

7/09/2007 This Week in Congress

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July 9, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." Because of Independence Day, Congress was out of session this week. I was in Kansas and enjoyed spending time in several communities celebrating our country's 231st birthday. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Touring Flood Damage in Southeast Kansas

Mother Nature has once again set her sights on Kansas. Heavy rains over the weekend of June 30 dropped 15 to 20 inches in southeast Kansas, causing extensive flooding. On Monday, I joined Governor Sebelius to see the flooding in Fredonia, Cherryvale, Coffeyville, Chanute and Osawatomie. The flooding was the worst I have ever seen. We were unable to land in several areas because there were simply no dry locations.

The following day, on July 2, the President approved the request to declare a federal disaster area for 18 flooded counties in southeast Kansas. This Presidential declaration will provide federal assistance for disaster relief and emergency assistance. While local volunteers and state officials are working diligently to provide emergency assistance

to those in need, state and local resources are strained. This federal assistance will provide much needed assistance to the victims of the storm.

This has been an odd weather year in our state. In the First District alone, 62 of the 69 counties have been declared federal disaster areas in the past eight months from natural disasters. Snow, ice, tornadoes and floods have damaged property, crops and public infrastructure. Despite the hard times, I continue to be encouraged by the resiliency of Kansans and their drive to clean up, rebuild and put their lives back together.

Joining Kansans to Celebrate the Fourth of July

Clay Center: On Monday, I joined Clay Center residents for a Fourth of July Block Party at the home of State Representative Vern and Susan Swanson. I appreciated the invitation of former Clay County Magistrate Judge Ruth Browne to join the group and enjoyed meeting with those in attendance, including many Clay County residents and area legislators. I enjoyed the music of the community band that played. It was great to see family, friends and neighbors joining together to celebrate our country's Independence Day.

Hillsboro: I was in Hillsboro on Tuesday for the second annual Fourth of July Eve Celebration sponsored by the Friends of the Hillsboro Museums. I spoke to area residents at the Schaeffler House Museum. The evening's entertainment included a community band, a children's parade and appearances by Abe Lincoln and Uncle Sam. Thanks to Mayor Delores Dalke for the invitation to join residents.

After the celebration, I toured the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church. The church was completed just last month and replaces the building that was destroyed in a fire in March of 2004. Thanks to Fire Chief Ben Steketee; Paul Penner, who serves on the church council; Don Ratzlaff with the Hillsboro Free Press; and Darrel Driggers, building chairman, and his wife, Charlene, for showing me the beautiful new church and for the book they presented me, "Trial by Fire." The new

structure is one of the most impressive church buildings I have ever seen and will well serve its congregation of 450 area residents.

Junction City: On the morning of the Fourth, I was in Junction City for the annual Sundown Salute parade and veterans ceremony. This week long celebration is one of the largest Independence Day events in Kansas. Following the parade, I joined Major General Carter Ham, the Commanding General at Fort Riley, and hundreds of citizens for a ceremony at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Heritage Park. It was an honor for me to participate in this event and also observe a wreath laying ceremony by the U.S. Army. I appreciate the hospitality extended to me by the citizens of Junction City. Thanks also to Jim and Sehee Germann for driving me in the parade.

Greensburg: Later that day, a rain soaked Independence Day celebration at Greensburg did not dampen the spirit of the hundreds of area residents and supporters in attendance. I enjoyed visiting with local citizens and continue to be inspired by the positive, forward-looking manner in which they are rebuilding their lives and their community.

Special thanks go to PigMasters Butch Bragg, Davis North, Greg Brooks, Jeff Clark, Kevin Morse, Matt Turcola and Wayland Cooke. Free of charge, this group of gentlemen traveled from Greensboro, North Carolina, with 10 dressed hogs and other donated food and supplies. They prepared a delicious, hickory smoked, North Carolina-style pig pickin'. I appreciated Kevin showing me how to chop a little North Carolina pork. This is not the first time PigMasters has donated time, talent and resources in a time of need. A week after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, they fed more than 1,000 National Guardsmen.

Thanks to Larry Burke for organizing the fireworks display and Matt Deighton for working locally to coordinate the day's activities. This generous team effort is an example of what is good about our country and why we can be thankful to be Americans.

Hays: On Wednesday evening, my family and I enjoyed the fireworks at historic old Fort Hays. On Saturday, I participated in the Wild West Fest parade and spoke at a program recognizing our soldiers serving in Iraq and our military and civilian first responders who have come to the aid of Kansans in times of tragedy, including the recent events in Greensburg. The program included the color guard, music by the High Plains Barbershop Chorus and a picnic.

The annual Wild West Fest, which features concerts, carnival games and more, allows families to come together as a community and celebrate this important day. I enjoyed the opportunity to visit with many Kansans at this year's event. Thanks to Wild West Fest Executive Director Deb Polfka-Pape, the sponsors of the event and co-chairs Bob Swift and Mary Karst, as well as all of the volunteers. My thanks also to Josh Zweifel for driving me in the parade.

