

6/25/2007 This Week in Congress

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June 25, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House this week passed two of the annual spending bills for the federal government, including funding for the State Department and foreign aid agencies, as well as for the legislative branch.

"This Week in Congress" is also available on my Web site each week. If you have trouble viewing it in your email or would like to view it online, you may access it [here](#).

Bringing Fellow Kansans in Congress to Greensburg

To give my congressional colleagues an opportunity to see the damage firsthand and gain a better understanding of the work ahead, I hosted a visit to Greensburg on Sunday with Congresswoman Nancy Boyda of Topeka and Congressman Dennis Moore of Lenexa. As we consider future legislative assistance for this community, I felt it was important to have them meet face-to-face with the dedicated personnel working day and night to rebuild the town of Greensburg after it was destroyed by a tornado on May 4.

A wide variety of state, local and federal officials came out to discuss how the clean up is progressing and what is needed to assist them in their efforts. The biggest issue facing the city right now is finding the funds necessary to hire long-range planning personnel and important administrative staff such as project managers, building supervisors and surveyors. The city received a grant, but we are working at the federal level to ensure the city is able to use the funds as they are most needed.

Following the meeting, we took a tour of the city to view the damage, but also to see the rebuilding efforts. I want to thank all of those who attended, especially State Representative Dennis McKinney, FEMA Region VII Director Dick Hainje, Kansas Adjutant General Tod Bunting, Greensburg City Manager Steve Hewitt, Kiowa County Commissioner Gene West, Greensburg Mayor John Janssen, South Central Kansas Tornado Recovery Director Kathleen Blair, Executive Director of Regional Red Cross Donna Meier-Pfeifer, Lighthouse Worship Center Director Pastor Christa Zapfe, State Coordinating Officer for Kansas Division of Emergency Management Angee Morgan, Federal Coordinating Officer for FEMA Mike Karl, Deputy Field Operation Manager for the Small Business Association Carl Gaspari and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development officials - National Housing Program Administrator Russell Davis, State Director Chuck Banks and State Housing Administrator Tim Rogers.

Prior to the meeting, Representatives Boyda and Moore joined me for the Methodist Church service held in a tent on the southwest corner of town. The resilience and hope demonstrated by this community never fails to impress me. At no point has there been the discussion over "if" they should rebuild, only "how." My hope is that this visit will give my colleagues more information so we can be of greater assistance in the community's efforts.

Rededication of Public Housing in Greensburg

Following the meeting, the group took part in a ribbon cutting for the first USDA Rural Development-funded housing complex to re-open in Greensburg. I was honored to join Director Banks and Administrators Davis and Rogers to

rededicate this 12-unit facility. This housing complex is an example of how federal and local resources can work together to help a community in times of need.

Agriculture Subcommittee Votes on Farm Bill Provisions for Kansas Farmers

This week, the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, of which I serve as the Republican leader, unanimously approved an extension of most provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill Commodity Title. A draft had been proposed that contemplated reducing direct payments, raising loan rates and increasing the counter cyclical program target prices - a step toward more trade distorting subsidies and away from a safety net that would most benefit Kansas producers. It was a step in the wrong direction and one I worked hard to prevent.

Although the Subcommittee renewed a majority of the current Commodity Title, the Agriculture Committee's work is far from over. I continue to be engaged in pursuing a more effective and trade-compliant system of delivering a farm safety net. However, given the divergent views of Congress and current budget constraints that have left us with 58 percent less funds than were spent during the last farm bill, further changes may be difficult to achieve.

I will continue to advocate for agriculture policy that uses taxpayer dollars responsibly, is more free market oriented and less trade distorting, allows producers to earn a reasonable living and helps to preserve the rural communities that we in Kansas call home.

Welcoming Home Kansas Guard Soldiers in Pratt

On Saturday, I joined Adjutant General Tod Bunting and residents of southwest and south central Kansas on Saturday in welcoming home from Iraq 26 Kansas National Guard soldiers of 3rd Platoon, Battery B, 1st Battalion, 161st Field Artillery. The ceremony at Pratt Community College was filled with joy and celebration for those returning home, as well as sorrow and tribute for Staff Sgt. David Berry of Wichita who was killed in February by an improvised explosive device (IED) and for the eight other members of this unit who were wounded. I welcomed these soldiers home and thanked them for their service to our country.

