

9/10/2007 This Week in Congress

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September 10, 2007

Making a College Education More Affordable

I supported House passage of legislation this week to reduce student loan interest rates and increase federal grants so that more Kansas students can afford a college education. The bill, which is expected to be signed by the President, increases the maximum Pell grant award for students and cuts interest rates in half for subsidized student loans.

In addition to lowering the costs associated with college, the bill also contained other provisions related to education, including the establishment of a new program aimed at training more students to teach in high-need subject areas like science and math. Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher (TEACH) Education Grants will help colleges and universities provide annual scholarships to students committed to teaching for four years in subjects currently lacking teachers. The Upward Bound program also received more funding.

Investing in our children's education should be one of our nation's most important priorities. Unfortunately, rising tuition costs have left many students and parents wondering how they will afford a college education. Reduced interest rates and higher grant awards will help more Kansans have access to a college degree.

House Shows Support for Kansas Flood Victims

This week, the House of Representatives passed legislation I sponsored that expressed support for flood victims in eastern Kansas. The resolution, authored by Congressman Todd Tiahrt, expressed gratitude to the officials, emergency personnel and volunteers who responded selflessly to the flooding that occurred in 20 Kansas counties earlier this summer.

The worst of Mother Nature has brought out the best in Kansans. From Greensburg to Chanute and Colby to Great Bend, individuals, churches and businesses have been quick to help neighbors in need. While the damage was in many cases devastating, the kindness people demonstrated to each other was inspiring. Thanks to all who have given time and money to help rebuild communities and lives affected by storms in our state.

[Click here to view my speech to the House in support of those in eastern Kansas.](#)

Learning about the Status of our Nation's Bridges

In light of the tragic collapse of the I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I participated in a Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing on the status of bridges that are a part of the national highway system. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters and Federal Highway Administrator J. Richard Capka testified about the current status of our bridge program.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) reports that of the nearly 600,000 bridges in the United States, more than 73,000 are in need of significant maintenance attention, rehabilitation or replacement. The Chairman of the House Transportation Committee has proposed a 5 cent increase in the gasoline tax to pay for needed bridge repairs. The Bush Administration has voiced its opposition to such a plan. I am currently examining this proposal. Whatever action Congress takes, we must make sure the needs of our state are not overlooked. Funding invested today in maintaining and improving our transportation infrastructure will pay off in the long-run in terms of increased mobility and safety.

Kicking Off the 2007 Kansas State Fair

Annual Kansas Farm Bureau Breakfast: I began the day Saturday by joining Kansas agricultural leaders at the annual Kansas Farm Bureau Legislative Leadership Breakfast at the Grand Prairie Hotel in Hutchinson. The event allowed me to visit with agricultural leaders from across the state about challenges farmers and ranchers face. Specifically, I talked about the 2007 Farm Bill and the opportunities that remain to improve this legislation.

WIBW Farm Bill Forum: After the breakfast, I participated in a farm bill forum with Senators Pat Roberts and Sam Brownback and Congresswoman Nancy Boyda. Joining us from the House Agriculture Committee was Chairman Collin Peterson of Minnesota. Members of several Kansas agriculture organizations posed questions about this important legislation and what it means for Kansans. My thanks to Kelly Lenz and Greg Akagi of WIBW Radio for hosting the forum and to Joe Kejr of the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers, Greg Shelor of the Kansas Grain Sorghum Producers Association, Ken McCauley of the National Corn Growers Association, Roger Griffin of the Rice County Farm Bureau, David Cross of the Kansas Livestock Association, Charles Atkinson of the Kansas Soybean Association, Rick Chambers of the Kansas Cattlemen's Association, and Lavern Potuzak of the Kansas Farmers Union for participating in the event.

Meeting with State Legislators: I joined members of the Kansas State Legislature at a luncheon hosted by Via Christi on Sunday. It was a good opportunity to visit with Via Christi executives and state representatives about health care issues facing the legislature.

Welcoming Hutchinson Hospital CEO: I welcomed Linda Harrison, the new President and CEO of Hutchinson Hospital, back to Kansas on Saturday. Linda recently became the fourth President and CEO at Hutchinson Hospital following Gene Schmidt's retirement after leading the hospital for 21 years. Although Linda is a native of Spearville, she had been working in Florida. It is great to have her back in Kansas.

Raising Money for Cancer Care

On Friday evening, I was the guest of Frank Ross at the sixth annual Treads and Threads fundraiser at the Kansas Speedway. Proceeds from the event go to cancer care at the University of Kansas Hospital. Specifically, funds from this year's event will help create a new Family and Visitor Support and Resource Center, as well as a second Palliative Care Suite within the hospital's inpatient cancer care area. Larry Moore, KMBC-TV news anchor and cancer survivor, was the emcee again this year. It was great to see so many people there supporting the cancer care efforts of the University of Kansas Hospital.

Accepting Applications for Congressional Internships

One of the great things about representing Kansans in our nation's capital is the opportunity to give college students the chance to learn firsthand about our government and serve folks back home through a congressional internship. My interest in public service was sparked when I was an intern in 1974.

I am currently accepting applications for the spring 2008 term. Applications for internships in any of my four offices are due by October 22. [Click here](#) for more information about internships and the application process.

Attending German Feast in Schoenchen

On Sunday evening, I attended a community supper at St. Anthony Community Center in Schoenchen. I enjoyed visiting with folks and supporting the local cause. Thanks to the members of the St. Anthony Altar Society for preparing the German dinner.

In the Office

The President of the National Association of Wheat Growers, John Thaemert of Sylvan Grove, was in to discuss the House-passed 2007 Farm Bill and the timetable for the Senate's consideration of this legislation. Stopping by to visit from Kansas State University were Sue Peterson and Chuck Reagan.

Connie Presley of Wichita and Howard Blankenship of Olathe were in with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association to talk about legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration. Travis Heimon and David Dare of Kansas City and Dan Senestraro of Johnson were in with the Dairy Farmers of America to tell me about the need those in the dairy industry have for workers and to discuss solutions to the problem of illegal immigration. Doug Scott of Andover was in with Hawker Beechcraft to visit.

In for a tour of the U.S. Capitol building this week were Troy and Debbie Cook of Hays, Mike Haug and Joe Frank of Salina and Michael Haug of Lawrence.

Very truly yours,

Jerry