Decatur County Hospital to Add Outpatient Medical Clinic with USDA Assistance

On Thursday, I attended a USDA Rural Development Agency check presentation with State Director Chuck Banks for the Decatur County Hospital in Oberlin. The funds will be used to construct a new outpatient medical clinic. I appreciate the work of USDA Rural Development and their efforts to partner with the people of Decatur County on this project. The joint venture will enhance the quality of medical services available to citizens in Oberlin and the surrounding area.

Touring Bus and Coach International in Jennings

Also on Thursday, I stopped in Jennings for a tour of the former high school building that has been renovated into corporate offices and a refurbishing center for Bus and Coach International (BCI). BCI is now one of five major bus coach manufacturers in the world. They manufacture new luxury coaches and refurbish used coaches. The community attracted BCI to the area through advertising the sale of its school building on eBay. The business has created new economic activity in the Jennings area. Thank you to Lois Heilman for the tour of the facility. It is exciting to welcome BCI to Kansas and to see such economic growth in rural Kansas communities.

Visiting the Family Crisis Center in Great Bend

I joined Executive Director Laura Patzner, board members and staff at the Family Crisis Center in Great Bend on Friday for a tour of the facility and discussion about domestic violence and the resources available to survivors in the central part of the state. In addition to Barton County, the Family Crisis Center serves nine other counties in the area. The shelter is furnished by the Catholic Diocese of Dodge City.

I appreciated the opportunity to visit about how important federal funding is to organizations like this center. Much of the work and funding at the center can be attributed to local volunteers and fundraising projects. Domestic violence continues to be a serious problem in Kansas. Oftentimes it is a mother and her children who are housed in shelter facilities. The work of the Family Crisis Center does not stop there, however, as personnel also provide counseling and legal advocacy for victims. I commend everyone involved with the Family Crisis Center for the services, support and shelter they provide to Kansas families in need.

Discussing Issues Important to the Salina Community

I met with Salina Area Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Dennis Lauver and Chamber of Commerce Board Chair Scott Bergkamp this week to discuss the many new initiatives underway in the First District's largest city. We discussed several items affecting the Salina community including workforce housing and the new economic development strategic plan for the city.

Attending Plainville High School Class Reunion

This weekend, I attended my class reunion at the home of Jerry and Bonnie Staab in Plainville. It was great to reminisce with my fellow Plainville High School classmates and I appreciate the hospitality provided by Jerry and Bonnie.

There were 38 of the 71 graduates of my class in attendance, including Linda Mason Bowersox of Topeka, Janet Stahl Brack of Dodge City, Don and Sharyl (Gerber) Brown of Stockton, Sandy Bollig Elliott of Dodge City, Kim Harrison of Leawood, Jana Jaco Kuhn of Overland Park, Mike Macke of Paola, Lola Meitler of Hill City, Dianne Demanette Meyers of Ellis, Keith Von Feldt of Derby, Janet Moeder Wise of Lyons and Doug Werner of Fort Scott. In attendance from Plainville were Deb Demanette Becker, Pat Bruna, Betty Becker Burgess, Paula Williams Glick, Shirley Glick Rempe, Bonnie Harrison Staab, Charlotte Plante Littrell, Mary Hargrave Wise and Larry Vohs. Traveling from out of state were Steve Gore of Hummelstown, Pennsylvania; Candra Rupp Guenther of West Point, Nebraska; Jacquie Harris Meitler of Glenwood Springs, Colorado; Allison Andreson Arnett of Aurora, Colorado; Pat Wise Mills of Pauls Valley, Oklahoma; Brad Mock of Jonston, Iowa; Kaylene Hrabe Mongeau of Bullard, Texas; Lisa Sparks Nienhuser of Belton, Missouri; Dan Steeples of Arlington, Virginia; Brian Sumearll of Guthrie, Oklahoma; Karen Van Dyke Travis of Danville, California; Dave Young of New Castle, Colorado; and Sue Beiker of Aurora, Colorado. In town from Hays were Linda Rempe Pfannenstiel, Deb Barber Rouse and Janice Weigel Skeen.

In the Office

Don Gaeddert, City Manager of Larned, was in with his wife Marie to discuss state health care plans, immigration issues and how environmental regulations affect county utilities. Dallas Linke, an Ellsworth County native living in Virginia, stopped by to talk about national security issues and Middle East political affairs.

Several Kansans stopped by my office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including Marllys Yelton of Palco and John Albrecht of Herington. Stephanie, Erica, Joshua and Jeremy Hall of Milford came by, as did Robert, Brenda and Grace Unrein of Hoisington. In from McPherson were David, Sharla and Nikolous Rempe and Brett, Tyler and Trae Yelton. Randy, Janet, Eric and Candice Goble of Salina were in, as were John Wild and Michael, Crystal, Daniel and Caleb Smith of Junction City. Mark, Melanie and Christopher Calcara of Great Bend also stopped by for a tour of the U.S. Capitol. Their son, Taylor, is currently serving as an intern in my Washington, D.C., office.

Very truly yours,

Jerry