dumler, Kansas State University Professor of Agricultural Economics, of Garden City; and Brian Starck of Fairbury, Nebraska. Their testimony is available on the House Agriculture Committee Web site.

I appreciated having Subcommittee Chairman Bob Etheridge of North Carolina and Representatives Nancy Boyda of Kansas, Steve King of Iowa and Adrian Smith of Nebraska join us for the hearing in the First District. Thank you also to K-State at Salina for the facilities. I welcome Kansans to share their thoughts with me about the 2007 Farm Bill by visiting my Web site.

Good News for Kansans Waiting on Passports

After continued insistence from me and other members of Congress, the White House announced changes on Friday to loosen passport rules for those traveling in the Western Hemisphere, including Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean and Bermuda. As of Friday, any Kansan who has applied for but not yet received their passport can use government-issued photo identification and a print-out of the online status check from the Department of State as their passport through September 30, 2007. The proof of application can be obtained at <http://travel.state.gov/passport>.

New regulations by the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security and State to strengthen border security have created a tremendous backlog for passport approval. These new regulations require Americans flying out of the U.S. to destinations in the Western Hemisphere to have a valid U.S. passport.

Temporarily changing these new regulations will ease the burden on the passport agency and hopefully reduce worry among Kansans about receiving passports in time for upcoming travel. Please note, however, that this new rule does not affect entry requirements to other countries. Americans traveling beyond the Western Hemisphere must still have a valid U.S. passport.

If you have any questions about the application process, the new rules or if you are having problems obtaining information about your pending passport application, please contact one of my Kansas offices.

Discussing the 2007 Farm Bill with Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns

On Wednesday, United States Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Chuck Connor and Congressman Etheridge joined me in my office to discuss USDA's 2007 Farm Bill Proposal. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss the Commodity Title with Secretary Johanns. It was a good to hear the Administration's suggestions, as well as allow me an opportunity to discuss my concerns with the proposal before the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management considers its version of the Commodity Title on June 19.

Agriculture Subcommittee Reviews Crop Insurance Program

The House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management held a hearing this week to review the integrity and efficiency of the federal crop insurance program. This is the third hearing conducted by our subcommittee to review crop insurance in preparation for drafting the 2007 Farm Bill.

Crop insurance is an essential component of the safety net utilized by farmers and it must continue to serve this purpose. The crop insurance program is unique from other forms of insurance in that it utilizes taxpayer dollars. For this reason, it is the Agriculture Committee's responsibility to see that these dollars are being spent wisely.

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) runs the program and RMA Administrator Eldon Gould joined us for the hearing, as did Dr. Keith Collins, USDA Chief Economist. We also heard from crop insurance representatives and agriculture economists. Testifying from Kansas was Dr. Art Barnaby Jr., Professor of Agricultural Economics at Kansas State University.

Accepting Internship Applications for the Fall

I had the opportunity as a college student to be an intern in Washington, D.C., for First District Congressman Keith Sebelius. My internship opened my eyes to the possibility that I could work as a public servant to make things better for Kansas. Since becoming a Member of Congress, I have enjoyed the opportunity to offer Kansas students the same chance I had to see firsthand how a congressional office operates and how the legislative process works.

I am now accepting applications for fall internships in my Washington, D.C., Hays, Hutchinson and Salina offices. Congressional interns assist with legislative and administrative projects on behalf of Kansans. Applications are due by July 9. [Click here](#) for more information on how to apply.

Attending the 2007 Beef Empire Days Parade

On Saturday, I was in Garden City to participate in the 2007 Beef Empire Days parade. The parade theme was "BEEF, America's Heritage," in recognition of area feed yard cowboys. Beef Empire Days has been a Garden City tradition since

1968. This year's festivities included the Western Art Show, carcass judging contest, live animal show, a road run, tennis tournament, softball tournament and PRCA Rodeo.

Visiting the Community of Kalvesta

En route to Garden City on Saturday, I stopped in Kalvesta to visit the co-op, implement dealership and elevator. Kalvesta is in Finney County. I enjoyed visiting with local farmers and residents about this year's wheat crop, immigration, the 2007 Farm Bill, as well as the No Child Left Behind legislation.