Kansans Receive NOAA Weather Radio Awards

I joined Ryan McClung of Nex-Tech Rural Telephone Company of Lenora on Thursday for the Mark Trail Award ceremony by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA). Ryan serves as a Mobile Radio Supervisor at Nex-Tech and was in our nation's capital to accept the award on the company's behalf. The award honors groups and individuals who use or provide NOAA Weather Radio receivers and transmitters to save lives and protect property. Following a December blizzard last year that collapsed a NOAA Weather Radio transmitter tower in Lenora, employees from Nex-Tech worked quickly to erect a temporary tower that allowed northwest Kansans to receive critical weather information. Also honored with the Mark Trail Award was KSNT-TV Channel 27 News Chief Meteorologist Bruce Jones of Topeka. I congratulate both Ryan and Bruce and thank them for their outstanding service.

Supporting Kansas Athletes Competing at the World Special Olympics in China

I joined athletes and supporters of Special Olympics Kansas on Sunday in Leawood to raise money for Kansas athletes competing in China at the World Olympics. 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. Since 1970, Special Olympics Kansas has provided individuals with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to improve their physical fitness, build greater self-confidence and form meaningful friendships. This organization does great work in our state and I am pleased to lend my support. Thanks to Bob and Ann Regnier for hosting this event at their home.

Visiting the Community of Maple Hill

On Monday morning en route back to Washington, D.C., I stopped in Maple Hill. While there, I visited with area residents at Maple Hill Market, Puffy's Steak House and Stock Growers State Bank.

In the Office

Charles Atkinson of Great Bend, Kenlon Johannes of Topeka and Patrick Lappe of Leawood were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to discuss the soybean growers' biodiesel initiatives and legislative priorities. Fred LaGreca of Hutchinson was in with General Motors Corporation to share his views on the Corporate Average Fuel Economy standard for automobiles. Allan Sents of McPherson was in with the United States Cattleman's Association to discuss farm bill issues related to the beef industry.

Representatives of the Kansas Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance were in to talk about the need to increase physical education in schools to prevent childhood obesity and to decrease health care costs. In with the group were Katie Bacon of Emporia, Lori Heger of Maize and Vicki Worrell of Wichita. Congratulations to Ms. Bacon and Ms. Heger for being selected as the Central District's middle and high school Teachers of the Year.

Dr. Rick Ginsberg of Lawrence and Maya Israel of Overland Park were in with the University of Kansas to highlight the School of Education's successes and their plans to help recruit teachers in the math and science fields. Hannah Koops of Ulysses was in to tell me about her experience in the Presidential Classroom program. Haley DaVee of Hays was in with the Kansas Credit Union Association to talk about a proposal to expand credit union services to underserved areas.

On Thursday, I welcomed back Kellie Roy and Grant Adams of Hays and Andrew Toth of Colby from a 10-month study abroad program in Germany. Kellie, Grant and Andrew participated in the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange program and made a brief stop in Washington, D.C., before heading back home to Kansas.

Fred Cholick, Dean of Kansas State University's College of Agriculture, was in to talk about the research title of the farm bill and how it would affect K-State. Matt Teagarden and Allie Devine of Topeka, John Butler of Manhattan and Tracy Brunner of Ramona were in with the Kansas Livestock Association to discuss portions of the 2007 Farm Bill. Patrick Meier of Hays and Ken Canfield of Overland Park also stopped by while in Washington, D.C., this week to visit.

Many Kansans stopped by my office for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including Derek Watson of Lindsborg, Nancy Meeks of Kansas City, Stephanie and Brett Billinger of Park, Robin Herrman of Garden City and Paul and Margarie Yaroslaski of Dodge City. Dana, Kari, Jacob and Connor Kresky of McPherson were in, as were Leslie and Kaitlin Morgan of Deerfield and Ryan and Wendy McClung of Ellis. Also in from Hutchinson were Barbara Gray and Skip, Joy, Taylor and Angela Johnson.

Very truly yours,

Jerry