In the Office

A group of Manhattan citizens were in representing the Chamber of Commerce to discuss issues important to the community. We talked about making sure Manhattan has reliable air service and access to quality healthcare through the hospital, as well as the recruitment of the National Agro and Bio Defense Facility to Manhattan. In with the group were Randy Anderes, Lyle Butler, Jerry and Linda Weis, State Representative Sydney Carlin, Dick Carter, Neil Farmer, Kent Glasscock, Jeff Levin, Sue Peterson and Fred Willich.

Sandy Barnett of Topeka and Susan Moran of Emporia were in representing the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence to advocate for full funding of the Violence Against Women's Act and the Victims of Crime Act. They also highlighted the importance of rural outreach efforts and the continued need to raise awareness about this issue. Dr. Tyler Hughes of McPherson was in representing the American College of Surgeons to discuss the importance of reforming the Medicare physician payment system in order to ensure patient access to care. Velma Goertzen of Inman was in this week with the American Association for Homecare to tell me about the importance of durable medical equipment, oxygen therapy and homecare to Medicare beneficiaries.

Members of the Kansas Livestock Association were in our nation's capital to participate in the Young Cattlemen's Conference. While in Washington, Eddie Nichols of Dodge City, Brett Spader of Lawrence, Matt Perrier of Eureka and Brian Groepper of Overland Park stopped by my office to discuss issues affecting young cattlemen in Kansas. Steve Johnson of Lawrence was in with the Kansas Gas Service to tell me about the draft environmental impact statement for the Overland Pass Pipeline project. Robert Cerda of Olathe was in with Crop Insurance Systems to talk about a proposal to make more insurance policies available to consumers.

Diane Forgy of Leawood was in with the National Limousine Association to discuss the RIDE Act, which would prevent the collection of fees by airports on limousines that cross state lines. Dwight Tully of Salina, Rick Wilborn of McPherson, Lori Church and David Hanson of Topeka, Del Chisolm of Leavenworth and Tony Kimmi of Manhattan were in with the Kansas Insurance Association to talk about the importance of preserving state regulation of insurance. State Board of Education Member Sally Cauble and her husband, Steve, of Liberal joined Judi Miller of Topeka with the Kansas Department of Education to discuss the migrant education program and make recommendations for No Child Left Behind.

Ron Miller of Overland Park and Dr. Art Barnaby of Manhattan were in with the Crop Insurance Research Bureau to talk about the crop insurance program. Representatives of the Kansas Building Contractor Association were in to voice their opposition to mandatory building codes and discuss regional approaches to achieving energy efficiency. In with the group were Gary Pashman, Chris Wilson and Dawn Right of Topeka; Mike George, Carl Harris, Tim and Jan Shigley, Vern Klassen, Thomas Baalman Jr., M.S. Mitchell, Wesley Galyon and Tony Zimbelman of Wichita; Jim Goentzel of Valley Center; Farrol and Marcie Brown of Pretty Prairie; and Sid Ziegler of Lawrence.

Brad and Sherri Luthe and Rose Mary Mohr of Wichita and Patsy Terrell of Hutchinson were in representing the Mental Health Association of South Central Kansas to talk about the importance of training and empowering parents to help children deal with mental health issues and the need for community support services. Dain Roose Snyder of Junction City was in with Edenspace to give me an update on the company's relocation to Junction City. Edenspace is a biotechnology firm that uses plants for environmental protection and renewable fuels.

Many Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol, including Erica and Ed Debesis of Beloit, Joan Jackson and Barbara Harris of Salina, John and Carolyn Smith of Johnson, Cyntila Nixon of Tipton, Cody Crenshaw of Wichita, Leonard and Beth Wolfe of Marysville, Brett Landoll of Manhattan and Travis Hampl of Hiawatha. In from Buhler were Michele Martens and Ken and Charlene Hogan. Nancy Jackson of Eudora came by with her daughters, Abby and Katie, as did Richard and Melissa Burks of Beloit with their daughter, Lindsay of Connecticut. Brent and Shellie Billau also stopped by with their children, Will and Adam, of Overland Park. In from Hutchinson were Rosemary Wagner; Myron and Pam Sasse with their daughters, Shelbi and Lindy; and Jeanette Ladd with students from Prairie Hills Middle School, located in Hutchinson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry